

Text: Rev. 20:4-6

Title: "The millennium"

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Place: NBBC

Intro: Meaning of the word *millennium* comes from this chapter. The Latin word for *thousand* is *milia*. So the abbreviation *M* refers to 1000. There is some confusion about that today. If you see that a Youtube video has 1.1M views, we are being told that 1.1 million people have watched. One-million is called that in English because it is the number equal to one thousand one-thousands. So to abbreviate 1.1 million, you really need two M's (1.1MM).

Noah Webster's 1828 English dictionary defines *millennium* this way: "A thousand years; a word used to denote the thousand years mentioned in Revelation xx. During which period Satan shall be bound and restrained from seducing men to sin, and Christ shall reign on earth with his saints."

Now there are many passages of Scripture that describe this reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem, but this is the place we learn that the reign we read about elsewhere includes a millennium, i.e. a reign of 1000 years.

It is interesting to me that Webster gave only one definition for the millennium, and that definition was what we would call the pre-millennial view of the millennium. Pre-millennialism is an article of our common confession of faith here at New Boston Baptist Church. The first paragraph of the section of our statement of faith titled, "End Times," reads as follows: "We believe in the bodily, personal, pre-millennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that He will come before the seven year tribulation period to catch away His church, coming only in the air, and that He

will come with His own at the close of the tribulation to judge the living nations and to set up His kingdom on earth; that He will reign on the earth for a thousand years (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 19:11-21; 20).”

So what makes us pre-millennialists here is our belief that the second coming of Christ is pre-millennial, i.e. it will happen before the millennium, and that the millennium is a literal 1000 year period in which the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. We see the restoration of a saved Israel as essential to this future.

The two other Bible-believing approaches to the millennium have in common the idea that the church has replaced Israel. Sometimes that is called “replacement theology.”

The amillennialist says that there will be no [*a-* is the negation particle in Greek] literal future earthly kingdom, but all the promises of future blessing in the Bible are supposed to be understood as spiritual blessings of life in heaven.

The postmillennialist says that the millennium is the church age – our time now, and Christ returns after our work of establishing His reign over all the earth is completed. This view was especially popular in the days shortly after Noah Webster, when evolution became popular and man’s progress was seen as a grand fulfillment of Bible prophecy about the kingdom of God. The 20th century killed the optimism of modernism, and so now we are in a postmodern pessimism about the future in which it is hard to find the postmillennialist today, but you can still find traces of this idea in social and political movements that endeavor to claim the kingdoms of this world for Christ now rather than waiting for His return.

A pre-millennialist is going to differ from the amillennialist and the postmillennialist in two important practical ways, in addition to our differing views on Israel's future.

First, we will be different from the amillennialist because we will interpret the prophecy of Scripture in the same way we interpret other parts of the Bible – normally.

For instance, in Ezekiel 37 the prophet prophesies with two sticks that become one in his hand. Ezekiel tells us there that the divided kingdom of Israel, north and south, would become one again in the days of the millennium. As pre-millennialists, we recognize the symbolism of the sticks. We know that God is not talking about future sticks. But when He says that the sticks refer to the two kingdoms of Israel becoming one, we interpret the passage that way.

The amillennialist Matthew Henry tells us that the two sticks are the Jew and the Gentile becoming one in the church. He saw no future for Israel in the plan of God, so he allegorizes the passage to mean something that may be true, but is not taught by Ezekiel 37. The same procedure can lead to things that are not true, like the sticks representing the Bible and the Book of Mormon becoming one. We differ from amillennialists in our interpretation of prophecy especially. That is an important difference.

We differ from the postmillennialist primarily in how we see our mission on earth. We believe that we are members of a kingdom that is not of this world. Our kingdom will not be established on this earth until Jesus comes. So our mission is to bring the lost to Christ for entrance into that kingdom. That is the mission of the church, to make disciples of Jesus Christ who are baptized and obey His other commands. We do not aspire to make America the new Is-

rael, or any other kingdom of this world, for that matter. We care for the physical needs of people, and we are responsible citizens who get involved in politics, but as church members we are ministers of the gospel telling sinners, "Unless a man is born again, he shall not see the kingdom of God." Why does our church not do more to cure the ills of society or get the right people elected? It is because we are premillennial gospel-preachers and disciple-makers. Our kingdom is not of this world.

So with that lengthy introduction, let's notice three things that our passage tells us about this future millennium, when after the return of Christ the kingdoms of this world do finally become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

I. The millennium will be a period of God's authority imposed on earth (v. 4a).

Illustration: Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, has defined his company's mission as "making the world more open and connected." Originally, the goal of the software he developed was that it would become a directory for his fellow college students. Today, around 2 billion people use Facebook. Recently, news reports have focused on the downside of making the world more connected. It turns out that when you strengthen the ability of worldlings to connect with one another, they divide and destroy one another with greater ease. The company is now having to deal with something called, "the weaponization of Facebook."

Application: Why is the Zuckerberg vision for a connected world naïve? It is because this world will not become what he envisions without the imposition of God's authority on it. To get where Zuckerberg wants to go, there is going to need to be a global theocracy. Israel was a theocracy, a time when God was the political leader of a country. No other

nation in the history of human kind has been that, but in the millennium every nation will be that. You cannot have the peaceful utopia of the millennium without God's authority. This is true on a global scale, but it is also true when it comes to peace in the individual human heart. You and I cannot have true peace and blessing without submission to God's authority in our lives.

In our church age, Jesus possesses authority over heaven and earth. We know this from the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18). It is why we make disciples. But this authority is not imposed upon men today. It is something that men must choose to submit to. The police will not force you to be baptized. You have to choose to do that out of a willing heart. The supreme court will not see to it that you become a fisher of men that obeys the commands of Jesus Christ. This you must choose to do on your own. The governor is not going to force you to become a faithful church member, in fact, he may some day throw you in jail for doing so. No you must choose to submit to Jesus's authority in this day and age. How have you chosen?

II. The millennium will be a period of reward for faithful servants (vv. 4, 6).

Illustration: Promotions can be exciting things. I experienced one major promotion in my storied career in the plastic bottle business. Our company moved us from Connecticut to Texas, paid me more money, and gave me a set of new responsibilities. It was an exciting time.

Application: The parable of the talents and other passages of Scripture speak of this millennial period as a time of exciting promotion for faithful servants of Christ. In our passage, the antecedent of the pronoun *they* of v. 4 looks all the way back to 19:14. We have seen already in Revelation 7

that the 24 elders are in some sense distinguishable from the innumerable multitude that is in heaven. The parable of the talents also indicates that not everyone will receive the same reward or promotion during this future period. Our passage tells us specifically that martyrs from the Great Tribulation will be recipients of these rewards. Not every rewarded believer will be a martyr, but their example informs us, I believe, that 6 things are true of those who are rewarded in the millennium:

1. Rewarded believers understood that the testimony of Jesus and the word of God are more precious than life itself (v. 4b). Not every rewarded believer is a martyr, but every rewarded believer is someone who has denied self, taken up his cross, and followed the Savior to Calvary. He is someone who dies to self daily (1 Cor. 15:31).

2. Rewarded believers refused to practice idolatry (v. 4c). They are those who worshipped the true God as He sought to be worshipped. They fled idolatry.

3. Rewarded believers are resurrected (v. 4d). The second death has no power over rewarded believers (v. 6b). They share this blessing with all believers. Bodies broken in the service of Christ are made whole for eternity. Prophecy speaks of two resurrections – the first of the just unto life, and the second of the unjust unto judgment (Daniel 12). The phrase, “This is the first resurrection,” refers to all the blessings of v. 4, everything that has happened to fill the thrones of the millennium, including the pretribulational rapture of the church and the resurrection of tribulation martyrs.

4. Rewarded believers are blessed and holy (v. 6a). Blessing and holiness are twin sisters, they always go together. Rewarded believers do not seek blessing apart from holiness.

5. Rewarded believers are priests of God and of Christ (v. 6c). They offer their bodies living sacrifices and bring sacrifices of praise to their God. They have a ministry of reconciliation and intercessory prayer. Rewarded believers are those who have taken these responsibilities seriously and shall be given more such responsibilities in the millennium.

6. Rewarded believers reign with Christ 1000 years (vv. 4e, 6d). They occupy the thrones mentioned here. The paupers of the church age become the princes of the millennium. Seeking to live like royalty now is vain, for what shall a man give for his soul? Rewarded believers are those who have laid up treasure in heaven, not on the earth.

III. The millennium will be a period tragically missed by many (v. 5).

Conclusion: We are not given the details of the nature of this existence of those who do not come to life until after the millennium. It is likely very similar to that described by our Lord in Luke 16, the rich man who cried out to Abraham for Lazarus to bring a drop of cold water to cool his tongue. These have no resurrected body. They miss out on all the blessings of the millennium as well.

Why do they miss out? They miss out because they were not among those wearing the white garments (19:14). Nor were they among the martyrs of the tribulation. Why were they not among these? Matt. 22:1-14 tells us why.

This morning, God's Word has bidden you to the wedding feast of the millennium. You must respond to the invitation of the King and His Son to come celebrate with them. That Son died for your sins. Turn from sin and trust Him to be your Savior, and you will be there someday to see this great

celebration of the King's Son as He reigns on earth, dressed in your wedding garment, fine linen, clean and bright.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*