

Revelation 20:1-6 – The Millennium

We are in chapter **20**. We're going to begin working through the **1st 6** verses.

The title of this study is '**The Millennium**.' The title of this book is "**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**".

And in chapter **19** we saw Jesus revealed in his second coming as conquering King.

In chapter **20** we see Jesus revealed to us as ruling and reigning on the earth for a thousand years.

The phrase "**thousand years**" occurs six times in the **1st 7** verses of this chapter.

And I think that's pretty weighty. That lends weight to how we are going to view this.

If God wanted to say something figuratively –

He could have used any number;

He could have used bigger numbers;

He could have done it in any other way;

But he seems to be very intent in letting us know about this period of time that's a thousand years in length.

And this period in history is known as the millennium.

It's a compound Latin word – '*mille*' – thousand; '*annum*' – year; a thousand years.

And if we take this chapter literally it's relatively simple to understand what is meant.

Having said that there are many – and I don't exaggerate with that – there are many Godly scholarly men who reject the idea that there will be a reign of Jesus Christ on the earth for a thousand years after his second coming. And as a result this chapter has been given such a tremendous variation of differing interpretations, and very complex in the way they have to present them. And all of those views essentially are designed to eliminate a literal rule.

And so here are the names – I'm going to give you a very brief overview. And this afternoon my wife Valerie came into my little study cave, and asked how I was going. I said, "*Man, I'm just wading through it. I'm just trying to get what are the views of the millennium that are there.*" And she said, "*Well, you just want to keep it short and sweet.*" And I do want to keep it short and sweet.

Post-Millennialism – According to this view the thousand years are not literal; but they are symbolic.

The term "**thousand years**" represents the triumph of the Gospel in the period leading up to the 2nd coming of Jesus. And in this view the return of Jesus follows the millennium. It follows this symbolic triumphant thing that happens.

For example, let me quote **Donald Fortner**. His commentary on the book of **Revelation** is called '**Discovering Christ in Revelation**'. What a great title / sub-title for a study in the book of **Revelation** because it is titled "**The unveiling**" – or – "**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**". And this is so amazing because all of these different guys that I read today were so emphatic. They were saying there is no other way to look at it but like this. Here's what he says –

"It should be clear to anyone who reads Revelation 20 that the language is figurative."

Well, apparently not. So what does it say about those who don't see it so clearly as being absolutely figurative?

"It should be clear to anyone who reads Revelation 20 that the language is figurative, as it is in all the pictures that we've seen."

Of course we've seen that there are many figurative pictures. And any of those analogies that are figures and types and symbols we've used the Word of God to interpret those things. But those were laid out to us by statements like, "*And I saw something like something.*" And we knew that word "**like**" means it's like something; it's not something. So he's saying everything that we've seen in the book is symbolic and not to be taken literally. And he says –

"The thousand years are no more a literal period of time than the great chain is a literal chain. As the chain represents restraining power, the thousand years represent a long period of time, that whole span of time" – this is crucial – "between Christ's first and second coming."

That's how they view it – this glorious rule of Christ that happens between his 1st coming and his 2nd coming. He says,
“It's also obvious that the thousand years precede; they do not follow the second coming of Christ.”

Apparently this was not so obvious to John the apostle; because, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit – He begins the chapter with the word **“Then”**, which begs the question – *When?* Whenever we read the word **“Then”** it's a timestamp. So when we read the word **“Then”** we're going to ask – *When?* And it's after the events of chapter **19** where Jesus comes and defeats the antichrist and the false prophet and all the armies of the world that are warring against him. **Fortner** continues –

“In other words, we are now living in this thousand year period which began with the Incarnation of Christ. The 1,000 years are this present gospel age. They do not begin at Christ's second coming. They end at his second coming. Our Lord Jesus Christ has so thoroughly bound the prince of darkness that he has taken total dominion over him.”

Now there's just a slight problem with that last bit. The testimony of the New Testament is that Satan is not bound during the period between Christ's 1st coming and 2nd coming.

Paul was sure that Satan was loose –

Ephesians 6: *“¹⁰ We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.”*

Peter agrees with Paul –

1 Peter 5: *“⁸ Your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion.”*

And John agrees also – **Revelation 2:13; Revelation 3:9.**

The text itself tells us in verse **3** that at the time John wrote the book Satan was deceiving the nations.

Dr James M. Gray said – *“If Satan is bound today it must be with a terribly long chain.”*

So that's Post-Millennialism.

A-Millennialism – The prefix 'a' means there is none.

This view denies that there is any literal millennium or reign of Christ on the earth.

The millennial reign of Christ is reduced to a spiritual reign in the hearts of believers.

And I have to tell you – I have two expositional heroes that were so influential in my life –

one, my pastor, Chuck Smith,

and another man, Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones. I never knew him; but I got to know him in reading his commentaries.

And I learned essentially how to teach the Bible by reading Lloyd Jones and listening to my pastor. I'd listened to – how they thought through text, and how they exposed the text, and how they applied the text.

My expositional hero, Martyn Lloyd Jones, he is an a-millennial guy. I haven't figured out how that happened.

But he's a brilliant man. He was a physician before he went into the ministry.

His exposition on the book of **Ephesians** – you have to have it.

His commentary on the **Sermon on the Mount** – you must have it. It's phenomenal.

In fact, when I heard my pastor Chuck Smith teaching the Sermon on the Mount, and then I came across Martyn Lloyd Jones' commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, I thought he ripped off Chuck Smith, because I was not quite sure who taught it first. But somebody was reading somebody. And they both sounded so much alike. So Chuck Smith and Martyn Lloyd Jones are now both in Heaven. And they can figure that out together.

The third view, which I personally like to refer to as the correct view, is Pre-Millennialism.

And these are all open-handed issues.

This is not one of the non-negotiables – Jesus is God the Son, who alone can save us from sin by grace.

This is not one of those.

This is not – 1 God who eternally exists in 3 persons – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – each fully & equally God.

That's a closed-hand issue. We are never opening up our hand and letting go of that, right?

So these three views are open-hand.

The pre-millennial view is given this name because –

It interprets **Revelation 20** as referring to a literal thousand year reign of Jesus following his second coming.

And as the second coming occurs before the millennium, it's therefore referred to as pre-millennium, right?

So here we go. I hope that was short and sweet.

“¹ Then” – here's our timestamp – circle that word.

It begs the question – When? – Following the events of **Revelation 19:20, 21**, in which –

“²⁰ ... the antichrist and the false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.

²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.”

So following that God deals with the one who furnished the motivation and the power of that rebellion against Jesus.

“¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.”

Now the Bible tells us in **Isaiah 14** that Satan exalted himself over and against his Creator.

Satan said, “I will be like the Most High.” Well, that didn't work out so well.

And if anything in the Bible serves to us as a lesson of what pride looks like, Lucifer, Satan – in just a few moments we'll see four of the titles given to him – it stands as this is what is at the heart and this is what is at the end of pride.

First – Satan was cast out of Heaven – **Revelation 12:9**.

And now at the second coming of Jesus Satan is cast out of the Earth.

And by the end of the chapter he'll be in the lake of fire that burns forever and ever.

So here comes this angel. He's come from out of Heaven. And he has marching orders from Heaven.

And he has “the key to the bottomless pit”. The Greek word there is 'abusos'.

And it's important that when we see terms like that we ask – ‘So what is this “bottomless pit”?’

You can put in the margin of your Bible there next to the word “bottomless pit” – **2 Peter 2:4**.

Peter refers to it there as – “the pits of darkness reserved for judgment”.

This “bottomless pit” – the 'abusos' – is the place where demons are sent to be reserved for their final sentencing to the lake of fire. The 'abusos' is not their final Hell. Satan, along with every fallen angel will go to the lake of fire.

Jesus said in **Matthew 25:41** that the lake of fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

This angel has a “key”. Now a key identifies authority. If you have the key you control the door.

This angel has the key. Thus it signifies that he has authority that he can open the 'abusos'; and he can close it.

Now this is very important. Would you write in the margin of your Bible – **Revelation 1:18**?

There we read that Jesus Christ is the one who has “the keys of Death and Hades”.

And he dispenses those keys. In **Revelation 9** they're lent to an angel to open “the bottomless pit”, and not to incarcerate a demonic entity,

but to release demonic entities in one of the judgments of God upon the earth.

Now again we see an angel – and this angel has the authority to open that pit as well, and then to lock it again. And notice the angel **“had a great chain in his hand”**.

Now some people ask, *“Well, what kind of chain can hold the devil?”*

Well, we don't know. But God can fashion a chain for that exact purpose.

And we know that right now there are demonic entities who are imprisoned and chained, according to –

Jude “⁶ And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—”

And so here we see that Satan is bound in the same place that these other demons have been bound in great chains from who knows when?

And, again, **2 Peter 2:4** says the same thing.

“² he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil & Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,”

This is an interesting thing – a nameless angel comes to bind Satan with a great chain.

Donald Grey Barnhouse is one well worth reading. You want to have him in your library.

In his commentary on the book of **Revelation** he makes note of the fact that there is no reference to this angel possessing any special ranking or any special power.

Now in the Bible we see that God created angelic beings in rankings – principalities, powers.

We read of Michael, the archangel. There are seraphim. There are cherubim.

In **Revelation 10:1** and **18:21** we read of mighty angels.

There are angels of rankings. And these angels had the description of being mighty angels.

This angel has no such description. This angel appears to be one of the domestic servants of Heaven (if you would).

The word common seems very inappropriate to describe these awesome creations of God.

But as angels go this angel is anonymous and common.

And don't miss this –

The one who was so full of pride that he said, **“I will be like the Most High”** –

is in the end subdued, not by Jesus himself, not by Michael or Gabriel or any other high ranking angel;

he is subdued by this anonymous angel.

“² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan”

Satan is identified as the same four names back in chapter **12**.

So in the margin of your Bible there next to verse **2** you can write **Revelation 12**.

The same names are used to identify him there.

Each name indicates a different aspect of his character or a particular activity of this particular fallen angelic being who exalted himself over and against God.

“the dragon” –

This Greek word is used 27 times in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures – the Septuagint.

And in each of those 27 times it's used to speak of various monsters.

Each of these 27 uses speak of that which is unclean and that which is foul.

How fitting that Satan should be referred to as the monster.

Have you ever watched a sci-fi monster movie, and thought –

‘Where in the world do people get these things?’ ‘How do they dream them up?’

And sometimes they're so monstrous; they're so hideous.

I think they're somewhere woven into some reality because there is a real monster – this dragon, this person.

Satan is the source, the monster behind –
everything that's foul,
everything that's vile,
everything that's obscene,
everything that's vulgar,
everything that's terrifying – in this world.

But following the second coming of Jesus to the earth –
the monster, the source of all foulness is arrested by a pure angel.

We have been saved to a future. If you are looking at this planet, and you're reading the headlines, whether it's on your web browser or whether it's in print, or whether it's in the news at 10, the world is going nuts. Stuff is going crazy all over the globe. The destination of the world is what we're seeing right here. This is where we're headed. Every foul, every dark, every obscene, every offensive thing is going to be removed from the kingdom of God when Jesus returns and sets up his reign on this earth. That's the glory that we're looking forward to.

The return of Jesus is not a doom and gloom prospect. We have this caricature of the lunatic looking guy that has the sandwich board on, right? And on one side it says, "*Repent*". And on the back it says, "*The End is Near*". For a long time that was the stereotype of lunatic fringe people who actually believed that Jesus would come again. But you'd look at these people; and they'd just be predicting doom and gloom.

No, the return of Jesus is the only hope for mankind; because the return of Jesus means the end of the monster. Try to imagine a world in which there are no monster stories. In the kingdom there are no monster stories because in the kingdom the return of Jesus means the end of the monster, the end of his deadly influence. And that means the end of every wrong foul thing.

Not only is he referred to the dragon but – "**the ancient serpent**" –

Now this refers to Satan as the culprit in the Garden of Eden.

You can put **John 8:44** in the margin of your Bible.

Interesting – Jesus was talking to very, very, very religious people when he said this.
He looked at these religious leaders, and he said,

“44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

So Jesus takes us back to **Genesis 3** and the lie of lies in speaking of this person.

And we spent a good deal of time unpacking that title, "**the ancient serpent**", in our study of chapter **12**. So I want to encourage you to grab the resources for it from metro calvary church app or from metrocalvary.org, and review it.

“the devil” –

This is the Greek word from which we get our English word 'diabolical' – '*diabolos*'.

There are some things in this world that are so bad that the term evil seems inadequate to describe them.

The term 'diabolical' comes to my mind when I think this is beyond evil. This is just diabolical.

And the dictionary definition of 'diabolical' means – belonging to or so evil as to recall the devil.

So this is not just somebody doing a bad thing. This is like direct ties, direct linkage to the devil.

And, again, I want you to see what's going to happen when Jesus returns.

The diabolical one and all of his diabolical influence is removed from the earth.

The word "**devil**" literally means – accuser or slanderer. As the enemy of God the devil accuses man before God.

The famous Old Testament illustration is in the book of **Job 1:6-11**, and also **2:1-5**.

And then in the book of **Revelation** we saw in chapter **12:9, 10** that he's called –

“the accuser of the brethren who accuses the saints day and night before God.”

Now this is really big.

Romans 8: “¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

God, who has announced that no one can lay any charges against the believer, now silences the accuser forever. The devil also accuses God to us. In **Genesis 3** he essentially said – that God was withholding some good thing from Adam and Eve, that God was lying to them, that God didn't really speak, that God was unreliable.

And then the name “**Satan**” – It literally means – adversary.

You see, from the beginning Satan has opposed the purpose of God and his Messiah.

Satan is the one who opposed Jesus at every turn of his earthly ministry.

Satan is the one who opposed Jesus, tempting him, working against him.

Satan is the one who sought constantly to destroy Jesus.

But ultimately it was the destruction of Jesus, the very thing that he desired so greatly, that became the victory of Jesus over him.

Colossians 2: “¹⁵ And having spoiled principalities and powers, he (Jesus), made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (meaning in the cross).”

Jesus holds the keys to death & hell because of his triumphant death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. And we'll have more on that in a bit.

Don't miss this – Today Satan is your adversary too.

1 Peter 5: “⁸ For your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

And with his minions he opposes the gracious, the loving plans of God for your life that are wrapped up in Jesus.

Jesus said, “**I've come that you might have life, and have it in abundance.**”

The abundant Christian life belongs to us because of who Jesus is and what he's done for us.

And Satan opposes the gracious and loving abundant life plans of God for our lives that are wrapped up in Jesus.

Satan and his minions oppose every effort of every Christian to live on mission with Jesus and for Jesus.

Know this –

If you come to a place in your Christian life where you're saying, “*I'm in; I want the passion of God to be my passion*”- The Bible says that God is passionate to make the name of Jesus known to every living human being – And the minute you say, “*I want to participate with God in his mission to make the name of Jesus known and the name of Jesus great*” I guarantee you that Satan and his minions will oppose every effort. It's warfare.

Satan and his minions oppose every God-honoring, Bible-believing Holy Spirit directed church.

The imprisonment of Satan in **Revelation 20** is the direct result of the cross of Jesus.

Please put these in the margin of your Bible there.

Colossians 1:13

“¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness & transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

Jesus delivers us from Satan's domain of death and darkness.

1 John 3: “⁸ ... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

Hebrews 2: “¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

“² he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil & Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.”

The Lord willing, in our next study we're going to get into the whole thing behind this – like – What?
Why did God let him loose?
What was the purposes of that?
Why does it say he was there for just a thousand years?

Satan is not cast into the lake of fire, along with the antichrist & false prophet, because God has 1 more use for him. And we'll see that in our next study. But there are some really important things for us to make note of –

Number One – The conquest of Satan – Satan being bound and thrown into the ‘abusos’ for a thousand years, never to be released till the end of those thousand years – **is not the result of human effort.**

Now there are those who think that the millennium will be ushered in by the Church.
And, again – some amazing people, bright people, scholarly people, Jesus-loving, Bible-believing people – They believe that the millennium will be ushered in by the Church.
It will be ushered in as the Church becomes more powerful and more pure.
It will be ushered in as the Church spreads the truth to every part of the world via Christian telecommunication.
It will be ushered in as the Church exercises moral influence in the geo-political realm.

This is a quote by one of the most influential Christians in modern time. It's pretty striking. He says – “*I think there are five giant problems in the world. I call them the Global Goliaths. Now these problems affect, not just millions of people, but billions of people. And to date everybody has failed at solving them. The United Nations have failed. The United States have failed. Multi-national corporations have failed. But I'm very optimistic. And I'm very optimistic because I think there is a new passion and there's a new partnership that is arising. I believe that what is lacking is motivation and mobilization.*” Wow! That's what's lacking – motivation and mobilization? And then he goes on to talk about this great cooperative between the Church and governments, and how all of that is going to bring down these five Goliaths that plague the world.

That's not what it says here.
It says this one is going to be incarcerated on the heels of the return of Jesus by an anonymous angel.
In fact, I don't know if you remember, but in the Gospels Jesus says,
“**And when the Son of Man comes (returns) will he even find truth?**” Wow!
We're not moving towards the Church creating this massive tidal wave of influence in the world.
The lights go on out on the world. Remember it says that everything was in utter darkness before the return of Jesus.
The only light at the return of Jesus was Jesus.

Secondly – During the millennium there will be no sign of Satan and his hosts at work among men.

It says – “**he threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.**”

God has no problem restraining Satan.
This incarceration is not for punishment.
That's reserved for the moment that Satan is cast into the lake of fire.
The incarceration is all about restraint.

Mount said this – “*The elaborate measures taken to ensure his custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on the earth.*”

By implication, his demonic hordes are also imprisoned. Now I couldn't help but think that today this is reality. Some of the most notorious heads of gangs, drug cartels are incarcerated. But they run their cartels and their gangs from within the walls of prison. And they're not getting in any more trouble. They're in trouble. They're there. They get all the benefits without having any of the hassles. And they send out all their orders outside the walls of prison. This will not be that. This isn't going to be like – Satan is in prison; but his minions are still out there; and there is going to be some communication that he is going to get messages out to them; and they're going to do his bidding. There will be no influence of Satan in any way, shape or form.

This is huge –

When Satan is incarcerated the will of Jesus will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven.

Does that excite you at all? You can't say that today!

I'm desperate for the will of God to be done in my own life as it is in Heaven – and I'm struggling bad.

I look at how much of my life is my will being done instead of his will being done.

There is coming a day when this whole world is going to be under the rule of Jesus.

Try to imagine the news.

What will the news be like with no crime, no political corruption, no racial conflicts, no wars?

What will the news look like? It will probably be like announcing babies being born. It's going to be incredible!

Third – We see the infinite contrast between the power of Satan and the power of Jesus.

Think about it – The powers of darkness could not seal the grave of Jesus. But when God locks up Satan, he is not only sealed with such power that he's utterly powerless to influence the world for a thousand years, he can't get out until he's released. The only way he gets out is God is going to release him. And, again, that's for our next study.

Fourth – Satan not only blinded the minds of individuals, he deceived nations.

The **Revised Version** translates **Ephesians 6:12** as – **“world rulers of the darkness of this world”**.

The stances of national governments against God, against his Word & Law, are all the result of Satanic deception.

The massive trends of nations towards Godlessness, idolatry, immorality are the result of Satan's deception.

Personal, corporate, national greed are the result of Satan's deception.

The god of this world is now in control of the world system.

Ephesians 2: “1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived...”

Now Jesus has paid the purchase price for the world.

Remember way early on in the book of **Revelation** the whole scene in Heaven is worshipping Jesus. They're saying, **“Worthy is the Lamb. You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power because you have redeemed us.”**

Remember when they were wondering who is worthy to take the scroll and to loose it. No one was found in Heaven or on Earth. And John was sobbing convulsively. And an angel came to him and said, *“Take courage, John, because the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed. And he is worthy to take the scroll and to loose the seals.”* And John turned, and he saw a Lamb as it had been slain.

Jesus purchased the world with his blood.

But he's not yet taken possession of that which he owns –

by right of creation,

and by right of redemption.

Jesus is going to do that, I believe, in the not too distant future.

At this moment Satan exercises usurped power.

He usurps authority in this world, in the individual, in communities, in cities, in states, in countries & around the globe.

He usurps authority by way of deception and fear. That's the only way he can rule.

He exercises his usurped power to rob, steal, kill and destroy.

But in the millennium the world will be under the authority of Jesus who is the rightful ruler of the earth –

by creation,

and by redemption.

It's going to be under the authority of Jesus who –

loves this world,

and laid down his life to redeem this world.

“4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.”

Now who sits on these thrones?

Perhaps it's the 24 elders representing the Church. We saw them in **Revelation 4:4**.

Perhaps it's the apostles.

Right next to verse 4 write **Luke 22:28-30**. Jesus says –

²⁸ You are those who have stayed with me in my trials,

²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,

³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Also there in the margin of your Bible write **Matthew 19:28** –

“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.”

This could be a reference to the company of the redeemed as a whole – **1 Corinthians 6:2, 3** –

“² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ...

³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? ...”

It says – **“⁴ ... to whom the authority to judge was committed.”**

Perhaps this is the judging of angels that we just read about in **1 Corinthians 6**.

More likely these are the saints ruling on and ruling over the earth.

“Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.”

I believe that this is not just speaking of or speaking to the tribulation saints.

I say that because of the promises made by Jesus to all believers.

In the margin of your Bible there write **Revelation 2:25-27**.

“²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”

You can also write **Revelation 3:21** in the margin of your Bible –

“²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

And then again **1 Corinthians 6:2, 3** – **“² do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ...”**

I think John makes specific mention to the tribulation saints here, not that he's implying that other believers will be left out. I believe he says it because this is a very special vindication for tribulation saints. They will have suffered as no preceding generation of saints has ever suffered. Whatever we know of persecution is going to pale in light of the persecution that believers will face during the great tribulation. And so God selects them for public triumph on the occasion of the establishment of his kingdom on the earth. And while these are specifically the tribulation martyrs, I believe they may just as well represent all Christians who have given their lives for their faith in Jesus.

“They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

These saints reigned with Jesus for the same period that Satan is bound – a thousand years. And they administrate (if you would) the kingdom of Jesus over the earth.

Now the big question is – Who will be on the earth during the millennium?

Well, even after the Church is taken out of the scene in the event known as the rapture, even after the sweeping cataclysmic judgments of the great tribulation, there is still going to be a large number of people left on the earth.

And tuck this away – The millennium – this thousand year reign of Jesus – It's sandwiched between two bookends of judgment.

You can draw a picture of this – write the millennium.

And on one side of it there is the judgment of the nations – **Matthew 25:31-45**.

“³¹ When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ⁴¹ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

At the close of the millennium is the great white throne judgment –

Revelation 20: “⁷ And when the thousand years are ended... ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books...”

So the millennium is sandwiched by two judgments.

These saints are going to govern those who, in the judgment of the nations, as we saw there in **Matthew 25**, are allowed into the millennial kingdom. Those surviving the great tribulation, and are permitted to enter the millennial kingdom, are going to enter it with natural bodies. They're going to build houses. They'll marry. They'll have children. And their children will outwardly conform to the Lord's righteous rule and forced righteousness on the earth. But not all of them are going to be truly born again as the millennium moves on. And this is really important to the remainder of the chapter. And it's going to have a lot to do with why Satan will be able to gather a great army of rebels at the close of the kingdom age in **Revelation 20:8**.

“They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

This is a reference to resurrection life, like the resurrection life of Jesus. I look at this, and I think, *‘I don't know how you can spiritualize this.’* People who have died in Christ or died for Christ cannot experience a spiritual resurrection. Again, some of my favourite commentaries are from **H. A. Ironside**. He was a Godly guy, a scholarly guy. But he just dove head first. He wrote, *“Of course this is a reference to spiritual resurrection not physical resurrection.”* And I'm thinking – How can somebody who has been made alive in Jesus be resurrected spiritually? You're alive in Jesus spiritually. You die spiritually after you've been made alive spiritually to be resurrected spiritually.

Every genuine believer becomes spiritually alive at the moment of conversion.

Ephesians 2: “⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

How do you resurrect that? That’s alive. And on top of that how can you within a single context have the mention of two resurrections – and the first resurrection is to be understood as spiritual, while the second resurrection is to be understood as literal – because the second resurrection has to do with people being resurrected – those who died outside of Christ, the unjust – they’ll be raised to stand before the great white throne judgment to be forever condemned into hell.

John Walvoord, in his commentary on the book of **Revelation**, quotes a man named **Henry Alford**, a very famous Greek scholar – *“Alford writes pointedly – so these are Alford’s words now – ‘Those who lived next to the apostles and the whole Church for three hundred years understood them in the plain literal sense. And it is a strange sight in these days – Alford was writing in 1860 – to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus which primitive antiquity presents. As regards to the text itself no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If in a passage, where two resurrections are mentioned, if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave then there is an end of all significance in language; and Scripture is wiped out as the definite testimony to anything. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hearty enough to maintain. But if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors I do maintain and receive as an article of faith and hope.’”* That’s big stuff – heavy stuff!

“⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”

So there’s a huge detail introduced by way of this contrast that John sets up between verse 4 and verse 5. One thousand years separate the resurrection of the tribulation saints from the resurrection of the unjust – those who died outside of faith.

And this is critical – John calls the resurrection of those tribulation saints – **“the first resurrection”**.

So we’ll close with a question.

In what sense can the saints in the opening verses be labelled **“the first resurrection”**?

How do we understand that? What does that mean – **“the first resurrection”**?

So Lord willing we will answer that question in our next study.

And then we will also in our next study see the Bible prove once and for all that the problem with man is man.

And we will see the Bible prove once and for all the incurable wickedness of Satan.

And we will see the Bible demonstrate once and for all the righteousness of eternal punishment.

Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for this time in your Word. Lord, it’s weighty stuff; it’s glorious stuff. The prospects for this planet upon your return are staggering. And I pray that when the Scriptures speak of how great a salvation we have that we would see that it’s not just one soul saved, but it’s what’s you’re saving in coming back to this world and establishing your rule upon this world and your rule here for a thousand years that is utterly void of the influence of Satan, the monster incarcerated, the deceiver, the adversary, the diabolical one shut up, locked up, a world without his influence, that saints, every believing man and woman will be a part of the governance of your millennial rule. It’s mind-blowing, Lord. I pray that as we’ve talked about the trajectory of this world, that if there is one person who needs to give their life to Jesus, Jesus who has claim to them as Creator and Redeemer, that they would see that he is mighty to save, to take us out of the domain of death and darkness, out from under the rule, the influence, the usurped authority of the devil, a life driven by, governed by lies, death and darkness, and that you would save them and put them into the kingdom of life and light that you reign, and that one day they could be a part of your kingdom on this earth and ultimately forever in a new heaven and a new earth be with you.