

THREE REASONS TO EXERCISE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

20 I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and [holding] a great chain in his hand. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³He threw him into the abyss, shut it, and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be released for a short time. ⁴I saw thrones, and those who sat upon them, and they were given [authority] to judge. And [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. [I] also [saw] those who did not worship the beast or his image and who did not receive his mark on their forehead or upon their hand—they lived and reigned with Christ for [the] thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended). This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection, the second death has no authority over them; on the contrary, they shall be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for [the] thousand years. ⁷When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them together for the battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down out of heaven and consumed them. ¹⁰The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne, and him who was seated on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence, but there was no place for them [to go]. ¹²And I saw the dead, the prominent and the insignificant, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and every man was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, [namely,] the lake of fire. ¹⁵If anyone's [name] was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Look! The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them. They shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. ⁴He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, neither shall there be any mourning or crying or pain any more; the old [order of] things has passed away. ⁵He who sits on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write [this down], for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Again he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will freely give [drink] from the spring of the water of life. ⁷He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. ⁸But the cowardly and the unfaithful and the

detestable and murderers and the sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars—their place shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev. 20:1-21:8)

Introduction

At times the Christian may be tempted to utter the words recorded in Malachi 3:14-15,

It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before Jehovah of hosts? ¹⁵But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.

As we considered the seven churches of Revelation (chapters two and three,) we discovered that a number of them suffered a great deal for their faith in Christ—to five of them Christ addressed the words, *“I know your tribulation.”* We discovered that the other two churches, Sardis and Laodicea, faced the opposite temptation: they were being lured away from Christ by material prosperity and the “good life” of this present world. We face the same situation today—as Christians, we are either being pushed out of this world or seduced back into this world.

As a Christian who is seeking to be faithful to Christ in the midst of this world, you may be tempted to ask, “Is it worth it?” Is it worth withstanding the opposition? Is it worth resisting the seductions? One reason Revelation 20-21 was written is to encourage, stimulate and fortify our faith in Christ by revealing the unsurpassable benefits and privileges that are granted to the believer in Christ, and to him alone. As we come to Revelation 20:1-21:8, let us consider, “Three Reasons to Exercise Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I. Exercise Faith in Jesus, ...and You Shall be Spared from the “Second Death”

In verses 1-3 Satan is described as being bound and cast into the pit for the thousand years, this is expressly done in order to prevent him from *“deceiving the nations.”* Verses 7-8 define this “deceiving of the nations” as Satan’s act of gathering the nations together for the final battle of Armageddon. Verses 1-3 do not mean that Satan is not active throughout this New Testament age; on the contrary, consider, for instance, Revelation 12:12, *“woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has come down to you. He is filled with fury, because he knows that he has only a short time.”* Consider, too, the exhortation given by the Apostle Peter: *“Be [spiritually] sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8.) What is meant by Satan being “bound” is that Satan is prevented from prematurely gathering the nations to their final cataclysmic destruction before the appointed time.

But when that time comes, when the “thousand years” are finished, Satan shall be permitted to gather the nations to the battle of Armageddon, as Revelation 20:7-9 indicates:

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them together for the battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down out of heaven and consumed them. (Rev. 20:7-9)

The nations laying siege to “*the camp of the saints, the beloved city,*” is pictorially describing the universal hostility towards the church of Christ, the fulfillment of His word recorded in Luke 21:17, “*You will be hated by all men for my name’s sake.*” This is the same scene as was earlier presented in Revelation 19:19, “*I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled together to wage war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.*”

Note: One characteristic of New Testament prophecy is that it at times employs Old Testament themes and language to portray New Testament era events. For example, consider our Lord’s teaching concerning the person and ministry of John the Baptist:

The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him whatever they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:10-13)

In this passage of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus explains how the Old Testament figure, Elijah, was prophetically foretelling and revealing the New Testament figure, John the Baptist. Notice that in referring to John the Baptist—the prophetic person whom the Old Testament prophet Elijah typified—Jesus continues to use Old Testament terminology, identifying John the Baptist as “Elijah.” It is important to appreciate this principle of biblical prophecy if we are to have a true understanding of the passage of Revelation 20:7-9.

But what starts out to be a universal “military campaign” against the church of Christ, proves to be a day of universal destruction for the hostile armies, and universal judgment (Rev. 20:9b.) On that day the devil, together with “the beast” and “the false prophet,” shall be consigned to the lake of fire (vs. 10.) Here is the eternal judgment and the final fate of the archenemy of God and His people, as well as the eternal judgment and the final fate of the demonically inspired kingdom of man, together with all of its philosophy and propaganda.

Verses 11-13 now go on to describe the scene of the Final Judgment: John sees “*a great white throne, and him who was seated on it*”—here is the awesome purity of God as it is revealed in all of its fullness on the day He judges the world in righteousness. John goes on to report, “*the earth and the sky fled from his presence, but there was no place for them to go.*” The whole creation is shaken and collapses before the presence of God, and finds no place to hide before His awesome presence. Then John declares, “*I saw the dead ... standing before the throne.*” Here is the fulfillment of our Lord’s prophecy recorded in John 5:28-29,

Do not be amazed by this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice ²⁹and shall come out: they who have done good shall be resurrected to life; but they who have done evil shall be resurrected to condemnation. (Jn. 5:28-29)

“*Books were opened,*” and the dead were judged based upon the things that were written in the books. The “*books*” contain the written record of each man’s deeds, and they become the evidence by which each man is judged. Our works and our lives are significant, and at the last shall receive their just desert of punishment or reward.

From verse 14 we learn that “*death* [by which we should take to mean physical death] *and Hades,*” (which is the place of the dead,) are thrown into the lake of fire. In other words, all the intermediate expressions of the divine judgment are now superseded by the ultimate and eternal form of judgment—the unmitigated experience of hell. According to verse 15, anyone whose name was not found written in “*the book of life*” was thrown into the lake of fire, which is defined as “*the second death.*” As Revelation 13:8 indicates, “*the book of life*” contains the names of God’s redeemed—those whom He has given to Christ, those who receive Christ as their Savior and remain faithful to Him.

Here is the first reason why we should exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: so that we may be spared from “*the second death,*” which is hell itself.

II. Exercise Faith in Jesus, ...and You Shall Share in the “First Resurrection”

The Apostle John now describes for us a heavenly scene that was revealed to him:

He reports that he saw “*thrones*” (note the plural)—here is the symbol of authority, rule, and dominion. He saw the persons who sat upon these thrones; these thrones are not vacant, they are not simply “reserved seats,” they are presently being occupied. Next John tells us that those seated upon the thrones “*were given [authority] to judge.*” That is to say, the power and authority to exercise judgment was given by God to those who sat upon the thrones; but note that the text only says this authority was given; it does not say that this authority was immediately exercised. By way of example: A missionary was ordained in the

city of Philadelphia, but he did not begin to exercise the authority of his office until some months later when he arrived on the mission field. What is described here is what the Apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:2a, 3a. Referring to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul asks, *“Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... ³Do you not realize that we will judge angels?”* Also take note of Psalm 146:6-9,

May the praises of God be in their mouths, and a double-edged sword in their hands; ⁷to inflict vengeance upon the nations, and punishment on the peoples; ⁸to bind their kings with fetters, and their nobles with shackles of iron; ⁹to carry out the sentence of judgment written against them. This is the honor given to all his saints. Praise Jehovah. (Psl. 149:6-9)

What is being described in Revelation 20:4a this is the position and the privilege given to those who share with Christ in “the first resurrection.”

The Apostle John also reports that he saw two groups of people. The first group is described as *“the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and the word of God.”* This group is composed of all those Christians who have been martyred for the sake of Jesus—as well as, we might add, all those who have faithfully completed their earthly Christian life. Note that John reports that he saw their *“souls”*—he neither sees them in their earthly bodies nor in their final glorified bodies; he sees them in their intermediate state as Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 5:8, *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* The second group is described as *“those who did not worship the beast or his image and who did not receive his mark on their forehead or upon their hand.”* This group is composed of all those Christians who are still maintaining their allegiance to Christ in this present world.

Speaking of these two groups together, John reports, *“[they] lived and reigned with Christ for [the] thousand years.”* As opposed to the rest of mankind who remain in their state of spiritual death and alienation from God (vs. 5,) by virtue of his faith in Christ, the Christian has been made spiritually alive and has been restored to God: *“And [he raised] you [also], when you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Eph. 2:1,5.) The evidence of spiritual life is the desire for God and identification with the things of God. Being united to Jesus through the act and exercise of faith, the Christian even now shares in Christ’s victory and dominion: *“he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus”* (Eph. 2:6.) In practical terms, this great spiritual truth means that nothing can defeat the saving work of God in the Christian’s life. In referring to the trials he is presently undergoing, Paul confidently declares,

Furthermore, I will also rejoice ¹⁹because I know that, through your prayers and the help [provided] by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of [all] this will be my deliverance. ²⁰This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1:19-20)

This great truth that we, as believers in Christ, are united to Him and share in His heavenly triumph also means that nothing can separate us from God our Father and Christ our Savior:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written, For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39)

The “*thousand years*” is a reference to this present New Testament age, this present age during which time 1) men enter into the life of God by exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2) Christians living in this present world are called to maintain their allegiance to Christ; and 3) Christians who depart this world via death enter into an intermediate state of glory in the presence of Christ and God the Father.

All that he has described in verse 4, John now defines as being part of “*the first resurrection*” (vs. 6.) Consider John 5:24-25,28-29, where the Lord Jesus also speaks of two “resurrections,” the first being spiritual conversion (vs.24-25,) the second being the final resurrection of the body (vs. 28-29):

I tell you the truth, Whoever listens to my word and believes him who sent me, he has eternal life and will not be condemned; on the contrary, he has crossed over from death into life. ²⁵I tell you the truth, The hour is coming, and even now has arrived, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen shall live ... ²⁸Do not be amazed by this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice ²⁹and shall come out: they who have done good shall be resurrected to life; but they who have done evil shall be resurrected to condemnation. (Jn. 5:24-25,28-29)

Here is the second reason to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: by so doing, you share in “*the first resurrection;*” as verse 6 declares, “*blessed and holy is he who has a part in the first resurrection.*” The one who shares in “*the first resurrection*” possesses the eternal blessings of God; for which the Apostle Paul leads the church in praising God: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ" (Eph. 1:3.) Furthermore, the one who shares in *"the first resurrection"* had been made holy for God—being set apart to be God's own possession and to share in the holiness of God, thus becoming the object of God's fatherly love and a source of joy and glory to God.

III. Exercise Faith in Jesus, ...and You Shall Inherit the New Creation

The words of Revelation 21:1 first bring to mind the history recorded in Genesis 1:1—*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"*—and then the promise recorded in 2 Peter 3:13, *"according to his promise, we are watching for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness resides."* Here in Revelation 21 John is actually given a glimpse of the new creation promised by God and referred to in 2 Peter 3:13.

In verses 2-3 John is given a revelation of the *"new Jerusalem."* During the Old Testament era, the city of Jerusalem was the place where God caused His temple to be built and where He met with His people. The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the sanctuary, and the sanctuary became filled with the glorious cloud of God's divine presence: *"the cloud filled the temple of Jehovah. ¹¹And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of Jehovah filled his temple"* (1 Kgs. 8:10-11.) All of Israel was invited and commanded to come to Jerusalem three times a year for feasts of worship and fellowship with the LORD their God. Life in Old Testament Israel, especially the yearly feasts at Jerusalem, was a model of what life will be like in the new creation: the LORD welcomes His people into His immediate presence to worship Him and to fellowship with Him.

Furthermore, life in the new creation will re-establish what life was like in the original creation. From Genesis 3:8a we learn that the LORD walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But in the new creation that spiritual life will be elevated to an indescribably higher plane. In the light of these great things to come, as Christians we should share the attitude of the Psalmist as expressed in Psalm 43:3-4, *"Oh send out your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. ⁴Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy."*

Verse 4 goes on to reveal some of the blessings to be experienced when the redeemed enjoy to the full life with God in the new creation. *"[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* The LORD God Himself shall personally minister comfort and blessing to His people. The description given in Revelation 20:4a corresponds to the incredible picture presented by our Lord in His parable of the master of the house serving supper to his servants: *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them"* (Lk. 12:37.)

John goes on to report, *“There shall be no more death, neither shall there be any mourning or crying or pain any more.”* The curse (death,) together with every aspect of it, shall be done away with in the new paradise of God; then we shall fully know the meaning of Galatians 3:13, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’”*

Verse 6 extends the invitation to come to Christ, in order to gain admission into the new creation and share in its life of blessing. The invitation is couched in terms of being invited to drink the refreshing waters of Christ’s salvation. Verse 7 makes the promise, *“he who overcomes shall inherit these things.”* The initial reception of Christ and the entering into His life must be followed with a continued commitment to the Savior unto the very end—and this itself is accomplished by means of the grace He supplies.

Verse 8 enumerates all those who shall **not** be given admittance into the new creation: They include *“the cowardly”*—those who turn away from Christ because of opposition, trial, or persecution, and permanently deny the Savior, never repenting and returning to Him. This category also includes *“the unfaithful”*—those who forsake Christ for the pleasures and benefits of this present world and permanently abandon the faith; as was the case with Demas: the Apostle Paul reports, *“Demas forsook me, having loved this present world”* (2 Tim. 4:10.) Then there are *“the detestable.”* In the Old Testament, the word, “detestable,” is often associated with the practice of idolatry. Referred to here are those people who refuse to give Christ the pre-eminent place as Lord of their lives, but permanently allow other gods and idols—whether such “gods” be religious, or whether they be the “gods” of materialism, or even other personal relationships—to occupy first place in their lives. Finally, this category includes *“murderers”* and all others who live lives in violation of God’s moral law—here are people those who deny Christ as their Savior from sin by permanently continuing to practice the lifestyle of sin. According to Matthew 1:21, a passage that expresses the purpose of the salvation Christ came to provide, we are told, *“She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

Here is the third reason why we should exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: in order that we may inherit the new creation.

Conclusion

Have you personally placed your faith in Christ the Savior? If not, you need to seriously consider these three reasons why you need to do so. Do you need encouragement to continue exercising faith in Christ? If so, keep clearly in view the great and eternal benefits described in this passage of Scripture.