

When The Saints Come Marching In!

This past Friday was the 500th Birthday of the Great Reformer John Calvin!

It is a shame when people think of John Calvin the first thing they think of is Calvinism, the theological system that came to be called by Calvin's name. Bible believing Christians often disagree on individual points of Calvinism, but all of us should be grateful for the impact this man had for Jesus Christ.

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, France. Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church when Calvin was eight years old. Like his father, Calvin began a career as a lawyer. At the age of just 23 and living in Paris as a professor he wrote a commentary on a work by the Philosopher Seneca. There were no indications he would lead anything but a secular life.

But then God saved John Calvin! And influenced by the Bible and Martin Luther John Calvin began to speak ideas that came directly from the Bible. The authorities in Paris didn't like that much and Calvin and a friend had to flee for their lives.

In 1536 at the age of just 27 John Calvin wrote the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The first edition was only 6 chapters and was more like *The Purpose Driven Life* than a long theological treatise. To a continent starving for Biblical truth the book had unbelievable impact! People were hungering for an explanation of what the Christian life really was like, and the *Institutes* filled that void, becoming responsible for the conversion of thousands of people.

That same year Calvin found himself fleeing again, thinking to relocate to Strasbourg. His trip took him through Geneva, a safe city for Protestants, and he intended to spend just one night on his way to Strasbourg. But God had other plans! When William Farel, leader of the church there, heard the author of the *Institutes* was in town at the bed and breakfast, he came to see him.

Farel begged him to stay. Calvin refused, saying he was a writer, not a pastor or administrator. Farel was so upset he looked right at Calvin and swore a great oath that God would curse John Calvin's studies unless he stayed at Geneva! Calvin had always had a tender conscience, and later wrote, "I felt as if God from Heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to stop me in my course...and I was so terror stricken that I did not continue my journey."

Over the next 26 years, except for a brief 3 year exile, John Calvin stayed in Geneva, and it became a hub of evangelical Christianity.

Calvin preached through nearly every book of the Bible, and several times updated the *Institutes* to talk about nearly every topic in the Bible; the final edition has 80 chapters! The final edition, though, began with the same sentence as the first: "Our true and genuine wisdom can be summed up as the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." Calvin thoroughly understood that we are sinners in need of salvation which only comes by God's grace through our faith!

Every facet of life in Geneva was affected positively by the Word of God and the preaching of God's grace. Hardly ever before had all people in a city felt so loved; rarely had such steps been taken to alleviate poverty. Calvin encouraged congregational praise, even setting music to a number of the Psalms himself!

Geneva developed such a reputation as a place ablaze with the truth of the gospel that people came from all over Europe to see what God was doing in Geneva. More than one visitor remarked that Geneva in those days was the finest expression of the Christian faith they had ever seen. Geneva became a missionary sending center for the Biblical Christian faith throughout Europe and even as far away as Brazil. John Knox called Geneva "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles."

To understand John Calvin you must first understand his love for the Lord and his love for the teachings of the Bible. Calvin's seal pictured a burning heart in a hand! He was a humble man and did not want to be made much of. So when he died he insisted they bury him in an unknown grave in a common cemetery to ensure his grave would not become a pilgrimage site. Ever the servant, during the plagues he was willing to go and minister to the highly contagious victims.

But understand that even though great things were happening in Geneva it did not mean there were not days of sorrow for the man, his family and Geneva. His health was often affected by trouble with digestion, his lungs, and the gout. John Calvin and his wife lost three children who all were born but died within a few days after birth. He was mercilessly ridiculed even in his lifetime by hostile critics. Sometimes people would try to physically intimidate him before, during and after church services. Numerous people died of the plague even within that hallowed city. In short, despite the amazing things that happened in Geneva during those years, the effects of the fall were still very evident.

Geneva during the days of John Calvin was one of the special examples of times when a large number of Christians have tasted a little of Heaven on earth. But there is a coming age of a thousand years that will truly be unique, a thousand years when Satan won't be around, but Jesus will be!

Read Revelation 20:1-6 PRAY!

Now when it comes to Bible prophecy, the most hotly debated topic after the Rapture is the Millennium.

The Word Millennium comes from two Latin words: "Milli" means a thousand and "annum" means year. Millennium means a thousand years.

The phrase 1,000 years, as in a time directly after the Second Coming of Christ, occurs only here in the Bible.

For some that is enough to say there can't possibly be a thousand year reign of Christ on earth after His Second Coming.

There are two answers to that charge:

First, The Old Testament prophets did not place it as a thousand years, but in numerous passages they speak of a time that is vastly different than the current age but not quite the New Earth yet. That time can only be what John refers to in Revelation 20.

Secondly, John speaks of the thousand years six times in seven verses here, so emphatically stating that this time will last for a thousand years after Christ's

second coming that it becomes the only way someone who reads the Bible literally can take it!

Now having said that much, we can define the three main millennial views.

The Three Main Millennial Views:

1. The Amillennial view- There is NO 1,000 year reign of Christ in earth.

“A” before something negates what comes next!

You go to a museum to think, to an amusement park not to think!
An Atheist does not believe in God.

An Amillennialist does not believe in a literal millennium.

To the Amillennialist all of the Old Testament prophets’ predictions of a golden age, along with Revelation 20, are to be understood as spiritualized language to represent the expanding kingdom of God, which is happening now spiritually.

2. The Postmillennial view- The 2nd Coming is AFTER the millennium.

In this view the millennium is not necessarily a literal thousand years.

To the Postmillennialist the church will be so successful in changing the world in its global efforts that the last part of the church age will be the millennial golden age, after which Christ will return to earth.

In both these views promises made to Israel of a literal reign of the Messiah from David’s throne in Israel were forfeited when Israel disobeyed God. Those promises are then spiritually applied to the church.

3. The Premillennial view- The millennium is AFTER the 2nd Coming.

In this view the millennium is a literal thousand years.

This view follows the order presented in Revelation 19-20, 2nd Coming, then the millennium.

This view sees the millennium as a key part of God fulfilling the unconditional Old Testament promises to Israel of a literal reign of the Messiah from David's throne in Israel.

This view alone interprets Revelation 20 literally!

Turn to Acts 1:6-8.

This would have been the perfect time for Jesus to tell his disciples, "you've got it all wrong, Israel has lost those promises forever."

In Acts 1:6-8 Jesus affirms two things: there is a time coming in the future set to restore the Kingdom to Israel (in fulfillment of Old Testament promises), and that in the mean time His disciples are to be witnesses (the church age).

Turn to Daniel 9:24-27

Now during our time in Revelation we have several times referred back to Daniel 9 because it is so key in understanding the seven year tribulation.

Daniel prophecies of seventy sevens, or weeks, to come, or 490 years, with some time passing between the first 69 sevens, 483 years, and the seventieth seven the last seven years.

The seventieth week of Daniel is understood by Bible scholars to be the seven year tribulation spoken of in Revelation 6-19.

Daniel 9:24 tells us what will happen at the end of the seventy weeks, which is the end of the tribulation.

The rebellion brought to an end!
A stop to sin!
Injustice wiped away!
Everlasting righteousness brought in!

We saw last week that Christ will return and at the Battle of Armageddon defeat the rebellion brought against Him!

The other things mentioned are the kinds of conditions that will prevail during the 1,000 year rule of Christ on earth, the millennium!

Revelation 20 lays it out nicely for us!

The Two Great Truths for Earth During the Millennium:

1. Satan won't be around! V. 1-3

I can't tell you how excited I get thinking about this!

A time coming when Satan won't be able to deceive the nations at all for a thousand years.

These three verses alone are why I could never in any associate the millennium with the church, as the Post Mil and A Mil views seem to do.

Peter told us what Satan is able to do during the church age:

“Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for anyone he can devour.” -1 Peter 5:8

Satan constantly is at work messing things up on earth right now as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience.

Back in chapter thirteen John told us that Michael was going to fight Satan and throw him down just to earth, and for the last three and a half years of the tribulation he was going to make earth a living hell for Israel and whoever else turns to God during that time.

But in Revelation 19 we learned that Jesus will have finally returned and whooped the antichrist and his forces at the battle of Armageddon.

While Satan is standing there with his mouth wide open at the loss of his forces, 20:1 tells us an angel (maybe Michael again?) will chain him up and throw him in the abyss!

Hallelujah!

The millennium might not be the new earth just yet, but what a place it will be without Satan around!

Now we'll talk about the short time of his release and final incarceration next time!

But just try to imagine earth without Satan's sinister influence!

What a time it will be!

2. Jesus will be on earth during the millennium! V. 4-6

It's pretty cool to think of Satan not being around, but it's even cooler to think of Jesus reigning on earth from Jerusalem for a thousand years on a Satan-free earth!

Israel will have her biblical borders!

Jerusalem will be the capitol of the earth!

Jesus will reign from David's throne!

The Temple will be at its most glorious!

Now there's some debate about which people will be on earth during the millennium.

At the start of it there won't be any non-Christians, because they will have perished in the battle of Armageddon.

Those among Israel and the nations who turned to Jesus will be alive as it starts. Many think they will continue to have children who have children who have children throughout the millennium. This set of people in the millennium would be the only ones able to die during the 1,000 years.

Verse four lets us know the martyrs of the tribulation will also come back to life and live during this time, presumably with glorified bodies.

There is some debate about whether the rest of the saints from Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church will be on earth. I think we will be!

Verse four tells us John saw people sitting on thrones and given authority to judge.

That's cool, because John had once before heard Jesus say this:

Jesus said to them, “I assure you: In the Messianic Age, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life.” -Matthew 19:28-29

That means John may have seen the back of his own head again!

WOW! Peter and John and James reigning on earth with Jesus!

Do you remember the question Paul asked the saints in Corinth?

“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest cases? Do you not know we will judge angels- not to speak of things pertaining to this life?” -I Cor. 6:2-3

Somehow during the millennium there will be meaningful oversight for us!

Isaiah 2:1-4 tells us earth will flourish with the knowledge of Jesus during this time, and people will stream from the nations to worship Jesus in Jerusalem! Jesus will settle any disputes among the nations and there won't be any war.

What Antichrist could only deliver for a matter of months Jesus will be able to achieve for a thousand years!

When people ask you if you've been to Jerusalem yet, you tell them, “not yet, but I'm going there someday!”

I think it's neat to think of being in my glorified body giving spiritual advice to the children born during that time.

Health will also flourish in the millennium. Isaiah 65 tells us there will be no such thing as a child dying young then, and the average lifespan will easily surpass a hundred years. The wolf and the lamb will eat together during that time, lions will again be vegetarians, and no evil will happen on God's entire holy mountain!

Now verse five says the rest of the dead don't come to life until those 1,000 years are over. I take that to mean that's when the judgment of the unsaved will come, after this amazing thousand years! That's what we'll talk about next time...

Let's Pray!