

The Messianic Kingdom & Dealing To Evil

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St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

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Readings: Psalm 94, Joel 2:28-32, Revelation 20:1-10, Revelation 20:11-21:6

Last week we left our progress through the Book of Revelation with Jesus returning to earth, conquering the Anti-Christ, destroying Babylon and rescuing His people from Petra. We will take a moment now to consider the role of the Anti-Christ, or Beast, as the NIV calls him in Revelation 19.

The Anti-Christ is spoken of repeatedly throughout the Scriptures. He is given various names though they all refer to the one individual. In the Old Testament we have: in Daniel 11:36, ***"The Willful King"***, and 11:21, ***"The Despicable Person"***, in Zechariah 11:17, ***"The Worthless Shepherd"***, in Daniel 8:23, ***"The Insolent King"***. In the New Testament, the descriptors are even more graphic: in Matthew 24:15 ***"The Abomination"***, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, ***"The Man of Lawlessness"***, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, ***"The Son of Destruction"***. Then finally in Revelation 13:1 and following ***"The Beast"*** (and he's not a quiz master). Clearly this individual possesses a significant number of negative characteristics and character flaws.

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8a tells us: ***"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"***. The "One" who restrains evil in the world at the moment is God, by the Holy Spirit. We see a clear example of this in the book of Job as twice God explicitly restricts what Satan can do to Job (Job 1:12 & 2:6). In the End Times, this restraining role of the Holy Spirit is removed. This allows Satan to wreck his venom on an unprotected and still rebellious world.

In Revelation 20 all attacks by demonic forces on mankind will be brought to a temporary halt. We are clearly not at this time yet. 1 Peter 5:8-9 speaks of our current situation: ***"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*** This current era of Satanic influence will come to an end as an angel from heaven arrives with a chain and a key to the Abyss. In Revelation, the Abyss is a prison for demons and Hades is the place of the human dead. We recall the account of Jesus, found in Matthew's gospel (8:28-34), casting the multitude of demons from the Gergesene demoniac into the pigs. The pigs immediately ran off a cliff into the water and perished. The understanding being that the deep waters at that place are an entry place to the Abyss. The water or more accurately "sea" is often an image of evil in apocalyptic thought and in the Book of Revelation. Significantly, it is the angel that takes hold of Satan and casts and locks him in prison for one thousand years. Significant, because it is an equal of Satan's, a single angel, not even the Almighty power of God, that is sufficient to overcome Satan. It is foolish to think that Satan's power, that of a created being, is anything near or like the power of the Almighty God. He only has any sway at all because God allows it for His own divine purposes. Satan is locked up and sealed away for one thousand years. After this period is over he will be released for one last, brief period. We will explain why shortly.

With Satan's demise an era of one thousand years is ushered in. A period where Christ and a number of resurrected martyred saints will reign over the earth. Writing some 700 years for more before Jesus' birth the prophet Isaiah (24:20-23) speaks to this time saying: ***"The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall,***

and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.” (NKJV.)

With the false princes of this world locked away the Lord and His selected saints will reign from Jerusalem. During this thousand-year reign God’s will is not imposed upon the earth even though Jesus reigns. People across the globe have a final, last, opportunity to respond to Jesus and receive salvation. It is a period where there will be no excuse that “the devil made me do it or tempted me”. Everyone will be fully accountable for their own decisions ... really just as we are now but even more clearly so the people of this age will be without excuse.

We have mentioned before that in the prophetic in Scripture there is often a two-fold element that is partially fulfilled in Jesus first coming that will be fulfilled in His second. Luke 1:31-33 picks up Isaiah’s (7:14) prophecy of the virgin birth and extends it to the returning rule of the Messiah in stating ***“³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”*** The thousand-year reign will be the beginning on earth of what will last into eternity.

At the end of the thousand years Satan will be released. Incredibly, there will still be people who are in rebellion against God. We should not be too surprised. If the people of Israel could get fed up at the foot of Mt Sinai and sin by creating idols while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God, if the nation of Israel could reject Jesus walking amongst them, is it any surprise that even in the Millennial Kingdom there are those who, sadly, ignore the invitations and the warnings? Satan, released on earth again, goes throughout the earth collecting to himself all those who have refused to respond to Jesus. These, having refused God, are now finally deceived by the devil to attempt to overthrow Jesus by force. To Jerusalem, all of the saints, from all over the world have gathered to be with Jesus. A fierce, demonically led, world-wide army is collected and gathered to completely surround and attack Jerusalem, aiming to destroy it and Jesus once and for all. Revelation 20:9 sums up the scale and intensity of this battle: ***“And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”*** And now the futility and idiocy of the devil and all of his schemes and forces is laid bare. Before God, the devil, in his rebellion and he has seemingly achieved, is a powerless wimp. God, in a single act, destroys and burns up the remnants of sin on earth. God’s judgement on Satan and his cohort is succinctly summed up: ***“¹⁰The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*** The false Trinity, beast and prophet, three separate individuals that had blasphemously attempted to mock the complete Oneness of the Godhead in Trinity, are now together forever in the torment of eternal fire. This is also a warning to those cult groups who do not see the Trinity as One as to who they are actually following.

For all who have continued to reject God their fate is now sealed for eternity... the time has come for the Day of Judgement. Revelation 20 sets out a very simple and straightforward process. The centre of everything is Jesus, seated upon a great white throne. All of creation “flees”, ceases to

exist, except for humanity and those of the spiritual realm. Before God stands everyone who has ever lived – the living and the dead. How a person died, or where, has no significance. Neither does what they believe or who or what they have believed in. All of humanity stands before God in the person of Jesus. And then the books were opened. I love the scene in *Bruce Almighty* where God (portrayed by Morgan Freeman) opens the file on Bruce's life. Unfortunately, when this happens on "the Day" it will not be so humorous. Each of us has an account before God and a time of accounting. But this accounting is actually an easy one. It is not a trial, there is no defence to be offered or debated. Our lives are all the testimony that is required. Matthew's gospel (25:31ff) records Jesus words on what will happen here. The Son of Man, in His glory, attended by angels will sit on His throne and He will separate the sheep from the goats, the faithful from the faithless. Here, the faithful are those whose faith has been reflected in their lives; hat they have done, who they have cared for, how they have gone out of their way for others. As James argues in his epistle; faith and works cannot be separated. Jesus personifies the action by saying that when we have served others in need it is as if we have been serving Him personally. Jesus will Himself speak for His own. Matthew 10:32 tells us ***"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven"***. This is not a fearful time for the Christian because our lives and our Lord bear testimony to our faith. Rather it is a time of great rejoicing and celebration.

But those who have not received Jesus and have not served this is a time of condemnation. For these, having rejected Jesus, will come a time of painful and fearful recognition of what their rebellious decision will cost them. Now, not only Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire, but also so are those who have been condemned by God. Sin is punished and its influence destroyed forever. Those found in the Book of Life now have a wonderful eternity to look forward to.

Revelation 21 introduces us to a new world order. A time without pain and suffering where we will be fully known and will know fully. We will understand the why of things and see the fullness of God's great wisdom and plan. But more on this in a couple of weeks.

This text, in effect, tells us of the end of the world as we know it. Not an end brought about by human folly, nuclear war, disease or natural disaster, but a climax worked out in God's economy top His plan. From the time of Adam and Eve through until the end God has worked to woo humanity, person by person, into His Kingdom. God has tried multiple methods and ways to encourage and inspire faith without ever taking away the free will of individuals. God has revealed Himself in various ways from walking in the Garden of Eden, through cloud and fire in the desert, through the prophets, in the person of Jesus and by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He has loved and warned, rejoiced with and punished, given His Word and His Son and in the Last Days poured out dire consequences so that all that will give their lives to Him have done so. We can only reflect on God's patience with us with wonder and the sad realization that for some, even this has not been enough. As we speak out, as we share faith with our friends and family we do His work, working with God to save those who are headed toward disaster, we truly do good. And this is a mission and work of God we need to take seriously and do our part.

Amen