

LESSON 11

ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF PEACE

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

Over 100 years ago, Victor Hugo, the French novelist and author of *Les Miserables*, wrote these words:

In the twentieth century war will be dead. The scaffold will be dead. Hatred will be dead. Frontier boundaries will be dead. Dogmas will be dead. But man will live. He will possess something higher than all these: a great country, the whole earth, a great hope, the whole heaven.

Today is Earth Day. We are almost at the end of the twentieth century. Meeting in the midst of our drugged and polluted planet, we have to say: "How mistaken Hugo was!" Or was he? Those words reflect the hope that has been burning in men's hearts for centuries -- the dream that there would come some day, somehow, a golden age upon the earth, a time when peace would spread throughout the whole world, a utopia, where men would live in unbroken peace and abounding prosperity. This has been the promise of every politician since governments began, but they have never been able to bring it to pass.

It is a hope that is yet unrealized. But still, as we have studied the book of Revelation, perhaps we have come to the realization that this wonderful dream could be only a few years away -- or even less than that! In our last study we saw the prophesied climax of history: The Second Coming of Jesus in visible power and glory to reclaim the earth from the devil and his angels, to end the domain of evil among men, and to fulfill the promise of an earthly kingdom made to Abraham and again to David many centuries ago.

It is very important to understand that there should be no chapter break between Chapters 19 and 20. In the original Greek this account moves without a break to what follows the return of the Lord. I invite you to look with me at this, in Verses 1-3 of Chapter 20:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss 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.
{Rev 20-1:3 NIV}

Twice in that passage appears the phrase "a thousand years." It actually occurs six times throughout the whole chapter. The word "millennium" comes from the Latin *mille annum*, which means "a thousand years." This is the passage that teaches clearly and distinctly about a millennium of peace yet to come upon the earth.

This passage is one of the great battlefields of Scripture. Two differing views of end events clash headlong in this chapter, *premillennialism* and *amillennialism*. Those are jaw-breaker terms, so to help you (*and me*) I will refer to those who hold these views as "pre mills" and "amills." Premills, (*among whom I include myself*), take this passage literally and believe that there is coming a thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth. That will be a fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies concerning an earthly reign of Christ.

The amills ("*a*" means *no, or none*), the non-

millennialists, believe that this event is now being fulfilled. They say there will be no thousand-year reign of Christ to come, but that this is a picture of the present age of the church and is being fulfilled in a metaphorical or figurative way. They say the binding of Satan which is mentioned here took place at the cross when Jesus overcame Satan, and he has been bound ever since throughout the history of the church.

Concerning that view, someone has well remarked that if Satan is bound today it must be with a very long chain!

Our Lord did, of course, liken Satan to a “strong man who holds his goods in peace.” The “goods” there represent the whole human race. Both amills and premills believe that Satan is in control of this world today. Jesus called him “the god of this world,” {2 Cor 4:4 KJV}. But our Lord said that he, Jesus, was a “stronger one” who would “bind the strong man and divide his goods.” You will find that in Luke the 11th chapter, Verses 21-22.

So there was a binding of Satan that took place at the cross. The Apostle Paul, in Colossians 2:15, says that Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” There was a time when Jesus indeed did bind Satan. And the amills say that this chapter is talking about that event. It is a flashback to the binding of Satan at the cross.

But Scripture indicates that that binding or restraint of Satan at the cross was only valid to faith. It was true only for those who believe in Jesus. James, in his letter, says to Christians, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” {Jas 4:7}, i.e., his power will not be able to control you. He is restrained, bound, restricted, with regard to you, if you believe. But that restraint does not help those who do not believe in Jesus. The Apostle Paul states, “The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ,” {2 Cor 4:4 NIV}. There is a blinding power which Satan exercises going on right now. The Apostle Peter, speaking to Christians, says, “Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith,” {1 Pet 5:8-9 NIV}. Even Christians need to believe

in order to oppose the devil. Satan is bound only to faith, but in that sense there is a binding of the devil occurring today.

But now notice the difference with this binding here. This is something quite distinct:

First, it was not done at the cross, but it follows the Second Coming of our Lord. It is clearly related to that event which closes Chapter 19 (*remember, there is no chapter break here at all in the original*); this binding of Satan occurs after Jesus appears in visible glory.

And, second, the binding was not done by Jesus! Notice, it was done by an angel whom Jesus sends to bind Satan with a great chain. It must have been a very great angel indeed, possibly, Michael the archangel.

Third, the angel not only binds Satan with the chain (*that is a metaphor, of course, of restraining him*), but he throws him into the Abyss and locks and seals the door!

There are four separate symbols here. It is not merely a binding that is in view.

First, the chain speaks of severe restraint. It is not a literal chain but what it symbolizes is literal. Satan is a spiritual being and you cannot bind a spiritual being with a literal chain. The chain is a symbol of extreme restraint, a limiting of his power and ability to function.

Second, he is not only bound but he is thrown into the Abyss, which pictures a total removal from the earth. Remember that, in Chapter 9, we saw an angel come with a key to the Abyss, open it, and out of it came a horde of demonic beings who poured onto the earth. The Abyss is there seen as separate from earth. For Satan to be thrown into it speaks of a total removal from the earth.

Third, the angel shuts the door and locks it, which means it is rendered impossible to be opened from within. If you are locked in a room you cannot get out yourself. That is the meaning of the Abyss being locked or shut.

Fourth, the angel seals it over so that it is impossible to open from without. No power can break through to release Satan during this time. He is totally removed from earth and permitted no access to it for one thousand years!

Someone may well ask, "What about the demons?"

Scripture reveals that not only is Satan at war with humanity but he has a whole host of beings whom Paul calls "wicked spirits in heavenly places," {cf, Eph 6:12 KJV}. What about them? What happens to them when Satan is removed? It does not tell us anything about that here, but we cannot require every passage of Scripture to teach everything there is to say about a subject whenever it is mentioned. But the question can be answered! Isaiah speaks of it in his 24th chapter, often called, "The little Apocalypse." This is what he says:

In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. {Isa 24:21 NIV}

We have already seen the punishment of the kings because that is what the Lord did when he came in Chapter 19. He assaulted the kings of the earth. But Isaiah goes on:

They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished [the margin says "released"] after many days.

The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. {Isa 24:22-23 NIV}

That seems clearly to be a parallel passage. It indicates that Satan and his angels are removed from activity on the earth. It is a total removal, without access to earth, with no possibility of release for a thousand years. Thus Isaiah confirms what John in Revelation also saw.

Now our amillennial friends say that the thousand years is not to be taken literally. It is only a figure, they say, a metaphor for an indefinite period, or even perhaps for an idea, such as "totally" or "completely." But the answer to that is contained in the passage in the last phrase of Verse 3, "After that, he must be set free for a short time." The word "time" is *chronos*, from which we get "chronology." It clearly is a reference to a specific period of time, as is the "thousand years" as well. Six times throughout the chapter the "thousand years" appears. As someone has well said, "If God wanted to say it was going to last a thousand years, how could he put it more plainly than this?"

Again, the amills say that this is the only passage in the Bible that teaches a millennium. But that is a distortion of truth. Actually the earthly kingdom of Christ, restoring the throne of David over the nations, is taught in scores of passages. We have referred to many of them as we have gone through this account, but there are many more in the Old Testament and a few in the New. We are going to look at one from the New Testament in a moment. This passage is, however, the only one that tells us how long that kingdom is going to last. It is the only place that tells us that it will be a thousand years duration. In that sense this is the only Bible passage that teaches there will be a thousand-year reign of Christ.

The purpose for this removal of Satan is clearly stated here: "to keep him from deceiving the nations any more." You are well aware that this is what Satan has actually been doing throughout this whole church age. He has been deceiving the nations. He deceives them with drugs. He deceives them with the wrongful use of sexuality. He deceives them with lusts for power and greed. He deceives them about the true values of life. These lies have been poured into human ears from unseen and invisible powers for centuries. The whole record of human history is a record of the deceitfulness of the devil. But now God says, "That will cease." It is not to go on any longer. Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss with all his angels. He is locked in and sealed over and God says, "For a thousand years the earth is going to live in peace."

Some of you may be asking, "If God took care of the devil like that, why on earth does he let him go again?" What a foolish thing to do!

Authorities do that sometimes. They turn murderers loose upon people again. There was a terrible story on television just this week about a man who had threatened to kill his wife if he was let out. He was freed from prison on an 8-hour pass, and, sure enough, he brutally killed her.

Why would anyone do such a foolish thing, especially God? I am going to answer that in a moment but let us read on now.

We are given information now on the long-promised reign of the saints with Christ.

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 worshiped 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 the 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. {Rev 20:4-6 NIV}

We must notice three distinct groups that are mentioned here:

First, John sees thrones, and seated on them are those “who had been given authority to judge.” Who are they? This ties in with a strange promise that Jesus made to his twelve disciples, found in Matthew 19:28. There Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the restoration of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Clearly he gives them authority to judge! The twelve disciples are specifically to judge the nation of Israel, and they are linked, in this Revelation passage, with restored Israel. “I saw thrones,” says John, “on which were seated those given authority to judge.”

But that phrase includes more than the twelve disciples, because more than they are “given authority to judge” by our Lord. It also includes the “overcomers” of the present age of the church. These are described in the letter to the church at Thyatira, found in Chapter 2:26. Jesus said to them, “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Thus, associated with the reign of Jesus over the nations are the believers of the present age, the true, born-again believers in Christ. That is why Paul writes to the church in First Corinthians, Chapter 6, and says, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” {1 Cor 6:2 NIV}. And he even goes further, “Do you not know that we will judge angels?” {1 Cor 6:3 NIV}. His argument is, “If we are going to do all this judging and we are

learning how to do it now, for heaven’s sake can’t you settle those little disputes in the congregation now!”

There is also a second group here -- the martyrs of the tribulation -- those “who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and ... had not worshiped the beast or his image or received his mark ... on their hands.” This is the same group we saw in Chapters 6 and 7 who were put to death because of their faith in Christ. They refused to bow before the authority of the Antichrist or to worship him. They will live again, we are told, and reign with Christ a thousand years.

But there is still a third group. They are only mentioned here but are not dealt with, and we will see why in a moment. In a parenthesis, in Verse 5, John says, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.” That is a reference to the unbelieving dead, who will appear before the Great White Throne which is described at the end of this chapter. We will look at that before we are through. Leaving out the parenthetical expression, John is saying that all those who reign with Christ are included in what he calls “the first resurrection.”

Would you not think that this would clearly establish the fact that there is more than one resurrection? If you have a first, surely there must be a second. But our amill friends believe there is only one. It comes at the final end of history and therefore must be associated with the Great White Throne judgment, yet to come. They say it will be a judgment of both the righteous and the wicked dead -- raised at the same time and judged in one judgment.

Of course, if that were the case, and since Verse 5 says “the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended,” they are driven to say that this “first resurrection” here is not a resurrection of the body, but something which happens to the spirit or soul. They say that this refers to spiritual rebirth, or possibly, to the survival of the spirit after death. But that is an extremely weak position because the word “resurrection” literally means “to stand up again.” The Dutch have a wonderful word for resurrection: *oopstanding*, they call it. That word captures the meaning exactly. A spirit cannot stand

up; it is immaterial. Neither can a soul. But a body can, and this word “resurrection” is never used in Scripture except for bodies. Therefore, it is indeed a raising of the bodies of the dead that is meant by “the first resurrection.”

I do not have time to develop this at length, but there is a passage in First Corinthians 15 that speaks of the order of resurrection and it says of Jesus that he was “the first fruits from the dead.” So the first resurrection here reaches back to include the resurrection of Jesus and those raised with him. Matthew 27:52-53 tells us that at the time our Lord was raised “many of the bodies of the saints came out of the tombs.” Many people do not seem to know that, although the Scriptures plainly state it. They, too, were part of that sheaf of the first fruits which was offered to God as the initial installment of the first resurrection.

Then the verse in First Corinthians says, “then, when he comes, those who belong to him [will be raised],” {1 Cor 15:23 NIV}. When Christ appears, to catch the church to himself, that is the next segment of the first resurrection. Over 2000 years lie between, but time is no factor in an eternal event. Then the verse says, “then the end will come,” i.e., the end resurrection, which would be the final one before the Great White Throne. So there are clearly two resurrections taught in Scripture. Jesus himself referred to a “resurrection of life” and a “resurrection of judgment” {cf, John 5:29 KJV}, and in several other passages this is made very clear. Resurrection of individuals will be “each in his own order” {1 Cor 15:23}, as Paul says, but the “first resurrection” touches only those who believe in Christ. Thus John says, “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the 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.”

In Verses 7-10 we are given the answer to why Satan must be released after 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 sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. {Rev 20:7-10 NIV}

Someone asked me last week, “What reason is there for a millennium after Jesus comes back?” Here is the answer: A thousand years of peace and blessing is to demonstrate, beyond question, the fact that everyone finds hard to believe: that we belong to a fallen race, and everyone is born with a basically evil nature. No one wants to believe that! Try teaching that in public school and see how far you get. Our whole education system is based upon the idea that we all have a basically good nature with some potential for evil; but Scripture does not teach that.

That famous theologian, Flip Wilson, was known for saying, “The devil made me do it!” That has become the ultimate excuse of man for the evil in the world.

Much of it does come from the devil, without a doubt. That is why he must be taken out of the scene before world-wide peace can come. But not all evil comes from the devil. God wants to impress upon humanity what Jeremiah declares so plainly, “The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” That is why everyone needs salvation. We are desperate and hopeless without it. If we do not have a Savior there is no hope for anyone because of the taint of evil within us which affects all we do.

That is very hard for people to believe. But I see it in my own life -- and certainly in yours! I struggle with it all the time. People are saying nice things about me as they learn I am going to be gone soon. It would be nice if I could believe that was all there was to say, but I know better. I know the malice, the selfishness, the impatience, the anger and other things which come upon me unbidden and unwanted many times. I struggle with the same things that you struggle with. Everybody does. There are no exceptions. When you take a look at your own life and what goes on in your thoughts -- your heart and your motives -- there is no question but what the biblical picture of man is accurate. We are born with a fallen nature.

The millennium will prove that to be true. No one will doubt it from then on. For a thousand years the temptation of the devil ceases. He is removed from the earth. He cannot stir up this evil propensity within us any longer. As a consequence the earth will be greatly improved. Men will live together in peace. There will be no more war. That beautiful picture from Isaiah 2, read to you this morning, will be true: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and men shall make war no more," {cf, Isa 2:4}. But did you notice also that it said that Jesus "will judge among the nations and settle disputes among many people?" Sin is still going to be there even when the devil is gone.

The curse will be lifted from nature. The land and ground will produce abundantly. Many lyric passages in the prophets describe this. There will be abundant food and beauty and peace. The whole world will be like Hawaii -- without the tourists! But there will still be sin and there will still be death! Read the 65th chapter of Isaiah. There the prophet says, "He who dies at 100 will be thought a mere youth," {Isa 65:20b NIV}. The life of man will be greatly extended, probably to reach the longevity the patriarchs had, like Methuselah who lived 969 years -- almost 1,000. That will be restored. The animal kingdom will be changed so that the animals that are now carnivores and predators shall live together in peace. This is all said in the same context as the verse, "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion eat straw like the ox," {Isa 65:25 NIV}.

Isaiah goes on to say, "The sinner who reaches 100 will be considered accursed," {cf, Isa 65:20b KJV}. There is still going to be some sin and it will affect the lifespan. The presence of sin is why Jesus must rule with a rod of iron -- still, righteousness will be dominant. Today evil is the dominant philosophy of the masses. Righteousness must struggle to exist. But then it will be reversed. The dominant practice of the day will be justice, wholeness, peace and purity. Evil will have to keep under wraps and will find it difficult to express itself -- but it will be there. Therefore the judgment of the "rod of iron" will still be necessary for some.

But, as Revelation goes on to say, at the end of the thousand years "at the four corners of the earth,"

retreating as far as possible from the central glory, there will still be many who represent Israel's old antagonists, Gog and Magog, and therefore are called by their names. They have the same attitude as the enemies of Israel who are described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. These are men and women who are not born-again despite the wonderful, almost perfect, world in which they live. When Satan is released there is an immediate response from them.

It will be clearly demonstrated for all time that there is still an evil inheritance in man; that until he is born-again his nature remains unchanged, and immediately these respond to Satan's appeal and deception. They march upon Jerusalem, but they are destroyed, with fire coming down from heaven. The devil, the old enemy, is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet have been for a thousand years. That clearly shows that the end of man is not annihilation or liquidation, as though they disappear into nothing, but they remain alive forever. As it says here, "They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." It is a very sad picture, but it is certainly clear.

Now we come to the last sobering scene in Verses 11-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. {Rev 20:11-15 NIV}

This scene hardly needs any comment at all.

Earth and heaven flee away, which means it is not on earth but it is a judgment in eternity. The judge is Jesus, not the Father! Jesus himself said, "The Father has committed all judgment to the Son," {cf, John 5:22}. So it is he who sits upon this throne of majesty and gathers all the dead before him. There will also be some living people from the

millennium who will be there as well for it needs to be determined as to whether their names are in the book of life or not. But judgment will be “according to what each one has done.” Deeds reveal what the heart is like. They reveal belief. It is all preserved in God’s great library. Books are used as symbols here; we would probably use video tapes. The whole record of every life is made known before all, and judgment will be based upon that.

We have already seen in recent history a President of the United States who was forced to resign because of the tapes he made when he thought no unfriendly ear was listening.

Here we learn that if your name is in the book of life, your deeds will have been righteous. Only those whose names are in the book of life can do righteous deeds. That is the point of this. Such deeds are done by the power and energy of the Spirit of God, not by the person himself. All other deeds are burned with fire, and only righteous deeds remain.

If your name is not in the book of life, it reveals evil deeds have been done. They may look good on the outside but inwardly are tainted by the selfish, self-centered desire for prominence or power, influence or recognition. So the ultimate question put here is the words of an old song,

*Is my name written there,
On the page bright and fair?
In the book of God’s kingdom,
Is my name written there?*

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to minister to other cities and towns in Israel they came back reporting great victories, and especially that the demons were subject to them. They could cast evil spirits out of people with just a word, and the demons obeyed them. They came back very excited about that. Jesus said to them, “Do not rejoice over that, [*That is nothing you have done; God did that through you*], but rejoice that your names are written in heaven,” {cf, Luke 10:20 NIV}.

That is the central question of life: “Is my name written there in the Lamb’s book of life?”

It is written when you believe in Jesus. No one needs to go to the lake of fire. No one is thrown into it against his or her will. They have chosen the lake of fire! They have refused the Savior, and there is no

other choice. This is not talking about those who have never heard; do not bring that up, because they are not in view here. The best information we have on them is found in Hebrews 11:6, “Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” God will deal with them according to the great declaration of Scripture, “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?” {Gen 18:25 NIV}. Scripture does not really tell us what happens to them, but God will deal in justice and righteousness with them.

The great question here is, having heard of him, is your name written there?

Jesus knows our hearts. Nothing has been hidden from his view. If we come to him, we will be given life.

In his first epistle, John writes,

This is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son! He who has the Son has life, but he who does not have the Son of God, does not have life. {1 Jn 5:11-12 NIV}

The ultimate issues of life are all settled here. If your name is written in the book of life, you enter into eternal life. If you refuse him, then your ultimate fate is the lake of fire, the second death, along with the devil and the beast and the false prophet.

That is a most sobering scene. I dislike preaching about these matters, but it is wonderful to preach against this dark background and offer to all what Jesus offers -- eternal life by faith in him, as you receive him into your heart and life.

May all who hear or read these words be included in the Lamb’s book of life!

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