

The Millennium

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[0 : 00] Good to see you. We're going to, with God's help, understand this passage because it is understandable. God doesn't put anything in his word for us to be confused about and not to understand and for it not to say something important to us, which this chapter definitely does.

Alright, well before we look at the Bible this morning, we're going to look at some pictures. So, first picture up on screen please. This is a painting by Monet. Who's seen it before?

Okay. It's a particular type of art. It's called Impressionism and it was called Sunrise, or in French. Its name is Sunrise. And Monet was one of the great Impressionist artists and what he did is he painted these paintings which reflected a particular feeling that he was feeling at a particular moment in time.

The impression that he got from that sunrise. He was trying to capture that moment so that you, as the observer, can feel that with him and experience that moment with him. And that's really the point of Impressionism. As you can see, it's a particular artwork which doesn't give you the details, but it rather gives you the impression of how you're meant to feel.

Let's look at the next type of picture. This is a very different form of artwork. It's the portrait of Napoleon by Jacques-Louis David. Now, that's not Impressionism. That's what's called realist or neoclassical art. And the point of that is to give you an accurate depiction of the subject.

[1 : 33] He wanted you, hundreds of years later, to know what Napoleon looked like. So, they didn't have photographs and cameras in those days and so they had these artists who could paint really accurate depictions of their subject.

And so, that's what he did so that we, even centuries later, can have a pretty good idea of what Napoleon looked like. And then we've got another type of art. This is a technical diagram of selected engine parts.

And the purpose of that is not to make you feel a particular way so much as to give you a very reliable and accurate description that you can use when you're putting an engine together or taking an engine apart.

Now, the Bible has various types of writings. And we've come across that. The Psalms, the different letters of the apostles, prophecies and things like that.

And when we look at the Bible, we've got to understand the types of writings that we're coming across. So, with these three different types of art, next picture, we look at those in a different way, just as we do when we're coming to different books of the Bible.

[2 : 43] So, for example, the Psalms, the Psalms are like Impressionist paintings. They give us a particular moment in time of the Psalmist and he wants you to experience his emotions.

And so, he writes from his perspective at a particular moment in time, just like Monet painted the sunrise. Whereas, we've got other parts of the Bible, like the Gospels, the historical records of Jesus.

And they're more realist. They're meant to give you an accurate depiction of the history and the life of Jesus, so that we know what actually happened all these centuries later.

And then you've got the writings of the apostles, and they're kind of like technical diagrams, that they show you how all these doctrines and these things we learn in Scripture fit together, so you don't make a mistake about them.

Now, when we come to Revelation, we've got to ask, well, what type of art is that? And I think Revelation is more like this. Okay, this is a painting by Pablo Picasso of his wife, Jacqueline.

[3 : 49] Boys and girls, do you think that's what his wife actually looked like? No. It's an art form called Cubism. It's a very interesting art form. He was one of the pioneers of it.

And the point of Cubism is to give you a subject from different perspectives, and it's not, it's definitely not meant to depict reality. So, the artist, one thing he's not doing is trying to say this is what the subject actually looks like, but he's wanting you to see a perspective in the way he depicts that subject that you wouldn't have otherwise got if you had just looked at that subject.

And I think here, I mean, I don't know what he's saying. You can probably scratch your heads and try to interpret the art. But he might be saying his wife has two different sides to her, a kind of a dark side and a good side.

I don't know, you're going to have to ask him if we ever get a chance. But you see the point of this type of artwork. It's not there to tell you what the subject actually looks like, but it's there to give you a perspective you wouldn't normally see.

Well, that's exactly what Revelation is here to do. Revelation gives us a selection, a series of these graphical pictures that are not meant to describe reality.

[5 : 06] We're not meant to try and map them out to particular times in history and say that equals that, and, you know, the trouble in the Middle East must be a fulfillment of this part of Revelation.

That's not how we're meant to read Revelation. That was never the point. If we're asking questions like that of how does this map out to a particular year in history, we're asking the wrong questions because that's not what it's given to us for.

The pictures in Revelation are given to us in order for us to see history from a perspective we wouldn't have otherwise seen it if we were just reading history books. Okay.

We've got to understand that, especially as we come to this chapter in Revelation 20, because this chapter is possibly one of the most controversial parts of Revelation, and it's got all these different interpretations.

And I think if we're going to get it right, which is possible to do, because it is quite clear actually what it's talking about, we need to understand that Revelation is given to us in this impressionistic kind of art, and what we're going to do this morning is we're going to walk through the art gallery that John paints for us.

[6 : 15] There's four particular paintings we're going to look at that are depicted here for us in Revelation. We're going to walk through this art gallery, and as we look at each of these pictures, we're going to stop and ask ourselves, what impression does this give me?

What am I meant to feel as I look at this particular picture? And how do I then see reality from a different perspective that John the artist wants me to see?

Okay, that's what we're going to do this morning. Everybody with me? Everybody understand?

Well, let's go for it. Let's look at the first painting, the first picture we're given, and that picture is the picture of a dragon that is bound.

Look with me at Revelation 20, verse 1 to 3. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key to the abyss, and a great chain in his hand.

He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed.

[7 : 23] After that, he must be released for a short time. Okay, so this is the first piece of artwork we are stopping in our tour of the art gallery.

And we're all standing in front of this piece of artwork, this picture, and we're looking at it. And what we see is a great evil figure being thrown into prison.

Okay, we've come across this dragon before, and this great dragon is now being thrown into prison. The only other time that Satan is described in these terms here in verse 2, look how he's described, the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, the dragon, the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, the only other time that label with those four names is given to him is back in Revelation 12. Now, we've already read that. You might remember it. Revelation 12, verse 9. John writes, So the dragon was thrown out of heaven after this battle with Michael.

Remember? The angel. So again, there's an angel. Again, there's the dragon, and he's described exactly the same way. The ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world.

[8 : 38] He was thrown down to the earth. See, John is very carefully connecting this passage in Revelation 20 with the passage we've already read in Revelation 12 a number of weeks ago.

What he's saying is that this is the same thing. He's giving us a different picture of the same event so we can see it from a different perspective.

Just like Picasso gave us two different perspectives of his wife in the same picture. Well, here John is giving us, he's rewinding, he's recapping what has happened to the devil that we've already read. What has happened to this underlying power of evil. And what we read about him in chapter 12. Now we're reading the same thing from a different perspective. Remember what happened in chapter 12?

The devil lost his power. Satan was thrown from heaven and he lost his power to accuse. Do you remember why? Because Jesus died on the cross for the sins of his people.

[9 : 43] And the moment Jesus did that, the moment Jesus died on the cross and all the sins of those who trust in him were taken on him and off of those people so that they could be washed clean of their sin.

When Jesus took sin on himself, which is a unique event in all of history, Satan lost his power in heaven to accuse the saints, to accuse the people of God because of the gospel.

But now, Revelation 20, we're reading the same event from a different perspective because what we're discovering now, now is the time in Revelation which John wants to tell us something more about what Jesus achieved when Jesus came to earth.

Not just in his death, but in his resurrection and in his ascension to heaven, which we just celebrated this week, remember? And what John is wanting to tell us in this piece of artwork that he's now giving us is not only has Satan lost his power to accuse, but because of what Jesus did in his resurrection and ascension, Satan has now lost his power to deceive the nations.

Do you remember Mark 3? I'll put it up on screen. Remember when Jesus says these words? Mark 3, verse 27.

[11 : 04] But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man, then he can plunder his house. Was Jesus giving thieves some tips on how to do their thievery?

No. Jesus was describing what he has come on earth to do. He has come to earth, Jesus was saying, to bind Satan's power to deceive the nations so that the true God and his plan of salvation can be made known not just in Israel but all around the world.

That is what Jesus came to do, and that is what he made possible through his resurrection and his ascension and his sending down of the Holy Spirit. He has made it possible to bind Satan, to limit his power to deceive people so that for the first time in history, people can actually know the truth about God and not just people in where Jesus was, but people internationally.

You see this? What we're reading in Revelation 20 is talking about now. It's talking about what Jesus has made possible in this age now, not sometime in the future.

Do you see that? And that is the first picture, the picture of Satan bound just like Jesus said he would be because of what Jesus achieved.

[12 : 25] But then we read another picture. So let's go on and see the second picture in this art gallery that John is taking us through. Look at Revelation 20 from verse 4.

This is the picture of the saints reigning. Then I saw thrones and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the Word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and they will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Okay, so we've moved on in our tour through this art gallery. We've now come to look at this second picture, this picture of God's people reigning, dead Christians rising and ruling with Jesus.

[13 : 38] For a thousand years. Now what is this thousand years? You've probably heard about the millennium before. This is one of the biggest areas of controversy and revelation. Many people believe that it's talking about a literal thousand years that's still to come in the future, either before or after Jesus comes back, where Christians and the church will rule in the world.

But we've already seen from the last picture that the thousand years, this period, is actually talking about now. It's talking about the age we're in now.

We also know that in Revelation, numbers are symbolic, right? Remember 144,000, 666, 1,260 days, three and a half years. Those are all symbolic numbers.

Every number we've come across in Revelation so far is symbolic, including this one. It's not a literal picture. It's not meant to give us a painting that actually describes our history or particular time in the future.

It's meant to give us an impression that we're meant to get. And it's talking about a long time where God's presence will be at work in His world, an age where God's presence is here with us.

[14:46] Because one of the technical details in using numbers in Revelation is that if you cube anything, any number cubed mathematically, pretty much depicts the cube of the temple, which is God's presence.

And this thousand is ten cubed. So, it's most likely that the thousand is a symbolic, long period of time that is referring to a time when God's presence is going to be here on earth in a very special way.

And during that time, this picture tells us, the saints will be reigning. How will they be reigning? It tells us in verse 4, through their testimony.

Those who had not accepted the mark of the beast. And those who didn't worship the beast. And those who were persecuted because of their testimony about Jesus.

So, it says, Christians testify that they reign. That's what this passage, that's what this picture is telling us. In other words, in this age, instead of Satan having power to keep the nations in the dark like he once had, the church now wields power to bring truth to the nations because God's presence is here on earth in his church.

[16:10] That's what this picture is telling us. That's why John writes in his letters, in 1 John, he writes these words to encourage Christians facing trials.

He writes, I've written to you, young men, because you are strong. God's word remains in you and you have conquered the evil one. Already.

Do you notice the past tense? He's writing to Christians who are suffering trials and he says, you've already conquered through the word of your testimony, the word that remains in you. Christians reign in this age by making God's word known and Satan can do very little to stop them.

Try as he might. Now where do they get this power to reign and to conquer Satan? Go back to Revelation 20 because it tells us they get this power from the first resurrection.

Look at verse 6. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection the second death has no power over them but they will be priests of God and of Christ and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

[17:20] The second death of course we see later is the consequence of sin for those whose sins have not been paid for and this is talking about all who have no power by the second death.

All Christians, all who trust in Christ, they share in the first resurrection which is the first resurrection that happened? Jesus' resurrection. The first true resurrection into new resurrection life and what this is saying, what this verse is saying is that Jesus' resurrection gives power to the church.

They share in that resurrection power to do their work in the world. Do you remember if you were at our Ascension Day service, we looked at Ephesians 1. What does Ephesians 1 say? It says the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now given to the church and God is wielding His resurrection power through the church today in this age.

And as we use that power that is given to us through the Holy Spirit, the power of being able to share God's Word, make it make sense and for it to do work in people's life and change people's lives and change communities, as we use that power and people come to faith, we are ransacking Satan's house.

Now, Satan's trying to stop that. He's frustrated that we're ransacking his house and he's sitting in prison like some gangster sending out his agents, communicating to the people on the outside, sending his henchmen to try to stop us.

[18:58] But there's only so much he can do. The beasts, his henchmen, do come and the societies and the ungodly worldviews and all those things that throughout the ages have tried to undermine the church and its message and its work try to stop us.

And the beasts do kill many of the saints. But one thing they can't do is shut them up. And no matter how much Satan tries to send his henchmen, he can't destroy the church.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter? On this rock I build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And that's what we're seeing here in Revelation in these pictures. Okay, so having seen these two pictures now, the question is, like we're supposed to ask as we're looking at these artworks.

You know, you're walking through this art gallery and you're meant to go, okay, what impression am I meant to get from that as I look at these pictures? How do they make me feel?

How do these pictures make you feel? Well, I think excitement. Hey? Makes me feel excited that we're living in an age where God is growing His kingdom and evil can do very little to stop that.

[20 : 13] That's exciting. And responsibility. I feel responsibility, don't you? Not to waste our time in this age that we've been given.

This thousand year period where God's presence is at work working powerfully through the first resurrection in His church and the saints are reigning responsibility to make hay while the sun shines.

To use the opportunity we have to get involved in the work of making truth known while we still can. And it's also an age of opportunity for you if you do not know the truth yet to know the truth through God's word through His church while that's still available because let me tell you that opportunity will not last forever because Satan won't be bound forever.

And that is the next picture we see in our tour of this gallery. The next picture is the release of the dragon from verse 7.

Follow with me in your Bibles. Revelation 20 verse 7. When the thousand years are completed Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth Gog and Magog to gather them for battle their number is like the sand of the sea they come up across the breadth of the earth and surround the encampment of the saints the beloved city then fire came down from heaven and consumed them the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

[21 : 58] Okay so we've come now to this picture. The first two pictures were encouraging but now we see this dragon is released. This picture paints the impression of a time where once he's released this opportunity to know truth is over and here when he's released the sides are set and whoever's not in God's kingdom is against it.

That's the picture that is painted here. Now the question of course that I certainly have coming to this passage is well why does God let Satan out? Why doesn't he just keep him locked up?

Right? Well the answer is actually in the Old Testament as most answers are from Revelation or the questions that Revelation gives us.

You don't have to turn there but the Old Testament passage we read some of it earlier that describes what's going on here and mentions Gog and Magog and helps us to understand what that all is about is in Revelation sorry not Revelation Ezekiel 37 to 39 and what we read in Ezekiel is a prophecy about the future time when the nations of the world would gather against God where everybody not in his kingdom would suddenly vehemently and violently turn against God's people and God's kingdom and they would be led by this symbolic ruler called Gog but the fascinating thing about Ezekiel and that prophecy is that God is in control of it all God allows it I'm going to read from Ezekiel 38 verse 16 says these words it will happen in the last days Gog that I this is God talking I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know me when I show myself holy through you in their sight and so God is actually using the gathering of the nations against him to show himself holy when he judges them all at once the gathering actually makes

God's job easier it's exactly what Revelation 20 verse 9 says will happen they come across the breadth of the earth and surround the encampment of the saints the beloved city then fire came down from heaven and consumed them it's again another description of the battle of Armageddon where they don't even get a chance to fight it reminds me actually of when we're camping how we get rid of mozzies before we go to sleep because when we're camping especially in summer and the sun goes down and there's a light in our tent all the mozzies you know what they do they find whatever opening they can and they get into the tent and so when we get into the tent ready to go to sleep we just hear all over but what the mozzies don't realize they think they're getting ready for a nice feast right what they don't realize is that we let them into the tent because what they don't

realize is we have a zapper you know the zapper those like tennis racket looking things you know what I'm talking about that they zap insects and we let those mozzies come into the tent and then just before bed we get into the tent we close the zip so there's no escape and we put on the zapper and they're all gathered around the light they're all dead we just judge them all at once and that's what God does to his enemies he lets his enemies gather against the church so that when he does judge them all together all those who survive will worship and glorify God all the more for rightly and justly taking down all evil once and for all now that's the picture we get as we look at it in this gallery how does that make you feel how does what impression does that picture give you safe

[26 : 32] I feel safe hey when I look at that picture God is in control of the worst evil he is in control and it's all going according to his plan even when he allows evil to grow and so we don't need to fear even when evil looks to be getting worse and worse in our world because it will and the Bible tells us it will get worse but God allows that every step of the way so that his judgment when it comes will be perfect at the perfect time and it will be right and it will be just and everybody will see that and that's the third picture we get but there's one last picture because having shown God's ultimate judgment over evil and that he is the ultimate judge over all evil his attention now turns to humanity itself in the final picture in this chapter and that is the picture of the books being opened let's read from verse 11 then I saw a great white throne and one seated on it earth and heaven fled from his presence and no place was found for them

I also saw the dead the great and small standing before the throne and books were opened another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books then the sea gave up the dead that were in it and death in Hades gave up the dead that were in them each one was judged according to their works death in Hades were thrown into the lake of fire this is the second death the lake of fire and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire okay so this is the fourth picture in our gallery and we're looking at and we're seeing this courtroom scene this great cosmic judgment this holy courtroom where all people who have ever lived are resurrected to stand trial and everything they've ever done has been recorded and written down in these books now many religions actually have this idea of your deeds being recorded so for Muslims the general idea is you've got one angel sitting on your one shoulder who's recording all your bad deeds in a book and you've got another angel sitting on your other shoulder who's recording all your good deeds in a book and at the end of the age the books are going to be weighed to determine to determine to determine your fate see which book has got more stuff in it that's how the Muslim worldview works except we see something different in this vision in this picture that John paints for us in Holy Scripture because in this vision all the books can ever do is condemn you did you notice that the books where your deeds are written down they can't they can't compensate your good deeds can't compensate for your bad deeds because the books show you without the shadow of a doubt to be a rebel against God and no amount of good deeds are going to make up for the sins that you've committed in your life these books can only condemn and that's why thankfully there's another book did you see it verse 8 no sorry not verse 8 verse 12 the book the book of life another book was opened which is the book of life just before the judgment happens another book is opened the book of life we've come across in revelation before so if you page back to revelation 13 8 look what it's called there revelation 13 verse 8 it's called the book of life of the lamb who was slain the book of life of the lamb who was slain it's a book that lists the names of all who have trusted in that slain lamb and what his death did for them and all who have held their testimony about the lamb to death all who have conquered all who have overcome by holding on to the testimony of Jesus and trusting in them for their life those are whose names are written in the book of life and no matter what's written in the other books if a person's name is in that book they are safe because the sins in the other books are paid for because of what Jesus did on the cross that's the picture how does that make you feel what impression do you get when you look at that picture well I feel a little scared that everything is recorded right there's a lot I don't want recorded but it's all written down there's nothing you can hide in your life from God who sees all and there's nothing that will be swept under the carpet nothing but also at the same time there's a satisfying feeling of justice that everybody in history who has seemed to have gotten away with their crimes they haven't gotten away because all evil will be rightly judged all evil will have its day in court even if it didn't in this age it will and that's satisfying isn't it it's satisfying to know that perfect justice will be done but then as I look at that picture and I see that other book

I feel a deep deep sense of relief for all who believe in Christ that there is this other book and that the blood of Jesus covers all of the sins in those other books my name is found in the book of life through what Jesus did and so now let's step back and let's look at all these pictures one last time the picture of the bound dragon the picture of the ruling saints the picture of the dragon released and the picture of the final day of judgment when you take all these pictures together what impression do they leave you with what feeling do you get well I think it leaves us with the responsibility of knowing that that day will certainly come and therefore to help others around us while we still can to have their name found in the book of life too while Satan is still bound let's make hay while the sun shines let's take our opportunity because he won't be bound forever let's not waste our time but get to the work that

God has given us to do you no matter who you are can be involved in that work too and to know how well that's what we're going to be covering next week in our AVM to know how each one of us will be involved in this work of doing God's work with the resurrection power he's given us while this age still gives us the opportunity to do that and so let's pray that God will help us to be involved Lord we thank you for the clarity you give us in scripture as we read it in context as we read it in light of everything else you've revealed to us we thank you for the different ways that you make truth known we thank you for these important pictures that you've given us not to map out particular points in history but to give us a different perspective on the age we live in and Lord may these pictures that you've given us this morning inspire us to use the opportunities you give us each and every day and to realize the power that is at work within us as the church to do your work in light of the day to come help us not to waste our time in

[35 : 00] Jesus name Amen finding out Thank you.