

Study 41: Revelation 20:1-6

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.

- Whoever this angel is, he has great power and authority. The key and chain are of course symbolic and not literal. What angel came down from heaven? Well, this reference is probably about Jesus. He is the only angel or “messenger” (that is what the word angel literally means) with sufficient power and authority to hold the key to the Abyss and spiritual strength to hold a great chain that could bind the devil.

2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

- Jesus bound the devil! Hallelujah! Jesus referred to this dynamic in his earthly ministry. First, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting demons out of people by the power and authority of the devil himself!

But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:24-30).

- Jesus has authority to bind and direct the devil and that means that the kingdom of God is here. The kingdom of God is now! Jesus' power is not equal to Satan's; it is greater than Satan's. That is why He can bind Satan with a great chain and lock him in the Abyss. When I see the phrase “kingdom of God,” I think of a seminar professor who referred to the kingdom as the government of God. Do you agree with this meaning? What implications does God's government have for you?
- Think of what this meant to the early church and what it means for us today. The early church was facing threats backed by the power of the Roman Empire. All this was demonically and devilishly inspired. But the message of Revelation is that Jesus is more powerful than anything they were facing or that we face today.
- However, you cannot be passive or casual about this spiritual truth. Jesus closed His message in Matthew by stating that those who did not make a conscious

decision to walk in the reality of His power would be scattered and subject to the devil's authority. The devil is a powerful, mean enemy and we are helpless to oppose him without Jesus. Even then, we must exercise diligence and wage war to resist him.

- Any spiritual power I have is because Jesus has that power and allows me to access it in His name. The disciples were excited about the authority they had, but Jesus cautioned them in the passage below:

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Luke 10:17-22)

- Jesus saw Satan fall, and his fall was as quick and dramatic as lightning. Because of Satan's limited authority, Jesus has given His followers the authority to overcome all the power of the enemy! Nothing can harm us. Not death, persecution, criticism, lack or any conspiracy of evil men!
- This authority is not given for your personal benefit. The early church did not use this power to get new vehicles, homes or diamond rings. They used this power, as small and weak as they were in their own strength, to eventually overthrow the Roman government. Jesus finished His message in Luke (see above) by talking about people knowing Him. That is how we are to use this power and authority: to bind Satan so that people can come to know Jesus!
- How are you using the authority that is yours in Christ? Are you using it at all? Using it for personal gain and comfort? Or are you advancing the kingdom of God by binding Satan in Jesus' name so men and women may come to know Him, in your nation and in the nations of the earth?

3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

- Now what about the issue of a millennium or 1,000-year rule? As we have seen in the previous studies, much of Revelation was written using symbols. The entire book is a vision, a dream that the Spirit gave to one man. This book was written in symbols so that the persecutors of the Church, if they were to read the book, would not understand what it meant. It is written in code, so to speak.

- So why would we take this 1,000-year concept as literally as some people have done? For me, the fact that Satan is locked into the Abyss for 1,000 years speaks of Christ's rule. He is in control of the events of history.
- There are seasons of relative peace for the church and there have been many of those in history. Then there have been seasons of persecution and difficulties. In fact, there can be those different seasons going on at the same time in different parts of the world. But no matter what is happening, we are not to panic and be concerned. Jesus is in control. If the devil is free for a short time, we worship the One who holds the key and the chain. And one day, He will pull the devil's chain and the devil will be unable to go any further and do any more.

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 for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

- There is a saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. We honor those who paid with their lives to stand for and further the Gospel. But we don't even know all those who died for Christ. Only God knows! And God has, is and will reward them.
- I used to think about whether I would be able to give my life for Christ, if it came to that. Would I be able to face the firing squad, torture or deprivation? I had to come to the conclusion that I didn't really know. But I gave my life to the Lord on May 18, 1973. I have made it this far by faith and I will finish my life by faith, even die in faith.
- I also know that the stories of the saints of old who gave their lives are a tremendous encouragement to me and the Church. Saints who died have taken their place alongside Jesus to encourage and rule in spiritual affairs. Think of Paul, Peter and the apostles. They were killed, but they live on! Their words live on, as do their stories and letters.
- The account of the faithful found in Hebrews 11 ends with the first few verses of chapter 12:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (Hebrews 12:1-4).

- We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, those still alive who have served the Lord with distinction in their lifetime and those who have gone before us, who made their mark in their generation. We read their stories, sing their songs, and endeavor to match their greatness and distinguished service to Christ.
- I do believe in what the Catholic Church referred to as “the communion of the saints.” I feel historically tied to those who have gone before me and I want to continue the legacy they handed me and my generation.
- I think Hebrews 12 that is quoted above is what you and I need to do with the truths revealed in Revelation. We must:
 1. Throw off everything that hinders;
 2. Run the race with endurance;
 3. Fix our eyes on Jesus;
 4. Not grow weary and lose heart; and
 5. Struggle against sin, in our own lives and in the world.
- Our job is not to figure out who the antichrist is or isn't, or whether the millennium is to be taken literally. Our job is to impact the world for Christ in our generation, whether we face extreme persecution or relative freedom.

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

- What is the first resurrection? Well, you and I were dead in our sins before we met Jesus. Now we have experienced resurrection life! That's right. The same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives inside you **today**. You have received this Spirit as a pledge, a down payment, on the resurrection and eternal life that is to come.

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is

**due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad
(2 Corinthians 5:1-10)**

- You and I were once dead, but now we are alive. This is the first resurrection, the first coming to life! And the best is yet to come!

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:13-15).

6 Blessed and holy are those who have part 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.

- Are you blessed to be part of the first resurrection? I know I am. I can face the ultimate judgment of Christ, the second death, because I have experience the born again phenomenon. I was dead, but now I live. I am a priest of Christ and I am reigning with Him now, with the best yet to come.

As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:4-10).

- Could there be a literal 1,000-year reign on the earth? Perhaps. But that is not important to me. What is important is that I, like my brothers and sisters who first received Revelation, can rule now regardless of the circumstances in which I find myself. I am a priest **now**. I rule with Christ **now**. I am enjoying resurrection life **now**. Should the Lord tarry, I know I will die, but that death cannot affect me. I am alive in Christ forevermore!

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- I had another seminar professor who said that eternal life is a quality of life so good and pure that nothing can end it, not even death. On that basis, we have entered into eternal life now!
- I refuse to spend one minute in foolish, useless speculation concerning obscure passages or concepts. If the Lord wanted me to know more about the millennium, He would have made it clearer. He did not so I choose to focus on the many, many things He **did** make clear. It is a much better and wiser investment of my life, time and ministry. Amen.