

REVELATION 20:1-6

Third Sunday After Pentecost, June 13, 2021

Smith

OUR RESURRECTION IN CHRIST

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and 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.

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given 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 worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 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 are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

In “just a minute,” you will understand what all this means.

I was reading the introduction to a Bible Commentary on the Old Testament book of Numbers recently, and this was a commentary written by a man who was part of what the News media calls the “Evangelical Right,” which has nothing whatsoever to do with St. Paul’s or the Confessional Lutheran Church. We are not a political organization, nor should we be. And we do not support a political party, nor should we. But this also happens to be one of the groups within Reformed Christianity that talks constantly about the Millennium. In his commentary this man bemoaned the fact that the Bible has so many chapters about the tabernacle and its furnishings and genealogies and so many other things-- dozens upon dozens of chapters and whole books that don’t really concern us, he thinks, or our worship life today, and yet the Bible has only part of one little chapter that’s about the Millennium, about which, he said, his church spends so much of its time preaching, teaching, and discussing.

This is the chapter, in fact, these six verses, before us today. “Millennium” means “a thousand years.” Confessional Lutheran churches and other orthodox church bodies don’t talk about the Millennium the way many Reformed churches do, because we have a completely different understanding of these six verses and about the entire book of Revelation.

To begin with: John, the author of Revelation, tells us that this book is a vision, not an exact event-by-event prophecy. Things in the book stand for other things; they are to be taken figuratively. The literal parts of the Bible we take literally, but the figurative parts, like Revelation, we take figuratively.

I am not going to point out what it is that I disagree with when it comes to other denominations. What I am going to explain is what this passage means in its context, in this book, and in God’s holy word.

1. Why are we certain that this angel is Jesus? We are certain that the angel in this chapter is Jesus Christ. Who else could bind or defeat Satan? Who else has ever defeated Satan? And the defeat of Satan is important to our understanding of what this “thousand years” is, because Jesus and his work are the context of the thousand years.

2. What is the Abyss? 3. What kind of chain binds the devil? The Abyss is Satan’s prison, which is hell. Remember that the devil is not the jailer of hell, he is a prisoner. But what kind of chain could bind him? Not any physical chain made of iron, lead, bronze, titanium, or moon rocks. Only the binding force of God’s holy word could bind Satan. Only God’s commands.

4. What does “devil” mean? “Satan”? The titles “devil” and “Satan” are connected to one another. “Devil” means “liar,” and “Satan” means “accuser.” They are the two hats he wears. First, the liar wants to tempt us to sin: Come on, everyone does it, you deserve it; it’s a choice you can make about yourself, your body, your life, or whatever other things he says. But then as soon as we slip into that temptation and sin, on goes the other hat, and the Accuser says, “How could you! God can never forgive you. Nobody can ever forgive you.” All of that is nothing but lies, but that’s what he does. But Jesus has thrown him into the Abyss for a thousand years.

5. When did this “thousand years” begin? Since the thousand years in the vision begin with the defeat and binding of Satan, we begin the thousand years on the cross, where Jesus won the victory for us: the victory over sin, over death, and over the power of the devil.

6. Does this “thousand years” = 1,000 calendar years? And so we see that this thousand years can’t be a literal thousand, meaning it isn’t 900 plus another hundred more. Oh, for a long time, the church thought it might be. Before the year 1100 AD, no church buildings in the world were built taller than about two stories high. Why not? They felt that if Jesus was coming back in two generations, why spend two generations building a taller church? But once we passed the year 1000, and then 1100 came and went, the church realized that this number, too, is a figure for something. The spiritual meaning of numbers in visions in the Bible is explained in the Bible. Ten generally stands for completeness. Multiples of ten, a hundred, a thousand, are ways of saying “Completely complete.” The devil will be bound and defeated by Christ for the whole time of the New Testament till just before the very end.

7. How does Jesus explain the “binding of Satan”? There will be no more deceiving the nations by the devil. Jesus said: “Now the prince of this world (the devil) will be driven out, but I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:31-32). Satan is bound by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jesus has given life to us, and the resurrection.

8—13. Life / death / resurrection. Now, John uses the words “life, death, and resurrection” in both familiar and unfamiliar ways. To “live” is to live in faith, as a Christian. Our translation says “come to life,” but here in this chapter, this word is in a simple past tense: “they lived,” and should have been translated that way. These are the Christians, both the martyrs and the other faithful. They have a first resurrection, which is our coming to faith, usually in baptism. And we also have a second resurrection: This is the resurrection that follows the grave.

And the Christian martyrs and the other faithful, have a first death, which is physical death, but there is, sadly, a second death that is possible. This is eternal death in hell for all who refuse to trust in Jesus.

In the vision, from the time of the binding of Satan, Christians reign with Christ. Satan's confusing lies are locked and sealed away. The meaning of the vision is that from the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, including his resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (all of which happened in under two months of actual time), the Church has had the truth of the Gospel and the complete message of Christ's victory on the cross.

The Kingdom of Jesus is a **spiritual** kingdom. Since the first resurrection is how we come to faith, the **second resurrection** refers only to the general resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, and nothing more than that. And the Church on earth is still subject to there being sin in the world even though Satan is condemned. The Church on earth is always the **Kingdom of the cross, prone to temptation and sin** until Christ comes again. And when he does come again, it will be the end of the figure of the "thousand years," the completeness of the New Testament.

One of the ways that this passage gives us comfort is in showing us that there is no complicated spiritual war or tribulation on its way apart from the trials and temptations we already face every day.

Taken item by item, this vision is truly simple, and comforting: The New Testament time is the "thousand years." It's going already, its clock (by our calendar) has passed two thousand years, but it's still the same figurative "thousand years" in the same way that when mom says, "I'll be ready in just a minute," she doesn't mean 60 seconds. She means that she will be ready when the time she needs to get ready is done: that's always what she means by "just a minute."

We see our need for a Savior here because the devil still has his two hats, even though his power is limited. He can no longer tempt other angels to fall away. He can no longer try to stop the victory of Jesus from happening. He can no longer crush the line of the Savior, since the Savior has come.

But the devil can lie and lie and lie, and he can coax you into thinking that this or that sin would be good idea, or no big deal, or a matter of personal, private choice for you that you think won't hurt anyone else. But that doesn't mean that sin isn't still sin.

The victory of Jesus means that when the devil puts on his accusing Satan hat, he can't accuse you. You get to say, "I belong to Jesus. I'm a baptized child of God." The Abyss the devil already knows will never be your dungeon because Jesus has saved you. You have not worshiped the Beast, which in the vision represents all false doctrine that tries to turn people away from Christ.

You have and love Jesus. If troubling visions like this one confuse you and frighten you, do not be afraid, but turn to a simpler passage that gives the same comfort: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." This is the comfort for your whole life through, to the last gasp of breath on your deathbed. Your Savior is Jesus Christ. In him you have eternal life. That's what all this means. Amen.