#  The Millennium

Readings: Psalm 96. 10-13; Isa. 2. 1-4; Rev. 20:1-10

A whole galaxy of scriptures in both OT and NT refer to a day when the Kingdom of God will be seen visibly on this earth, i.e. the rule of God will be acknowledged universally. Ps. 72 is typical of many.

Rev. 20 alone speaks of the thousand years reign of Christ with His people - hence the term 'millennium’. Since many numbers have symbolic significance in Revelation we need not be dogmatic either way as to whether 1000 years is meant literally (I think it is), but that a substantial period of time is indicated is beyond dispute.

This period will be one of unprecedented righteousness, peace and joy, as God's King is universally acclaimed, Isa. 2. 4.

Why should the Christian be interested in this great period?

1. Christ taught His people to pray for the advent of God's kingdom: *'thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’.* It would be extraordinary for the church to pray these words for centuries and yet not be interested in what happens when the kingdom finally comes!

Two thoughts:

a. in one sense it is coming *incrementally* all the time through the preaching of the gospel - its frontiers are being extended worldwide, during the King's absence.

b. In the fullest sense it will come *absolutely* with the future return of Christ.

2. the vision of the future glory gives us courage for present trials: cp. the experience of Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. What they saw there was the kingdom in miniature - the power and coming of our 'Lord Jesus Christ' 2 Pet. 1. 16.

## Differing interpretations of the Millennium

Different views have been held by Bible believing Christians over the years, depending on one's overall scheme of prophecy:

premillennialism - teaches that the coming of the Lord *precedes* the millennial reign. This was the view of the early church, until approximately the end of the 3rd century AD. I believe that this is what scripture teaches.

amillennialism - this view rejects the possibility of a literal reign of Christ over the earth, and instead teaches that the millennium is to be understood spiritually of the present reign of the perfected saints in heaven during this age.

- Began to be popular around the 4th Century, as a reaction when some heretics interpreted the millennial reign in grossly material and carnal terms – cp. ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’ today. Amillennialism sees the church as heir of the spiritual promises to Israel.

postmillennialism - this view was popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. The idea is that through the spread of the gospel and consequent education and social improvement, the world will be progressively Christianized, ushering in the golden age, at the close of which Christ would come. This view has been discredited by the events of the 20th Century, but still adhered to by some. Generally associated with a much more positive engagement with culture.

## Vindication of God

The Millennial Kingdom will vindicate God in respect of:

1. His Son, Jesus Christ

 2. His suffering saints of all ages, including the NT church

 3. His dealings with Israel

### 1. Christ

It is surely precious to know that right here on this earth where He was rejected, scorned, and crucified, He shall be at last universally acknowledged. It is a divine decree: ‘He must reign’, 1 Cor. 15.

*'Jesus shall reign where ‘ere the sun*

*Doth his successive journeys run;*

*His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,*

*Till moon shall wax and wane no more'*

[**Isaac Watts** (paraphrase of Ps. 72)]

At Jerusalem city He was scorned and crucified. Yet ‘his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives’, Zech. 14. 4.

Rev. 1:7 *Behold, he comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*

### 2. Suffering saints

*If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him* (2 Tim. 2: 12)

*What? know ye not that the saints shall judge the world*? (1 Cor. 6).

Those who have shared his reproach will also share his glory cp. Mephibosheth (2 Sam 19:30).
‘. . . beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast neither his image ... and they lived (=came to life) and reigned with Christ’, Rev. 20. 4.

They will be priests of God and Christ, Rev 20:6. The priest is a mediator between God and men - suggesting that believers of this era will fulfil the role of intermediaries for the peoples of the millennial earth.

Sometimes people scoff at the notion of glorified saints visiting earth - but surely our Lord's post-resurrection appearances prepare us for this possibility? See Luke 24, John 20, Acts 1 etc.,

*‘The millennium is not the end of history, but the end of history as we know it’* (H. L. Ellison).

### 3. Israel

The millennium will be the vindication of God's longsuffering ways with Israel throughout their long and chequered history.

A glorious future yet awaits the nation, when as a result of fierce tribulation they will be refined, purified, and when they see Messiah Jesus returning in His glory, converted nationally. Their present state of judicial blindness will be dispelled, and they shall look on the One they pierced. They will say, *‘this is our God we have waited for Him* ...’, Isa. 25:9.

Then the complete fulfilment of the blessings covenanted to Abraham will come in respect of their possession of the land.

Jerusalem will be the capital of the millennial earth, in line with the many Old Testament prophecies e.g. Ezekiel 48.

*‘the name of the city from that day shall be Yahweh-Shammah’* (= the LORD is there).

The whole nation will be blessed - ancient tribal animosities and tensions will be no more.

## The nations of the world blessed

In the election of some (e.g. Israel as a nation), it is never God's intention to restrict blessing, rather that in blessing the elect, they in turn might be a blessing to others. As God said to Abram: *'I will bless you ... and you shall be a blessing'*, Gen. 12:2.

So the nations of the millennial earth will be blessed spiritually through regenerate Israel, Rom. 11. 15 *'if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world...what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead*?'

## All creation blessed

But the blessing will not be limited to mankind - all creation will benefit. The earth is always linked to man’s fortunes, just as with Israel and the Promised Land.

‘The creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' Rom 8:21.

Not a cosmic bonfire, but a wonderful liberation awaits our world! The animal kingdom will be less ferocious, wild beasts will become docile, Isa. 11:6-9. In agriculture, the earth will yield her increase Ezek. 36:29-30. Whilst these ideas are often expressed poetically, we must not spiritualize them to such an extent that they are emptied of their obvious import.

**Rebellion**

And yet sadly, it will all end in judgement. Even after such a long era of Messiah’s perfect reign! At length the great deceiver will loosed for ‘a little season’. During that time he will foment such rebellion that the judgement of God will fall, concluding this phase of God's eternal kingdom, and ushering in the final Great White Throne judgement and ‘the eternal state’. This will truly show how hopelessly reprobate is the heart of man, apart from God’s grace.

## So how should all this affect me here and now?

1. It should be the object of our ***longing*** - every believer desires not only the coming of their Lord, but surely also His vindication and reign. And if God is going to publicly acknowledge Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is it too big a thing to openly confess Him as my Lord even today?
2. We should be ***people of hope***. This world’s present evils, oppressions, and wickedness will soon be brought to an end. After the nightmare of man’s misrule, God’s prefect King will be in control, no wonder the psalmist is exultant, Pss. 96-99! Here is pure gospel for a fractured and hopeless world. Earnest evangelism that others too may share in the first resurrection to live and reign with Christ.
3. Believers will surely wish to be as useful as possible to their Lord both now and in that day. Cp. the parables of stewardship:-

- Parable of the **talents** "I will make you ruler over many things..', Matt. 25.

- Parable of the **pounds** ‘have authority over ten cities’, Luke 19.

Our degree of faithfulness in service and stewardship of our Lord's gifts now will determine our position and capacity to serve in His heavenly administration. Whilst therefore we ardently watch and pray for the coming of God's kingdom, let us also see to it that by His grace we develop character and capacity down here which will fit us for honourable service then.