

# "The Millennium"

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, church. If you missed Sunday school this morning, you missed a great lesson about the American pilgrims and Puritans, but in their honor of our spiritual forebears, the sermon this morning will be three hours long.

I'm kidding. Oh, if only we had the kind of passion and fervor for God's Word that some of our spiritual forebears did. Well, we're actually looking at Revelation 20 this morning, so would you turn with me to Revelation 20?

That's page 976 in the Pew Bible. Revelation 20, we'll be considering verses 1 through 10 today. 976, Revelation 20.

Let me pray for us, and then I'll read. Father in heaven, what a gift it is to us to have the Scriptures. Lord, as we think about our pews and our homes and our bookstores, it's embarrassing, God, how easy it is for us to get a hold of your life-giving Word and read it and meditate upon it, to memorize it, to study it, to worship you and pray to you with it.

Lord, what a great treasure it is. And we know that we neglect it, God, so we ask for your forgiveness, but we thank you for this morning when we can realign our hearts to it again. We admit, God, that without your Spirit, our reading and our preaching and our studying would be to no avail.

[ 1 : 3 4 ] So, Jesus, we look to your Holy Spirit in these moments to come and enliven our hearts and our minds to be receptive to your Word and to do the work that only you can do to conform us to the image of Christ so that we might be image-bearers and witness-bearers as you've ordained us to be.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, Revelation 20, 1 through 10. John writes this, Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were ended.

After that, he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also, I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

[ 3 : 0 0 ] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.

Their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

So, one of the things about studying the book of Revelation is that as you work your way through the book, you'll often read in various commentaries or you'll hear teachers say things like, this

passage is a difficult one to interpret, or historically, Christians have differed over the meaning of this text.

[ 4 : 09 ] You see that kind of again and again in almost every passage of this book. But when you come to Revelation 20, that sentiment raises to a whole new level. One writer put it this way, the interpretation of this chapter, he says, comprises what is arguably the chief controversy in eschatological studies, if not in all evangelical theology.

Wow. Now, I think he's overstating things a little bit. I wouldn't say that this is the chief controversy in all evangelical theology, but you get the point.

When it comes to John's vision of the 1,000 years in Revelation 20, faithful Christians have consistently come to different conclusions about what exactly this refers to.

So before we walk through this passage, section by section as we normally do, I want to briefly mention the three major approaches, and then I want to draw out a pastoral point from that that's very relevant for our life as a local church.

Now, I know some of you have been waiting for the day in our series in Revelation when we'd finally get down into the weeds and maybe pull out some charts and some graphs and compare the different approaches and just go for it.

[ 5 : 29 ] Well, you'll probably love today's sermon. This one's for you. But some of you, having perhaps been subjected to a sermon series in Revelation before, have been dreading the moment when we talk about this view or that view, and you've struggled to see why any of that actually matters.

Well, let me assure you that we will spend some time considering why Revelation 20 matters. And we're going to see that no matter what your view of this passage, Revelation 20 is really good news for the church today.

So as I mentioned, there are broadly speaking three ways to understand this text. And each view is commonly given a name based on how this 1,000-year period or millennium relates to the return of Christ.

But what we'll also see is that each of these views also sees the nature of that 1,000-year period or millennium differently. And it's that, the different nature of the 1,000 years, that's a really significant difference between the three views.

So let's just kind of walk through. The first view that we might consider is called the pre-millennial position. Now this view would say that Christ returns to earth in glory before the 1,000 years.

[ 6 : 45 ] Hence, it's called pre-millennial. Makes sense. And the 1,000 years itself is understood to be a literal earthly reign of Christ with the resurrected saints over the nations during that 1,000 years.

And after the 1,000-year reign is over, Christ will defeat evil once and for all and then establish the new heavens and new earth or what's sometimes called the eternal state. Now, it's pretty easy to see why folks take this view, isn't it?

After all, in Revelation 19, the chapter right before, we see a picture of Jesus returning in glory and defeating the beast and the false prophet. Revelation 20 just seems to be the next step in the story. Jesus reigns on earth for 1,000 years with the resurrected saints. And at the end of that time, Satan is defeated and thrown down to join the beast and the false prophet where they already are. Pretty straightforward, right?

And this view has a very impressive pedigree. Justin Martyr from the 2nd century, Charles Spurgeon, Francis Schaeffer from the 20th century, and many other faithful, Bible-believing pastors and theologians have held this pre-millennial view.

[ 7 : 53 ] But then there are others who would say that the return of Christ in glory happens not before, but after the millennium. So this view has come to be called the post-millennial view because Christ returns after the millennium.

And the 1,000 years itself is actually referring to, in this view, not a sort of literal earthly reign of Christ, but a coming time in history, towards the end of history, a coming time of powerful gospel advance before Jesus returns.

Through the preaching of the gospel and the pouring out of the spirit, this view would see, Satan will be bound and there will be a massive global spiritual flourishing.

And then at the end of this golden age of the gospel, Christ will return in glory, defeat evil once and for all, and establish the new heavens and new earth. We're going to find they all sort of end the

same way, right? Now admittedly, this view, this post-millennial view, is probably the least popular today.

But there have been some weighty and godly teachers who have held to a post-millennial view. John Owen, perhaps the greatest English-speaking theologian. Jonathan Edwards, who many consider the greatest American theologian.

[ 9 : 07 ] Charles Hodge, the great Princeton defender of orthodoxy in the 19th century. All these, and many, many more, were post-millennial in their view. So, you know, even if many aren't fully persuaded by this view today, we still have to pause and realize that there must be something to it, right?

And perhaps, if we had lived through the great revivals of Jonathan Edwards' day, and seen the power of the gospel like that firsthand, or perhaps, if we had the sort of confidence in God's powerful grace, even through trials and suffering, like a John Owen did, well, maybe we too could believe that God could bring about a dramatic, worldwide movement of the gospel that would usher in the return of Christ.

Okay, so that's post-millennialism. Lastly, there's a third view, a third view called amillennial, that holds that the thousand years is neither a literal earthly reign of Christ after his return, nor would it say that it's a sort of golden age of the gospel before Christ's return.

Rather, this view would say, like so much else in the book of Revelation, this third view would say that the thousand years is a symbol. Specifically, the thousand years is taken to be a symbolic expression for the church age, the entire time between Christ's first and second coming.

So Revelation 20, in this view, is yet another perspective, another camera angle, another portrait in the art gallery of the same stretch of time, the same events that we've seen again and again in Revelation.

[ 10 : 40 ] According to this view, because of Christ's death and resurrection at his first coming, Satan has been bound, much like we saw in Revelation 12, when Satan was cast down from heaven upon the advent of Christ, the first advent of Christ.

And while the gospel goes forth in this view, the saints and martyrs are seen as reigning with Christ in heaven. That's much like Revelation 6, where we saw a vision of the martyred saints in heaven rejoicing before the throne of God.

And when the church age is complete, Christ will return to defeat Satan once and for all and establish the new heavens and new earth. Like I told you, they all end the same, right? So this battle in verses 7 through 10 and the amillennial view is seen as a parallel description to the many other scenes of Christ's return and the defeat of evil that we've seen throughout the book.

Again, it's another camera angle on the same events. That's the amillennial view. It sees these thousand years as a symbol for the church age. And again, this view also has an impressive pedigree.

Augustine, Calvin, J.I. Packer in the 20th century and many other faithful men and women have taken this view. Okay, there you go. And there are hundreds of variations on these three views depending on who you talk to.

[ 11 : 52 ] Now, what do we take from the fact that good, faithful Christians can take such different views of the same passage? Well, I think it ought to be a lesson for us in charity.

There are some doctrines which are essential to Christianity and the gospel. Doctrines which are abundantly clear in scripture such that if you visited a church in the first century or in the 10th century or in the 21st century today, we would hold them in common whether you were in Africa or Asia or North America.

Doctrines like the deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, the atoning death of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the bodily return of Jesus, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the scriptures.

These are the doctrines that are primary and essential to historic biblical faith. Those are the doctrines that make Christians Christians. And those are the doctrines that are worth struggling for, worth battling for because they're at the heart of the good news.

The heart of the good news that the God who created all things loved the world and sent his son to die for our sins and rise again on the third day so that everyone who believes in him from every tribe and every nation and every language might be forgiven of their sins, granted new spiritual life by the Holy Spirit and assured of eternal life.

[13:18] These are the primary things that we hold. But there are other doctrines that are not primary. There are doctrines where faithful Christians disagree.

Doctrines that are not essential to the gospel or essential to biblical holiness. And the temptation, temptation, though, is to approach these primary or even tertiary, that is, third order doctrines, with the same passion and fight as the primary ones.

That's the temptation. Of course, it's good to develop your convictions about those things. But when our swords come out over the millennium or spiritual gifts or church polity, what happens?

Well, then a local church becomes known more for its stance on the end times or what have you than its joyful embrace of the gospel.

And that's what we want to be known for. That's the thing that gives us life and energizes us. In other words, you know, what is it that we want to define ourselves? Do we want to be defined by the center that we hold in common?

[14:30] Or do we want to be defined by the boundaries of the secondary and tertiary issues that we've come to? I think developing this wisdom to discern what's primary and secondary and even tertiary and then to show appropriate charity toward those with whom we disagree on secondary and tertiary issues is critical for us today.

It's critical for our life together and it's critical for our witness to the world. Justin Martyr, the second century apologist that I mentioned earlier, was a premillennialist, right?

But he realized that Christians, even in the second century, didn't all agree on the details of the end times. And he's actually a really good model for us. In one place, he writes, I and many others are of this opinion and believe that such will take place as you are assuredly aware.

So he says, look, this is what I believe, as you know. Then he goes on to say this, but on the other hand, I signify to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise.

Did you catch that? He says, many who are true Christians think otherwise. Friends, beware of a teacher or a website or a theological movement that makes secondary or tertiary issues a litmus test for orthodoxy.

[15:56] We ought to have a closed hand around the core of our faith, the essential teachings of the gospel, the clear teachings of biblical holiness and ethics, and an open hand to the non-essential ones.

Develop your convictions. Yes. Have hearty conversations. Yes. And some of those secondary issues like baptism or church polity, that may mean that we choose to attend one local church over another, right?

That's okay. But all of our hearty conversations about these topics should end with love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. And in so doing, we, as the church, are modeling for the world the difference that God's grace makes in our human interactions.

Inside the church, we're embodying together a new way to be human. No longer driven by anger or fear, but by a deep conviction for the truth, yes, and by a deep love for one another.

So the pastoral point of observing these different views of Revelation 20 is a call to interpretive and communal humility and charity toward those with whom we disagree and to do so for Christ's sake.

[17:20] Now, having said all that, you might be wondering, okay, but where does Trinity land on all this, right? Well, you'll notice if you go onto our website or if you've been to Trinity 101, our doctrinal statement does not take a position on the question of the millennium.

So we don't require our members or our church officers to believe one view or the other. Now, personally, I find myself slightly more convinced by the amillennial view, but only slightly, actually. There are days when I read the text and I think, you know, those premillennialists have to be right, right? I would joke with Pastor Matt before he left for sabbatical because I think he's a premillennialist.

I would joke with him, I'd say, Matt, I think I'm coming over to your camp. I think I'm being convinced. So anyway, Revelation 20, it teaches us a lesson in charity, but what else is it meant to teach us?

What else? What was John hoping to convey to the original readers of Revelation? Well, as we take a step back and consider where we've come in this beautiful and bracing book that we call Revelation, it seems clear that Revelation 20 is showing us sort of the climactic victory of Christ and his people over the great deceiver.

[ 18 : 44 ] This is the victory of Christ over Satan, the one Revelation calls the dragon. If last week showed us the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, now the camera shifts and shows us what about the dragon?

And it shows us this victory in three steps. First, it shows us that Satan's deception, because he's called here the great deceiver, but first it shows us that his deception will be restrained.

That's verses 1-3. Deception restrained. Satan is bound and locked away and then we're told this beautiful good news, that the nations are deceived no more, so that the nations might not be deceived anymore.

The darkness is lifting. Now, the premillennial view would see this as a time after Christ returns, and for a thousand years the lies of Satan will be locked away.

What joy that will be on earth. What freedom that will bring. But can't we also say that something like this is true even today?

[ 19 : 58 ] In the amillennial view, the thousand years is the church age, as we said, and when you consider how the gospel has advanced over the last two thousand years from one corner of the world to the other, it would seem that Satan's power to deceive the nations has been dealt a mighty death blow.

Nancy Guthrie makes this observation in her excellent book on Revelation. It's one of the best I've been reading, actually, as we've walked through this series. She says this, she makes these observations, she says, if we go back to the Old Testament and we remember after we read about the promise to Abraham that through him all the families on the earth shall be blessed, remember that in Genesis 12?

Well, when that happens, there's not an immediately huge influx of the nations taking hold of the covenant promises of God, is there? We read about individuals or particular tribes joining themselves to the people of God in the Old Testament, but it's limited.

But then, everything changes with the coming of Jesus into the world and the sending of his spirit upon his ascension. We read in Acts how Pentecost ushered in an era of the gospel being preached to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

We read in the epistles about churches being formed throughout the known world. What changed? What changed was through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, Satan was bound so that the nations are no longer deceived and they begin streaming in.

[ 21 : 28 ] And Satan remains bound until all who were chosen in Christ for salvation from every people group of the world are safely brought into the fold. You know, Revelation has held up for us a vision again and again, hasn't it?

That we as the church are meant to be witness bearers. The church bears witness through suffering to the true God who is the creator and redeemer. And in light of this passage, we should remain confident in this calling that God has given us.

It may feel like the gospel is implausible to so many around us, but the deceiver, friends, has been bound. He may roar from time to time, but his lies have been exposed.

And before the light of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, the deceiver is no match. So that co-worker you've been praying for or that family member you've been sharing the gospel with, friends, don't get discouraged.

Don't think it's a lost cause. The gospel is a liberating power and the lies of Satan are no match. So stay faithful. Stay prayerful.

[ 22 : 46 ] And pray for the nations. Pray for the people groups who've not yet heard the good news. Satan binds them no longer. His deception has been restrained.

Pray that God would raise up workers for the harvest. Perhaps he might even be calling you. In fact, if I can go out on a limb, he is calling you.

Because right here in New Haven, people from around the world are gathering. Do you think Satan enjoys this result of globalization, right?

That people from around the world, some of whom have never heard the gospel, end up in New Haven, Connecticut and can hear about the saving love of Jesus for the first time.

Think of the strategic location that God has given us for the global advance of the gospel. We don't need to get into a plane to win the nations, although some of you might be called to do that.

[ 23 : 51 ] In fact, we don't even need to get into our cars. The field is white for the harvest. Will you lift your eyes and see it?

Will we pray for the Holy Spirit to move in power? Yes, Satan may be trying to do all he can, but his lies are no match for the gospel.

So the first paragraph shows us deception restrained. The next paragraph, verses 4-6, shows us deception overturned. Deception overturned.

Now, what do I mean by that? Well, consider who John sees in this part of the vision, verses 4-6. He sees the saints. Christians. Now, what did Satan have to say about these saints, about these Christians?

They refuse to worship the beast. They refuse to take the mark of the beast. So according to worldly standards, right, they're fools. They're on the losing side of history.

[ 24 : 53 ] And some of them are even martyred for their resistance to the idolatry and greed and oppressive power of the dragon and his beasts. They're dead.

Doesn't that prove that Christianity is a lost cause? The godless powers put them to death. Does that not prove that the dragon and his beasts are the ones really calling the shots around here? Shouldn't we just give in? Ah, but John sees a different reality. Those saints and martyrs who looked weak, who looked like fools, who looked like they were clearly on the wrong side of history, they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Do you remember when Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings* first meet Strider in *The Prancing Pony*? Some of you are like, you lost me, Nick. That's like total geekdom. I'm out.

So *The Prancing Pony* is the name of this inn and these two hobbits go there and there's this guy named Strider and they meet him and all they see, all they see is a weather-worn wanderer.

[ 26 : 05 ] All they see is a suspicious vagabond. But what their untrained eyes could not see was that this weary and weathered and forsaken man was actually the true king.

John's making the same point here of every believer in Christ. The world may condemn, ridicule, even kill you, but the truth is you are priests of God and you will reign with him.

And whether this reign takes place in a literal kingdom after Christ returns or whether this reign is taking place now in heaven, it makes little difference. whether the first resurrection is a metaphor for the life of the saints right now before the throne of the Lamb like we see in Revelation 6 or whether the first resurrection is the bodily coming to life of all Christians a thousand years before non-Christians.

Again, it makes little difference. The point is the same. As Tolkien wrote, all that is gold does not glitter. Not all those who wander are lost.

The old that is strong does not wither. Deep roots are not reached by the frost. From the ashes a fire shall be woken. A light from the shadows shall spring.

[ 27 : 22 ] Renewed shall be the blade that was broken. The crownless again shall be king. The crownless again shall be king. Christian, you are a co-regent with Christ no matter what this world says about you.

Even death cannot steal your dignity. The deceptions of Satan, his lies about who you are and what you are are overturned are overturned by the verdict of God.

So Christian, when trials come, hold your head high. When the hurricane of trials and afflictions come, when the world does its worst, remember, you are blessed.

The crownless again shall be king. Let not the noise of the world or the evil one silence your love for him or for one another.

Persevere in faithfulness, compassion, goodness. Let your reign fall on the just and the unjust just like your heavenly father. You will reign with the king.

[ 28 : 42 ] Or perhaps you've been considering Christianity for some time but you've not yet given your life to Christ. You've been counting the cost of following him and that's good. Jesus tells us to count the cost.

But friend, don't you realize that whatever you lose for his sake is nothing compared to what you gain? Even if you count everything is lost, by comparison, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Our life is a short span of years. How long will we live? 80 years? 90 years? What is the reputation of a moment?

What is the wealth of a passing hour compared to reigning with the king of glory? He stands at the door and knocks and he knocks even for you.

Will you open the door of your life and let him come in and dine? will you surrender your life to him? He surrendered his life for you, you see.

[ 29 : 54 ] He gave up his crown, he was crucified so that you could take up a crown and live forever. Is there any better exchange than that? Than the gospel? Is there any better bargain than what Christ holds out for you?

your sin for his righteousness, your rebellion and shame for his crown and glory? So the call is clear.

Open the door. Let Christ take your sins and let him put a crown on your head and anything you lose will be nothing compared to what you gain.

So John shows us then deception restrained, deception overturned, and finally deception defeated. This is verses 7 through 10. Deception defeated.

And again, here the point is the same regardless of your view. Satan's lies will be exposed and removed once and for all. John makes an allusion to the prophet Ezekiel here, Gog and Magog.

[ 30 : 54 ] In Ezekiel 38 and 39, Gog is the name of a terrible and great enemy of God's people and Magog is sort of his land, his nation. So Gog and Magog means something like prince and people.

And John is showing us here the ultimate fulfillment of Ezekiel's shadowy vision. The dragon leads his people to war against the camp of the saints.

The saints who are God's beloved city, the church. But in that final assault, the end comes swiftly. Satan and his lies are vanquished once and for all.

The spell of deception is finally broken. I wonder if you can imagine a world where the lingering thoughts and the lingering doubts that have haunted humanity since the fall no longer plague us.

Can you imagine a world like that? The surfeit said in Genesis 3, did God really say? Did God really say?

[ 32 : 05 ] Isn't that not the great lie, the great insinuation, the great deception? Surely God didn't say that. In other words, underneath that lie, that insinuation, are the lies that God isn't good, God can't be trusted, God doesn't love you, you have to find your happiness somewhere else.

You're on your own, Satan says. But then ironically he says, you're on your own, so follow me. And follow him we did.

That's the history of humanity. And misery was the result. But imagine the day when the great lie is broken forever, when deception is defeated, when the truth of God's goodness and love will be the unquestioned and undeniable reality, not just at the bottom of everything, but alive in our own hearts.

What a great day that will be. And if that is the end, John seems to be telling us here in Revelation 20, live now in light of it.

Don't let the spin and the half-truths of the world lull you to sleep or make you afraid or spin you into a rage. I like how Paul puts it in Colossians 3, 1-4.

[ 33 : 33 ] He says, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on the things that are on earth.

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ and God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Set your mind on things above.

And again, Paul says this in Philippians 4, 8-9. He says, finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen and me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. I think it's vital for the church today to take these verses to heart. Deception will be defeated in the end, but in the meantime, we need to set our minds on things above. We need to set our minds on what's true and honorable and just. Are we willing to do some self-examination on this front?

[ 34 : 48 ] Do you spend as much time or a comparable amount of time reading and meditating on scripture as you do consuming other forms of media? Is it any surprise that Christians are blown and tossed by cultural movements, whether to the left or to the right, given how much time we spend uncritically ingesting the world's media and how little time we spend saturating ourselves in God's word?

food? I'm not saying we should stick our heads in the sand and be unaware of our cultural moment. Of course not. Yes, we need to stay current and be involved. We need to contextualize the gospel for our time and our place.

But if you find yourself watching the news, for example, and getting consistently angry or consistently afraid, it might be a good sign that you're being blown and tossed by a world that wants to keep you angry and afraid.

And you may need to think about recalibrating your daily intake. More time with God's word, maybe a little less time with human words. Because ultimately, God's word is what will endure.

And that means we never need to be ultimately angry or afraid. There are some things that may rise in us, that righteous anger, right? That's fine. But friends, so much of our anger and fear is not righteous.

[ 36 : 16 ] Only God's word is what will endure. And if we're rooted in him and in his word, then ultimately we never need to be angry or afraid in those ways.

So if we take anything from Revelation 20, take this, the true king is on the throne, the evil one and all his lies are bound and headed for destruction, and the church will be safe.

And not just safe, but they'll reign. The crownless again will be kings, priests who reign with Christ forever.

And as we go to the Lord's Supper this morning, as we're going to do in just a minute, what do we see there at the table? Well, doesn't the Lord's Supper tell us who we are and whose we are, right? Who are we? We're the people for whom Christ died. That's the truth about us. And whose are we? We belong to the world's true king who died and rose again for us and our salvation.

[ 37 : 20 ] You see, at the table, the lies are dispersed as we remember his body broken and his blood shed. In other words, we see God's truth at the table.

We see the truth of the gospel. We see the truth that our sin was so great that Jesus had to die for us. But we see the truth that his love for us was so great that he came and was willingly glad to die for us.

and to him to the