

**And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. <sup>2</sup> He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. <sup>3</sup> He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.**

**<sup>4</sup> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.**

#### TOTAL VICTORY FOR BELIEVERS EVEN IN OUTWARD DEFEAT

- I. This victory is Christ's work for all people
- II. This victory is yours through the first resurrection
- III. This victory erases fear from our hearts

Dear fellow saints of God,

The final victory of those who believe in Jesus Christ is really the theme of the whole book of Revelation. It is what the book is all about. Take a look at the background for the meaning of these words. John was inspired to write these words at a time of great persecution. Christians were being robbed of their possessions. They were being imprisoned and exiled. And many of them were being put to death in the most barbaric ways. Our sufferings for the name of the Savior pale in the face of what these people endured because of their witness for Jesus.

Commentators on the Book of Revelation are often misled by the notion that every vision in Revelation portrays some future event. This is not the case, and it is demonstrated beyond all doubt by the vision of the woman's child and the dragon in chapter 12. No one can deny that that vision portrays the birth and ascension of Christ and all the attempts of the devil to destroy the woman's Son between His birth and ascension. After the ascension He is forever beyond the devil's reach.

In the first three verses of our text we have pictured for us Christ's victory over the devil. The text says, **And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and he bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and locked it and set a seal on it, in order that he might no longer deceive the Gentiles until the thousand years come to an end; after this he must be released for a short time.**

The angel coming down from heaven is Christ. Of course, he is not an angel in the way we often think of an angel. He is the Son of God from all eternity. But the word angel means messenger, and it certainly fits Jesus, who was sent as God's spokesman to the world and who in the Old Testament is often referred to as "the angel of the LORD." We are told that this angel has the key to the abyss. The abyss is a reference to hell. In the first chapter of this book Jesus is quoted as saying, "I have the keys of death and of Hades (or hell)." This angel lays hold of Satan and binds him with a great chain and locks him up in the in the abyss. Jesus has spoken of dealing with the devil in just these terms. One time when Jesus was accused of being in league with the

devil because he cast out demons, Jesus countered that argument by pointing out that then Satan would be fighting against his own interests.

To illustrate what was really happening, Jesus told them, “No one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.” Jesus is thus saying that by delivering the man from the devil’s possession he proved that he had tied up the devil and was therefore free to carry off the devil’s possessions.

The binding with chains should not be understood as handcuffs and leg irons. It is a reference to Jesus restricting the devil from doing what he wants. Jesus has set limits beyond which the devil cannot go. It is like tethering a ferocious animal to a tree. The beast can move around, but only within the restrictions of the tether. Listen to what Jude says: “The angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” The devil and all the fallen angels have been sealed under the judgment of God. They are unable to believe and be saved. The Gospel holds them in check. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, the devil is limited in his activity. He is not able to deceive the nations. The Bible says that the Son of Man was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. The more widely and more purely the Gospel is proclaimed, the shorter Satan’s chain becomes. This also explains how the devil is loosed for a short time. The Bible speaks of widespread apostasy during the last days of the world. Where the message of the Gospel is no longer heard or where it is so obscured by false teaching that the light of salvation shines very dimly, the devil is free to continue to deceive men and lead them astray to the eternal destruction of their souls. The devil can move farther on his chain whenever larger segments of the visible church become apostate and non-evangelical cults and sects proliferate.

Do you see what Christ has done for you? He has bound the devil. You do not have to live in fear of the devil. Because you live in Jesus Christ by faith, you are kept safe from Satan. The stronger One has rescued you and is holding you secure. This is true for everyone. Christ lived, died and rose again for all people. This truth is not a license for us to try and amuse ourselves by toying with Satan at the end of his tether. Ignoring Jesus and His Word and play ‘cat and rat’ with the devil spells disaster. The devil wins every time.

Now let’s look at what this means for you. The text goes on to say, <sup>4</sup> **I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** <sup>5</sup> **(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.** This passage is used by millennialists as proof for their teaching that prior to the Day of Judgment Christ will return and set up an earthly, visible kingdom in Palestine which will last for a thousand years. According to this view the “first resurrection” is the physical resurrection of the believing children of God, whose bodies will be raised so that they might rule with Christ in this visible kingdom. This doctrine teaches that the unbelievers will not be raised until the thousand years, the so called millennium, comes to an end.

Now take a look at what the Scripture says. It is not referring to saints in their resurrected bodies. It is referring to the souls of those who were martyred. When the children of God die they go to live with Christ in the glories of heaven. In the symbolism of this passage John is telling us the same thing. Nowhere does it say anything about being with Christ in an earthly kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem. Nor is anything mentioned about a double physical resurrection. The kingdom of Christ is an everlasting kingdom. He will rule forever and ever. Those who are Christ’s will also rule with Him forever.

John concluded this section with the words. **This is first resurrection.** The first resurrection is the one that occurs when a person is raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. This happened when the Holy Spirit instilled faith in your heart. He made you spiritually alive in Christ.

With this in mind we need to apply these words to the first readers of the Revelation. They were people who were living at the time of a bloody persecution. Brothers and sisters were being brutally treated and many of them were martyred because of their confession of Christ. It certainly had to seem to them that the devil and his henchmen in the cruel Roman government were winning at every turn in the road. It looks this way to us sometimes too, doesn't it?

But now John tells them that God has given him a vision of those friends who had punctuated their confession with their blood. Their bodies may have been put to the rack or sawn apart, or burned, but their souls were there on thrones and they were reigning with Christ. This outward appearance of going down in the devil's attack through persecution did not tell the whole story. What was not on the surface, what was not seen, is here revealed so that we know of the victory of those who have died believing in Jesus. They are even now enjoying the company of their Savior in heaven. Isn't this a comforting message? Those saints are, in fact, not dead. They are living with Christ in glory. It is just as Jesus told Martha: "He that believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me, will never die." This victory is ours right now.

The text concludes, **Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.** The souls will reign with Christ for a thousand years. When the second resurrection occurs the bodies of those souls will be raised up and reunited with their bodies. The thousand years for each believer is the time between his conversion and the resurrection of his body on the last day.

What a wonderful comfort for those whose loved ones had been martyred. They had not died after all. They merely moved out of the tent of their bodies and went to live with Jesus. Doesn't Jesus give us great words of comfort? What was true for those early martyrs is true of all who die believing that in Jesus their sins have been forgiven, washed away. We know that, in what seems to be total defeat, God's people still win the victory. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Amen.