

SUMMER 3 - Glimpses of Glory

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] Our God, we thank you that you are sovereign over this world and over the universe.

We thank you that you are a mighty God and that your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is coming again in triumph. We pray, our God, that as we study these chapters from your word tonight, that you will increase within us the faith of his coming again, stir us up to be ready to meet him, fill us with urgent zeal to be about your business on this earth, and set our minds in heaven, there to worship you and sing your praise. Amen.

Amen. Over the last two weeks we've seen some visions of the final judgment.

In the earlier chapters of the book of Revelation, the visions pertain mainly to not the final judgment, but warnings. Judgment, yes, but warnings of the final judgment.

But now in these last chapters, the judgment visions that we're looking at pertain to the end of world history. No longer is there the second chance or the warning giving people an opportunity to change or repent.

[1 : 3 5] Last week we saw, in particular, a vision of Babylon. The city, yes, but called a prostitute. Personifying and characterizing all that is godless and evil in our world.

And now at the beginning of chapter 19, comes a song of praise at the fall of Babylon. At God's justice. So the chapter begins after this.

That is, after hearing about the fall of Babylon and the voices bewailing the fall of Babylon, if you remember back to last week, those who had lost their wealth through her fall. After this, John heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting, Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! You'll be surprised, perhaps, to learn, only occurs four times in the New Testament. A word that we think is so common.

It's common in the Old Testament. It's a Hebrew word. Meaning, praise Yahweh. Hallelujah is to praise. And Yah is a shortened form of Yahweh, the name of God in the Old Testament.

[2 : 4 2] Most of our Bibles usually put in the word Lord at that point in capital letters. Only occurs four times in the whole of the New Testament. And all four are in this chapter, at the beginning of chapter 19.

So they're singing praise to the God of the Old Testament, who is, after all, our God as well, the God of the New Testament. Salvation, glory and power. Three things attributed to God.

Often, in the Bible, you get threes or sevens listed together as things attributed to God in praise of God. If you remember back far enough, in chapters 4 and 5, that occurred to God and to the Lamb.

The reason for singing hallelujah here is because God's judgments are true and just. These are people singing praise to God for his justice in bringing down the evil prostitute Babylon, as personified in the previous chapter or two.

He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. And you remember that that's not talking so much about physical sexual sin, so much as immorality generally and certainly idolatry, the worship of other gods.

[3 : 52] He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. Way back in chapter 6, the martyred Christians, the servants of the Lord, who'd lost their lives because of their faith in Jesus Christ, had cried out to God from the altar, how long?

And here, now, their prayer has been answered. God has brought about vindication of them and brought down those who persecuted them. And again, they shouted, this multitude in heaven, hallelujah, the smoke from her goes up forever and ever.

That is, the smoke of Babylon destroyed the fallen city and so on. We might think it's a touch bloodthirsty in a way. But as I mentioned last week, it's really singing about God's justice rather than gloating so much over the death or destruction of evil people.

In the end, this is acknowledging that God is triumphant over evil, that God's justice will in the end prevail, even if now in this world we, along with those martyrs, cry out, how long, oh God?

This also recognizes that there is no escaping judgment in the Bible. So often, Christian theories of modern times try to espouse a Christianity without judgment, as though God's love means the impossibility of judgment or anger.

[5 : 23] But none of those work. The Bible, from beginning to end, acknowledges that God is a God of justice and judgment. And it is never the case in the Bible, in any part of the Bible, let alone the whole Bible put together, that there is a hint of all people of any generation or race all being saved willy-nilly.

God's justice and judgment will come at the end. And those who've chosen to live lives without God now, rejected the Lord Jesus Christ now, lived lives of immorality and idolatry now, will face the judgment seat of God and be found wanting.

The 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God. This takes us back into the throne room of heaven, where we began last year's series in chapters 4 and 5.

The 24 elders, probably signifying a combination of Old and New Testaments, 12 tribes, 12 apostles, but not meaning so much the leaders of those groups, but just a number to indicate the totality of God's people being represented here, Old and New Testaments.

And the four living creatures, representing in part creation itself, fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried, Amen, Hallelujah, the third time that the word Hallelujah has occurred.

[6 : 47] Then a voice came from the throne, God himself speaking here. Yet he says, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great.

Perhaps this voice from the throne itself is the Lamb, the Son of God, exhorting the creation and the people to praise God and God the Father.

And it's an invitation to every servant, small or great, not just the famous ones who will be there, but all of us who are Christians, whether with reputations or not. We are all summoned and gathered together here to praise our God as one.

Well, that snippet, if you like, is of praise because God's justice has brought down the destructive Babylon, as we saw last week. But praise in heaven continues in the next paragraph.

This time it's praise because it's ready, it's time now for the marriage feast of the Lamb. Again, John hears. This time a multitude again, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder.

- [7 : 59] It's hard to quite imagine the sounds that John hears sometimes. And again, they shout hallelujah, the fourth and final time that that word occurs.
- For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, as indeed we have just sung those very words. But that song, that chorus that we've sung, leaves out the reason for saying, let us give praise to God.
- The reason that's given here is for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. The Lamb, of course, is Jesus Christ.
- He appeared way back in chapter 5 as the one, the only one, who is worthy to open the scroll. And indeed, everything that's happened in Revelation since then has been a result of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, opening that scroll in heaven.
- Reminds us again that everything that has happened in the book of Revelation is under the authority of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. He is the one who instigates it or brings it forth.
- [9 : 09] In the previous chapter, we had a prostitute, but now it's a bride and a bridegroom. I think there's a contrast meant to be painted. Last time we saw the city, Babylon, the apostate city, but next week we'll see the holy city, Jerusalem.
- So there's a double parallel going on. What was Babylon? A city and a prostitute. We now find the real bride, if you like, the real woman being the church and God's people of every age.
- And the next week we see the real city being the heavenly Jerusalem come down from heaven from God. The idea of God's people, the church, being the bride of the Lamb, because that's what it's talking about here, is one that runs through the Old Testament as well as in the New.
- For example, back in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets, Hosea, you may know, was a prophet in about the 8th century BC, a contemporary of Amos. And Hosea was called by God to marry a harlot.
- It was a difficult marriage, you can imagine. But the difficulty of that marriage was meant to symbolise in a vivid way for God's people that God himself had betrothed himself, if you like, to a harlot of a person in Israel, the nation.
- [10 : 27] That is, God's people were playing the harlot with him. They were going after other gods and engaging in idolatry rather than in faithful worship of God. But Hosea wasn't the only one who spoke in terms of God and Israel's relationship as being like husband and wife.
- Jeremiah the same, Isaiah 54 the same, Ezekiel hints at it as well in some early chapters, and there are other glimpses in the Old Testament. That is, it wasn't an uncommon idea to think in terms of God's people being married to God himself.
- It's an extraordinary metaphor or image to use, really, when you think about it. That God, the holy God, should in some way consider his people on earth to be in a marriage relationship with him.
- And yet, it expresses something of the extraordinary love and grace of God. It expresses something about his commitment to us, a sort of monogamous commitment, if you like, to us.
- That he's so committed to his people, he will not let them go in any age, even though from time to time and indeed in many times, God's own people are unfaithful to God.
- [11 : 40] The word that's used of God's love for his people in the Old Testament is a Hebrew word, hesed, because it's not here in this passage, but it's a word that denotes this steadfast, loyal love.
- And marriage is probably the best human institution that typifies that. Well, good marriages, I mean. The idea of God's people being married to God is one that's carried over into the New Testament.

Jesus tells a parable about the bride and the groom and the feast and so on. At 2 Corinthians 11, Paul has a similar idea. In Ephesians 5, perhaps the best-known place, words that are often used at a wedding, usually only of Christian couples these days because it seems to be a bit sort of, the women don't quite have the same equality of role as the men, so usually people don't like that reading, but the point of it is that it's saying that the relationship between a husband and a wife is the relationship between God and God's people.

There's a similarity or parallel between them. It might be worth also thinking that when Jews got married in the ancient times, there were three stages.

The first stage was the announcement of betrothal, the engagement, if you like. It was more serious than our engagements because betrothals were fairly lasting.

[13 : 01] Sometimes, you know, you can get engaged and you can call it off and in a sense it doesn't matter, but a betrothal in ancient Jewish times was more of a commitment, if you like, than an engagement today.

And in a sense, the Old Testament time is a bit like God's betrothal to his people. They are, in fact, considered husband and wife, virtually, even though the formal marriage has yet to occur.

The second stage of a Jewish marriage was the payment of a bride price, a dowry sort of thing. And in a sense, Jesus coming to earth and dying for us and for God's people generally is the payment of that price.

God buying us. There's a hymn. Church has one foundation. It says, From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died.

So that's a suggestion of something along those lines. The second stage, if you like. And the third stage is the marriage itself. And that's what we're getting a glimpse of here in Revelation 19.

[14 : 04] The feast is ready to begin. All these things that have been leading up to it, the final judgment, destruction of evil and so on, has now led forth into the next step in history, at the end of time, into the marriage feast of the Lamb and the festivities that after all will be eternal that flow from that.

We're told something of the clothes that will be worn. The prostitute, you may remember, wore scarlet and purple, gaudy sort of things and jewels and so on. But here, now the bride is given fine linen, bright and clean, to wear.

Now we're given a clue here about what this means. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Not meaning St. Paul and St. Peter, those famous saints that sometimes we have special days in church for and name church buildings after.

But rather, we all, Christian people, are saints. In fact, in the New Testament where the word occurs, it is never talking about an individual. It's talking about groups of Christians.

And it's not singling out the best Christians or the more mature Christians, but all Christians are saints. You and I, together, all of us, are saints. So this is not talking about special people.

[15 : 18] It's talking about us. And it's saying that every righteous deed that a Christian person does is in a sense woven into the fabric of the church's bridal gown.

Now this is not a picture of each one of us as individuals wearing fine linen bridal gowns to be married to the Lamb, to Christ. This is a picture of us together with all of God's people in every age together as one bride.

That is, not lots and lots of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of individual brides, but one bride. So that is that each righteous deed that you do gets woven into the gown of the whole and so on.

That is, it's a very corporate view of Christian people. One that we do well to rethink in our modern individualistic day and age where we think so much of me and my life rather than about being part of the church as one unity and one body.

But this verse actually says something that's very significant beyond that. It's almost something that we pass over because the word is a common word.

[16 : 34] Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. You see, the righteousness which is ours to wear on that bridal day is in the end a gift.

Not something that we earn, not something that we achieve. We don't make our own bridal gown. In the end, righteousness is a gift of God. And in a sense when we stand before God's throne, the righteousness with which we will be clothed, the New Testament in other places makes clear, is not our own righteousness for we can never stand before God as self-righteous people.

But the righteousness with which we'll be clothed on that day is Christ's own righteousness. Back in chapter 7, the robes the Christian people were wearing, we're told, were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

I don't think that's quite talking about the wedding gown there, but it does remind us of the same point, that Christian people are clothed in things made clean or pure by Jesus.

In fact, I think what chapter 7 is talking about, being washed and made pure in the blood of the Lamb, is talking about us being forgiven. But I think what's being spoken of here when it talks about the righteous deeds of the saints is talking about our own practice of holiness or what a theological term is, sanctification.

[18 : 01] But the two are related. In the end, the two are a gift. It's not as though we earn our salvation in any way, but it's something that God gives us which we appropriate by faith working itself out in daily life.

Now, just to try and be a little bit more precise here, it's very easy in our thinking as Christian people to rely upon our good deeds, to somehow feel if not smug, at least proud of the good things, charitable things, honourable things, selfless things, gracious or generous things that we have done for other people, for family members, for the church and so on.

And those things are good, but they're not what we ought to rely on when it comes to standing before God. They are what we are meant to do. They are meant to be an issuing out of the faith that is inside us.

Well, Christian faith is never unaccompanied by good works. So, when someone says or we think we have Christian faith, then the good works that we do for God are illustrations of that, but not something that we depend upon.

We depend only upon God and the gifts he gives us. Nonetheless, there is a challenge there, surely, to us. What is our contribution to this wedding gown?

[19 : 24] What are the righteous deeds that my life and your life are typified by? There may be a challenge to you here, those who perhaps are living complacent Christian lives.

What righteous deeds are you on about in your day-to-day life for the glory of God? Well, this vision here of this marriage feast and its preparation is very important.

John's told to write this down. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And he added, these are the true words of God to underline their importance.

Now, this is not a word that is meant to give us doubt. Am I invited? I don't know whether I've got an invitation. We are invited. We respond by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These words are not to occasion doubt in us, but rather to give us reassurance that we have been invited to be part of it and we can be assured of God's grace.

[20 : 28] Well, John is overcome by these words and strangely perhaps he falls at his feet to worship the angel. We might think, well, I'd never do that, but even John somehow did.

Overcome by the vision, the words, the importance, unable to know how to respond perhaps to what's going on. The angel said to John, don't do it. I'm a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Worship God for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Well, in the ancient world, worship of angels was probably more common than it is in our society.

So maybe what John did was not, in a sense, unusual for him culturally, even though it's wrong as a Christian to have done that. But anyway, he's told off for doing it. Reminds us though that nothing, nobody, no person or thing can be or ought to be worshipped apart from God himself.

No person, no matter how great that person, warrants worship apart from God. It's also a reminder that the message is more important than the messenger. The angel acknowledges the importance of his message, but he says it's the message that's important, the testimony of Jesus that's important, not him the messenger, he's a servant.

[21 : 48] It's another reminder to us in our day and age where so often it's tempting to follow the messenger rather than heed the message. Where it's so easy in our world to have cults of personality and charisma rather than a following of the word that is faithfully spoken.

I think what the angel is doing here is telling John I'm no different to you. In a sense I'm an angel and you're not. But we are both servants of God and we both hold and give testimony to Jesus.

Therefore we're on a par. We are fellow brothers together. Any Christian person and angel brought into this category as well it seems is somebody who gives testimony to Jesus.

They're on a par here. And he's saying to John in effect your job as a prophet speaking God's word is no different to mine. Don't worship me. Worship God.

It also reminds us finally that the testimony of Jesus is the key to the book of Revelation. It is Jesus who unlocks the key to the book. And here is a verse that I think in a sense says that to us.

[23 : 01] We now come to another scene but it's not the scene of the wedding itself. We might expect now when John sees Christ to see him as the groom standing at the front of the church or its equivalent visionary scene ready for the bride to arrive.

But no we see Christ and it's clearly Christ but the warrior on his horse dressed in white the rider Christ is called faithful and true with justice he judges and makes war.

A number of the images here of Jesus are ones that the book began with back in chapter 1. And we find often that in these last four chapters of Revelation there are more allusions back to the opening couple of chapters as well as the book in a sense rounds itself off.

His eyes are like blazing fire again something from the first chapters and on his head are many crowns. This is Jesus crowned with many crowns not just three or seven or eight or ten diadems or crowns like the beast and the prostitute and so on who sometimes wore crowns.

This is many crowns. This is a demonstration that this one Jesus is the king as it will go on to say explicitly in a minute. We're told that he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself which I must confess is a puzzle may be saying something like his is the name that is above every name.

[24 : 27] It may be saying that in the ancient world people when they could name something sometimes made a sense of ownership over it. Maybe this is saying that nobody can claim ownership over Jesus.

Beyond that I'm not sure what this secret name is. It's not for us to know. We are though told of names of Jesus he's called faithful and true back in verse 11 and there are names coming in the next verses as well.

Verse 13 says his name is the word of God but I don't think this is the secret name. I think that's something else. He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood verse 13 says. His own blood.

He's the lamb who was slain remember. It's not just Jesus the great teacher the great healer the Palestinian Jew the rabbi type character who is the center of heaven.

It is Jesus the lamb who was slain. It's because he died on a cross that the book of Revelation focuses on him. If he hadn't have died for our sins he would not be the central figure of the book of Revelation.

[25 : 29] And we're told that his name is the word of God the title that he's given at the beginning of John's gospel. I think a hint that this John of Revelation is clearly the same John of the gospel.

The armies of heaven were following him riding on white horses dressed in fine linen white and clean. These are Christian people it seems and angels perhaps was part of that.

It's a victory parade. It's not so much riding into battle as a victory parade. The fine linen is not the clothing of battle so much as the clothing of victory as well of course of being the bridal clothing that we've just seen.

And the fine linen also links it back to the righteous deeds of the saints that we've already seen. It's a reminder to us though that victory Christian victory belongs to Christ and those who act righteously with him.

That is it's righteous actions that bring victory. Not a military victory like the crusades of the middle ages and so on but righteousness. And when Christians practice righteousness they are exercising Christ's victory all over again in a sense.

[26 : 41] And out of his mouth comes a sharp sword. Not in his hand but his mouth presumably suggesting that this sword as we're told elsewhere in the New Testament in Ephesians 6 and Hebrews 4 and so on is the word of God.

That's his weapon you see the word. Not a sword not might but the word of God. It is the word of God that conquers and brings victory in this world.

And this word here is to strike down the nations. Then comes a quote from Psalm 2 he'll rule them with an iron scepter. Psalm 2 is anticipating the Messiah coming and judging the nations and here this vision is saying this is it.

It's happening. Psalm 2 is being fulfilled. And then he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty that is exercising God's anger. Righteous anger not a sort of capricious anger or a hot temperedness like some parents sometimes get with their children and fly off the handle or we might with our children or parents or something but it's an anger that is rightly responding to the right sort of provocation.

It's a righteous anger. It's not a deficiency of God's character when we hear that he is angry at sin. And on his robe and on his thigh which may mean the robe as it covers the thigh he has this name written King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

[28 : 03] The title we saw last week as well applied to Jesus Christ. It's a reminder to us yet again that Jesus is clearly divine. He's not a second stage person on the ladder between God at the top and human beings at the bottom.

Jesus is on top. He's King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's divine. He's God to be worshipped. That's the victory procession and it comes before the description of the enemy going into battle.

But this description of the enemy in the final battle is really quite an anti-climax. An angel standing in the sun cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in mid-air come gather together for the great supper of God.

But this isn't an invitation to the banquet the wedding feast this is an invitation to birds of prey to feast on the carrion that is the destroyed corpses of the enemies of God.

It shows that God has already decided and determined the outcome of battle. Do not come and watch the battle but come now and feast on the defeated the evil defeated so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, mighty men, horses, their riders, the flesh of all people free and slaves, small and great.

[29 : 13] A total list which shows us that the destruction of evil will be total, absolute, complete. None will be left out, small or great. It's not just getting at the leaders, it's getting at everything that is evil in the world.

Then John saw the beast, the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against Christ, that is the rider on the horse and his army. But there's no description of the battle. The next verse goes on to say the beast was captured within the false prophet whose beast and false prophet are characters back in chapter 13 characterizing evil personified in the Roman Empire of John's day.

With these signs he deluded those who'd received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Final destruction. And the rest of them, all the other people following the beast and the false prophet, are killed with a sword that came out of the mouth of the rider of the horse.

That is killed by the word of God. As one commentator said, the word of grace that they rejected has become the word of judgment by which they are condemned.

The gospel you see is a two-edged sword. It offers God's extraordinary grace to any sinner who repents. But for those who reject that grace, God's word is a word of condemning judgment.

[30 : 37] Jesus himself said, if they reject me, my word will judge them on the last day. Chapter 20 is one of those chapters in the Bible that has puzzled and divided Christians for a long time.

some of the ways in which revelation is read are extraordinary. I mentioned a couple last week that I think were a bit nonsense. People have built extraordinary towers of theory based on the first verses of this chapter.

John sees an angel coming down out of heaven having the key to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. Notice that it's God's angel who holds the key to the abyss, the place in a sense of evil, the prison where Satan is.

And this angel seized the dragon, the ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the abyss, locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.

After that he must be set free for a short time. What on earth is this about and when is this thousand years? You may know that Hitler's Third Reich claimed that it would last a thousand years, a parody of Jesus here.

[32 : 00] There are three ways in which generally speaking this passage has been understood. One way is thinking that this is talking about Christ returning, binding Satan, then a thousand year reign of peace before a final tribulation or rebellion where Satan is loosed and then the final, final return of Christ at the very end to defeat Satan forever and bring in heavenly peace forever as well.

That sort of thinking is usually associated with a thinking that the world is gradually getting worse, a deterioration of this world gradually and that something has to be done about that.

That's why Christ will come bind Satan, the world will be a bit better and peaceful for a thousand years, Satan will be let loose and then the end. So it has a fairly pessimistic view of the world. The term that's used to describe this view is usually called premillennialism.

Don't need to worry about the technical term but I say it in case you're interested or you've heard the term before. That is that Christ will come pre or before the thousand year time of peace and then at the end of that time after the loosing of Satan he'll come again to end the whole lot and then heaven carries on forever.

One of the problems with that view and one can see from this statement here in Revelation 20 verses 2 and 3 that that could fit. One of the problems though is that nowhere else in the Bible is there any suggestion of a third coming of Christ.

[33 : 36] It talks about the second coming and Christ's return but it never talks about him returning and then returning again. When he returns according to all the letters in the New Testament and in Acts and sermons and so on in Acts there is going to be one return and that's it.

Another view about this is that gradually the world is going to get better so that the thousand years of peace will be brought about by the triumph of the gospel in the world and the church in the world.

So gradually as the gospel spreads and is more triumphant and more and more people follow it the world will be Christianly speaking peaceful for a thousand years. Then Satan will be loosed for a short time and then comes the second coming.

Satan defeated and the world carries on. Both those views that I've described talk about something happening in the future. That is the thousand years is something yet to occur in world history.

Both of those views generally speaking acknowledge a sort of literal thousand year period. Now there's some variations on that but basically they're acknowledging a real one thousand years in the future at some time.

[34 : 44] The second view I've just described is called post millennialism. That is Christ comes after the thousand year reign. Now what do we think of those sorts of views?

One of the things, one of the dangers about interpreting the Bible is stacking a lot on one verse. This is the only place in the Bible that talks about a thousand years of anything virtually but certainly a thousand years of peace leading up to a final rebellion and the coming of Christ.

So we have to be very careful if we're going to build a bit of a theology on one verse. Secondly, we've got to remember that Revelation being so full of symbols has its codes or clues in the rest of the Bible that's more straightforward.

The Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament for that matter as well. So any theory we build on this verse ought to be consistent with the plainer things of other parts of the talk about Satan being bound.

It talks about Satan being bound in Jesus' own words in Mark 3 in parallels in Luke and Matthew. That is Jesus coming to earth the miracles he performs the teaching he gives leading up to his death on the cross is the binding of Satan.

[36 : 31] It's very clear in Mark 3 Paul makes it very clear in Colossians 2 that Satan has been bound and limited by Jesus' death on the cross and there are many other references that allude to the same thing.

It seems to me therefore that it's clearest that Satan is already bound in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. And the thousand years isn't a literal one but a general term because it ends when Christ returns at the end of history.

And according to this passage in Revelation but also in 2 Thessalonians 2 and other places it seems that the period of time just before the end may be very brief indeed may well be a time where Satan is let loose over this world and the opposition to Christians and to God is more ferocious than at any other time in world history and then Christ returns so it seems to me that we now are in the middle of this thousand year period it's not something in the future but something now and of course John's readers were in the middle of it as well and it makes much more sense as a book to be encouraging and persuading John's readers to talk about the present that's something that's going to be thousands of years in the future what hope can it give them to think of a thousand years that may be so far down the track it doesn't really impinge on their lives rather it's best to see us in the middle already of this thousand year period now I've got a little diagram here just to clarify the three views

I've shown pre millennialism at the top the cross is Jesus death we're there where I've put us sort of roughly life is gradually getting worse and then Christ will come he'll bind at the end and the thousand year period because the gospel and the church as witness does that itself but then Satan's let loose the rebellion and Christ returns at the end and the third view which I think is more faithful to the book of Revelation and the New Testament as a whole is more simple Christ has died in his life and death Satan was bound that doesn't mean that he's got no power at all but his power is limited we live in this thousand year period thousand being a complete it's a rounded sort of number and we've already seen lots of those sorts of numbers in Revelation and at some stage in the future for some reason we don't know

Satan will be let loose for a very brief period and then Christ will return that I think that final view is much more faithful to the Bible as a whole to what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2 which you may wish to go and look up some other time and those passages in the Gospels and Colossians and so on I've referred to about binding Satan as well in some ways I think that view also illustrates what we saw last week that puzzling expression about the beast and the prostitute who was but is not and will yet ascend from the abyss that is it's talking about the binding now now the question that this view raises however is this if Satan is bound now why does it seem Satan is so effective now and I think the answer would be that if Satan were not bound now this world and our lives and the stake of the gospel and the place of the

[40 : 09] Christian church would be much worse than it is now I think Satan's binding now is linked to the gospel so what we see at the end of verse three is that the purpose of this binding was to keep Satan from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended before Jesus came Satan was in a sense on the loose and the gospel did not go to all the nations it was the preserve of one group of people but with Jesus life and ministry the gospel is for every nation and Satan is bound by the gospel and by Christ wherever we see a sinner converted by the gospel there we see the effects of Satan being bound where we see the gospel go to the nations of this world there we see Satan being bound now let me give a practical comment in relatable this there is an important reassurance

I think for Christians here Jesus life and especially his death have bound and limited Satan already in a sense we don't do that we don't have to do that Christ has done it and his death is the power to do it when we preach and live by the gospel we appropriate that power of Christ's victory over Satan but so often it seems to me Christians look for power in the wrong places in prayer or meditation or self help or psychology and all sorts of other things as well but the greatest spiritual power of all is the power of Jesus death on the cross appropriated by faith in the practice of the living by and preaching of the gospel well I better move on that's sort of a little bit of a discursus but so often we get caught up and tripped up by some of these things and I hope that I've made it clear even if I've simplified the views a little bit

John then sees thrones on which were seated those who'd been given authority to judge and he saw the souls of those who'd been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God they're Christian martyrs I think beheaded is a symbol for just general martyrdom they had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands these are Christians who've persevered in Christian faith to the end they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years the same thousand years that Satan is bound this is talking about now you see this is saying that Christian people who have died for their faith but I think probably it's talking about all Christian people who've died because John has one group of Christians in mind not two not martyrs and others are now in a sense alive with Christ reigning today now in this metaphorically speaking a thousand year period from the world's perspective Christians who've died and

Christian martyrs especially are dead but from God's perspective they're living notice that it talks about their souls because it seems that the perspective of this verse is that these are Christian people who are alive their souls or their spirits are alive but the bodily resurrection will happen on the day when Jesus returns at the end of history we're told then in verse 5 that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended I think that's talking about non-Christian people I don't think it's talking about the other Christians because I think John always describes Christians as one group martyrs those who bear witness to Christ live once they die because they're with Christ the second resurrection I think by implication is when Jesus returns again he goes on then to say blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection the second death has no power over them that is death beyond judgment but they will be priests of

God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years it's a combination of royal and priestly imagery they will reign with Christ what a privilege for Christian people it's not just Christ who's reigning but Christians who are reigning with him what an extraordinary privilege not only to be in heaven with Christ but to reign with him as well the combination of a royal and priestly idea priestly is sort of mediatory between God and other people is one that runs from the beginning of the Bible to the end the creation gave dominion to the created human beings over this world to reign to rule and they were in a sense to be priests of that as they mediated God's presence in this world as well that's made clearer after the nation of Israel became into being in Exodus 19 at Mount Sinai you are a royal priesthood that is

[45 : 23] Israel was meant to be what created humanity was made to be but wasn't but Israel didn't keep it either Jesus came as the perfect king and priest together one reason why we sang that first hymn Lord enthroned in heavenly splendor talking about the great high priesthood of Jesus Christ and Christians are called to be what Israel wasn't and what created humanity wasn't 1 Peter 2 says you are a royal priesthood to reign and to mediate that's a description of what we be in church using the term priest I say well priest in the new testament is a preacher of the gospel I'm not offering any more sacrifice I'm preaching the gospel well now we get a vision of the loosing of Satan at the end of this thousand years

Satan will be released from his prison why we do not know really but this will give forth into a small brief time of rebellion worse perhaps than any other rebellion or trial or persecution there has been Satan will go out in verse 8 to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth Gog and Magog who on earth are they the characters that don the clock in royal arcade in the city yes but I don't think that's what's being spoken of here in the book of Ezekiel 38 and 39 Gog and Magog stand for the final forces of evil against God's people and in fact the end chapters of Ezekiel are very important for understanding the end of revelation because the end of Ezekiel actually has a period of peace after the exile when God's people will return to peace in their land then will come this vision of Gog Magog the final rebellion and then the last chapters of Ezekiel are a description of the final Jerusalem the final temple and that's what we get in revelation picture of peace the thousand years of peace now the unleashing of Satan in the final rebellion with Gog and Magog giving us the clue to Ezekiel and then what we'll see next week the picture of the heavenly city of

Jerusalem just like Ezekiel finishes his book as well and now come the forces of evil gathering to battle marching across the breadth of the earth surrounding the camp of God's people again metaphorically speaking I don't think it's talking about Jerusalem as the city today geographically in the land of Palestine but rather just surrounding God's people generally the city he loves but fire came down from heaven and devoured them looks as though we've got a great cataclysmic battle this is another picture of Armageddon but it's all a bit of an anticlimax because fire comes and they're gone and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur the beast the false prophet they'd already been thrown there in chapter 19 now devil himself Satan himself was gone it's the end of evil at last and now finally in this chapter a picture of the judgment throne God seated on the throne so holy is he that earth and sky even flee from his presence and now John sees the dead great and small every person none accepted standing before the throne and books were opened no CD

ROMs here and another book was opened which is the book of life it's the book that we've already seen in an earlier chapter it belongs to the lamb it's got written in it the names of those who follow the lamb and the dead were judged according to what they done as recorded in the books according to what they do you see what we do in our life matters isn't it a good thing to think that we'll be judged because if we're not going to be judged what we do today tomorrow doesn't matter it doesn't matter if we're not judged at all God doesn't care about us if he doesn't judge us but he does and what we do matters and he'll judge us according to what we do which is a bit scary when we think of the things we've done but this is not an occasion for doubt John's not trying to sow seeds of worry so much into his Christian people because Christians who've been reading this book know that their names are already in the Lamb's book of life because they've responded to God's gospel by placing their faith in Jesus

Christ their names are indelibly written there have confidence Christian people that that's where our names will be and that on that final day when we stand before God judged according to the things we do which makes us no doubt fear God because we've all done things that we're ashamed of and fail God we can stand because we're clothed with the white linen garments that Christ gives us not anything we've made not anything that we've earned but clothed in Christ's righteousness not our own and each person is judged none escape this this is not just for the leaders or the heroes of the world not just for the really bad but for every single person who's ever lived so John sees that the sea and death and Hades figuratively speaking wherever dead people go all the dead come up out of that to face the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ and then death itself is destroyed Hades the place of the dead a neutral sort of place it's also destroyed the lake of fire is the second death it's where those who are judged by God on that final day go forever we don't know much about it we do well to avoid speculating if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire there is plenty of impetus in these two chapters for us in our

[51 : 17] Christian life there is plenty of impetus to avoid laziness in our spiritual life to be active in spiritual things for the sake of the gospel because we must anticipate that judgment day there is plenty of impetus here for us to be about the business of spreading the gospel in the world because this is the time when Satan is bound this is the gospel time therefore the purpose of Satan being bound is that we may spread the gospel and it will bring conversion to people of every race and tribe and tongue in this world now is the time to do it and now in world history is the time when we have the technology and the money to do it more effectively than ever ever before but now is the time and we ought to do it before it's too late before Satan is let loose and Christ returns and there's no second chance for anyone but also for Christians in these two chapters there is plenty of reason for assurance and confidence God reigns God is sovereign Satan is bound by Jesus death and though this world may look as though the opposite is true it's not have confidence in God and have confidence in the Lord Jesus

Christ because he is king of kings and lord of lords and unlike the personifications of evil which have little crowns to wear Christ is crowned with many crowns so have confidence in him have assurance in him let's have a minute quiet before we sing the hymn crown him with many crowns the lamb upon the throne questions or comments anyone wants to make yes so would yes yes yes I don't think the judgment picture that we've seen tonight is only of those who are not Christians yes the question I've been asked to repeat questions and I forgot to do that for the first one which was about Romans 14 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 3 so that's for the benefit of the people on the tape this question is about the difference between

Ephesians 2 talking about for grace you've been saved James 2 by faith needs to be accompanied by works and in Revelation 20 talking about being judged according to our works I don't think James and Paul are contradicting each other I think they're arguing a different point for different pastoral reasons we are saved by grace alone it is God's gift and we contribute nothing to that at all we appropriate that gift by faith the nature of faith that appropriates the gift is not an intellectual assent I believe that Jesus died and lived 2,000 years ago lots of people believe that as a fact but that's not Christian faith Christian faith is perhaps better said as Christian trust we place our trust in Jesus death that that is where our forgiveness and our salvation derive and are found that also means that on the judgment day when we stand before God and before the throne of Christ we can stand confident not because of anything we have done but because of

Christ's death for us however the nature of Christian faith is also that it is obedient faith that is the way we express our trust in Jesus death is by living obedient lives of good works Paul said as much in Ephesians 2 because verse 10 of Ephesians 2 goes on to talk about doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do that is the nature of Christian faith issues forth or is accompanied by works of obedience to God so there is a sense in which on the judgment day when we're assessed for our works and what we've done in our life one we will fail but two will be part of the works we will have done will have been Christian works demonstrating faith and but three in the end we're acquitted because of Jesus death for us and the forgiveness that that brings us if I could remember my church history more particularly there was a wonderful quote I think by Bishop Nicholas Ridley of London in the period of the 1540s and early 50s who said that we are justified by faith but the faith which justifies us is never alone or something to that effect saying that you cannot have justifying faith without the good works that accompany it yet it's the faith which is the means of appropriating salvation not the works I hope that's clear enough one more question and where's the verse that says God is enthroned on the praises of his people on the throes of well I can't remember that where that verse is 22 is it thanks yes the repeat the question the question is is Revelation 19 verse 5 which says then a voice came from the throne saying praise our God all you his servants related to Psalm 22 I think which says God is enthroned on the praises of his people I don't see why not but then on the other hand I'm not sure that there's a direct link either I'm not sure what I'd say to that I take it that the question is because this is a voice from the throne therefore

God himself saying praise our God I take that's why you're thinking this question is related to that I'm not sure I'd have to think more about Psalm 22 as well to be able to give a better answer I'm afraid shall we have a minute or two of prayer and then we'll sing two songs to finish if anyone would like to pray or give praise to God for anything that's come out of tonight's two chapters please do so loud voice you don't need to be long brief prayers are good and given that's 25 past nine appropriate as well and I'll close in a minute thank you so much