

Revelation 20:1-6
Victory Then, Now, and Forever.

For all the Detroit Lions fans out there, I'll apologize ahead of time for bringing this moment back into your lives, but I promise I have a point larger than you're your suffering. The professional football team I cheer for (the Packers) was losing to the professional team my wife and most of you cheer for. It was 23-21 on the last play in the fourth quarter. 60 yards to go. One final heave was all there was time for. And as the snap approached, there was no doubt in my mind. As the play developed, I never once wavered in my conviction. As the ball sailed high in the air, I was 100 percent sure it was going to be caught. You're saying, yeah sure. But honestly, it's true. You know why? Because this was a couple of weeks ago and I was watching a replay. I already knew what was going to happen.

You've done that before haven't you? Watched a replay or reread a book or rewatched an episode or movie that simply brings you joy. Now, you're not getting the suspense the second time around. Kadie and I (though she'd like to forget it) were actually at that Lions-Packers. I remember the sinking feeling of my team struggling all game. I remember the frustration. I remember being berated by a couple of Lions fans in the bathroom at halftime. I remember NOT thinking the last play would amount to much of anything until it did. But on replay all that's gone. There's just the joy of experiencing what you already know to be true.

Friends, that was just a meaningfully football game. What if we could do the same in life? What if we already knew what was going to be? That is exactly why God gave us the book of Revelation. No, it doesn't cover ever uncertain moment in your life. It doesn't tell you which job to take or when you'll find a spouse or how the market will look in a week or a year. But it gives us the big picture. It gives us the confidence of knowing how all of this is going to play out. It tells us that Jesus has won, is winning, and will win all the way into eternity. God reveals these truths to give us comfort. To calm our fears. To take away all the suspense of wondering and instead to give us the confidence to know that the victory is his and the victory is our, then, now, and forever.

So as we dig into the vision given to the apostle John in Revelation 20, let start by identifying some of the details of this vision so we can make sense of it all.

First the angel. The angel is Jesus. Now we wouldn't normally call Jesus an angel, but here's why we know this is him. In chapter one, Jesus is described as holding the keys to Hades, or Hell, or here the Abyss. This angel is the one who defeats Satan, which is fitting only of Jesus. And finally, even through we hear "angel" and think of an specific class of spiritual beings, the word itself just means messenger... which is certainly fitting of Jesus. In fact, in the Old Testament, the preincarnate Christ is often called the Angel of the LORD. So the angel is Jesus.

The abyss, as I mentioned, is Hell. That deep, nearly bottomless pit of darkness which Jesus alone has control to open and close.

The dragon, as John tells us, is the Devil or Satan, using both his main titles which mean the “accuser” and the “enemy” respectively.

The thousand years is a symbolic number. Many Christians make a mess of these sections of Scripture because they miss the symbolism. It’s the number 10, the number of completeness, cubed. Three times over...which is a way to emphasize its symbolism. It’s a number that means this is the period of time which God in his wisdom has set as the certain and complete amount of time in which these things will take place. And when we see that the thousand years runs from the time Jesus defeats Satan in v. 2 to the time of the end, we understand that this number is symbolic of the full number of days God in his wisdom has ordained for life to continue after Jesus’ victory until judgment day.

Ok, we’ve set the scene. So what did John see and what does it mean for you and for me?

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years, ³threw him into the abyss, locked it, and set a seal on it, so that he could no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years come to an end.

What John saw first was a dramatic reenactment of what took place on Good Friday and Easter and Pentecost. He saw Jesus, the angel taking a great chain and locking up the dragon. Binding him **so that he could no longer deceive the nations**. John saw Jesus taking away the dragons chief weapon against the people of the this world.

Already starting from the very beginning in the garden, deception was the name of the game for the serpent. Did God really say? As Satan, as the enemy, he’s ready to undermine God with whatever deception he can think of. God’s way is boring. Don’t bother. God’s way is no fun. Enjoy yourself. God’s way is unfair. Why shouldn’t you get what you want. God’s way is holding you back. Be what you want and get what you want. Deception after deception. And then you know what he does after he tempts us to stray from the path of God? He puts on his Devil hat, the accuser, and says, how could you? More deception. God could never love someone like you. You’re the worst.

The work of Jesus and the gospel message which proclaims that work has bound up the dragon and his deceptions. To sinners who have been led to think that God could never love them...that they are too lost...too unredeemable...they meet his Son. The one the Father send BECAUSE he loved them. And they here Jesus say, “Paid in

full!” “It is finished.” The price has been paid, completely! And the dragons deceptions fizzle away.

To sinners who hear those temptations...God’s way are no good...the Father shows them his Son. The one whose gospel empowers us to see love in every action God makes for our benefit. Whose gospel empowers us to see the freedom and fullness of life in God’s way. Not a burden but a joy. And the dragons deceptions fizzle away.

Friends since the day Jesus finished his work...since the day he sent out his people as his witnesses with the gospel, the dragon has been bound and locked up, stripped of his dominion over helpless sinners.

But that doesn’t mean he can’t do harm. One church teacher said we should think of the dragon here like a ferocious dog chained in the yard. Stay outside the circumference of the chain and you’re fine. But venture in and you’re in trouble.

Satan has no power over us...unless we let him. Unless we push the gospel out of our hearts when temptation comes calling and those deceptions once again start to hit their mark. No power unless we push the gospel out of our hearts when the accusations come after our sinful straying...and the begin to believe the lie.

That’s why God encourages you...why I encourage you...why your parents encourage you...to be in the Word. To let the gospel...the message of Christ and his work...that chain that holds the dragon at bay...to let the gospel fill your heart and your life. To give comfort for sins committed. To hear the “it is finished” when Satan accuses us. And to give power to see the joy and freedom in a life lived for Christ...not believing the lie of what we’re missing, but celebrating a life of God ordained good.

Stay out of the dragon’s pen. Stay in the Word instead.

But then John threw in a detail that troubles us. After all that talk of victory he wrote **After this he must be released for a short time.** Now don’t think of this as Jesus letting go of the chain or God intentionally letting Satan go just for fun. Remember, the chain that holds Satan back is the gospel, the message of Christ’s completed work of salvation. Well this time of the dragons release is describing a time near the end of the world when the gospel will be so thoroughly and routinely rejected that the dragon will run rampant in this world. Jesus described it as a time where all would fall away if it weren’t for the preserving hand of God in keeping them in faith.

Are we in that time? Sure feels like in on certain days doesn’t it? Luther thought it was his day as well. I don’t know when that time will come. All I know is that as we see more and more people openly rejecting the gospel...as we hear more and more people mocking it...as we find more and more direct challenges to the clear truths of God’s Word, we shouldn’t be surprised. God tells us it will happen.

But we need not fret or become fearful. Because listen to what John saw next. **Then** (after seeing the dragon released) **I saw thrones, and those who were sitting on them were given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast and his image, and they did not receive his mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** ⁵(The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years came to an end.) **This is the first resurrection.**

We already talked about the 1000 years. Remember, that whole period of time from Christ's first coming to his second. So what did John see? He saw those reigned with Christ because they had taken part in the first resurrection. This is not a physical resurrection. It's your first resurrection. Your spiritual resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life. When God came to you, personally, for many of you at the waters of your baptism, his gospel brought you to spiritual life. He spoke to you and said, the work of my son is FOR YOU. For YOUR sins. For YOUR salvation. You are my child. All those who have been brought to life, reign with Christ.

Whether those ancient martyrs or modern day martyrs who've faced the executioners sword for their faith...whether those who've faced persecution for preaching the Word...whether those who've had to go through the tribulations of this world facing the dragons and his workers, the beasts who seek to lead us astray...all of those who have had a part in the first resurrection reign with Christ. Reign with him in heaven. Yes, reign with him even on earth.

Even when it doesn't feel like victory, we are reigning. You know why? John says it. **Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.** We are reigning because no matter what this world does to us or says to us or throws at us, we have a promise through Christ that eternal life is our. **Instead they will be priests of God and of Christ.** We are reigning because no matter how difficult life gets, we have the privilege and the calling of representing God to a world increasing lost in their sins. We have the privilege of holding forth Christ as the answer to the deceptions of Satan. We are priests who boldly serve our God now and forever. **And they will reign with him for a thousand years.**

It can be scary looking at the world out there....looking at where our society is heading...looking at the state of visible churches...but remember that you already know how this all ends. So fear not. Because Jesus wins. And his victory is our victory. Thanks be to God. Amen.