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**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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**‘The Unveiling’**

**The End of Evil - Revelation 20**

This evening we come to a key moment point in the Lords unveiling of history to John, and to us. I was going to put a title of ‘The Millennium’ to this message, but then I changed my mind! I’ll tell you why! The millennium is a point, maybe THE major point of discussion and difference in people’s understanding of the Revelation (and for some the whole Bible). And we could focus on our differences, argue them, discuss them, etc – but with little profit!

There is however something far more significant and wonderful in this chapter and it’s that which our title flags up – the little matter of **the end of evil**! In the scene before us the Lord unveils to us the ultimate defeat and eternal punishment of Satan, our old and greatest enemy. Having previously seen the end of the beast and the prostitute, now we see the end of the Dragon itself – **v10**. Hallelujah

But before we get to that point we do have to just mention these verses that talk about the 1000 yrs – **v2, 3, 5 & 6**. I’ve tried hard to steer clear of jargon and labels in this series, but tonight I do need to bring some of these in and explain them because you see this is one of the scenes which really defines how people interpret the whole of the book.

People have pondered almost from the beginning as to how we are to understand this part of the Revelation. Today people may sound very certain about it – but truth is that there has never been a consensus view among even the best Bible scholars and teachers. Thus whatever opinion we may hold we must do so with humility, because we may just be wrong! Be wary of those who speak with certainty on these things – however convinced and convincing they may be.

**So what’s the big debate?** Quite simply it’s whether Jesus returns to earth before or after this 1000 yrs – and oh, as a side point, ‘what is the 1000 yrs anyway?’!

3 basic views:

1. Pre-Millennialists – literal 1000yrs and Jesus will come back afterwards
2. Post-Millennialists – literal 1000yrs and Jesus will come back afterwards
3. A-Millennialists – who think it’s a figurative number – but that Jesus will come back afterwards.

(Just to confuse you there are nuances even within these)

Important to understand that all are based on the reading of scripture – so no one needs fall out with anyone or question their Christian integrity! It’s one of those things where it’s OK to differ – but we need to do so with humility because at the end of the day one will be wrong and I’ll be right! (Only kidding!!)

Much of the debate and uncertainty comes from the scene John describes in **v1-3** – **this binding of Satan** for 1000yrs, and the question is what and when is this?

I’ll lay my cards on the table as to where I come from and will explain why – you may agree or may get to the end and be unconvinced. That’s OK! My understanding is that Rev 20:1-3 refers back to Jesus time on earth – that Jesus bound Satan by his death and resurrection – and that the 1000yrs is not a literal figure.

So my label is **‘A-millennial’**. Couple of reasons why I believe this

1. Firstly - so much else, pretty much all else, in Rev is obviously symbolic, why would this be literal?
2. Secondly, and more importantly, is that in my opinion, Jesus and the apostles said taught this!

*Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house*. **Matt 12.29.** The context is crucial here - Jesus accused of using Satan's power but he says he’s actually against Satan, using God’s power to drive him out – in effect beating him, demonstrating his power, God’s power, over Satan in a way that hadn’t hitherto been apparent.

*‘Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out’* **John 12:31** That sounds a lot to me like something significant was about to happen to Satan, that his power and influence on the world was about to change, diminished cp to what it was before. And again the context is very significant; look at what he says he’s about to do – be lifted up and draw all people to himself, and this is all prompted by the arrival of this group of Greek people wanting to see Jesus.

The time has come for the tables to be turned says Jesus, now is the time – what time? His death. Look at **Col 2.15** – ‘*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*’

Past tense. Something happened on the cross, something happened to Satan, Jesus did something or huge significance and I believe that is what Rev 20:1-3 is referring to.

**The objection to this is obvious - if Satan is bound now then whatever would things be like if he wasn’t!** It certainly doesn’t look like he’s bound. Evil, violence, godlessness, etc, etc abound on every hand. How can we possibly believe he’s bound?

Well look at it this way - up to the cross God’s grace and love has pretty much been confined to the Israelites. Others could come in if they wanted, but in truth very few did! Most of the world was in darkness, untouched and unreached by the mercy of God, held firmly in Satan's grip.

But think what happened after Calvary and the resurrection! Look at the explosion and incredible spread of the gospel and the dramatic growth of the church – all around the then known world. And it continues today. If we understand the binding of Satan in these terms of the spread of the gospel and the expansion of God’s kingdom then it makes a lot more sense.

So it seems to me that we are now living in the time of Satan being bound – a time that started with the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and will continue until he decides the time is right. As such it corresponds to the 3.5 years of ministry of the witnesses in Ch11.

During this 1000yrs the martyred saints are said to reign with Christ – **v9**. Where is this reign? On earth? No – **v4** says there were thrones and every time we see thrones in revelation they are in heaven. This is a heavenly reign, it’s a time of victory over Satan. We conclude then that the first resurrection – **v5**, refers to either their new birth (which is seen as coming from death to life in the NT) or the fact that when a person dies their soul is said to ‘ascend’ to heaven.

*Our time then is a time of opportunity; it’s a day when the power of God is greater than Satan. It’s a day when God says to us – ‘Right go – go and make disciples of all nations’. It’s a day when the harvest is ripe. It’s a day of opportunity and people will be saved. I will not have people saying ‘it’s a day of small things’ today is the day of salvation, today is the day of Grace, today is the day when God wants us to go out with him and call in his people. may it be for us like Paul ‘I have many people in this city’. Let us not give up – our God is greater, and he wants to save people. So don’t be afraid, share Jesus, invite them to hear him. Don’t be embarrassed.*

**The release of Satan – v7**

Anyway, after this 1000yrs Satan is released and unleashes a furious assault against the church. It only lasts a very short time and is cut short by the intervention of God. This assault is yet another reference to the battle of Armageddon – one and the same, and is the same as the 3.5 days that followed the witnesses work on earth (the witness we said are the church).

Gog and Magog – **v8**, refers to the massed enemies of God wherever they are. Everything is combining together, every force, every influence, every ideology, every teaching is massed together to destroy the church (‘the city’ – **v9**). It seems as though all is lost.

**The triumph of Christ:**

Just when all seems lost, when the power and onslaught of the enemy seems irresistible and the church will be overwhelmed -fire comes from heaven – **v9**! Or as in another image we saw - the rider on the white horse appears and Satan is immediately, without fight, overpowered and thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the end of the enemy, every enemy – the beast, the prostitute and the dragon have all been dealt with, all thrown, once and for all into the place of perpetual judgement and suffering. The ultimate rebellion is dealt with by the ultimate judgement. There was no worse a crime that to fight against God and there will be greater punishment as a result.

Now the end has come. We’ve seen again the sweep of history from the cross to the return of the Lord.

All that follows now is for inhabitants of earth to come before their maker and have his verdict read out to them.

**The Great Judgement – v11-15**:

The judge is Jesus – and every single person, great and small, princes and paupers all in the same boat, all who have lived appear in turn before him. And he pronounces judgement on the unbelievers – who will be judged not unfairly but according to how they have lived – **v13**. This is nothing to do with getting into heaven or not (the two books, **v12**, have already decided where the person will go); this is about severity or otherwise of punishment. So yes, it appears there will be degrees of punishment for unbelievers.

We only see those who refused Jesus in this scene; of course there are two books and somewhere the believers fit in too – but this scene focuses on the utter, ultimate and conclusive end of everything that spoils. Ch 20 will show how things will be afterwards – the point of this scene is to assure the poor persecuted believers of John’s day, and ours, that evil will one day be finally, utterly and completely dealt with. Not trace left to spoil what comes next.

How to wrap up:

* Solemn passage – all will appear before God. Which book are we each in? Are you safe? Today is the day of salvation – get in whilst you can!
* Let’s understand the judgement and therefore redouble our efforts to warn and woo people to Jesus.
* Knowing that we two will stand before him (not seen in this passage but others do) let us live wisely so that we have something to offer him on that day – not as a bribe to let us in, but as a gift of gratitude for his love and mercy.

Prayer

Sing: