

21 May, 2000  
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**FOLLOWING CHRIST IN A FRIGHTENING WORLD:  
Y?K-THE REAL NEW MILLENNIUM  
*Revelation 19:17-20:15***

Last December 31, the world held its collective breath. For years we had been hearing warnings about Y2K. What was going to happen when the clock struck midnight? Would the computers of the world go crazy? Would our systems of commerce and infrastructure deteriorate? What would the world look like when we got up on January 1 in the new millennium?

It was the biggest non-event in the history of non-events, wasn't it? A big fat nothing? But it sure held our attention?

There is another millennium that has held the attention of Christians for two thousand years. It isn't Y2K. It is Y?K. We don't know when this millennium will occur. We can't even agree on what it will look like or whether it will be a literal thousand years. But this morning we come to that part of the story of Revelation. (Read)

This book is full of controversies. We have touched on some of them throughout the year. There are a variety of different understandings about how Revelation should be interpreted. But I suppose that there is no other passage in the book of Revelation that has generated MORE controversy than the first six verses of chapter 20.

Let me set the context. Remember back on Palm Sunday, we met the rider on the white horse in chapter 19. It is an awesome site. God has had enough. Jesus has returned and he is going to bring all things into submission. His eyes are blazing, his head bears many crowns, his robe is covered with his own blood. He is followed by an army of heavenly hosts, all of them dressed in white. His only weapon is the word which proceeds from his mouth. The same word that spoke all things into existence now decimates his enemies.

We saw the consequences of that battle in the first part of the reading. Satan's two evil sidekicks, the sea beast and the land beast,

draw together kings and rulers from around the world to wage war against Jesus. But it is futile. They are both captured and, we are told, thrown into a fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of the army is utterly destroyed, so much so that the birds gorge themselves on their flesh.

But that's just the henchmen. Next, we turn our attention to the dragon...Satan himself. And angel comes down from heaven, seizes him, binds him in chains and casts him into the Abyss...a pit...which is locked and sealed. And, we are told; the dragon remains there for a period of one thousand years. After that thousand years, Satan is released and tries once again to rally the troops against the Lord. From the four corners of the earth, the armies gather for battle. Like the sand on the seashore, they are so numerous. They surround the encampment of God and, just when it seems they will attack, they are devoured by fire that comes down from heaven. And the devil is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, along with the beast and the false prophet, where they suffer in torment forever. The scene closes with the great white throne of judgment where all those in rebellion against Jesus receive their verdict and are, themselves, consigned to the lake of fire.

As I said, perhaps no passage of scripture has generated as much controversy as this one. Perhaps it will be helpful to briefly describe the three main understandings of this issue. The first is premillennialism. This is a very complex doctrine that weaves together Old Testament and New Testament passages in an intricate timeline of the end times.

Like the name suggests, this teaching believes that Jesus will return prior to a literal thousand year period. This option focuses on the restoration of the nation of Israel as the key agent in the culmination of all things. Satan is stripped of his power. The Christian dead are resurrected and Jesus sets up a kingdom on earth governed jointly by him and these resurrected believers. After that 1000-year period, Satan is released and tries once more time to rally his troops against God. This time he is defeated and cast into the lake of fire forever.

The second is postmillennialism. Postmillennialism believes that the first coming of Jesus ushered in the millennium. It is not a literal thousand-year period of time but simply an extended

period of time. Postmillennialists believe that gradually, the gospel is going to penetrate into the world and the world will become better and better and better as the influence of Christ is felt. All evil will not be completely stamped out. There will still be remnants of sin and pockets of those who do not confess Christ. But the vast majority of the world will confess Jesus and gradually, century by century, the world will become a better and better place. Put simply, postmillennialism is utopianism. After this golden age—this millennium--Jesus will return. Thus the expression, "postmillennialism." He will return AFTER the millennium. Jesus will discover an overwhelmingly Christian world. He will judge those few that haven't bowed in obedience to him. The rest of us will be taken up into heaven to continue our eternal existence with Christ.

The third option is amillennialism. This views the thousand years symbolically. There is no literal thousand year reign of Jesus on earth. Thus "a" millennial...which, in Greek, means "no" millennial. Amillennialists believe that there is only one return of Jesus, only one resurrection of the dead, only one judgment. Satan's power was bound through the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. It was because of the authority of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit that his disciples were able to obey him and take the gospel into all the world, a world that had, before then been the domain of Satan. Even now, Jesus reigns supreme over all things although his final return and judgment has yet to occur. When Jesus finally returns, Satan will be released and ultimately destroyed.

So, which is true? How in the world do we decide? I'll be honest with you, I've dreaded preaching this message. Trying to sort through the writings of these various options was exhausting and confusing work. What in the world are we to make of it?

First, it should be said that all three of these positions are held by deeply devoted followers of Christ. Regrettably, this matter of end times has been a source of great controversy, even division among Christians. There is suspicion of one group towards the other because they don't believe the right things, don't interpret the Bible seriously or correctly. Frankly, I have experienced some of that myself during our series through Revelation. These differing views are not between conservatives and liberals, between those who revere the scriptures and those who do not.

They are held by devout, Bible-believing people. It is reprehensible to me that a doctrine that is mentioned only in these six verses of scripture, in what should be admitted is very unusual language, should become the litmus test for whether a person is truly spiritual or not. I think God is embarrassed by such arrogance and we should be ashamed of ourselves for treating Christian brothers and sisters with such contempt.

For what it's worth, the amillennial position has been around the longest...since the second century. Its most vigorous early proponent was St. Augustine. John Calvin was also an amillennialist. The most popular position today, however, is the pre-mil position. This is the position espoused by the Tim LaHaye "Left Behind" books, by Hal Lindsey's writings and the recent movie, "The Omega Code." But I should also mention that the pre-mil position is only about 200 years old. Postmillennialism has relatively few proponents today. Having just left the bloodiest century in the history of humanity, I suspect it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that the world is becoming a better and better place.

Darrell Johnson suggests that we ought to sort through this issue by figuring out where we agree. And it is this: the future is not up for grabs. It belongs to Jesus Christ. Whether you think Jesus is returning pre-mil or pos-mil or is already reigning, all three of these positions affirm the same essential truth: Jesus Christ will bring all things under his authority. On this we do agree.

Here are some things we **ought** to agree on:

1000 years is a symbol, not a statistic. I know that flies in the face of the pre-mil position, but by now I hope you have seen that when John uses numbers, they are a symbol, they are not a statistic. Maybe the millennium will be exactly 1000 years, but I think it is John's way of telling a first century church that was in terrible persecution ...and a 21<sup>st</sup> century church that wonders what the future holds ...that everything is under God's control. Don't panic. Don't worry. God is in control.

Here's another thing we OUGHT to agree on. Jesus is not going to "become King." Any interpretation of Revelation which suggests that Jesus will "someday" be king ...that we are waiting for him to be king...does a terrible disservice to the text. Jesus isn't GOING to

be king someday. Jesus IS King...right now...King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What did Jesus say before ascending back into heaven? "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." Listen to Ephesians 1:20-22: God raised Jesus from the dead "...and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." It doesn't say, "God will seat...someday..." It says, "God seated him." It is done!

Revelation 1:5...at the very beginning of this book...affirms this: Jesus is the "first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

Proponents of all three of these positions ought to agree that Jesus Christ is ..right now ...present tense...King of Kings and Lord of Lords.'

There are some things about which we must agree to graciously disagree:

When will the 1000 year period take place-we don't know. It is not clear.

What about the "rapture" of the church? Will it take place? When will it occur? Again, a fair reading must admit that it is not at all clear.

What about a possible seven-year period of tribulation? What about the whether the temple will be reconstructed and animal sacrifice reinstated? Again, I must say that these matters, believed by some, are not clear.

But here's the deal. Here is what we must declare louder and clearer than all the things we might disagree on. The stuff we DO agree on is so much bigger, so much greater, so much important that the stuff we differ on. When will Jesus come? Before the millennium? After? Who knows? But Jesus will come again! When will Satan and his evil accomplices be destroyed? Where will the battle occur? What is the nature of the Lake of Fire? Who knows? The point is, Satan **will be** destroyed. Jesus will be victorious!

Where do I stand on these three positions? I like what Ralph Winter says: I'm a panmillennialist. I believe it will all pan out in the end. Seriously, I lean toward the amillennial position. I believe that the binding of Satan began on the first Christmas Eve. Jesus' whole ministry was a demonstration of his power and authority over the evil one. His very first miracle was casting the demon out of the man in the synagogue at Capernaum. Again and again, the demons begged Jesus to leave them alone. Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness, he defeated Satan in exorcisms, he defeated Satan in his acts of healing and, ultimately, he defeated Satan when he rose again from the grave that could not hold him. I think that one day, Jesus will return one time. There will be one final confrontation and Satan will be destroyed. There will be one great judgment of all of humanity. And those who have loved and served Christ will be called to glory. That is what I believe.

In some respects, I consider many of these debates futile, divisive and counter-productive. It matters little to me whether there will be a literal 1000 year reign or not; whether Jesus will come before or after the millennium; whether or not there is a seven year period of tribulation. Here's what matters to me: that when Jesus comes ...and he will come ...he will find me faithful, doing all I can to obey his commission to go into the world and make disciples. Isn't that the bottom line for all of us? Shouldn't it be?

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR  
Y?K-THE REAL MILLENNIUM  
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Pastor Mark Toone  
21 May, 2000

- *Pastor Mark described three views on the millennium. Can you remember them? Review each position together? With which position are you most familiar? Which most closely describes your understanding of the end times.*
- *Of all the issues that have divided Bible-believing, evangelical Christians, differing opinions on the millennium and end-times has been among the most contentious. Why do you think this is so? Why are Christians so suspicious of each other over these kinds of issues?*
- *Pastor Mark suggests it is inappropriate to think of Jesus' kingship as somehow being reserved for a future time. In what way is Jesus already King? What passages of scriptures can you suggest that support this? If Satan is "bound" presently, in what way is that so? The world still seems awfully evil.*
- *Why is eschatology important? Why does any of this matter? What difference does it make in our Christian walks?*
- *Pray together.*

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