

Heaven—Part 1 **Daniel Cote**
2nd Congregational Church **11/3/24**
Scripture Reading **Revelation 19:11–16**
Sermon Text **Revelation 20:1–6**

The story is told of a miserly man who died and went to Heaven. He was met at the pearly gates by the apostle Peter, who led him down the golden streets. They went past mansion after beautiful mansion until they came to the end of the street, where they stopped in front of a shack. The man asked Peter why he got a shabby hut when there were so many mansions in which he could live. Peter replied, “I did the best I could with the money you sent us.” I should have saved that one for stewardship Sunday, but it highlights the point that our understanding of heaven is often cartoonish when there is much that can be learned about heaven in Scripture. We should seek to know more about heaven because it is where we will spend eternity.

As your Pastor, I am responsible for explaining the Bible to you, educating you in the things of God and His purposes in human history, and encouraging all of us, including me, to be better disciples of Jesus Christ. John and I have done sermons of late related to discipleship, but today, and in the next couple of sermons, I want to turn to God’s remaining plans for human history, the return of Jesus, and the eternal heaven that we will call our home. There is a day coming that will be like no other day in the history of the Earth, and that is the Second Coming or the Second Advent of Jesus.

Some might find this sermon to be technical, and others will think I am feeding the flock and helping them grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures. My hope is that this message will give you hope for the glorious future that lies ahead for the saints! You have probably never heard sermons on some of the topics I will cover in this series because they are often not emphasized in seminaries, where time is often lacking to cover everything in the Bible. Furthermore, end-time passages can be hard to understand, and there is debate as to how end-time passages should be interpreted.

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and we can trust that everything it tells us is true and that everything it prophesies will come to pass. Jesus says in John 17:17 that God’s Word is true. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-18 that everything prophesied in Scripture will come to pass. As the Statement of Faith of this church says, “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God and that they are the supreme authority in faith and life and absolutely trustworthy.” Our Statement of Faith also affirms that Jesus will return at His Second Coming to judge the world and establish His eternal kingdom. We will consider amazing things in this sermon series, and we can be certain that they will come to pass.

Now, some interpret the Book of Revelation in a non-literal way. Amillennialists do not believe in a literal thousand-year millennium, even though the millennium is mentioned six times in Revelation, Chapter 20. They treat the Book of Revelation as an allegory, and they spiritualize its meaning. For instance, you will notice that the binding of Satan described in our Sermon text comes after the Second Coming of Jesus in the Scripture passages just read.

Amillennialists argue that the binding of Satan described in Revelation 20 occurred at the death and resurrection of Jesus. So they contend that during the church age, which is now, Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations. That is just ridiculous. This flies in the face of the news headlines, which show that our world is in the grip of evil at a demonic and satanic level. It is also contradicted by the Apostles, who warn us of the dangers we face from Satan in their letters. First Peter 5:8 says that Satan is a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Paul says in Ephesians 6:11-12 that we must stand firm against the schemes of Satan, who is our

powerful adversary. Satan is not bound according to the Apostles; thus, Amillennialism must be false.

Premillennialists see the events of our sermon text as taking place in the future after the Second Coming of Jesus, and they interpret the text of the Book of Revelation in the normal literal way, allowing for figures of speech, symbolic language, and the use of parables. I believe this is the correct approach for several reasons. First, the rest of the Bible is interpreted literally; why would we use a different approach when we come to the Book of Revelation? Second, all of Bible prophecy that has been fulfilled has been fulfilled in some literal way. Consider the Messianic prophecies, which find perfect literal fulfillment in the life of Jesus. Third, if the text doesn't mean what it says in some literal sense, it can mean anything, leading to fanciful interpretations untethered to Scripture.

Finally, as a teacher of the Bible who will give an accounting for my teaching before God, I take very seriously the warning that the Apostle John gives at the end of Revelation 22. John writes:

Revelation 22:18–19

¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

That is a very serious warning. I certainly do not want to add or take away from what is taught in the Book of Revelation. On that basis, I think the only way I, or anyone else, can be faithful to the text is to interpret it literally and explain what it means in the context of the entire Bible. So, that is what I will do in this short sermon series on the Second Coming and Heaven.

Enough introduction. Our Scripture reading describes one of the epic moments in the history of the entire universe, and that is the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in great power and glory. In His first advent, He came as a suffering servant who sacrificed His life to bring salvation and reconciliation with God for all who believe. But Jesus will return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords at His Second Coming. It will be the time Jesus promises in Matthew 13:49 in the Parable of the Dragnet, where His angels will come forth and remove the wicked and all evil from the world. For those who love Jesus and yearn for justice and truth, it will be the best day ever. For those who rejected Jesus and worked evil in the world, it will be the worst day ever.

The image the Apostle John is given is of a rider coming from heaven on a white horse. Several names are given to the rider on the white horse, and we see with certainty that the rider is Jesus because He is called the Word of God. Anyone with even a passing familiarity with John's Gospel will know that he refers to Jesus as the Word of God in the first line of his Gospel. The rider on the white horse is Jesus, which is further evidenced by the fact that He is the King of Kings and, furthermore, that His robe is dipped in blood, symbolizing His suffering and sacrifice at His first advent.

According to our passage, Jesus will return with "The armies of heaven...following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (vs. 14). Who are the armies of heaven dressed in fine linen that accompany Jesus at His return? These are the saints of all ages, the church, as we learn in Revelation 19:8, just ahead of our Scripture reading. This is further confirmed by Revelation 17:14, which describes the world powers waging war against Jesus and His chosen faithful followers. So, if Jesus is returning to Earth at His Second Coming accompanied by the church, it is obvious that the church must have been removed from the

Earth previously at the Rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, which I preached on last May.

Our Scripture reading continues to describe the Battle of Armageddon. Armageddon is the location of the final battle between the satanic and human forces of evil and God. Armageddon is located in the large valley between Mount Carmel and the city of Jezreel in northern Israel. It will not be much of a battle because the human forces will be struck down in an instant by Jesus himself. Our passage says that the evil forces of the nations will be struck down by the sharp sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus. The sword is symbolic of the power of the Word of the Lord. God spoke the universe into existence, and with the same authority, at the word of Jesus, the forces of evil will be destroyed. Like grapes in a winepress, the forces of evil will be crushed as the fierce wrath of God is poured out.

The unholy trinity controlling the forces of evil in the end times comprises Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet. At the beginning of the battle, we learn in Revelation 19:20 that the Antichrist and false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire, which burns with brimstone, and the rest of the forces are killed with the sword of the Lord.

We then come to our sermon text at the beginning of Revelation 20. In his vision, John saw an angel coming down, holding the key to the abyss and a great chain. John saw this same angel taking hold of Satan, binding him, and confining him to the abyss for 1000 years. During the 1000-year period, Satan will no longer deceive the nations. The word *millennium* comes from the Latin words *mille* and *annus*, which together mean 1000 years. So, the 1000-year period referred to in our sermon text is called the Millennial Kingdom because, as we learn in verse 6, Christ reigns on Earth for 1000 years. However, John sees that at the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released for a short time.

Why would Satan be released for a short time? Why would God allow a final satanic rebellion at the end of the thousand years? We need to consider who will be present in the Millennial Kingdom, and then we will return to that question.

At the Battle of Armageddon described in our Scripture reading, all of the evil unbelievers will be destroyed; thus, they will have no part in the Millennial Kingdom. They will await to be resurrected until the end of the Millennium when they will face God's judgment. These are the people who Jesus refers to in Matthew 24:40–42, saying:

⁴⁰ At that time there will be two *men* in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two *women* will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

Those who lived through the tribulation and came to faith in Christ during that time will live on into the Millennial Kingdom with standard-issue human bodies like ours. They will be faithful Gentiles and Jews who were alive at the return of Jesus, and they will live on into the Millennial Kingdom. They will live and reproduce in the Millennial Kingdom until the thousand years are up. In their standard human bodies, they will still be subject to sinning and dying, but Satan will not be around to tempt them.

The other group who will populate the Millennial Kingdom will be the saints of all ages in glorified resurrection bodies like that of Jesus. As I explained earlier, the church, which had been removed from the Earth before the Tribulation, returns to Earth along with Jesus at His Second Coming. So, too, the Old Testament saints who were faithful to God will also be present in the Millennial Kingdom in resurrection bodies. Daniel 12:2 says of the Old Testament saints, “...many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.” Added to the group of New Testament and Old Testament saints in resurrection bodies will be those martyred during the Tribulation because of their faith in Jesus. As John writes in verse 4 of our text, “... I saw the souls of those

who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their foreheads and on their hands; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

John refers to the resurrection of this group, composed of the raptured New Testament church, the Old Testament saints, and the martyrs of the Tribulation as the “first resurrection.” This is the group you want to be a part of because their destiny is eternal heaven in the presence of God and Jesus. John writes in Revelation 20:6, “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” What a spectacular thought! All true believers throughout the ages will reign with Christ for a thousand years. You and I will reign with Christ. We are not worthy, but in Christ, we are loved by God with an unending unbreakable love. That is a message of great hope.

As we learn in verse 5 of our text, the unbelieving dead throughout the Old and New Testaments times and the Tribulation will not be resurrected until the end of the thousand years because they are not part of God’s kingdom. Instead, they will be resurrected at the end of the thousand years and face the Great White Throne judgment, resulting in their eternal banishment from God’s kingdom. This is the second resurrection. In verse 5 of our text, John affirms, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.

We need to return to verse four of our text, where John writes, “Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.” Who are they who sit on the thrones in judgment? The best answer to this question comes from the words of Jesus in Luke 22:29–30, where he tells the Apostles, “and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” So it seems that the Apostles are sitting on the thrones, which makes sense since they were God’s agents on Earth, through whom the church was initiated.

There will be great peace and harmony in the millennium, and the OT has much to say about it. Isaiah 11 says that the wolf dwells with the lamb during this period, and the leopard lies down with the young goat. The weaned child will put his hand in the viper's den. Isaiah 11:9 states, “They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.” Micah 4:2-3 says this about the Millennial Kingdom:

² Many nations will come and say, “Come and let’s go up to the mountain of the Lord And to the house of the God of Jacob, So that He may teach us about His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.” For from Zion will go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³ And He will judge between many peoples And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift a sword against nation...”

A final question we must answer regarding our text is, why does God release Satan for a short time from his prison in the abyss? Why didn’t He just have Satan thrown into hell directly at the Second Coming with the Antichrist and False Prophet? In fact, as atheists have suggested, why doesn’t God eliminate all evil from the world right now? The answer is found in the Parable of the Weeds and Wheat that Jesus tells in Matthew 13:24-30, which He explains in Matthew 13:36-43. Let me summarize what Jesus says. Each individual in this life is either allied with God or with Satan. There are only two teams. We are either on God’s team or Satan’s team. The deceit and temptation of Satan force us to choose between God and Satan. You see, God wants people to choose Him freely out of love for Him. God does not want robots in heaven that are forced to believe in Him. Forced love is not love. True love can only freely be chosen. God wants

people in His heaven who have chosen Him freely out of love for who He is and what He has done. God wants people to choose between the truth of the gospel and the allure and pleasures of the world. That is what is happening right now all around us and worldwide. People all around us are making decisions to receive Jesus or reject Him.

Let's get back to the people who have survived the millennium in standard issue, corrupt human bodies. They will live and reproduce in the Millennial Kingdom until the thousand years are up. There will be a vast population by the end of the millennium. Isaiah 65:20 says of the millennium, "No longer will there be in it an infant *who lives only a few days*, Or an old person who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of a hundred, And the one who does not reach the age of a hundred Will be *thought* accursed." Imagine if all the diseases we experience are greatly curtailed or eliminated. The human population would explode! That will be the case in the millennium.

However, those who enter the Millennium as mere humans will produce many children in the millennium who are mere humans and were never tempted by Satan because Satan will be in his abyss time out during the millennium, as we read in our text. At the end of the millennium, God will allow Satan out of the abyss for a short time for the purposes of sifting the human children born during the millennium to determine if they will ally themselves with Jesus or with Satan.

Again, God wants people in his kingdom to choose him and love Him freely, and so, at the end of the millennium, Satan will be allowed to tempt the nations and the people of the world so that they will have an opportunity to choose between God and Satan. It seems amazing that even though Jesus physically is present and ruling from the throne of David in Jerusalem, there will still be those who will revolt against Him. It should not be too surprising, however, because, at His first coming, He worked miracles that made it plain to see that He was the Son of God, and the masses still revolted against Him. Revelation 20:7-10 describes the scene of this final battle of good and evil. The forces of Satan will number like the sand on the seashore as they surround the camp of the saints at Jerusalem, but God will destroy the rebels with fire from heaven in a brief but decisive battle that ends with Satan being thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is Hell for all eternity. Evil will finally be destroyed and removed from God's kingdom for all eternity.

In the next installment of this sermon, we will encounter Heaven, our eternal hope and our eternal home. One night at dinner, a man who had spent many summers in Maine fascinated his companions by telling of his experiences in a little town named Flagstaff. The town was flooded in 1950 when a hydroelectric dam was built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more woebegone. Then he added by way of explanation: "Where there is no *hope* in the future, there is no power in the present."ⁱ Where there is no hope, there is no strength. Dear friends, our hope for the future is certain and has been secured for us by the one who is faithful and true. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Thus, we can live for Him with power in the present. Amen.
de in your hearts. Amen.

ⁱ Halford E. Luccock, Unfinished Business.