

*There was a man who was celebrating his 100th birthday, and a reporter said to him, "I'm curious. **How did you manage to live so long? What's your secret?"***

*The old man answered, "Well, son, I got married when I was 21, and the wife and I decided back then that if we had arguments, the loser would take a long walk to get over their anger. I guess you can say that God has blessed me with 79 years of fresh air."*

In light of all of the judgment and wrath we have covered thus far, we are due for a breath of fresh air and that's what we will get this morning. If you recall from a couple of the previous messages, Babylon was destroyed, Jesus returned as a conqueror, the Antichrist and the False Prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire, and we left off with a lot of dead people and a lot of fat birds. The Tribulation period is over, Jesus has returned, and now it's time to breathe.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 20** and we will begin with **verse 1**. The Apostle John says,

**<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup>And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup>and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.**

John begins with the words "**then I saw**" which indicates there is a sequence. In sequence, we are picking up where we left off in **Chapter 19**, where we saw the end of the Tribulation period and the Second Coming of Jesus. So, it makes sense that what we read in **Chapter 20** naturally flows and follows the return of Christ.

We are told that John sees an angel, a single unnamed angel, coming down out of heaven, and he takes custody of Satan, binds him in chains, and confines him in the **abyss**. If you remember, the abyss or the bottomless pit depending on your translation, is a prison for demons. It's a place where demons are held until their final judgment in the lake of fire. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are the first two occupants in the lake of fire, but here, Satan is thrown into the abyss suggesting that God is not done with him yet.

Satan is bound for 1000 years – but more importantly – during this 1000-year period, Jesus sets up His promised earthly kingdom called the Millennial Kingdom.

Now, we need to talk about this for a moment because Bible scholars are all over the place with some mind-numbing views about the Millennial Kingdom. I tried to study them but for my own sanity, I had to stop, but here is a sampling of the views out there.

Some say there is no such a thing as a Millennial Kingdom – proposing it's just symbolic and is not to be taken literally. Others tell us it's not really 1000 years – instead it only represents a long period of time. There are those who suggest the Millennial Kingdom pictures the spiritual reign of Christ in His church, not His physical and personal reign upon the earth in the future. Some claim we are actually in the Millennial Kingdom right now – we just don't realize it – and that's a head scratcher for me because if we are in it right now, then that means Satan is bound in the abyss, and as far as I can tell, that isn't our reality. As I see it, Satan is very active and he still prowls around like a roaring lion creating a lot of havoc in this world.

As I have said a few times during this study through the book of **Revelation**, sometimes the best and the most accurate interpretation of the Bible is the simplest interpretation, and I think the best way to understand the Millennial Kingdom is in a straightforward literal way.

The 1000-year period represents real time – a thousand years, in fact, it is mentioned six times in this chapter. If it was just mentioned once, then you could argue it is symbolic, but 1000 years is specifically mentioned six times. Also, it comes after the Second Coming of Jesus because that is the way it is presented to us in the Bible. We are not in the Millennial Kingdom now – but in the future, as an answer to our prayer “*Thy kingdom come,*” Jesus will personally and physically return to establish His promised literal kingdom on the earth. That is the consistent picture throughout the Bible – the Messiah will establish His physical kingdom on the earth, in fact, this is one of the reasons why many who believed that Jesus was the Messiah were confused because Jesus told them He had to die, when they expected the Messiah to physically reign right then and there.

So, the first thing we see that occurs in the Millennial Kingdom is Satan taken out of the picture so he can no longer prowl and **deceive the nations**, and although we are not told here, I am going to assume this also includes his demons as well. There will be no demonic influence, and that will be a breath of fresh air, but there is also a flip side to consider – his removal is also the removal of any excuse for a rebellious nature, meaning, that during the Millennial Kingdom, mortal people will still have free will, and no one will be able to say, “*the devil made me do it.*”

Then John informs us that after the 1000 years is complete, Satan will be released for a short time – and we will get into that later, but during the Millennial Kingdom, things are made right and set straight. Jesus is the earthly King, but He does not reign alone as John tells us in **verse 4**. John says,

**Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**

When Jesus swooped down from heaven on His white horse, with Him were the redeemed from all ages – His called ones, His chosen, His faithful followers. That would include the dead in Christ who were raised to life, the raptured church, and it includes the Old Testament saints who come back in their resurrected bodies at some point. We return to the earth with Jesus and we reign with Him as pictured by the reference of **thrones**. Jesus won't reign alone, for that's what He promised His followers many times. For example, in **Revelation 2:26-27**, Jesus said,

*<sup>26</sup>“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; <sup>27</sup>and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father.”*

Then later in **Revelation 3:21**, Jesus tells us,

*“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

So, the called ones, the chosen, the faithful will reign with Jesus in glorified bodies during the Millennial Kingdom, and we are also told there is one last group who will reign with the Lord as well – and it's those who became faithful followers of Jesus Christ during the Tribulation period and were killed by the Antichrist as a consequence. Their souls have been in heaven under the altar of God, but now John sees their bodies being resurrected.

Those seated on thrones will be the Lord's agents who carry out His will and His wishes in His government – a government that is good and righteously ruled, and just so know, our roles and our responsibilities in His government are given to us

according to our faithful service in this life. That's the idea we get from the parable of the talents found in **Matthew 25**. Jesus will reward us with various roles and responsibilities according to our faithfulness to Him in the here and now. How we serve the Lord in this life, will have a bearing in how we serve the Lord in the next.

So, you've got resurrected Old Testament saints, resurrected New Testament saints, and now you've got resurrected Tribulation saints – all reigning with the Lord, but here's the million-dollar question: with all these thrones, **who is left to be ruled in this kingdom?**

Those being ruled are the believers who actually survived the Tribulation period in their mortal bodies without being killed. It will include both Jewish and Gentile survivors who had not received the mark of the beast but managed to avoid execution at the hand of the Antichrist and his wicked followers. These mortal survivors – Jews and Gentiles alike – will be ushered into the Lord's kingdom and they will be responsible for repopulating the earth. They will have children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren and on and on during this 1000-year period.

Okay, let's look at the next two verses beginning with **verse 5**.

**<sup>5</sup>The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

Now, there are a couple of things going on in this passage – but right off the bat, we are told that the **rest of the dead** – referring to the spiritually dead, the unbelievers, the lost who have died throughout history, they will not be resurrected yet – instead they continue to wait in Hades until the 1000-years is completed.

Then, John introduces us to what is referred to as the **first resurrection**, and one of these two words has created a lot of confusion and even fierce debate, and the difficult word is not the word “*resurrection*” – oddly enough, it's the word “*first*.” Now I assure you, I don't want to add to the confusion or the debate, but I need to explain this to you – so let's carefully work through this difficulty together.

When we hear the word “*first*,” I think initially, we tend to understand the word as referring to something that comes ahead of all others – meaning what comes *first* is

*number one*, and that makes complete sense, but if we see the **first resurrection** mentioned here by John in that context – as being *number one*, then we have problem, because both historically and chronologically – the *number one* resurrection was Jesus. Jesus was the first raised from the dead and whose body was transformed and glorified, never to die again. Jesus gets the distinction of being *number one*, and as a side note, if you recall, after Jesus was resurrected, **Matthew** tells us many saints were raised to life and came out of their tombs.

So clearly, the Lord's resurrection occurred first, along with some saints who were right on His heels; therefore, John's use of the word "*first*" cannot be simply seen as *number one* – it has to be interpreted differently, and I think it is.

In the Greek, that word "*first*" is "*protos*" and it has a couple of meanings. It means "*before*" – as in this comes *before* that, but it also means "*better or best*" – as in I like this *better* than that. So, the word "*first*" does not necessarily mean *number one*. It can simply refer to a place in sequence or it can refer to the importance or the priority of something, and in context – I think both of these meanings apply and let me explain.

There are two bodily resurrections – a resurrection of the righteous for life, and there is a second or a final resurrection which is a resurrection of the spiritually dead for judgment and condemnation. There are two resurrections, separated by the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom and that is key to understanding this first resurrection that John mentions here. It is called the **first resurrection** – not because it is *number one*, but because it comes *before* and is *better* than the final resurrection.

**So, who is being resurrected and when does the first resurrection occur?** The first resurrection, is the resurrection of all the chosen, the called, and the faithful throughout history. It will include believers who died in Christ, you could add the raptured church, it will include Old Testament saints who are resurrected at some point, and last but not least, it will also include the martyred Tribulation saints.

And as for when it occurs, I don't see the first resurrection as a *single event*, but rather I see it in *stages* – and if it helps, picture the stages of a harvest in Old Testament times. In those days, when harvesting a grain field, there would be a gathering of the *first fruits* which were taken to the temple and presented to God as an offering, then there was the *main reaping* of the field, and afterwards, as a service to the poor and the needy, they were invited to *glean* the field of whatever remained. If you remember, that's what Ruth was doing when she met Boaz.

Using the *stages* of a harvest as a reference, the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that when it comes to the resurrection, Jesus is the *first fruit* – offered to God on our behalf. It started with Him. Then comes the *main reaping*, when Jesus returns for His church – His bride. Paul described it in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**,

***<sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.***

In this *main reaping*, the dead in Christ rise first in transformed bodies and afterwards believers who are alive are raptured and their bodies are changed as well. Then, last but not least there is the *gleaning* – the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs before the Millennial Kingdom. So, the first resurrection – the *better* resurrection – which is for all believers, comes at various *stages* in history – but all coming *before* the final resurrection of the spiritually dead.

Now, I know that was a lot to take in, and you don't have to agree with a single thing I just said, but regardless of your view, here is the bottom line from **verse 6**: **Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

We will be with the Lord, blessed, never to die, and we will reign with Him. So, that begs the question – **what will life be like during the Millennial Kingdom?** Well in a nutshell, we get a taste of life as if Adam had never sinned, and there are several passages scattered throughout the Bible that speak to this, but for the sake of time, I am going to keep us in **Isaiah**. Let's begin with **Isaiah 2:1-4**,

***<sup>1</sup>The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.***

***<sup>2</sup>Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. <sup>3</sup>And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; so that He may teach us about His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go out from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>And He will judge between the nations, and will mediate for many peoples; and they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not lift up a sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.***

We are told that people from all over the world will come to Jerusalem to be taught by the Lord Himself. Jerusalem will be the capitol of His kingdom and people will regularly journey there to meet and worship the King in person. Isaiah tells us that we will continue to be divided into **nations**, but there will be no fear of war under the rule of Jesus. Yes, people and nations will still have their issues because free wills are involved, but we are told that Jesus will **mediate** and settle their matters.

Then a few chapters later we come to **Isaiah 11:6-9**, where we read,

*<sup>6</sup>And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. <sup>7</sup>Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup>The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. <sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

The effects of the fall have made this world a dangerous place, but the Lord's kingdom will be one of complete peace and harmony, in fact, we learn that the animals will change. All animals will become herbivores just as it was at creation before the fall of Adam. Even little children can play with cobras without fear of harm.

Because of the earth's perfect conditions, people in their mortal bodies will work, they will have families, and they will live long lives just like those we read about in **Genesis**. Look at **Isaiah 65:19-24**.

*<sup>19</sup>I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. <sup>20</sup>No longer will there be in it an infant who lives only a few days, or an old person who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of a hundred, And the one who does not reach the age of a hundred will be thought accursed. <sup>21</sup>They will build houses and inhabit them; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup>They will not build and another inhabit, they will not plant and another eat; for as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, and My chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup>They will not labor in vain, or give birth to children for disaster; for they are the descendants of those blessed by the LORD, and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup>It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will listen.*

So, in this passage we learn a few interesting things. We are told that all the injustices of life will disappear, people will actually enjoy the work of their hands, the lands will flourish, the property of another will be respected, and the fear of disaster or misfortune will be gone. All mortal people will be expected to live to a ripe old age – long life will be a given, and for those who surprisingly don't live long – well that can only be explained as being the consequence of some sin.

There are other passages we could look at, but hopefully, you get the idea. Jesus will be the earthly King in Jerusalem, those in His kingdom will experience what life is like under His righteous reign, and during His reign, people will have time to gain a true knowledge of God without any deception or obstacles by the enemy, but it doesn't remain that way after the 1000 years are completed.

Let's get back to **Revelation 20**, and pick up beginning with **verse 7**.

**<sup>7</sup>When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. <sup>9</sup>And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup> And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

Some people may find this passage shocking, but here we are told that even in ideal conditions, even in the presence of the Lord, even under His righteous rule, there will be many who will still oppose Him when given the opportunity. It's hard to fathom, but here it is, and let me explain.

Everybody who enters into the Millennial Kingdom is righteous, but during this 1000-year period, those who are mortal will repopulate the earth with children and grandchildren and so on and so on. In a 1000-year period, there will be numerous generations of people with free will, and not all of them will choose to follow the Lord like those before them. Just like today, people will still make individual decisions to follow or reject Jesus, and when Satan is released for a short time, he will **deceive** and stir up a rebellion by those who do not follow the Lord.

In a sense, this rebellion will sum up all that God has said about the heart of man, for even though the environment will be perfect – a perfect environment cannot

produce a perfect heart. Today, there are those who believe that man is basically good. There are many who believe that man is really innocent, and are simply the products of their environment, but this will reveal the true nature of man, and if given the opportunity, people will still make the wrong choice, even in a perfect environment.

We are told this rebellion will prompt a battle, but it's not much of a battle as **fire comes down from heaven** to quickly destroy this rebellion, and then Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire to join the Antichrist and the False Prophet in torment forever and ever. Then comes the final judgment of the spiritually dead, the lost, the unbelievers, and we will look at that next week.

We covered a lot of ground this morning, and for me there are two things that really stick out. For believers, how we live our lives in the here and now will have a bearing on our future in the Lord's Kingdom. I don't know about you, but I want to hear these words from Jesus – *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* I don't need a crown – I just want to hear those words.

Then for those who do not know Jesus, if you die in your sins, if you reject the Lord's love and grace and forgiveness – you miss it all while you wait in Hades for the final resurrection of the spiritually dead. This isn't a game, there are real life and death consequences, and I encourage you this morning to choose a life in Christ.

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