

The Binding of Satan

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Over these last few months we have entered the visionary world of Revelation, where through the symbols of 7s, 10s, and 12s, beasts and the Lamb, a Woman and a Harlot, we've discerned things of immense, eternal significance. *But eternal does not mean ethereal.* Kierkegaard reminds us: *only the eternal is always relevant.* Like the north star, it can guide everyone everywhere all at once. Where is the Eternal guiding us today? Chapter 20 introduces three major ideas: the binding of Satan, the reign of the beheaded, and the blessedness of the first resurrection.

The Binding of Satan

Most of chapter 19 and 20 describe the Battle of Armageddon, the final battle where the forces of the Dragon and his hordes assemble against God and the Lamb. *But* sandwiched in-between, we find a puzzling description of Satan bound for a thousand years. What does it mean? An angel descends from heaven **holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.** Interestingly, each time an angel *comes down out of heaven* there is additional symbolism associated with that angel. In chapter 10, the angel descends *wrapped in a cloud with a face like the sun.* In chapter 18, an angel comes down *having great authority, and the earth was made bright*

with his glory. This angel comes down *holds in his hand the key to the bottomless pit*. What are these images saying? This is no ordinary angel. He shares the attributes of the glorified Christ in chp 1; he holds a key. Why? Keys have the ability to lock and unlock, seal off or open up: a symbol of *authority*. **In prison the Law holds the keys, but in the cosmos *Christ* holds the keys.** You want to be on the right side of Jesus. He seizes the Dragon, binds him, throws him into a pit, then shuts and seals it over him. Bam! Now if it was that easy to bind Satan why didn't Jesus do it sooner? Remember what Jesus said on the way to the cross, *Now will the ruler of this world be cast out* (Jn 12:31); and to his disciples, *I saw Satan fall like lightning from the sky*; his discussion about *binding* the strong man (Mt 12:29). Jesus bound Satan at the Easter event: his cross and his resurrection! He did do it sooner. But if so, why is there so much devilish activity in the world? Because of this objection, some take the binding to be a literal, future event—a millennium when Satan is bound and God's kingdom temporarily reigns until Satan is loosed for a brief time, then defeated again. Apart from sounding cruel, there's a more reasonable explanation. Just because he's bound in a pit doesn't mean he can't exert influence. When Osama bin Laden was found bound to a compound in Pakistan, he was still free to orchestrate Al Qaeda activity. Similarly, Satan is bound but free to orchestrate oppression. Then what good is his binding? The text

says he's bound [so that he might not deceive the nations any longer](#). Binding prevents deceiving. But isn't there a lot of deceit? Until the Easter event the whole world was under Satan's grand deceit: *eat the fruit and you'll be like God*. People have been consuming that lie ever since. *You can be like God by deciding your own morality; like God by demanding respect thru your career, like God by attracting others with your looks; like God by controlling your future, kids, influences*. The nations wanted to be like God *without God*. **But then God became like man. Jesus born in straw, impaled on a cross, resurrected from a grave to liberate us from Satan's grand deceit**. Then *the nations came streaming*. People from every nation under heaven in Acts 2, shooting out onto every continent, tens of thousands of people redeemed *from Satan's deceit through Jesus's gospel*, every single day. Be encouraged! Despite what the headlines say, Christianity is booming. Satan is bound. Nations worshipping him. How does the eternal impact our lives? *Evangelize with expectation*. **Often we expect people to reject the gospel, but if Satan is bound we should expect people to receive the gospel.** We should share in expectant faith, trusting the results to God; not in doubting disbelief, trusting in our technique. Deep down people know being like God doesn't work. **Tell friends and family this Thanksgiving that God became like them, so they could become one of his: freed, forgiven, loved!** Let the Word do the work. I have

a friend who's been doing CrossFit for years, and recently he decided it was time to turn a corner with his workout buddies. He asked them, given all the politics around Christianity if they want to get together to explore what Christianity really means. Each week they consider a key question: What is life? They share their views, then he shares what the Bible says about life. They're receiving the gospel, praying when they've never prayed before! *Evangelize with expectation.*

Reign of the Beheaded

Next the scene shifts from the bottomless pit to eternal heaven. John sees thrones with the authority to judge. Who is on the thrones? Most likely it is those in the next verse: *the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image.* Sound familiar. John is recalling chapter six, where the souls beneath the altar cry out, *O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you avenge our blood?* The beheaded, the martyred, the persecuted apocalyptic images of faithful Christians who resisted the Beast and paid the price in some form. While we should certainly honor those who give their physical lives in faithful witness, we should also remember that persecution isn't just physical: *Blessed are you when others revile you (verbal) and persecute you and utter all kinds of*

evil against you falsely (emotional) on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Mt 5:11-12). Yet even with this expansive view of persecution, many Christians can’t relate. Why? Because they choose Babylon, live under the power of the Beast, *content to bear his mark rather than risk rejection*, carry on indistinct lives, fearful of employers, neighbors, social media followers. Shake off such compromise, count it a privilege to take up our Lord’s cross, to be numbered among the beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. For **the bolder the faith, the greater the blessing.** *Blessed* are those who hear *and keep* the words of this prophecy. *Blessed* are you when others revile you on my account. On Christ’s account! ***You see, the more you give to Christ, the more you receive from Christ.*** There is a profound, irreplaceable sweetness that comes from identifying with the sufferings of Jesus by proclaiming *his* Word, keeping *his* testimony. But the more we compromise, the less we long for him, clouded by fear of man and love of comfort. *Don’t worship the beast or its image; worship Christ and bear his image.* **The more you give to Jesus, the more you get of Jesus.** *And there is nothing, nothing, like Jesus.* Which brings us back to the thrones: *They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* Now remember the thousand years, like virtually all other numbers in this book, is symbolic of the church age. Which means that upon death, faithful witnesses reign

with Christ in heaven. When your soul crosses into heaven you are seated with Christ and vindicated of all sufferings on earth. New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham says: *The theological point of the Millennium is solely to demonstrate the triumph of the martyrs: that those whom the beast put to death are those who will truly live. And those who contested his right to rule and suffered for it are those who will, in the end, rule. Forever.* The binding of Satan signals the irreversible triumph of the beheaded, the faithful witnesses. So cling to the testimony of Jesus, stand for the Word of God, and you will be enthroned next to Jesus.

Blessedness of First Resurrection

The binding of Satan for the undeceiving of the nations; the enthronement of the beheaded for vindication of the saints; and finally, the blessedness of the first resurrection. John writes: *Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!* What is the “first resurrection?” It’s saving, *spiritual* life in Christ. Colossians: we are “seated with him in the heavenly places.” That spiritual seating is already and not fully. We are already seated with Christ *positionally* but not yet consummately. But for those who die possessing the first resurrection, positional truth becomes consummate truth. What was already folds into what is not yet. As Jesus said: *to the one who overcomes I will give to him to sit with me*

on my throne 3:21. The first resurrection is spiritual life in Christ. Next: *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.* At the end of the church age, when Christ returns, all will experience *bodily* resurrection, wicked and righteous, to face judgment: *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened (20:12).* Those in Christ will be vindicated but those marked by the beast will be eternally punished. *You see the gospel is not just important; it's urgent.* People need to hear the gospel from our lips. The people of the first resurrection have hope coursing through their veins: hope of a second resurrection, of total vindication, of evil's defeat, of a whole new, irreversible new creation. We are *blessed*. Will we share that blessing? Will we live like the second death has no power over us? Don't hold back. *The more you give to Jesus, the more you get from Jesus.*