



## Three Controversial Questions in Revelation

### **It is sanctifying to disagree about these questions.**

And so we come to three controversial questions in Revelation. Now, before we dive into these three questions, I want to reiterate something that I've already shared, and I want to emphasize again. It is sanctifying to disagree about these questions. It is good to remember that none of us in this room has an infinite God and His plans totally figured out. There are many things, essential things, on which God has been absolutely clear. But there are less important doctrines, more obscure passages in the Bible, that it is fine for us to disagree about. We know that one day, when we are joined together with God in heaven, it will become clear exactly what was meant, not only by the millennium, but we will likely understand much more about the mysteries of God that baffle our minds today. But in the meantime, it's good to be reminded that we all have much to learn, and we have much to learn from each other.

Throughout history, giants of the Christian faith have disagreed over these three questions. Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, and Billy Graham have disagreed about the millennium, and as a result, we should all approach this issue with a clear air of humility, knowing that none of us, including myself, is going to come on the scene of Christian history and solve this one for everybody else. Instead, we're going to learn from one another and respect one another in the body of Christ as we talk together about things that matter pertaining to the end of the world.

### **It is sin to divide over these questions.**

And in the middle of those discussions, even disagreements, I hope it will be clear that is sanctifying to disagree about the millennium, but brothers and sisters, it is sin to divide over these questions. There are some in the church who would like to take these questions and make them a litmus test for fellowship together in the body of Christ, and I want to say as clearly as possible this morning: That is just plain wrong. It is sinful, and it dishonors God to divide over issues that are not essential to our faith as Christians, and not even essential to our mission and fellowship in a local church.

Recently, I was listening to a sermon by a preacher and theologian I respect greatly named Tom Schreiner. Dr. Schreiner has been so helpful to me, particularly in his writing, on many different doctrines, and not long ago, he was preaching through Revelation. And he preached Revelation from a particular theological perspective, even with a particular view on the millennium, all the way through the first nineteen chapters, and then, when he got to Revelation 20, he totally changed his mind about his view on the millennium.

And so when he got to this text, this is how he opened his sermon. Schreiner said:

Everything in God's Word is important. Yet good Christians have different views on the millennium. A month ago, and during this whole series, I would have said, "I'm an amillennialist." But I've actually changed my mind as I studied this passage. So how much trust are you going to put in me tonight? Right? I'm not very stable on this issue. You know, that's a good thing to be

reminded of, that our confidence is not in a preacher, but in God's Word. It's in the truth of God's Word. That's what matters; not my opinion towards something. I think we also learn from this to be charitable towards different views. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind, at least if you can be. But we must distinguish between central issues of the faith and issues which aren't central. Some people have a hard time doing that. Everything for them is of equal importance in the Bible. But that's not true. There are some things that are non-negotiable in our faith. The Trinity is non-negotiable. The authority of Scripture is non-negotiable. The substitutionary atonement, justification by faith alone, the deity of Christ, and, of course, I could mention other things. But there are less clear matters in the Bible as well; things like when the rapture will take place and what we're looking at today regarding the millennium. We must beware of being divisive, and schismatic, and inflexible on matters that are less important. That really shows, I think, a character flaw in us—something that God wants to work on in us. At the same time, we need to be aware of being namby-pamby. That's another problem ... not to hold strong convictions. We want to speak the truth of the gospel in love. That's what's crucial. We need balance. I need balance that comes from the Holy Spirit. We all need that. We need the Holy Spirit to be our teacher."

Well said from a brilliant theologian who is pretty unstable on his view of the end times.

## **What does this book mean and why do we have it?**

So, with this foundation laid, let's ask the questions. First, starting with the book of Revelation, what does this book mean and why do we have it? Revelation can be a very challenging book. I read somewhere that Revelation is the book people in the church most want to hear taught because they don't understand it. At the same time, Revelation is the book preachers in the church least want to teach because they don't understand it.

And it can be tough just to sit down and start reading. You go through your quiet time in the morning and you find yourself meditating on an apocalyptic monster, and you think, "I'm not sure what good this does for me today; not sure how to apply that monster to my morning." So, it can be challenging, but when you study it, it truly is a glorious book. Revelation 1:1-8 says,

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and*

*the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

#### **Four historic interpretations ...**

Traditionally, throughout Christian history, there have been four historic interpretations of the book of Revelation. Now, this is going to sound pretty technical, but I want give you a brief overview, because the way you read this book will have a huge effect on the way you understand it. One way that people have interpreted Revelation is the Preterist interpretation, which says that these prophecies, were fulfilled in the first few centuries of Christianity.

So, basically, some people believe that everything that's written here in Revelation was fulfilled not long after it was written. Some people believe the book is prophesying the fall of Jerusalem in the first century. Others believe the book is prophesying the fall of the Roman empire in the fifth century. But nothing beyond that. Now, the good thing about this interpretation is that it takes seriously the potential application of this book to its original audience. The bad thing is that it ignores the clear allusions to final judgment, not just for Israel, but for all the nations of the earth.

Then, you have others who have taken what's called a Historicist approach, saying that these prophecies have been and are being fulfilled in the course of Western Christian history. Basically, it's been common throughout more recent history, in particular, over the last five hundred years or so, to read predominantly Western Christian history into the pages of Revelation. During the Protestant Reformation, many reformers believed that the pope was the antichrist or the Roman Catholic Church was the false prophet. Like we mentioned earlier, others have said Hitler was, or Napoleon, or Mussolini, and then, particularly after the last sixty years, after Israel became a nation, there's been heightened intensity with this interpretation, where people see every detail of Revelation through the eyes of current events in the Middle East.

The problem with this is that the focus shifts almost exclusively to Western church history, including all kinds of speculation that's involved in trying to find contemporary parallels that then leads you to have to rework your understanding for every new period in world history, and on top of all this, interpreting Revelation exclusively this way makes the book virtually irrelevant for its original hearers. This was not a message that when they heard it made them think about Hitler or Mussolini or the Pope or Benjamin Netanyahu.

That, then, leads to the futurist interpretation, which says these prophecies are largely unfulfilled. Basically, Revelation 4-22 are still awaiting fulfillment in the future. There are different versions of this view. Some believe these prophecies will be fulfilled literally in the order in which they're listed here in the book of Revelation. Others believe these prophecies will be fulfilled not quite as literally or as strictly chronological as they're described here in Revelation. Again, one problem here is this calls into question what application this book would have had for its first century hearers if the majority of the book was talking about things that haven't happened in two thousand years since then. And then, it leads to a lot of speculation about how these prophecies will literally play out.

Finally, there's the idealist interpretation, which says that these prophecies are being and have been fulfilled symbolically throughout the history of the church. And this interpretation views Revelation as a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between God and Satan, Christ and His church battling with the forces of sin and evil, a conflict that is reflected in every age of the church and a conflict that will one day culminate in the ultimate triumph of Christ and His church. This interpretation obviously avoids some of the speculation that's common in

the other interpretations, but at the same time, it seems to downplay some of the literal historical realities that are represented by certain symbols in the book of Revelation.

So, which one is right? I'm not going to come on the scene today and claim to have it all figured out. I will say that there's a reason why all of these perspectives have been held by Christians, because there's some good in all of them. Like the Preterist view, we do need to seriously consider how these words spoke and applied to the very first people who heard them. Like the Historicist view, we need to think about how this cosmic war between Christ and Satan is playing out in every age in the church. Like the Futurist view, we need to consider how Revelation is pointing to a coming reality when the kingdom of God will be consummated in a new heaven and a new earth, final judgment and final redemption. And like the Idealist view, we need to seriously consider the symbols of this book and what they represent, not reading too much literal into them to the point that we end up skewing the meaning of the text.

### **Three different genres ...**

This leads to this next point. Revelation is a unique book in that it contains three different genres. So, when we ask the question, "What is the book of Revelation?" meaning "What type of book is it?", that's not an easy question, either. Other biblical books are easier to define in their genres. The Psalms are poetry. The Gospels are narratives. New Testament Epistles are letters. So, what is Revelation?

And here's my best attempt to sum it up: The book of Revelation is a series of apocalyptic visions. Now, you look back up at Revelation 1:1-8 in your notes, and there are three key words/phrases that clue us into the genre of this book. The first is "*revelation*", which is the word "*apocalypsis*"; it literally means an uncovering of truth, a revelation of truth. This book is the "revelation of Jesus Christ."

Then, Revelation 1 says this book is the revelation of "*things that must soon take place*". So, it's revelation of something that is either happening or is going to happen soon. And then Revelation 1 says that John "*made this revelation known by sending his angel to his servant John*." So, when you read that, you step back and realize what we've got; we've got revelation of something that is already happening or is going to happen, and this book is written to make it known.

Now, it's interesting. There's only one other time in all the Bible where those three words/phrases appear together, and it's Daniel 2:28. I don't have that written here in your booklet. I wish I had, but this reference to Daniel 2:28 is important because what's happening in Daniel 2 is Daniel is interpreting a dream/vision for Nebuchadnezzar about the future, and as Daniel interprets it, he uses the word "*apocalypsis*" five times. He mentions "*things that will soon take place*" three times, and he mentions "*make known*" two times, and each of these phrases are used here in Revelation 1:1.

Now, back in Daniel 2, God uses a dream, a vision, to reveal/uncover to Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar that one day God was going to set up a kingdom that will never, ever be destroyed. And so when John opens the book of Revelation, the very first verse he points us back to, of all places in the Bible, is the day when God revealed through a vision how His kingdom would be established and would never, ever be destroyed. And that is what the book of Revelation is all about. This book is a revelation through a vision of how God's kingdom is being and will ultimately be established, and will never, ever be destroyed.

So, just like in Daniel, God is giving a vision to John that is filled with all kinds of symbols and images. There is a predominant use of symbols and numbers all over Revelation.

Revelation is less like a systematic theology and more like a picture book, and it's designed that way. This book is designed to communicate truth through pictures and symbols. In fact, some translations, instead of "*made it known*" in Revelation 1:1, actually say "*signified*", because that's what that word literally means "*to make known or to communicate by signs and symbols.*" These are symbols that are being shown, another word used in Revelation 1:1. This is a book that's about all that John saw. He says that in Revelation 1:2.

Now, the reason this is so important is because we need to realize from the start that not everything here in the book of Revelation is intended to be understood literally. Some people try to read it this way, looking for literal fulfillments of everything that's mentioned here. But John is telling us from the very beginning, "This book is intended and written to be understood symbolically. It's a vision filled with symbols that signify the coming of God's kingdom on earth."

Now, that doesn't mean every single verse is symbolic. There are some places where John is clearly telling us to take something literally, and this leads to confusion in interpretation over what should or shouldn't be taken literally, but from the very beginning, we know that this book is a series of apocalyptic/revealing visions filled with symbols and a predominant use of symbols and numbers. Certain numbers are used over and over again as symbols of various things: Twelve and its multiples, like 144,000, symbolize God's people. Ten and its multiples, like 1,000, describe complete amounts of time.

The number seven is used to symbolize perfection and completion. The Holy Spirit is described as the "seven spirits," a picture of the perfect Spirit of God. Revelation is written to the seven churches that are in Asia, but there were more than just seven churches in Asia. It's a picture of the entire church, not only here in Asia but around the world. In Revelation, you read about seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, all of which together symbolize God's complete judgment in Revelation.

The number four also symbolizes completeness, particularly in the world. The earth is described in four parts with four corners and four winds. Sometimes four and seven are used together. You read about four series of seven judgments on the earth. Various names of God and Christ are used either four or seven times. The seven spirits are mentioned four times. Jesus is referred to as the "Lamb" 28 times, which is seven times four, and seven of those times Jesus as the Lamb and God as Father are mentioned together.

Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Aren't you reading a little too much into this? Doesn't somebody have a little too much time on their hands to count up all these numbers?" But that's part of the beauty of this book! Is it possible that some of these numbers mean nothing? Sure. But once you see these things over and over and over again, you start to realize, nothing in the all the universe is haphazard or accidental or incomplete. Everything here is planned and purposeful and complete. It's like there's Someone behind it.

So, what we've got is this book is a series of apocalyptic visions with a predominant use of symbols and numbers, but it's also filled with prophetic pronouncements. You look at Revelation 1:3, and you see John write, "*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy...*" So, this is also a prophetic book in the line of other prophetic books in Scripture like Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and others, all of which are alluded to in Revelation. There's a sense in which Revelation is the climax of all prophecy because, unlike all of the Old Testament prophets, Revelation is not announcing the coming of God's kingdom. The message of Revelation is that the kingdom of God has come and will soon be consummated.

So, this book is a series of apocalyptic visions, revelation through symbols, filled with prophetic pronouncements that is also written as a congregational letter. So, you get down to Revelation 1:4, this book starts to sound like an epistle from Paul. John is writing a letter to seven churches in Asia Minor, which is eastern Turkey today, who represent all the church. And when you follow the progression from Revelation 1:1 to Revelation 1:3, you see that this revelation comes from God in Christ through an angel to His servant, John, for the church. And don't miss the picture in the last part of Revelation 1:3. John writes, "*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear...*"

So, follow this: Imagine the scene. You have churches in the first century that would gather together for worship, and someone would read this letter to them, the book of Revelation. They would read it out loud from start to finish while everyone in the church sat and listened to what it said. Now, realize why that's important! This letter was written in such a way that members of the church in the first century could hear it read in a church service and understand what was being said and be able to apply it to their lives, to keep what is written in it.

What that means is that we've got to be careful not to overcomplicate this book. First century hearers, many of whom didn't even have enough education to read for themselves, were able to hear this book once, understand it, and apply it to their lives. They didn't have charts in their hands. No commentaries, as if they could read those. No Bible search software. They just listened to the Word.

Now, you might wonder, "Well, then, why isn't that enough for us? How come we can't just listen to Revelation being read and understand it that easily?" And this is the challenge of Bible study, because we're not members of the church in the first century. There are images here, and there is a writing style here that would have been easily understandable to them that is not so easily understandable to us.

Think about it this way. Most of us in this room don't do a lot of poetry. If I were to preach Secret Church tonight as a poem, you'd probably think I was a little weird, and you'd probably have a bit of a hard time trying to follow what I'm saying. But when you look at how the Old Testament prophets preached, that's exactly what they did. Old Testament prophecy is filled with poetry, and the Israelites understood it. But they were living in a different time, with a different understanding, so our goal, whenever we study the Bible, is not just to hear what the Bible says, but to get into the shoes of the people who were first hearing it read. And the purpose of commentaries and resources and sermons and studies is to help us get into their shoes.

But even with all that said, we still need to remember, brothers and sisters, that the only thing we necessarily and ultimately need to understand the Bible, including the book of Revelation, is the Spirit of God, and I want you to be encouraged by that. Some of you may look at this book and think, "I can't understand it," but if you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus, even if you are an illiterate follower of Jesus with little to no education, you have the Spirit of God inside of you, and He is supernaturally able to help you to understand this Word, to understand this unique letter filled with apocalyptic visions and prophetic pronouncements.

### **Two significant contexts ...**

Now, in order to understand Revelation rightly, we've got to take into consideration two significant contexts. And this right here applies to all Bible study, but it's particularly important when reading Revelation. First, we need to read every text of Revelation in light of its specific historical context. A basic rule to remember for interpreting the Bible is this: A

text can never mean what it never meant. This means that, just like we were talking about earlier, we've got to put ourselves in the shoes of the first people who read, or heard, this book, and as best as possible, understand what it was saying to them. Then, and only then, can we begin to cross the bridge of time to understand what it is saying to us.

And this is so important in Revelation because these Christians in the first century would have understood all these symbols and images. So, we've got to try to get into their shoes and think about things from their perspective. Believe it or not, the book of Revelation was not written to inspire a *Left Behind* series. It was written to real Christians in the first century who were facing real suffering and temptation and persecution all around them. So, we've got to put ourselves in their shoes when we read this book.

We've got to imagine that we're living in a day when it wasn't easy to be identified with the church, much less proclaim Christ. Facing danger on every side, whether it be Jewish persecution or Roman persecution. Imagine members of the church in prison right now in dark dungeons. Others have been hung on crosses. Some have been thrown before wild beasts. Many have been beheaded. And John writes this letter to you from an island where he's been exiled. You are facing daily pressure to bow down and worship the Roman emperor, and if you don't, you may lose your job, your family, or your life. And all indications are pointing to the fact that things are not getting better; they are only getting worse. These are the shoes we must stand in when we read this book. Not that Revelation doesn't speak to us in our shoes, but we can't understand what God is saying to us in this text until we first understand what God was saying to them.

So, we've got to look at each text in its specific historical context, and then, in the overall biblical context. This book is the climax of the New Testament and it contains over 400 allusions to the Old Testament. So, wherever we encounter obscure passages in Revelation, we have a whole Bible that's ready to help us understand them. This is another good principle for studying the Bible: Always move from the clear to the obscure. Meaning, start with what you do know in Scripture, what is abundantly clear in God's Word, and then move to what you don't know, what is more difficult to understand in God's Word. If you start with the obscure, the difficult, you'll end twisting what you already do know to make sense of what you don't know, and that can be dangerous.

### **One essential reminder ...**

In all of this, there is one essential reminder that we can't forget when reading this book. This is huge. This book was not written to promote hopeless speculation about the future; this book was written to fuel hopeful obedience in the present. Now, that might catch some of you off guard, but let me say it again: Revelation was not written to create confusion for the Christian; it was not written to cause division in the church, and Revelation was not written to promote speculation about the future.

Now that's what many people think the purpose is: The purpose of Revelation is to drive us to charts, map out the end of the world, speculating and debating about how this or that will take place, but that is not the purpose of this book. Certainly Revelation speaks about the future coming of Christ and the end of the world, but that is not the primary purpose the book was written. The book of Revelation was written to fuel hopeful obedience in the present.

Look at Revelation 1:3. John writes, "*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*" That's the point. John wants his readers to keep what is written in it. These first century Christians were tempted to turn away from Christ in the middle of all these

temptations and trials. They were tempted to compromise in order to save their jobs or families or lives, and some of the teachers in the church were saying they should compromise.

And then, in addition to the threat of persecution, there was the lure of pleasure in the Roman empire. Sex and success, money and materialism, and some of the supposed Christians were falling away, giving themselves over to the seductive power of worldly pleasures. And so God through John calls them to obedience. Ten different times in Revelation, we see the people of God urged to keep the commands of God.

And then, you know what's even more interesting is the book of Revelation does not end with a vision of heaven. That's what you think it would end with if the book was specifically about the future, but that's not how the book ends. Instead, after we see the picture of a new heaven and a new earth for God's people in Revelation 21 and 22. To close out the book, John gives repeated exhortations to obedience in the church. Eight of the last 15 verses in Revelation call God's people to obey, to stay faithful. This is summarized in Revelation 22:7, just like we saw in Revelation 1:3. It says, *"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."* The purpose of the book is not to promote hopeless speculation about the end of the world. The purpose of the book is to call people to hopeful obedience to Jesus today; that's the point.

So, when we read the book of Revelation, we need to put the charts away for a moment, and look at our lives. Are we following Jesus? Are we walking faithfully with Jesus? Are we proclaiming Jesus or are we giving in to the ways of this world? That's what this book is about; it's written to make us look more like Christ and proclaim Christ with greater zeal to the lost around us in our cities and the lost around us among the nations. So, don't miss the point. If we're not careful, we can try to explain every phrase, identify every allusion to the Old Testament, trace every connection in Revelation to the rest of the Bible, and uncover every mystery that is here, and yet, if we are still lured by sex and pornography and possessions and pleasures and safety and security and comforts in this world, then we miss the entire point of Revelation, no matter how we interpret it.

## **What is the millennium and when will it happen?**

Second question: What is the millennium and when will it happen? One of the most prevalent questions in the book of Revelation, a question that revolves specifically around this passage from Revelation 20:1-10. This word "millennium" means "one thousand years" and it's a reference to a time when Satan will be bound and Christ will reign for a thousand years. Read Revelation 20:1-10 with me. John writes,

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*



*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

Okay, in the passage we just read, we heard about a particular thousand year period of time that is connected with the end of the world. At six different points in the first seven verses, John referenced this thousand years, this millennium. And for the last two thousand years, Christians have debated and disagreed about exactly what the millennium means. Someone has said, "The millennium is a thousand years of peace that Christians like to fight about." So, let's fight; just kidding.

Here's the deal: Clearly, in this passage, we see Satan bound, thrown down, and sealed in a bottomless pit. For a thousand years, he is unable to deceive the nations. During that same period, either martyred or faithful Christians come to life and reign with Christ in what's called the "first resurrection." At the end of that time, Satan is released. He mounts a final assault against the church, and he is overthrown and destroyed. The rest of the dead rise, and along with Satan, the beast, the false prophet, death, and Hades itself are judged before God.

## **Three Major Questions...**

### **When?**

So, that's what happens here. Simple, right? Well, not so simple, because there's all kinds of questions surrounding this passage, and I've listed just a few of the main ones here. One question is, "When? When is this going to happen?" One of the big questions in this text, and really in all of Revelation, is, "Is the book of Revelation arranged chronologically or cyclically?" And specifically, is this passage, Revelation 20, and the texts surrounding it arranged chronologically or cyclically?

So, in Revelation 19:11-21, which you see in your booklet there, Jesus returns.

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly*

*directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

And so, if you're understanding Revelation chronologically, then it naturally follows that after that, after Jesus returns, then Satan is bound. Then, Christians reign with Christ for a thousand years. And then, after that, Satan is finally defeated, and we are all judged. It's as simple as that, some would say.

But then others say, "Not so fast." And others would say that the book of Revelation is not written to be read chronologically, but cyclically, meaning the whole book is a series of repeating cycles, specifically, repeating cycles of seven. So, what's happening here in Revelation 20 has actually already been described at other places in Revelation. Revelation 20:8 says that Satan *"will come out to deceive the nations that are the four corners of the earth...to gather them for battle."* Well, you look at Revelation 16:13, and it says,

*And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

So, some would say, "Revelation 20 is the same battle that was described in Revelation 16." And then, even when you get to Revelation 19, you see a similar battle being described there. Revelation 19:19 says, *"And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army."*

So, some say that when you get to Revelation 20:8, this is simply repeating what we've already heard about in Revelation 16 and Revelation 19, which goes to show that this is not a chronological account of this happens, then this happens, then this happens, which then leads to the question, "Is the millennium before Christ returns or after Christ returns?" Does Jesus' return inaugurate this millennium, which is what we would conclude if these passages are arranged chronologically, or does He return at the end of this millennium, which is what some might conclude if these passages are arranged cyclically.

And for all those who are thinking, "Who cares if all of this is in the future? We'll just see what happens when it happens." Well, we need to realize that how we answer these questions actually sheds light on how we understand not just the future, but the present, because all of this affects our answer to the question: Is the millennium present (happening now) or future (still to come)? Some believe we're in the millennium now. Some believe the millennium is still to come in the future, before Christ returns, or some believe the

millennium is still to come in the future, after Christ returns. Are you confused yet? And that's just one set of questions.

### **How long?**

Then, you have, "How long?" Is the millennium literally 1000 years? Some people say, "There it is. The Bible says it, plain as day. This is 1000 years." Or is the millennium simply a planned, perfect, limited time? Others say, "John has used figurative numbers all throughout this book that are symbolic of certain things, and we've seen a thousand used as a number to refer to completion and perfection, and the point here is that the millennium is a complete, perfect, and limited amount of time that God has set, much like the number 144,000 isn't literally the total number of Christians; it's a symbol of a perfect, complete number of God's people. So, the same thing is true here." And you've got different people coming down on both sides of this question.

### **What and where?**

Then you've got the questions of, "What and where?" In Revelation 20, you've got some people seated on thrones. You've got souls coming to life and reigning with Christ in a first resurrection. So, what does this mean? Will the millennium involve a physical resurrection of Christians to reign on earth during the millennium? Which is how many people interpret this passage, that Christians from throughout history will come to life and reign with Christ during a thousand year period on earth. Some would say that's clearly what this text is teaching.

So, that's one option, or will the millennium involve a spiritual resurrection of Christians to reign in heaven during the millennium? Some would say that this reign of Christians is a reference to what happens when followers of Christ die; their souls are resurrected to heaven, where they reign with Christ now as they await the final judgment and the second resurrection, which is a resurrection of their bodies as God ushers in a new heaven and a new earth.

So, there's all kinds of discussion and debate and disagreement over what this "first resurrection" is, and how you understand that affects the way you understand the rest of the passage. And again, not just the future of the end of the world, but this even affects the way you might understand the present state of Christians who have died in the past.

## **Three Major Views...**

### **Premillennialism: Jesus will return before the millennium.**

Now, the way you answer these three major questions then leads us to three major views on the millennium that have been posited throughout church history. The first is Premillennialism. It is the belief that Jesus will return before the millennium. Now, this view is a bit hard to pin down because there's some variation among those who hold to this view concerning the timing of Jesus' coming and the tribulation, which we'll talk about in a minute. Some people who hold to premillennialism believe that Jesus will come back before the tribulation, and others believe that Jesus will come back after the tribulation but still before the millennium. Those who believe that Jesus is going to come back after the tribulation are commonly referred to as "Classic Premillennialists", so that's the position I'm going to present here, but when we get to the question of the tribulation in a minute, we'll discuss the varying views of the tribulation among premillennialists.

So, in Classic Premillennialism, people understand from Revelation 20 and the rest of Scripture that after a time of great tribulation, Jesus will return to establish a millennial kingdom on earth. And the argument here is that the Bible, in numerous places, describes a future period of time that will be far greater and more peaceful than the present, but it will still not be the eternal state, the new heaven and the new earth that we have talked about. This is how premillennialists would understand passages like Isaiah 11:2-11 and Isaiah 65:20, even specifically pointing to a special place and role that Israel and Jerusalem will have during the millennium. Isaiah 11:2-11 says,

*And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.*

Also, Isaiah 65:20 says, “No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.”

And these passages, according to premillennialists, along with Revelation 20, envision a time of peace during which Jesus will rule on earth. Zechariah prophesies a time during which the Lord will reign as King over all the earth, but there will still be suffering and death. In other words, this is not a prophecy of the new heaven and the new earth. Zechariah 14:6-21 says,

*On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security. And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their*

*eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. And on that day a great panic from the LORD shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of another, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other. Even Judah will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. And a plague like this plague shall fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever beasts may be in those camps.*

*Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.*

Likewise, the Premillennialist says, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 implies that, just as there's an interval of time between Christ's resurrection and His second coming when we will receive a resurrected body, so there will also be an interval of time between Christ's second coming and the end, when we enter into the new heaven and the new earth. 1 Corinthians 15:23-25 says, *"But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."* This is another way of saying that Revelation 20 will happen chronologically after the second coming of Christ in Revelation 19. Revelation 19:15 says, *"From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."*

So, during this millennium, Jesus will rule on the earth, and Satan will be bound in hell according to Revelation 20:1-3, which says,

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.*

Clearly, the Premillennialist says, Satan is not bound now. He is, at present, blinding the minds of unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, *"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* There are spiritual forces of evil at work in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present*

*darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” John even describes the whole world in the power of the evil one in 1 John 5:19: “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” But there is coming a day, during the millennium, when Satan will be bound in hell, during this time, many will come to faith in Christ, because Satan is bound.*

So, Premillennialists would believe that during this millennium, many will turn and trust in Christ. And for all who trust in Him, Christians will reign with Christ. This is what Revelation 20 refers to as the “first resurrection”. This is a time when Christians will be raised with Christ to reign with Him on the earth with authority, just as Jesus talked about in the New Testament, including the book of Revelation with authority to rule over cities and nations. Christians will reign with Christ on the earth during the millennium. Luke 19:17-19 says, *“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’”* 1 Corinthians 6:3, *“Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!”* Also, Revelation 2:26-27 says, *“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”*

And then, at the end of the millennium, which could be a literal or figurative thousand years...some premillennialists believe in a literal thousand year reign; others are more open to a figurative, complete, perfect period of time...but after the end of the millennium, Satan will be released, which Revelation 20:7-10 describes.

*And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

And during this time, rebels will battle against Christ. Eventually, rebels will be defeated by Christ, and all unbelievers who have died will be resurrected to judgment, which Revelation 20:11-15 describes.

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

And then, after this final judgment, the eternal state will begin. Revelation 21:1, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."*

**Postmillennialism: Jesus will return after the millennium.**

So, that is premillennialism. And then, there's postmillennialism: The belief that Jesus will return after the millennium. According to this view, during the millennium, which, again, could be a literal or figurative thousand years, the gospel will spread throughout the world and many will become Christians, thus ushering in an age of peace and righteousness on earth. So, the major tenet in this view is that the gospel will spread successfully to the nations during the millennium, before Jesus returns.

This idea is based on prophecies throughout the Old Testament that envision the nations coming to know God. Psalm 72:1-4 says, *"Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!"* Isaiah 45:22-25,

*"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.' Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory."*

Hosea 2:21-23 says, *"And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"*

And then, you have Jesus' teaching on the kingdom in places like Matthew 13:31-33, where He describes God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, not as much as a future heavenly realm as much as it is a present reality on the earth. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven in bread, gradually working its way out into the world, and eventually, it will work its way out. The passage says,

*He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."*

This is just as Jesus promised in Matthew 24:14, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

So, the postmillennialist believes that conditions will get better in the world as the gospel progresses to the world, and all of this is guaranteed by Christ's own promise in the Great

Commission in Matthew 28:18-20: *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"* And then, at the end of the millennium, Jesus will return. At that time, Jesus will quell final rebellion, He will enact final resurrection and the eternal state will begin.

**Amillennialism: The millennium is the present age, and there is no other future millennium to come (before or after Jesus' return).**

Now, postmillennialism is in some ways closely related to amillennialism. Though there are some significant differences, I want to move from one to the other quickly here because both of these positions would posit similar ideas about Revelation 20, the focal passage concerning the millennium.

So, amillennialism is the belief that the millennium is the present church age, and there is no other future millennium to come before or after Jesus' return. So, the amillennialist would differ from the postmillennialist in saying that we are in the millennium right now. It is a figurative, symbolic, complete, and perfect period of time, so not a literal thousand years, that was inaugurated when Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave. And as a result of the death and resurrection of Christ, Satan is now bound in the present church age.

And according to the amillennialist, the binding described in Revelation 20 is a reference to the binding that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12:28-29. After Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, Jesus was accused of being satanic, and so Jesus looked back at the crowds, and He said, "How can Satan cast out Satan? That makes no sense." And then He went on to say, *"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house."*

The whole picture there is Jesus saying, "The kingdom of God has come upon you, and I am binding the strong man, i.e., the god of this world, Satan. I'm casting out demons, showing my authority over demons, and in the process, plundering his house, the place where he rules, this earth." And the whole picture we have in the Gospels is Jesus doing exactly that; asserting His authority over this world, sin, suffering, and Satan, first, in His life, and then in His death at the cross, and in His resurrection, Jesus defeated sin, suffering, death, and Satan, once and for all. Colossians 2:13-15 says, *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]."*

Hebrews 2:14-15, which we've looked at, says, *"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."* So, Christ has come, and Satan has been bound. And as a result, the gospel is going forward to the nations, which is, according to the amillennialist, why Revelation 20 talks about the devil deceiving the nations no more.

Now, it's not that the devil isn't at work at all; he certainly is at work in the world, just as 2 Corinthians 4 and other texts earlier describe, but according to the amillennialist, the picture here is that the devil can't stop the gospel ultimately from going forward to all nations. The Great Commission will be accomplished. We just read it, but Matthew 28:18-20



says, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" This is just as Jesus promised in Luke 24:45-49. The passage says,

*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*

And this is all done through the power of His Spirit. Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

What's driving Paul in Romans 15:8-21 is this ambition to proclaim the gospel where it hasn't been heard. This is the overflow of that, and the success of this mission is guaranteed. He says in that passage,

*For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."*

One day, according to Revelation 7:9-10, people from every nation, tribe, and language will have heard and believed this gospel. It says, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" The gospel is going forward to the nations.

Now, at the same time, the church is experiencing persecution by the nations, which is exactly what Jesus promised in Matthew 24:9-14, which says,

*"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

This is exactly what we see playing out across the rest of the New Testament in places like Acts 5 and 2 Timothy 3. Acts 5:41-42 says, *"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."* 2 Timothy 3:12, *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."* Even the book of Revelation was written to suffering saints who were facing persecution and even martyrdom. Revelation 2:9-10 says, *"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."* Again, Revelation 6:10-11 says, *"They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."*

Now during the church age, according to the amillennialist, Christians reign with Christ. And there are varying views among amillennialists regarding the exact interpretation of Revelation 20, but the overall picture is that during the church age, Christians reign with Christ much like Ephesians 2:4-7 talks about. It says,

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Even now, while they are alive on earth, Christians reign with Christ. Christians will not just be more than conquerors in the future; they are more than conquerors in the present. Romans 8:35-38,

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers...*

So, Christians are reigning with Christ even now while they are alive on earth, and also, when they die and go to the intermediate heaven. Many amillennialists believe that

Revelation 20:4-6 is referencing the souls of Christians who are now in the intermediate state, reigning with Christ in heaven, awaiting the full consummation of the kingdom as the gospel goes forward to the nations. The passage states,

*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

And then, according to the amillennialist, at the end of the church age, Jesus will return to usher in the eternal state. The amillennialist maintains that the Bible only teaches one resurrection when both believers and unbelievers will be raised, which was prophesied in Daniel 12, taught by Jesus in John 5, and reiterated by Paul in his testimony before Felix in Acts 24 as well as his letter to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4. Daniel 12:1-2:

*"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

In John 5:28-29, Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Acts 24:14-15, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." Also, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

So, in summary, the amillennialist believes that we are in the millennium even now as Christians, both dead and alive, are reigning with Christ, the gospel is going forward to the nations amidst suffering and persecution, and Jesus could come back at any moment. So, there you have these three views: Amillennialism: We are in the millennium now, and Jesus will return at any moment. Postmillennialism: A millennial reign is still to come in the future when the kingdom of God will infiltrate the world with peace, after which Christ will return. And premillennialism, which posits that Jesus will return to inaugurate a millennial reign of peace on the earth.

## What is the tribulation and who will experience it?

Now, I mentioned that among premillennialists, you also have debate that revolves around the question of, "What is the tribulation and who will experience it?" And, really, each of these millennial positions has a view on the tribulation, but it's premillennialists who have a clear debate among them about the timing of Christ's return and the tribulation. These premillennialists can't agree on anything!

So, Jesus talks about "great tribulation" in Matthew 24:21-31. He says,

*"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*

Then in other places like Revelation 7:13-14 references those who have come out of the "great tribulation". It says, *"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"* So, what is that a reference to?

### **The tribulation is an intense time of trial and trouble on the earth that will precede the millennial reign of Christ.**

Now, again, amillennialists and postmillennialists would both understand this tribulation as a time of suffering and trial in the world among God's people, and that would factor into their understanding of the times leading up to the return of Christ. For example, many amillennialists would say that just before Christ returns, there will be the most intense time of suffering and persecution, a time of tribulation. But, specifically according to premillennialists, the tribulation is an intense time of trial and trouble on the earth that will precede the millennial reign of Christ. This is, according to premillennialists, what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24:9-13, which says, *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."*

It is a particularly horrifying time. Mark 13:19, *"For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be."* That will last potentially seven years based on prophecies that I've listed below from Daniel and how they relate to time indicators in the book of Revelation. Again, some see this as more literal and some see this as more figurative, which is why I put "potentially" seven years, but all premillennialists, based on their understanding of Scripture, envision this particularly horrifying time of potentially seven years that will precede the millennial reign of Christ. Daniel 7:25-26 says, *"He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end."* Also, Daniel 9:24-27:

*"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."*

Again, Daniel 12:7 says, *"And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished."*

Then, you see some passages like this in Revelation. Revelation 11:1-10 states,

*Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies*

*and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.*

Revelation 12:5-6 says, *"She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days."* Revelation 12:14, *"But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time."* Revelation 13:5-7 says,

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation...*

The question is, "Will Jesus return to inaugurate His millennial reign before this tribulation or after this tribulation?" And the reason this matters is obviously, at least in part, because how we answer this question determines whether or not Christians will go through the tribulation or not. If Jesus comes back for His people before the tribulation, then they won't experience the tribulation. If Jesus comes back for His people after the tribulation, then that means they will experience the tribulation. So, which is it?

### **Post-tribulational premillennialism ...**

There are two main camps here, the first of which is post-tribulational premillennialism, or, as I referred to earlier, classic premillennialism, which says that Jesus will return after the tribulation. So post-tribulation, which means that the church will experience the tribulation. According to this view, the church will be present during and will experience the great tribulation. In addition to the way post-trib pre-mil brothers and sisters understand passages like Matthew 24, they point to other places in Scripture that point to believers undergoing tribulation like Jesus was promising would come. John 16:33, *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* Romans 8:17, *"...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."* Hebrews 2:10, *"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."*

Practically, the whole book of 1 Peter is giving the message that you will experience suffering and trial and tribulation in this world, so don't expect to escape it. 1 Peter 2:21, *"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."* Later in the letter in 1 Peter 4:14, Peter says, *"If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."*

In this world, believers will experience the wrath of Satan. In other words, Satan will attack you. Jesus says to His church in Revelation 2:10, *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."* And then, Revelation 7:13-14 clearly implies that His saints will have gone through the tribulation. It says, *"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed*

*in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”*

And then, Christ will return after the tribulation to inaugurate the millennium. According to post-trib premillennialists, Jesus will return for His people when He comes to inaugurate His millennial reign. Many passages appear to speak to this. Matthew 24:29-31,

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*

First Thessalonians 4:16 says, *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”* 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”* Then, Revelation 19:11, *“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.”*

And, whereas His people will have experienced the wrath of Satan during a time of tribulation, believers will not experience the wrath of God, but instead, will reign with Him on the earth in the millennial kingdom. Romans 5:9, *“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”* Then, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 states,

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

### **Pre-tribulational premillennialism ...**

So, that’s post-tribulational premillennialism. But then, there’s pre-tribulational premillennialism, which basically says the opposite; it says that the church will be raptured before the tribulation. According to this view, there will be a secret rapture of the church when Jesus comes prior to the tribulation to remove the church from the world. Christians will be taken away from the world, and the rest of the world will be not know what has happened, i.e., the rest of the world will be “left behind.” You following me, here?

So this view understands 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 to be teaching this secret catching away of the church, where Jesus will come back for His people and return with them to heaven, leaving non-believers here for a time of tribulation. The passage says,

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

After all, according to this view, Jesus told His church in Revelation 3:10, "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth."

Now, during this time of tribulation various prophecies, including those pertaining to Israel, will be fulfilled during the tribulation. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 says, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." So, you remember all the prophecies we talked about that need to be fulfilled before the final return of Christ and the ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth? Well, it's during the tribulation that many of these prophecies will be fulfilled, including the ingathering of the people of Israel, which we talked about in Romans 11:25-32:

*Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

And this is key, because many people who hold to this view of the millennium and tribulation draw a clear line of distinction between Israel and the church and point to distinct plans and purposes that God has for Israel, based on their understanding of Scripture and its promises to Israel.

So, during the tribulation, various prophecies will be fulfilled, including prophecies concerning ethnic or natural Israel, and then, Christ will return again after the tribulation to inaugurate the millennium. And the key word is "again" here. Remember how back when we talked about the second coming of Christ, we asked the question if this would occur in stages or not, and the post-tribulational premillennialist here envisions two comings of Christ: One for His people, and then the second time with His people after the tribulation to then inaugurate the millennium. And one of the primary prophecies pointing to this is Zechariah 14:4-5, which says,



*On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.*

So, those are the controversial questions in Revelation. What does this book mean and why do we have it? What is the millennium and when will it happen? What is the tribulation and who will experience it?

Now, I know that some of you hear these questions, and you're tempted to throw your hands up in the air and say, "Does any of this really matter? Why even think and talk about these things? Aren't there more important things to talk about?" And in a sense, there are, just as we've discussed. There are primary doctrines that are much more important, but that doesn't mean these questions aren't important at all. Yes, there are all kinds of potential for disagreement here and all kinds of things that we don't know for certain, but this is God's Word. God has spoken, and He has given us minds to understand, and He has given hearts that want to know Him, hearts that seek Him, and as followers of Christ, we want to love God with all of our hearts and our souls and our minds. So, it is an expression of our love for God to love His Word, to understand His Word and to wrestle with His truth, and to let it drive us into deeper dependence upon Him and His Spirit, even when we know, like we've talked about, that there's some things we're not going to know for certain this side of heaven. So, we study these things diligently because we want to know God, and we want to know truth, but we also study these things humbly.

Now, some might say, "Well, David, where do you come down?" And I hope it's not obvious based on the way I've presented these views, because I've wanted to present them fairly. Premillennialism is probably a more common view in many churches today, including both pre-trib and post-trib varieties. Postmillennialism is a less common view today, but it was a more common view in other eras of church history. And then amillennialism...in a sense, you'd have to be crazy to think that we are actually in the millennium now. But in the end, I'm actually crazy enough to believe that, to believe that Revelation was written primarily cyclically, not chronologically, to a church undergoing suffering and trial and temptation and persecution, and all throughout the book, the Lord is telling His church then, and us today, that Christ is reigning now, and we have victory in Him now, and we must proclaim the gospel with boldness in the middle of suffering and persecution now, knowing that Jesus could come at any minute and will come when the nations have been reached with the gospel, at which time He will consummate His kingdom.

Now, I hold this position loosely. After all, it's the position that Tom Schreiner, who I shared about earlier, used to hold, so apparently, he's smart enough to change his mind, and I'm not yet! And I also realize that this is likely a minority position not only among many churches represented here tonight, but is probably a minority position even among the pastors here at Brook Hills. I've never taken a poll of our pastors, but I've got a feeling I'm in the minority, because I've had some great discussions with some of our pastors who disagree with me, but that's the beauty. Remember, these doctrines do not divide us. Christians in the same church disagree with one another over tertiary doctrines, but it does not in any way decrease the intimacy of their fellowship with one another. And then Christians divide from non-Christians over primary doctrines, and Christians are willing to die for these doctrines. In other words, I may fall down in the amillennialist camp at this

point, but if you put a gun to my head in persecution, I could turn premillennialist real quickly...real quickly.

## **Seven Critical Conclusions From Revelation God is Sovereign**

These three controversial questions are not where I want us to end, though. I want us to let them lead us to seven critical conclusions from Revelation. Seven, the perfect number in the book of Revelation, right? Here we go. Amidst all the things we may now know for certain about the end times according to the book of Revelation, here are seven truths we do know for certain. One, God is sovereign. If one truth is clear and conclusive from cover to cover in Revelation, this truth is clear: God is sovereign. God is in control of all things at all times.

So imagine this, again, imagine this from the perspective of suffering Christians who are being persecuted on all sides, tempted on all sides, by the Roman empire around them, and God says, from the beginning in Revelation 1:8, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"* And then, when you begin to see history unfold, even the worst of history as judgments and evil and suffering are described in the world, listen to how history is described in Revelation 6:1-11:

*Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!" When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

It's the same thing in Revelation 7:2, *"Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea..."* And this theme goes on and on and on and on. Revelation 8:1-3, *"When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a*

*golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne..." Revelation 9:1-5,*

*And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.*

Revelation 13:5-7:

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation...*

Then, a few verses later in Revelation 13:13-15, it says,

*It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.*

Everything that happens was permitted by God. Every authority that is given is given by God. You go all the way down to Revelation 17:17, and it says, "...for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled." Everything that is happening in Revelation, even the worst things that are happening, are happening according to the ultimate purpose of God.

This is good news. So, see it; see it then, and see it now. No matter what is happening in the world...where you live, where we all live...no matter what is happening in North Korea or Iran or with China's economy or with rumors of war against Israel or in the Middle East, know this: No matter what is happening, history is not out of control. God is in control, and He is sovereign over all things.

## **Satan is subordinate.**

And not only is God sovereign, but second, Satan is subordinate. All throughout the book of Revelation, it is clear that Satan is limited in his power by the sovereign prerogative of God. Regardless of what you might think about the specific interpretation and application of

Revelation 20, we know from all of Scripture that Satan does not have free reign in this world, and he does not have free reign in your life. All throughout Revelation, we read stories about the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, good and evil, but this is not some dualistic battle between two equal, but opposing forces. No, this is not dualism; this is domination. This is not Star Wars, good versus evil, how's it going to turn out? We know how it's going to turn out because God is Almighty.

God is sovereign, and Satan is subordinate; He is limited and ultimately, He is doomed. Oh, I love Revelation 12:12: *"Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"* Yes, the devil knows this. The ultimate battle has already been fought at the cross of Christ, and Satan has lost. He is doomed to be defeated. The devil knows this for certain, demons know this for certain, so we can know for certain!

## **Our God Wins**

This leads to the third conclusion from Revelation. Here it is, the entire book of Revelation summed up in three words. Are you ready? Amidst all the complicated questions and confusion we might have about the book of Revelation, here's the point of the entire book summed up in three words: Our God wins; Our God wins. Revelation makes clear that the gospel of God will advance through the church. One day, every nation, tribe, tongue, and language will know His salvation, guaranteed. Revelation 7:9-10 says, *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

His gospel will advance through the church, and His Son will return for the church. Revelation 1:8 promises this: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"* Also, Revelation 11:15-17 tells us of this:

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign."*

And on that day, His greatness will be exalted across the earth. Revelation 5:13-14 says, *"And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped."* God is sovereign, Satan is subordinate, and our God wins!

## **We must see the world in all its deception.**

Fourth conclusion, then: We must see the world in all its deception. Revelation 17:1-13 gives us a picture of the seductive power of this world to lure us by its sensual pleasures and material possessions and temporary promises. It says,

*Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.*

Together with Revelation 13:12-18, we have in Revelation a vision of a beast and a prophet and a prostitute, all of which attempt to followers of Christ in the first century and you and me today from God. This passage states,

*It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*

And, oh, I know I'm going quick here, but to sum up the message of Revelation. In the beast, we are exhorted: Do not put your hope in government. Followers of Christ must never be duped into thinking that the state holds the key to salvation. As long as your hope is in human government or a human president, as good or bad as that government may be, as good or bad as that president may be, you will have a very unsteady foundation in your faith. Do not put your hope in government.

The false prophet reminds us: Do not even put your hope in religion and the religious systems of this world. And then, in imagery of Babylon the prostitute in Revelation 17-18, we are urged: Do not put your hope in material affluence and social acceptance in this world.

### **This world is full of deceptive attractions.**

This world is full of deceptive attractions. Sensual pleasures, material possessions, the promise of satisfaction, the hope of security, the insatiable lust for power, and the subtle lure of pride, all of these things surround us on a day-by-day basis. C.J. Mahaney once said, "Today, the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world." Spurgeon said:

I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church. Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church's history, and [you] will find a little marginal note: "In this age [people] could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended."

The reality is we live in a day where you cannot tell where the world ends and the church begins. Study after study after study shows that our lifestyles as professing Christians look just like the world around us. We are just as materialistic, just as sexually immoral, and just as self-centered as the world.

Just as materialistic: Our spending patterns are strikingly similar to the world around us. Our giving patterns are strikingly similar to the world around us. Six percent of Bible-believing American Christians tithe. And this is not just outside of us; this is us in this room. We know from giving patterns here that the overwhelming majority of people in this room don't tithe. We spend our money on all the same things that the world spends money on.

We're just as self-centered; we're just as sexually immoral. The percentage of professing Christian men who view pornography is virtually the same as non-Christian men. Men all across this room have visited a pornographic site over the last week, the last month or the last year. We in this room are just as likely to have sex outside of marriage, whether we're single or married, it doesn't matter. Sexual activity with someone who is not your spouse is almost just as common among professing Christians as it is among non-Christians in the world. And in marriages, we're just as likely to divorce as non-Christians; just as likely. Some studies have even shown that divorce is more common among professing Christians than non-Christians. Other studies show that marital abuse is even just as common.

And in parenting, the priorities of professing Christian parents for their kids look virtually identical to the priorities of non-Christian parents. We cart our kids all over town in the exact same way that non-Christian parents do, teaching our kids to be good at the things this world says are most important: Sports and entertainment. And it's not always what our kids are getting that's bad, but it's what our kids aren't getting that's bad. They spend hours in practices for this or that, hours in videogames, hours in front of the TV and minutes, at most, in the Word or in prayer with their moms and dads. And the effects are evident: Sixty to eighty percent of our kids will leave Christianity behind once they hit eighteen.

Is this acceptable? Something has to change. We are living just like this world! We look just like this world! And John is saying, "The church should look different!" Very different. Our schedules should look different, and our spending should look different, and our marriages should look different, and our parenting, our purity, our possessions, our love, our lives should look different. Not for the sake of being different, but because we love God more than we love this world.

**This world is headed to a definite conclusion.**

Sensual pleasures, material possessions, the promise of satisfaction, the hope of security, the insatiable lust for power, the subtle lure of pride, and we know this world is headed to a definite conclusion. Revelation says, "it's going to fall apart." All of these things are going to burn up in the end, Revelation tells us. Revelation 18:19-24 says,

*And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."*

This world will pass away completely, this world will pass away suddenly and this world will pass away eternally. So, don't build your life, don't bank your eternity on that which won't last! See the imagery in Revelation 6:12-17:

*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

See it! This is the end of the pleasures and pursuits and possessions of this world! In the words of William Hendricksen:

Try to visualize what John saw, taking the picture as a whole: heaven itself curling up like a piece of paper, rolling up like a scroll; the sun, it's light blotted out so that it resembles a black sack used in mourning; the big, full moon, a huge, awe-inspiring bloody ball; the stars, turned out of their orbits and plunging to the earth in great showers; the earth itself quaking violently so that every house crashes to the ground; and every mountain and island

suddenly disappearing. What a picture of dread and despair, of confusion and consternation—for the wicked!

This world is full of deceptive attractions, and they will all one day be destroyed. The pleasures and possessions of this world will one day be no more; they're going to burn up; their smoke will rise forever and ever. Satisfaction and security in the things of this world will not last! So, don't build your life on these things!

**Clearly, love for the world and love for God cannot coexist.**

Don't build your life on love for the world when, clearly, love for the world and love for God cannot coexist. Revelation 18:4-5 says, *"Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.'"*

See this. Here's the way it works, plain and simple: Love for the world always pushes out love for God; love for the world always pushes out love for God. The more we love the things and the pleasures and the possessions and the pursuits of this world, the less we will love God. The more we nibble at the table of this world, at the things of this world, the more our hearts will numb toward the love of God. Do we wonder why we don't have a deeper hunger for God in our day? Isn't it surely because our stomachs are full with the pleasures and possessions that we have partaken at the table of this world? The more we love this world, the less we love God.

But then it works the other way, as well: Love for God always pushes out love for the world; love for God always pushes out love for the world. This world is full of deceptive attractions: Sensual pleasures, material possessions, the promise of satisfaction, the hope of security, the insatiable lust for power, and the subtle lure of pride. And Revelation is saying: Don't buy them. They won't lead to satisfaction. Don't believe the lies of this world. Oh, C.S. Lewis put it this way: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, don't be so easily satisfied with the things of this world. Your desires are too weak. Infinite joy has been offered to us in obedience to Christ, in obedience to His commission, for God's sake and for your own sake and for the sake of your own pleasure and good, now and forever. Seek Christ! Obey Christ! Lose your life in following Christ and gain your life in following Christ!

**We must see the Christ in all his glory.**

This leads to this next conclusion, which is really an exhortation, from the book of Revelation: We must see the Christ in all His glory. Revelation 1:1-7 says,

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who*



*was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*

That's what Revelation means: The revelation of Jesus, and the portrait we have of Jesus in the book is nothing short of astounding. Dennis Johnson, in his commentary on Revelation, says:

We need to see Jesus—to meet his blazing eyes of heart-searching holiness, to wake up at the trumpet blast of his voice, to respond to his jealous demand for exclusive and passionate loyalty. Shocked insensible by the impact of his splendor, we need then to hear his words of compassionate comfort, quelling our fears and quaking our hopes. Every congregation, whatever its struggle at its post on the battlefield, needs to fix its eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

### **He is fully human and fully divine.**

Oh, see Jesus in Revelation. He is fully human and fully divine. In Revelation 1:8, God says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'* Then, in Revelation 21:6, Jesus says, *"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."* Then a few verses later, Jesus says again, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* So, God says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"* and then Jesus says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"* in His humanity, equating Himself with God. He is fully human and fully divine.

### **He is the fulfillment of prophecy and the final high priest.**

He is the fulfillment of prophecy and the final high priest. All throughout Revelation, we see allusions to Daniel and Ezekiel and Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets who looked for, longed for the day when the Christ, the Messiah, would come, and over and over again, John points us to Jesus as the fulfillment of all those prophecies. Revelation 1:12-13 says, *"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest."* Revelation 22:16 says, *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."* He is both the root and the descendant of David, coming before and after him. He is the fulfillment of prophecy and the final high priest, wearing in Revelation 1:13 the garments of the high priest.

### **He is infinitely old and infinitely wise.**

Jesus is infinitely old and infinitely wise. He has existed forever. Jesus knows no beginning, and He knows no end, and His wisdom knows no beginning, and His wisdom knows no end. Revelation 1:14 says, *"The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire..."* Now, remember, John uses images throughout this book that are not always intended to be taken literally. John's purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity about what Jesus is wearing in heaven or tell us whether or not His hair has grayed. These are images that were familiar to John's readers: A high priest's clothing, the white hair of a wise and ancient man, images that evoke awe and wonder at the majesty of Christ.

**His purity has no error and His power knows no equal.**

His purity has no error and His power knows no equal. Revelation 1:15 says, *"...his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters."*

**His voice resounds with authority and His face radiates with light.**

His voice resounds with authority and His face radiates with light. When He speaks, it sounds like the roar of many waters, and from His mouth protrudes a sharp two-edged sword. Revelation 1:16 says, *"In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength."*

**He had the first word in creation, and He will have the last word in creation.**

He had the first word in creation, and He will have the last word in creation. Jesus the Christ is the force behind all of human history. He is the first and the last. Revelation 1:17, *"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last...'"*

**He was dead for a time, but He is alive for all time.**

He was dead for a time, but He is alive for all time. Jesus declares in Revelation 1:18, *"...and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."* He has defeated death.

**He is the conquering Lion and the slaughtered Lamb.**

He is the conquering Lion and the slaughtered Lamb. The conquering Messiah of Genesis 49 and Isaiah 11 has come! Throughout history, from the beginning of time, men have come and men have gone, women have come and women have gone, all of them, the noblest of them, the kindest of them, the strongest of them, the greatest of them, all of them have fallen prey to sin. All of them and all of us, every single man and every single woman is a slave to Satan. All of them and all of us, generation after generation, century after century, every single man and every single woman on the earth has succumbed to death. But then came another man unlike any other man! This man did not fall prey to sin; He possessed power over sin. This man did not succumb to death; He triumphed over death. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has come and He has conquered!

How did He conquer? John rose in Revelation 5 to see the strong Lion, and to his surprise, he glimpsed a slaughtered Lamb standing. Just in case you were wondering: Slaughtered Lambs don't stand. But this Lamb endured death in our place and defeated death by His power. And the greatest news in all the world is that the slaughtered Lamb of God now reigns as the sovereign Lord of all. Revelation 5:5-6 says,

*And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

**His worth is undisputed, His work is unforgettable, and His worship is universal.**

His worth is undisputed. Power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing belong to Him! His work is unforgettable. For all of eternity, we will never, ever forget the price He paid for our sin. And His worship is universal. This Lion-like Lamb does not deserve the praise of one type of people; He deserves the praise of every type of person on the planet, and one day, He will receive the reward of His sufferings: A kingdom of men

and women from all over the world who have experienced His salvation and who will exalt His supremacy. Revelation 5:7-14 says,

*And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

**His birth declared the death of the ancient serpent, His death defanged the adversary, and His resurrection demolished every accusation against the church.**

According to Revelation 12:1-10, His birth declared the death of the ancient serpent, His death defanged the adversary, and His resurrection demolished every accusation against the church. The passage says,

*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."*

Now, that may sound confusing, but here's what it means. This is the story of the Bible: From the very entrance of sin into the world, God promised to send a Savior in the form of a man, born from woman, to defeat the devil. This God did in the person of Jesus, who was born, just as had been prophesied for centuries. Jesus did what no one has ever done or will ever do on the pages of human history: He lived a perfect life, free from sin, never once

giving in to the temptations of evil. And then, He died on a cross to pay the price for sinners who have rebelled against God, sinners like me and sinners like you.

And then, three days later, He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death and the devil himself, so that everyone who believes in Him, everyone who trusts in Him will be saved from their sin, so that, when the devil accuses you of being a grievous sinner, you might look back and say, "You are right, but I have a great Savior, and because of His blood shed for me, I am safe from your accusations forever!" Forever.

### **He is faithful and true.**

And we know His promises are forever because He is faithful and true. Revelation 1:5 says, *"...and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood..."* Revelation 3:14, *"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.'" Also, Revelation 22:6, "And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.'"*

### **He is the righteous Judge and Messianic Warrior.**

He is the righteous Judge and Messianic warrior. John writes in Revelation 19:11, *"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war."* In Revelation 19, we see Jesus riding on a white horse with the armies of heaven by His side, on the assault against evil and injustice and unrighteousness in the world.

### **Many crowns adorn His head, and much mystery surrounds His name.**

Many crowns adorn His head, and much mystery surrounds His name. The next verse, Revelation 19:12, says, *"His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself."*

### **He conquers God's enemies and He reveals God's Word.**

He conquers God's enemies and He reveals God's Word. Revelation 19:13-14, *"He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses."*

### **He rules the nations of this world and He brings God's wrath upon this world.**

He rules the nations of this world and He brings God's wrath upon this world with a rod of iron and a sharp sword. For all who have turned away from this Christ to live for this world, you don't want to meet Him on that day when He comes. He will come, yes, to consummate salvation for all who have trusted in Him, but He will also come to usher in wrath for all who have turned against Him. Revelation 19:15, *"From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."*

### **He is King of kinds and Lord of lords.**

He is King of kings and Lord of lords. So, turn to Him today; trust in Him today, for His grace is free and His joy is full. Revelation 22:7 says, *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."*

### **He is the Savior who came once, and He is the Sovereign who is coming back soon.**

He is the Savior who came once, and He is the Sovereign who is coming back soon. Oh, see this! See this! See this! See the way Revelation closes! This Jesus, whom we have seen all

throughout this book in brilliant imagery, promises to us that He is coming soon. Revelation 22:7, *"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."* Revelation 22:10, *"And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.'"* Revelation 22:12, *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."* Revelation 22:20, *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"*

### **No one and nothing compares to Him.**

Four times, "I'm coming soon, the time is near." So, the cry of our hearts is clear: "Come, Lord Jesus!" We want to see Christ! No one and nothing compares to Him. Oh, see Him even now in this way as the risen and coming King. Dennis Johnson asks:

When you think of Jesus Christ, do you see him in all the ways that Revelation's images portray him? When you think that you have hidden your sins well from others, do you remember his eyes like flames? When fear grips your heart – fear for yourself, your family, or Christ's church – do you fight that fear with the picture of the rider on the white horse, against whom the devil's worst, last weapons are impotent? When you are confused, not knowing whom to trust or which path to take, do you hear the voice of the faithful witness ringing in your ears, "These words are faithful and true," and do you turn expectantly to his words to find your way? When the accuser, though disbarred from heaven, renews his prosecution against your conscience, do you stand with John in awestruck wonder, gazing at the slain Lamb who poured out his blood to wash you clean and robe you in his own fine linen, bright and clean, to make you—yes, you!—God's precious treasure.

Conclusion from Revelation: We must see the Christ in all of His glory.

## **We must see the church in all her beauty.**

### **We are His body.**

And then, number six, we must see the church in all her beauty. Revelation 3:22, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* In Revelation, this letter written to the churches that makes clear: We are His body. The body of Christ! And we, along with every saint in all of history, are longing for His return. Oh, the beauty of the church! Hear Russell Moore:

If one really wants to see a theology for the church in action, one might walk into an old church graveyard at night. Walk about and see the headstones weathered and ground down by the elements. Contemplate the fact that beneath your feet are men and women who once had youthful skin and quick steps and hectic calendars but who are now piles of forgotten bones. Think about the fact that the scattered teeth in the earth below you once sang hymns of hope—maybe "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder I'll Be There" or "When We All Get to Heaven." They are silent now. But while you are there, think about what every generation of Christians has held against the threat of sword and guillotine and chemical weaponry. This stillness will one day be interrupted by a shout from the eastern sky, a joyful call with a distinctly northern Galilean accent. And that's when life really gets interesting.

Christ, one day, is coming back for His body.

### **We are His bride.**

We are His bride. Oh, the imagery of you and me, the church, men and women with sin-sick, sin-stained hearts, men and women who have given into the evil and anger and lust and pride of this world, us, standing before a holy God dressed in white, fine linen? How is this possible? Don't miss it: Revelation gives us a picture of the bride through the eyes of the Groom...the gracious, merciful, loving Groom who has given His life for His bride. No groom looks at His bride on their wedding day and thinks, "Uh, she looks all right." I stood at the front that gathering of the church that day, and when those doors opened, I thought, "This gorgeous, beautiful, stunning woman in white is my wife!"

So, see the church through the eyes of the Christ. See yourself through the eyes of Christ, Christian. We are His body, His bride. Nothing could be more precious or more valuable. Revelation 19:7-8 says, *"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."*

### **We must see our lives in proper perspective.**

#### **Fight against sin.**

And so, in light of all of this, seventh conclusion: We must see our lives in proper perspective. Don't see like the world sees; see as God sees. And when we do, we will fight against sin. Revelation 14:4-5, *"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."* We will see sin for what it is, we will see sin for all the devastation and damnation it brings, and we will fight against it. So, when you come to Revelation put away the charts and put away the speculation for a minute and look at your life! Are you fighting against sin? Are you giving in to the ways of this world?

And Revelation is urging us to resist compromise. Revelation 2:14-16,

*"But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."*

These first century Christians were tempted to turn away from Christ, tempted to compromise with worldly ways and worldly practices and worldly festivals in order to save their jobs or their families or their lives; tempted to compromise with the world and tempted to compromise in the church. Oh, Christian, we've seen it; we've talked about it. It is so easy to blend in with the world in subtle, seemingly justifiable ways to the point where our lifestyles are virtually indistinguishable from the lifestyles of our neighbors. We should not look just like the world! Revelation 2:20, *"But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols."*

Resist compromise and refuse complacency. Warnings against this are all over Revelation. Revelation 2:4-5, *"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."* Revelation 3:1-3,

*"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.'"*

Revelation 3:14-19 says,

*"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.'"*

Lack of love in the church at Ephesus; lukewarm faith in the church at Laodicea. A smug self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency of a people who waned in their want for God. John Piper said,

The essence of lukewarmness is the statement, "I need nothing." The lukewarm are spiritually self-satisfied. To find out whether you are among that number, don't look into your head to see if you think that you are needy; rather, look at your prayer life. Do you seek the Lord earnestly and often in secret for deeper knowledge of Christ, for greater earnestness in prayer, for more boldness in witness, for sweeter joy in the Holy Spirit, for deeper sorrow for sin, for warmer compassion for the lost, for more divine power to love? Or is the coolness and perfunctoriness of your prayer life Exhibit A that you are spiritually self-satisfied and lukewarm?

And all throughout Revelation, God is promising blessing for the faithful. Seven different times, we see the promise, "Blessed is the one who..." This is how the book opens and this is how the book closes. Revelation 1:3, *"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near."* Revelation 22:7, *"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."* Revelation 22:14, *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates."*

God promises blessing for the faithful, and at the same time, God promises judgment for those who fall away. Remember that this book, with all of its frightening, terrifying pictures of God's wrath, is a book was written for the church. And there were men and women in the

church in Asia Minor who claimed to be Christians but were wandering from Christ and denying Christ and running after the world. So, God gives them visions of wrath to warn them of impending judgment.

Hear His words to His churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Revelation 2:5, *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."* Revelation 2:16, *"Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."* Revelation 2:22, *"Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works..."* Revelation 3:3, *"Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."* Also, Revelation 3:16, *"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."*

This book is a serious, somber warning to false Christians who are faking it in the church, evident in their falling away, and God is calling them to repent and turn from their sin. So, church, let this book be a wake-up call to us all. Your sin is not to be toyed or trifled with. Disobedience to God damns. So, turn from sin; run from the ways of this world. For Christ is coming to bring blessing on the faithful and judgment on those who have fallen away.

Now, some of you say, "Well, I thought once you were saved you are always saved," and there's no question that Scripture teaches that once we are truly in Christ, we are in Christ forever. Once we have united our lives with Christ by faith, we have an inheritance that will never pass away. At the same time, nowhere in Scripture do we have the Christian life after that point of faith painted as a nice smooth ride down a hill with the wind blowing through your hair. No, the Christian life is a battle, and we face temptations on all side, every day, in every way, and so, God gives warnings to Christians about falling away to keep Christians from falling away.

You say, "Well, what about those who do fall away, who do give into the ways of this world and turn away from their faith in Christ?" And John, who wrote Revelation, answers that question in 1 John 2:19: *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."* In other words, they showed that they were not truly in Christ in the first place. So, God gives us warnings like we see in Revelation to repent, and warnings like this all over Scripture, to call us back to Christ, and how we respond to those warnings shows whether or not we were truly in Christ in the first place.

None of this, however, is intended to steal away our hope. The Bible is clear and Revelation is clear: By grace through faith, true followers of Christ will persevere to the end. 1 Peter 1:3-5 says,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Jesus says in John 10:27-29, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to*



*snatch them out of the Father's hand."* Ephesians 1:13-14 makes clear: *"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."*

By grace through faith, true followers of Christ will persevere to the end. How will they persevere? By grace through faith, true followers of Christ work to persevere to the end. This is why we've seen all kinds of exhortations tonight like this one from Jesus in Matthew 24:13, which says, *"But the one who endures to the end will be saved."* And these from Hebrews. Hebrews 3:14, *"For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."* Also, Hebrews 10:36, *"For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."* So, Christian, by grace through faith in Christ, fight against sin in this world.

### **Endure amidst suffering.**

Endure amidst suffering in this world. Revelation 13:9-10 says, *"If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints."* Again, this book is written for brothers and sisters who are suffering in the first century, and the world seems to be falling apart around them. The church is under attack, Christians are losing their lives, and they're wondering, "What is going on? Does God see our tears? Does God hear our prayers? Why are our enemies prospering while we are suffering?"

And you and I may not be experiencing persecution today like the first people who heard these words, and like many brothers and sisters are experiencing around the world today, but we are familiar with suffering in various ways. The cries of first-century Christians in Asia Minor are echoed in thousands of ways all across this church in twenty-first century America. "Why cancer in me, God? Why is my marriage falling apart? What is happening to my son or daughter? Why did I lose my job? Why do I feel so lonely? Do you hear my prayers? Do you see my tears?" And the book of Revelation is written to encourage us to endure amidst suffering.

Revelation tells us: Do not be surprised by it. Revelation makes clear that the call to follow Christ is a call to suffering. Revelation 1:9, *"I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."* We are partners together in tribulation and patient endurance, John says. One writer said:

If we close our eyes to Revelation's harshly realistic portrait of the church's life as one of suffering and martyrdom, we will be caught off guard when pain, social rejection, or even violent opposition break in upon our lives. Is it our intentional deafness to Revelation's call to expect and endure suffering that leaves so many comfortable Western churches and Christians ill-prepared to stand fast when life gets hard? Does this explain their disappointment with God when he does not deliver the tranquil life they expected and instead calls them to endure hardship – walking by faith, not sight?

Oh, that's a word we desperately need to hear amidst casual, comfortable Christianity, and in a world where a false prosperity gospel is spreading like wildfire.

Do not be surprised by suffering in this world, Christian, and do not be overcome in it. Over and over and over again, the theme of revelation is overcome; conquer. You see it in all

these verses listed here. Revelation 2:7, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."* Revelation 2:11, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."* Revelation 2:17, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."*

Revelation 2:26, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."* Revelation 3:5, *"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."* Revelation 3:12, *"The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."* Also, Revelation 3:21, *"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."*

Revelation is saying, "You may think things are out of control as you see the beast coming up out of the abyss to make war with you and your family, but take heart in this: Christ is in control, and Christ has conquered all, and Christ is reigning, not just in the future, but Christ is reigning now, and He sees your tears, and one day soon He will return, and He will personally wipe those tears from your eyes, and all the pains and hurts of this world will be gone, and the new will come." So, overcome in the midst of suffering. You are a conqueror in Him.

### **Proclaim the gospel of Christ.**

Endure amidst suffering as you proclaim the gospel of Christ. And that's the point. So many in the church in the first century were sitting back silent in their witness, afraid of what might happen in their lives if they proclaimed the gospel, and so many of us are there. Oh, church, with all of this news about heaven, hell, and the end of the world, with the good news of Christ in us, we cannot be silent. Decide tonight not to live your Christian life in silence anymore. Proclaim the gospel of Christ!

Let's pray passionately. Oh, see the picture in Revelation 8:2-6. I love this:

*Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.*

Did you see that? The trumpet judgments in Revelation 8 and 9, signaling the coming of Christ and the end of this world, are actually a response to the prayers of God's people described in the beginning of Revelation 8. Don't miss this: The consummation of God's kingdom in the world here is coming about in response to the prayers of God's people! One

writer said, "These verses are an astonishing tribute to the enormous historical importance of prayer."

Get the picture here in Revelation 8: Our cries go up, "Your Kingdom come, O God! Your just will be done. Hallowed be your name in all the earth! Fill the earth, O God, with the knowledge of your glory like the waters cover the seas. Bring an end to sin and suffering around us; usher in redemption and restoration and full and final reconciliation." These are the cries of the church. And as our cries go up, Revelation 8 teaches us that His kingdom comes down. Progressively, in the hearts of men and women who trust in Christ and live out the life of Christ in this world, and then ultimately, in the day to come when Christ will return for His people. Every time you and I cry out to God, "Your kingdom come," picture it: Every one of those prayers is taken, figuratively, to a heavenly throne room, and one day, all of them collectively are going to usher in the consummation of God's kingdom in this world. Piper writes,

What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny? Here is the astonishing answer: the prayers of the saints and the fire of God. That means that more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in [this] world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth.

Oh, we fight the battle against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms first and foremost from our knees.

So, let's pray passionately; let's give sacrificially. Stop storing up so many treasures on earth, Christian. Start storing up treasures in heaven. We are the wealthiest people to ever walk planet earth here in the West, so let's give sacrificially; give until it hurts for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. There are no U-Hauls attached to hearses. Life is short, death is coming, and we can't take anything from this world with us. So, give it away for the glory of Christ!

Let's pray passionately, let's give sacrificially, and let's go confidently to everyone we know, to everyone you work with, to everyone you encounter, tell them that God's grace is free and God's wrath is real. Tell them they can be saved to know and enjoy God forever and ever! Let's go confidently to everyone we know, and to the ends of the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people on the planet. You say, "Well, that could cost me; that could cost my family; that would change everything." Yes, it will, and yes, it could cost everything, but in light of everything we have seen, let's go confidently, and let's die willingly.

If Revelation 6 makes anything clear, it is clear that there Jesus has still not come back because there are still more martyrs to be slain, still more men and women who will lose their lives in love for the nations of the world. You say, "Isn't this a dangerous way to talk? Isn't this the way Muslim suicide bombers talk about being martyrs?" No, this is totally different. That is dying out of hate. Suicide bombers die because of hate. We're talking here about dying because of love, about laying down our lives to show and to share and to spread the love of God in Christ for the peoples of the world. And we would be fooling ourselves to think that we are going to penetrate the unreached peoples of the earth without experiencing the loss of some of our lives and some of our families across the church.

These people groups are unreached for a reason; they're hard to reach. They're difficult and dangerous to reach. All the easy ones are taken. The ones that are left will oppose you and me when we try to reach them. You say, "Well, then, why do we go?" And the answer is simple: It's the gospel. We go because God came to us when we were resistant to being reached by Him, and He sent His Son to sacrifice His life for our salvation, and so it just makes sense for people who believe this gospel to die willingly in order to reach others with this gospel.

Our brothers and sisters around the world know this. They're losing their lives now. May we not sit back and even just send our money so that they can lose their lives while we watch TV, play games, and get fat on the things of this world. May loyalty to Christ and His commission be more important to us than life itself. Revelation 1:9 says, *"I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."* Revelation 6:9, *"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne."*

Revelation 12:17, *"Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea."* Revelation 20:4, *"Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."*

### **Hasten the coming of Christ.**

Proclaim the gospel of Christ. Pray, give, go to everyone you know and to the ends of the earth, and as you do, as we do, hasten the coming of Christ. You say, "What does that mean, 'Hasten the coming of Christ?'" We can hasten the return of Christ? Speed along the return of Christ?" And this is where I want to bring Peter in as we close. I hope that if we've seen anything tonight, we have seen that any time the Bible talks about the future or the end of the world, the purpose is not to promote speculation among God's people, but to fuel obedience in God's people. And that's why I put 2 Peter 3 here at the end. I want to show you another example of when the Bible talks about the future, specifically about the return of Christ, but the point is not to promote speculation; instead, the purpose is to fuel obedience.

So, here in 2 Peter 3:1-18, people were asking, "When is Jesus going to come back? Is Jesus even going to come back?" Some people even saying, "Maybe He won't come back." So, listen to what Peter says:

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and*

*earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

So, Peter's saying, "Some people are asking if Jesus is going to come back, and if He is, why hasn't He?" And you may wonder the same question. We talk about Jesus coming back today, but it's been two thousand years since He promised to return, and nothing's happened. Is this real? Is this true? And if you've thought that, even after tonight, if you think that, listen to what Peter says next:

*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

So, He's coming back, Peter says, and as a result of that, listen to Peter's exhortation:

*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

"What sort of people ought you to be?" Peter asks. People of holiness and godliness. He continues:

*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

Did you see it? When the Bible tells us Jesus is coming back, the Bible is not telling us to get our charts out and figure out when. The Bible's telling us, "Get ready; live in holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening His coming." Peter said the reason Christ has not yet come back is because God desires more people to reach repentance, 2 Peter 3:9. And then he says in verse 12: "Hasten the coming of the day of God." Usher it in!

Oh, think about it: If Jesus has taught us to pray and plead, "Your kingdom come," and if Jesus has promised to come when the gospel is proclaimed among every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, then we don't just sit back and wait for Him to return. We give our lives working for His return. And so my prayer for you and my prayer for me and my prayer for us at the end of this: In light of the book of Revelation and in light of all that we have seen, let us pray, "God, give us unwavering holiness in this world. God, by your grace..." Verse 21, "By your grace, help us to resist compromise and to refuse complacency, to fight against sin,

and to endure amidst suffering, to proclaim the gospel of Christ to everyone we know and to the ends of the earth, knowing that it won't be easy, knowing that this is a costly way to live in this world."

C. T. Studd was a wealthy Englishman who sold everything he had to take the gospel to the nations. Studd's family and various Christian workers were brought in to dissuade him from going overseas, but he went anyway, first to China and then to India. At the age of fifty, he decided retirement was not an option for the Christian, so he went to Sudan, where he spent the remaining years of his life. His grave would become the stepping stone for the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, which spread gospel seeds all across Africa, Asia, and South America. He once wrote:

Believing that further delay would be sinful, some of God's insignificants and nobodies in particular, but trusting in our Omnipotent God, have decided on certain simple lines, according to the Book of God, to make a definite attempt to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact .... Too long have we been waiting for one another to begin! The time for waiting is past! The hour of God has struck! In God's holy name let us arise and build! We will not build on the sand, but on the bedrock sayings of Christ, and the gates and minions of hell shall not prevail against us. Should such men as we fear? Before the whole world, aye, before the sleepy, lukewarm, faithless, namby-pamby Christian world, we will dare to trust our God, we will venture our all for Him, we will live and we will die for Him, and we will do it with His joy unspeakable singing aloud in our hearts. We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only in our God than live trusting in man. And when we come to this position the battle is already won, and the end of the glorious campaign in sight. We will have the real Holiness of God, not the sickly stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts; we will have [real] Holiness, one of daring faith and works for Jesus Christ.

Oh, no matter what it costs us or what risk it involves, God, give us unwavering holiness in this world with unshakeable hope in the world to come. I love the way C.S. Lewis ends his last paragraph in the last book of the Narnia series. He writes:

The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Yes, the end of Revelation, the end of the Bible is only the beginning of a story where every chapter will be better than the one before. And so we cry with saints in heaven and joined with saints around the world, "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*" (Revelation 22:20-21)

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