

## We are in a Millennium of Victory!

Fellow saints,

Doesn't it feel great? We can get together and we don't need to wear masks—what a change from just a couple months ago. We know of so many illnesses and deaths. But in our nation at least, the battle against covid has turned, and life, by God's grace, seems to be getting back to normal. It feels like a victory!

There are other victories. Sports seasons are coming to an end. Soon there will be soccer league trophies and plenty of other sports championships.

The Book of Revelation is all about a championship. That's the point of the book: Jesus wins! And Revelation makes it clear that all of us, all Christians, of all ages, get to celebrate right along with Jesus. Again and again Revelation pictures the epic battle between good and evil—only to celebrate again and again the victory Jesus won for us.

Some people have a hard time believing that the victory is won. That's because they don't feel like champs—not yet anyway. Maybe in the future there'll be a victory, but not now, with all the problems we face.

But Scripture is clear: Jesus has defeated our enemy, the devil. Revelation chapter 20 pictures what we enjoy today: We are in a Millennium, that is, a Thousand Years, of Victory! The devil has been chained. And, as we'll see, the saints are ruling with Christ.

This chapter begins by referring to Jesus as an "angel" who has the key to hell. Jesus, the Judge, is the only one who can send anyone to hell.

Now listen to what he does with that key. John writes, **"I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years, threw him into the abyss, locked it, set a seal on it, so that he could no longer deceive the nations...."** What a great picture! Satan in chains, and thrown into a bottomless pit! This is how we should picture the devil, especially when we start to fear him or the evil he unleashes.

Our nation's supermax prison is in Florence, Colorado. I've been to the Florence complex—it's a series of federal prisons, and when I served in Colorado I visited several prisons, including maximum security. I didn't get into the Supermax—almost no one does. It's in a very bleak desert area. The prisoners spend 23 hours a day in a solitary, soundproof cell, and the other hour in their own exercise cage—some prisoners have gone crazy from the lack of human contact. No one could break out of that prison.

Well, the devil is locked up even better than our Supermax. Jesus has him bound and secure. Whatever mischief he causes—and he does cause trouble—it's tightly controlled by the one who holds the key.

Now, we need to look at these words closely. This is figurative or picture language. Satan is a spirit. No physical chain would hold him. Throwing him into a physical pit wouldn't do any good. These are all pictures for Jesus' control over the devil. It's like the parables Jesus told, like a farmer planting seed, some of which grows and some of which doesn't—Jesus wasn't talking about crops, he was talking about his Word

growing in human hearts. Likewise, John describes the devil's loss with the picture of a chain and a pit.

Just as the dragon and the chain and the key are all pictures, so the 1000 years is figurative—it's not a literal thousand years. Jesus' victory party, with the devil chained, would last a long time—that's the point of the "1000 years." So in Revelation 20, we have a picture for Jesus' control over Satan for a long time—right up to his return in glory.

As I said, it doesn't often look like Jesus is in control. Even when Jesus was on earth, it didn't look like he won much of a victory. He grew up in humble circumstances. As an adult he could preach powerfully and even perform miracles, but, after being wowed, the crowds would turn away when he spoke about the cost of following him. The religious leaders conspired to have Jesus executed. True, he rose from the dead, but then he left his small band of disciples seemingly to fend for themselves. What did he accomplish?

Scripture tells us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." We heard what Satan had done to this world in our lesson from Genesis—tempting Adam and Eve to turn against God and bring sin and ruin into creation. But God promised that one of Eve's descendants would crush the devil's head. And that's what Jesus did—he came to earth to take away Satan's power.

Satan's real goal is not just to get you to sin. Satan wants you to feel guilty—so guilty that you doubt you could be saved. Satan's name means "the Accuser." He loves to remind us of what we've done wrong—even bringing up things from years ago, from decades ago—so that we are dragged down by despair. Maybe even making you feel like hiding from God like Adam and Eve did.

But Jesus took away Satan's basis for accusing us. Jesus did that by paying for all of our sins. Some people run up debt with all their bills; they may wonder how they'll make it; they may figure that they'll never get their debts paid. That's how our spiritual situation looks. But when Jesus died, he paid off all of our sinful debts. Every time you forgot Jesus' victory; every time you started to despair at this evil world—all those sins were on Jesus' shoulders as he hung on that cross. Your debt has been cancelled. And that means that Satan has nothing to charge you with.

Furthermore, Jesus gives you a new life, so that you can resist Satan's temptations. It's like being inoculated against a virus. Your new life fights off Satan. And God keeps your new life in Christ strong through his Word.

There's more. Jesus protects you against Satan's attacks. Sometimes he allows Satan to test our faith. But there's always a limit; God keeps evil in check as he preserves your life.

This is the victory that we enjoy, today, in this millennium of Jesus' victory. The devil has been chained.

The problem, as I said, is that it doesn't always look like the devil is all that chained. Not with all the problems in this world. Not with all the pains we feel. Not with the fighting at home and abroad; not with the evil at work and at school. This has led some people to suggest that the millennium of Jesus' victory is in the future. Some have re-interpreted the Bible to fit their idea that Jesus is going to set up a 1000 year reign on earth, a reign of peace, a time for Jewish people especially to be converted. These theories run counter to many Scriptural truths. No, the devil is chained now.

Picture a dog—make it a vicious dog--on a chain. If you go near the dog, it's dangerous; but that dog can only go so far before he's yanked back by his chain. Well, that's how it is with Satan. If you go inside his circle—by doing those things you know you shouldn't, or by constantly listening to those websites or TV shows that make you angry, then you'll get bit. But Satan remains chained. And even when we fall into sin, God still is in control. Picture it this way: he grabs Satan's chain and pulls him back, then comes to us and heals us with the life-giving Gospel of forgiveness.

The devil is in fact chained. We are, right now, in a millennium of victory! And the saints are ruling, even now, with Christ.

Perpetua was a young mother around the year 200 who had just converted to Christianity. The Roman empire was cracking down on new Christians. Perpetua, along with the rest of her confirmation class, was thrown in prison and sentenced to death. Her father came and pleaded with her to renounce her new faith. But Perpetua persisted in confessing Christ. She and others were thrown into an arena before a large crowd that watched them be attacked by wild animals and then beheaded by a soldier.

The first readers of Revelation knew all about that. Just as we have been worried about family getting covid, early Christians knew their families could face martyrdom. But now they could read these words in chapter 20: **“I saw thrones, and those who were seated on them were 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 lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”** This is what else is going on in this millennium of victory. How wonderful—to picture your deceased loved ones, right now sitting with Jesus, sitting in victory, the champions.

You know what happens to the Super Bowl Most Valuable Player—right there on the field they record the commercial: “What are you going to do now?” “I'm going to Disney World.” Well, for the saints in heaven, things are even better. They won the championship, and now they have perfect joy in Jesus' presence.

John says they went through “the first resurrection.” Jesus said those who believe in him have already crossed over from death to life. Your eternal life started when you first believed in Christ. For most all of us, this happened when we were babies, when God's Word connected to water washed your sins away and the Holy Spirit put faith in your heart. If you believe in Jesus as your Savior, then you've begun your eternal life. This is the “first resurrection.”

**“Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection....They will be priests of God and of Christ. And they will reign with him for a thousand years.”** You are ruling with Christ, even today. Jesus told all Christians that we have his authority to make disciples by baptizing and teaching his Word. When Jesus' first disciples came back to him and told about their preaching, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from the sky.” We get to yank the devil by the chain! As a pastor, I get to exercise this authority regularly. When I announce God's forgiveness at the start of our worship, those words drive the devil and his doubts from your heart. When I meet with people individually, I'm not just going to try to give you good advice, but to get to the point where I can assure you that your sins are forgiven—that's what foils Satan's work. Jesus said that when we forgive someone's sins we are opening the door to heaven for them. This is how we, saints of Christ, are ruling with him in this millennium of victory!

Sometimes our ruling with Christ may not seem all that effective; it may not seem like the devil is chained. Such times are a warning to us. Scripture says that as the Judgment draws near, wickedness will grow on earth. Jesus announced wars and false prophets and natural disasters. Here, in Revelation 20 verse 3, it says that at the end of the millennium, the devil **“must be released for a short time.”**

But we Christians live by faith, not by sight. We have complete confidence that even in these last days God is in control.

You’ve seen it in movies. The hero—maybe Captain America, maybe Batman-- has been captured, beaten bloody, tied up. The villain is about to strike his final blow. But he notices that the hero has a little smile. “What are you laughing at?” The hero, you see, knows what is really going on: the villain has lost. Maybe there’s a SWAT team surrounding the building. Maybe the bank box the villain stole is filled with confetti. The hero knows, so he can smile.

We know our enemy has been defeated. So even in the worst moments of life—and I don’t mean to downplay how bad things can get; but even in the worst times, we can have a smile inside.

God is in control. More than that—we are still the champions with Jesus! We remain in a millennium of victory! The devil has been chained, and the saints are ruling with Christ. Rejoice every day in Jesus’ victory. Amen.