

**Revelation 20:11 – 21:8**  
**By Grace I'm Saved**  
**The End Times**

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<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, 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. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

<sup>21:1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him. Amen.

I’d like to start out this morning with a little bit of a quiz. Imagine if you will that I just handed each of you a sheet of paper and a pencil. If you actually have a pencil and paper you can write your answer down but you don’t have to if you don’t want to. We’re nearing the midway point in our *By Grace I’m Saved* message series so I thought I would ask you this. When you think of being saved by God’s grace, would you say that’s something that happened in the past, something that is happening right now in the present, or something that is going to happen in the future?

I imagine there are a few of you who would put, “I have already been saved, it’s something that took place in the past.” If I asked you to defend your answer you might point back to the first several lessons we’ve looked at this summer. You could argue that we are born with a sinful nature upon which we pile up the guilt of our own personal sins—the things we do

and say or the thoughts we entertain that contradict God's will. But somewhere around two thousand years ago, God sent His Son into this world who lived a perfect life for you and gave up His life to pay the penalty for your sins so that you can confidently say, as we heard in Ephesians 2 a few weeks back, **By grace I have been saved through faith, and this was not by myself it is a gift from God.** So if you said salvation is something we can talk about in the past tense, you were right.

Others of you, however, may have been thinking more about the past three weeks where we've been studying the means of grace and how God works in our hearts through the power of the Gospel. Holy Baptism, the Holy Word of God, and Holy Communion are the means through which God creates and strengthens saving faith in our hearts and gives us the power over sin. As we continue hearing God's Word and celebrating the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit continues His work in our hearts so we could also confidently say as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, **The message of the gospel is the power of God to us who are being saved.** So if your answer was that salvation is a thing of the present, you were also correct.

But what about salvation in the future tense? Is there a sense in which, even after the justifying work of Jesus through His life and death two thousand years ago and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which continues in our hearts each day... Is there a sense in which we could still say *I will be saved*? That's what we'll find out as we study today what God has to tell us about the Last Days or the End Times.

When we talk about the End Times we're talking about the period of time between Jesus ascending into heaven and His return on the Last Day. In other words, we are living in the end times right now. In Matthew 24, Jesus gives us a pretty detailed description of what we can expect during that period of time. The disciples had asked Him, **What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?** And Jesus responded by saying, **Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumors of wars.... <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.**

<sup>9</sup> **"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, <sup>11</sup> and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. <sup>12</sup> Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup> but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

It isn't the prettiest picture that Jesus paints, is it? But you don't have to stretch your imagination that far to picture a world like the one He's describing. Those signs that Jesus gives of the ends of the age: wars, natural disasters, false teachers, widespread hatred, persecution, and so on... we have all those things, don't we? In fact, by the time the disciples' lives had come to an end around 90 AD all of those signs had already been fulfilled. And as we live in that world that Jesus described, the one we experience day after day, there are times when we may not feel all that safe. In a world ravaged by sin, we may not feel very saved.

But did you catch the words right at the end? After all of those terrible signs of the end times, Jesus gives us a promise. He said **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** So

if your answer back when we started was that salvation is a thing of the future then you were right too.

There really are three senses in which we can talk about our salvation. *We were saved* from the penalty of sin when Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross. *We are being saved* from the power of sin as the Holy Spirit works through His gospel means of grace to deliver us from the mastery of sin by creating a new heart within us that lives for God rather than for ourselves. And *we will be saved* from even the presence of sin when Jesus takes us from this world to our heavenly home.

And there are two possible ways He could do that, aren't there? The first would be if our life in this world would come to an end before Christ's return. Death can be a scary thing for a lot of people to think about. And the reason for that is because it's unknown. As troubling as this world can be, it's at least familiar, so we might be tempted to think of that as preferable to what comes next.

But death isn't something we need to be afraid of. Think back to the words we heard in our verse of the day this morning. Jesus said, **I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.** Through the power of His gospel God has given you the gifts of His saving grace which Jesus won for you. He has given you forgiveness from your sins, and salvation, and everlasting life. Just as it's true that salvation is something we have already received, the same is true for everlasting life.

You have received, already, as a free gift from God, spiritual life in Christ that will never end. You are immortal. Your body may reach the end of the days that God has appointed for it, but you will live on. When our eyelids close in death in this world it is not the end, it isn't a plunging into some vast emptiness or some plane of non-existence. No, we have the promise of our Savior that the moment our earthly life comes to an end we will be together with Him in paradise.

The other possibility for our being rescued from this world and saved from the presence of sin is if we live to see the day the Jesus returns. The Bible tells us that a day is coming and coming soon when Jesus will appear in the clouds in a manner so powerful and glorious that He will be seen by all around the world. The Bible says He will be accompanied by the angels, who serve as His agents in the final judgment. They will separate the believers from the unbelievers, the righteous from the wicked, and begin the destruction of the earth as we know it.

The Bible tells us Jesus' return will be announced by a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and by the trumpet call of God. The sun and moon will be darkened, stars will fall from the sky, the earth and the heavenly bodies will shake, and other cataclysmic events will take place—events which will terrify and horrify the unbelievers. They will burst into tears and will attempt to flee, but there will be no escape. But believers will stand and lift up their heads because they know their redemption is drawing near.

In 1 Corinthians, God tells us the dead believers will rise first, and then those who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet our Lord in the air and the bodies of all believers will be transformed in an instant into glorious bodies fit for heaven, bodies untouched by the effects of sin. The unbelievers will be raised at the same time, and there will be a final judgment of all people, the living and the dead, as we heard in the Gospel: **The unrighteous will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life** (Mt 25:46).

And that, my friends is just the beginning. It's hard for us to even begin to imagine what a concept like eternity entails. If you have ever gone on a vacation, you know that there are basically two stages. There's the first part where, looking forward, you have the entire week or weeks laid out in front of you and what an amazing feeling that is. But eventually, you get to the point where you realize your vacation is coming to an end and you don't have all that much time left. In eternity, you never leave the beginning stage.

But there are two sides to eternity, aren't there? Eternal punishment and eternal life. The first of those two is not all that pleasant to think of. The Bible describes the eternity of unbelievers as exclusion from God and from all of His grace and blessing. And that is not what we were made for. Just as fish are made for water, so humanity was made for fellowship with God. Take a fish out of water and you can see the agony it goes through. Banish a human from fellowship with God and his agony is that much greater and, in this case, never ending.

As unpleasant as it is to think about that, we have to, because it is going to happen, and it's going to happen to billions. What can we do about it? We can preach the good news of salvation through Jesus. We can share the gospel with them so that by God's grace they may come to the knowledge that they have been saved by the life and death of Jesus, the freedom which comes through the ongoing work of the Lord in their hearts, and the hope that they will be saved from this sinful world.

We will be saved. What life after that final saving act of God will be like we can only begin to imagine. But He gives us a glimpse of it in the words we heard from Revelation 21. As God revealed the glories of that life to come to St. John he tells us: **Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away....<sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."**

That one great, timeless thought of our God, His eternal plan brought to completion. This really is the climax of this book about our salvation. God loves you. He wants you to be His. He wants to live with you forever in perfect joy and peace and unity. He has made you His through the life and death of His Son. He is making you His through the power of the Spirit conforming you to His likeness through the means of grace. He will make you undeniably and eternally His by rescuing you from this world of sin and sorrow and bringing to His new heaven and earth.

Is our salvation something to be talked about in the past, present, or future? Should we say I have been saved, I am being saved, or I will be saved? The answer is, By God's grace, yes! All of the above!

Amen.

Our God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ. Amen.