

Understanding Revelation Part 30
Preparing to Reign with Jesus
Revelation 20:1-6

It is always interesting to watch the Middle East

as the citizens of nation after nation have risen up to try and topple their governments and install new leaders who they believe will rule with truth and justice

But the fact is that no government here on earth, regardless of the intentions of its leaders, is capable of governing in a manner that is completely righteous and just

But there is coming a day when Jesus will establish His righteous rule here on earth.

And that will be a great day for us as well, since they we get to reign with Him in His kingdom

We've seen God, in many cases through His agents - the angels - carry out His judgment through a series of seals, trumpets and bowls.

Those events have served both to punish the ungodly and to test the godly.

But even though men recognize these events as coming from the hand of God, most still refuse to repent and commit their lives to Jesus.

We've also seen Satan operating through his agents – the Antichrist and the false prophet.

And through those agents, he is able to deceive much of the world and persuade them to assemble for the purpose of waging war against Jesus.

We've seen God's mercy on full display as time after time he has sent witnesses – both humans and angels – to proclaim the gospel and give man numerous chances to repent and turn to Him.

And finally, last week, we saw the return of Jesus, followed by the armies of heaven, and His victory over all who would oppose Him at the battle of Armageddon.

It is only after the culmination of all these events that Jesus will finally establish His physical reign here on earth.

The idea that the Messiah will one day establish a physical reign here on the earth is taught throughout the Bible – in both the Old and New Testaments.

In fact, one of the main reasons that some of Jesus' followers, like Judas, became so disillusioned with Him at His first coming is that Jesus began to talk about dying on a cross rather than establishing His earthly rule at that time.

But **when Jesus returns to this earth, He is going to literally fulfill every one of those prophecies.**

What is interesting about this passage here in Revelation 20 is that it doesn't give us a whole lot of detail about what will be occurring here on earth during this time, but for John's audience that information wasn't really needed since they were quite familiar with all of the Old Testament passages that provide more information about those details.

The primary contribution of this passage is that it does provide one important piece of information that is missing from those other prophecies – the length of this physical rule of Jesus here on earth.

Although there is not universal agreement on this, I am going to take the same approach to this passage that we have employed all throughout our journey.

We have consistently treated the events described in the text as literal unless there is something in the text itself that would lead us to take the language figuratively or symbolically.

In this case, there is nothing in the text that would lead us to conclude that the 1,000 year period described here is anything other than a literal period of 1,000 years.

In fact, that time period is described six different times in the first seven verses of the chapter.

And there is nothing in the text that would lead us to believe that God intended for this to describe some indefinite period of time.

It is from this 1,000 year period that we get the terms “millennium” or “millennial reign” that we often use to refer to these events.

While it is true that God's kingdom does exist right now, it obviously does not operate completely in the manner that it will at the return of Jesus –

both during His millennial reign here on earth or in the new heavens and new earth that will be brought into existence thereafter.

When we look at this text, as well as the other supporting texts that describe the millennium, it is obvious that the conditions which will characterize that time just don't exist at present.

To be sure, what we experience right now is a primitive picture of what the kingdom will be like when Jesus returns to the earth and establishes His physical reign.

Although Satan is not completely restrained right now, He is still under the authority of a sovereign God.

Although it does not begin to compare with what it will be like when Jesus returns, His followers do co-reign with Jesus right now.

But just like the Lord's Supper, which is a primitive picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb, can't begin to compare to the actual event in the future, our participation in God's kingdom right now can't begin to compare to the future participation in His physical reign here on earth.

So with that in mind, let's look at the three significant events that are described here in this passage.

THREE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

1. Satan restrained

After we just saw Jesus destroy the nations that were massed against Him with just His word at the end of Revelation 19, it is quite interesting that it is not Jesus, but one of God's angels that is sent to restrain Satan. This provides us with a couple of significant observations about Satan and his power:

- On one hand, this is a clear demonstration that Satan is not God's equal.

God merely has to dispatch one of His angels in order to bind up Satan and throw him into the bottomless pit and lock him up.

- On the other hand, this also shows that binding Satan is not something that man can do merely with his words.

It is not human effort, but rather the divine work of God that results in Satan being bound.

You will notice here that the restraining of Satan is total and complete.

John records four separate actions that are taken in order to keep him from being able to have any influence whatsoever –

he is bound, thrown into the bottomless pit, the entry to that pit is shut and then it is sealed.

We very clearly do not currently live in a time when Satan has been restrained in this manner.

Although he is, as he always has been, under the sovereign control of God, God currently allows him to have a certain level of dominion in this physical world.

That is why Paul refers to him in Ephesians 2 as “the prince of the power of the air”.

And when Peter describes Satan with these familiar words, he also makes it clear that Satan is not currently bound in the manner described here in Revelation 20:

1 Peter 5:8 - *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

We are even told exactly why Satan will be restrained in this manner for 1,000 years – it is so that he will no longer be able to deceive the nations.

And the reason for that seems quite clear once we understand what will be going on during this earthly reign of Jesus.

Isaiah 65 contains a description of some of the things that will occur during this time.

One important aspect of that reign is described in this verse.

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

We know that during this time people will be born and will die.

We also know that man will still be able to choose to follow Jesus or not and that some will sin and choose not to follow Him.

That same idea is confirmed in **Zechariah 14:16-17** - *Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them.*

Although God commands the people to go to Jerusalem and participate in the Feast of Booths, man will still be able to choose not to do that, which is a sin that will bear consequences in their lives.

By the way, this is one more aspect of the millennial reign of Jesus that is clearly not operating today.

No one is going to be able to claim “The Devil made me do it.”

It will prove once and for all the validity of the words of the prophet **Jeremiah:9** – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

*So how should this future restraining of Satan affect the way that we live our lives today?

As we've seen, right now Satan is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

And as we see from Genesis to Revelation, he does that primarily through the means of deception.

That is why he must one day be bound so that he can no longer deceive anyone.

So in the meantime, how do we guard against being deceived by Satan?

*We guard against Satan's deception right now through the Bible

As we have discovered frequently throughout this series, the way that we combat deception and falsehood is by being so familiar with that which is genuine and true that we will immediately recognize that which is not genuine and true.

And there is only one place that we can find that objective truth.

Both the Psalmist and Jesus clearly identified that source of truth:

Psalm 119:160 – *The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.*

John 17:17 – *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*

The way that we guard against the deception of Satan is by being so familiar with the truth of God's Word that we immediately recognize that which does not match up to the Bible.

But in order to do that we have to saturate our lives with God's Word.

An hour or two once a week on Sunday morning just won't do that.

We need to heed the words of Paul in this matter: **Colossians 3:16** – *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*

The word "dwell" there implies that the word of Christ is to take up permanent residence in our lives in a manner that makes it an active force in directing the way that we live.

God's Word must so saturate our lives that it impacts every single area of our lives.

That is the only way we will be effective in combating Satan's deception.

2. Saints reign

John sees thrones and on those throne are those to whom the authority to judge has been granted by Jesus.

So exactly who sits on these thrones?

Although we get a partial answer to that question in this passage, in order to answer fully, we must look at some other supporting passages:

Who sits on the thrones?

First, let's go to Daniel's vision of the character of the Gentile nations who would rule over Israel

Daniel 7:18, 22, 27 – *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever...and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom...And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'*

We find three times in this chapter that dominion and judgment will be granted to the saints of the Most High.

Although I believe this includes all believers of all ages, just to be overly conservative for now, let's just limit this to...

• Old Testament believers

Let's go next to the words of Jesus: **Matthew 19:28** – *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Once again, one could legitimately make the case that Jesus addressed this to all His followers, but just to be overly cautious again, let's just limit this to...

• The apostles

Finally, verse 6 here in Revelation 20 makes it clear that those who experience the first resurrection will also reign with Jesus.

We'll look at the first resurrection more in just a moment, but for now let me share a couple of passages from Paul's letters that further identify this group:

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 – *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

2 Timothy 2:12 – *if we endure, we will also reign with him...*

Here Paul is clearly making the case that those reigning with Jesus will be...

• All Christ-followers

Now you can see why I was able to be so conservative in identifying the first two groups, because ultimately all genuine Christ-followers are going to sit on those thrones and reign with Jesus.

Again, this is something wonderful to look forward to, but how should this knowledge impact the way we live right now?

Since we are going to co-reign with Jesus in the future, how do we prepare for that in our day-to-day lives?

Application:

We prepare for our future reign with Jesus through prayer

Throughout the Bible we see numerous examples of how we participate in the things of God through our prayers.

The best way to prepare for the day when we will literally reign over this earth alongside Jesus is to develop our prayer life right now.

3. Saints resurrected

There are two different resurrections referred to in this passage.

This really shouldn't come as a surprise since Jesus said that this is exactly what would happen:
John 5:28, 29 - *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

There are clearly two resurrections to come – the resurrection of life for the righteous who have committed their lives to Jesus and the resurrection of judgment for those who have not.

What Jesus didn't reveal at that time is that the two resurrections would come 1,000 years apart.

This is an area where we don't have all the details in Scripture, but here is what we can understand just from what we have in the Bible text.

The process:

- When a person dies, the body immediately begins a process of decay and the spirit/soul goes to a "holding place"

Although the Bible does differentiate between the soul and spirit, for purposes of discussing the resurrection we will experience, the body represents that which is material and the soul and spirit are both the immaterial parts of our lives and we can use either term to describe that part of who we are.

- *For believers, that holding place is "heaven"

The very moment we die here on earth, our soul is immediately in the presence of God, as Paul confirms in this familiar passage:

2 Corinthians 5:8 - *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

- *For unbelievers that holding place is "hell".

Next week, we will see in more detail that hell is merely a temporary holding place and that it will be thrown into the lake of fire along with Satan and those who have not committed their lives to Jesus.

There they will join the Antichrist and the false prophet who will have already been captured and sent there alive at the Battle of Armageddon.

- At the return of Jesus, believers will experience the "first resurrection".

The details of that process are described in more detail in 1 Corinthians 15.

Our souls will be reunited with our resurrection bodies, which will be different in many ways from the bodies we have now, but will also be recognizable by others.

It is in that state that we will reign with Jesus in His earthly kingdom.

- At the end of the 1,000 years, unbelievers will experience the "second resurrection".

We're going to look at the details of what happens to the unbeliever in the last part of chapter 20 next week.

But for now, it's enough to know it won't be pleasant and we certainly don't want to experience it.

This is a wonderful reality to look forward to, but how should we live today in light of this future?

Application:

We prepare for our future resurrection by serving Jesus in the flesh

Although our physical bodies will not survive in their present form for eternity, and they are going to be replaced by new resurrection bodies, our bodies still serve an important function as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, as we live our lives here on earth in the flesh right now, we prepare for the future by using our bodies for godly purposes, as Paul exhorts us to do:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

During the millennial reign of Jesus, our reigning with Him will involve both service and worship.

Ezekiel, in chapters 40-48 of his prophecy, describes a temple that will be established during that time where worship takes place.

We also know from the Scriptures that the believers who reign with Jesus will also be given responsibilities to serve based on how faithful they were with the tasks that God has given us here on earth.

In Luke 12, Jesus is exhorting His followers to be ready for His return by faithfully serving Him here on earth.

And then He speaks these words that describe the relationship between how we live our lives here on this earth and the responsibilities we will be given when Jesus returns:

Luke 12:42-44 - *And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.*

There will be a direct correlation between how faithful we are in using our bodies to serve God here on earth and the responsibilities that we will be given by Jesus at His return.

So the best way to prepare for an eternity of serving Jesus after our resurrection is to serve him now in these bodies of flesh.

I am so thankful that I live here in the United States.

When I look around the world and see the oppression that people all around the world are facing, I am grateful that we don't have to face that here in our country.

But as good as our government might be, it can't even begin to compare to that glorious day in the future when Jesus returns to establish His earthly rule.

When that happens, will you be ready?

Will you have protected yourself from deception by saturating your life with God's Word?

Will you have prepared to reign with Jesus by co-reigning with Him in prayer?

Will you have prepared to serve Jesus in your resurrection body by serving Him in the flesh right now?