**St Martins C3 – September 10, 2023**

**Come, Lord Jesus – Preparing**

**Sermon Summary:**

In life and in our journey of faith, the clearer our vision is for the person we want to be in the future, the greater our motivation will be to make changes now to bring that future about. Therefore, if we don’t intentionally ponder on the future God has for us, we lose motivation to passionately follow Christ in the present. So, that is why we are exploring what the Bible says about our future as followers of Christ, over the next few weeks. Specifically, we are exploring the last three chapters of the Bible, Revelation 20-22.

**Read: Revelation 20:1-10**

In this first section, John’s vision describes a world in trouble and in need of God’s intervention. It describes what is going on in the spiritual world and how that effects our world. It is very symbolic and spiritual language, which isn’t easy to understand on first reading, but there are some important truths for us to glean.

Some interpret this passage very literally, believing that it describes a future millennial reign of Christ. Others, (like myself and many other Biblical scholars) interpret it as symbolic, like the rest of the book of Revelation. By symbolic, I (we) don’t mean that it isn’t real. God will (or is) reigning with His people and Satan is (or will be) bound, so that God’s Kingdom can expand. However, we don’t think Satan is in an actual abyss and the reference to the 1,000 years is simply referring to a long time.

The important thing for us is the meaning and message of this passage. It was written in the context of Christians suffering persecution who needed the encouragement to persevere because there will be a future deliverance. The main theme then is an encouragement to stay true to Christ, so that we are preparing for a future where Jesus destroys Satan and ushers in a New Heaven and Earth. We see that staying true to Christ means:

1. **Not compromising with Satan or the world**

Even if it gets very difficult to take a stand for Christ and say “no” to the world and its ways, stand your ground. Don’t bow to the pressure around you. God will empower you and help you through those challenges. God rewards those who don’t compromise.

1. **Speaking up for Jesus and His Kingdom**

Jesus is the only hope for the world we live in. His Kingdom will bring righteousness to the world and deliverance from evil in the future. It is a bold and sometimes unpopular message in the age we live in, but a message that needs to be on all our lips.

Another important message in this passage is the certainty that Satan’s influence will be completely removed from the world one day. We need to remember, evil is temporary. As Charles Spurgeon said: “*Patience, then, believer, eternity will right the wrongs of time.”*

**The overall point of this passage is to encourage us to stay true to Christ, because He is calling us to reign with Him in the present and in the future.** In looking for our future deliverance, as well as strength for the present, we pray. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

**Suggested Questions for Connect Group Discussion**

*How have you interpreted Revelation 20:1-10 previously and does what was presented on Sunday differ from or reinforce that interpretation?*

*From what we read in this passage, what stood out to you as some of the main encouragements for Christians living in this present age?*

*How might knowing what happens at the end of this age help us live with confidence in the here and now?*

*Where might we be tempted to compromise with the world around us?*

*What might reigning with Christ look like, both now and in the future?*

*What is one perspective or life change that you might take from this and apply this week?*

**Songs we sang on Sunday:**

* You light me up
* Battle belongs
* He Toka
* Jesus you alone
* Burn in me
* King of Kings

**Monday’s Devotion – Fighting**

**Revelation 20:2-3**

*He seized the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.**He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

One of the many tricky things to interpret in this passage is the influence of Satan. Is this a time Satan’s influence has been removed from the world, or just significantly reduced? Given that he is sealed in an Abyss, he would seem to have no influence. However, if he had no influence, how come when he returns the nations are so quick to follow him? Personally, I read it as though Satan’s power has been significantly reduced to allow for the expansion of God’s Kingdom. Whichever way we interpret it, there are two important points to note here:

Firstly, Christ is King over all. Notice that Satan hasn’t got the ability to resist being thrown into the Abyss. This is because God has ultimate authority over Satan. We must never underestimate Satan’s power, he obviously has a lot of power over humanity, but he has no power over God. Secondly, as we stand with Christ, we have a common enemy. One which in the meantime, we need to fight. That is best done by being aware of his deceitful ways and resisting them, then partnering with Christ in extending His Kingdom. Yes, it will require strength and perseverance, but God’s Kingdom will triumph in the end. *So, where is resistance against Satan required in your life and what would Christ’s reign over that area look like for you?*

**Tuesday’s Devotion - Reigning**

**Revelation 20:4**

*They had not worshipped 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 for a thousand years.*

Stop and ponder for a moment, the significance of this verse. We are given the power and authority to reign with Christ! I remember when I first read this and thought, this is too good to be true. So, I searched the scriptures and realised that it is a theme that runs through the whole of the Bible. We see it from the beginning with God giving Adam and Eve dominion with Him over the world, to our unity with Christ, which releasing a reigning in life. (Romans 5:17)

God’s intention is not only to save us out of the world, but for us to be partners with Him in His Kingdom which will be established over all of Heaven and Earth. The truth is humanity has a very important role to play in the new Heavens and Earth. We don’t yet realise the glory that will be revealed in us. (Rom 8:18-19)

When we grasp how important this truth is, it shapes our life’s purpose. Our time in this life isn’t to simply enjoy this life, but to prepare ourselves to reign with Christ in the next. We are not only preparing to get to Heaven, we are preparing to take up our role with Christ in Heaven. We haven’t just been called into God’s family, we have been called to lead in God’s family. The question to ask ourselves then is this: *Am I allowing Christ to form His character in me to the point where I will be ready to reign with Him?*

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Qualifying**

**Revelation 20:4**

*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. Theyhad not worshipped 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 for a thousand years.*

Are you willing to be martyred for Christ? That seems to be what qualifies us to reign with Christ. However, keep in mind that the context of John’s Revelation letter to the churches was a time of persecution in the Roman empire. Christians were beginning to get martyred for their faith. Some already had and others were living in fear. Part of God’s purpose in revealing what He did to John, was to encourage those who were faithful to remain faithful to the end.

The same message applies to us today. We are to remain faithful to Christ and His Kingdom, even when there is a lot of pressure on us to compromise. As we choose to prioritise Christ above all other competing priorities, Christ will empower and honour our commitment to Him.

I don’t think this verse is implying that we have to be beheaded in order to reign with Christ. However, it is laying down a challenge for us to be faithful to Christ and not compromise in any area of our lives. Sacrifice is required in order to inherit Christ and His Kingdom. *So, what are you willing to sacrifice in order to step into all that God has for you?*

**Thursday’s Devotion – Living**

**Revelation 20:5-6**

*(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.**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.*

Consider for a moment the significance of being resurrected. Like Christ, there will come a day when we will physically be made alive again and we will keep that body for eternity. As unbelievable as this sounds, it is a foundational truth which shapes the Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 15)

These verses reinforce this truth, but throw a complication into the mix for us to get our heads around. Does this mean there are two resurrections? Does this mean those who are not part of the first resurrection are in “soul sleep?”

There could be an interesting connection here to those “saints of old” who were raised to life at Jesus’ crucifixion. Was that the first resurrection? Does God raise people to life at different times for different purposes?

I don’t have all the answers to those questions, but I do know that everyone is raised to life to be judged eventually. (Rev 20:13) The important point is that we were created to live forever. We were created for life not death. Therefore, we ought to never see death in this world as the end. The question is, *how does the certainty of life after death in the future, shape how we live in the present?*

**Friday’s Devotion – Triumphing**

**Revelation 20:9-10**

*They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.**And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

A world scale final battle between good and evil at the end of this age is a major theme of Biblical apocalyptic passages. The focus of this battle is the city of Jerusalem. (This is one of the reasons the fight for the city of Jerusalem is watched very closely by millions worldwide) It is possible that Jerusalem is another Revelation symbol for a place where God’s people dwell, but for our purposes today, it doesn’t matter either way. The point is that there is a large battle in the end. A battle where it seems Satan and the forces, he has arranged behind him, will win.

However, when all seems lost, God intervenes. (Much like Aslan showing up at just the right time in the Chronicles of Narnia) Why God needs to bring everything to a climax like this, I don’t know, but I trust that He knows what He is doing.

The reason why we are given insight into this future now, is to encourage us in the present. The fact that we will triumph with Christ in the end is a needed reassurance when we are facing off against the powers of evil in our current time. Let us never ever give up, Christ may delay, but at just the right time He will intervene, and we will triumph with Him.