How to Think About the Millenium

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[0:00] Please open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 20. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring a Bible for you that you can have and you can use. We've been going through our series in the book of Revelation.

We're coming to the end here, the last few chapters. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.
Father, all scripture is breathed out by you. Every word, and therefore every word is profitable for us.
It's able to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ and it is profitable for equipping us and building us up so that we might be complete, equipped for every good work. And so, Lord, we don't skip passages.
We come even to a difficult passage like this, expecting to hear from you, wanting to learn from you. So, Lord, teach us and lead us. We humble ourselves before you.
[1:09] Exalt the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, and humble us so that with greater humility and love we might engage with one another and with others who might disagree with us on a number of issues related to this passage, but also so that we might conduct ourselves and all our dealings with great love.

Help us in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you're able, please stand and join me in reading God's word from Revelation 21 to 6. I will read it out loud for us and you can follow along with your eyes. Revelation 20 verses 1 to 6. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.
And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and 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. Then 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 worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.
[2:38] They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

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.
This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. I feel like I owe people who are here for the first time an apology because this is the most hotly debated passage in the entire book of Revelation, possibly in the entire Bible.
It tells us about a period of time when Satan will be bound for a thousand years and the people of God will reign with Christ for a thousand years. And before, well actually that depends on how you interpret this.
But exactly how long this millennial period is, whether it's a literal thousand years or a figurative thousand years, whether it will occur in heaven with believers reigning in their souls or on earth, when exactly it will occur.
[3:53] It will occur before Christ returns or after Christ returns. All of these things are contested points about which many faithful Bible-believing Christians disagree.

Someone has joked that the millennium is a thousand years of peace that Christians love to fight about because of the difficulty of this passage and the history of extensive debate surrounding it

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and the fact that many Christians have strong, very strong opinions about it and have divided over these issues.
I'm going to do something unusual and spend two weeks teaching on Revelation 21 to 6. And this week I'm going to provide mostly the historical background and a theological overview of the millennium.
And then next week we're going to get into the nitty-gritty exegetical details of the passage itself. So normally I don't like to do something like this. I like to be close to the text. But a friend of mine who's a pastor said he took four weeks to do it.
So you guys, I'm sparing you guys of that. And he said he did that and had all the qualifications and still at the end of the four weeks some people decide to leave the church because of this. And so that's why I think it's important to give this kind of context and background.
[5:04] I don't think that's going to happen in our church but I can surprise myself. We'll see what happens here. Now, I think a controversial passage like this is in Scripture and God gives us passages like this as a way of keeping us humble.

It reminds us that we don't have all the answers. So I can be so prideful with the little knowledge that I have. Imagine what kind of prideful monster I would be if I had all the knowledge.
Perfect knowledge. Knew everything. And so I think this is intended to keep us humble. It reminds us that in this age before the second coming of Christ and the new heavens and the new earth we know in part and we prophesy in part as it says in 1 Corinthians 13.9.
It reminds us that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. This is in 1 Corinthians 8.1. So the doctrine of the millennium is not a matter of indifference that Paul speaks of in Romans 14.
But his exhortation there to us about protecting one another's liberty, freedom of conscience is still helpful for us. So I'm going to read that before we start. It says in Romans 14, as for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.
[6:22] One person believes he may eat anything while the weak person eats only vegetables. One person esteems one day as better than another while another esteems all days alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. So Paul's using this example. He clearly has an opinion about it because he says that people who only eat vegetables are the ones who are weaker in faith.
He has an opinion about it. But he says that this is a matter of indifference. It's not something that really matters. And so when he was dealing with believers who by their conviction believed that they should only eat vegetables or should never eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, he would accommodate them humbly because it's a matter of indifference.
There are some things that are not worth quarreling over. And in those cases, and I think this millennium, I don't think it's that kind of matters of indifference.
I think it's important and consequential. But it's still something that I think people can have the freedom of conscience to disagree about and be faithful Christians in.
[7:25] So that raises the question, however, how do we determine what is something to divide over and what isn't something to divide over? What's essential doctrine and what's not essential doctrine?

If you walk into an emergency room, the doctors and nurses assess the severity of your illness and determine the order of priority in which you should be treated. Every time I've gone to the emergency room for something, I've had to wait many, many hours, which tells me that they clearly don't think that my problem is as severe as I think it is, right?
And so this is, you have to use the process of triaging in order to determine who should be treated first.
And similarly, we need a process for theological triaging. And to that end, there's a really helpful book that I recommend to all of you by Gavin Ortlund entitled Finding the Right Hills to Die On.
In the book, he argues that we should avoid both doctrinal minimalism and doctrinal sectarianism. As the old saying goes, quote, there is no doctrine a fundamentalist won't fight over and no doctrine a liberal will fight over, right?
[8:38] So that's painting in broad strokes and not entirely fair to either fundamentalists or liberals, but you get the point. Doctrinal sectarianism is when we find too many reasons to separate from Christian brothers and sisters with whom we share a profound spiritual unity and not allowing them the liberty of conscience that Paul spoke of in Romans 14.

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Titus 3, 9 to 11 describes this. It says, but avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.
As for a person who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned. That's doctrinal sectarianism.
Doctrinal minimalism is when we find the lowest common denominator, doctrinal denominator, and say, in essence, that most other doctrines basically don't really matter. But theology is important.
It shapes the way we live. We cannot obey what we do not know and what we do not understand.
We're supposed to be transformed by the renewal of our mind, it says in Romans 12, 2, that by testing, we may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
[9:50] Philippians 3, 15-16 says, let those of you who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. As God reveals more and more of what we ought to think, we mature in accordance with the knowledge we have attained.
So we need to steer clear of both of these equal and opposite errors, doctrinal sectarianism and doctrinal minimalism. And then Gavin Ortlin delineates four helpful categories in which we can prioritize our theological doctrines.
The first category is primary. The Bible itself uses this language, 1 Corinthians 15, 3-4. It says, The Bible teaches us that the gospel of Jesus Christ, this doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Man who died as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and He was raised on the third day to be victorious over sin and death so that we can all be forgiven.
Those who put their trust in Jesus and repent of their sins can be forgiven and have eternal life with Him. That's the doctrine that is of first importance. The doctrines in the primary category are doctrines that are essential for the gospel.
[11:19] People who don't believe these doctrines are not Christians at all. So these doctrines unite the entire universal church. These are doctrines that we must fight for and be willing to die for with courage and conviction.

Other primary doctrines include our belief in the Trinity because without the Trinity you lose the gospel if Jesus is not the Son of God. The incarnation because if Jesus is not also the Son of Man we also lose the gospel.
And the atonement of Jesus on the cross. Our belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture because if the Scripture is not the inspired testimony of God how do you even know the gospel? This is what makes us this is what it's able to teach us and able to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ.
So that's primary. The secondary doctrines are not direct gospel issues and genuine Christians do at times disagree about them. However, they are nonetheless urgent for the church because they have implications for the gospel.
Differences in secondary doctrines have significant impact on our life how we live and on our doctrine what we believe. And for that reason disagreements along these lines I do think they warrant formal division along denominational or ecclesiastical local church lines because they raise urgent issues of faithfulness to Scripture because if you don't agree on these things you can't be faithful to Scripture according to your conviction.
[12:51] Secondary doctrines include our belief in the believer's baptism that only people who are mature enough to give a credible profession of faith which necessarily excludes infants should be baptized.

That's our church's position on that. This doctrine protects the gospel. Complementarianism is another one. Our belief that God created men and women as equal co-heirs of the grace of life that is in Christ but that they nonetheless have distinct and non-interchangeable roles within the household of the family and within the household of God, the church.
This doctrine depicts the gospel because the husband's love for his wife and the wife's submission to him is supposed to be a picture of Christ's love for the church and the church's submission to Christ.
I also would consider continuationism to be a secondary doctrine because our belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit that even the miraculous and supernatural ones continue to this modern day and did not seize with the apostles it flows out of the gospel.

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It flows out of our belief that Jesus is the one who secured the gift of the Holy Spirit for us and that continues to this day. And so during my first year in seminary I was part of a Presbyterian church but my convictions about continuationism and believer's baptism led me to the conclusion that I could not be a thriving member let alone a pastor in that denomination and that's why I left that denomination in search of a denomination where I can have a church home and that's how I found our current denomination sovereign grace churches for which I am very grateful.
[14:24] So that's secondary category. Then there are tertiary categories. The tertiary doctrines these are doctrines that are neither essential for the gospel nor urgent for the church but because they still pertain to life and doctrine of the Christian they are still consequential.

They're tertiary but they're still consequential and important. Included in this category will be things like how should men and women dress and wear their hair. Now this might be a controversial opinion but I don't think women should dress in a manner that makes them look like men and I don't think that men should dress in a manner that makes them look like women because God designed humanity to be men and women and to be distinct.
Now that also means I don't you know if that sounds crazy to you read 1 Corinthians 11 and you can listen to my sermon on that when you get home.
But I will never use however my pastoral authority to demand that a man cut his hair short or a woman grow out her hair long.
Why? Because this is a tertiary issue and I believe that faithful Christians can disagree on this. And be members of the same faithful members of the same local church together. They are still important and they are not issues to divide over but they still have consequences for how we live and obey God.
[15:53] Tithing I think is in this category. Is tithing giving 10% of our income is that still a legal biblical requirement or is that something that has been fulfilled by Christ? Churches disagree on this.

I'd also include philosophy and ministry issues like how often should the church celebrate the Lord's Supper. I think that the church to celebrate the Lord's Supper I think is more of a secondary a higher order issue but how often to celebrate exactly how to celebrate I think those are tertiary issues.
Should a local church in normal times offer a live stream of the church's service online? That's a tertiary issue. What does that teach about what a local church is?
What Christian community is meant to be? What does live streaming services teach about worship? Are these questions consequential? Absolutely, they're consequential but these are not issues to divide over and believers may have differences in these matters yet maintain the unity of the spirit in the same local church.
So primary, secondary, and tertiary issues are not something that we can be agnostic or neutral about because they have consequences for our life and doctrine. Even if you don't take a position in your thoughts, you're going to end up taking a position by default in your actions because they determine how we obey God and how we're faithful to Him.
[17:14] So these are not issues you can just be neutral about. You do have to make a decision. Then finally, there are matters of indifference. That's the fourth category. Things that don't actually matter.

Things that are immaterial that the Bible is not concerned about such as what kind of church building to worship in. Whether those who distribute communion should wear gloves or not. Believe it or not, churches disagreed on these issues.
Whether the pastor should wear a suit or not. So we once had a church member in our church that believed that I as a pastor should not wear shorts to our Wednesday prayer service.
And I disagreed with her. I mean, it's in my house. Right? But I disagreed with her. But I actually, during the entire time that this church member was in our church, I did not wear shorts to the prayer service.
Because it's a matter of indifference. It doesn't matter. So it doesn't matter. Okay, sure. Like, I can do that. That's easy for me to do. Does that make sense? Yeah. So these are matters of indifference.
[18:18] And in matters of indifference, out of humility, we should be willing to adapt ourselves for the sake of others. And that's what Paul writes about in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

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To the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law.
To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.
That's what we do for things that are matters of indifference. Now, having established these categories, what criteria should we use to triage our doctrines? Orland asks four very helpful questions in the book.
First question is, how clear is the Bible on this doctrine? I think clarity would be affected by how often it is addressed in Scripture, how clearly it is taught, or whether it's something that people have not been able to agree throughout the history.
[19:36] What is the doctrine's importance to the gospel? That's the second question to ask. Third, what is the testimony of the historical church concerning the doctrine? I think this one's particularly important, not more important than the other questions, but important because every generation has its own blind spots.

Because of our own cultural context, we have our own blind spots that we can't see some things. And people from other cultures who didn't have those blind spots but had different blind spots can help us.
We can help each other see. So what is the testimony of the historical church concerning this doctrine? And then finally, what is the doctrine's effect upon the church today? I think these are really helpful questions to keep in mind.
It's because of my answers to these triage questions that I consider, so for example, two doctrinal stances of our church that I get the most questions about at membership interviews is continuationism, our belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue today, and complementarianism, our belief in the roles of distinct but non-interchangeable roles of man and woman.
Now, I consider these, based on my answers to these triage questions, to be secondary doctrines that warrant dividing over along denominational and ecclesiastical lines rather than as tertiary doctrines of indifference.
[20:52] Why? Because they have clear biblical support and they have urgent implications for our life and doctrine, and because the church universal had unanimous agreement on these issues until the 16th century for continuationism and 19th century for complementarianism.

So also, it's helpful to know, this is another thing to think about, that the more intimately and closely you partner with someone in ministry, the higher the level of agreement you need.
So for example, can I partner with Jews and Muslims in distributing food to the poor in our neighborhood? Absolutely. That's a common cause that I can join them in, gladly join them in, to do that work.
Now, can I sit around the circle with them and sing worship songs and pray with them? Absolutely not. Because we would not be praying to the same God and there would be no way to sing songs to our God without offending them deeply.
I'd have to witness and be part of, in some way, idolatry if I were forced to do that. Now, can I sit around the circle and sing songs and pray with other Christians with whom I disagree on secondary doctrines?
[22:06] Absolutely. I'd be glad to do that. But can I be a member of a same local church with those same Christians that disagree on secondary doctrines? No. Because if the church were governed according to their convictions on these secondary matters, every week I would be sitting there having my conscience violated and feeling like I'm in disobedience to scriptures.

Right? Do you guys see the difference, the rising level of intimacy and partnership and the more degree of agreement and clarity you need? Now, can I, well, you know, if, can I then be the same member of the same local church with Christians, other Christians who disagree on tertiary matters?
Yes, absolutely. But, can I be on the same local church eldership with Christians who disagree on these tertiary matters?
In some cases, no. Because if we had a church elder in our church who, for example, thought that, you know, having live streaming our service is the best way to reach the lost.

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And they wanted to do that every single week. And I'm convinced from my convictions that that would be detrimental to the health of the church because it communicates false ideas about what a church is because to me, church is by definition a gathering.
[23:20] And you don't gather when you're watching a service, you're consuming. Right? And so, that's a significant disagreement that affects the life of the church. So, like, yes, I can be, if you think that, you can be a member of our church, but can I have someone who thinks differently from me be on the same local church eldership?

Probably not. And so, that's what I mean. These are things, the higher, the more intimacy of partnership, the more agreement you need. Now, let's ask these theological triage questions of our passage this morning, Revelation 20, 1-6, the doctrine of the millennium.
How clear is the Bible on this doctrine? It's not very clear. Yeah. Because, when one of the main difficulties is that this is the only passage in all of Scripture that explicitly talks about the millennial reign of Christ.
It's the only one. And so, if you disagree on this one passage, then you really kind of have nowhere else to go. Right? So, it's not that clear. Now, what is this doctrine's importance to the gospel?
It's neither essential nor urgent to the gospel. It is consequential, and I'll talk about the implications of it later on. What is the testimony of the historical church concerning this doctrine?
[24:35] The church has had at least two differing positions on this doctrine since at least the second century A.D. Already, writing in the second century, church father Justin Martyr speaks of the belief that Christ will return to establish the millennial kingdom this way.

I and many others are of this opinion and believe that such will take place as you assuredly are aware, but on the other hand, I signify to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise.
So, already, in the second century, the church fathers recognized that there was a diversity of views on the millennium and that it was not something to divide over. It's very different from some of these other secondary issues I mentioned to you.
What is this doctrine's effect upon the church today? It does have some significant effect upon the church today and I'm going to discuss those later on in my sermon. However, because, as we have seen, this doctrine is not very clear, does not have implications for the gospel, and it has been disagreed upon since the early church age.
That's why I consider the doctrine of the millennium to be a tertiary doctrine over which we should not divide. So, if you don't agree with me at the end of my sermon today and the sermon next week on exactly what the millennium is, that's okay.
[25:56] Please don't leave the church for that. As is the case with other doctrines, people can tend toward doctrinal sectarianism or doctrinal minimalism when it comes to the millennium as well.

And I'm on too many mailing lists and once in a while I get an email from some organization that's emailing all the local church pastors that can find with openings, a list of openings for other pastoral jobs.
I have never searched for a different pastoral job, so don't worry. I've never searched for another job, period. But they send me those and it's interesting to read those sometimes because they'll tell you what they're looking for in a pastor and sometimes they're oddly specific.
And so, one of those things I saw was that the pastor has to be a pre-tribulational rapture dispensationalist premillennialist. Right. So, that was a requirement.
Now, you guys laugh but some churches take this very seriously. That church is using, I think, a tertiary issue as a litmus test for pastoral faithfulness.
[27:03] And I don't think that's good for the church. They're ruling out many faithful, godly, gifted pastors by insisting on something that the Bible talks about only once. It's not healthy, in my opinion.

That's an example of doctrinal sectarianism. On the other hand, we should also avoid the pitfalls of doctrinal minimalism when it comes to this. There are some people who say, post-millennial, pre-millennial, amillennial, I have no idea, I'm a pan-millennialist.
What does that mean? It's all going to pan out in the end. I've heard a pastor tell this joke, it's pretty funny. I see the appeal of that kind of attitude, but our view of the millennium has significant effects upon the church today.

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And we should cherish and study and obey all of God's word. Throwing our hands up in the air and not doing the hard work of thinking deeply about difficult theological issues is not a virtue.
So let's do some hard thinking about Revelation 20. There are four main views on the meaning of the binding of Satan and the reign of Christ during the millennium, with much intramural debate within each of them.
[28:13] And so if I have the, there are four views. First is historic pre-millennialism. Second, that's the view I hold today. So just so you know how difficult this issue is, I began the sermon series in Revelation as an amillennial, number four.

And then by the time, by the time we got to this point of our sermon series, I'm now a historical pre-millennial. So this is a, so if you don't know what you think about these issues, I understand. That's where I am.
The second, dispensational pre-millennialism, third, post-millennialism, and fourth, amillennialism. I'm going to talk about each of those. Here's a diagram that our one and only John Buckley made for us on short notice this week.
This is now, so yesterday, Ed and I got some good laughs looking at the diagrams on the different views of the millennium online because Christians who are serious about the Bible are not always serious about beautiful graphics.
And so this is now officially the best-looking diagram on the four views of the millennium online. Yeah. And so, thank you, John.
[29:21] The historic pre-millennialism is called historic because it most closely resembles the view of the millennium that the church fathers, the majority of the church fathers, held, including Apostle John who wrote, I don't know, I'm not saying Apostle John held.

Apostle John's the one who wrote Revelation. Apostle John's disciple Papias and Polycarp and Polycarp's disciple Irenaeus as well as other notable church fathers like Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Pseudo-Barnabas, Methodius, Lactantius, Comodianus, Theophilus, Melito, Hippolytus of Rome, Victorinus of Petau, Nepus, Julius Africanus, Tatian, and Montanus.
They all believed in historic pre-millennialism. Now, the prefix pre- means before. So pre-millennialism is the belief that Christ will return in his second coming before the millennium reign.
He's going to come to establish the millennium reign. So, the people that, I think this is what makes the best sense of the scriptural data, but there's still a lot of questions and uncertainties around it. The most prominent modern proponents of this view are D.A. Carson, John Piper, and Jim Hamilton, among others. Dispensational pre-millennialism shares the name pre-millennialism with historic pre-millennialism because it also says that Christ's second coming will take place before the millennial reign, so pre-millennial.
[30:50] But then, after that, it departs sharply from historic dispensationalism. Dispensational pre-mill argues not only that Christ will return before the millennium, but also that he will return for a secret second coming prior to that to rapture the believers.

so that they don't have to endure what they believe is seven years of tribulation, the great tribulation. And it's only after that secret rapture, that secret second coming, and then the great tribulation, and then he will come in public, in a public second coming, to bring about the millennium.
That's what dispensational pre-millennialism believes. So, if you can't tell, so that's the first picture, is Christ on the cross, first coming, and that the middle here, that's the secret second coming for church only, it's raptured, and then the tribulation, the second coming, that's the picture of Christ on his white horse from Revelation 19, and then the millennium, and then the final judgment.
So that's the picture. It's beautiful. The most, this dispensational pre-millennialism began in earnest with the 19th century Plymouth Brethren pastor named John Nelson Darby, you may have heard his name before, and became prominent due to the influence of Dallas Theological Seminary and the popularity of Hal Lindsay's book, The Late Great Planet Earth, and the Left Behind series, which I mentioned to you before, Tim Leahy and Jerry B. Jenkins.
The most prominent proponent of this view nowadays is John MacArthur, who describes himself as a leaky dispensationalist. The fact that this is a modern innovation is an argument against it.
[32:26] This view is not attested among any of the church fathers. Moreover, the idea of a rapture is not found anywhere in the book of Revelation.

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It's based, people who believe it based it on 1 Thessalonians 4, 16 to 17, which says, For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.
Then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. So dispensational premils argue that that's meeting the Lord within the air refers to us being caught up in heaven to live with Jesus.
That's a secret rapture. However, I've mentioned this to you before, that the Greek word translating meet has a very specific meaning. It's a word that is used in Greek literature to mean going out to meet someone who is already on his way to you.
So it's a way of going out to meet, to welcome, and escort them back to where you're going together. Or if your enemy is coming out to meet you and you go out to meet them who's already on their way to you, it's about meeting halfway so that you can come back.
[33:41] So it's not a word that describes meeting him and then going away somewhere. It's a word that describes meeting Jesus in the air as a way of greeting an important dignitary and then coming back to where you guys are going together.

And so that's, I don't think, the right interpretation of that word, of that passage in general. And another passage that's often used to argue for the rapture is John 14, 1-3, where Jesus says, Let not your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself that where I am you may be also.
That's another passage that people point to as an example of the rapture, the secret second coming rapture. However, I do think this passage is talking about Jesus' return. But I think it's talking about his final second coming and I think there's only one second coming in the Bible when Jesus brings about the new heaven and the new earth, establishes the holy city in New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God.
And so Jesus returns to the Father and prepares these rooms, places for his disciples and then in his second coming he brings down the heavenly Jerusalem where he will take his people to dwell with him.
[34:58] I think that makes the best sense of John 14. Nowhere does John 14 say that this is speaking of Christ's secret return prior to his second coming. I just don't think that doctrine is in scripture at all.

All that to say, arguments for the secret return of Christ to rapture the saints are few and I think not very strong. but the reason why people subscribe to dispensational premio is not primarily because they're persuaded by these proof texts, they're not that persuasive, but because they have bought into dispensationalism as a theological system, as a system of biblical interpretation.
Dispensationalism is the belief that God has ordered human history into seven main dispensations or administrations and one of its main tenets of dispensationalism is their literal hermeneutic, the way they interpret the Bible literally wherever possible.
And because of that, it's a system that is very attractive to theological conservatives who have a very high view of scripture, which is me. And for this reason, they expect the Old Testament prophecies about Israel being restored to the land of Canaan, for example, and about the temple being restored, for example.
They see these as not being fulfilled figuratively and spiritually in Jesus Christ, but as they believe that those things will be literally and physically be fulfilled in the land of Israel in the physical temple on Mount Zion.
[36:24] So they maintain a strict distinction between Israel, which is made up for ethnic Jews, and the church. That's why I think they find this system persuasive. However, a problem with this view is that the Bible itself understands some of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel as being fulfilled spiritually in Jesus Christ.

For example, Revelation 2, 9, and 3, 7 that we saw, Jesus denounced those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. This was a condemnation of ethnic Jews who rejected their Messiah, Jesus, and persecuted Christians.
Those who believe in Jesus Christ, according to Revelation, are the true Jews, not those who are merely ethnic descendants of Israel. The promises that God gave to the Jews in the Old Testament do not belong to the children of the flesh, as Paul writes, but to the children of the promise in

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Romans 9, 6-8.
It's the spiritual descendants of Israel, not the physical descendants of Israel, ethnic Jews, who make up true Israel. For, it says in Romans 2, 27-28, no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit, not by the letter.
And that's why in James 1-1, it addresses all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, as dispersed 12 tribes of Israel. We are the true Israel of God.
[37:52] Likewise, the ultimate restoration of the Jerusalem temple does not happen before Christ's return, but after Christ's return, as we see in Revelation 21. And it describes the people of God, the old covenant people of God, represented by the 12 tribes, the 12 sons of Jacob, and the 12 apostles, the New Testament covenant people of God, represented by the 12 apostles, they make up this new city of Jerusalem.

So Revelation itself does not insist on maintaining a strict distinction between Israel and the church. Revelation unites them as the people of God, and this is why I don't find dispensational premill to be persuasive.
But why does this matter? Many dispensational premillennialists follow Hal Lindsey's view in the late great planet Earth and believe that, for example, the Arab-Israel war and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 in Palestine, as well as Israel's victory in the Six-Day War and regaining control of the Sinai Peninsula and, most importantly, city of Jerusalem, they believe that these are literal fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy.
They also believe that a literal physical temple will eventually be rebuilt on Mount Zion where currently the Dome of the Rock, the Islamic mosque, sits. So in other words, dispensational premill leads Christians to see the nation of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and therefore support Israel as a political entity.
Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that God doesn't have any future plans for the Jewish people. I think he does, according to Romans 11, 25 to 26. I think there will be a softening of the hearts of the Jewish people and many of them will come to faith, saving faith in Jesus Christ in the end times.
[39:37] I love the Jewish people. We have some Messianic Jews in our church. I love the Jewish people even if for no other reason than the fact that my King and my Savior is Jewish.

If Jesus weren't born among the Jews, then I would still be condemned in my sin for salvation is from the Jews, Jesus said in John 4, 22. And so this is not my, I'm not trying to share a political opinion on what's going on with Israel and Palestine.
I'm very supportive of the Jewish people and love the Jewish people. However, with that said, the state of Israel is not a fulfillment of the promises of God to his people.
The church of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to his people. So the true temple of God is not one that will be physically rebuilt on Mount Zion. It is the people of God who are indwelled by the Holy Spirit.
That's why Paul writes about how we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. So the Jews are not our brothers and sisters in the family of God. The Messianic Jews are.
[40:41] And the Palestinian Christians are. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. You guys understand what I'm saying? So it has significant implications for how we understand what's going on in the world today. People who subscribe, so I'm going to go to Postmill now, people who subscribe to Postmillennialism argue that Christ's second coming will be after the millennium.

That's why it says post, which means after. So Postmillennialists believe that Christ will return after the millennium. Generally, some people believe that the millennium is already happening, and others believe that there will be an amazing spread of the gospel and an infiltration of the values of the kingdom and scriptural principles at all levels of society, and then a true millennium where there's peace and harmony and faithfulness to God all around will take place later on, closer to the end.
That's what some people believe. And Postmill believe that there will eventually be a pervasive influence of the gospel at all levels of human society and government before Christ returns.
They often cite Habakkuk 2.14 and Isaiah 11.9 saying that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. They believe that the Great Commission teaches that the Great Commission anticipates a time when most people in the world will become Christians.

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That's what they believe. Because Matthew 24.14 tells us that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. [42:18] Postmails think that before Christ's second coming, there will be an unprecedented spread and acceptance of the gospel and the most of the world will be converted to Christianity. However, that verse does not say that the gospel of the kingdom will be accepted throughout the whole world.

It says that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world. In fact, in the immediately preceding verses, Matthew 24.9-13, Jesus prophesies that Christians will be delivered up to tribulation and put to death and be hated by all nations for Christ's name's sake and that many will fall away and betray one another and that many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Jesus continues, because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. Before the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, lawlessness will not decrease, it will increase.
and the love of God will not grow hot, it will grow cold among many. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 7, Jesus teaches very clearly that many enter by the wide gate and the easy way that leads to destruction, but that only a few enter by a narrow gate and a hard way that leads to life.
And speaking of his return in Luke 18.8, Jesus asks a rhetorical question. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? The implied answer is no.
[43:46] He will not find faith on the earth. So today, there has been a minor resurgence of postmillennialism due to theologians like R.J. Rushdooney, who's passed now, but he's considered the father of Christian reconstructionism.

And he was the inspiration of the modern homeschooling movement. I don't have anything against homeschooling. I've homeschooled my kids before, but it did come from this postmill. It was inspired a postmill mindset. The most prominent proponent of postmill nowadays is probably Pastor Douglas Wilson, who is highly influential among the ranks of Christian nationalists.
He is a pastor who did an interview with Tucker Carlson on Christian nationalism. And the Christian book publisher he started Canon Press steadily pushes out books that espouse postmillennialism, including The Case for Christian Nationalism by Stephen Wolf.
The allure of postmillennialism is that it focuses our attention on the world here and now rather than on the world to come.
It promises victory for Christians and about ushering in an age of godliness. However, as Pastor Jeremy Sexton notes in his D'Amelios article on postmillennialism, a biblical critique, he writes, postmillennialism's disworldly conception of Christ's kingdom lays the theological and spiritual seedbed for a culture warriorism characterized by carnal warfare and worldly stratagems.
[45:14] If you look at Christians who are the most strident political activists in the U.S. today, many of them are postmills. But we must remember what Jesus said in John 18, 36.

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews.
But my kingdom is not from the world. And according to Revelation 11, 15, the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ when?
Not when we Christianize the world, but when Christ returns in His second coming. Now, this doesn't mean that we stop loving our neighbors or stop doing good to everyone as the Bible commends us to do.
Political involvement can be a form of loving our neighbor and doing good to our neighbors. Moreover, we should continue to pray the Lord's prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
[46:21] We pray for that and we should seek that and strive to see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. So I'm not denying these things. But we should go about doing good works and loving our neighbors with our ultimate hope in the return of our king rather than in the election of your preferred president.

Do you guys see what I'm saying? If we see it as our primary duty to bring about the millennial kingdom, then we're going to be prone to taking things into our own hands and we're going to value success and win in the culture over faithfulness.

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Next is amillennialism. A is an alpha privative. It's a prefix that negates. For example, if you say that you're an atheist and you're not a theist, you don't believe in God.
So amillennialism means no millennium or at least no literal millennium. It's not exactly an accurate term because amillennialists do not deny that there is a millennium because it's in the Bible.
You have to believe the millennium. It's in the Bible. You just disagree on what it looks like. So amillennialists believe that the millennium is happening right now. The entire church age between the first coming and the second coming of Christ is the figurative millennium is the way amillennials believe it.
[47:40] So some people call it instead inaugurated millennium. We might call it inmillennialism because in is the prefix that means now or present or in. And so if that ever catches on that was coined here so you heard it here first.

It's not going to catch on. Like Postmill and Amill like Postmill Amill also says that the devil is presently imprisoned in the abyss but they believe that this binding is more limited than the way Postmill's understand it.
And so even though there will be a long period during which the gospel will spread bringing about spiritual flourishing throughout the world they believe Amill's believe that the gospel influence will not penetrate all levels of society and human government.
So in a sense this is the way Paul, one of our elders described it that Amill is a more cynical version of Postmill. They're very similar. I think this is the next most plausible interpretation of Revelation 21-6 after historic premillennialism and there's a number of very strong arguments that I'm going to share with you next week about that support Amillennialism.
And Amillennialism I think understandably for this reason like historic premillennialism has strong representation among the church fathers including Augustine one of my favorites Origen Dionysius of Alexandria Eusebius of Caesarea Epiphanius of Salamis Ephraim the Syrian and Theodoret of Cyrus another one of my favorites.
[49:09] And so I think that's why I think Amill if you guys walk away either Amill or historic premillennial I think I'll be pretty happy. And the most prominent modern proponents of Amill are G.K. Beale and Sam Storms.

You guys have probably heard those names before. Now which millennium view you hold is not essential to the gospel nor urgent for our life and doctrine but it is consequential as we've seen. And all the views that I have mentioned do fall within the pale of orthodoxy. orthodoxy. But you should also be aware that difficult passages like this and difficult books like Revelation are easy to twist to our own purposes and many cults throughout the ages have done that.
If you look at cults and study what they teach many of them their defining texts are from Revelation. For example within the last year we have had two people visit our church both of whom were recently involved in a cult that twisted Revelation into various heretical beliefs including claiming that their respective founders are the second coming of Jesus Christ.
So Shincheonji Church of Jesus it's a Korean cult we had one person come who was involved in that before known as the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony as well as Mormonism also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints both claim that their founders are the only people who are capable of deciphering the symbols of Revelation and making it known to the followers of God.
[50:42] So beware. In 2 Peter 3 16-17 Peter speaks of the letters written by the Apostle Paul in this manner. There are some things in them that are hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

You therefore beloved knowing this beforehand take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. Not only does this verse reveal the apostolic self-awareness that the New Testament apostles were writing authoritative scripture it also comforts us by acknowledging that some parts of scripture like some of the letters of Paul and like the book of Revelation are indeed hard to understand.
So that's okay. This calls for extra vigilance and extra care in interpreting the book of Revelation and difficult passages like chapter 20. We must be like the noble Bereans of Acts 17-11 who received the word with all eagerness examining the scripture daily to see if these things were so. Right? Andrew and Ed and I spend scores of hours pouring over the biblical text every time before we preach a sermon.

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Why do we do that? Even really difficult passages why do we why do we do that? Why am I why don't I just skip this? That's what a lot of people do when they preach Revelation. It's not because we just I don't know want to know or know something and teach something like if we just like teaching and hearing our voices we could do a lot of other jobs.
[52:24] It's because it's God's word. It's because if you have labored over problem sets and poured over difficult books that you have to read for your job or for your school and if you have done that why would we not do that with the very word of God?

He is the king of kings and lord of lords. He's the creator of all the earth. Why would we not pour over every word that he has said to us? If you received a love letter from the love of your life would you not cherish it and read every word and memorize it and read it again and smile over it as you're reading it?
Why do we not do that with the word of God in which God speaks to us? Communicates his love for us? His salvation plan to us? That's why we do this.
Not so that we can get into an argument with somebody about it. So let's be a people who search the scriptures with diligence in humble faith asking God to grant us understanding and let us engage in careful and responsible theological triaging relating to one another and engaging with different theological positions on tertiary matters with appropriate humility and charity.
Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the gift of your word.
[53:52] Lord, we thank you that your word teaches us so that we might know your will and discern your good and acceptable and perfect will and that we might be transformed by the renewal of our mind.

We thank you for that, Lord. But we thank you also that through passages that are hard to understand, you also humble us. So, Lord, help us to be a church that combines both clarity and confidence and humility and charity in the way we hold your word.
Grow us in the way we cherish your word and believe your word and study your word. Make us like the noble Bereans, Lord, that we might honor you in all of our lives.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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