

(Revelation) 09 Revelation 20 - the Millennium

by David Pawson

The sermon discusses the events of Revelation 20, focusing on the removal of Satan, the saints' reign, and the two resurrections.

Duration: 1:10:37

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 19:30, Matthew 20:16, Revelation 20:1-10

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Christian Community"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares about his experiences preaching to prisoners for several hours at a time. He tells the prisoners that if they remain faithful to Jesus and overcome their current struggles, they will have the opportunity to be judges and apply justice to others in the future. The speaker also shares a remarkable transformation that has taken place in one wing of the prison, where every prisoner has become a Christian and now live in brotherhood as one community. The governor is amazed by this change and even the officers now seek permission to enter the prisoners' cells to have coffee and read the Bible with them.

Transcript

I think we'd better read the passage that we're going to look at, Revelation chapter twenty. And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss or the pit, and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ 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 are those who have part in this first resurrection.

The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.

They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them, and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

We are dealing now with the next part of the last seven visions in the book of Revelation, four and five. Notice that we're now right into chapter twenty and the most obvious key phrase in the passage I read was, a thousand years. Repeated six times in this very short passage.

How often does God have to say a thing before we get the message? And not only is it repeated six times, four times it is a thousand years and twice it is the thousand years. Very important. Clearly to God this is a vital period.

Now there are some who take the figure a thousand years literally, others take it symbolically, whichever way you take it, it's a long time. Here we have a long period on the old earth in which certain things happen. The next striking thing about the passage I read is that most of it is about Satan.

Quite extraordinary that these thousand years he seems to be the most important person in it. In fact, I've divided it up, from my understanding, into three sections. Verses one to three talk about Satan being removed.

Then verses four to six we read about saints reigning. Then from seven to ten, Satan is released again. There's a kind of sandwich in this period.

It begins with something happening to Satan and it ends with something happening to Satan. But there's a lot that happens in between even though it's compressed into just three verses of scripture. But there are many other scriptures scattered through the Old and the New Testament which clearly relate to this period.

Let's take verses one to three. Satan removed from the world, and this seems to be the particular part of Revelation 20 that has caused trouble to our tapes and our machines even here at the beginning of this conference. Notice five verbs are applied to him.

He is not just bound, and I say that for a reason which will come clear later. He is dealt with by an angel, not by God, not by Jesus. An angel deals with him.

As an angel threw him out of heaven, the archangel Mikael or Michael, an angel throws him out of the earth. Now we don't know if that's still Michael or another angel, but it only takes one angel to deal with the devil. It's the final insult.

God doesn't bother to deal with him or Jesus. He sends an angel, go and throw that other angel out of earth. For the devil is simply an angel.

He was up there in heaven. That's where he originated, a creature of God, a heavenly creature. But he wanted his own kingdom, he rebelled against God, and has taught the whole human race to do the same, and we've fallen for his devices.

Now the angel is equipped with a chain and he first of all binds Satan, then he throws him into a pit, he locks the pit, he seals the pit. How much more? How many more verbs would we need to be persuaded that the thing is total, completely shut off from the world that has been his kingdom for centuries? And the revelation goes on to say he is no longer able to deceive the nations. Incidentally, that word nations always means in the New Testament ethnic groups and particularly those groups that are not Jewish.

It's the same as the word Gentiles really, the Hebrew word goyim. So he's shut off altogether. That is not the final end of the story.

As you noticed, he reappears later. He is released again at the end of a thousand years and we shall have to ask why when we come to that part. But at least the earth is going to be free of the devil for a thousand years.

The two of his puppets who were controlling the world until now are already in hell. They are already being tormented. They were sent straight from the battle of Armageddon, thrown alive into hell at that point.

But the devil is not sent there yet, not yet. God has one further purpose for him, which we'll see in a moment. But he's out of the world.

The world is free of the devil, of the Antichrist, of the false prophet, and of course that leaves a gigantic political vacuum. Not all the inhabitants of the earth were killed at Armageddon, only those involved in the army led by the unholy trinity. They were slaughtered, but there are still millions of other people living.

Who is going to control the situation? Who is going to govern the world now? The answer is Jesus has come back to reign, but he's not going to do it by himself. Way back there in chapter 5, do you remember when we saw Jesus up in heaven? The angel was singing, worthy are you because you have redeemed with your blood from every kindred and tribe and tongue and nation men for God and they shall reign on the earth. Furthermore, in one of the seven letters to the seven churches Jesus has said, he who overcomes will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

Exactly the same phrase that is applied to Jesus himself later in the book. So that Jesus and his saints are going to reign. Jesus and the overcomers will constitute the government for the next period of a thousand years, a Christian government ruling the world.

Well now that's verses 1 to 3, Satan utterly removed, totally helpless, unable to communicate with anyone on earth, shut up in a dungeon. Where that is don't ask me, but God can have it anywhere. But he prepared the pit for this purpose as he prepared hell for the devil and all his angels.

You know, I often say to people, God never intended human beings to go to hell. He had to prepare it for the devil and all his angels, and incidentally I forgot to mention that in chapter 12 it says that the devil, when he was thrown out of heaven and came to earth, pulled a third of the heavenly host with him. A third of the stars of heaven followed Satan.

A third of the angels rebelled against God. That's a mighty number. We call them demons now, but they're nothing more than angels who shared in Satan's rebellion.

But here, Satan is utterly out of the picture and now the saints reign. Now the next vision needs to be approached very carefully with a simple question, how many groups are mentioned in this middle section? Satan's forgotten now, the saints are reigning now, but how many of them and who are they? A superficial quick reading could be quite misleading. We notice the word thrones now.

There it is again. We've so far only seen thrones in heaven, now we're seeing thrones on earth. A throne is a ruler's seat.

He first of all sees a number of people who have been given the responsibility of ruling the earth under Christ, and he sees them on thrones ruling. To them has been given judgment, the establishment of justice in the world. While there are sinners and sin in the world, there will always be need for judgment and for justice to be done, but it will be perfectly done in the millennium through Christ and his servants.

Now I take this first group that is mentioned to be all the overcomers, all those who have taken part in what is called the first resurrection, and it's overcomers who later inherit the new heaven and the earth. I'm afraid believers who under pressure have denied Jesus will not be part of this. So let's move on.

Within that larger group he says again, and I saw. What does he see now? He sees a smaller group, and he sees a group of martyrs now, those who have been beheaded, those who have been executed for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Is this a second group? Well if the first group are overcoming saints, then this is a second group, though they were faithful unto death.

Then we find apparently another group, a third group. He sees those who were resistant to the beast, the Antichrist, who refused to take the number on their hand and on their forehead. Now he sees them, again apparently the martyrs who for their refusal were killed.

Some people have thought there are three groups here. I don't think so. A very careful reading of the Greek suggests that there is one large group and within it a smaller group, the smaller group being part of the larger.

In other words, he sees the overcoming saints first ruling over the earth. But within that group, he particularly notices those who were killed and thrown out of the earth during that last dreadful struggle. It's such a comfort to them and to him to know that they are now in charge.

Human courts and judges executed them and expelled them from the world, but now they are on the judgment seats. It's an extraordinary reversal of people. I think it's written here to strengthen the people who were facing death.

I told you this book is a manual for martyrdom. Many a Christian who has died for the Lord is on record as saying and as thinking when a Roman emperor condemned them to be thrown to the lions. They comforted themselves by saying, one day I will be in your place and you'll be in mine.

It's a great reversal. These people were told they were not fit to be allowed to live on the earth. Now they are in the judgment seat.

Extraordinary reversal of fortune. But these are not exclusive groups. Undoubtedly there were other martyrs alongside them.

But John, you see, is preparing people for the last big trouble here and he's saying, even if they kill you and martyr you, one day you'll be on their throne. Hold on to that for the joy is set before you, endure the shame. Now it is my privilege to minister to many different kinds of people.

I love to go to gypsy camps. I have a lot to do with gypsies in England. There are sixty thousand of them and there is now not a gypsy family in England without a Christian in it.

The most remarkable move of God in my country is among gypsies, the outcasts, the people nobody wants to talk to. They're lovely people though and what a transformation Christ is bringing into their lives. I love being with them.

The other group I love ministering to and I have the opportunity is in a top security prison where all of the men I talk to are there for life. They are drug dealers, they are murderers, they're killers one way or another, and they've all been sent to prison for life. I learned quickly that you never ask how much longer have you to do because they just shut their minds to the freedom that they have lost.

But a remarkable thing is happening in that prison. An entire wing has been converted. Every prisoner in one whole block is now a Christian and with the governor's permission they have knocked down the walls of the cells.

They now live in brotherhood as one community and they've changed the locks from the outside of the doors to the inside. That whole wing, that whole block which used to be the worst in the prison where the officers only went in threes for their own protection and where human excrement was smeared on the walls, a dreadful place, now the officers go and knock on the door of the cell. May we come in? And the prisoners say, come in, sit down, we'll make you coffee and we'll read the Bible to you.

It is a remarkable thing. The governor cannot believe what's happened and you can see their faces change. Now I talk to them for three to four hours at a time.

Once nearly got shut in at night when the gates closed. But you know, last time I told them, if you are now faithful to Jesus and you overcome the pressures that you've been under, one day some of you will be judges sitting in courts applying justice to others. I said, you'll have a chance then to be fair, even if you feel a sense of injustice now.

Well, their eyes were out on storks. Their mouths were this wide. The idea that prisoners, life prisoners, could ever be sitting on a judge's bench, boy.

But I said, why not? Why not? God's in the business of recycling people and we're going to get a lot of surprises when he comes. The first shall be last and the last first again and again and again. Well here we have those who are judged unworthy of living, thrown out of the earth by worldly judges and now they are sitting on the thrones.

Jesus made the same sort of promise to some fishermen. He said, you will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. They could hardly believe it.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, had heard that they were arguing that actually Christians were going to worldly courts to sue each other. That's a scandal. I'm afraid it's happening today too.

Christians going before a judge who doesn't believe in God and suing a fellow Christian in law. Jesus told us before you bring your offering, you go and be reconciled to your brother. But it's happening and it was happening in Corinth.

And do you know what Paul said to them to sort it out? He said, you must sort out this difference among yourselves and settle the dispute. You're going to judge the nations. You're going to settle disputes for the world.

You can't even settle them for yourself. You have to go to an outside judge. It's a very interesting little argument there in 1 Corinthians 6. You look it up.

We are to be in training now, not just for the tribulation as Corrie ten Boom said, we are in training for the millennium. We are in training to take the world over under Christ. But I'll say more about that later.

We're told very little in Revelation 20 here, but it's clear that people who've died for Christ are now on the judgment seat applying justice to others. All the overcoming saints and particularly the martyrs, John sees them in this vision. We're going to go straight on and come back to that later.

I'll go straight on with the passage because we want to deal with the controversial issues. I think the big surprise--no, let's just draw this out. If there are dead martyrs here judging, then obviously they've been raised from the dead.

And if all the saints are there, many of them have been raised from the dead too. And so John makes this quite clear. There has been a resurrection limited to those saints who come back to reign.

It is the first resurrection he says. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in that first resurrection. In other words, there are to be two resurrections.

This is clearly stated here, the first and the second, one at the beginning of the millennium and the other at the end. One of the righteous, the other of the wicked. Now that is a truth that many Christians seem to have missed.

In fact, the majority of churches in my country believe in one general resurrection, as they call it, of everybody to be judged. But here it is clearly stated there is a first resurrection and a second. And in fact, you find both Jesus himself in the Gospels and Paul in his letters confirming this simple truth.

Not everybody will be raised at once. It is very clear of course that everybody will be resurrected. That means everybody will get a body and live again.

Daniel was the first to say this. Daniel 12 says that both the righteous and the unrighteous will be raised from the dust, some to everlasting life and others to everlasting shame, but both will be raised. Jesus himself said exactly the same, that both the righteous and the wicked will be raised.

Paul, on trial for his life, said, I am on trial because I believe in the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Everybody is going to be in a resurrection. Everybody will get a new body, the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad.

That is why people have not escaped the judgment of God. Adolf Hitler will be resurrected by God and faced with what he did. There is no escape from God.

There will be the resurrection of the righteous and wicked, but what is being said here is that the resurrection of the righteous is long before the resurrection of the others. The rest of humankind will not be raised until after the reign of Christ on earth is over. Now let's take that a little further.

There are two resurrections here, one of the saints and one of the rest. Now Jesus himself was once asked about this and he was asked, did he believe in the resurrection of the righteous? He said he did and talked about it. Paul refers to this first resurrection again and again.

He gives it a very unusual label. He calls it the resurrection, the out-resurrection, out from the dead when he refers to it. He uses the word out twice.

In Greek it's a little two-letter word, ek, and he uses this twice every time he mentions it. The out-resurrection, out from among the dead. He describes Jesus' resurrection as a resurrection, out-resurrection, out from the dead.

What that phrase means is not a general resurrection but somebody being taken out of the world of the dead and resurrected, you follow me? Leaving other dead behind. Jesus certainly had an out-resurrection, out from the dead, because he left everybody else behind. He was unique, he was the firstborn of all creation, he was the firstfruits of new life.

Paul's ambition was to share in that first resurrection and not be left until the second. That is why he says in the letter to the Philippians that he wanted to share the sufferings of Christ, that he might share the glory that followed, that he might attain to the out-resurrection, out from among the dead. There's the phrase again.

He wants to be raised as an overcoming saint and even Paul himself did not presume that he would be among them. He says, leaving everything behind and pressing on to that which is before, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling. Paul didn't take it for granted that once saved, always saved.

He said, I'm pressing on. I want to be in that first resurrection. I want to attain that and so I'm wanting to be as like Christ as possible.

I want to share his sufferings. It's interesting that he saw suffering the way through to that first resurrection. Do you? Well that should be the ambition of every Christian, to be among those who rise and reign with Christ on this old earth for a thousand years.

I certainly want to. Well that's enough. Let's move on to the release of Satan.

Now if God hadn't revealed this in his Word I would never have guessed it, would you? It is so unexpected, so extraordinary. There are antichrists and the false prophets still in torment in hell, but Satan is allowed back again into this world. Why on earth would God want to do that? Because immediately he begins to damage the situation.

Immediately he gathers an army, a huge army, numbering like the sand of the sea and they march to Jerusalem, the city he loves, God's camp, the camp of God's people. They are determined to destroy this Christian government which of course will be centred on Jerusalem, the headquarters of the real United Nations. And they don't even get anywhere near.

Fire comes from heaven and destroys them on the way. But why on earth should God allow this to happen? Well there's nothing specifically said here, but it makes a lot of sense to me. I will confess I'm now inferring from scripture, so you can take it or leave it.

But it seems to me exactly what God would decide to do. He has given the world a thousand years of peace, prosperity, health, longer living. He has given them all they say they want except the freedom to go on in sin, vice, and crime, and they don't like it.

You see, what God is proving at the last is this, that sin is not a product of your environment, it's a product of your heart. There are humanists today who say that all the sin, vice, and crime is due to economic conditions, due to poverty, due to bad housing, due to a whole host of things. And that if we put the environment right and gave people a decent house to live in and a working wage and all the rest of it, so many politicians, humanists, who believe that basically human nature is good and that its external influence is on us that makes us rebellious.

It's a lie. It's a fraud. Don't believe it.

And so they promised to improve the environment and everything's going to be wonderful. And Russia got the revolution and believed that they would be in a crimeless, classless society from then on, and very quickly found it nothing of the sort follows. Because sin is in the heart, it's rebellion against external influence, it's wanting to do your own thing.

And even though that millennium will be a wonderful time, a wonderful environment in which to live, in which people ought to be happy and healthy, there will be an underlining resentment against being free to do the bad things that we really want to do. And so God has to show finally, to demonstrate to the world, it's not the world that makes us sin. It's not our environment that forces us to be unkind to each other.

It's not that at all. It's the heart that is still sinful even in an ideal environment. Satan comes with the same suggestion that he came to Adam and Eve with.

It's as if history ends as it began. Satan comes and says, you don't want to obey the Lord? You don't want to do what this government tells you? You don't want to live under the kingdom of God do you? Then come on, let's make a break for freedom. He is able to gather thousands and thousands of people who want to get rid of the Christian government.

Now God has demonstrated so clearly that the real issue is quite simple. The issue is, do people want to live in his kingdom or not? Do they want to live under his rule or not? Do they want to enjoy the benefits that come from his rule or would they still rather do without those benefits and do what they want to do? That's the choice and that answer to that choice will divide families and communities, towns and cities right down the middle. In other words, it is all a preparation for Judgment Day to justify the action of God in dividing the human race into two groups forever.

Does that make sense to you? Satan is allowed to be free to demonstrate that still underneath there is rebellion in the human heart against living God's way and a determination to be free to live their own way, which is what has ruined this world all the way through. Now that then is the passage which is called the Millennial Passage. I've given you just the rough outlines of it.

Now come two crucial questions about what is said. It's said simply and clearly what has happened during that thousand years. The questions are, where is all this happening? And the second question is, when is

it all happening? To the question where, the answer is surely here on the old earth.

Now I know that Revelation as a book goes up and down from heaven to earth and it's almost like a roller coaster ride at times, and so you've got to ask of each section, where is this? Are we up in heaven now or are we down on earth? But when I look at this passage, it is very clear from the whole context that this series of visions is on earth. The rider on the white horse is coming from heaven down to earth. And you notice at the beginning of chapter twenty, I saw an angel coming down out of heaven.

Well Satan is already on earth, he's been thrown out of heaven. The angel has to come down from heaven to deal with him and lock him up. You find that Satan is released after the thousand years, he goes out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth.

There's no mention of being up in heaven here until the fire comes down from heaven and deals with this last satanic army, which incidentally is called Gog and Magog, a reference back to Ezekiel if you care to look it up. In other words, Armageddon is not the last battle, in fact it's not even a battle. There's no fighting takes place, but it's often called the last battle.

But it's the second last, the last is Gog and Magog. And again there's no battle, fire from heaven deals with the situation, no fighting goes on. But it's all over so quickly.

In other words, every reference to location through these chapters, through these visions, is earth. It's what's happening on earth. Therefore, this reign of Christ and the saints for a thousand years is on earth.

Though it's amazing how many commentators try and persuade us that it's the saints reigning up in heaven because they don't like the implication of a reign on earth. But the other question is the critical one over which there is great division of opinion among Christians, deep division, so much so that in my country there is now a gentleman's agreement to a conspiracy of silence. And if ever I talk on the Millennium, I am heavily criticized for being divisive, for not being interested in Christian unity, and not being loving.

Oh dear, the accusations. That's true of my country, I don't think it's quite as true over here. You've heard of amillennial, premillennial, postmillennial.

I told you about my friend who was asked, which are you? And he said, that is a preposterous question. But do you know what people are saying now? If they're asked that question in England they say, I'm panmillennial. And if you ask them, what is a panmillennial? He said, he would say, it's someone who believes that everything will pan out all right in the end, whatever happens.

That also is an evasion of the Word of God. It's laughing off this passage and I'm not prepared to dismiss the Word of God with a joke. That's what's being said.

You know that Christians have argued about this millennial question for centuries, divided deeply over it. And as I say, in my country there is a conspiracy of silence that a preacher who wants to be popular must not talk about it at all, whatever his view. Well I can't be quiet when I feel that the Word of God is saying something clearly.

And others say, well this is a purely academic question. Why don't we be panmillennial and just wait till it all happens and then see who is right? The answer is because this belief, whichever way you hold it, is going to profoundly affect your evangelism and your social action in the world. The different views lead to

totally different Christian attitudes to this world now.

That's why it is important to decide which view you hold, which is the right one. Is Jesus coming back for two minutes to write this world off and wind it all up and finish it off? Or is he coming back to clean it up? That's a big issue. Is his return the absolute end of this world or is his return the beginning of the best part of history this world has seen? That's a huge difference and it will affect your thinking about the present.

Since the future is revealed to influence the present and not to satisfy curiosity about the future, then clearly it's a very important issue. So for five centuries the Christian church held only one view. Would to God that we could get back to that and cease arguing about things and preach them with confidence and joy.

The church held one view and it was the view that this thousand-year reign followed the Lord's return. After all, that's where it comes in the visions. In these seven visions there are certain major events, four in particular.

There's the return of Christ, the thousand-year reign, the day of judgment, and the new heaven and the new earth. Every Christian on earth believes in one, three, and four. There's no argument about those.

All the argument is about number two. Now in my Bible, two follows one, three follows two, and four follows three. I'm afraid I'm rather naive, but I assume that one is followed by two and two is followed by three and three is followed by four.

What has done the damage is a figure twenty in your Bibles, chapter twenty, which seems to split off the second coming into a chapter of its own. And it is that figure twenty that was pushed into the scripture, not by John, not by Jesus, but by a French bishop. And that has so misled people.

It has enabled them to say, chapter twenty doesn't follow chapter nineteen. It may do in your Bible, but what it describes doesn't follow what nineteen describes. And that is the position of those who take other views.

But in the early church, for five hundred years there was no debate on this, no argument, no dissension. You didn't have to read different books to find out what different Christians believed. They were all united in one belief and we call it the pre-millennial belief.

And that simply means Jesus comes before the thousand years. He comes pre-millennium and that is the pre-millennial belief. And it was universally held.

The believers, Papias, one of the early bishops of Smyrna, in one of the letters in Revelation to Smyrna, one of the early bishops of Smyrna, Papias, said, we believe and preach the return of Christ and his corporeal reign on earth. Corporeal is an ancient word for bodily. He is saying, we believe and preach the return of Christ and his bodily reign on the earth.

So what went wrong? What started all the arguments? Why didn't the church just go on believing that? It seems the simplest understanding of these visions that the return of Christ is followed by a thousand-year millennium of his rule and reign, that that is followed by the day of judgment, that that is followed by the new heaven and the new earth. And nobody argues with one, three, and four. But a lot of Christians want to put two in front of one.

Why should they want to do that? And I'm afraid I have to tell you that the man who did all the damage was a bishop in a town of Hippo in North Africa called Augustine. Yes, the great Saint Augustine. I'm sure you've heard the story of his conversion called the Confessions of Saint Augustine is a Christian classic, and he had a very real conversion, no question about that.

But that man has done more to influence the church of the Western world, both Catholic and Protestant, than any other, and I'm afraid I believe has done more to damage the Western church. Because halfway through his ministry as bishop he changed his understanding of Christianity. He'd been brought up before a Christian as a rather immoral young man, had lots of girls, had an illegitimate son to look after, and had played the fool in many ways.

But he was soundly converted but reacted very strongly against physical things, probably partly because of his immorality in early years, but primarily because of the Greek philosophy he'd been taught when he'd studied at certain classical schools, notably the Neoplatonic studying the works of Plato, but also the Manichaeans he'd also studied under. And this gave him a fear of physical things, a fear of his flesh. Now when the New Testament talks about flesh, it doesn't mean your body, it means your lower nature, your fallen nature.

The body was made by God, it is basically good. It is sin that has spoiled it, and we mustn't have this horror of physical things. I'm afraid Augustine's reaction to his life before and his reframing the Hebrew Christian faith in Greek terms has given Christians to this day a fear of physical things as if we shouldn't enjoy anything physical.

That's not being very spiritual. We are almost afraid of sex even to talk about it, and yet God created that exquisite pleasure. He only said, you must keep it within a commitment between two people for life, but he wants people to enjoy sex within that relationship.

That was his idea, his pleasure. But you see, we've reacted against it for a thousand years. Priests had to be single after Augustine.

Celibacy was considered a holier life than one who enjoyed a physical pleasure like sex. It's affected the whole Western world, this division between physical and spiritual, sacred and secular. Now then, in his early ministry the good Bishop Augustine preached what I have just preached to you, that Jesus coming back to reign, he's coming back in his body for a bodily reign on the earth as the early church taught.

But then he reacted against that and he thought, a physical Jesus, a Jesus in a body coming back to a physical earth? He couldn't cope with that and he reacted strongly against it and began to preach that it could never be that way. Do you know from that moment the earth dropped out of the future hope of Christianity. From then on, Christians' only hope of the future was going away from the earth, getting away from this physical world and getting to heaven and enjoying God's presence in heaven forevermore.

Even the new earth, which is mentioned at the end of Revelation, which we'll talk about tonight, dropped out of normal Christian thinking. And when I preach on the new earth I'm always accused of being a Jehovah's Witness for some reason. But you know they get some things right.

They get a lot wrong, but they get some things right and the new earth is one of them. But they're the only Christians preaching the new earth now, but it's in my Bible, it's in the book of Revelation. It was this separation of heaven and earth, pushing the kingdom of heaven back up there into a kind of spiritual

floating around the clouds with a long white nightie and a harp.

You know the kind of picture of heaven? A sort of vague spirituality in which you sing every chorus seventeen million times? All this kind of picture is what is communicated. Worship leaders often tell us that worship is the activity of heaven and this is what we're doing all the time when we get there. We need to think again and go back to our Bible.

The Bible is a very down-to-earth book. Jesus coming down to earth to reign and rule, and we are coming back with him to rule with him and make this world what it ought to be and what God meant it to be when it's under the right sort of government. So Augustine reacted and had such profound influence.

He was a powerful man, very influential in the Western Church. In fact, I have been in Ephesus, as I told you, and I visited a church, the ruins of a large, huge church in Ephesus. I was rather sad to visit it.

I didn't quite know how to react, but it was the church in which a council of the worldwide Western Church was called in the year 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus. The influence of Augustine made them pass a resolution that anyone who believed in the bodily return of Christ to reign bodily on earth for a thousand years was a heretic in the church's sight. One of the saddest days in church history, I believe.

Most of the mainline churches have suffered from the decision of that council ever since. The Protestant Reformers never talked about a millennium, a reign of Christ on earth. Most Christians since have never mentioned it.

Sad. But there's been a very strange twist in the historical development of the idea. Around the year 1830 - no, I'll go a bit further back.

There was a Roman Catholic priest many centuries ago who loved his Bible and he studied his Bible and studied it very carefully and he came to the conclusion that his church was wrong about the future. He wrote a book in Spanish about the millennium. I have an English translation of that book of home.

It's thrilling to read it. Here's a man who all alone by the power of the Spirit and with the scripture and an open mind found that Jesus was coming back to reign on earth. Well of course his church didn't know what to make of him.

But the book was published and it's still available. And you know, my attention was drawn to this book by a dear friend of mine who is a Roman Catholic priest. Some of you will have, I think, heard of him.

Peter Hocken. You know him, Mike. Peter Hocken gave me that book and so one Catholic priest gave me another Catholic peace book.

That was the first man to do it, but when he published it hardly anybody accepted it or read it and so the idea didn't take any hold. And then around 1830 we're back to the dispensationalists and here's something good about them. They rediscovered the millennium and they put it into their system, that dispensational system, but they did recover it.

And now there were people around the world saying, Christ is coming back to reign again. They were pre-millennial. Alas, it was all part of this new dispensational system and the millennium became a very separate and a very Jewish era because the Jews are God's earthly people and we are God's heavenly people.

But at least they recovered it. From there it went through the Schofield Bible into the Pentecostal movement and Pentecostals preached the millennium and Christ coming back to reign. All this was good.

The problem is that now people can't believe the millennium can be believed in without becoming part of the dispensational scheme and the secret rapture and all the other things attached to it. That's the problem I have. Every time I preach on the millennium people say, you're a dispensationalist.

I say, no I'm not. I believe in one return of Christ at the end of the big trouble. They say, well why do you believe the millennium? I say, for the same reason that I believe that, it's in the Bible.

And what I believe we need to do today is to recover belief in the millennium and drop the other things that it's now so closely associated with. So what did Augustine put in its place? How did he handle the scripture that I read to you? And we need to understand this so that we can spot it. Well he changed pre-millennialism into post-millennialism.

He said, Revelation 20 in history comes before Revelation 19. In other words, the thousand years refers to a period of time before Christ comes and therefore he will come post-millennium. Got the difference now? This was a huge shift.

After 500 years of believing that Christ will return pre-the thousand-year reign, now the church officially said, no he will come post, after a thousand years reign. Now bear in mind that they're discussing this in the fifth century. They hadn't even had a thousand, and so they believed that they were in the thousand years of the reign of Christ.

In other words, the millennium is the period between the first advent of Jesus and the second. You with me so far? And that is why all over Europe there was terrific excitement in the year 1000 because they said, Jesus is coming post-millennial, we've had it, we've had the millennium, he's coming this year. And you wouldn't believe what was happening all over Europe in the year 1000.

There was an urgent political attempt to start the European community before the year 1000 because they wanted to have one Europe to present to the returning Jesus. And so the Emperor Otto went from country to country saying, let's have a common market, let's have a European community, so what's new? And he failed, but his grandson Otto the Second had another go and it failed because Poland wouldn't join in and Poland was the most powerful nation in Europe in the year 1000. But you'd be amazed how many kings and queens were converted and how many countries became Christian.

Countries like Iceland became officially Christian just before the year 1000 so that they were just in time to greet the returning Lord. And other Christians became, throughout Europe, kings and queens were converted by the sorties coming back in the year 1000. Of course he didn't.

They even stopped building churches and cathedrals about twenty years before 1000 AD because they said, what's the point of building buildings? We're going to be with him in heaven. And so they didn't build any. It was only about thirty years later that they resumed rebuilding churches and cathedrals.

It's a very interesting bit of history. But when Augustine said, the millennium is now, we're in it, he's coming post-millennium, afterwards, you can guess that they expected it in the year 1000. So what do post-millennialists think now? Well they say, we must take the figure 1000 symbolically.

It's at least 2000 and maybe 3000. Well, that's one way to approach it. So what did those who accepted this do with Revelation 20? Well, they went through it and they changed every bit of it.

They said, it isn't going to be an angel that binds Satan, Jesus has already bound him. Either at his temptations or at the crucifixion, he's already bound. And they believed he was.

Now this I find difficult. They ignored four out of the five verbs, sealed, locked, thrown. They ignored all that and just concentrated on bound.

And you will hear preachers say, Satan is now bound. Well my Bible tells me he's a prowling lion, looking prowling around to devour Christians. So how come he's bound? And do you know what the answer is? He's on a long chain.

I'm quite serious. There are commentaries you will buy that tell you that the binding of Satan by Jesus 2000 years ago put him on a very long chain so he can prowl around but he's limited. Well what about the pit and what about the seal and the locks? Oh, we forget that.

The martyrs are reigning now in heaven. They're not on earth at all. Those who've been beheaded through the ages are reigning in heaven, not down here, up there.

So the reign is now up there. What about the first and the second resurrection? Well the first resurrection, they say, is your conversion, the resurrection of your soul. And the second resurrection is the resurrection of your body, to join your resurrected soul.

What do you make of all this? And the rest in the second resurrection, oh well that's the general resurrection when we all get resurrected. Well now all this, I'm sorry, but it's twisting scripture isn't it? It's saying things that scripture doesn't say to try and fit in and make the millennium before Christ. Now there was one other development in this that I have to mention because I haven't mentioned amillennialism yet, have I? So how did that come about? Well when Augustine transferred the thousand years from after Christ's reign returned to before, people said, well what kind of a reign is it before? Is it a spiritual reign or is it a political reign? There was great discussion and after Augustine was out of the picture there was a division among his followers, which was now the whole church, as to whether he meant that the Christians were in a spiritual reign now or whether they were to be in a political reign on earth.

In other words, the belief that the church would take over the world and run the government of the world before Christ gets back for a thousand years, that's the political version. The spiritual version says that there's a Christian reign now because Christ is reigning in heaven and the martyrs are reigning with him and to some extent we are reigning on earth in the name of Christ. So there was a division between the spiritual millennium and the political.

Those who believed in the spiritual millennium believed that it would last through the whole of church history from the first advent of Christ to the second. Those who believed it would be political, of course, couldn't believe the millennium would start till the church was in charge of the world and had taken over the government of the nations. So it was the last thousand years of church history for the political post-millennialists, whereas it was the whole of the church history for the spiritual post-millennialists.

So frankly, here were two groups with very different views using the same label of post-millennialist. So what happened was the political people who believed that the church would take over the government of the nations for a thousand years before Jesus returned, they kept the term post-millennialist and the other

side who believed in a spiritual reign in heaven throughout all the years of church history took the title amillennialist. It's not a very accurate title.

It's highly misleading because they still believe in the post-millennial return of Christ, but they had to distinguish themselves from the political boys. Actually, amillennial means you don't believe in a millennium at all, like atheist means you don't believe in a God at all, so it's not accurate at all. When I meet someone who tells me they're an amillennial, I say, no you're not, you're a spiritual post-millennial.

Then I have to explain to them, but as soon as I explain it they realize that's what they are. So really the big division is, does the thousand years come after Jesus returns or before? If it comes before, does it come in a spiritual way or a political way? And that's it. Well now, that's the argument and recently the political post-millennialists who keep that title have really become very strong, particularly in America.

Across the Atlantic Pond comes waves of things called Reconstructionism and Dominion Theology and a whole lot of other things and you export them to us. Boy, the confusion that comes is, there it is, I'm sorry there's confusion. I am what's called a classical premillennialist and that means simply that I believe that the early church was right.

They believed that Christians would go through the big trouble, that Christ would return and reign on earth for a thousand years and they all believed it for a thousand years, for five hundred years until the time of Augustine when he changed his mind. And we call this old premillennialism classical premillennialism as against the 1830 dispensational premillennialism which is the sort that is now being spread everywhere in the world by American evangelists. The vast majority of the evangelists and missionaries you send overseas are teaching dispensational premillennialism.

I'm glad they're teaching premillennialism. I wish they could drop the dispensational secret rapture business that's now so closely associated with it. Well, has that left you all terribly confused? You see, the problem is if you reject dispensationalism you are in danger of throwing the baby away with the bath water, the baby being the millennium.

Do you have that saying over here, throwing away the baby with the bath water? I bet you don't know what it means. It goes back to the days long ago when there were no bathrooms in a house. You were lucky if you had a tin bath that you put in front of the fire and filled with kettles.

I can remember bathing in one of those on the farm where I used to live. Every member of the family used the same bath water. There were large families in those days, very large families, and there was an order of bath.

The most senior member of the extended family got it first. Gradually it came down through the ages, the baby got it last. But by that time you couldn't see through the water.

It was so soapy and so dirty that if the baby slipped under the water nobody noticed. And when they carried the bath out and tipped it up in the trough, they were tipping the baby out with the bath water. That's how it originated.

That's given you something to talk about, and the trouble is that having said that, that's the one thing you'll remember from this afternoon's talk. All right, but how do I apply it to this? Don't throw away the millennium with the dispensational system. See, hold on to that.

It's clearly taught in scripture and I will go on preaching it whatever people say. I long to see Jesus reigning over this world and to see what a Christian government can do when it's in charge. But of course there will be censorship on a wide scale, television will be under Jesus' control, the press will be under Jesus' control, the internet at last will be under control.

It's under no one's control now and people will hate it. They want to see those things, they want to do those things which under a Christian government will be forbidden. There'll be no abortion clinics, there'll be lots of things changed, and I'm afraid Satan will still be able to persuade people you'd be better off without this government.

Well that proves, as I've said, that the final decision is do we live under the kingdom of God or not? Let me finish quickly by giving you ten reasons why I'm a classic premillennialist. How about that? Here are ten reasons why I believe what the early church believed and will preach it to my dying day, God willing. Why am I a classical premillennialist, not a dispensational one, the early church sort? First, because it's the best interpretation of Revelation 20.

You don't have to twist anything to fit. It's a straightforward, simple, literal understanding of the Word of God. Second, it gives the best reason for the second coming.

I find it is only those who have a premillennial position who get excited about the return of Christ. Those who hold other positions don't get excited about it because they're not sure why he's coming back. You see? If he's coming back to reign and put this world right, I can get excited about that, can't you? Thirdly, those who believe in that put the most emphasis on the second coming, and my New Testament puts heavy emphasis on the second coming, three hundred times.

It's only premillennialists who do that. Fourth, this phased transition from this old earth to the new earth fits God's way of salvation. It's a kind of halfway house to establish his reign on the old earth before creating the new earth.

It's exactly how he's redeeming me. He's first of all redeemed me spiritually but left me in the old body for a time, and then he's giving me a new body. He's established his kingdom in my spirit now but in my body later, and that makes sense.

He's going to save the world in the same way. He established his kingdom on the old earth first for a time and then gives his kingdom a new body, the new earth, and it's all complete. Next, it means that the earth is our future destiny.

Augustine in his later years has misled the whole church into looking forward to heaven as our eternal home, which it is not. It is a waiting room we go to until we return to earth, and our final destiny is on the new earth as we'll see tonight when we get to Revelation 22. It earths our future.

Six, it's neither optimistic nor pessimistic. The pessimists say the world will never be any better. I'm just waiting till Jesus comes by with the school bus to take me up there.

They are pessimists about the world. On the other hand, there are many Christians who are too optimistic about the world. You know, we're going to march for Jesus, we're going to clean up America.

In Britain, we're going to drive Satan through the Channel Tunnel to France. He can do his work there, but we're going to march for Jesus and clean up the world. Listen, we should be disappointed if we think we're

going to take the world over in the name of Jesus.

We're not going to. The kingdom of Satan is going to grow as well. So there are Christian optimists and Christian pessimists.

I'm a realist, I'm a realist. The wheat and the tares will grow together until... and I believe he's going to come and clean it up. We can't do it, but he can.

So I'm a realist. Then this approach has fewer problems than all the others. It still leaves a number of questions unanswered, but fewer than all the other schemes and that counts with me.

Eight, what I've been teaching here is exactly what the Jews believe. They believe Messiah is coming and is going to reign on earth for a thousand years. Do you know that Jews were saying this before Revelation was written? Even the thousand years rabbis were teaching.

It's what they believe. John of course was a Jew, he must have heard this, but the Spirit inspired him to confirm it. You talk to Jews, they believe that Messiah will come back and reign on earth for a thousand years.

That counts with me. Nine, that the early church unanimously believed this. That counts with me too.

And finally, it gives my daily work significance because there'll be work to be done in the Millennium. And my Monday to Friday work is preparing me for the Millennium, much more than what I do on Sunday. The way I do my daily work is showing to Jesus if I'm reliable, responsible, a man who can be trusted when he comes back to be given a job to serve and to reign.

So my daily work becomes far more significant and the thought that all I do on Sunday is preparing for the future drops out. No, we are working now and how we do our daily work, whatever that is, will count in the Millennium. We are preparing our reference, our CV, whatever.

We're preparing now for it. Well those ten reasons added together I think make a pretty powerful motivation to believe a classical premillennialist position. Simply, Jesus is coming back to reign on the old earth for a thousand years, that's all.

I'm stopping there because I want to take up the rest of the story tonight. God willing, we'll get to the last verse of Revelation 22 about half past nine tonight. How about that? See you there.

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