

Revelation 20

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to the passage we read earlier, Revelation chapter 20. If you're new to Cornerstone or a visitor, let me explain.

It's our custom to work through books of the Bible. And over the past weeks, we've been looking together at the last book of the Bible, which is a revelation, hence the name, given to John by God to show what was to take place in the coming days leading up to the end of the age.

And we notice this revelation isn't a chronological outline of what's going to take place from John's day until the end, but rather it's a series of eight scenes with each scene, maybe except the first and the last, covering the whole period.

With each scene looking at that period from a different camera angle, if you like. The last six chapters of Revelation from chapter 17, the final three scenes, if you like, are concerned with the nature and destiny of two cities, two symbolic cities, Babylon, mentioned specifically in 18 and 19, 17 and 18, Babylon representing the world, and Jerusalem representing the church.

We'll hear a lot about Jerusalem next week in chapter 21. And the basic theme of the last six chapters is the respective destinies of the world, Babylon, and the church, Jerusalem.

[2:05] Babylon is further represented as a woman, as a prostitute in all her debauchery. Jerusalem is also represented as a woman, a pure, perfect bride of Christ, the church of God.

And each city has a prince or a ruler. Babylon's prince appears first in chapter 12. Remember these chapters are repeating each other.

Chapter 12 with seven crowns on his head, indicating that he's a prince here in chapter 20 as the dragon. He's the one whom Jesus referred to as the prince of this world.

And Jerusalem's prince is the one referred to in chapter 19, as we saw last week, as king of kings and lord of lords. We saw in chapter 18, the destruction of Babylon.

We're now going to see the destruction, the final destruction of the prince of Babylon, the dragon. And then the last two chapters, the final coronation of the prince, who is lord of lords and king of kings.

[3:23] Chapter 20 is part of the seventh scene. It begins in chapter 19, verse 11, and goes through to chapter 21, verse 8.

And like other, the other scenes, it's made up of seven parts. Okay, we've had seven seals in scene two. We've had seven trumpets in scene three.

Seven balls in scene five and so on. Here in the seventh scene, we have seven visions. Still with me? We have seven visions.

We looked at three of them last week, from chapter 19, verse 11 to the end. Here in chapter 20, we have visions four, five, and six.

And then the seventh vision in the opening verses of chapter 21, which we'll come to next week. Now that sounds all very straightforward.

[4:20] But chapter 20 is perhaps the most difficult and controversial chapter in the whole Bible.

Denominations have been founded. Churches have been split. Many, many books have been written in connection with the contents of chapter 20, especially the thousand years that's mentioned in verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

But at the same time, this chapter is one of the most comforting and encouraging chapters for the Christian, for the believer in Jesus Christ.

And it's my prayer that as we look at this chapter, we won't get bogged down in controversy, but we'll be blessed as we look into the meaning of this chapter for us today.

The overall theme of the chapter is God's ultimate victory over Satan and death. So, into chapter 20.

[5:37] I said earlier there are three visions here. First, look in verse 1. And I saw. And that vision goes from 1 to 3.

And then I suggest verses 7 to 10. The second vision begins at verse 4. You see, I saw. And goes through to verse 6.

And then the third vision begins at verse 10. See it? Then I saw. And goes through to the end of the chapter, verse 15. So, here are my headings for today.

They should come up here. Satan and his destruction. Verses 1 to 3 and 7 to 10. The saints and their security.

Verses 4 to 6. And judgment and its finality. So, that's where we're going. Hopefully. First of all then, Satan and his destruction.

[6:38] Look at verse 1. John writing, And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss, and holding in his hand a great chain.

He seized the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 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. Well, what do we make of all that? Well, we're told very clearly, who is being seized and bound?

It's the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil, or Satan. I don't like snakes, do you? Maybe you do, I don't.

As a vet, I had to treat several ferocious bulls. I had to, one time, treat, the bulls actually were, actually got them into a crush, so it wasn't too bad.

[7:52] The, one, I remember one ferocious guard dog, I had to go to visit. Thankfully, by the time I got there, he was muzzled, and he was held down by two, attendants, so it wasn't too bad.

I also had to treat a, a very large chimpanzee, in Edinburgh Zoo. Thankfully, I was able to anesthetize it. But, I think the thing that scared me most, and this happened after I stopped being a vet, really, I was in ministry, in, in the Republic of Ireland, and one of my, congregation, asked me if I would go, and, and inject, his son's, snake, and it was a, huge, it had a whole room of the house, for itself, and he wanted me to go and inject this, with some, something that that had left him.

That was a bit scary, because it wasn't even his, I asked him to hold it, but I wasn't sure that he would. Anyway, we survived. Yeah, I don't like snakes.

But, but it's, it's a fitting description, of the devil, isn't it? Of Satan. And that's, that's who the angel, came to deal with.

Okay? And, he dealt with, Satan, in three phases, notice. First of all, Satan was seized, bound, and cast into the abyss, for a thousand years.

[9:27] Secondly, he was set free, for a short time, verses three, and seven. And then thirdly, he was destroyed, in the lake of burning sulfur, in verse 10.

Actually, where the beast, and false prophet, have been thrown, as we saw last week. So anyway, let's look at these, in a bit more detail. Firstly, what do you do first of all?

The angel, who God sees, with the key, of the abyss, and the great chain, in his hand, sees the dragon, binds him, with the chain, and throws him, into the abyss, which is locked, and sealed over, to keep him, from deceiving, the nations anymore.

Now, we've, met, with the abyss, before. look back, in chapter nine. Remember, these are repeated scenes, so, what we've heard before, we're hearing again.

In chapter nine, verse one, we read this. The star, was given the key, to the shaft, of the abyss, when he opened the abyss, smoke rose, from it, like the smoke, from a gigantic furnace, the sun, and sky, were darkened, by the smoke, from the abyss, and out of the smoke, locusts, came down, to the earth, and were given power, like that of scorpions, of the earth.

[10:55] And who is the prince, of the abyss? Well, look at verse 11. They had a king, as head over them, the angel of the abyss, whose name, in the Hebrew, is Abaddon, and in Greek, is Apollyon, that is, destroyer.

Another name, for Satan. So, here's Satan, appearing, chapter 9, as the prince, of the abyss, and here, in chapter 20, he's cast into it.

See, the abyss, is the proper abode, of Satan, and all the demons, who fell with him. It's referred to, again, actually, in Jude 6, as the abode, of fallen angels, and also, in 2 Peter, chapter 2, verse 4.

And it's at this point, that we're told, that Satan, was thus restrained, or bound, for a thousand years, to keep him, from deceiving the nations, anymore, until the thousand years, were ended. So, I want to ask, and answer, three questions. What does a thousand years, mean? What does it mean, that Satan is bound?

[12 : 15] And when does this binding, take place? What does a thousand years, mean? Well, over the past weeks, in our studies of Revelation, it's clear, that, numerical symbolism, is one of the features, of this book.

The numbers, seven, and ten, and twelve, have appeared, again and again. Seven is the perfect number, ten is the number, of completeness, twelve, is the symbol, of the church, the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles.

Number one thousand, don't have to be good, at maths, to work this out, number one thousand, is ten to the power of three, cube of ten. And, I suggest, that like the other numbers, in Revelations, it's also, symbolic.

Back in chapter, fourteen, we read this, then I looked, and there before me, was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him, a hundred and forty-four thousand, who had his name, and his father's name, written on their foreheads.

And they sang a new song, before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders. No one could learn the song, except, the hundred and forty-four thousand, who had been redeemed, from the earth.

[13 : 37] So, this, hundred and forty-four thousand, is the company, of God's people. But it's not, literally, the total number, of God's people, is it?

It's symbolic. It's a multiple, of twelve, and stands, for the complete number, of God's people. So that's symbolic.

Why take, one thousand years, as literal? It's symbolic too. And, in Bible, throughout the Bible, one thousand, is used, in a symbolic way.

For example, in Psalm 50, we read, God says, I have no need, of a bull, from your stall, or a gorge, from your pens, for every animal, of the forest, is mine, and the cattle, on a thousand hills.

I remember this verse, because, my, my old boss, in the vet practice, in Hampshire, a Christian guy, he used to say, when, when, when finances were tight, he would say, Lord, why don't you just sell, a few cows, and let us have, some of the money?

[14 : 44] But, think of, think of the verse. If, if the cattle, on a thousand hills, belong to God, what about the cattle, on hill 1001, and 1002?

Doesn't he own them as well? Of course he does. The idea is of, totality, and completeness. Peter says, one day, with God, is like a thousand years, and a thousand years, is one day.

So, it's a symbolic, period of time. And so here, John, in his revelation, isn't giving us, a mathematical, number of years, but rather, a particular, period of time, of, total, completeness.

Ten cubed. second question. What is the binding of Satan? Does it mean that, for this period, Satan is totally inactive, and there is no satanic activity?

Well, no, it doesn't mean that at all. The chain, that's taking to bind Satan, is a restraining of Satan. He's restrained by God, not destroyed.

[16 : 10] Overcome, but not cast out, if you like. Third question. When does this binding take place? Well, this is where we need to look at our Bibles.

What does the Bible, lead us to believe about, Satan's, binding? Let me read a few verses, from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12.

Turn to it, if you like. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12, and at verse 24. When the Pharisees heard this, they said, it is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow, casts out demons. Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them, every kingdom, divided against itself, will be ruined, and every city or household, divided against itself, will not stand.

If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons, by Beelzebub, by whom do your people, drive them out?

[17 : 16] So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God, that I drive out demons, and the kingdom of God has come among you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house, and carry off his possessions, unless he first ties up, or binds, the strong man?

Then, he can plunder his house. Jesus is saying, that what he is doing, by invading Satan's kingdom, is binding Satan, in order that he may lose his captives.

So here, the binding, is in association with Jesus' first coming, and ministry, and supremely, is death and resurrection.

And this is confirmed, in at least, three places, in the New Testament. In Colossians chapter 2, Paul speaks about God, making us alive with Christ, forgiving us our sins, having counseled the charge, of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us, and condemned us.

He's taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And then, verse 15, having disarmed, the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them, at the cross.

[18:44] Now notice, not destroyed them, but disarmed them. Then Hebrews chapter 2, verse 4, since the children of flesh and blood, he too shared their humanity, so that by his death, he might break the power of him.

Who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those, who all their lives, were held enslaved, by their fear of death. 1 John 3, 4, the reason the Son of God appeared, was to destroy the devil's work.

Notice, not destroy the devil, destroy the devil's work. So the binding of Satan, means that he will be unable, to prevent, the heralding of the gospel, to the nations.

So, the symbolic, 1,000 years, in which Satan is bound, is restrained, represents, the gospel age.

The period from Christ's, first coming, his death and resurrection, to his second coming.

The second phase, of the angels, dealing with Satan, comes at the end, of the thousand years. End of verse 3, after that, he must be set free, for a short time.

[20:08] And verse 7, when the thousand years, or Satan will be released, from his prison. Now, remember, God is in complete control.

But Satan will be released, for a short period, and will create havoc, in the world. Verse 8, he will go out, to deceive the nations, in the four corners of the earth, and gather them, for battle.

Now, we'll come back to that shortly. But you might well be thinking, that Satan, is on the rampage today, isn't he? With all that's happening, in the world, is he really restrained?

But look at it this way. If he wasn't restrained, there would be no opportunity, for the spread of the gospel. The whole cause of the gospel, would not be able to advance.

It's because Satan is bound, the strong man is restrained, that God has given us, this gospel age.

And, we really don't understand, what an unrestrained appearance, of Satan, would be like.

[21:25] If we think, things are bad now, they're going to get, an awful lot worse. What we're told, that he will go out, he'll gather the forces, of evil together, represented by these, two figures, who've appeared already, in Ezekiel chapter 38, Gog and Magog, symbolic figures, for the world, the flesh, and all the company, of those who are set against God.

Right? In fact, in later Judaism, Gog and Magog, were symbols, of the evil generations. And here, here they come, against God's people. Verse 9, they marched, across the breadth, of the earth, and surrounded, the camp of God's people, the city, he loves.

Now that great gathering, has been referred to, twice before, in Revelation, remember, this cyclical pattern. In chapter 16, we read, of demonic spirits, coming from the mouth, of the dragon, and the agent, the beast, and the false prophet.

And they perform signs, and they go out, to the kings of the whole earth, to gather them for battle, on the great day, of God Almighty. And then, in verse 16, then they gathered, the kings together, to the place, that is in Hebrew, called, Armageddon.

They gather there, but, there's no description, of the battle. Then again, chapter 19, verse 19, as we saw last week, we read, the beast, and the kings, of the earth, and their armies, gathered together, to wage war, against the rider, on the horse, and his army.

[23:11] But again, no description, of the battle. Now here, in chapter 20, verse 9, we have the ultimate, description of this battle, with Satan, at the end of the army, surrounding the camp, of God's people, the city he loves, but notice, it's not even a battle, there's no contest.

Look, verse 9, but, fire came down, from heaven, and devoured them. Now, we've heard of that before, haven't we?

Listen to, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, God is just, well, he sure is, God is just, he will pay back trouble, to those who trouble you, and give relief, to you who are troubled, and to us as well.

This will happen, when the Lord Jesus, is revealed, from heaven, in blazing fire, with his powerful angels. He will punish those, who do not know God, and those who do not obey, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. This, is the final phase, of God's dealing, with Satan. When Christ returns, in power and glory, with burning fire, Satan, isn't, now restrained, he's destroyed, in the lake, of burning fire, where the beast, and the false prophets, his instruments, had been thrown, as we saw last week. [24 : 50] They will be tormented, it says, day and night, forever, and ever. So that's, the first vision.

Satan, and his destruction. Now, you may not agree, with my interpretation, of that thousand years. And the binding of Satan.

But, the really, really important thing, from this mess, from this vision, for us today, the really important thing, is that Satan, will be destroyed.

That's, the certainty. God is on the throne. And no matter, how Satan, may be bothering you today, he's not going to last.

He will be destroyed. Luke. We want to the second vision. Verses four to six. The saints, and their security.

[25 : 54] Verse four, I saw thrones, on which were seated, those, who had been given authority, to judge. Now, this is clearly, a vision of heaven, and the heavenly glory.

Nowhere else, in Revelation, are there thrones, except in heaven. Back in chapter four, John had opened the door, John had the door opened, into heaven.

And he saw, a throne, and then other thrones, on which the 24 elders sat. So, this is heaven, we're looking into.

And what does John see, there in heaven? Well, he sees, a company, of people, consisting, again I suggest, of probably, two groups.

And, this is where I'm, using the, the, the footnote version, of our Bible, for verse four. Let me read it, as in the footnote. It says, And I saw the souls, of those, who had been beheaded, because of their testimony, about Jesus, and because of the word of God.

[27 : 03] I also saw, those who had not, worshipped the beast, or its image, and had not received, its mark, on their foreheads, or hands. So, here we have, the martyrs, who have died for Christ, and, those who had not, worshipped the beast, or its image.

In other words, all those, who had not been, conformed to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those who were, faithful, and persevered, for Christ.

Believers, saints, as I'm calling them. Look what's said of them, at the end of verse four. They came to life, and reigned with Christ, for a thousand years.

Now, there were martyrs, in John's day. There are martyrs, today. Christians, in John's day, and today, seem to fare, no better than others, do they?

They suffer, and die, just like those, who don't believe. And it looks, to all intents and purposes, as if, Satan is winning.

[28 : 19] Thank you. But, is Satan winning?

Just look, where these martyrs, and believers are now. On thrones, in heaven. See, when believers die, they leave this world, they leave this evil world, and go into the presence of God, into glory, sitting down, on thrones in glory.

This is the first resurrection. The soul, rises to heaven, to be with the Lord. Remember Jesus' words, to the thief on the cross, today, you'll be with me, in paradise.

Death is, swathed up in victory, death's sting is withdrawn. Now, there are three, again, three scriptures, that back this up. John 5, 24, whoever hears my words, and believes him, who sent me, has eternal life, and has crossed over, from death, to life.

Ephesians, 2, 5, begins, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead, in transgressions, is by grace you've been saved, and, God raised us up, with Christ, and seated us with him, in the heavenly realms, in Christ Jesus.

[29 : 47] 1st John 5, 11 and 12, and this is the testimony, God has given us, eternal life, and this life, is in his son, whoever has the son, has life, whoever does not have the son, does not have life.

So, the saints, reign with Christ, for a thousand years, the same thousand years surely, until, until Christ's return, and then, their souls, will be reunited, with their bodies, and they'll be resurrected, the second resurrection, and this fits in, with what verse 6 says, it speaks of the second death, having no power over them, see, all death is separation, the first death, is separation of the soul, from the body, the second death, is separation of the soul, from God, and that separation, has no power over these saints, now, again, you may not, we may not understand, all, of this, second vision here, but the main lesson, the main lesson, of this vision, is that those of us, who believe in,

and belong to Jesus, are eternally secure, that's the main lesson, when we die, our souls rise, to be with the Lord, in heaven, and when Christ returns, we'll be reunited, with our bodies, and we'll be forever, with the Lord, in the new heaven, and new earth, that we'll, learn about next week, the saints, and their security, so on to the third vision, judgment, and its finality, it doesn't get any easier, you know, judgment, and its finality,

Jesus often spoke, about, the time of final judgment, and he often, spoke in terms of, of separation, you know, he said it'd be like, the sifting of the wheat, from weeds, Matthew 13, sorting of, good fish, from bad, separating of sheep, from goats, and these warnings, really, are given to prepare us, for, this vision, of the final judgment, here in verses 11, to 15, it will be the moment, of supreme, sorting out, of the true, from the false, the final separation, of those accepted, from those rejected, verse 11, then I saw, a great white throne, and him who, seated on it, the heaven, and earth, fled from his presence, and there was no place, for them, and I saw, the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books, were opened, there's a great throne, and one, seated on it, all eyes, are turned here, even earth, and sky, it recede, from John's view, the throne, is central, everything else, is vanished, it's a white throne, because of the purity, of its occupant, and throughout Revelation,

God is the, one who's depicted, as being on the throne, so the throne, is central, and who is standing, before the throne, well, the dead, great, and small, everybody, everyone, made in the image, of God, men and women, accountable, not merely, to their fellows, but supremely, to their creator, and the books, were opened, Augustine, explained these books, now symbolic, of what he calls, the divine memory, the deeds, the words, the thoughts, the motives, that are packed, into our lives, and that have, gone unrecorded, and then all the wrongs, perpetrated, through our human story, all the horrors, and evils, many undiscovered, and secret, things, but as Jesus himself, said, there is nothing, concealed, that will not be disclosed, or hidden, that will not be made known, verse 12, the dead, were judged, according to what, they had done, recorded, in the books, we all stand condemned, no one, none, can plead,

I am innocent, I am innocent, and yet, it's not on this alone, that the eternal testimony, of mankind, depends, because there's also, another book, the book of life, to be opened, we've read about that, earlier in chapter 13, all the inhabitants, of earth, will worship the beast, all whose names, have not been written, in the lamb's book of life, the lamb who was slain, from the creation, of the world, see whether or not, a human soul, is consigned, to the lake of fire, turns upon, whether or not, his name is found, in the book, that book, whether or not, he is trusting, in Christ's work, on the cross, to deal, with his sin, three more scriptures, John 3, 17, for God, did not send his son, into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world, through him,

[35 : 51] John 5, 24, I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and will not be condemned, he has passed, from death to life, Romans 8, 1, therefore, there is no condemnation, for those, in Christ Jesus, the condemnation, of the great white throne, is already taken, off you, if you were a believer, in Christ, why, because, in the death of Christ, God has accepted, in himself, the condemnation, for your sin, and mine, but those, whose names, are not in the book of life, will be thrown, into the lake of fire, which is the second death, the separation, of the soul, from God, as we said earlier, that's a very, very solemn thought, isn't it, and the separation, described here, is irreversible, there's a great, chasm fixed, the door is shut, it's a lake of fire, it's the second death, the destruction, of the disobedience, is said to be, everlasting, that passage, in first, in second,

Thessalonians, I quoted earlier, goes on to say, God will punish, those who do not, know God, and do not obey, the gospel, of our Lord Jesus Christ, they will be punished, with everlasting destruction, and shut out, from the presence, of the Lord, and from, the glory, of his might, see this isn't, something new, this is something, we've read about before, and, like these other two visions, maybe we don't understand, everything, in these visions, but again, the important truth, is so clear, there will be, a day of judgment, a day of final separation, there will be, and that should challenge us, should it not, what, what are you relying on, if you stand before the throne, on that day, oh, but I've lived a good life,

I've done my best, I've been kind to the neighbors, and I've never kicked a cat, I've been coming to church, all my days, and I've read my Bible, and I've prayed, and I've, maybe you have, but none of that, none of all that together, is enough, the only way in, is because of what Jesus has done, the question is, are you trusting in Jesus, is your name, in the Lamb's book of life, that's the important

thing, have you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, yeah, you may not, you may not agree, about the thousand years, of binding of Satan, the details of the last judgment, but remember, Satan, will be destroyed, saints, will be secure, judgment, will be final, so where do you stand today, this is so important, where do you stand, before we sing, our closing song, I want us to take a moment, in quietness, to think about, these, important truths, maybe, maybe you've been coming, to church for a long time, maybe you've just come, for the first time today, that you've never, accepted Christ, as your Savior, and Lord, your name isn't in, the book of life, so what's stopping you, what's stopping you, coming, to Christ today, perhaps you're a believer, for years, and yet you're worried, you're worried about the devil, or about your, eternal destiny, but be assured, the devil will be destroyed, and that being in Christ, your future, is eternally secure, thank you, thank you for your word, hard as it may be, to understand, understand, thank you for these, wonderful truths,

Lord, grant us to, act upon, what we've heard today, to trust Christ, for the first time, or to keep on, trusting Christ, assured, that, you are sovereign, you are king, you are in charge, our lives, in Christ, are secure, hear our prayers, for Jesus' sake, amen, amen,