

Series: Behold the Royal Lamb (a study in Revelation 19-20)

Sermon Text: 20:7-15 The Final Judgment (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

Last time, we explored the so called “*Millennium*”, a **1000-year** period which may explain why our gospel mission (cf. Matthew 28:18-20) has enjoyed global success. **Verses 1-3** reflect how *Satan has been bound* like a junk-yard dog: he can still bark and pull the chain but can ***no longer deceive nations***. **Verses 4-6** imply that believers who die before the 2nd coming instantly ***come alive to reign*** with Jesus and others ***in heaven***. That led our buddy Ben to ask this fun question: “*Will our resurrected bodies be like zombies?*”, fictional creatures that are reanimated dead bodies that lack free will or rational thought. The answer, of course, is “***NO!***” Our resurrected bodies won't be decaying or falling apart; they will be conscious, perfected, and whole just like Christ's resurrected body. Ben's cool question did remind me of how hackers create “*zombie botnets*” by infecting computer networks with malware to control them. In 2021, [international agencies disrupted one](#) and jailed the botmasters. But despite being defeated and ***bound in chains*** (like Satan in **20:1-6**), [infected machines kept doing their bidding](#). That is exactly what we witness in today's text. Satan is temporarily released from his prison and immediately tries to reboot his old network for one last-ditch “*botnet*” attack against God's people. But as we are about to see, this virus is instantly neutralized by heaven's firewall. This passage encourages us to resist Satan's tiresome, cultural attacks the Lamb's way by assuring us of this...

BIG IDEA: God will vindicate faith by eradicating Satan's network and expunging our guilt.

Let's see how this final reboot begins in **verses 7-8: *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth*** (a Hebrew way to say “*the whole earth*”, cf. 7:1), ***Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea*** (a Hebrew way to say “*innumerable*”). John pulled from a prophecy in Ezekiel 37-39 promising that Israel's enemies would trouble them in the future. This was surely symbolism since he lumped ***all earthly nations*** under the

label ***Gog and Magog***, meaning these empires likely won't revive or be Russian cities as suggested by premillennialism. And since the church continues Israel's mission, all this seems like a final assault on our gospel witness. It runs parallel with and ends just like those gruesome visions of Armageddon in ***chapter 16*** and the feast of fowls in ***chapter 19***--both contain elements of the ***Gog and Magog*** prophecies. Given the nature of apocalyptic literature, and John's repetition of the phrase "I saw" (chart below), these final chapters seem less like a timeline (minority view) and more like parallel pictures of what Christ's return will be like (majority view).

We find the result of Satan's last stand in ***verses 9-10: They marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them*** (the unbelieving attackers), ***and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were*** (the 2 beasts from ***chapter 13***), ***and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever***. While people debate the where and how of this final battle, the symbols affirm what other Scriptures say--***the devil*** is no match for God. Believers are described as ***the city God loves*** which will descend from heaven in ***chapters 21-22***. Christ's return is depicted as ***fire from heaven*** like in 2 Kings 1 where Elijah called down fire to consume the prophets of Baal. Scholars debate ***the lake of fire's*** nature since spiritual beings (***the devil*** and his ***2 beasts***) can't be burned by physical flames. But whatever the form, ***verses 9-10*** prove God's creation will be purified after all that ruins, abuses, deforms and corrupts is ***forever*** locked away in what amounts to a cosmic incinerator or garbage dump. Said more positively, Christ's 2nd coming will be the long-awaited reversal of Genesis 3. Humans will finally be set free to lean fully into our created purpose of ruling, cultivating, and filling earth with God's glory under the righteous leadership of the Resurrected Lamb!

Meanwhile, the wealthy buy their way out of prison and murderous rulers sleep peacefully as abuse victims are silenced. Deep down, we ache for a day of absolute justice, like those souls back in ***chapter 6***, crying out from under heaven's altar, who were handed white robes and told to rest just a little longer. We grow weary as we wait for the cosmic pot to come to a boil and find it hard to rest amidst so much

injustice. But here's the thing...resting in God's plan isn't about doing nothing--it's about embracing the long game because we know the cross guarantees the ending depicted next in *verse 11: Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them* (this Daniel 2:35 phrase implies “no trace of the old/evil”). As we saw in *chapters 4-5*, John borrowed his *throne* visions from Daniel 7 and likely Ezekiel 1:26-28, which portray *God seated* and *books opened*. *White* recalls God's purity and holiness to remind us of the dual purposes of His judgments: to punish evil and to vindicate His persecuted people. This conclusion is affirmed by similar *books* in Daniel 7 where evil was ended and Daniel 12 where saints were redeemed.

Verse 12 depicts how God's *judgments* will bring *heaven's* harmony to earth: *And I saw the dead, great and small* (from every social status), *standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.* These are most likely God's memories, not literal *books*. The recap in *verses 13-14*, underscores the totality of evil's eradication: *And the sea gave up the dead who were in it* (those unburied/lost at sea), *Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them* (land burials), *and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.* John doubled down on *the lake of fire being the second death* likely to show that prior to Christ's return, we all experience “*the first death*” which is physical in nature but not *the second* which is eternal, spiritual separation from God of those who prefer rebellion and autonomy over relationship with the rightfully ruling King.

The headline here, however, is what will happen in God's courtroom: ALL injustices will be brought to light! There will be no cold cases, no missing evidence, and no forgotten victims. Not a single unjust stone will remain unturned--even *death* will be swallowed up in victory (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54). But now the world can feel like a cruel, frigid sea. The shadow of death looms large like a terrifying iceberg, tempting us to think that drastic human effort could somehow avert a Titanic-sized disaster. [Well, the Coast Guard proved otherwise back in the 1950s](#), by launching

military attacks against massive 250,000-ton icebergs. After using warships, depth charges, and bomb-dropping aircraft, they realized the futility of human firepower and the benefit of letting the icebergs [drift into warmer waters to be consumed](#). We find a similar outcome in our text where ***Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire***. Our weapons and strategies can't defeat ***death*** nor break its grip, but the chilling foes of human history will inevitably dissolve in the blazing ***fires*** of God's judgment and be gone ***forever***. Our text reveals the futility of using Babylon's aggressive antics to fight evil (anger, muscle, and firepower). It seems far more efficient and effective to simply map out truth, sound the warning, and invite people into the safety of the Lamb.

This brings us to the good news in ***verse 15: And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire***. Finding 2 sets of ***books*** is generally bad for business, but here it can fill us with hope! Instinctively we know our goose would be cooked should God base our eternal sentence on recollections of our historically imperfect works. Thankfully, there's this other ***book***, also called ***The Lamb's book of life*** in ***21:27*** and ***the book of life of The Lamb who was slain*** in ***13:8***. Unlike presidential pardons that merely excuse a guilty criminal, this is a catalog of those whose records have been legally expunged. Scripture refers to this miracle as "***justification by faith***" whereby we are declared innocent and credited with Christ's perfect record. So, "***How can God do this thing that humans can't?***" It's because ***the spotless Lamb*** sacrificed Himself to fully satisfy our sin debt. Now, when God looks at that ***book***, He doesn't see a list of excused criminals but rather righteous sons and daughters.

This leaves just one question: "***How do we get our names on that list?***" The simplest answer is found in Romans 10:13 which states "***whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved***." That's good news in a performance-based world obsessed with canceling us for past mistakes and maintaining meticulous mental and digital records of our worst moments. Just this week, a friend recounted how people he cared for deflected healing truth he was sharing by salaciously resurrecting his past failures which he repented of and is repairing. Ever been there? By God's grace, we've repented of errors, taken responsibility, and begun growing. But amateur

investigators dig up our deeds from unforgiving internet archives, haul us into kangaroo courtrooms, and seek to silence us with the history that's been handled by Jesus. This text helps us stop participating in human "*shame games*" because at the ultimate tribunal, the already decided verdict will be announced--Jesus already took the ledger of our worst moments, nailed it to the cross, and signed His own name to our defense. You need not spend your life performing, hiding, or defending your record--because Christ's spotless record is credited to your account and your pardon is *forever*. This frees us to become healing agents while God continues His healing work in us. And like my friend who reached out for accountability and encouragement, remember that we're not in this alone. We can lean on Christ's church to help to take those difficult next steps.

PARALLEL PICTURES OF CHRIST'S RETURN?

18:1	"I Saw" The End of Babylon
19:11	"I Saw" Christ on a White Horse
19:17	"I Saw" The Great Supper of God
19:19	"I Saw" The End of the 2 Beasts
20:1-4	"I Saw" Satan Bound and Saints Reigning
20:11	"I Saw" Old Creation Cleansed
20:12	"I Saw" The White Throne Judgment
21:1-2	"I Saw" New Creation Begins
21:22	"I Saw" Heaven and Earth are One Temple

REGARDING THE DEATHS AND RESURRECTIONS

Pastor Tim Chester (p.158) explains that: "The first resurrection is the gift of spiritual life we receive when we become Christians (v 5). This is the sign that we'll receive the second resurrection, which is physical resurrection to eternal life. John says the second death is to be thrown into the eternal lake of fire (v 14). This is the spiritual death of eternal separation from God. The first death, then, is the physical death we all must face (unless Christ returns during our lifetime)."

The first resurrection = spiritual	The second resurrection = physical
The first death = physical	The second death = spiritual

Sunday to Monday Connection: Revelation 20 reminds us that while hardship is part of the Christian life, evil doesn't win. Satan's days are numbered, God's justice is coming, and because of Jesus, we can live with confidence today. If your faith is in Christ, your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, not because you've earned it, but because of His finished work. That's the hope that frees us to follow Him faithfully this week.

- **Question:** When you're tempted to fear evil or defend your reputation, are you resting in your own work, or in what Christ has done for you?
- **Next Step:** This week, as you're tempted to respond in fear or anger, remember that your identity is secure in Christ. Ask Him to help you respond with the confidence, humility, and faithfulness that come from knowing your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. What new perspectives about divine judgment and about Revelation have you gained from reading this chapter? Are there parts of the chapter with which you disagree?
2. What questions or concerns remain for you about the judgment of God and/or the scenes of judgment in Revelation?
3. How might Christian churches begin to raise and address the issue of “Babylonian” vocations and other economic practices? the problem of apathy about injustice?
4. If God did not deal with evil, would God be just? Would God be God?
5. The mention of Gog and Magog from Ezekiel 38–39, has led some to link Bible references to modern nations and timetables for Christ’s return. Why might people be drawn to name and date setting which only seems to have muddled our understanding of Revelation? In what ways could such approaches take away from the God-centered and Christ-centered focus of Revelation?
6. How do the holiness and justice of God compel Him to judgment? What is the meaning of the statement in the commentary that God judges both to punish the rebellious and to vindicate His people? Does a lack of understanding of God’s holiness and justice lie behind our modern tendency to downplay the reality of the everlasting conscious punishment set in motion by the great white throne judgment?
7. What does reigning through the word and reigning through suffering mean for you?

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Summary:** “Between the two comings of Christ, God restricts Satan in his ability to deceive the nations into joining forces to attack and completely annihilate the church, but this restraint is now removed. Satan will escort an army drawn from the ‘four quarters of the earth,’ an Old Testament expression for the whole earth (Is 11:12; Ezek 37:9; Dan 7:2). The assembling of these antagonistic forces against God’s people fulfills the prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39, in which ‘Gog’ and ‘Magog’ and ‘many peoples’ gather together for war against Israel in the end times (cf. Zech 12–14). The attack on the church, the continuation of true end-time Israel and the covenant community, is

unsuccessful as the satanic trinity—the devil, beast, and false prophet—is cast into the lake of fire for all eternity.” (Beale, 487-488)

- **Gog and Magog:** “The assembling of these antagonistic forces against God’s people is seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Ezekiel 38–39 that “Gog and Magog” and “many peoples” would gather together for war against Israel. In particular, the language of “gathering together” the nations derives from Ezek. 38:2–7 and 39:2, together with passages from Zechariah 12–14 and Zephaniah 3, which also stand behind the parallel phrases in Rev. 16:14 and 19:19. All of these OT texts foretell that God will gather the nations together in Israel for the final war of history (see further on 16:14 and 19:19). Against this background, the definite article before “war” (“the war”) in 16:14; 19:19 and here may be an article of previous reference, referring not only to the OT prophecy of the final battle but also back to the initial (anarthrous) description of the last battle in 11:7. Thus, all these references refer to the same final battle, not different battles... Ezekiel distinguishes Gog and Magog from the other nations of the earth who are allied with them (38:2–7, 15, 22; 39:4). But in Rev. 20:8 “Gog and Magog” are not distinguished from the other nations but are figuratively equated with all the nations. In addition, whereas “Gog and Magog” and their allies come out of “the remote parts of the north” in Ezekiel (38:6, 15), now they come from throughout the whole earth, the four corners of the earth (though Ethiopia and Put, from the south, were also among the allies in Ezek. 38:5). This is a universalization of the Ezekiel prophecy, suggesting a universalization of oppressed Israel, which becomes equivalent in v. 9 to “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” and is to be understood as the church throughout the earth. The same universalization occurs in 16:12, 14, where “the kings from the east” appear to be interpreted as “the kings of the whole world,” which further identifies the two passages as referring to the same events (see on 16:12–16). It is also possible that all the invading nations mentioned as well as implied in Ezekiel 38–39 are now referred to as “Gog and Magog” because John may have understood that this nation headed up and represented the others, including Put and Ethiopia, who were not from the north. Such a viewpoint may be supported by Ezek. 38:14, 16, 18 and 39:1, 6, 11, which refer to Gog or Magog as the main invader who would attack and suffer defeat (note also Ezek. 38:7: “prepare yourself [Gog], you and all your companies”). Even so, there would still appear to be some greater degree of universalization in Rev. 20:8, since the nations in Ezekiel 38–39 appear to come only from, at most, two major directions, while here they proceed from all four points of the compass.” (Beale, 452-453)
- **The timing of Satan’s demise:** “There is no verb in Greek with the clause where the beast and the false prophet are also. The NASB adds the ‘are.’ Premillennialists typically see the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire for a thousand years before the devil was cast there. This issue is confused in the NIV, which refers to the devil being thrown into the lake of fire ‘where the beast and false prophet had been thrown.’ But the beast and the false prophet can be seen as thrown into the fire at the same time as the devil, if the (omitted but understood) verb is taken most naturally in the same tense as the

verb in the preceding clause, ‘the devil ... was thrown’: ‘the devil ... was thrown ... where the beast and the false prophet were also thrown.’ The overall perspective of the passage definitively determines whether the episodes are simultaneous or separated by an interval of time and the context favors a simultaneous notion. That the episodes are simultaneous or directly following one another is borne out by our overall analysis of ch. 20 so far, which has suggested that the events of 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 are contemporaneous. This is further supported by the fact that in 19:20 the beast and the false prophet are thrown into ‘the lake of fire,’ the same phrase occurring here with respect to the devil. In 20:14–15 and 21:8, the ‘lake of fire’ is called ‘the second death,’ which is the final, eternal punishment and begins for all the ungodly (unbelievers, the beast, the false prophet, and the devil) at the same time, at the destruction and re-creation of the cosmos (so vv. 10–15; 21:1–8). The strong verbal parallels between v. 10 and 14:10–11 (eternal torment with fire and brimstone) suggest that the same reality is referred to there.” (Beale, 456-457)

- **Grand Finales:** “Revelation portrays the judgment of God in groups of seven scenes: seven seals (6:1–8:1); seven angels with trumpets (8:2–11:19); and seven angels with bowls (15:1–16:21, with the seventh bowl extended and then celebrated, as the finale, in 17:1–19:10). This is not really the finale, however, as Christ appears in judgment on his white horse as the Word of God and as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, crowned with many diadems and clothed in a blood-dipped robe, to make war with the sword in his mouth (19:11–21). However, this is not the finale either, because following the 1,000 years of Satan’s binding (20:1–6), the final finale occurs: the final judgment, when the unholy trinity (devil, beast, false prophet), the unrepentant, Death, and Hades all meet their fate (20:7–15) ... It is tempting to read the visions of judgment and (symbolic) destruction as the activity of an angry God and/or the ranting of an angry people; many have been unable to resist the temptation. But in the end, we have argued, God is portrayed in Revelation, not as uncontrollably angry, but as inexorably just. God’s faithfulness to the creation, all humanity, and the church leads to the divine war against evil, Empire, and their lies, represented by the unholy trinity and named “Babylon.” The three members of that unholy triumvirate together meet their final fate, along with those who ultimately refuse the mercy of God, as well as Death and Hades themselves (20:10, 14–15). In other words, God wins: “It is done!” (16:17; 21:6). The new creation inaugurated in the death and resurrection of the Lamb can now be completed. “It is done” means also “Let’s begin! I am making all things new!” The church celebrates the victory it has longed for only because the judgment of Babylon means the salvation of the world.” (Gorman, 140, 158-159)
- **A super special book:** “What is it about the book of life which spares them? The fuller title for the book is ‘the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain’ (13:8; and 21:27 has ‘the Lamb’s book of life’). The life granted them in association with the book comes from their identification with the Lamb’s righteous deeds and especially with His death, which implies likewise that

they are identified with His resurrection life (cf. 5:5–13). They do not suffer judgment for their evil deeds because the Lamb has already suffered it for them: He was slain on their behalf (so especially 1:5 and 5:9; see on 13:8). The Lamb acknowledges before God all who are written in the book (3:5) and who are identified with His righteousness and His death... According to 21:4, 8, physical death (the first death) will have ‘passed away,’ whereas the lake of fire, the second death, will last forever (cf. 14:10–11; 20:10). Part of the reality of suffering the second death is eternal separation from the presence of God in His city. The same categories of wicked people who will suffer this death are also said to dwell outside the heavenly city, while the righteous enjoy the blessings of participation in it (cf. 21:8 with 22:15; so also 21:27; 22:14–15, 19). Elsewhere the NT can also speak of a spiritual death which separates people from God (e.g., Luke 15:24, 32; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13).” (Beale, 461)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [An Evening of Eschatology](#) – A Charitable Debate of the Millennial Categories
- [A relevant song](#) - My Worth Is Not In What I Own by Keith and Kristyn Getty
- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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