

Guest Preacher Mr Donald Macaulay

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the book of Revelation and chapter 20.

And rather than perhaps take a particular text, although the most important text is the final verse of chapter 20, if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Now the first part of the chapter, that is the first ten verses of the chapter, are perhaps the most conflictive, the most difficult section in the whole of the book of Revelation.

And certainly the section that has produced more and more speculation about what it actually means, and divisions throughout the history of the church.

Now I'm not going to go into every single little detail in them, because otherwise we would be here until about midnight, but we'll see how far we get in covering various parts of it.

[1 : 37] Remember again that Revelation, written in Patmos by John, is one continual vision from the beginning of the book right through all the way to the end.

And we see at the beginning of chapter 20, John says, Then I saw, that is after the battle that had taken place in the previous chapter, the battle that is usually referred to as Armageddon, I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

It's interesting that the angel is not named. There are many angels throughout the book of Revelation, but none of them particularly are named with the exception of Michael and his angels in one particular part.

So who this particular angel is, is not specified for us. But what he does is to chain up the dragon, the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and threw him into the pit, and shut it, sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were ended.

After that, he must be released for a little while. Now, the big question, of course, that comes, and the question that has been so hotly debated for a long period of time now, is this question of what exactly do the thousand years mean?

[3 : 12] It's referred to as the millennium. And you will find in the various commentaries or sermons that you see on this part of Revelation, that there are quite different teachings about the meaning of the millennium.

Is it literally a thousand years? Or is it a symbolic period of time? Well, that depends entirely on what position you hold regarding the thousand years.

And you see that the thousand years is mentioned again at the end of verse 4, that those who had not watered the beast of its image, they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Now, there are three different positions that are taken with regard as to what the thousand years actually mean.

There are those that are called the premillenniasts, that we are living in a period of time before this actually, the thousand years, take place.

[4 : 32] Then there are those that are called the postmillenniasts, who say that the thousand years has already happened and that we are living in the period after that.

And then there are those who are called the amillenniasts, A is the Greek prefix for no or no millennium, who believe that this is symbolic.

Like so many things in the book of Revelation, it is not to be taken literally, but it is symbolic of periods of time.

Now, the premillennialists at this particular stage, you tend to see enormous amounts of their writings appearing on the internet, particularly from the United States. And one has to be very, very careful with some of the things that are in what's called eschatology, that is the study of the end times and the various things that are put forward about it.

[5 : 43] The main views in the premillennialists date back to 1585, first written by a Jesuit monk called Ribora in Spain, but it didn't really become popular until the 19th century.

And that was with the rise of what are known as the dispensationalists. Those who believed, led particularly by the teaching of John Nelson Darby, I'll say more about him in a minute or two, who believed that the history of the world was divided into various dispensations, various different sections that you could work out, and that this is referring to the final dispensation.

Darby took the writings of Ribora, and along with others, etc., he propounded this theory that at Christ's return, the Christian dead will be raised, and believers still living on the earth will be caught up to meet him in the air.

Now, there's nothing wrong with that. That's entirely scriptural. If you go back to 1 Thessalonians 4, and verse 17, then we find Paul writing exactly the same thing to the Thessalonians.

He is declaring at verse 15, For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep, those who have died.

[7 : 19] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Now, you'll notice that in what Paul writes, there is no mention of a period of time between the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the final judgment.

And that is where the premillennialists begin to differ. They refer to this particular section, and particularly what Paul has written there, as the rapture.

And although the word doesn't appear in script, it says from the Latin, raptor, meaning to be caught up. They refer to that, and believe that that is going to happen, that all Christians, all believers, will be suddenly raptured from the earth, and then there will be a period of a thousand years.

[8 : 32] Some disagree with a thousand years there. Some say it's only seven years, etc. I'm not going to get into that discussion. But there will be a period of time before the final judgment, in which there will be no Christians left on the earth.

They'll all be in heaven, etc. Now, that gained popularity with a television series called Left Behind. Some of you may well have seen it, etc.

Which is quite interesting to watch, but quite erroneous in the way that it works. And premillennialism then suggests that Christ will come then, and all the believers will then reign with Christ for a thousand years.

The millennium. And then after this, Satan will be released to cause trouble on the earth once again. This is where the difficulty starts.

First of all, if you look at what the Lord Jesus Christ says about his second coming in Matthew 24, in Luke 21, and so on, there is no mention of him coming, and then a period of time between that and the judgment.

[9 : 49] Quite the opposite. Each passage insists and leaves very clear that the second coming of Christ and the judgment will take place one immediately after the other.

So those who propound the rapture theory particularly, that there will be this period of time, sometimes described as seven years, according to how they interpret the book of Daniel, and so on, and others, that it's a literal one thousand years, is not correct in terms of what Scripture actually says.

So the premillennialists, although they have a lot of power, particularly in the U.S., and it comes through not only Darby's writings, but also what is known as the Schofield Bible.

I don't know if any of you have come across that before. Cyrus Schofield published his Bible in 1909 in the States, and it's a dispensational Bible, and it very much emphasizes this whole period of the premillennium.

And Darby, of course, he took most of his ideas from Darby, but not just from Darby. Darby went on later to found something in England that you may have heard of called the Plymouth Brethren, or the exclusive Plymouth Brethren, et cetera.

[11 : 23] And his views spread throughout the Brethren churches for quite a period of time. But it was really in the U.S. that this whole premillennialist theology has caught hold, and it's caught hold very much in the last 20, 30 years.

Personally, I'm quite amazed by the number of posts that come up on Facebook, particularly about pre-rapture theology and pre-rapture warnings, to get ready for the rapture.

It seems to be a message that is prevalent throughout some circles of American theology. But Reformed Presbyterian theology, Reformed theology, dismisses that as being quite incorrect. The post-millenniasts, they say that the return of Christ takes place after the millennium, that there will be a period of a thousand years in which there is literally peace on earth, and then Christ will come, and Christ's kingdom will advance.

But that completely ignores the fact that Satan, at verse 7, when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison.

[12 : 45] Now, it's evident, if we look at the state of the world today, that Satan is active. There's no question whatsoever about that.

What is the difference? Well, the difference is that there was a period of time in which Satan was totally active, had control. If you come up to the history of the world before the crucifixion at Calvary, Satan is in control of most of the world with the exception of God's covenant people, the Jews. There are very few instances in Scripture mentioned of those who were not Jews believing in God prior to the spread of Christianity in the first century.

There are a few. Remember Job and Melchizedek and Job and his friends? They were not Jews. They were Gentiles. But for the majority of the history of the Old Testament, it would seem that the world outside God's covenant people, the Jews, was in complete spiritual darkness.

So when has Satan been released? Or is Satan actually in his prison still?

[14 : 11] And that's a question that's been debated, of course. There'll be books and books and books written about that. And so we see that Satan finally is to be defeated.

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog to gather them for battle. Their number is like the sand of the sea. Now the reference to Gog and Magog comes from Ezekiel 38 and 39. And it basically refers to the countries that we know nowadays as Syria and the then Persia, modern day Iran.

A lot of people draw conclusions from that. And say, oh, Iran has got to be defeated. And there is a huge movement in the US, of course, that backs that with the current situation that's going on there. I'm not going to get into the politics of that. This is not the place for that. But we see that Satan is defeated. And we see that not only he's defeated, but he is destroyed.

[15 : 25] Because Satan's armies then and marched up surrounding the camp of the saints and the beloved city. But fire comes down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were.

And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. it's an eternal judgment upon them. But also along with that John sees in verse 4 he sees thrones and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.

And he sees the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God and so on. And notice that it's the souls he sees.

He does not see bodies. There is no resurrection of the body here. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Now this referred to as the first resurrection is the separation that takes place between body and soul at the moment of death.

[16 : 41] Body and soul are not left in the grave. At the moment of death the soul goes to one of two places. It either goes to glory to heaven with Jesus or it goes to Hades or hell, whichever word you want to use for it.

And bear in mind that the hell that we see in scripture is an intermediate place. It's not the final place. it's an intermediate place where the souls will be until the great judgment, the judgment that

comes.

Most people don't like to hear sermons about souls going to hell, but we have to be very clear about that. That is what scripture tells us and says.

And John sees the souls of those who had been beheaded. Now notice it's beheaded. And that again was, of course, what was happening to so many people, Christians, in the Roman Empire at this time.

You can never take scripture out of its historical context. So we have to be very, very clear that this is the time where Nero and various others, the persecution of Christians and their beheading was taking place throughout the Roman Empire.

[18 : 10] And you remember, of course, that Paul himself was beheaded as one of those. So the first resurrection that is mentioned here is referring simply to the resurrection of the soul that takes place and is with Christ in heaven.

And then we are told that this is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power.

Now, we come to the second death at the end of the chapter in verse 14. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

And that is the eternal death, the eternal situation of the resurrected soul and body of those who are not believers.

Because as we see then in verse 11, then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Who is seated on the great white throne?

[19 : 25] The Lord Jesus Christ. You notice that this throne is different to the throne that we've seen earlier in Revelation where the father sat that we saw into the throne room of heaven in chapter four.

This is the great white throne. And the whiteness signifies, of course, various things. First of all, it signifies the holiness of the person who is sitting on the throne.

Secondly, it signifies that the judgment will be perfect. perfect. And you notice that the second coming of Christ is mentioned here quite clearly.

We've seen it before in verse 11 of chapter 19, the heavens opened and behold the white heart and he who was sitting on it faithful and through. And even in the passages, if you go to Matthew 24 and Luke 21 and so on and have a look at what Christ himself says, again, I don't have time to go into all this in detail, but look at what Christ himself says about his second coming.

Look at what the angels say to those at the ascension in Acts 1. And there you see clearly laid out that in the same manner as he has gone, he will come again.

[20 : 44] But he won't come alone the second time. He will come with his holy angels. And by this time, by the second coming of Christ, Satan has been defeated.

He's already been defeated at the cross. But in his final onslaught on the church, and bear in mind that John is seeing, as it were, the whole process of history, the history of the church.

In the second onslaught, notice there's no battle. Verse 9, they marched up over the broad plain of the earth, surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.

But fire came down from heaven and consumed them. There's no battle. It's simply total annihilation that takes place there.

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever.

[21 : 56] And you notice that the judgment is eternal. It's forever and ever. And so, excuse me, and so, as we see the final scene of the judgment, from verse 12 onwards, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

No one is excluded from this. Everyone, you and I, will be present there, the dead, great and small, unless we have been alive at the second coming of Christ, and caught up, as Paul says, with and into glory.

Everyone will be there, great and small. Many people have difficulty with the phrase, great and small. What does it actually mean?

Does that mean adult and children, or does it mean important and not so important? The general interpretation of that is that it's all encompassing, that it means every human soul that has ever existed.

Now, that's an amazing amount of people. If you consider that from Adam onwards, how many people have died?

[23 : 31] How many people still exist? The number of people on the earth at this particular time? Billions and billions and billions will be standing before the throne. people.

But remember what Jesus says in Matthew 25, that he will separate his people as sheep and goats are separated, on the right hand and on the left hand.

And here then we see the books were opened. now we've seen the books before, much earlier in Revelation, but there is a separate book here.

Another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they have done.

Now, what does that mean for you and I as believers? How are you judged? Are you judged according to what you have done? And there are some who say, well, that seems to suggest that we are judged by our works.

[24 : 42] but that's not the meaning of it at all. What it means is, did you believe what was preached to you?

Did you believe the word that was preached about the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, about why he came and why he died, and that his blood on the cross cleanses the sinner from every sin? That's the question that matters here. It's not what you did, or what you may do in the future, because you and I, even as God's people, will still continually sin daily in thought, word, and deed. We may even backslide for a period of time. There may be things that we do that we shouldn't have done, things that we say that we shouldn't have said. But that's not the judgment that's laid on the Lord's people.

And our Lord is very clear on that, very clear if you go, when you go home, read Luke 21 or Matthew 24 and 25 and see what he says.

[26 : 03] Again, I don't have time to go into that in all detail. But it's evidently clear from scripture itself, that the people of God are judged according to the grace and the faith that they have been given.

Now there are some people of God, some believers, perhaps you're here this evening and you think, well, I haven't done very much for the cause of Christ. My faith is not very strong. Perhaps maybe I don't really have much faith at all. But then remember what Christ said about faith. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would be able to say to the mountains, etc. and so on. Faith is faith. You can't have bigger faith or smaller faith. You can have stronger or weaker faith.

That's a different question altogether. And for some of us, our faith perhaps appears to be stronger than it is for others. But that's not the case through the work of the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 16] The Holy Spirit guarantees that faith will be efficacious, effectual to everyone of those who have been predestined through election to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That in itself is a most amazing mystery. Why would God, the Father in heaven, have chosen some people to come to faith and others not?

Perhaps sitting in the same church for years, perhaps hearing the same sermons, and yet one is converted and the other isn't. The other remains in darkness. grace. Why is that?

Of course, there are those who argue that, well, if God's choice is election, if that's the way it is, there's nothing I can do about it.

Well, let me say this to you if you're tied up about election. Election is none of your business. Election is God's business.

[28 : 29] You will never know if you're elect or not until you come to faith. None of us who came to faith knew that we were elect beforehand.

In fact, it never even bothered us. And it's only afterwards, very often, that many people, particularly at the beginning of their Christian walk, get worried about election.

What if I'm not really elect, etc., and so on. That's not your problem. Your problem is to believe on the finished work of Calvary.

To believe. Isn't that what Paul replied to the Philippian jailer? What must I do to be saved? I didn't say look behind your ear to see the mark of election.

What did he say? He said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. and thy family. As simple as that.

[29 : 29] And yet, all of us know through our struggles with faith that it's not as simple as it sounds. It doesn't seem to be as simple. And yet, that's all that's required.

Believing faith. And if believing faith is what you have, then your name will be written in the book of life. It's not about what you do.

It's not about how good you are or how bad you were. It's about your faith and your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your Savior.

And time is passing. Let's try and finish the chapter. The dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done. Now, that particularly seems to refer much more to the other books, the books that were opened in verse 12.

But this another book opened, the book of life, is the book that really matters to you and me. Is your name in the book of life?

[30 : 40] There are some of us here who firmly believe and trust that it is through the grace of God. There are others perhaps who struggle with that, who are not sure.

And there are some who don't care. You may be here this evening and it doesn't really bother you very much. It's not important to you. But it should be because your eternal destiny depends on it. Your eternal destiny depends on it. You see, see what happens towards the end. Verse 13, the sea gave up the dead who were in it.

Death and hell or death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged, each one of them according to what they had done. the question is quite simply, did you believe when you heard the word of God preached to you?

Did you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? That's the only thing that matters. And we see here in verse 14 that death and hell were thrown into the lake of fire.

[32 : 01] And you might say, well, what was the difference between the two? Well, hell, of course, sorry, death, of course, when it takes place is the separation of the soul and the body.

Where does the soul go? It goes to Hades or to hell. Remember, I think I said this before, that the hell that we see in Scripture is an intermediate place.

That is where the dead who are not believers in Christ will be until the day of judgment, until the second coming of Christ.

There's no longer any need for death after the second judgment, because it's done, it's finished. Hell is no longer the place where those who did not believe, did not accept what Scripture says. That's no longer necessary, because that place of torment, and it is mentioned many times in Scripture as a place of suffering and torment. That place now gives way to the lake of fire.

[33 : 23] It must be a terrible thing to be thrown in to the lake of fire. fire. This is the lake of fire.

And you have to think of it this way. There are some of you who think, oh, well, that's quite comfortable, that means I'll be burnt, destroyed finally. No, you won't. You will be in the lake of fire for all eternity.

It's a difficult teaching, but that's what Scripture says. if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

It must be an enormous lake to contain the resurrected bodies and souls of those who have been opposed the church of Christ.

It must be an enormous lake. It's inconceivable for us to think of just how many billions of people will end up there.

[34 : 33] Not just their souls, but their resurrected bodies as well. This is the only general resurrection that we see in Scripture. Scripture.

very difficult, very difficult to think on these things. It's a very solemn vision that John is giving.

Anyone's name was not found written in the book of life. He was thrown into the lake of fire. Does that frighten you?

even perhaps as a believing Christian, some of us are frightened by that. But nevertheless, it should only strengthen our faith and strengthen our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that brings the vision of the judgment to an end. The great white throne. The judgment of the great white throne.

[35 : 39] the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all authority has been given to carry out the judgment of those who have stood against him.

And remember that some have stood against him deliberately and persecuted the church. Others have stood against him, perhaps unconsciously, not really caring, doesn't bother you, not important.

And today's words, of course, in today's atheistic society, there are so many to whom these things have no importance whatsoever. But to you and I, who are called as believers to spread the word of God, our testimony, our faith, our behavior, in and out of the workplace, in and out of the home, is vitally important.

We are the only ones, when I say we, I mean the believing church throughout the world, who show to others the grace and the love that has been shown to us.

We can't convert anyone. That alone is the work of the Holy Spirit. But some are led to faith through the testimony of others, through the witness of others.

[37 : 15] In this period of time, there are more Christians in the world than there ever have been before. the gospel has spread throughout the world.

Satan has been released for a little while, but his time will come to an end. And there have never been, perhaps, so many believers, so many parts of the world where God's word has reached, penetrated, and has borne fruit.

But there are still places where the word of God has not yet reached. There are still some. And until that happens, I personally believe that the second coming will not take place until then, because Jesus says the gospel must be preached, must be published, as the word that's translated, in the whole world.

And that has not yet happened. It's not far away. with the internet, et cetera, and everything else, and cell phone, mobile phones, et cetera, the word of God is reaching places that it has never reached before.

Are we near to the second coming? I don't know. We're certainly nearer to it than we were a thousand years ago. There's no question about that. We're nearer to it than we were at the turn of this century.

[38 : 48] How near we are, that's anyone's guess. And in a sense, it doesn't really matter. But you and I should live out our lives as if the second coming of the Lord was just about to happen tonight, tomorrow.

What if it did happen tonight? What if it did happen tomorrow? I remember this example. I may have used it here before.

I'll finish with this. Next time I deal with this, I'll be looking into the chapter 21, the new city coming. What takes place after the judgment? And that will be a comfort to every Christian. But I want you to think of this, leave this with you.

Supposing you had a little button on your seat this evening, on the arm of your seat or on the back of the seat in front of you. And you were asked this question.

[39 : 59] If you want the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to be now, press the button. How many of us would press it?

the believer's first reaction is to say, oh, yeah, there's nothing I want more than to be eternally with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But then you begin to think, what about my children? What about my friends and my family not yet converted? Our Lord grant time.

and you pull your hand away from the button. Aren't you glad it's not your choice? It's not your choice.

We don't know when the second coming will take place, but it will take place. There is nothing more clear than that throughout the New Testament and in the Old as well.

[41 : 05] Where will you be? where will you stand before the judgment seat of Christ when the second coming actually takes place? May the Lord bless these meditations upon his word.

Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that we can meditate upon these things. And although perhaps there is so much that we don't understand, nevertheless, we understand our need to see the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to come to you and to plead the merits of Christ and the merits of the atonement that was rendered.

We pray for any here this evening, perhaps watching online, who have not yet found you as their Saviour, that they would seek and find. Your word testifies, even in the book of Revelation, that if they ask, they will seek.

Christ is knocking at the door, and if you open it to him, if any man open, he will come in and sup with you.

We pray that that would be the experience of those as yet who do not know you as Saviour this evening. We pray that your people would feel comfort and blessed in the fact that you are coming again, and that you will take them to be with yourself forever.

[42 : 32] we pray, O Lord, that you would restrain Satan, and that peace would be given in order that you may be glorified through the world.

Pardon our sins through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Let us conclude then by singing these beautiful verses in Psalm 72, page 314, Psalm 72, at verse 17, the last three verses, so often sang just at communion times, but nevertheless so appropriate when we are thinking on the last things that are to come.

His name forever, verse 17, His name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall. Men shall be blessed in him and blessed, all nations shall him call. Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he alone doth wondrous works and glory that excel.

And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity, the whole earth, let his glory fill. Amen. So let it be. His name forever shall endure.

This name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall.

[44 : 09] Men shall be blessed in him blessed, all nations shall have come.

Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he be a home, the wondrous world, their glory of their still.

blessed be his day, to all eternity.

The whole earth has its glory filled. Amen.

So let it be. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever.

[45 : 48] Amen.