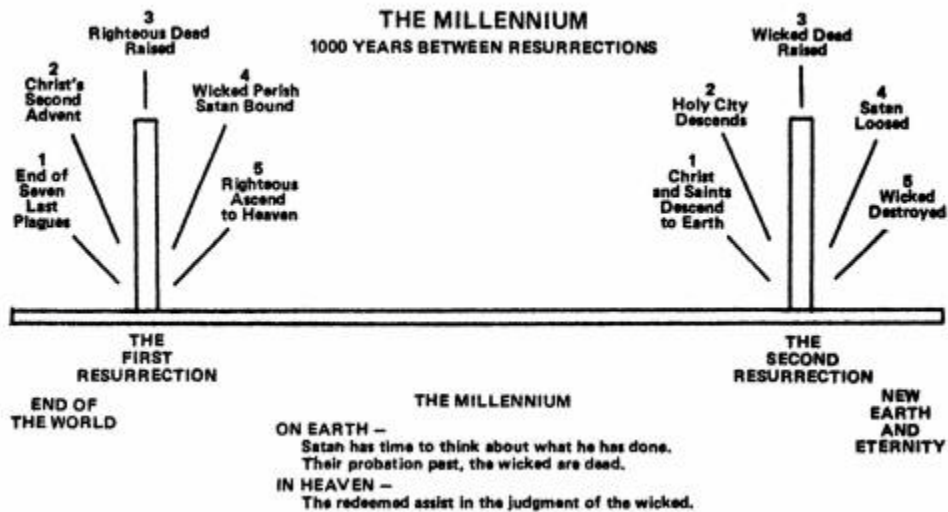


My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #7: "The Millennium"



The Thousand Year Reign of the Saved

In Jeremiah, we find a very strange picture of this earth. In vision Jeremiah sees an empty, dark earth. The cities are broken down, the people are gone, and even the birds have fled.

Jeremiah 4:23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. 24 I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. 25 I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. 26 I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.

What does this strange dirge mean? Is it a prophecy of what will happen to this earth at the end of time? It reminds me of the following account of a visit to an abandoned mining town.

Ghost Town

Taken from Macartney's Illustrations pg. 322

"One day I paid a visit to an abandoned mining town in Nevada near the California line. Around the town were great heaps of ore and refuse at the forsaken shafts. Through the town ran one broad street, flanked by the stores with their typical high board fronts. It was weird and almost uncanny to walk through the silent place and try to picture it as it must have been when it was a thriving, prosperous, mining town. Grass was now growing on the street and between the planks of the boardwalks in front of

Lesson 7: The Millennium

the shops and stores. The signs which told of a boarding house, meat shop, drug store, saloon, and bank were still there; but what they had advertised had long since vanished.

"On each side of the town stood a church, as empty and silent as the saloons and gambling dens whose evil influence they had sought to counteract. Only the cemetery was inhabited, and its inhabitants were unable to speak of the life they had once known in that now silent place.

"I thought of the ambitions, the joys and sorrows, the hatreds and the affections, which once had surged in the hearts of those who dwelt there. What now had become of that population? Not all of them were dead, for the town had been abandoned only a few years. But all of them were gone elsewhere. What once in this town had engrossed their interests and desires meant nothing to them now. Their life and their interests were elsewhere.

"To one familiar with the sayings of Christ about his second advent, this silent, empty, and deserted town spoke of the abandonments and evacuation and separations of the last great Day. It seemed to be a perfect picture of how in that great day all the values of this world will lose their significance, as meaningless as the empty shops and untenanted shanties of the mining town, and how all that which now engages our thought and our energy, and is the object of our desire, will become as nothing."

What will it be like after Jesus comes? What is the millennium, and when does it begin? Where will the righteous be during that time? What is the "bottomless pit" of Revelation 20 that Satan will be bound to during this time?

These questions and others are answered in the Bible. Today's lesson helps us to see the sequence of events that will take place as the history of this sinful earth comes to a close.

How will Satan spend his time during the thousand years when he is bound? There won't be much to do in a bottomless pit. There will be no one to tempt, no human beings to harass. He will have no effective way of fighting God's kingdom. What will occupy his time? The only thing he will be able to do is think. With time weighing heavily upon him and nothing to do, the memory of his cruelty and the misery he has created will certainly overwhelm his thinking. It will be too late for him to repent and undo the atrocities that he has instigated.

The following story is about a man who, after living a life of crime, was suddenly given time, lots of time, to think. Fortunately, for him, it was not too late to change.

Harry Orchard

Adapted from *'Harry Orchard The Man God Made Again An Autobiography*

A loud, official knock sounded at the door of the hotel room. The sheriff stood outside. "Orchard, you're under arrest," he stated.

Shortly, Harry Orchard found himself in the county jail. That day marked the end of a long career in organized crime.

Life began for him in 1866 on a farm near Toronto, Canada. Every Sunday he was sent to church. By the age of 22 he married a sweet Scottish lassie and together they worked to establish their home. It was a happy home and all seemed to be going well. Life was off to a good start.

After four or five years of marriage however, plagued by debt, Harry began taking steps that led him down the wrong path. First it was an occasional drink and a game of cards. Next came frequent gambling and many nights away from home. Little dishonesties crept into his business practices.

Lesson 7: The Millennium

One winter day Harry and his wife went to visit an uncle that was a minister. They intended to stay a day or two, but an unexpected blizzard snowed them in for two weeks. During this time God spoke to his heart, and Harry gave his heart to Jesus. He vowed to turn his back on the world and live for God. Peace returned to their home.

Unfortunately, Satan was there to destroy that decision. Back home, Harry had a court case pending where he had to face a previous dishonesty in his business. He was determined to confess the whole thing and make it right, but at the moment of truth he weakened and covered the whole affair with lies.

His vow to God was broken, his new Christian experience was gone. From then on Harry plunged deeper and deeper into sin. Desperate for money, Harry set fire to his business, collected the insurance, then skipped the country with a friend's wife.

Alone before long, he eventually moved to Idaho and began working in the mines in 1899. Those were the days of the "wild, woolly west." Crime was prevalent, and labor unions ruled the country with a reign of terror. At first, Orchard despised the ruthless tactics used by the unions. Later, however, he became convinced that their cause was justified. The cruelty used by officials who were sent in to correct the situation enraged him. He didn't understand that two wrongs do not make a right.

He gave himself over to getting revenge. For years he was a skillful and willing tool for the leaders of the labor unions who were anxious to remove any man that stood in their way. For a price, he became guilty of the blood of scores of innocent people.

The day of reckoning finally came. After taking the life of former Governor Frank Steunenberg of Idaho, he found himself for the first time behind bars. It was a jarring experience. He felt like a caged animal. Deprived of his freedom he had time to do something that he hadn't done for years. He had time to think. In fact, he had nothing to do but think. As he lay in his cell, the dreadful deeds of the past forced their way into his consciousness.

Beginning with his boyhood, each scene marched through his mind. As he reflected, conviction and remorse began to take hold of him. Desperately he tried to fight these feelings but to no avail. For weeks the struggle continued. Nights passed where he was unable to close his eyes all night due to the thoughts that chased each other wildly through his mind.

After three long weeks in the local county jail, he was moved to the penitentiary at Boise for "safekeeping." The struggle in his mind intensified. He was placed in solitary confinement. His meals were handed to him in silence. For ten days he was not permitted to communicate with anyone in any way. This angered him, but here again there was nothing to do but think without interruption.

Try as he would he could not get away from those terrible scenes that seemed to haunt him. He was not deeply concerned with the charges that were being brought against him, for though he was guilty, he knew it would not be difficult for the labor union leaders to build an alibi to acquit him. He also knew that any money needed to buy his freedom would be used.

It was the eternal side of life that troubled him now. He often had boasted that he did not believe in God, but deep in his secret heart he believed there was a God and that he must face Him. Alone and imprisoned, he finally wondered if he could ever make his peace with God.

As he realized how terrible his life had been, the guilt pressed him down with a weight that seemed to be more than he could bear. The devil harassed him with the thought that he had gone too far and that God would not listen to his cry. Suicide was an appealing thought until he would realize that he was not ready to die.

Lesson 7: The Millennium

The thought came forcibly to his mind that if he would frankly confess his terrible deeds, God might still forgive him. Then the seriousness of his crimes would plague him again and banish the possibility of forgiveness from his mind.

Days and weeks passed with this towering question ever on his mind. At times he thought he would fight it out in court until acquitted and *then* change his life and seek God's mercy and forgiveness, but this plan brought nothing but darkness. Only one course of action brought him the tiniest ray of hope--to make a full confession regardless of the consequences.

After months of deliberating, he virtually came to this decision. Then he would think that he could never go through with it. The thought of the shock it would be to the world, and the monster that he would be pictured as, were appalling to him. He felt that he could make public his confession only if he could receive God's forgiveness and then die. He wanted the earth to swallow him up so that he would never have to look upon the face of man again.

The mental agony was terrible. The one thing that overshadowed all others and made the rest sink into insignificance was the desire to first of all make his peace with God. When he surrendered, his cold, hard heart began to melt, and the first real tears in years came to his eyes. What a relief they were! That night he made a solemn vow--to confess to all men the terrible sins of his evil life. The following morning he began to write out his awful confession which he later gave to the world from the witness stand.

When the trial came, the labor union leaders were there to prove his testimony false since it laid bare their own criminal plans and actions. Lawyers were hired to confuse him and prove his story false. Throughout the grueling days of cross examination, he clung to God to help him tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, though he knew that his plea of guilty carried with it nothing but the death sentence. When the lawyers finished cross-examining him, they were constrained to express their amazement at the consistency of his long sordid story. When he was finished, he was sentenced to be hung. But in his heart there was peace, for now he knew he was forgiven and had become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Not long after being returned to the penitentiary, he heard that his sentence was being commuted from a death sentence to a sentence of life imprisonment. As he faced the thought of life imprisonment, he felt overwhelmed. Dying seemed easier than living. Again he struggled as he learned to submit to the will of God for him.

Life was not easy in the prison, but he determined by the grace of God to make the best of it. Day by day he went to his Saviour for the help that he needed in struggling with the nature and habits that had controlled him for so long.

God worked miraculously to change him. A chaplain proved to be a valuable spiritual counselor to him and he eventually had the joyous privilege of following Christ's example of being baptized. He saw a touching revelation of the love of God when Julian Steunenberg, the son of the former governor whom Orchard had murdered, came to see him to tell him that he and his mother had forgiven him and wanted only for him to turn to God for forgiveness and the salvation of his soul.

For nearly fifty years Orchard walked the grounds and halls of prison. He made himself as useful as he could and became a financial asset instead of a burden to the state. At his death his one expressed wish to be buried outside of the penitentiary was granted to him.

In his personal testimony he states, "Were I to live a thousand years, and had to spend every one of them in prison, I would still say that I am glad in my heart that I burned all the bridges behind me when I turned my back upon the old life of sin that dragged me down to the committing of such terrible crimes."

Lesson 7: The Millennium

By the time of his death at the age of eighty-eight, the hardened expression and shifty eyes of the criminal that had first entered the prison had been changed. The lines of his face seemed to be etched with kindness and love. A gentleness seemed to radiate from his presence. God had re-made him.

It is helpful to know the answers to questions about the millennium, but the most important questions are, "Am I ready for Jesus' coming?" "Is my heart right before God?" The answer to these questions will determine where each of us will be, not only during the millennium, but throughout eternity. May God be with you as you seek daily to know that there is nothing between your soul and the Saviour.