

## A VERY JEWISH CHAPTER

Chapter 20 of Revelation is perhaps, the ***most divisive chapter in the entire book***. The prophecy of the “millennium”, or thousand-year reign of Christ has effectively split Christendom into three. There are the ***pre-millennialists; post-millennialists; and a-millennialists***, each with their notable champions.

Basically, that comes down to Christ coming before His thousand-year reign, after the thousand years, or if there is even a literal thousand-year reign at all.

We’ll talk more about that this evening. But here’s the point for this morning; it’s little wonder that Christianity is somewhat hazy on this chapter because this is perhaps, the ***most Jewish chapter in the entire Revelation!***

***The thousand-year reign of the Messiah*** is not a New Testament idea, it is Old Testament, the history goes back to at least 700 BC when the remnant of Israel was in Babylon and then there was a major shift in understanding the Messianic promise around 100 BC.

- The ***millennium*** is an Old Testament concept.
- The imagery of the ***lake of burning sulfur*** is based in Old Testament history.
- The imagery of the ***abyss or pit***, is based in ancient Jewish thought.
- And our focus for this morning; the ***Book of Life*** goes all the way back to the early pages of the Old Testament. Moses was willing to be blotted out of the BOOK OF LIFE, (Exo. 32:32) if it would save his people. 5 centuries later, David asked that the wicked be blotted out of the BOOK OF LIFE (Ps. 69:28). 3 centuries after that, Isaiah spoke of those written among the living. And of course, the Apostle Paul picks up on THE BOOK OF LIFE (Php. 4:3), himself, when writing to the church in Philippi.

In chapter 20, the books are balanced, and THE BOOK is honored.

## THE BOOK OF LIFE

### Rev. 20

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a ***great white throne*** and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the ***dead, small and great, standing before God***, and ***books were opened***. And ***another book was opened, which is the Book of Life***. And the dead were judged ***according to their works***, by the things which were written in the books. <sup>13</sup> The ***sea gave up the dead who were in it***, and ***Death and Hades delivered up the dead*** who were in them. And they were ***judged, each one according to his works***. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were cast into the ***lake of fire. This is the second death***. <sup>15</sup> And anyone ***not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire***.

It’s a certain thing! For nearly 4000 years, God has kept this ***theme of a BOOK OF LIFE a constant***. If you are not in it, you are excluded from God’s Kingdom and you suffer the “second death” which is eternal.

In our last session in the midweek study, the question came up, ***how differently might we live if we truly had our priorities based in the eternal?*** -Not the afterlife, the eternal. Eternal started long before we were here, includes the present, and then near, and distant future. How differently might we invest ourselves, or prioritize our schedules or ambitions?

***There are a lot of documents that are important to have our name:*** our passports, our wedding certificates, our college diploma; but nothing... absolutely nothing is more important than this divine document called THE BOOK OF LIFE. No document is older or more perfectly kept. There are no errors, there won’t be any slipping in on a technicality; there won’t be any wrongful omissions.

## ***So, how does one's name end up in this most important book of all creation, all the universe?***

Those judged "according to their works." We can check back to the original language and we'll find that it says the same thing, "***according to their works.***"

***What does that mean?*** Do we work for our salvation?

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

<sup>9</sup> **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.

***Since Scripture doesn't contradict itself***, the Book is speaking to something grander, which we'll discover in a moment. But, even so, we can't ignore this side of the salvation story: for **some four millennia God has emphasized that; *each of us is presently writing their own destiny within the offer*** of His Grace. God empowers, God saves, and God judges; but each of us, right now, **according to our own works**; is writing into our own eternal destiny.

## **FAITH AND WORKS**

Grace is crucial, faith is involved, and works are involved; each of these elements are crucial to have one's name in this great BOOK OF LIFE. So, ***just how do these elements fit together?***

***Let's start with James.***

Tradition has it that James originally heard of the Apostle Paul's teaching second hand, and he was ***worried about an imbalance on faith***. Later when they met face to face, they found they were in complete agreement. But before that time, James sent out this letter:

**James 2**

(NKJV) <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "**You have faith, and I have works.**" **Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.** <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! <sup>20</sup> But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?** <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> Do you see that **faith was working together with his works**, and **by works faith was made perfect?** <sup>23</sup> And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see then that a **man is justified by works, and not by faith only.**

<sup>25</sup> Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

<sup>26</sup> For as the **body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.**

If there was ever a time for this teaching, it is today. ***It has been said that in the millennial generation, nothing is more important than relationship.*** Even in the older generation, there are many people who say they join this or that church because they feel that they "fit." Relationship is big!

A small vignette: In the district's licensing board; we are seeing a significant trend in young up-coming pastors and churches. ***They are all about relationship above everything else.*** One of our most promising young pastors asked the District Superintendent, "*Isn't it all about relationship?*" -To which Jon replied, "*No, it's all about truth. Relationship is important, but it is not number one!*"

***Faith rests in relationship. It is relationship with Christ.*** "What a friend I have in Jesus." "Come just as you are." God's love is unconditional. That's true, but a relationship with God begins with God's answer to ***perfect justice***; the ***punishment on the cross***; and **justice is very conditional.**

Here's the balancing point: A genuine relationship with Christ is He in you, and you in Him. When you are merged with God, guess what! -You WILL be changed! Scripture uses the word "transformed"; there is a transformation of the human heart, soul, and mind. Being transformed by God displays very specific conditions. There is *fruit* in your spirit, and there are *gifts* that become active.

**That's why James is saying faith and relationship are very conditional.** He points out that even demons believe; so don't hang your hat on that. His conclusion is very pointed: ***faith without works is dead***.

***The Greek used there is "nekros", which means, a corpse.*** Even if you have the most sincere faith, but have no works, James says your faith is a corpse!

Faith is vital, there is no denying that; but for the sake of the whole picture, keep this in mind: **It is possible for one's faith to be a corpse.**

So, let's explore this dynamic of works a little further...

## WHAT DO WORKS REALLY DO?

Before we list a few things James tells us, ***let's requalify that our own "works" cannot possibly save us***, we are too imperfect. That being said, here is the part works play in getting our name into the BOOK OF LIFE.

### **Works brings life to faith.**

Faith with no physical body is a ghost. It just floats around, it doesn't really follow God because God commands the actions of demonstrated love. It's a ghost; invisible to the world, nothing more than a wisp of thought or sentiment in someone's mind.

### **Works "completes" faith.**

The word "complete" in the original Greek means to perfect something, to make it what it is supposed to be. The word-for word translation in **James 2:22**, says of Abraham; ***"faith worked with the works of him"***; ***faith co-operated with works***. That is a balanced relationship with God!

***A great example of physical action "completing" faith, is the missionaries.*** I've had the blessing of knowing a few missionaries, at this point, from their *initial sense of call* to the *completion of their service*. Let me tell you; they had developed into ***very different people***. It isn't that they've simply "matured", in pouring their *physical lives* into their faith, they have experienced things, both painful and pleasant, ***they prove that what we experience physically changes us inwardly***. So, ***imagine, how a person might change if they experience God; if in their "works" they experience God working!***

### **Works "justifies" faith.**

You don't have to be a Christian to understand this one! We have a saying, *"Put your money where your mouth is."* Last summer we did a tremendous midweek study called "THE TRUTH PROJECT." Dr. Del Tackett asked James' question this way, "Do you really believe that what you believe is really real?"

***"Justified" (dikaioo) in the original Greek means to make right, to show***, as well as to render just or innocent. Works are *faith manifested*; works are faith that has proven its really there.

That is what “works” does for faith, but let’s pair down to an even more basic question: ***what exactly do the Bible authors mean when they use that word, “works”?***

The original Greek word is “**ergon**”, where we get our word “**energy**.” It is *defined as toil, as in effort or occupation*. The Merriam-Webster dictionary has a great definition for “**occupation**”; ***the principal business of one’s life.***

Now here is where faith and works really come together. When you get into the “**principal business**” of ***your life***, you are not simply talking about a few *casual activities*; you are talking about what you DO as a direct consequence of what you ARE.

It is a basic rule to teaching, clinical psychology, counselling, and just plain common sense; if a person is really *changed*, their *behavior* will change.

When the BOOK OF LIFE judges according to our works, it is ***discerning the inner nature of a person by the outer evidence.***

## FAITH, WORKS, AND THE BOOK OF LIFE

For over 4000 years, God has expressed this way of thinking to humanity:

And ***another book was opened, which is the Book of Life***. And the dead were judged ***according to their works***, by the things which were written in the books. ... And anyone ***not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.***

***Now, please get this right. ...The challenge here isn’t as silly or simplistic as:*** You’d better get out there and do some God-stuff (*pass out tracks, slip the name of God into at least 5 conversations every day, be nice to someone*).

***As we grow up in faith***, we understand more deeply God’s desire and His ways. A five-year-old might grasp that God LOVES; but their concept of love doesn’t go any deeper than being “nice.”

However, after walking with God, ten, twenty, or fifty years, our concept of Godly love should be far more profound. Now it understands it’s not about being “nice”, but the depth of compassion. It’s not being friendly, but caring for the welfare, eternal and physical, of another.

If God has really transformed us inside; one’s nature changes; if the nature has changed in a Godly way, then there will be Godly actions. And real Godly actions aren’t simply “nice”, they impact the eternity of others.

As our WORKS “co-operate” with our FAITH, we are writing our destiny in God’s book of life... ***or we are NOT.*** God’s book, God’s judgment, God’s power; but our “penmanship.”

Let God’s word leave us with this challenge: ***In the coming week, what will your life write in God’s book? What will your outer life write about your inner condition?***