

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 82 – REVELATION 20:4-6 - RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS]

At the beginning of this series on the book of Revelation, we identified three themes running throughout the book.

- ◆ The first and major theme is one of allegiance.
- ◆ We shared the legend of a Native American grandfather speaking with his grandson about the two competing wolves that reside in each of us, one representing evil, and the other good.
- ◆ The story ends with the grandfather answering his grandson's question as to "Which wolf will win?" with the response, "The one you feed."
- ◆ John wants his readers to align themselves with the kingdom devoted to the preservation of life rather than the destruction of life despite the perils they may face.
- ◆ In other words, align yourselves with the kingdom representing "good."

But there are a couple of sub-themes running throughout the dialogue.

- ◆ There are evil powers at work that infiltrate and infest all levels of human society, and the book of Revelation systematically exposes these malevolent powers, along with their final destruction.
- ◆ However the book does not end with destruction, but with a final vision of hope.
- ◆ From a human perspective it appears like the forces of evil are winning the battle but in the end as we saw, the forces of good prevail.
- ◆ We now turn our attention to this second sub-theme, the final vision of hope.

Now we are introduced to two resurrections – the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of all peoples.

- ◆ Last time we finished with the destruction of the dragon, the false prophet and the beast representing the forces of darkness.
- ◆ Now we see what the giver of life has in store for humanity now that the sources of evil have been removed.
- ◆ To look at this first resurrection, we need to back up again and look at this 1000-year "between the times" or "millennial time" period between Christ's resurrection and His promised return.
- ◆ ***Revelation 20:4-6 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.***
- ◆ This as we saw is referring to the millennial or church age (v.5).
- ◆ John identifies these faithful Christians as martyrs (or from the Greek, "witnesses") those who had remained loyal even in the face of death down through the centuries.
- ◆ ***V.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 order to understand what is going on here, we need to make a distinction between what happens to one of God's saints when they die and those who are not.
- ◆ As we learned earlier, there are two different dimensions at work, the physical one we humans occupy of time and space, and the spiritual one, eternal time, the one God occupies.
- ◆ Back in Revelation 7, we were introduced to the 144,000, the church, who are the continuation of the Israel of God, hence the mention of the twelve tribes (Revelation 7:4-8).
- ◆ These mentioned here in Revelation 20 are the same group, the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7 who have remained loyal to the Lamb down through the ages and have their future sealed.
- ◆ They may have died from persecution or natural causes but because they died in the faith, the second death has no power over them.
- ◆ The second death is reserved for those who at the end of time refuse to accept Christ's gift of grace.
- ◆ But notice they came to life and reigned with Christ as priests during this 1000-year period of the church age.
- ◆ To understand what is happening here we need to remember that with Christ's victory over death at His resurrection, He introduced the age of the new creation.
- ◆ We have these two overlapping times, the old corrupt age leading to death which is passing away, and the new age of the kingdom of God leading to everlasting life.

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- ◆ It is these two overlapping ages that can be a little confusing as we read scriptural references concerning these issues.
- ◆ Sometimes they are looked at from the perspective of the new creation, sometimes from the perspective of the old decaying creation.
- ◆ But not only has time changed with the introduction of the new creation, but also the status of Christians.
- ◆ Prior to our conversion, like the rest of humanity, we were born of the earth or “dust”, in other words, mortal (Genesis 2:7).
- ◆ But now, because of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit we have been born from “above” (immortal) (John 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:49).
- ◆ **1 Peter 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.**
- ◆ Christians, by the fact they have been baptised and incorporated into the body of Christ, have passed from death, (the old corrupt age of the flesh), to the life of the Spirit of the new creation (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).
- ◆ **Romans 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**
- ◆ Baptism pictures the death of the old man and the birth of the new man in Christ.
- ◆ As far as God is concerned and from the perspective of the new age, we are already citizens of the new creation, the kingdom of God and spiritually speaking, already sit with Christ in the heavenly realm (Colossians 3:1-3), and reign with Him (Revelation 20:4; 3:21).
- ◆ **Ephesians 2:4-6 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.**
- ◆ And even though this old body, which is part of the old corrupt age, is decaying away, we also have a spiritual body that is being renewed day by day.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.**
- ◆ A Christian already partakes in the power of the resurrection by the fact the Holy Spirit lives in him (Romans 8:9-11).
- ◆ It is because of the believer's status as belonging to the realm of the new creation and his new relationship status to Jesus Christ that his death is different to that of a non-believer.
- ◆ Paul confirms this in Philippians 1:21-23
- ◆ **Philippians 1:21-23 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;**
- ◆ Paul is saying, “If it is God's will for me to continue his work to preach the gospel in this old decaying time, so be it. But my preference is to depart and experience the life of the new creation in Christ's presence.”
- ◆ Paul understood that when viewed from the perspective of the new creation, when a believer dies, they immediately cross that threshold between mortality and immortality and enter into the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).
- ◆ This seems to be Jesus' understanding when He promised the thief on the cross, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43).**
- ◆ Of course a more traditional view on the resurrection of the saints is that the body waits in the grave until Christ's return.
- ◆ But again, this appears to be what is happening because it is being viewed from the perspective of old time and space.
- ◆ Another position held by some is that of “soul sleep” or an “intermediate state” which is an unconscious state between death and resurrection.

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- ◆ Both of these positions fail to take into consideration the impact Christ's resurrection to glory and majesty had on the old structures of time and space and the granting of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to believers.
 - ◆ After these momentous events instigating the new creation, there is no going back to the old decaying structures of time and space.
 - ◆ This is also why a millennium within the old structures of time and space after Christ's return in all His manifest glory is a contradiction of all that has transpired with Christ's atonement, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost.
 - ◆ Both of these positions, the traditional view and the unconscious or intermediate state are difficult to reconcile with what we read earlier.
 - ◆ As we read in Revelation 20:4-6, it would be difficult to be seated on thrones and reign with Christ as priests during this millennial church age from the grave or in an unconscious state.
 - ◆ We also saw back in Revelation 6 the souls of those slain under the altar asking, "**How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?**" (*Revelation 6:9-11*).
 - ◆ Although this could be interpreted figuratively it could also suggest a conscious state.
 - ◆ And then there is the reference to this being the first resurrection.
 - ◆ **Revelation 20:5-6 ...This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection.**
 - ◆ The implication of this verse is that the saints who die are resurrected to glory during this 1000-year church period prior to Christ's return.
 - ◆ Paul gives a further insight when he addressed the concerns of the Thessalonian church as to what would happen to those of their fellow believers who had died in Christ.
 - ◆ **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**
 - ◆ Again, the implication is these saints have been with Christ in heaven all along in order for Jesus to bring them back with Him.
 - ◆ Those saints who are still alive at Christ's triumphant return will join them.
 - ◆ **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**
 - ◆ There is no reason to believe that what happens to these believers who are still alive at Christ's return when they are transformed and receive their glorified spiritual body will not happen to believers at the point of their death prior to His return.
 - ◆ This section of scripture also refutes the modern popular idea of the rapture of the living saints being taken from the world prior to Christ's return to escape the coming "tribulation."
 - ◆ There is no scriptural support for this position.
 - ◆ The 144,000 figuratively represent these two groups of saints together, those who have died in the faith, and those still alive at Christ's return.
 - ◆ And finally, what would be the point of leaving these saints in either the grave or in an unconscious state when we are told the second death has no power over them?
 - ◆ Why unnecessarily prolong the Christian hope of eternal life with our God?
- That takes care of the resurrection of the saints but what about the rest of humanity? The great mass of struggling sinful humanity who up till this point have never heard of Jesus Christ, or if they have, refused to engage with the gospel message of salvation? What does God have in store for them?***
- ◆ This is where the second resurrection comes in.
 - ◆ But before we move on to the second resurrection, we need to just back up to Revelation 20:4-6 again and ask the question, what are these saints doing while they reign with Christ as priests during this 1000-year period.
- Besides experiencing the pleasure of being with their Lord in heaven, I would like to suggest these now glorified saints are given another responsibility while they wait for Christ's triumphant return to the earth.***

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- ◆ I want to stress this is a personal point of view but I feel the saints of God are going to play an important role in the next phase of God's purpose and that is the second resurrection to judgment.
- ◆ The mission Jesus gave to His disciples prior to His ascension to heaven is given in Matthew 28:19.
- ◆ **Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**
- ◆ The church, with mixed results, has been carrying out this mission over the last 2000 years.
- ◆ But the question is, does this mission stop at Christ's return or does it continue and really come to its ultimate exciting conclusion after Christ's return?
- ◆ I would suggest these saints who are ruling with Christ during the 1000-year period are being prepared to play an important role in the great white throne judgment when the billions who have ever lived are resurrected back to life
- ◆ **Revelation 20: 11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.**
- ◆ Here standing before Jesus Christ is this great mass of humanity, most of who haven't even heard the name Jesus Christ or what He has done for them.
- ◆ Another group who have different levels of comprehension of who Jesus is and what He has done for them but have not acted on that information.
- ◆ Then there are the countless babies who have died in infancy and the mentally disabled who have not had the capacity to make a decision one way or the other.
- ◆ Unlike those in the first resurrection, this group is subject to the second death.
- ◆ **V.14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.**
- ◆ What is the fate of these billions?