

## **The Best of Times and the Worst of Times**

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Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 19-20

Charles Dickens wrote what may be the most famous opening lines to any book in English literature when he wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*. Some of you may remember this book from Jr. or Sr. High School. Dickens' opening paragraph reads this way:

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*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” is a summary statement for how the New Testament portrays the life of a Christian in this world. Every single day my emails from individuals in this congregation confirm both the Bible and Charles Dickens' description of our lives. I receive over 150 emails each day

from people around the world and from people here in the church. Many of the emails share with me stories of blessing – how God healed someone through our soaking prayer ministry, or how someone's marriage was restored through our Begin Again weekends. I receive fabulous stories about a church member's 80-year old dad getting saved, or a mission experience one of our teens had in Mexico, or a prophetic word that called someone to ministry.

Every single day someone shares with me an instance of their experience of the best of times and God's goodness in this world. And every single day I receive numerous emails describing the worst of times in a person's life.

Some of the emails I get are simply in the form of a prayer request:

- Please pray for my son, he has been diagnosed with brain cancer.
- Please pray for my daughter, she is going back into drug rehab for the third time addicted to crack.
- Pray for me; I'm out of work and we are going to lose our home.

Other people share with me life traumas. Just this week I heard stories of rape, a story of an attempted suicide, a husband's agony over his wife seeking a divorce and a half dozen stories of critically ill relatives.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. As we move into the home stretch of the book of Revelation, the portrait of life in this world comes into even

sharper relief. John, the author of Revelation, moves from the wedding feast of the church and Jesus to warfare against the anti-Christ and those associated with anti-Christ. Wedding and warfare; feasting and fighting; blessing and battling; conversions and conflict – it was the best of times, and the worst of times.

These are the two roles of the Christian life. To put it in kingdom theology that we have adopted here at Vineyard, the Christian life is a continual experience of the already of God's Kingdom and the not-yet of this world. I have called today's talk very simply, The Best of Times and the Worst of Times. Let's pray.

One of the things that John does in this text is to draw a contrast between good and evil. See, John was writing to churches that were being tempted to compromise. We live in an age of compromise – an age where everything is a political deal struck, everything is shades of gray, and we Christians even judge things as not that bad.

- What I'm watching on TV or video is not that bad.
- The websites that I visit are generally OK.

In a world of dotted lines, the book of Revelation draws a sharp solid line. The book of Revelation is a book of black and white, a book of radical contrasts, a book designed to awaken us to the ugliness of sin and the attractiveness of

holiness. Revelation is a book of utter absolutes. Revelation is a book of prophecy. That is what the apostle John tells us in Rev. 1:3,

#### SLIDE

Rev 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Do you know prophets don't use the language of therapy. You don't hear prophets in the Bible using words like dysfunctional, abnormal, and unhealthy. Prophets don't use flabby words. There are no weasel words in the prophets. They use words like wicked, perverse, and abomination.

The text that we are going to look at today like the rest of the book of Revelation, sharpens the distinctions. This text highlights the contrast between good and evil. In a world of compromise and gray, every once in a while we need someone to sharpen the focus and declare that some things are good and right, and some things are evil and wrong.

Now, the first contrast that we read about in Revelation 19 is the contrast between the bride of Christ and the whore of Babylon, Rev. 19:1-8,

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Rev 19:1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

Rev 19:2 for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.  
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

Rev 19:3 And again they shouted:

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

Rev 19:4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

Rev 19:5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God,  
all you his servants,  
you who fear him,  
both small and great!”

Rev 19:6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Rev 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.

Rev 19:8 Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

In chapter 18 we read about the great prostitute called Babylon. A few weeks ago we learned that Babylon is a symbol of cultures and countries in which everything is for sale, in which everything has a price. Babylon is a symbol of countries and cultures, businesses, and family systems that corrupt anyone who touches them. Babylon is the government. It is the office. It is the family that is spiritually faithless

Now, note how Babylon, the prostitute, is dressed. Rev. 18:16,

## SLIDE

Rev 18:16 and cry out:

“ ‘Woe! Woe, O great city,  
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

John wants us to contrast the whore of Babylon with the Bride of Christ. Rev.  
19:6-8,

## SLIDE

Rev 19:6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing  
waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Rev 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.

Rev 19:8 Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

The bride is chaste. The bride is pure. The bride is clean. The bride of Christ is  
faithful to her husband. She is dressed in fine, clean linen symbolizing her  
righteous acts of service and obedience.

When I think about the clothing of the bride of Christ, I imagine the millions and  
millions of secret private choice made for the sake of Christ being made public.  
The glory of millions of acts of sacrifice that no one ever knew about suddenly  
being revealed. Choices in the heart that no one else knew about. The millions

of choices of Christian people to forgive those who hurt them. The countless wives who have forgiven their husband's infidelity. The countless husbands who have forgiven their wife's infidelity. Children who have forgiven abusive parents. Employees who have forgiven unfair employers. I think of the millions of acts of charity; I think of all of the people throughout history who have given to the cause of Christ out of their poverty. I think of the billions of prayers prayed in faith.

All of these private acts of obedience will be gloriously revealed – they are what the bride of Christ will be arrayed in – obedience, sacrifice, service, faith, purity.

Then John draws a contrast between Jesus the Lord and Satan the deceiver. Again, the contrast is between the best and the highest and the worst and the lowest. Concerning Jesus the Messiah, we read these four names given to him in Rev. 19:11-16,

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Rev 19:11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.

Rev 19:12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

Rev 19:13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

Rev 19:14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Rev 19:15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Rev 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Christ, first of all, is called faithful and true, Rev. 19:11

SLIDE

Rev 19:11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.

In Jewish thought, both the words faithful and true are synonymous. They communicate Christ's utter reliability. In other words, by calling Jesus faithful and true you are saying that you can count on Christ. When he makes a promise in this book, no matter what the circumstances, no matter the opposition, if Christ has made you a promise, he will keep it. That is what the apostle Paul says in 2 Cor. 1:20,

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2Co 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Is this how you see Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus will be totally reliable to you? That you can build your life on him? That he really is a solid foundation to build on, to trust in? Do you believe that you can count on Christ regarding your children – that there is no safer person in the world to entrust your loved ones to than Jesus Christ? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you think he is reliable? Can you count on Christ to provide for you? Can you count on Christ's promise to work for your good even bad things? Will Christ work everything together for good for you?



Do you believe that you can count on Jesus' promise that if you really do put his kingdom first in your life, then he will take care of everything else? When you pray to Christ, when you read this book, is your first thought: I am praying to someone, I am listening to someone who is faithful and true?

What else is Jesus called here? Rev. 19:12,

**SLIDE**

Rev 19:12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

When it says that Christ has a name that no one knows but himself, here is what that means. Names in the Bible stand for a person's identity. A hidden name means a hidden identity. When we human beings approach Jesus Christ, we realize that Christ has not revealed all of himself to us. However much we know of Christ, there is still a great deal we do not know. 1 Cor. 13:12 says this:

**SLIDE**

1Co 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

So when we speak about Jesus there is a humility in our speech. We do not pass off all of our views as if they are God's views. We parents cannot pass off our own parental perspectives, as if this is what God thinks. We husbands cannot declare that our view of something in our marriages is something that

God thinks about this particular issue. There is a humility in our approach to Jesus because our knowledge is partial.

The scripture says that Jesus has a name that no one knows but himself. Not everything has been revealed to us. So we have a modesty when speaking in the name of Christ.

But we are not utterly in the dark. In v. 13, John calls Jesus the Word of God, just as he did in his gospel in John 1:1.

#### SLIDE

Rev 19:13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

The idea that Christ is the Word is this: Just as people reveal themselves by their speech, so God reveals himself through his Word. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God. Jesus is the self-expression of God. Yes, it is true that there is much of God that we presently don't know. There is much about God that is too high, too wonderful, too magnificent for our limited sinful minds to comprehend. There is much that we Christians ought to be modest about and humble about as we declare our positions on political issues, or social matters.

But, and here is what the author of Revelation is saying, we who have looked to Christ can confidently and unashamedly say that we do know God. We don't know him exhaustively, but we know him. We don't know him completely, but we

are not agnostics. We do know God. We see God Almighty in the face of Jesus Christ. We have found God's love through the cross of Jesus Christ. We have discovered God's power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Word of God. Christ is the self-expression of God. Christ is the way that we come to know God accurately and truly, if not exhaustively.

And fourth of all, Christ is called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Rev. 19:16,

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Rev 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

Many of us can't read this words without thinking about Handel's Messiah. King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever and ever Halleluiah. It doesn't matter how incredible a human being is, friends, whether we are talking about a Pope or President, superstar athlete or supermodel gorgeous, Supreme Court nominee or basketball court player – Christ cuts everyone down to size. There is only one person who deserves ultimate honor. There is only one person that deserves our full confidence. There is only one person who always speaks the truth and never lies. There is only one person before we bow down and that is Jesus Christ.

Because as the apostle Paul says in Phil. 2:9-11, God has been given a name that is above every other name.

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Phil 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
Phil 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
Phil 2:11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Revelation calls him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And in contrast to these four glorious titles, we read about the four names given  
God's enemy in Rev. 20:2,

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Rev 20:2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and  
bound him for a thousand years.

Revelation 19 also draws a sharp contrast between the wedding supper of the  
Lamb and the great supper of God. Concerning the wedding supper of the  
Lamb, we read these encouraging words in Rev. 19:9,

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Rev 19:9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to  
the wedding supper of the Lamb!' " And he added, "These are the true words of  
God."

Do you know, friends, there is no better invitation that you could receive than an  
invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb. It is better than an invitation to a

White House dinner. It is even better than an invitation to sit in the G.M.'s box in Yankee Stadium, which admittedly would be a pretty great thing, don't you think?

There is no invitation that you could ever receive better than invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

But there is another supper that is a ghastly, grotesque alternative to the Lamb's wedding feast, Rev. 19:17-18,

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Rev 19:17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God,  
Rev 19:18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

The invited guests to that great supper will be vultures. The food that will be served will be human flesh, the bodies of those who received the mark of the beast.

I recently saw a vivid illustration of what this might look like during my trip to Tanzania. While our team was in Tanzania, we took a day and a half and went to one of the game preserves to see all of the African wildlife. It was just amazing to look out over this vast African plain and see herds zebra and antelope and wildebeests and elephants and giraffes, and cute baby giraffes, hippos, crocodiles, African deer. As we were driving through this game preserve,

we saw the bloody hind quarter of a zebra ten feet off the road. Circling above this bloody dead zebra were dozens of vultures. There must have been 60-80 vultures in the trees hanging like gigantic ugly leaves. Just a few feet off the road, behind a tree, was a gigantic male lion, with the rest of the zebra carcass devouring the zebra. The vultures were just waiting to get their shot at it.

The question that John presents to the reader of Revelation 19 is this: Would you prefer to go to a supper as a guest or do you want instead to be the main course like that zebra? The wedding feast of the Lamb, or the great supper of God? You're going to go to dinner. Do you, in other words, want to recline with Jesus around a banqueting table and feast with him, or as a ghastly alternative, do you want to be the feast and served up for the vultures? Talk about the best of times and the worst of times.

The final contrast that the apostle John draws out here in Rev. 19 and 20 is between the Book and the books. Rev. 20:11-15,

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Rev 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Rev 20:13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Rev 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

Rev 20:15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

What John is saying again is that here are two radically different alternatives. In other words, you have a choice. Either your name will be registered in the Book of Life, and you will be saved eternally, or instead, your name is not found in the Book of Life and you will be judged based upon your works listed in the books. Unfortunately, the whole Bible teaches that no one will be saved based upon their good deeds. No one will be saved because they have tried to be a good person.

So, here is the question, friend: Do you know if your name is found in the Lamb's Book of Life? How confident are you that Jesus Christ has written your name with his blood in his Book?

Scripture tells us how we can be sure that our name is in the Lamb's Book of Life. We read in John 1:12-13 these words:

#### SLIDE

Jn 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Jn 1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Has there been a time in your life when you can confidently said: I have believed in Christ and not only have I believed in Christ, but I have welcomed his Spirit

into my life. I know this; I have assurance from the Holy Spirit that my name is written in the Lamb's Book.

In a world of compromises and partial obedience, and "it's not that bad" judgments, "what is sex anyway" questions, "who knows if this is faithful or unfaithful", and "how do we define gossip anyway?", in a world of lukewarm discipleship and flabby words, and "can't we all just get along", the book of Revelation demands that we pick sides and that you stick with the side you pick.

John presents us with a series of alternatives. It is either the bride or the whore; Christ or the devil; being a guest or becoming the meal; the Book or the books. See, Revelation is teaching us that there is a good and there is a bad. There is a right and there is a wrong. There is a best and there is a worst. And this solid line, Revelation teaches us, runs through all of life. Revelation sharpens our moral and spiritual discernment. It is a book of prophecy.

Then in Rev. 20 we come upon John's reporting of the millennium. Judging by the amount of writing regarding the millennium and the controversy surrounding it, a person might think that your view of the millennium is the key to understanding the whole book of Revelation. It is not. There are some things that are really clear:

- The return of Christ is clear.
- The final judgment is clear.



- The defeat of the wicked is clear.
- The end of evil is clear.
- The reward of the righteous is clear.
- The wedding feast of the Lamb is clear.
- The new heavens and the new earth are clear.

All these things are clear. Exactly how we approach Revelation 20 is not so clear. Rev. 20:1-6 says this:

#### SLIDE

Rev 20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.

Rev 20:2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

Rev 20:3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Rev 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Rev 20:5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Now there are a number of different views concerning how to approach this text.

In my mind the two strongest and most viable ways to interpret Rev. 20:1-6 are either to offer a literal interpretation of these words - the literal perspective is often called the "Pre-Millennial Perspective" or to instead offer a spiritual

perspective of these words. The spiritual perspective is often called “The A-Millennial” viewpoint. There is a third perspective called “post-millennial,” but it is the weakest and least viable of the three alternatives. So I want to focus on the first two perspectives for a moment – the literal view that is often called the pre-millennial view and the spiritual view that is often called the a-millennial view.

Columns:

Literal – Pre-Millennial View

- The thousand years are to be taken literally.
- The millennium will take place following the return of Christ
- The binding of Satan is future. It will take place when Christ returns.
- The resurrections are literal and physical.
- The resurrection of the just and the unjust are separated by a thousand years.
- Revelation gives a chronological

Spiritual – A-Millennial View

- The thousand years are symbolic. The length of time is indeterminate.
- The millennium describes the church age between the first coming of Christ and his return.
- The binding of Satan is past. It took place at the cross.
- The resurrections are spiritual.
- All of the dead, both good and bad, will be raised at the same time.
- Revelation continually recaps

ordering of events.

the same events.

Those who hold to a pre-millennial perspective tend to view events in the book of Revelation in chronological order. In other words, first we have the opening of the seven seals, then we have the blowing of the seven trumpets, and then we have the pouring out of the seven bowls, and then we have the battle of Armageddon, and the judgment, the beast, the false prophets, and then the binding of Satan, and then the millennial reign of Christ, the judgment of Satan, and then the judgment of the wicked dead, and then finally the judgment of death itself, and then you have the new earth.

Those who hold to a spiritual perspective of Revelation tend to view the events in this book as a continual recapitulation of progress towards the end, sort of like a spiral laid on its side.

SLIDE – Spiral

So, John is recapping the judgments and this book ought not to be read in strictly chronological order, but it keeps coming back to the beginning again as he moves us closer and closer to the end. So Rev. 20, then, would be seen as a recap of all of church history.

As I said, I think that both the literal pre-millennial view of Rev. 20 and the spiritual, a-millennial view have strengths. I think that sincere Bible-believing Christians can hold to either view. In favor of the literal, pre-millennial view is the following:

SLIDE (one at a time)

- Many of the early church Fathers held to a literal pre-millennial view, including Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Justin.
- It is not obvious that Satan is currently bound or that the nations are “undeceived.” These events must be future.
- The literal view gives the most obvious sense to the phrase, “they came to life” in Rev. 20:4.

In favor of the spiritual, a-millennial view are the following:

SLIDE (one at a time)

- Virtually all of the other time-frames and numbers in Revelation are symbolic.

For example, the beast does not literally have ten crowns on his head. That is symbolic. And I don’t believe there are literally 144,000 people saved by Christ. I think that number is symbolic. And I do not believe that we will literally have stamped on our foreheads the number 666, as we studied that, we found it to be

symbolic. Why, then, do we view the 1000 years in Rev. 20 literally and not symbolically or spiritually?

SLIDE (one at a time)

- No where else in the Bible do we read of an intermediate Messianic reign lasting 1000 years between Messiah's return and the New Heaves and New Earth.

The great theologian, George Ladd, who himself was a literalist when it came to Rev. 20, makes this incredible admission: "This text in Rev. 20 is absolutely unique and singular in the entire Bible. There is no other clear biblical reference to the millennium other than Rev. 20."

Now, friends, it is hard to build a doctrine on one single text especially when the text is found in a highly symbolic book.

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- There is almost no other reference to a literal 1000 year reign of Messiah in all of Jewish literature.

In other words, if you survey all of the ancient Jewish books before the time of Jesus and after the time of Jesus, you have almost no support for the view that

when Messiah comes he is going to set up an intermediate kingdom before the New Heavens and the New Earth that is going to last for 1000 years.

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- The spiritual view of Revelation 20 was held by some early church Fathers and virtually the entire church from the time of Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Nowhere else in the Bible do we read of two resurrections separated in time by 1000 years.

The resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked are generally viewed in the rest of the Bible as two simultaneous aspects of one great act of God. So we read verses like this in John 5:28-29,

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Jn 5:28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

Jn 5:29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

As I said, I think sincere Christians who love and study their bibles can differ here, but if someone put a gun to my head and said, “You can only choose one

view – you can't hedge your bets – which view, on balance, fits the context of the book of Revelation best?" I would be forced to choose the spiritual view.

I think it fits the overall structure of the book of Revelation. I believe that Revelation does not move forward chronologically but rather keeps recapping the same events in a spiral-like way as we move toward the end.

Now what are the implications of taking the spiritual view of the millennium?

Rev. 20:1-6 contains the expression "for 1000 years" four different times. We read first in v. 2 that Satan is bound for 1000 years.

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Rev 20:2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

We read that the nations are undeceived for 1000 years in v. 3,

#### SLIDE

Rev 20:3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Third, we read that we are resurrected with Christ for 1000 years in v. 4,

#### SLIDE

Rev 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped

the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

And finally, we read that we get to serve God as priests and kings in v. 6,

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Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

According to the spiritual view, these four truths – that Satan is bound, that the nations are undeceived, that we are raised with Christ, and that we reign with Christ as priests and kings, are current realities and not just future truths. This current reality should impact our lives right now. There is going to be a fuller expression, a more complete and final expression of these four truths when Christ returns, but right now we can experience a fore-taste of these four realities.

Again, according to kingdom theology there is an already as well as a not yet concerning these four things. Let's look at them quickly.

Right now, Satan is bound, v. 2,

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Rev 20:2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.



He not only will be bound completely in the future and destroyed with, but he is bound right now. Jesus tells us this in Matt. 12:29,

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Mt 12:29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.

The great binding of Satan is not just through the exorcism of Christ that Matthew 12 is speaking about. The great decisive act of Satan's binding took place through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is what Col. 2:13-15 tells us.

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Col 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Col 2:14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Col 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

I love the JB Philips translation of Colossians 2. He writes:

SLIDE

He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his head on the cross.

The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, experienced the reality of this present truth in a dream in which he was visited at night by Satan. Satan brought to Luther a record of Luther's own life written by his own hand. The tempter said to him, "Is that true? Did you write it?"

Luther, trembling and terrified, had to confess that it was all true. Satan unrolled scroll after scroll and again, the same confession was wrung out of Martin Luther: Did you write this? Is all this damning evidence against you? Are these all the things you've done?

Luther had to confess over and over again, "It is true. It is true." The burden of his guilt was immense. At length, Satan prepared to leave, having brought Martin Luther down to the lowest point of abject misery. Suddenly, Luther turned to the tempter and said, "It is true, every word of it, but right over every scroll are these words: The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sins."

How is Satan bound? How is he kept within limits right now? Because Jesus Christ has taken away from Satan the main weapon of his attack on us – our guilt through our breaking of the commandments of God. Satan can no longer use that weapon against God's people.

Does Satan still have weapons of power? Yes. Can he still attack in many ways? Yes. He is not totally destroyed. That awaits the second coming of

Christ. But his main weapon – unforgiven sin - has been taken away right now through the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

Right now, the nations are undeceived. Rev. 20:3,

#### SLIDE

Rev 20:3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

During the church age, God has worked by the power of the Holy Spirit to convert billions of people through the preaching of the gospel. People could not be converted if Satan was not in some way restrained from his deceiving power. Right now, we are resurrected with Christ, Rev. 20:4.

#### SLIDE

Rev 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

The resurrection of the Christian believer, according to the New Testament, is not just future. It is now. By virtue of our faith connection with Jesus Christ and the baptizing work of his Spirit, we Christian believers have become identified with Jesus' death, his resurrection, and his ascension. In fact, the scriptures teach that right now we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, Eph. 2:6,

#### SLIDE

Eph 2:6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

Philip Brooks, a 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher, said, "The great Easter truth is not that we are to live newly after death – that is not the great thing. The great Easter truth is that we are to be new here and now. Not so much that we are to live forever as that we can live a new quality of life now."

The New Testament teaches that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ you have eternal life now. You are resurrected now. That doesn't mean that we have our resurrection bodies now, but there is a spiritual foretaste of the resurrection. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 6:8-11,

#### SLIDE

Ro 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Ro 6:9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

Ro 6:10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Ro 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

What does this mean that you died and that you were raised? You might say, “I don’t feel like I died.” Mark Twain quipped, “The news of my passing has been greatly exaggerated.”

But there is a reality here that a saved person needs to embrace. Jesus Christ died. That is a fact of history. Jesus Christ came back to life. That is also a fact of history. When he died and when he was raised, his relationship to this world as specifically to sin in this world was radically changed. Christ could no longer be tempted by sin as a dead man. Christ was raised above sin through his resurrection.

Now, think about the sin you give into the most. Think about the dark vein that wraps you up and continually defeats you. When will you finally overcome your particular sin of choice? What we are reading here in Revelation, and more specifically in the parallel text of Romans 6, is that you don’t have to wait until they close the coffin on you to defeat problems in your life. You can win right now. There is a radical change that has taken place inside of a saved person by virtue of our spiritual union with the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. Before being joined to Jesus’ death, sin reigns over us. Sin is in control. A person can hardly help but sin when they are joined to Christ. But when you are saved, your relationship to sin changes.

Now, you might say: Rich it certainly doesn't feel like my relationship to my sin has changed. This particular sin in my life still exerts tremendous influence. I still fall into lots of the same habits as I did in the past.

Let me put it this way. Perhaps it will be understandable. It is one thing to have a new status and a new relationship. It is another thing to realize that new status and to live out of that. For example, consider a child whose family of origin contains a lot of abuse. Children's Services may take that child out of his family of origin and place the child in a foster home. The foster parents might be loving, kind and gentle, and treat that child with incredible affection. But the child whose status has changed is now living in an entirely different home. They still continue to act as an abuse victim. That child may be unable to give or receive love. Maybe they interpret their foster parents actions with a great deal of mistrust and fear. The child may act in rebellious or angry ways.

See there is a world of difference between having a changed status and recognizing you have a changed status. That is why Paul, in Romans 6, tells us that we need to reckon these things to be true in our lives. There has been a change. The sin that feels so strong no longer has power over us. Again, this process is not completed. It doesn't mean that there isn't a fight. But the power of sin is broken in our life. We are raised with Christ. We are no longer under sin, we are over it.

I've used this analogy before, but I wrestled in high school and there is a world of difference between having someone on top of you and you being on top of them. It is still a fight when you are on top of someone else, but it is sure a lot easier. And that is the description of the changed status that a saved person undergoes in dying and rising with Christ. We are now on top of sin, not underneath it.

Finally, right now we are priests and kings. The spiritual view of the millennium tells us that whatever you are as a follower of Jesus, a mom, dad, a student, a daughter, a son, an attorney, plumber, small group leader, or whatever else you are, in Christ you are a priest. You stand before God interceding for this world, calling out to God for his kingdom to come fully, and his will to be done fully on earth as it is in heaven. You are a priest. You not only intercede before God on behalf of the world, you intercede before the world on behalf of God. You are the intersecting point between heaven and earth – you, Christian.

And you, Christian, have authority. Not the authority that you one day will have, but you have authority now over the demonic, over illness, over sin. The best of times and the worst of times. This is the apostle John's description of our lives right now. Let's pray.

## **The Best of Times and the Worst of Times**

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Rich Nathan

July 23-24, 2005

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