

Apokalypsis – Crushing the serpent’s head

Text: Revelation 20

Theme: The Book of Revelation, End times, Prophecy, Salvation, Spiritual warfare, Combating evil.

- The Book of Revelation is a gift to us. We may struggle in understanding the meaning of certain passages in Revelation, but as a whole, the Book helps us get caught up in the great story of God! That behind and before our living, our breathing, our working, our paying of the bills, our running after the kids and grandkids, our daily tasks and responsibilities, our aches and pains - there is always the great and grand Story of God that gives our lives hope, perspective, purpose and meaning!
- I love epic, sweeping stories like the Hobbit, the Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia. These are stories that take in many characters, over many years and over an entire world and that usually end with good triumphant over evil. In the process of story unfolding however, there is a lot of conflict before there is peace.
- As a whole, the Book of Revelation challenges us to remember that we together have been caught up in the Great Story of God! His Story! And it is The Salvation Story. The Gospel story! It is also a cosmic conflict story - we are a part of the ancient and ongoing battle between God’s own plan for our good in Jesus and Satan’s own plan for evil and our demise. But in the end – the Lord will prevail!
- **For me, chapter 20 is about the final defeat of Satan himself and also of those who follow him.** The end of chapter 19 was the beginning of the end for him. Chapter 19 is one of the clearest descriptions in Revelation of the return of Jesus. Pastor Paul spoke so well on this last Sunday.
- **But look at what happens at the end of chapter 19... vs. 19-21.**
- Revelation reveals to us that in a future a powerful and evil unholy Trinity will arise and deceive many people. That unholy trinity consists of the dragon (Satan himself), the “beast” or the anti-Christ, and the “False prophet”. At the end of chapter 19 – 2 of the unholy trinity are captured and destroyed immediately following Christ’s return.

The apostle Paul also foresaw these things. Listen to 2 Thess. 2:1-8: “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers,²

not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming".

- **This happens here at the end of Revelation 19. But notice the ringleader of this trio isn't dealt with yet at all...Chapter 20 deals with him.**
- A few things to remember about Satan himself. Remember he is a created being. He is **not** eternal. Satan is **not** a power **equal with God**. He is not a demi-god! Satan is a created angel – archangel actually. And originally, as with all of God's creation, he was created good. So there was obviously a fall in the angelic world before the fall of the human race. Before there was a fall on earth, there was a great fall in heavenly regions themselves! Keep in mind also that there is absolutely no Biblical evidence of a redeemer for fallen angels. Angels are in a different order of creation and they were not made in the image of God – we were – God sent the human race a redeemer but not for angels.
- Remember also that the cross of Jesus Christ and his resurrection defeated Satan in principle. He is very much a defeated foe but he is not going down without a fight. **(Much like Hitler at the end of WW2. The war was already won in principle but Hitler didn't go down without a furious fight!)** We have already seen in chapters 12-14 that Satan is filled with fury against the church. **Remember 12:12!** He has fury and rage because his time is short. He's defeated but seeking you and me as "a consolation prize" (D.A. Carson)!

- Chapter 20 prophecies his end. In this chapter there seems to be a 1-2-3 step knockout blow to Satan (I'm grateful to D.A. Carson for this 3-step terminology).
1. **Step 1 - Satan is temporarily restrained! – 20:1-6.** After Christ returns there is a period of time in which Satan is temporarily restrained and chained up. 1000 years. There are a lot of numbers in Revelation and as we've seen numbers are consistently symbolic in Revelation. The question is what is this number symbolic of? This question has been debated since the first few centuries of the church history so I approach this discussion with humility – I'm not about to solve the debate of centuries! For example, "Amillennialists" like Augustine, Calvin and Luther take the 1000 years here as symbolic for the present age – the age in between Christ's 1st and 2nd coming. The 1000 years is thus symbolic of perfect reign of Christ in the present age, whereas "premillennialists" like Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Isaac Newton take the 1000 years as future – it will take place after Christ's return; "postmillennialists" like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney have predicted a future millennial period before Jesus comes back [this last view is pretty rare today].¹ So please understand there are lots of differences of opinion among very Godly people around the 1000 years of Revelation 20. I will say this: Many ancient Jewish texts also pictured an intermediate kingdom between the present and future eternal reign. This text to me seems clear: Satan will be chained up for **a period of time**, and taking chapters 19 and 20 together –this will take place **following Christ's return**. So for me, the 1000 years represents an idealized period of time – in the future – after Jesus comes back - a time determined by God, for Satan to be restrained and for Christ to reign on the earth!
- During this time: Vs. 3 - Satan is kept from deceiving. He is kept from doing what he does! Lying and deceiving people! (Imagine that – no more lies!) There is also a resurrection of martyrs (vs. 4) – this is called the "1st Resurrection" and those resurrected will reign with Christ. **Look at verse 6 – "they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years"**.
 - Why this time for Satan to be restrained and chained? I mean God, why not just deal with Satan once and for all and let's get to the good stuff of chapters 21 and 22. Well I really don't know, but perhaps God, like a really good appetizer before a meal - is giving

¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 20:1–6). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

the planet (for a time period of time) a taste of things to come. This will be a period of time to come on the earth where evil is held back. D.A. Carson calls it: Incipient glory! Anticipation of glory to come but still way short of the new heaven and earth.

2. **Step 2 - Satan is released and then eternally punished– vs. 7-10** – So out from his prison, Satan explodes with deception and violence and is finally destroyed. Why would God allow this before Satan’s end? I don’t know - but it is in the text.

- Keep in the mind the divine and supernatural protection of the people of God in verse 9. Remember also that the story of God – salvation history - has been a cosmic and spiritual battle all along – from Genesis 3 onward! So again, perhaps the millennium is that period of time for the earth to anticipate the final destruction of Satan. To have a breather! A time out. A calm before the storm. And then – Satan’s end. And what an end it will be. **Look at verse 10!**
- Vs. 10 fulfills **Gen. 3:15 (on screen)** – the great serpent is crushed forever! This has to happen before the new heaven and the new earth of chapters 21-22.
- And church this is **eternal, conscious torment**. There is just no way of getting around it. I can’t make this text say something it doesn’t. It says what it says.
- Notice also there is not a hint of Satan ever repenting. He is still filled with rage and hatred towards God. Forever and ever. It seems he never comes to a place of saying, Ok I was wrong. God you win! He is eternally opposed to God in torment. Hell will be filled with fallen angels and people who still love their sin and will not repent of it (Carson).
- Thanks be to God that the gospel saves us from ourselves. From our sin!!! From the wrath of the lamb that is coming. Sin is so bad folks and Jesus saves us from it! Today is the day to turn from sin and trust in God’s mercy and grace in Jesus!

3. **Step 3 – Satan’s followers are similarly destroyed.** Vs. 11-15.

Great white throne judgment. And what a scene it is. **“The dead, great and small, standing before the throne”.**

And the books were opened! The book of life was opened.

The dead were judged “according to what they have done”.

Vs. 15 – one of the most sobering verses of the Bible – **“If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown in the lake of fire”**. The same place the devil was thrown into.

Jesus has a book! Jesus is the life-giver! In him is life and his life is the light of men! The book of life is the book of those who are **in Christ**. Are you **in Christ** this morning? Have you turned from sin and trusted in what he has done for you? Are you fully trusting in his grace this hour? If so, your name is in that book. You have no reason to fear.

If you are not sure if your name is in Jesus’ book, or if the thought of your name not being found there is scaring you right now, please come and see me or one of our those present for prayer this morning - and leave this place knowing and assured that your name is in Jesus’ book.

So there you have it. Revelation chapter 20 – the chapter when Satan’s head is finally crushed forever! God will serve him up a three step knock out punch! After Jesus returns, Satan will first be temporarily restrained. Then he will be released for short time before he is eternally punished. Then, all those who follow him will similarly follow suit.

This 3-step knockout punch must happen before we have the New heaven and New earth of chapters 21-22. **Thanks be to God that “In Christ alone” we are on the victory side of this ancient, cosmic battle.**

I close with these comforting words of 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17 – written in a similar context of Revelation 20:

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.