

Revelation 20: 7-15

We've all seen courtroom dramas, whether it is an American show like Law and Order, My Cousin Vinny, or Perry Mason, or a John Grisham novel. It may be a British show where the lawyers wear the funny wigs and robes.

I like courtroom dramas. Part of the drama is not knowing the final verdict as in the movie THE VERDICT. The US Supreme Court offers its own form of drama as justices hear arguments early on and then we must wait for months for the decisions. In some cases we have to wait for 50 years for a sound legal decision to be made.

Here in Revelation 20 we get a courtroom but little drama because it is a fast verdict and there are no appeals, no hung juries. The drama comes in regarding the sentence, not the verdict and the surprise pardon for a certain group.

Satan Freed, Doomed

7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Judgment at the Throne of God

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, (rf 6:12ff) and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of *them* according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

One thing that we must understand clearly as we read revelation and that is that this is not a video game. This is not some sort of simulation. This is not something that should be taken lightly. This this is deadly serious.

This ultimately is what the church is all about. What worship is all about. When it comes down to it the entire Christian life is shaped by the future presented in Revelation.

Revelation 20:7-15 is serious stuff.

Before we get into this text, I'd like to follow up from last week...

Dr. Rayburn had some good insights regarding the different millennial views – Pre, Post, or Amill:
(He indicates that he is PreMil)

So, what does any of this mean for us? The problem with such a sermon on this topic is that I am not sure the application to our own lives would be very different if we took Rev. 20:1-10 as the Amils or Postmils, do.

Revelation was written to a tried and afflicted church. The persecution and opposition of the world was beginning to bite deep. If there can be no deliverance from the present trial then what is there to comfort, console, encourage and sustain us but the knowledge and the conviction of ultimate

victory? Beyond and above the chaos of this world there stands a throne and, on that throne, sits the Lord Christ, revealed in his glory as the King of Kings in the first chapter of Revelation. The Devil will do what he may while he is permitted. If he is not bound today, it is because the Lord would have you fight him! This is a philosophy of history that you and I need to constantly take to heart and impress upon our minds and the minds of our children. It is designed to make us a peaceful, calm, confident, and cheerful people, no matter the difficulties we face.

That is a nutshell of the whole book of Revelation. This passage today is truly one of hope because it shows how God will finally deal with sin, and it sets up the picture of the New Heaven where there will be no more tears. Isn't that what we long for?

In chapter 20, we come to the end of our history and the 'beginning' of eternity. We move from temporary to permanent. From brokenness to wholeness for believers. From suffering to more suffering for those who don't follow Christ.

I think we can all admit that there is a good deal of symbolism and mystery in Revelation. The real issue is one of HOPE and seeing Christ as the returning victorious king. This pastoral letter is NOT ABOUT laying out a precise timeline of events at the end of the world.

Today's text shows us events around the time of the return of Christ.

Satan is released for a short time, and he intends to deceive the nations and gather them against the people of God. His doom is sure, and the Great white throne judgement comes next.

Revelation and this text show us the clear nature of spiritual reality – there are ONLY two options. EITHER Follow Christ OR Not.

This seems "intolerant" to our culture, but those who say that are simply being intolerant of our view.

A common idea today sounds like this, "You must avoid the either/or paradigm, there is no one truth." The popular view today is to hold to a 'both/and' view, where differing views can both be accepted even if contradictory. But that itself is an 'either / or' paradigm.

What the 'both/and' people are really saying, without knowing it, is that "You must use EITHER a both/and argument OR nothing at all." "It is both/and OR YOU ARE WRONG."

Do you see how the the EITHER / OR just keeps emerging even when you are opposed to it?

<http://www.bobmo.com/2006/11/ravi-debates-buddhist.html>

Revelation brings this home – Either you embrace Christ for salvation OR you follow something else to condemnation.

the Release and Defeat of Satan v. 7-10

Released and then defeated

Satan was bound or imprisoned by Jesus during His earthly ministry and remains bound during this symbolic period of 1000 years between the first coming and second coming of Christ.

I've tried to lay out how Revelation is a cycle of repeating time periods; it is not a letter to be read with a linear chronology in mind. The "recapitulations" give us different perspectives on the same time frames.

We saw in the first part v. 1-6 that Satan is bound and cast into the abyss. He is bound but not annihilated. He is active in seeking to kill, steal, and destroy, but he can't thwart the advance of the Gospel to the Nations.

Now in v. 7-8 he is released and stirs up the nations against the church. That has been his M.O. from the beginning – see chap 12.

Upon his release he is working to create a global movement of a God hating empire that will permeate every facet of life – Gov't, academics, entertainment, culture, medicine, politics, technology, information,

and religion. This final push will have Christ, His kingdom, and His people as the ultimate targets. The attacks may present themselves in a “non-religious” domain, but the believing church is always the target.

The Dragon, Satan, is never in control but is always on a leash. God can bind him and release him as we see in v. 7-8. Paul alludes to this same idea in 2 Thess as he speaks of the man of lawlessness who will appear in alignment with Satan prior to the return of Christ and final judgement.

Satan is bound so that he can't deceive the nations, so the advance of the Gospel is NOT thwarted. But now in v 7-8 he is released and he goes back to deceiving the nations to gather them for battle against the “camp of the saints”. This phrase echoes the OT Exodus when the Hebrews came out of Egypt and camped around the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

This is a description of “the war” that we've already seen described earlier in 16:13-14; Rev 19 Again we now see a different focus in ch 20 as the end of the Dragon is explained.

This may not be a battle in the way we think of it. There is mystery and symbolic spiritual language. There will be a battle, but we don't know the particulars. There will be some kind of gathering against the saints, but it's not clear.

The battle is described from ch 6 and the six seals all the way up to the return of Christ.

We can anticipate an intensity as the nations gather.

The kings of the earth are represented by Gog and Magog, two names presented in Ezek 38-39. Their destruction is clear in Ezek and it is clear in Revelation.

They represent the four corners of the earth – the unbelieving nations or peoples opposed to Christ. In The Jewish Talmud those are codenames for nations in rebellion against God. They are symbolic names used to represent all the God-hating nations of the world.

It will appear at first that the church is defeated as the nations gather like the sand of the sea to surround the camp of saints.

While I'd like to think that Christians would somehow miss being persecuted, the language here seems quite clear. As I read it, John sees a coming period of intense global opposition to the church. It is of such intensity that Jesus asks a question in Luke 18:8, “When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?”

While some details are not known, we do know this:

- Satan is behind this attack
- It is worldwide – the four corners of the earth come against the church, the camp of saints as there is an intensity of attack, i.e. like the birth pains of labor and delivery.
- This period is seen as a ‘short time.’
- The outcome is sure – fire from heaven consumes the enemies of Christ.
- All who oppose Christ will be judged and cast into the lake of fire.

The camp imagery reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven and we are strangers and aliens, i.e. this is not our home.

EX: camping creates a longing for home.

While we don't live in makeshift shelters, this reminds us not to be so intent on building our heaven on earth. We are to look for the city whose builder and maker is God.

Rev 3:12ff gives a vision of overcomers are to be pillars in the temple of God in the New Jerusalem. That is our ultimate calling.

There are only two cities in Revelation – the city of God and the city of man.

The final result is sudden and final – fire from heaven. Is it real or symbolic? Not really important. The main point is the victory of Christ and the judgment of Satan and the beast.

v. 10 there is real torment and there is a real consequence to sin. We tend to forget or downplay the seriousness of sin as cosmic rebellion against God.

The GREAT THRONE

“then I saw” = symbolic reality

There are seven throne scenes in Revelation. This one is unique because here the scene is quiet and all we see is the throne with One sitting on it.

A white throne symbolizes purity. The one on the throne, HIM, is righteous, pure, and true.

Who “Him” isn’t specified - Father or Son??

. The APOSTLE’S CREED, referring to Christ says, “From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

In Revelation we see several throne scenes and typically the One on the throne is God the Father.

I don’t think it is a stretch to say that we have a singular throne – one throne of God and of the Lamb, who is the Son.

Jn 5 tells us that “the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” It would seem that God the Father judges through God the Son, and Jesus is sitting on the throne.

v. 11 ref ch 6 parallel structure and vision of mankind trying to flee from God.

6:15 they all hid from God and called out to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.” This fits with 20:11

The gaze of the holy God is so piercing that those in view want to hide. But there is no place to hide. It is a scene of total exposure before Him. There are no do-overs.

V 12 – General Nature of the resurrection and judgment as ALL stand before the throne.

This speaks of ALL standing before God’s throne. Even the sea and the grave give up their dead, which Jesus foretold: “...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” (John 5:28–29).

There is no escape and NO avoiding judgment. The verdict that we deserved from our first breath is finally delivered. Everyday has been a continuance or delay in our trial, but one day we must appear before the bar of God’s justice.

Judgement is a decision based on pre-determined standards. It is not wrath per se; that comes later. The standard is the character of God revealed in His ‘law’ i.e. good instruction

All are raised to stand before the throne of judgement. God doesn’t even need to hold us to the standard of His Holy Law...

We can’t even follow our own low standard of morality.

EX: have you ever done something that you knew to be wrong? If so, then GUILTY.

A TALE OF TWO BOOKS

WE ARE Judged for what we’ve done.

The verdict for all of us based on our deeds is “guilty.”

But the opening of the book of life changes everything.

One book is unnamed but would seem to be a book of deeds and the other was the Book of Life. 17:8, Daniel 12:1

It seems that all are mentioned in the book of deeds, and by our deeds we are all guilty. But there is a second book – the book of life, which changes everything for those whose names are written in it.

Based on the deeds of Christ imputed to us through faith, we have a right record and a right standing with God.

Dennis Johnson:

Written in this second book are not deeds but names (20:15; cf. 3:5). When this book appeared earlier in Revelation we were told that these names were inscribed "from the foundation of the world" (17:8), and that the book belongs to the Lamb that was slain (13:8)."

It is the registry of those from every nation whom he "purchased for God" with his blood (5:9), and it is the one book in all the universe that spells the difference between eternal life and unending death. While people are justly judged according to their deeds, only those inscribed in the Lamb's book of life will escape the lake of fire (21:15). They have been judged already according to Jesus' deeds-his obedience as the faithful witness and his sacrifice as the Lamb-and consequently their vindication is sure.

This is the anchor of our souls – Hebrews.

Jesus has gone before us so His blood is sprinkled so that our sins might be covered.

We are vindicated because of what Christ accomplished.

v. 14 Those whose names are NOT found in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. This is a word of Hope and a warning to those who don't know Christ.

It is a call to believe in the Lamb who was slain.

Am I in the book? Are you in that book?

Faith in Christ is evidence that God made you His own before the foundation of the world and your sins are forgiven and taken away. Good deeds may simply be an evidence of religion or of some form of self-righteous morality. When they are devoid of true faith in Christ then they are "damnable good works."

Faith in Christ DOES matter. He is the Lord of Life. He warns those who would trust in their own efforts in Matthew 7: 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them "I never knew you, Depart from me"

This is sobering, not just for us but for all those around us who don't know Christ. Do we care about them? Are there people that you are praying for who don't know Jesus?

As we look at revelation and consider that this age might be near the return of Christ, we have varying responses. On the one hand we get scared and concerned. On the other hand, shouldn't it excite us and give us a sense of joy. Isn't this what we are longing and waiting for - the return of Christ in glory even if it entails a period of difficulty and trial for the camp of the saints?

As believers our victory and our future are assured in Christ.

That should make our faces light up.

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