

Rev 26-07-12a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday Morning Services, plural, here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We have service from the Scriptures, we have service in music, we have service in fellowship and encouragement, and in the mutual interactions that allow us to function as a fellowship. And what a gracious and beneficial gift it is from God to share this time together.

Let's ask God's blessing on this time of study in particular, and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for the many ways that you bless us and provide for our needs. We thank you for our challenges and the difficulties that face us.

We know that you have woven them together as a part of your perfect plan and provision for us to strengthen our faith, to remind us of the things that we have learned, to give us opportunities for application, to look beyond ourselves and overcome subjectivity, and to reach that place of viewpoint and understanding that prepares us for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray that our investigations this morning into this wonderful book of revelation sourced from you through the Lord Jesus and the Apostle John, that we may understand the future in terms of what it means to us in the present by way of application. We pray that in all things our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified.

We thank you for him and his constant witness as he sits at your right hand, representing us, interceding for us, and awaiting the day when you send him to return and take us to himself. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are in Revelation chapter 20, moving into chapter 21. This is a thousand-year period that is dealt with in a very few verses. I hope that by this time, many of the questions that have been constant in the minds of believers across time, across the centuries, across various ways of understanding Scripture, are now possessed of an answer in your own heart and mind.

You think of the Old Testament age and the promises, the provision, the plan that God implemented on their behalf and in their interest. We know that that is unique and distinct to that period of covenant promises and future blessings that were held in reserve, held in escrow, awaiting the time when they could be fulfilled for every Old Testament believer. Their future is not simplistic.

Our future is not simplistic. The running understanding that people have adopted that is very generalized and very non-detailed is that you live this life, you die, you go to heaven if you're a believer. God's plan is more sophisticated.

It has many moving parts. It has people groups that have different purposes during the time of human history. And we know that for the Old Testament group, those of faith, they were promised a future land in which they could potentially possess an inheritance, peace and safety, prosperity, no danger from the chaotic forces of evil.

That is fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom that is described in brief here in chapter 20. Why is it not given in more detail? Because there are plentiful passages in the Old Testament that detail the conditions and the fulfillment of promise that characterizes this 1,000 year age. So when we started chapter 20 and we saw another angel coming down from heaven, like unto the ones that John has seen before, he has the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

God controls this key and he gives it to whom he wills. We saw earlier that it was given to the falling angel who releases other evil angels from the bottomless pit. That key has been retrieved and now it is used to lock the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, in the bottomless pit and bind him there for 1,000 years.

He cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up and set a seal on him. Notice the threefold fate that befalls Satan. It doesn't just say he was thrown in there.

It says he was laid hold of and bound in verse 2. He is cast into the bottomless pit, shut up and sealed in verse 3. This is a fivefold restriction if you think about it. He's not getting out of there. He's not speaking.

He's not like some crime boss who goes to prison but continues to operate his empire through intermediaries and remote control. When he goes into the bottomless pit, he is seized, he is bound, he is cast in, he is shut up and sealed. He has no influence whatsoever except as a memory for the 1,000 years of the millennial rule.

What is this rule like and to what extent does it characterize the land of Israel, the promised land, vis-à-vis the outside world? For one of many passages that describes this time, turn back with me to Ezekiel chapter 34. Ezekiel chapter 34. We're going to let this be representative of many.

You can easily find these if you're interested in even greater detail. All of chapter 40 through 48 of this same book details much about worship during that time and the purified Levites. But Ezekiel chapter 34 begins with the description of unfaithful shepherds.

We tend to think that pastor, which is a word that means shepherd in Latin, is someone who is a spiritual leader. In this case, these shepherds are engaged in rulership, in civic function, the execution of law enforcement, and so on. Who are the shepherds, spiritually speaking, in Israel? These would be prophets and priests, but they don't exercise a disciplined function.

The guidance that they provide is in their communication of the word of God. So keep that in mind as you look at the description of these shepherds, beginning in verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me saying, Shall a man prophesy against the shepherds of Israel? These are the elders, the ones who set policy and determine the direction of culture and civilization and interactions among Israelites as a group. In later days, this will include the chief priests, those who are influential in civil government, in culture.

And this, of course, overlaps with and should be permeated by spiritual truth and spiritual understanding, which they would receive by way of example, by way of the shadows that are present in the Levitical worship system. But these are primarily governmental types. Prophecy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not these shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool.

You slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost. But with force and cruelty you have ruled them.

Notice this is not the priestly function. The priests aren't out there ruling the people. These are civil government.

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill. Yes, my flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.

Therefore you shepherds hear the word of the Lord. As I live, says the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd. Nor did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed my flock.

Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand. I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more.

For I will deliver my flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them. Notice in a church age shepherd flock metaphor, the food is the word of God. And if that were the case here, the shepherds feeding themselves would be a good thing.

They would be imbibing the word of God, being corrected and instructed by it, and do their job properly. This is material aggrandizement. This is personal prosperity.

This is getting along and climbing up the backs of the poor, disregarding the widow and the orphan, allowing the land to be attacked from the outside in the interest of compromise and the accumulation of material goods and prosperity to themselves. This is the kind of shepherd. This is the kind of environment they are feeding themselves.

So the word of God is not in view as it would be were we using that analogy in a church context. So verse 11, thus says the Lord God. Indeed, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out.

Understanding this context is important because this is what is corrected in the millennial kingdom, which is about to be described. What is corrected in the kingdom? It's not you received faulty teaching and bad instruction in the law, and that's going to be corrected and the corrupted ones will be removed and wonderful teachers are going to teach and provide hidden manna and so on. That's not in view.

What does the millennial kingdom do? This is the fulfillment of the material promises of land, of peace, of safety, of provision and prosperity in Israel for believers in God who placed their faith in him did not receive the fulfillment of those material earthly promises during their lifetime. And even those who had prosperity, you can think of Abraham and Job and others that had ample flocks and herds and were preserved. Abraham, even in battle, went and rescued those that were taken prisoner and taken captive in the early to mid chapters of Genesis there.

But the millennial kingdom is a fulfillment of life on this earth in fullness, peace, safety, provision and prosperity unencumbered by evil and the machinations of Satan. This begins in Revelation 20 by saying that he is bound. You hear people today talking about praying to bind Satan.

It takes an angel given a key by God to bind Satan. Don't think a human being is going to send up an uninformed prayer and Satan is going to be restricted. That's just not the case.

He roams the earth seeking whom he may devour. And the very people who stand there reminds me of people that keep vicious wild animals as pets while I raised it from a small version to adulthood. And then you read about them being eaten and they are so surprised that the wild nature asserts itself.

But look at the description here. Thus says the Lord God, this is 34:11 of Ezekiel. I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out as a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep.

So will I seek out my sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. This is anticipating the resurrection. You might say resuscitation because this is not into glorified eternal bodies.

This is all of the scattered sheep of all of the old Testament age before and after the law of Moses given at Sinai, before and after national Israel under Saul and David and Solomon and the subsequent kings of the divided version. All of the old Testament age, these are God's sheep. You think about Psalm 100.

We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. The under shepherds did a terrible job. Had they kept the covenant and we've read the promises of God on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

If they had been faithful and led the people in the ways of obedience and faithfulness, these covenant promises could have been fulfilled during their lifetime. They were not. And in many

cases, it wasn't the faithful people's fault.

So God is firing the shepherds and he is going to shepherd his people and fulfill these earthly promises in the millennium. It is an earthly kingdom. They have to come back in an earthly form to have these very firm, guaranteed promises fulfilled.

So God says in verse 13, I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries. I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country in Israel, out of the nations, out from where they have been scattered.

This is throughout history, excepting the church age, where if you're a believer, you're church. But the entire Old Testament provenance and the last seven years that we've seen detailed in chapters six through 19, all of those believers will be gathered, not only across geography, but across time. And they will be evaluated and placed for fulfillment of promise.

And remember, promises are conditional. If you are faithful, God can bless. There are many who were believers but are unfaithful and fulfillment of promise will be less for them.

This is important for us to understand because as goes the nation of Israel, the Old Testament believers as a group, so goes the New Testament individual believer. And we learn by observation how important it is for us to wake up and smell the coffee, redeem the time, be faithful and obedient, because this is a picture. God keeps track of what we think and what we say and what we do.

It is recorded. When the books are opened in Revelation 20, there is a book. Think about it right now.

There is what amounts to a scroll or a book. Of course, I'm sure there's some advanced record keeping system in the heavenly realms, but it is described to us as a book or as a scroll. Bound books with a spine and pages did not exist for a couple of centuries after the time that John is writing.

You had scrolls. So anytime you see book in Scripture, the picture at the time was a scroll. The scrolls are opened and another scroll.

That's what the word means. But it doesn't really matter in terms of its form. It is its function.

And there is a record. Think of it right now. What we did yesterday was written down.

What we thought about, to what extent we served ourselves instead of thinking that we are here to reflect the Lord Jesus, to represent him, to function as his body, to have the kinds of thoughts and words and actions that will be appreciated and be rewarded at the judgment. That is what is on the line. So I will bring them from the peoples, verse 13, verse 14.

I will feed them in good pasture and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel, of Israel. This isn't a spiritual Israel. This isn't a heavenly Israel.

This is the Israel that is on the map today. It will have expanded borders. These are described in this very same book.

In the valleys, in the inhabited places of the country, I will feed them in good pasture and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. You can't help but think of Psalm 23.

I will feed my flock, verse 15, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will feed them. I will give them rest.

Sheep lying down, this is rest. They're not even having to walk around to travel to where the good pasture is. David describes this.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

Verse 16, I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken, strengthen what was sick, but I will destroy the fat and the strong and feed them with judgment. Feed them with the fat and the strong. How many times did Jesus say, the last shall be first, the first shall be last.

You make a goal out of prosperity and getting ahead in this life, you're going to be fed with judgment in the next life. As for you, verse 17, O my flock, thus says the Lord God, behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture that you must tread down with your feet, the residue of your pasture, to have drunk of the clear waters that you must foul the residue with your feet? It's one thing to serve yourself, to aggrandize, to accumulate, to be greedy, to be avaricious, to seek to advance yourself.

But God says you've made it worse because you have done it at the expense of those around you. There's nothing wrong with ambition and with setting goals and seeking to achieve them, to make something of yourself, to be self-sufficient. But do we dedicate that effort to the Lord? I want to be in a place where I am stable and well-provided so that I can be a blessing, so that I can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Or is it just self-gratification? But self-gratification is exponentially worse when it comes at the expense of others. You muddy the water, foul the residue. Verse 19, as for my flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.

You think of the prosperity that we enjoy in this country and the things that we have access to,

but how much better would it be if there was not waste, fraud, abuse, greed, and self-serving power-grabbing influence all up and down our government, our elections, those that have the power to determine what happens in communities, in cities, in states, and in the nation. When it is all about maintaining power, advancing oneself, someone goes to the federal government and suddenly ends up a millionaire and they have no job but serving in government. You look at the salary and say, how did you become a millionaire? Well, there is a lot of inside information and so on.

This is what will be judged and it is an analogy for us. Do we do this in small ways? Do we take advantage of others? Do we elbow others aside to get to what we want? And we are insensitive. We are intemperate.

We are unfeeling and we are not dedicating our day and our time and our effort to what God would have us do, what he put us here to accomplish. That is the crime here. These shepherds are put for, remember so often in scripture, leaders are put for an entire group of which they are a chief representative.

The 24 elders that we have seen time and again in the revelation. These tribulational martyrs that we see in Revelation 20. The shepherds here are put for anyone in Israel, whether they qualify as an actual shepherd or not.

The fate of the shepherds, their attitude is representative and all of those who share in that attitude and in that way of living life will share their fate. We are going to see this upcoming in Revelation 20 and into 21. So verse 20, The Lord God says to them, I myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep, because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad.

Therefore I will deliver my flock, and they shall no longer be a prey, and I will judge between sheep and sheep. You've heard me refer to this time and again, that not all Old Testament believers are going into the millennial kingdom proper. The land of Israel where the special conditions of complete peace and safety and provision and prosperity prevail.

Some will be rejected. There are those who are outside. Jesus described them in his parables.

Cut in two and apportioned their lot with the hypocrites. Cut in two means whatever power they had or expected to have in the future, cut in two, this is like snapping their rod of authority on his knee. And their lot, their portion, their meros, M-E-R-O-S, translated part in Revelation is with the hypocrites outside.

When they try to enter the land, they have a full expectation. I was a big wig during my earthly life. The rod is gonna drop, they're gonna be tapped aside.

No, Timbuktu for you. By who? And that's where they will go. Verse 23, I will establish one

shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, my servant David.

My servant David. David is gonna be back. David is gonna be in the land.

David is going to resume his shepherd role, not just over sheep, but over the sheep of Israel. The Lord Jesus as David's greater son, David himself and the sons of David, various scriptures in the Old Testament all are said to be a part of this rulership. I don't think David is a metaphor or a symbol here of the Lord Jesus.

God says, David, it's gonna be David. Can you imagine David coming to the Lord and saying, I notice you put my greater son, the Lord Jesus on the throne, but remember this verse here where you said I was going to shepherd? Was that? Oh, well, not you. David was faithful.

David was a man after God's own heart. And David himself is going to be actively involved for a thousand years in the government of Israel in the land. And you can imagine the greatly expanded nation of Israel is gonna require quite a bit of governance.

It is still an earthly government. It still requires a rod of iron in the head of the ruler and it extends beyond the borders to control the rest of the entire world. So there will be plenty of opportunities for the Lord Jesus, for David and for David's progeny, his descendant, faithful kings.

Can you imagine the unfaithful kings not gonna be a part of this. My servant David will feed them and be their shepherd and I the Lord will be their God and my servant David, a prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

This is a no kidding promise about David. I will make a covenant of peace with them and cause wild beasts to cease from the land, not from the entire planet, no wild beasts in the land. There is going to be increasing levels of chaos, disorder, disobedience because the faithful are concentrated in the land.

The semi-faithful will be near the land and able to come in and out from it and enjoy a lot of its prosperity, but they're not residents. The further you get from Jerusalem in the millennium, the less light, the less control, the less blessing, the more danger, the more chaos, the more that there are gonna be these things that will be judged at the sheep and goats judgment at the end of that period because there will be those who are sick and in prison, those who are naked, those who are hungry as described in Matthew 25. I will make them, verse 26, and the places all around my hill a blessing.

Notice the specificity of this. People just blow through this without paying attention. God doesn't say, I will make the world a perfect place.

My hill and the area immediately around it is blessed. I will cause showers to come down in their season. There shall be showers of blessing.

That would be a great title for a hymn, wouldn't it? Then shall trees of the field yield their fruit and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land, the land of Israel, safety. And they shall know that I am the Lord when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

Keep in mind now, we're talking about the literal millennial kingdom and God's actual material fulfillment of his promises to all of those Old Testament saints. But remember, this is a pattern that is also fulfilled for you and for me. And the conditions are the same.

To what extent are we faithful? To what extent do we trust God? Look to him for provision and protection, for guidance, for blessing, for instruction, for forgiveness, for strength to overcome our fallen nature and to deal with the fallen natures of those around us. To exhibit, manifest, and be proliferating the fruit of the spirit. The abiding in the vine and being pruned so that we can bear even more fruit.

Recognizing that pruning can be painful. I was reading a book where there's some people that think trees are conscious and I had to do some tree trimming recently. And so as I lifted the pole saw and pulled the trigger and severed these branches from a living tree.

And sometimes it's not as clean as you would like. The branch falls and the bark rips and you've injured the tree in a potentially future damaging way. And I kind of feel for the tree.

I wish I didn't have to trim it. I wish it could go wild and free and just be a tree. But it is in an environment where it needs to be trimmed.

It needs to not cause damage to things around it. And in some ways when there are dead branches and you trim them out, it is beneficial to the tree. But the Lord Jesus said, you'd read John 14 and John 15, I'm the vine, you're the branches, abide in me and bear fruit.

If you're not fruitful, you're going to be pruned out. If you are fruitful, you're going to be pruned so that you can be more fruitful. All of that is a pattern that we see described in detail both in its antecedent failures in the first part of Ezekiel 34 represented by these unfaithful shepherds, these self-centered, self-interested, self-gratifying shepherds at the expense of those around them.

We can't let that be us. We don't want to match that pattern. Those who were injured by that and maintained their faith in God are coming into the land of Israel in the millennial kingdom.

And these are their blessings. Verse 27, the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. The earth shall yield her increase.

They will be safe in their land and they shall know that I am the Lord when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. We are often enslaved. We think slavery is a thing from the 1800s, got rid of it under Lincoln.

Sorry, no, there is enslavement of all types and we can be limited by physical health. We can be limited by circumstances, by the unreasonable demands of government or employers. The situation we find ourselves in has built in restriction and limitation and lack of potential.

And we may live with that our whole life. God is going to break those bonds. When we enter into resurrected life, this is the picture, this is the pattern.

And it fits us to benefit or to judgment, just as it is explicitly described here. Verse 28, they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them, but they shall dwell safely and no one shall make them afraid. Fear, thing of the past.

Don't have to fear uncertainty. Don't have to fear poverty. Don't have to fear danger.

Don't have to fear consequences. Don't have to fear deteriorating health. I will raise up for them a garden of renown.

Verse 29, wouldn't that be great? Whatever our future may hold, the place that the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare for us, you sometimes go through gated communities or other places where there's an HOA and they will give awards for well-tended yards and things like that. To have a garden of renown associated with your dwelling place that you can go and sit in and enjoy. Enjoy just for beauty's sake.

God has given us the capacity to appreciate symmetry and beauty and a wonderful, peaceful, enjoyable and satisfying environment. That is what is in store for those who by faith and patience inherit the promises. It's being described here for Israel in the literal millennium.

It fits and is a promise to us as well. A garden of renown, verse 29, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God.

You are my flock, the flock of my pasture. Again, you can't help but think of Psalm 100. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him and bless his name, for the Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting and his truth endures unto all generations.

Got to put Psalm 100 out in the margin by this if it's not already in some kind of a steady note. You are my flock, the flock of my pasture. You are men and I am your God, says the Lord God.

Extraordinary. We are humans, the lowest in the sentient creation. Compared to the angels, we are made lower.

But God highly exalts us. Old Testament and new through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the Millennial Kingdom.

And there is passage after passage after passage. You can go to Jeremiah. You can go to other chapters here in Ezekiel.

And see the details. That is why in our passage, Revelation chapter 20, it is just given in a very summary fashion. It says that there is rulership for a thousand years.

The prayer of all of the martyrs represented by the tribulational martyrs is now fulfilled. And so when you come to Revelation 20 verse 4, I saw thrones and they sat on them. And it says judgment was committed to them.

And this is not what it means. A judgment is given to them. A judgment is given to them.

A divine verdict has been handed down in their favor. Remember the souls under the altar back in our earlier chapters. Chapter six, verse 10.

This is the verdict. This is a judgment. And as with so many things in scripture, it's sort of a double-edged sword.

If they're sitting on thrones, you imagine that they have authority to judge, but it literally says a verdict is handed to them. A judgment is given to them. And this is the reason they are sitting on thrones.

And the reason they're given this authority is that God has judged and found them worthy. They pass under the rod, as we saw in Ezekiel chapter 34 and similar passages. There is an evaluation.

There is a verdict. There is a judgment. And conditions, opportunities, blessings, rewards, inheritance in this resurrection are conditioned upon what that judgment finds.

How does the jury find? How does the judge find? Based on what is written in the books. Well, this is an exciting prospect for us because we know how to stand at this judgment and be approved. An approved workman that needs not to be ashamed because we do our best to rightly divide the word of truth.

Be diligent to show yourself approved. This is something we can spend some time and effort on. Be diligent to show yourself approved unto God.

A workman that needs not to be ashamed. Rightly dividing the word of truth. That word of God that's alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword.

That's what we're doing this morning. We're gonna pause here and take our break. When we

come back, we are going to sail through the remainder of chapter 20 and move into chapter 21.

And one of our favorite things leads off chapter 21. It's gonna be fun to look at. We'll see it when we come back.