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June 13, 2021

Sermon Text: Revelation 20:1-6

“Jesus Wins”

Grace and peace to you from Him who is, who was and who is coming. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

War, famine and death follow the four horsemen of the Apocalypse ...a fiery red dragon seeks to devour the Church... two monstrous beasts, allies of the dragon, trouble and attack God’s people.

The book of Revelation is full of frightening pictures, for a good reason. When Jesus showed this vision to the Apostle John, God’s people faced violent persecution, unbelief and error all around, false teachers, plus growing unrest and war in the world around them.

All these years later, little has changed. The devil, the unbelieving world and their ally in our own sinful nature all busily launch their assaults on our faith and well-being.

So thank God that the main purpose of the book of Revelation, like the rest of the Bible is to bring us comfort through God’s promises. Like the rest of God’s Word, our lesson from Revelation assures us: **Jesus Wins!**

As the book of Revelation often does, our lesson uses vivid word pictures and figurative images. Let’s start with the one that is easiest to understand: **The dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan.**

This **dragon** is of course, the devil, that fallen angel who wars against God’s people. He is the enemy of God and mankind, the **ancient serpent** from our first lesson, the one who led Adam and Eve into rebellion against God bringing sin and death into the world. Satan is portrayed as a terrible **dragon** because he is enemy that we could never escape and never defeat by our own power.

And how often haven't we proven just that point, falling headlong into Satan's lies and temptations. Every time we give way worry, doubt or reject something the Bible says, we listen to what the devil said to our first parents: **Did God really say...** (Genesis 3:1).

Our every single sin is swallowing down the temptation that stood behind eating the forbidden fruit. The one Satan put in these words: **when you eat of it... you will be like God** (Genesis 3:5). Every sin is choosing to be 'god' for ourselves, telling God, 'no thank you, I'm going to do it my way.'

Oh what arrogance! Oh how we deserve to join the devil in eternal punishment.

Therefore, praise God for *these words*: **Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand.** At first this sounds like a created **angel**, one of those mighty spirit beings who carry out God's will.

But this 'angel' is able to defeat Satan! And earlier in Revelation, Jesus say this: **I am the living one. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever. I also hold the keys of death and hell** (cf. chapter 1).

This helps us see this '**angel**' is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who indeed **came down from heaven** as the only one able to defeat the devil and save us!

To call Christ an **angel** here is not strange if we understand that in New Testament Greek, the word **angel** means **messenger**. As true God in our human flesh and blood, Jesus is God's greatest **messenger**, who shows us God's heart of saving love and compassion. He is the Word made flesh who brings us God's message of **truth and grace** (cf. John 1).

And it is Christ alone who defeats **Satan. He seized the dragon...** Our Lord grabs the old tempter and slams him down, for He is the One foretold in our first lesson, the virgin born **seed of the woman** and Son of God who has come to **crush Satan's** power like **crushing** a tiny **snake's** head with a heavy work-boot!

Jesus' whole life was one giant stomping of that **ancient** Satanic **snake**. Where Adam and Eve, you and I have failed again and again, Jesus was victorious. He met Satan's every temptation and attack with humble and holy obedience to God's Will.

On the cross Jesus **smashed** Satan's claim on us by shedding His holy blood to wash away the arrogance of our sins. With his innocent suffering and death, Christ took the penalty of hell and death to rescue us from every way we listened to the devil's lies.

Rising bodily from the dead, Jesus proves He has won the victory, for not even the grave can hold Him! Satan loses. **Jesus wins** and gives us the victory of forgiveness!

Because they have been misunderstood, these verses need some explaining: **He bound him** (that is Satan) **for a thousand years... so that he no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years come to an end... 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 a thousand years.**

Some have wrongly taught these are a **literal thousand years**. They wrongly say that Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity while the devil is locked away and unable to do anything. After that Satan will be released and things will get worse, and *then* the end of the world will come.

Now there are so many reasons why that is the wrong way to understand this verse. First, did you notice how our reading is full of figurative pictures? A **dragon** stands for the devil and an **angel** stands for Christ, showing us you can't take the **thousand** years literally either!

The rest of the Bible not only doesn't mention a 1,000 year peaceful kingdom on this earth, but it teaches there could be no such thing. Instead, Jesus tells us wars, false teaching and troubles will remain until the end of this world.

In John's gospel, He clearly says: **My kingdom is not of this world.**

Plus, Scripture tells us to be ready for Jesus' return at any time, which would make no sense if there was to be a kingdom that would serve as a 1,000 year countdown to the end.

Take a close look and you'll see these verses *never say* that Jesus **reigns for a thousand years** and it never says 'on earth.' It says those who died with faith in Him are the ones who are **reigning for a thousand years**. Jesus does not reign for a **thousand years**, No! He reigns **forever and ever!**

So the **thousand years** is just a picture for the same set of events the book of Revelation describes over and over again with different pictures and from different angles. **The thousand years** stand for the time between Jesus' first coming and second coming.

First Jesus came to this world to save us, overthrowing the devil's power and binding Satan, just like Jesus speaks of in our Gospel lesson, tying up the strong man devil to rob the devil's kingdom and set souls free.

That does not mean that **Satan is bound** in such a way that he can cause no trouble, but as our lesson actually explains so that **he *could* no longer deceive the nations...**

Only one thing opens people's eyes so that they ***could*** no longer be **deceived** by the devil's lies: The Gospel message, God's Word, and Holy Spirit worked faith in that Word.

It does not say **Satan will** no longer **deceive the nations**, but that he ***can*** no longer **deceive** them. Those who listen to God's Word are set free from the devil's lies.

And consider that word **nations...** In the Old Testament, God's Church was made up of just the believers in Israel and a handful of people from the gentile nations here and there. But after His resurrection and ascension, Jesus sends His Church to **make disciples of all nations** and through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has created believers in every **tribe, language, people and nation**.

Again that shows us **the thousand years** is the time of the New Testament where the good news of peace through Jesus has spread across the globe. Then just before Jesus' returns, **Satan** will be **released**, largely because so many turn their back on the Bible and the freedom it gives from the devil's **deceit**.

We might be living in that time, or it may still be coming, that is not for us to know. Either way, God's people will still face sorrow, trouble and attacks on our faith. So find comfort in these words: **Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. Instead they will be priests of God and of Christ. And they will reign with him for a thousand years.**

Since the rest of the Bible teaches us there is only **one resurrection** when the bodies of all people are raised from the dead, these verses are talking about something

else, a spiritual resurrection. In the language of our lesson, the *second* resurrection would be when Jesus raises us up at the last day.

So the **first resurrection** is when someone is brought to believe in Jesus. Ephesians tells us that we were **dead** in sin, but made **alive** in Christ. Whoever by God's grace, believes in Jesus already *has* life, eternal life that does not end at death. On the other hand, **the rest of the dead** are those who by their own fault remain in the spiritual death of unbelief and never truly live.

Unbelievers are the ones who will **experience** the **second death**, that is eternal death and punishment. But those who have been forgiven and declared holy through faith in Jesus, **the second death has no power over them**. None of this is any different than what Jesus says in John 11: **Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish.**

That means **Jesus Wins** and shares His victory with His believing people who **live and reign with Him** for all eternity, where there is no sorrow, pain or trouble! This *is* yours, only because **Jesus Wins!**

Let me make one more application before I close on the day after many of us had heavy hearts and shed a tear as we said farewell to Mr. Raymond as he left for a new field of service. Even when there are tears in our eyes, **Jesus still Wins**, and so does His people.

Consider how we have seen that: At Peace we have been blessed through Mr. Raymond's ministry, where Christ has used him to share the soul freeing message of the Gospel with us and our children. And now the Lord will bless others through Mr. Raymond at in Washington State.

And through it all, here or there, **Jesus Wins** and therefore so do you, His people. Amen.

The one who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

We confess our Christian faith in Jesus' victory using the explanation of the 2nd article of the Apostles' creed on p. 10 in the worship folder.