

## REV 20:1-6—APPEARANCES ARE DECEIVING

**INTRO:** We have been looking at the book of Revelation for the last several weeks. Now we are coming to the end. This week and next we will be in **Rev 20**. Today's passage, **vv. 1-6**, is actually one of the most disputed passages in the Bible. That's one reason why some people avoid the book of Revelation. They say, "Doctrine really isn't important; it's only important to love."

Of course, there is some truth in that. People can get involved in doctrinal wars, end up breaking friendships, and lose sight of the deeper and greater things that should knit us together. When Christians do that, they end up giving Christianity a bad name.

On the other hand, even the statement "all you need is love" is itself a doctrine. Who Jesus is, what he has done, how we are saved, are doctrines. God has given us his word in the form of a book. He gave it to us in this form so that he could communicate to us what is important for us to know. So, one way or another, everything in this book is a matter of doctrine.

The Bible tells a coherent story. By "coherent" I mean internally consistent—it is not self-contradictory. If our views on different biblical subjects don't harmonize or fit together, then that means we are not properly understanding what God is saying to us. And if we don't properly understand what God is saying to us, then we can never be the kind of well-integrated people he wants us to be and live the kind of well-integrated lives he wants us to live—where our head, our heart, and our hands are all working together.

Can we be a Christian if our views are incoherent? Of course. But we will be like someone who says, **"I'm from Wisconsin and I love the Packers and hate the Cowboys; that's why we should all wear blue stars today."** That statement is a very severe form of incoherence. In fact, that statement is an example of what I read in a medical article that said, **"Incoherent discourse, with a disjointed flow of ideas, is a cardinal symptom in several psychiatric and neurological conditions."**

Today we are going to look at **Rev 20:1-6** and see how it fits into the biblical storyline. When we understand this, it can affect how we look at the world and how we look at ourselves. Before we begin, let me briefly mention the structure of **ch.20**. **Ch.20** consists of four paragraphs or subsections: **vv.1-3** deal with the binding of Satan; **vv. 4-6** deal with the reign of the saints; **vv.7-10** deal with the final destruction of Satan; and **vv.11-15** deal with the final judgment of people. But these four sections fall into two groups: **vv. 1-6**, which we will be talking about today, deal with events that occur *before* the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, and **vv.7-15** deal with events that occur *in connection with* the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

**PROP:** These six verses reveal better than perhaps anyplace else in the Bible that: **Appearances are deceiving—apparent victory is defeat, and apparent defeat is victory.**

**O/S:** We will see this as we first look at the binding of Satan in **vv.1-3**; and second, the reign of the saints in **vv. 4-6**.

**I. [READ vv.1-3]** These verses tell us that despite all the evil that Satan causes in this world, he already has been defeated.

**A. The biggest issue that confronts us is: When did this binding of Satan take place?** Some say it happened in connection with the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ, and others say it will happen in the future in connection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. I believe this binding of Satan clearly took place in connection with the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ, and that Satan is bound now. Here's why:

First, as we have seen the book of Revelation is laid out in a format that is called "progressive parallelism." That means that different sections of the book each cover the whole scope of church history from different viewpoints, often emphasizing different things or adding different details or nuances.

**Ch. 20 is an example of this.** **Ch. 20** does not follow chronologically from where **ch. 19** ends but goes back and again gives us a view of the whole of church history from the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ at the beginning of the chapter all the way to the final judgment at the end of the chapter. We know that because **ch. 19** dealt with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. The last verse of **ch. 19** says that when Christ returns **"the rest were killed"**—not some, not many, not most—but all mortal people still living when Christ returns. In our passage today, **v.3** talks about Satan's being bound **"so that he would not deceive the nations any longer."** But since all mortal people still living will die when Christ comes again, if **ch.20** followed **ch.19** chronologically in time, there would be no nations at all for Satan to deceive. So, **ch. 20** is going back *before* Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and recapitulating church history from a different perspective, adding new details.

When **vv.1-3** tell us that Satan was bound at the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ, that simply is in keeping with what the NT tells us time and time again. In fact, the NT has over 30 passages that talk about how the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of

Christ caused Satan's judgment, fall, limitation, and defeat. Let me just mention two of them: When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus replied, in **Matt 12:29** **"How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man?"** The "strong man" clearly is a reference to Satan. The word used there to describe the binding of the strong man is the same word used in **Rev 20** to describe the binding of Satan.

Similarly, in **John 12:31** Jesus talked about what he was about to accomplish on the cross. In **John 12** Jesus does not use the imagery of "binding" Satan but uses a different image. He says, regarding the cross, **"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."** That same image of "casting" is picked up in Revelation: **Rev 12:9** says that, at the cross, Satan was "thrown down," and **Rev 20:3** uses the same word, **"He threw him into the abyss."** "Casting" and "throwing" in **John 12**, **Rev 12** and **Rev 20** are all variants of the same Greek word. So the "binding" and the "throwing" are different ways of saying the same thing, namely, one of the effects of Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> coming was to limit Satan's activities.

**B. Some may say, "Satan doesn't look very bound to me—look at all the evil in the world."** I agree; there is great evil in the world. That is why, if we only look with our physical eyes, we will miss the true state of affairs. That is also why we need to consider the precise nature and purpose of this "binding." As one commentator put it, the binding of Satan **"is a symbolic way of describing a curbing of his power and activity; it does not mean complete immobility. His incarceration in the abyss does not mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified."** (Ladd, *Commentary*, 262). The binding of Satan at Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming is for a *specific purpose* and for a *specific time*.

**Rev 20:3** tells us the purpose. It says Satan is bound **"so that he would not deceive the nations any longer."** In OT times only Israel knew the true God; to learn about God you had to go to Israel and basically become an Israelite. That is why in **Eph 2** Paul said that before Christ came, the gentiles were **"separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of God, had no hope, and were without God in the world."** But Christ's coming into the world changed all that. Now, the gospel has spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Now God has his people out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation in the world—and Satan cannot prevent that, because Satan has been bound. IOW, being bound means that Satan has been prevented from stopping the spread of the church to every nation of the world.

Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming is like D-Day in WWII. After D-Day, even though the war was still being fought, the decisive battle, which determined the final outcome, had already taken place. Oscar Cullmann said it like this: **"Although the decisive effect of that battle is perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory. But the war must still be carried on for an indefinite time, until 'Victory Day.' Precisely this is the situation of which the NT is conscious . . . That event on the cross, together with the resurrection which followed, was the already concluded decisive battle."**

The end of v.3 also tells us the time period. It says that after the 1000 years Satan **"must be released for a short time."** That thought is picked up in **vv.7-8** which say, **"When the 1000 years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war."** IOW, sometime in the future when he is released from his restrictions, Satan will lead a great worldwide war to try to blot out the church.

Satan's being bound now prevents him from gathering the nations in a worldwide conspiracy to blot out the church. That goes hand-in-hand with his not being able to stop the spread of the church. Satan and demonic forces remain active in the world but the scope of their deceptive authority has been significantly limited, their power has been decisively broken, and their ultimate defeat has been definitely insured.

**C. That leads us to the reference of the "1000 years."** Since Satan was bound in connection with Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming, the "1000 years" has to be a symbolic reference to the time we are in now, not a reference to a 1000-year period after Christ returns. It's sort of like the "cattle on 1000 hills," where "1000" is symbolic, not literal. Think about it: To hold to a "literal" thousand years requires, to be consistent, that the "key" and "chain" held by the angel in **v.1** are a physical key and chain and that the "abyss" of **v.3** is an actual pit in the earth which has a physical lock and physical "seal." That, of course, is nonsense and is not what is intended by such language. Satan is a *spiritual* being, not a physical one. The language John uses is like we have seen throughout the book: He is describing a *vision* using physical language to illustrate spiritual truths that are relevant for the church today.

**D. So how is this relevant for us today?** I think the fact that Satan was bound in connection with Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming makes a big difference, particularly for how we view the world. **vv.1-3** tell us that despite all the evil that Satan causes in this world, he is limited. Indeed, he already has been defeated. Christ's kingdom will

continue to spread. Yes, there will be ups and downs. And yes, the tares will continue to spread as well as the wheat. But we can have hope and confidence because, as **1 John 4:4** says, “**Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.**”

Therefore, we should redouble our efforts and fight the good fight. We need to commit our resources to advance Christ’s kingdom *now*. Particularly since this is the beginning of the new year, it is a good time for all of us to re-look at our income, our expenses, and our giving. Let’s try to cut unnecessary expenses and budget more money for world missions and the spread of the gospel. We are accountable for the use of our money, and we can do this with confidence knowing that our great enemy has been limited; he is on the defensive, and will go down to ultimate defeat. God uses us. Will we get in the fight?

**II. The reign of the saints in vv.4-6. [READ vv.4-6]** These verses tell us that despite all the defeats that Christians experience in this world, they are the victors.

**A. As with the binding of Satan, the reign of the saints in vv.4-6 is describing something occurring now, not something that occurs after the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.** That, it seems to me, is evident from the fact that, throughout the NT, the final judgment is always associated with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. The final judgment is described in **Rev 20:11-15**. Since the judgment is pictured as coming *after* the thousand-year reign, and the judgment occurs in connection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, the thousand-year reign of **vv.4-6** must occur *before* and *not after* the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

All commentators agree that the church or its representatives, the martyrs, is being described here. In **Rev 3:21** Jesus had promised that those who overcome would sit on his throne. That’s what we’re seeing here. Indeed, every time “thrones” are mentioned in the book of Revelation, they are always located in heaven or in the spiritual realm, not on earth.

**v.4** says, “**I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded . . . and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**” The clear parallels between this scene and the scene of the martyrs in **Rev 6:9-11** shows us that we are seeing a picture of heaven, not earth. A long time ago I preached on **Rev 6:9-11**—the prayer of believers who have been martyred for Christ. They are in heaven *now* and are crying out, “**How long, O Lord, until you judge?**” Look at how closely **Rev 6:9** parallels **Rev 20:4**:

<u>Rev 6:9</u>	<u>Rev 20:4b</u>
I saw under the altar the souls ----- of those who had been slain ----- for <i>the word of God</i> and the <i>witness</i> they had borne.	I saw the souls ----- of those who had been beheaded ----- for their <i>witness</i> to Jesus and for <i>the word of God</i>

That shows us that, just as in **Rev 6:9**, what’s going on in **Rev 20:4** is going on *now*.

**B. Rev 20:5** begins by saying, “**The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1000 years were completed.**” That sentence is like it is in parentheses. It is contrasting “**the rest of the dead**” who come to life *after* the 1000 years with the souls in **v.4** who came to life and reigned with Christ *for* 1000 years. We will return to the rest of the dead in a moment—but the second sentence of **v.5** (“**This is the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection**”) continues the line of thought in **v.4**. IOW, the thought of **v. 4** goes like this: “**and they came to life and reigned with Christ for 1000 years; this is the first resurrection.**” *Are we together here?*

So—very simply—what is the “first resurrection”? It is the *spiritual* resurrection, not the bodily resurrection. The bodily resurrection will take place when Christ comes again. The NT never refers to the bodily resurrection as “**souls coming to life.**” That’s why we looked at **Rev 6:9**. In **Rev 6:9**, like here in **Rev 20**, the souls of those who had been slain *are alive*, although they are *not* in the body.

The “first resurrection” is all about Christ and our being connected with him. When we are regenerated by Christ in this life—IOW, when we are born again—we are given new, spiritual life *now*; then, when we die, our death translates us to heaven to “**live and reign with Christ for a thousand years.**” Death is what other people fear, but for Christians it simply means that we are now forever with the Lord. But that’s not all, in the Bible, Christ is called the “first fruits” of the resurrection. That means, for those of us who are connected with him, when he comes again, *our* transformation will be complete: we will be raised in new glorious bodies to live on the new glorious earth that he will bring about.

**C. So let’s go back to the first sentence of v.5.** It says, “**The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1000 years were completed.**” That is a reference to the *bodily* resurrection that will occur in connection with Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. All people—believers and unbelievers alike—will experience *that* resurrection, because all

people will experience bodily death. But these verses are telling us: The most important thing is *not* the *bodily* resurrection or *bodily* death. The most important thing is: Are we part of the “first resurrection,” the *spiritual* resurrection? Because only if we are part of *that* can we escape the “**second death**,” which is the eternal, spiritual death of unbelievers in hell. Do you see the contrast here? This is most important to understand.

These verses are telling us that the stakes for what we do now in this life about Jesus Christ are incredibly high. That is why John is telling us in v. 6: “**Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power.**” IOW, he is exhorting us to be connected with Jesus Christ *now*. We will be translated to heaven to sit on the thrones with Christ *only if* we have been born again in this life. Are you part of the first resurrection? If not, then *please*—settle that issue. If you have questions, talk with me, or with one of the elders here or other mature Christians. But do something about Jesus. Jesus’ claims about himself, and the stakes for you, are too great to ignore this.

If we *are* part of the first resurrection, that fact should change how we look at ourselves—and that should affect what we do. If we are part of the first resurrection, then regardless of our outward circumstances, we are priests of God; we know where we are going when we die. If this knowledge turns into a great certainty at the core of our being—it can help us loosen our grip on the things of this world and give us the boldness to work actively for Christ’s kingdom now. You see: **vv.4-6**—who we are in Christ—work hand-in-hand with **vv.1-3**—what Christ has done to bind and limit Satan’s power. Since we know who we are and where we’re going—we know we have nothing to lose but everything to gain, even in death itself. Therefore, we can and should use the time, money, and abilities we have now to help advance God’s kingdom.

**CONCL:** Appearances are deceiving. Despite all the evil that Satan causes in this world, he already has been defeated. Despite all the defeats that Christians experience in this world, they are the victors. The promises we have in **Rev 20** begin now. While the promises *begin* now, we will experience them in a deeper way after we die when we will be translated to reign with Christ. But when Christ comes again we will experience the *fullness* of these promises. Satan’s defeat will be total and our resurrection life will be completed with our new bodies, on a new earth—living, laughing, and serving with our Lord forever.