

How will God completely remove evil at the end?

Revelation 20

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So, at one of the sessions of the Triennial this past week we were asked to think back to when we received Christ and when we were baptized, and to remember that time of life and what God was doing in our lives; perhaps remembering when we received Christ and our actual baptism. And I would like you to go back there in your own life today if you know Christ. Back to the time: maybe you actually have a date or the season where you received Christ. And then to the day of your baptism, and think back for a few moments to that time. For me, I came to Christ December 26, 1971 when my sister led me to Christ: the day after Christmas, after all the presents and that day I received the greatest gift that you could receive. I was then baptized in March of '74, so I've been with the Lord for 46 years now.

Through all the ups and downs of life and through all the joys and sorrows the Lord has been faithful and I praise Him for that. As you think about your walk with God I wonder what you think. I wonder what you're thinking about the time when you came to Christ to today, and what God has brought you through. And I wonder about what you are thinking about the future? Do you think that maybe in your life back then at your baptism or whatever you are thinking of, that that was the high point in your spiritual life, and even since then it has been kind of bumpy or maybe you have been sliding down or lukewarm to God? Or maybe there's just been a lot of things that have happened that have happened in your life and you are hoping you can survive. Would you ever think that the best is yet to come?

There was a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she got things "in order," she contacted her pastor and invited him to her house. She wanted to discuss her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, scriptures to be read, and even the outfit she wanted to be buried in. The woman also requested to be buried with her favourite Bible. Everything was in order and the pastor prepared to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

"There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the pastor's reply.

"This is very important," the woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The pastor stood puzzled, not knowing quite what to say. "That surprises you, doesn't it?" the woman asked.

“Yes,” said the pastor.

The woman explained. “In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners I always remember that when the dishes were cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, ‘Keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming... like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful and of substance! So I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork... the best is yet to come.’

The pastor’s eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the woman goodbye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the woman had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She knew that something better was coming.

At the funeral people walked by her casket and they saw the pretty dress she wore, her Bible and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the pastor heard the question, “What’s with the fork?” And over and over he smiled.

During his message, the pastor told the people of the conversation they had; about her fork and what it symbolized to her. He told people how he could not stop thinking about the fork. So the next time you reach down for your fork, let it remind you oh so gently, that the best is yet to come. **(SLIDE 1 – Everlasting Life)**

Today’s passage from Revelation talks about some of the best yet to come. It actually contains a startling claim. In fact, this claim seems impossible because we have never experienced anything like it. We have never encountered a relationship in the realm this claim describes. We have not lived one day of our lives in the environment promised by this claim. Yet, Revelation 20 and the Bible overall forcefully makes this claim. It invites us to imagine a world unlike any that we have experienced. It also calls to expand our understanding and faith in God and His power.

So what is this outrageous claim? **God will completely remove evil at the end. (SLIDE 2)** Can you even imagine a world without evil; relationships without sin; life without the ravages of the devil and his forces? Can you formulate in your mind what a community would be like without evil? No one would lock their doors because there’d be no crime. No one would lack food because there’d be no greed. No one would experience loneliness because there would be no exclusion, ignoring and posturing.

Everything evil would be removed – The devil; death; fallen angels; spiritual forces of evil; followers of evil. God would remove anything and anyone who caused and harm destruction without repentance. No human could accomplish this.

The devil would certainly not want to accomplish this. The only one who could possibly approach such a claim is God Himself. Yet it still seems too good to be true. So today we are going to examine this claim. We will ask how God could completely remove evil at the end. But we will also see how this promise can give us hope and strength today. Then we can always live keeping a fork handy for we know something much better is coming.

Revelation 20 (ESV) (INSERT TEXT)

20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and 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.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw 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 and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and 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.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then 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 had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, 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. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

How can God completely remove evil at the end? The first ten verses of this text reveal that **God will completely defeat and remove Satan.** (SLIDE 3) John receives another vision. An angel comes down from heaven holding in his hand a key to the bottomless pit and a large chain. We encountered the bottomless pit back in Revelation 9 when it opened and a demonic army ascended from it. We also find a couple other places in the Bible where fallen angels are held in chains. 2 Peter 2:4 states "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment. Then in Jude, the little letter just before Revelation,

verse 6 states, “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” So God has the ability to capture and bind fallen angels.

John sees an angel from God with the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. Those familiar with these other references would immediately recognize that this angel will put a chain on a fallen angel and put him in this prison. Now if you saw someone with a key to prison and a chain with your name on it coming for you, you’d likely run or resist this person. But in verse 2, Satan seems unable to resist or run. The angel simply seizes the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan. He binds him and throws Satan into the pit. Then the angel shuts and seals the pit with the key.

So do not miss what these verses communicate. To take down Satan, God sends only an angel. God does not have to engage in some sort of death match with Satan where the victor remains in doubt. He sends an angel with power to bind Satan and throw him into this pit. This will not be some temporary 3 day stay in jail until some other high order demon comes up with bail money. The angel binds Satan for a thousand years. The end of verse 3 reveals the purpose for this bind. It is not punishment. It is to restrict his deceptive activity. Deception is one of Satan’s primary skills. It describes the effect on a person or group who previously held a correct position or lived in an appropriate way. But Satan’s deceptions trick or mislead them so they go astray. Satan will be unable to deceive for 1000 years. So the complete defeat and removal of Satan begins with the angel capturing him, binding him and throwing him into the pit for this long period of time.

But what is this thousand year business? **(SLIDE 4 – 1000 Years)** It’s referred to at least 5 times here in 20. It is more commonly known as the millennium – 1000 years. Now much of the disagreement and debate among Christians about Revelation concerns the millennium. But it is only referred to in Revelation 20 in this book or the New Testament. It is less important than the triumph of God, the defeat of evil and reign of Christ and God’s faithfulness to His people. So we need not over emphasize it.

Yet we must try to interpret it. There are three primary interpretations of the millennium and where it fits that have been made by Christians throughout history. **(SLIDE 4.1)** There is **Pre-Millennialism**. This view believes that in the future, **Jesus will return prior to the millennium**. He will come back and reign on earth for 1000 years. Those who have followed him will reign with Him over the earth. **(SLIDE 4.2)** Then there is **Post-Millennialism**. This view argues that **Jesus will**

return at the end of a 1000 year period when the earth becomes more and more Christian. This view had much support during the 1800's and early 1900's because of the great missionary work. Christian missionaries went into Africa, Asia and South America with great impact. Many believed that the majority of the world would turn to Christ.

But World War 1 shattered this confidence and support for this view. The supposedly Christian nations of Germany, France, Britain and Austria entered into this dreadful war against each other. Millions died. The world saw an incredible evil committed by the so-called Christian nations. So post-millennialism lost much of its influence.

(SLIDE 4.3) The third interpretation is called **Amillennialism**. In Greek, if you put an alpha or an "a" before a word, it negates it. So A-millennial means no millennium. This view argues for a **non-literal meaning of the millennium**. It sees the number 1000 as symbolic for a long period of time. It believes that we are in the millennium right now. It is the period between the first and second coming of Christ. So these are the three primary views. One immediate question that arises is how each view interprets the binding of Satan in the pit for a thousand years. The "Pre-Mill" position argues that this will be a future time period when Satan is kept from his regular activity for the entire 1000 year period. The "A-mill" position argues that Satan has been bound in some sense with Christ's coming. Those criticizing that position argue that if Satan is bound, he still seems to be pretty effective. If the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, it doesn't seem like that chain is working well. To me the pre-millennial view seems to equate well with Scripture and reality.

But then there is that disturbing conclusion at the end of verse 3. Satan is bound until the thousand years are ended. After that he must be released for a while. I've often wondered why. This is not a way to completely defeat the devil. You don't let the greatest criminal in the universe out after you've got him.

(BLANK) But before we discover the answer to that, John shares another phase of this vision. While Satan will dwell in the bottomless pit for 1000 years, something wonderful happens. In verse 4 – John sees thrones and those seated on them had authority to judge. We're not sure who sits on the thrones. Are they the martyrs talked about later in the verse? They could be the apostles. Back in Matthew 19:28 Jesus said, "Truly, truly I say to you, in the new world when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel." It could be all Christians. In 1st Corinthians 6:2-3, Paul writes "Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more then, matters pertaining to this life!" Or they

could be anyone who remains faithful to Christ through trials. In Revelation 3:21, Jesus said, “The one who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat with my Father on his throne.”

We’re not sure who John sees on these thrones in Revelation 20:4. But then he also sees those who had been beheaded or killed for their faithful witness to Christ. They had not worshipped the beast or its image. They had refused to get the mark on their foreheads. These martyrs come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Therefore, it is quite possible that John sees the martyrs on these thrones. They come to life to reign with Christ. The Pre-mill position argues that this is literal physical resurrection. The A-mill position argues this is spiritual resurrection or when people first come to Christ and they move from spiritual death to life.

Then verse 5. “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.” So the first resurrection refers to those who came to life in verse 4. The rest will get resurrected after the 1000 years. So who gets resurrected in the first resurrection? There are two options. It could refer to all Christians who have died. Then the second resurrection would refer to all non-Christians who have died. The other option is the first resurrection refers only to martyrs who suffered death to keep the faith. Then the second resurrection would include all other Christians and all who have rejected Christ.

In verse 6, John pronounces another blessing. “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”

Now I know this can be confusing. But let’s step back for a moment and notice a couple of key points. It seems like the millennium is not the final, enduring, eternal kingdom of God. There was an understanding of an intermediate kingdom in Jewish thinking. Some believed that Messiah would come and reign. Then he would present this intermediate kingdom to God Himself to transition into the eternal kingdom.

There’s a second point we need to think about with respect to the millennial reign. Specifically, what is the point of it? Why have a millennial kingdom if Satan will be released and there will be a final rebellion? There’s a couple of likely possibilities. One is to reward the martyrs. The whole of Revelation has spoken courage to the martyrs to persevere even unto death. But they will in the future be rewarded with this great privilege of reigning with Christ. Another possible purpose for the millennial reign is to finally and completely reveal the heart of Satan and fallen humankind.

This leads us into verse 7. At the end of 1000 years, Satan is released. Why? Well, it's interesting what happens. If we were in prison for an extended period of time for some crime we committed, we would hopefully think about not doing it again. But the devil immediately goes back to deceiving. His heart has not changed. His time in prison brought no reform.

But perhaps more disturbing is the response to Satan's deception. Satan goes to the corners of the earth and people flock to follow Him. And he doesn't gather forty or fifty outlaws. So many want to follow him that they number like the sand on the sea shore. Now if the millennium is a literal one thousand year reign of Christ on earth, these people had all this time with Christ. They had all this opportunity to see and know Christ. Yet the moment an opportunity arises to rebel, they jump at it. They've had 1000 years apart from the devil's deceit. Yet they immediately rebel when invited. So this release of Satan reveals the wickedness in the human heart and our basic tendency to rebel against our creator.

But this rebellion will not succeed. The massive army marches across a great plain to surround the saints and their beloved city. But as we've seen many times before in Revelation, there's little if any battle. God sends fire from heaven that destroys the army. Then He decisively deals with the devil. He throws him into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet already live. He will be tormented day and night forever and ever. So God will completely defeat the devil and remove the devil from having any more influence over God's people. We will one day live a life where the devil is completely removed. Keep your fork ready – the best is yet to come.

But the outrageous claim stated God would completely remove evil in the end. What about the other fallen angels or souls of people who rebelled against God. The end of Revelation 20 reveals the final act in God's removal of evil.

(SLIDE 5) It shows us that **God will judge everyone righteously, based on evidence from their lives.** John sees another vision with a great white throne and someone seated on it. This someone is so powerful that earth and sky flee from his presence. He is the all-powerful ruler of the universe – God Himself. Yet Jesus also somehow shares in this judgment. 2 Corinthians 5:17 talks about the judgment seat of Christ. Romans 14:10 mentions the judgment seat of God.

Verse 12 tells us John saw the dead great and small standing before the throne. They stand to receive a verdict from the judge. Books are opened that contain information necessary for judgment. The dead were judged according to what was written in the books. So that means that this is a judgment based on deeds. This judgment takes into account the evidence of actions taken by each person. This does not mean that this is a judgment based on works. But works

reveal faith. Our works grow out of our beliefs. So based on our deeds, God will judge. But there is also the mention of the book of life. This includes God's gracious act of saving and writing the names of those He saved in it.

Verse 13 also covers a major grey area in the ancient world. What would happen to people who died at sea? They understood that those who died on land could be resurrected. But what if they never found the body? God can find and resurrect anyone. They too would be judged. No one too great or too small escapes judgment.

But then comes another piece of good news – another forkful that we await. Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire. God will finish judgment by judging death. Death will be no more. 1st Corinthians 15:26 talks about the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. So death will no longer be part of the world God prepares for His people. Finally in verse 15, all those who have continually rejected God will join Satan, the Beast and everyone else in this lake of fire. There will be no more opportunity for people with evil unredeemed hearts to wreak havoc or cause destruction.

Everything evil will be completely removed from the new heaven and the new earth. By the end of this chapter, everything is in place for God's people to enter into a protected, peaceful, eternal fellowship with Him. There will be an eternity of forkfuls yet to come. That's a story for the last chapters of Revelation. But let's conclude today by pondering again the outrageous claim and then thinking about how we can live in light of it?

The claim: **God will completely remove evil at the end.** Is it too good to be true? We have never known a world apart from evil. But we have gotten glimpses of it – a touch of heaven when God's work breaks through or becomes obvious – like a testimony of a life changed or a baptism of someone we never thought would go there. These encourage us that there is something more awaiting us. So we must continue in the life of faith trusting God. Does He keep His Word? Does He fulfill His promises? That's what the Bible is all about. It testifies to God's faithfulness and reveals God to us. As we continue to grow in knowing and trusting God, we can trust that He will actually keep His Word about these tremendous possibilities in the end.

SLIDE 6.1 - If God will completely remove evil in the end, then **we can live hopeful lives.** One day we will actually be with Christ; with our Lord; with our Savior; with the one who gave up His life for us; with the one who has watched over us; with the one who prepares a wedding banquet for us. Whether in a temporary intermediate kingdom or in a new heaven and new earth, we will be with Christ.

Though we face a formidable enemy today in the devil, he is not supreme to God or greater than Him. One angel can bind him. We need to recognize the reality of Satan's threat. But we must not live in fear knowing I have the Lord and His angel's help through prayer.

We can live with hope because we look forward to a time when death will no longer be part of life. We look forward to living in a world where we are reunited with my loved ones

(SLIDE 6.1) If God will completely remove evil at the end, **we must live watchful lives today.** Earlier judgments in Revelation failed to bring repentance. Now even with a thousand year absence of Satan, hearts ready to be deceived. The millennium proves that humans cannot blame their sinfulness on their environment or circumstances. People apparently can live during the reign of Christ and still not submit to His Lordship. So we must be vigilant against allowing our own hearts to become complacent. We must regularly confess my sins and open up our hearts to the Holy Spirit's penetrating insight.

(SLIDE 6.2) If God will completely remove evil at the end, **we can live with purpose today.** Every day actions matter because they are recorded in God's books. Doing whatever we do to the glory of God matters. Living in obedience to God matters and will be rewarded on Judgment Day. Therefore, we cannot live our lives for the Lord only on Sundays. We must continually turn to Him and walk with Him for strength to live in a God-glorifying way all the time.

God will completely remove evil one day. There will be no more death. No more pain or sorrow. There will be no more perishing and no more sin. There will be no more wickedness and no more devil. Until that day, God provides tremendous resources and strength for us to persevere. So keep your fork for all God has for you.

If you don't know Christ, It not's too late for you to get a fork. God will one day bring all things to an end. Then it will be too late. But you can call out to Him now and begin this journey towards life in the new heaven and earth in God's presence.