

The Millennial Reign

Revelation 20:4-6

INTRODUCTION

- A. Illustration about the Christian man's saying that he wanted a two way ticket, Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, #7631—That's how much of the religious world sees things — they believe that Jesus will return to this earth and establish an earthly kingdom.
- B. It is not my aim this evening to refute the idea of a thousand year reign, although such a view has no scriptural support.
 - 1. My aim is to examine this passage from Revelation, the text from which the religious world derives their premillennial views, and explain the passage as I understand it.
 - 2. Let's see what we can learn from this text.

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION, v. 4

- A. John saw thrones. and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed.
 - 1. Exactly who sat upon these thrones is not altogether clear; it is quite likely that these are the ones who had been beheaded for Jesus in the next phrase.
 - 2. Judgment was committed to those who sat upon these thrones.
 - a. One of the most puzzling aspects of the End is the realization that saints, in some way, will judge the world.
 - 1) Jesus said that the apostles would "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30).
 - 2) "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:2-3).
 - b. Exactly how this judgment will take place, I must plead ignorance. God has not spelled out the details, but he has given us the "big picture."
- B. Then John saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
 - 1. We hear so much about how this verse teaches a resurrection of the righteous who will reign with Christ a thousand years. There are a couple of problems with that view:
 - a. Only those who were beheaded were resurrected. If this were true and a Christian died by means other than beheading, he would not share in the first resurrection.
 - b. This passage nowhere says that the reign of Christ will take place on earth!
 - 1) We hear that Jesus will establish his throne in Jerusalem and reign from there, and this is the text that is chiefly used to establish a thousand-year period.
 - 2) But, this text does not say that Jesus will reign on the earth!
 - 2. John specifies those who participated in this first resurrection — those who had been beheaded for their witnesses to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands.
 - a. These Christians had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God.
 - 1) Roman citizens were put to death by beheading (remember, Paul, a Roman citizen, was beheaded); although this may signify that at least some Christians in the Roman Empire had some status. this probably refers to execution in general.
 - 2) They died for their witnesses to Jesus and for the word of God.
 - a) Their witness to Jesus cannot be understood to mean that they had personally seen

Jesus, for most of these disciples, no doubt, never saw Jesus in the flesh: these brethren were in Asia Minor.

- i. This witnessing must be understood in a more general sense: they witnessed to the power of Jesus through the transformation in their lives. They called people to join them.
- ii. We need to witness in the same way: we need to allow people to see what Jesus has done in our lives and call others to join us.

b) They also died for the word of God — these brethren valued the word of God enough to lay down their lives for it, if need be.

b. These brethren had not worshiped the beast or his image. and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands.

- 1) These brethren had remained loyal to the Lord in the face of overwhelming odds — they had not given in to the things of the world. They did not go along with their friends and neighbors and do evil.
- 2) We need to separate ourselves from this evil society and do what God expects.
 - a) “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2)- In other words, if everyone else is bowing down to an image of the emperor, don’t you do that.
 - b) “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).
 - c) “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

C. They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

1. Earlier in the book, Jesus had promised that those who overcame would sit with him on his throne — “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).
2. The point seems to be that saints will share in the glory of Christ.
 - a. If we are God’s children, then we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).
 - b. “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4).
3. The Lord Jesus is going to share some of his glory with us. What a beautiful thought that we shall share in the glory of the Lord Jesus!

D. These martyrs seem to be the ones we’ve met before.

1. Remember, when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (6:9).
2. The image of resurrection is one of victory.
 - a. Jesus’ resurrection demonstrated his victory over the forces of evil.
 - b. The image of resurrection was used in the Old Testament to stand for victory.
 - 1) God uses the image of resurrection to depict Israel’s victory over idolatry — “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes” (Hos. 13:14).
 - 2) The Lord used the image of resurrection for the remnant’s coming back from Babylonian Captivity — “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezek. 37:12).

THE BLESSINGS OF THE FIRST RESURRECTION vv. 5-6.

A. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished, v. 5a.

1. The “rest” are obviously not righteous, for they did not live and reign with Christ a thousand years.
2. The rest are resurrected in that they have victory after the thousand years have expired.

- a. The rest of the dead seem to be those whom Christ killed with the sword of his mouth (19:15).
 - b. Their hopes are resurrected when Satan is released from the bottomless pit; they have victory at that point, although the victory is very short lived — the devil is cast into the lake of the fire after he is released from his prison (20:10).
- B. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. v. 6.
- 1. The one who has part in the first resurrection is blessed.
 - a. Those loyal to Christ, the ones who overcome, are those who have part in the first resurrection.
 - b. The resurrection as a symbol of victory had to encourage the first readers of this book — even though things looked hopeless, their hopes and dreams would be resurrected; they would overcome.
 - 2. Those who have part in the first resurrection are blessed, because:
 - a. The second death has no power over them.
 - 1) The second death is identified with the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (21:8).
 - 2) Those who are loyal to Christ will not experience the second death; it has no power over them.
 - b. They shall be priests of God and of Christ.
 - 1) Instead of having to go through an ordained priesthood, as under the Old Testament, Christians can go directly to God for themselves.
 - 2) “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).
 - 3) You don’t have to come to me when you sin, you don’t have to go to one of the elders, you can go directly to God through Jesus. He is our High Priests, and we individually are priests in the kingdom of God.
 - c. They shall reign with Christ a thousand years.
 - 1) This reigning has to do with victory, with glory.
 - 2) We, as Christians, share in the glory of God.