

THE BOOK OF REVELATION SPIRITUAL

A SERMON

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“Afterward that which is spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 15:46

LAST Lord’s day morning we noticed that this was God’s order of things: first, in federal headship, as shown in the order of the first and the last Adam; secondly, in God’s order of things in personal salvation; thirdly, that this is God’s order of things in the Holy Scriptures.

We will have, then, first, a few more words upon the third point, that *this is God’s order of things in the Holy Scriptures; the natural first, and the spiritual afterwards*. We observed in treating upon that part that the last book in the Bible is especially a spiritual book, a book to be figuratively and spiritually understood. I shall therefore go on a little further with that subject; and in so doing I shall notice the 20th, 21st, and 22nd chapters of the Book of Revelation, in order to show that those chapters, like all the preceding, must be figuratively and spiritually, not literally understood. I feel very much interested in this subject. I am fully aware that nearly all that has been written upon the Book of Revelation has set out upon a wrong principle and has rather obscured the book; and these writers made it more difficult with their learned conjectures than without them.

Now in the 20th chapter you have an angel coming down from heaven, not literally, of course, but mystically; that angel meaning Christ, with a great chain in his hand. Of course, you must not take that chain literally; a literal chain would not bind an immaterial spirit; but it means that he came down from heaven with power to bind and confine the adversary within certain limits. “And he laid hold on the dragon;” you must not take that dragon literally, as an earthly animal; it is something that we do know, made use of figuratively, to teach us what we do not know; “and bound him a thousand years;” “and cast him into the bottomless pit,” or abyss. The word “bottomless pit” never means hell; in not one of the places in which it is mentioned in the Book of the Revelation does it mean hell; in each case it means this world, including the deep abysses of iniquity and Satanic mysteries by which Satan carries on his deep, dark, and deceptive designs. And as to the seal set upon him, the Savior has set a seal upon him, “liar and murderer.” But let us see what this means. Now this circumstance in the beginning of the 20th of Revelation is taken from several scriptures in the Old Testament; I will mention two, and then one in the New. 27th of Isaiah: “In that day the Lord, with his sure and great and strong sword” not a literal sword, you see, but the sword of the Spirit; for no literal sword could reach Satan, but the sword of the Spirit can reach him, “shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent;” he who pierced us through in the fall

of man; “even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.” Here we see Satan is punished and slain as to his power over Gods elect. And what is the consequence? “In that day sing you unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; least any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” You will observe here two things; that with the victory which the Savior has wrought over Satan, here is a vineyard; not a literal, but a spiritual vineyard, that is, the true church of God, established in such a position as never to come short of any one thing the Lord designs for it. “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment.” The Lord has taken your soul into his momentary, special care, and keeping by what Christ has done. Satan is slain as to his power over you; the consequence is, that being brought to see and understand the victory that Christ has wrought, you are taken into the momentary care and keeping of the blessed God. His loving eyes are upon you night and day, from the beginning of the year even to the end; he waters the work every moment, keeps you night and day, least any hurt you; and when you get to the end of your journey, while you have received ten thousand hurts, God has overruled those hurts, and turned those curses into blessings, those losses into gains, those sorrows into joys, and you will be at the last compelled to say:

“I know in all that me befell,
My Jesus has done all things well.”

There is the binding of Satan, he is there said to be slain, but he is not slain abstractedly, he is not slain personally, for that would put an end to his existence, whereas he is to be cast into the lake of fire, with all his servants, and to be tormented day and night for ever and ever. That, then, is one scripture meaning the same thing as when he is said to be bound or limited by this chain. There seems also a reference to the 51st of Isaiah: “Awake, awake, put-on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not it that has cut Rahab”, that is, severed Egypt, “and wounded the dragon?” The dragon there literally means Pharaoh, mystically and spiritually means the antitype of Pharaoh, namely, the devil. As Pharaoh held the Israelites in bondage, and would have kept them there, so Satan held us, and would have kept us; but the dear Redeemer's omnipotent arm has bruised the serpent's head, and slain the dragon, as to his power over the people of God. Then come to the New Testament and you get further light upon this subject. There you read that “the children,” that is, the children of God, “being partakers of flesh and blood”, he “Christ likewise partook of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death;” not destroy him from being but destroy him in his power over the saints of God. Satan's power over us is by delusion, unbelief, enmity against God; the god of this world, blinding “the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” That is the way in which Satan is slain as to his power to deceive God's elect. “That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Now just notice three beautiful states of things that follow these three scriptures I have quoted. In the 27th of Isaiah, where the dragon is slain, there is a vineyard where the Lord dwells, and takes care of us every moment, night and day. In the 51st of Isaiah, where the dragon is spoken of as being wounded, the consequence is, “the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion.”

“They shall sing as they pass through this valley of tears,
The righteous shall hold on his way.”

“Everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.” Then in the 2nd of Hebrews, where he has destroyed him that had the power of death, see what follows, “and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage;” and then also follows his character as a merciful and as a faithful high priest, making reconciliation for the sins of the people. Thus, then, when Christ died, and rose from the dead, and when the Holy Spirit descended, then was Satan bound, that is, limited; that he should no more go out to deceive the nations as he had done. You observe that the word “nations” in the Scriptures very often has a very limited meaning indeed. Hence the land of Canaan, we will call it about 170 miles long, and upon the average about 90 miles wide; and yet within that small space you read of seven nations. And as you are aware, in the time of the Saxon Heptarchy, we had also seven nations in our little island; the inhabitants of this island were divided into seven nations. You must understand the word “nations” in the Scriptures sometimes to have this limited meaning. I mention this that you may understand the reference to ancient nations. “He shall no more go out to deceive the nations.” The nations there which he had deceived refer to the twelve tribes of Israel. And how had Satan deceived them? He got them to substitute human tradition for God’s truth. Now, says Satan, if you will but abide firmly by these traditions, and if you will put this Jesus Christ to death, said Caiaphas, “You know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” You will never prosper as a nation all the time you suffer this Jesus of Nazareth to live among you. “Being high priest that year, he prophesied.” Caiaphas did not prophesy by the Holy Ghost; he prophesied as the Pope does, ex officio, by virtue of his office, and it was the devil that was the author of that prophecy. “He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” The children of God, in the view of Caiaphas, meant the Jews that were scattered over the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Now he said, in order that we should please God, and prosper, it is necessary that this one man should die, or else God will sweep us all away, if we do not sweep this man away. And so, Caiaphas looked out for the fulfilment of his own prophecy; therefore, when the Savior stood before his judges, Caiaphas said, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Then Caiaphas, glad to see an opportunity to fulfil his own prophecy, like some persons praying for the minister, to keep him humble, and they take good care they will keep him humble too; Caiaphas rent his clothes, and of course he had put on an extra good garment that morning to appear on such an important occasion, and said, “What need we any further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; what think you? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.” Ah, my hearer, were a people under heaven ever more deceived by Satan than that people were? Did any people under heaven ever take a worse step than they took? Was not the deception most dreadful? And so afterwards. Now he has filled Jerusalem with his doctrine, and we must persecute his followers; the best thing we can do in to get rid of this sect everywhere spoken against. They got the secular power of Rome into their favor, and Rome did as Jerusalem wished it to do, and carried on this bloody work as long as it could; and then Rome papal came in, and took up the same horrid work, putting the saints to death, to get rid of God’s truth. Thus, has Satan deceived the nations. Was there ever a greater deception? But the time came, only forty years afterwards, when God laughed at their calamity, God mocked when their fear came. Ah, see the miseries to which they were subjected.

Now there are some coming tribes, antitypical tribes, to whom the promise belongs; “In you shall all the families of the earth”, that is, all the families that God has included in the covenant, “be blessed;” and these antitypical tribes shall not be so deceived. “If it were possible, they should deceive the very elect;” but in this new covenant the nations, tribes, families, brought to know him, shall be brought to know him by regeneration, brought to know him by his laws being put into their minds, and written in their hearts. And I will say for myself, and for you too, I do not believe that there is any plan now mooted in hell, that there is any scheme now going on on earth, either among the Puseyites in their dark holes, or the Pope and his cardinals in their infernal dens, I do not believe there is anything going on, or anything Satan can bring forward that could deceive you and deceive me. I am so well satisfied with Jesus Christ, I am so well satisfied that without him I perish, without his truth I perish, without his spirit, without his covenant, I perish; without a covenant God, a God in a covenant ordered in all things and sure, I must perish. If the Jews had been thus taught, they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory. Thus, then, Satan deceived the nations, that is, the tribes; for the nations there must be understood in a narrow sense; though I am aware that there is a broader idea as well; “God suffered the nations to walk in their own way.” Satan so deceived the typical Israel that they lost everything; but the antitypical Israel shall be so much too much for Satan that they shall lose nothing. All they have is in Christ, and they themselves are in Christ.

“Where is the power can reach them there,
Or what can force them thence?”

Where is the moth that can corrupt our treasures there? Where is the thief that can break through and rob us of the treasures, we have there? Thus, then, Satan is slain as to his power over the saints, and is limited, and cast into the abyss of this world.

Now to explain what is meant by his being cast into the abyss, go to the 12th chapter of the Revelation, “There was war in heaven;” not the heaven of glory, but the dispensational heaven, the New Testament dispensation; “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon”, surely you would not say it was a literal dragon, “fought, and his angels.” And if it were a literal war, the weapons by which the saints overcame certainly are most singular. I should think the war is spiritual, myself. And the dragon, that is, the tyrant, that is, Satan, and his ministers labored with all their might to maintain their ground, but “they prevailed not;” and Satan and his servants were cast out, and there was no more place found for them. Satan got into the first temple, but God is the second temple, cannot get there. Satan got into the first city, but cannot scale the walls of the second city, for the walls and bulwarks thereof are salvation. Satan polluted the first land, but cannot pollute the second; that is incorruptible, undefiled, fades not away. So, the devil is beaten, and beaten forever. Nevertheless, he has certain lengths he can go; so, he cast out floods, persecuted the woman, persecuted the remnant of her seed. But how did the people of God overcome? Just showing that if the war were carnal, the weapons of victory were very unsuitable. “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.” Here was Satan pleading all their sins against them. The poor sinner stands trembling; he says, Ah, there is that outward sin, and that outward sin; and this inward sin, and that inward sin, and I am all sin together; there is no hope for me. Presently the Holy Spirit reveals with power what the Savior has done; the poor sinner lays hold of the atonement of the dear Redeemer; every sin is blotted out, not a spot or wrinkle left; there is no hole now by which Satan can get his finger in. You gain complete victory over him by pleading

the infinite efficacy of the atonement of Christ. "And by the word of their testimony." Ah, say some, if you believe that Jesus Christ died, that will do, never mind about doctrine. But the saints of old were obliged to bring in the word of their testimony. Satan would say, Ah, it is all very well for you to plead the atonement of Christ, but how do you know it takes away all sin? The believer's answer is, Because the word tells me so. There is the word. Very well, you plead the atonement of Christ; but how do you know it is for you? Because I know it is for every one that believes; for "he that believes has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." It is all very well for you to plead the atonement of Christ, says Satan, but what does the Word say concerning it? Why, that "he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come to God by him," I am not seeking to come to God in any other way, and that "he has perfected forever all them that are sanctified." Thus, you see the atonement is needful, and the word of testimony, that we may plead what kind of atonement it is. And then something else is needed: "They loved not their lives unto the death," that is, their dear covenant God was dearer to them than life itself; therefore, they could willingly give up father, mother, wife, children, houses, lands, liberty, health, and life itself, rather than give up God's eternal truth.

Now after this defeat of Satan what do you find? After this binding of Satan in the 20th of Revelation, what do you find? Just what you find in the 7th of Daniel. What do you find in the 7th of Daniel? "The thrones were cast down until the Ancient of days did sit." What do you find in the 20th of Revelation? Why, when Satan is bound and limited, "I saw thrones." What are these thrones? The truths of the gospel. "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them." It is a mystic and spiritual representation of the apostles sitting on thrones, judging the true tribes, the twelve tribes of Israel. And how did they judge the twelve tribes of Israel? I will give one sample; it is this: "This is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins; and so, all Israel shall be saved." That is the judgment. "all Israel shall be saved." Peter, do you deny it? Oh no, he says, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God." James, do you deny it? Oh no, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." John, do you deny it? Oh, dear no; his sheep are ordained to eternal life and can never perish. As for that wicked Paul, he is forever telling us of the safety of the people; I say wicked Paul, because if he were living now, he would not come off so well. Hence the people of old built the sepulchers of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchers of the righteous; and if those prophets and righteous men had been living they would have put them into the sepulchers, and that pretty soon, too, depend upon it; but now they are dead, and yet they are not dead; the apostles still speak, the prophets still speak, the Lord himself still speaks. They are enthroned, and from their judgment there is no appeal; whosoever sins they testimonially remit are remitted; whosoever sins they testimonially retain are retained. I have no unkind feeling towards his Holiness the Pope, but I have nothing for him to do; the Holy Scriptures decide everything concerning me; there is nothing for the Pope to decide, there is nothing for the Puseyite to decide, there is nothing for the priest to decide; there is nothing for man to decide. "Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven." The word of God has already decided everything.

"The sacred truths his lips pronounce
Shall firm as heaven endure;
And if he speaks a promise once,
Eternal grace is sure."

Thus, a king reigns in righteousness, princes' rule in judgment, and by their testimony Christ becomes our hiding-place, a covert from the storm, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded;" that is, the martyrs; secondly, souls that were like unto them. What does the Savior say upon this? Why, if you are not virtually a martyr now, if you do not carry your life in your hand now, you are not my disciple. "If any man comes to me, and does not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Unless a man takes up and bears his cross daily, he cannot be my disciple; that is, he will not be able to bear my discipline. You must have a martyr's spirit, carry your mortal life in your hand, while your eternal life is hid with Christ in God; and say to Satan, Here, Satan, I have got my mortal life in my hand; I hold it with a slack hand; the God that loves me will soon call upon me to give up this inferior life for a superior. Here, Satan, you may have my mortal life, but you shall not have my soul, you shall not have my conscience, you shall not have me; I am the Lord's, and he is my God; and by him I shall tread upon the lion, the adder, the dragon, and the young lion shall I trample under foot, and rejoice in the triumphs of the dear Redeemer's cross forever.

Our learned divines (and I respect their industry and learning; I will not speak disrespectfully of any one if I can help it) are aware that this 20th chapter of Revelation describes a time reign of Christ, just as the 72nd Psalm, that he was to reign as long as the sun and moon endure; that is, all time. So, in the 20th of Revelation there is a thousand years spoken of; it is a time reign, but nevertheless it is now going on; it commenced with the gospel dispensation and will end only with the same. Then it goes on to say that those who are of this character, virtually martyrs, lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years; that is, successively during the whole of this dispensation. When you and I are gone, others will spring up in our place; the Lord will still have a seed to serve him. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." That is clear enough; that is, all died in Adam; and none but those persons who reigned with Christ lived again; that is, none but these are born again; the rest of the dead are not born again; they would not be dead if they were; they do not live again, and they will not live again until the resurrection, and then they will be called out of the grave by virtue of God's law, and their responsibility to that law; the saints of God will be called out of the grave by virtue of their oneness with Christ. There is the mighty difference between the two. The one shall live to be cursed, the other to be blessed. "Your dead men shall live; with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs." "This is the first resurrection;" that is regeneration; that is my first personal resurrection; and Christ is the first fruits from the dead, not in the order of time, because some were raised from the dead before him in the order of time; but he is the first fruits from the dead in the order of place and dignity, as he rose the resurrection of others. And therefore, the first resurrection personally means regeneration; the first resurrection relatively means the resurrection of Christ; and the man that is born again, he is begotten again according to the abundant mercy of God to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ. "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection," that is thus regenerated; blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings, and holy as he stands in Christ; "on such," he being in the faith, and in Christ, "the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him," successively, generation after generation, while time shall last. I have had a very prosperous reign; I have reigned forty-three years; that is a good long reign; and I do not know how much longer I shall reign yet on earth. I have never been dethroned yet, never lost my standing yet; the crown has never fallen from my head; my loins have never been loosed ever since God girded me

with the girdle of truth; there it is now; and ever since he gave me these shoes of iron and brass, I have got them now. He was my refuge forty-three years ago, has been ever since, is now, and always will be. Oh, that the Lord would increase our acquaintance with the deep mysteries of his love, his wondrous provision, and his eternal stability. How much more then should we think of godliness! We should think less of the clouds of time, and more of the permanent glories of that eternity to which, when in our right minds, we hasten with pleasure and delight; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, a day of glory to every poor sinner that feels he has no hope but by the mediatorial person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But by and by comes the judgment. At the end of this gospel dispensation Satan's limits will be enlarged. He shall come out of his present boundaries; some of the statutes of limitation shall be taken away, abrogated, and Satan shall have a wider range. And I do most solemnly think that when that day of days, the last day, the judgment day, shall come, there will be at that time but very few real Christians on the earth. "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" The world at that time, for aught I know, from pole to pole, and from zone to zone, may all be converted; but what will they be converted to? that is the question. I read that towards the end of that thousand years of Gog and Magog, a number like the sand of the sea; Satan marshals these together; what does he say? I can see what he says, and so can you, if you look at it. Satan says, Don't you see that I have converted the whole world? (for Satan appears as an angel of light), and there are only those few high doctrine people left. Now they are very few, and very poor, and many of them very old; and now he says to Gog and Magog, you see what the hindrance is. And you may even hear the language begun; I have heard ministers say we should have converted the whole town before this time if it had not been for those abominable high doctrine people; I don't know what we should have done, if it had not been for them; those wretches stand in the way everywhere, say they. Now, says Satan, sweep these few away. Gog and Magog gather together in the plenitude of their piety, and compass the camp of the saints, the poor little camp of the saints. Ah, but just as the devil has got his powder dry, his battalions ranged in order, just about to give the charge, to annihilate this little flock, fire comes down from heaven, consumes his host, scatters it to the four winds, and the top-stone immediately will be brought home, with shouting's of grace and grace onto it. So, Satan will be let loose at last upon an apostate world, that his defeat may appear the more conspicuous, and that the glory of God in interposing for his little few may appear the more glorifying to his name, the more astonishing to angels, and to all interested in his lovingkindness. You see, then, the order of the Scriptures. There is the judgment day, and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

But a word now upon the next chapter, the 21st. The subjects of this Book of the Revelation are ranged as it were in columns, side by side, so that this 21st chapter is not, as some have thought, another dispensation following the present, but only another representation of the dispensation under which we are now living. John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea." What is the meaning of the new heaven and the new earth? Does it mean that the Lord will create a new sun, and put it into the place of the old one? and that he will take the present planets and distant stars away, and put some more in their place? and that he will take this old earth away, as some say, purify it by fire? I want to know what there is sinful in this earth that fire could take away. And supposing you burn poor old dame Earth to ashes, why, I do not see any harm in the earth myself. I am sure she has held us in her lap, and nursed us, and she feeds us by the kindness of her bosom and fills our

hearts with food and gladness; and yet she is to be treated like some dreadful old jade, and burned to ashes in order to purify her! She will, by and by, be dissolved into her original elements, and pass away; but as to purifying her by fire, I don't understand it. I never saw any harm in her myself. I think the harm is in the people. You may not be of the same opinion, but that is my humble opinion, the harm is in the people, not in the earth. The earth is the work of God, but there is a great deal in the creature that is the work of the devil. Let us hear what the Lord says about this new heaven and this new earth, and then we shall get at the meaning. We shall see that the language is figurative, and not literal; that it must be spiritually understood. Now John says that this new heaven and new earth needs not the light of the sun; well, but, John, are you going to leave us in the dark? No. I will not leave you in the dark, nor of the moon; "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." In this new city we do not need a temple, for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." 60th of Isaiah: "The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you; but the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. "Your sun" ah, who is your sun? Christ himself, the Sun of righteousness, God himself, "shall no more go down;" Christ went down at Calvary, rose from the dead, he dies no more; "neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended." Ah, then, God himself in covenant is the new heaven. Christ is the new thing created in the earth, and the new Jerusalem by him is created. "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth." What does it mean? Why, the Lord says, "Be you glad and rejoice forever in that which I create," for I will give you a brighter sun, and more stars, and I don't know what all? Not a word about it: "behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." Well, but, say you, Peter said, "We look for new heavens." The new heavens and new earth are come, the kingdom of Christ is come, the glory of God is come; but it is not yet come into our full possession; and therefore, while the kingdom of Christ is come in a manifest way, it is not yet come into our full possession: we possess it by faith and promise, therefore we are to pray, "Your kingdom come." The new heavens and the new earth, which are nothing else but God in covenant creating a people anew, seeing all of them are new creatures in Christ Jesus, thus forming the new earth in connection with him.