

The Defeat of Satan & the Great White Throne Revelation 20:7-15 (Expanded Sermon Notes)



In recent years our culture has become obsessed with the notion of life beyond our little planet. This is demonstrated by a rise in the conversations around aliens and UFOs. Even the government is releasing information on the topic. Then we have the popularity of the Marvel series of movies. Each of these connects the events of Earth to the larger battle going on in the cosmos. And that Earth and its inhabitants are ultimately powerless against these cosmic forces, so a group called “The Avengers” must defend Earth against this cosmic chaos. This recent cultural focus is reflective of a larger truth, the lives we live are not merely physical. They are indeed physical and spiritual and, in that way, connected to a dimension that is both part of our known experience and much larger. This is something that Revelation speaks to with clarity. Its genre is Apocalyptic. A genre that seeks to offer a heavenly perspective on an earthly reality. This is the exact same thing that the Marvel series is attempting to do. The only difference is that Revelation is not a work of fiction.

So, why is this important? Well, it helps us to understand the days and moments of our lives. What we might perceive as the randomness of evil or the neutrality of good is not so. Our lives are part of a cosmic reality where the forces of evil seek to win a lasting victory over the Lord. Revelation helps to ground our hearts and minds in that way. It also reminds us that while those forces may try as hard as they might, their defeat is a certain thing. In other words, it is without question. The other thing that is without question, Jesus is victor, and all those who are allied with him are victorious. Yes, we will be judged for the substance of our lives, but it is the righteousness of Jesus that has secured eternal life and joy for the believer, and nothing can take that away. The days and moments of our lives often feel hectic, hurried, and haphazard, and Revelation shows us that they are part of God’s plan to bring redemptive history to fruition. And he will. It is absolutely certain. With those truths in mind, we are encouraged to remember that **healthy certainty fosters peace**. We do not need to be anxious or worried but can live at peace even in turbulence and trials.

1. The Deceiver

a. A heavenly explanation of an earthly reality.

- i. We can look at passages like this with confusion and dismiss them or dig too deep to find some relevant meaning.
 1. We should avoid both of those. – Why? Because the first misses the point of the text, and the second too often makes the text about me.

- ii. **One of the things this passage offers us is an explanation of our current reality. That is, that we are living in a physical and spiritual reality.** Therefore, the events of my day (good and bad) are not merely physical or spiritual. They are both.
- iii. **It is not a cosmic dualism** that we see in other religions, though. Good and evil are not equal forces that are in some tug of war for control. There is no hope of victory for evil or the forces of evil. **There is only one authority over the universe, God. He has no rival, no equal, and evil is no threat to him.**
- b. **The form and genre - This is a letter** – That means that John is writing to address the specific situation that the original audience has found themselves.
 - i. The letter also falls into a larger genre that we find in the OT, specifically, apocalyptic literature.
 - 1. But normally, an apocalypse purports to be a revelation made by some celestial personage (like an angel) to a great figure of the past (such as Abraham or Moses or Ezra). The message is usually expressed in vivid symbolism, sometimes of a bizarre kind. It appears in difficult times and conveys the author's profound conviction that the troubles in which his readers find themselves are not the last word.¹
 - 2. This is a genre that we are not as familiar with as an audience.
 - 3. Here is a great overview of this genre:
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/apocalyptic-literature/>
 - 4. The point of this genre is to make something clear that is unclear.
 - a. This is what God is doing here, he is bringing clarity to human history from a divine perspective.
 - b. I.e., **A heavenly perspective on an earthly situation.**
 - 5. Daniel is filled with this type of genre. → In fact, Jesus' self-claimed title (Son of Man) comes directly from Daniel 7. And, here in Rev. 1,
 - 6. Symbols – Often Biblical authors assume that the reader is able to understand what the symbols mean. Other times, they tell the audience directly what the symbols mean.
 - a. Because we are unfamiliar with the genre and are so far removed from the original setting, we need to employ an intellectual humility as we read this letter.
- c. **His nature – One who is deceived.**
 - i. The devil is, as his name indicates, engaged in opposing God and the work of Christ. He does this especially by tempting humans. This is shown in the temptation of Jesus, the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30), and the sin of Judas (Luke 22:3). (See also Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:26.) One of Satan's primary means is deception. Paul tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and that his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14–15). His use of deception is also mentioned in Revelation 12:9 and 20:8, 10. He has "blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). He opposes and hinders (1 Thess. 2:18) Christians in their service, even using physical ailments to that end (so, probably, 2 Cor.

¹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 25.

12:7). For all of his power Satan is limited, as indicated in the case of Job. He can be successfully resisted, and will flee (James 4:7; see also Eph. 4:27). He can be put to flight, however, not by our strength, but only by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26; 1 Cor. 3:16).²

d. His action – One who deceives.

- i. **The passage offers a pointed commentary on the human condition by indicating that whenever Satan is active, some will indeed be responsive to him.** Any kingdom short of the new creation, with its new heaven and new Earth, will include those who have a propensity to evil. Finally, restraining evil is not enough. Its seductive power must be brought to an end. Those who are drawn by its siren song are warned that disaster waits for those who yield to it.³
- ii. **Humans belong to God and to no one but God. Even the devil belongs to God.** Neither humans nor the devil have any power apart from him. God's only obligation was to punish his former servant who had persuaded a fellow servant to follow him in leaving their common Lord.⁴

e. Our response

- i. **God is both completely sovereign and has granted man some level of free will.**
 1. This means that I am both held responsible for my actions and I am fully able to lean into the sovereignty of God when things don't quite make sense.
 - a. **V. 12** – There is both God's sovereignty and man's action.
 2. **Note that in the judgment, both divine grace and human accountability are important, but God's decision finally is based on the grace that is represented by the book of life.** John does say that people are "judged according to their works, as recorded in the books" and that they are "judged according to what they [have] done" (20:12, 13). Clearly, he understands that God holds people accountable for their way of life. At the same time, John does not suggest that salvation is ultimately based on human achievement, so that only those who achieve a certain score in their books of deeds merit a place in the kingdom.⁵
 3. **vv. 11-15** - John speaks now of an awe-inspiring judgment. All the dead are judged. This is the final overthrow of the wicked and even of death and Hades. **Beasley-Murray points out that in chapters 6 to 19 we have the judgment of God in history, here his judgment on history.**⁶
 4. **Powerful as are the world's system and ruler, they are doomed. The defeat of the world is already determined.** In a spiritual sense, the world was judged at the time of and through the death and resurrection of Christ. It will someday be actually judged before God's own throne. Indeed, believers will themselves be involved in judging the world, so they should not submit to the world today.⁷
- ii. **Buy-in – We allow ourselves to participate in the glory and deception of this age.**
 1. **Remember** – This has been a warning in Revelation as we have gone through it. **→ Resist and don't buy in to Babylon.**

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 417.

³ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, 2018), 185.

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 727–728.

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: 2018), 187.

⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 228.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 591.

- a. In God's love, he allows us to pursue what we want, even if it is harmful to us. Why? → Because love is not love if love is forced.
 - 2. **Victory in chapters 15 and 16. → Victory is the primary theme.**
 - 3. **15:2 - ² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.**
 - a. John sees also those who had obtained the victory which he spells out as *over the beast and his image and over the number of his name* (see note on 13:18). **Nothing evil can triumph over God's people.**
 - b. In the early church, the day of a person's martyrdom was often called the day of his victory. Barclay comments, **'The real victory is not to live in safety, to evade trouble, cautiously and prudently to preserve life; the real victory is to face the worst that evil can do, and if need be to be faithful unto death.'**⁸
 - c. **They are able to participate in the Lamb's victory because of their enduring faith in the midst of persecution and their resistance to compromising their faith with the world** (in direct development of 12:11).⁹
 - 4. **16:15 – ¹⁵ "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!"**
 - a. **cf. 3:18 - ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.**
 - b. In 3:18, Jesus spoke to the church in Laodicea to remain faithful and gave them the image of nakedness as an image of their idolatry.
 - c. In the context of the Apocalypse and specifically ch. 16 to "watch" and "keep one's garments" is to refuse to concede to the idolatrous demands of beast worship (see on 3:4–5) in the face of the pressure of the final attack.¹⁰
 - 5. Revelation gives us a picture of the victory that will come once Jesus returns, but it also reminds of the victory we have experienced now as well.
 - a. How do we experience victory now?
- iii. **Resist – We don't have to be overcome by this age.**
- 1. **Revelation does not list the names that are in the book of life, but it does give readers enough information to know that the comments about the book of life are designed to encourage faithfulness, not despair.** John's counsel can be summarized this way: Trust that the Lamb, who died to liberate people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" for life with God (5:9–10), also

⁸ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 181.

⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 790.

¹⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 837.

died for you. Trust that God wants you to put this faith into practice—then leave matters concerning the final judgment in God’s hands.¹¹

2. This has been a frequent theme in Revelation. → Jesus told the seven churches in chapters 2-3 to “conquer” this age. If it was not possible to do so, it is cruel that he would command it.
3. **The question is, under whose power am I to conquer and resist this age?**

2. The Saints

- a. **Who is a saint? → If you are in Christ, that is someone who has placed your faith in Jesus for salvation, you are a saint.**
 - i. Why? → Because as a Christian, you are set apart (made holy / sanctified) in Christ for God’s purposes.
 - ii. In the NT, synonymous with the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ. Its OT antecedence implies the idea of being set apart for God as well as conformity to God’s likeness through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.¹²
 - iii. This sense of sanctification is found in the New Testament as well. Peter refers to his readers as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (1 Pet. 2:9). Here, being sanctified means “belonging to the Lord.” Sanctification, in this sense, is something that occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life, at the point of conversion, along with regeneration and justification. **It is in this sense that the New Testament so frequently refers to Christians as “saints” (ἅγιοι—*hagioi*), even when they are far from perfect.**¹³
- b. **Repentant – Jesus over self.**
 - i. Where are the saints? → They are with Christ. (vv. 4-5)
 - i. Why are they with Christ? → Because they have repented and turned from worshipping self to worshipping Jesus.
 1. This is available to all!
- c. **They are in a state of relational and abiding communion with the Lord. → “Regin with...”**
 - ii. John speaks of the saints’ whereabouts in relational rather than in geographical terms. Each time we might expect him to say that they “reigned on earth,” **he says that they “reigned with Christ” (20:4, 6).** The point bears repeating. If we ask, **“Where are the saints?” we receive the answer, “They are with Christ.” The relational answer “with Christ” points us to the heart of life in the millennial kingdom.** John is more concerned with “who” than with “where.” Having assured readers that the saints will be “with Christ,” John leaves most other questions unanswered, as if to say, “What more do you need to know?”¹⁴
- d. **Those who have conquered...** they conquered not under their own strength, but the strength of Jesus. They conquered because they were filled with the life of Christ.
 - i. They were about Jesus’ business because they had Jesus’ perspective.
 - ii. They had Jesus’ perspective, because they knew Jesus and are known by Jesus.

¹¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI:, 2018), 187.

¹² Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 104–105.

¹³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 898.

¹⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI:2018), 181.

- i. **The blessing of obedience is the assurance or confidence that it gives us in our relationship with God.**
 - 1. It reminds us that we are unified with him.
 - 2. That we are safe and secure in him now and in the future.
 - 3. That we are cared for by him. → Again, if he cares for us now, how much better with his care be in the age to come?
- e. **Protected – From deception.** → Again, we know the game and we don't have to give in.
 - i. **While there are many theories on them, all of those theories come back the main point of what John is trying to remind us of, in Christ we are offered a life that cannot be taken away from us by physical death or by the powers of spiritual darkness.**
 - ii. The heavenly explanation of Revelation clues us into the ability to resist deception and to know that the Lord protects the saints.
 - iii. **On good and evil spiritual forces** - Obscure and strange though this belief in good and evil angels may seem to some, it has a significant role to play in the life of the Christian. Several benefits may be drawn from our study of this topic:
 - 1. It is a comfort and an encouragement to us to realize that powerful and numerous unseen agents are available to help us in our need. The eye of faith will do for the believer what the vision of the angels did for Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6:17).
 - 2. The angels' praise and service of God give us an example of how we are to conduct ourselves now and what our activity will be in the life beyond in God's presence.
 - 3. It sobers us to realize that even angels who were close to God succumbed to temptation and fell. This is a reminder to us: "Be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12).
 - 4. Knowledge about evil angels serves to alert us to the danger and the subtlety of temptation that can be expected to come from satanic forces, and gives us insight into some of the devil's ways of working. We need to be on guard against two extremes. We should not take him too lightly lest we disregard the dangers. Nor, on the other hand, should we have too strong an interest in him.
 - 5. We receive confidence from the realization that powerful though Satan and his accomplices are, there are definite limits on what they can do. We can, therefore, by the grace of God, resist him successfully. And we can know that his ultimate defeat is certain.¹⁵
- f. **Preserved – For eternal joy.**
 - i. In this passage and flowing in to the final chapters of Revelation, we are reminded of the promised future state of the believer. No matter what the spirit of this age or the deceiver tries to throw at of do to believers, they are powerless against God's established authority and victory.
 - ii. Coming back to v. 12 – Those that are in the book of life are preserved for eternal joy. The question that lingers for us as we wait to be called home to the Lord, what are we looking for to comfort us now? The Lord or the spirit of Babylon? Consider this quote from C.S. Lewis.
 - iii. **"We find thus by experience that there is no good applying to Heaven for earthly comfort. Heaven can give heavenly comfort; no other kind. And Earth cannot give earthly comfort either. There is no earthly comfort in the long run."** – C.S. Lewis¹⁶

¹⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 419–420.

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, via *The Quotable Lewis* (1990 by Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root.)