

Why Premillennial?

Selected Scriptures

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Tonight, we come to the issue of why is it that we believe that Christ will return before a literal millennial reign on this earth. Why are we premillennial? Cornelius Plantinga of Calvin Seminary wrote a book entitled *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*. It's a great title, isn't it? We often feel that way. Perhaps you felt that way on the job, you felt that way at school, you felt that way in your home, you felt that way in the world at large. Things are just not the way they're supposed to be. Plantinga writes,

“Central (is the Christian understanding of the world) in the Christian understanding of the world is a concept of the way things are supposed to be. They ought to be as designed and intended by God.” [But he continues,] “Things are not that way at all. Human wrongdoing mars every adult's workday” [many of you can confess to that], “every child's school day and every vacationer's holiday.” [His point is you cannot get away from the fact that the world that we live in is simply not the way it's supposed to be.] He goes on, “A moment's reflection yields to memories and images of wrongdoing that are so commonplace we accept them as normal.”

Think about it for a moment, the way things ought to be. We understand that. There really lies in each of our hearts a longing for things to be the way they're supposed to be. The hope of a perfect world hangs in the air of this planet like the thick air of a Mobile afternoon. Call it Eden, call it utopia, call it Shangri-La, call it El Dorado.

Everywhere, man longs for a perfect place and a perfect world; a world where there is peace instead of war, a world where there is justice for those who have been oppressed, a world where there is honesty in business, where there is loyalty in relationships, where there is good will among all people, where there is mutual respect and genuine concern for others, and where there is a deep and heartfelt abiding love for God our Creator. And we all long for such a time.

And according to Scripture, such a time is coming. And it's not called utopia or Shangri-La or El Dorado, but the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. There will be a future thousand-year period of

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time when Christ will rule a literal world empire on this planet on which we live. That is what we believe the Bible teaches. But is a future, literal millennial kingdom biblically defensible? What does the Bible say? That's always the question we need to come back to. What does the Bible say? Not what have we been taught, what does the church believe in which we, which we attend, but what does the Bible teach?

There are those who seriously disagree with the position that I've just mentioned to you - postmillennialists and amillennialists. They say that premillennialism will not stand up to the test of Scripture. So, I want us to examine the arguments against the position we hold tonight. And then I want us to walk through the arguments that support premillennialism.

But before we do that, let's start with a brief history of the conflict surrounding this issue of the millennium. When you look back in time at the very beginning after the closing of the canon, you come to a group of men called the apostolic fathers. They are simply those who knew or were instructed by either the apostles themselves or the disciples of the apostles. So, they're within one or two generations of the apostles that were alive during the first century.

And when you look at some of the primary names of the first century, you find that they were premillennialists - Clement, the bishop of Rome, Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch. And then when you look at various miscellaneous writings like the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas - all in the first century and under the writings and auspices of the apostolic fathers - you find that they were premillennial.

Most of these men had direct contact either with the apostle John or with Polycarp, John's most famous disciple. And while they write that their view of premillennialism was built on the Old Testament prophets and the teaching of our Lord, they also asserted that the most direct teaching about the premillennial reign of Christ is found in the book of Revelation - the writing of course of the apostle John, whom these men either knew or who were discipled by men discipled by John. And they were premillennialists.

When you come to the second century, you find similarly other men like Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr expected a literal fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and David during the coming millennium. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, was also premillennial in his view; Tertullian

of Africa. You see in this list the greatest names of the early church. This is true through the second century.

Now, when you come to the third century through the Reformation, things begin to change. Like the first two centuries, there were in the third century a number of leaders who embraced premillennialism; men like Cyprian of Carthage, bishop of Carthage. But it was during the late third and early fourth centuries that the position of amillennialism (that is, there is no literal future kingdom, that whatever millennium means it's happening here and now), this view displaced premillennialism. Why did that happen in the late third and early fourth centuries? Well, there really are two reasons that are obvious and apparent. One of them is the legalization of Christianity by Constantine with the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. What occurred as a result was there was a sort of increased anti-Semitism. Well, with that, of course, came the idea of we don't want the place that Israel occupies to be so great, and so, there was a distancing from the position. Also, when Constantine legalized Christianity, it made the idea of a Christian empire, the great ideal to look forward to. And so, the idea of the millennial reign (as it's taught in the Old Testament and in the New) began to wane in popularity.

A second cause was the rise of what's called the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation. When we look at the Bible, we take a grammatical historical approach. We interpret the text of Scripture in the same way that you would interpret any other human document. But the allegorical approach arose which was an approach to Scripture that said let's look for layers of meaning.

So, for example, every time in the allegorical approach you come across the word "Jerusalem", it means several things. On a literal level, it means that city over in Israel that was the capital of David's kingdom. But it can also mean the church. It can also mean the heavenly Jerusalem, all at the same time in the same verse. So, suddenly, you have these layers of meaning that you're trying to discern what the Scripture's teaching.

And this approach took off about this period of time. The early proponents of it were Origen, the church father Origen, and others who were influenced by the teachers based out of Alexandria, Egypt. The chief proponent of this view was Augustine, this approach was Augustine. And of course, we respect him for many things – his doctrine of salvation, his doctrine of sin. But

Augustine, as every man is, was not perfect in his interpretation in all things. And he was the chief proponent of this. He is thought by many to be the father of amillennialism.

Now interestingly enough, Augustine says that he was at one time a premillennialist, but he abandoned the view because there were premillennialists around who were describing the millennium as a time of feasts and banquets even including gluttony and drunkenness. And so, he felt that such could not be true of the kingdom of God and so he sought a different approach and arrived at what grew in full flower to amillennialism. After Augustine, from the early fourth century on, the church embraced his allegorical approach to Scripture and followed his amillennial views.

So, that's a brief history of what happened to premillennialism and why (through much of the church), amillennialism has been the reigning view of eschatology. So that's just a brief history. I just wanted you to be aware of that.

And with said, I want to move on then to the arguments against premillennialism. I thought of several different ways to handle this. Initially, I thought that perhaps I would give you each of the views – amillennialism, postmillennialism and premillennialism. And I would take one each night, and I would show you the, the arguments in favor of that view and the arguments against that view. As I thought about it, I thought that would be a bit tedious, particularly those of you who have young children in here because there's no Awana, and so I thought instead I would summarize the views against the view that we hold and the views in favor of it tonight. So, let's, with that in mind, take a look at these arguments against premillennialism.

Now, just know that I am being fair in my representation of the views against the view that we hold. I am not presenting you with straw men arguments here that I can easily knock down, and there actually are better arguments hidden somewhere else. These are the arguments that the leading amillennialists use against premillennialism.

First of all, they're against it because it is not the predominant view of church history. While that is true after the fourth century - as I showed you, it waned - it's not a valid argument. I showed you why that happened. There was an obvious shift from premillennialism. And I'll get back to this, by the way, when I get to the arguments in favor of premillennialism so I'm not going to

spend a lot of time here. But while it is true that the predominant view of church history (in sheer,) in terms of sheer volume of time is amillennialism, nonetheless there have always been premillennialists and it, it was the dominant view of the early church and the early church fathers.

Secondly, they would say we don't believe in premillennialism because the New Testament example of interpreting Old Testament prophecies non-literally (or some would say symbolically, not all of them like that word) allows us to do the same with New Testament prophecies. In other words, if the New Testament interprets the Old Testament with some degree of freeness, then we can as well. Well, there's a problem with that. We would not grant that position. There are reasons not to interpret prophecy non-literally.

First of all, I wouldn't agree that the New Testament does that with the Old Testament. And there are a number of resources that prove that, that go through the texts in terms of how the New Testament uses the Old Testament. But there are some specific reasons let me point out. First of all, because if we just decide we're going to interpret Old Testament prophecies symbolically or non-literally, then it leads to this sort of morass of subjectivism. Who decides what an Old Testament prophecy means? Is it your symbolism, or is it mine? There's no way to be certain what the text says. It's not that different, in all fairness, to the allegorical view where I can decide that there are levels of meaning, and I make that decision.

Secondly, if the Old Testament prophecies about the millennial kingdom ought to be applied only spiritually to the church (there's not going to be a literal kingdom), then it robs the Old Testament text of any meaning to the original recipients. The whole point of a lot of those promises and prophecies is to say, "Get your act together" or it's to say, "You are under the wrath of God. You're enduring the trouble that God has brought. You're now in captivity. Listen, God is going to restore you someday in a millennial kingdom." And without that implication, it robs the Old Testament text of any meaning for those who originally read it if it's just for us, the church, and it's just symbolic for the church.

Thirdly, if you interpret the millennial prophecy spiritually, then you create these inconsistencies. Let me give you a couple of examples. Why is it that the curses God gave to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled literally on Israel? They had drought; they were taken

into captivity. All of those things literally happened to them. All the curses happened literally. But then amillennialists turn around and say, “Yeah, but the blessings, those are for the church and they happen spiritually.” It’s an inconsistency. Both amillennialists and postmillennialists interpret many passages at the end of Revelation literally.

If I were to take you to the end of Revelation, they would say, “Yes, in chapter 19, there is the second coming of Jesus Christ. We believe that’s going to happen. In chapter 20, there is the great white throne judgment. We believe that’s going to happen literally as it’s, as it’s written there on the pages of Revelation.” Then in 21 and 22, there’s the new heavens and the new earth. Amillennialists, postmillennialists would say, “Yes, we believe that’s going to happen just as it’s written there. We interpret it literally.”

But buried in the middle of all of that is a little passage talking about the millennium. That they will not interpret and do not interpret in the same way that they interpret the texts around it. So, it creates this sort of inconsistency if you try to interpret the Old Testament or the New Testament for that matter non-literally.

Another argument they use against premillennialism is there are certain passages that appear to teach a sort of synchronized general end of the world with no space for the millennium. Basically, Jesus comes back, there’s judgment and boom – we’re into eternity. They say what do you do with that? A good example would be in the kingdom parables of Matthew 13. Turn there for a moment. In Matthew 13, there are a couple of these. Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, what it’s like. He’s giving parables, similes, to explain what the kingdom is like. Sometimes He’s explaining the spiritual aspect of the kingdom that’s now, and other times He’s explaining the future aspect of the kingdom which speaks of His reign. But here in Matthew 13, look at verse 37 for example. He explains to His disciples the parable of the tares of the field. Verse 37,

... He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; *as for* the good seed, they are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; ... the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; the reapers are the angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be in the end of the age. The Son of

Man will send forth His angels, they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, ... those who commit lawlessness, ... will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears [to hear], let him hear.”

There’s one example. They’d say, “See, look at that. It seems to describe this sort of everything wrapped up at once. Jesus comes. He sets everything right. There’s judgment and boom – we’re into the eternal state.” The same thing would be true in verses 47 - 50, the same basic picture.

Now such passages are not inconsistent with the millennium. I embrace and believe these passages. They can be explained in light of the millennium so they don’t disprove a millennium. Also, we must defer to passages where the issues are purposefully taught. That means that details in a parable do not take precedence over passages written to teach the flow of end time history like Revelation. And so, we defer to those passages where the specific doctrine’s taught rather than to a parable which can’t be pushed in all of its details but is making one main point.

Another argument they would use is: it is inconceivable that glorified humanity and sinful or non-glorified humanity could coexist together during the millennium. You know, at the end of the millennium, we believe at the end of that thousand year period (as we’ll look at next week in Revelation, or next time we look at it in Revelation 20), we believe that at the end of that time, there will be a great rebellion against Christ even though He has ruled this earth with a world empire for a thousand years. That means there has to be sinners here. And they say it’s impossible to even conceive of glorified believers living alongside unredeemed or non-glorified humanity. How could they coexist together?

Well, I don’t see why this is inconceivable. It’s exactly what happened for the forty days between Christ’s resurrection and His ascension. With Christ, He was glorified, and yet for forty days He dwelt and lived and lived here on this world, interacted with His disciples who were not. And, and so it is not inconceivable.

The same thing happened with those who were raised at the same time as Christ. You remember in Matthew 27 we’re told that the tombs were opened, and many of the bodies of the saints who

had, who were dead were raised? And they went into the city after His resurrection and appeared to many, visited. So, it's not inconceivable that that can happen.

Another argument that they would use against our position is the premillennial position requires multiple resurrections. Scripture teaches only one general resurrection, they would say. There's only going to be one resurrection, and all the dead'll be raised, and yet your position requires several resurrections. Well, there are three passages in Scripture that seem to teach one general resurrection. One of them is Daniel 12:2, which says, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt." John 5:28 and 29: "... an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ... will come forth; those who did the good ... to a resurrection of life and those who committed the evil to a resurrection of judgment." And then Acts 24:15, "... there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

Now look at those passages. Not a single one of them clearly contradicts the idea of two resurrections. And in fact, John 5 actually hints that there may be two resurrections. Notice it speaks of a resurrection of life and of a resurrection of judgment. It seems a strange way to express the idea if there is one general resurrection. So, it may be a hint there. But regardless, Revelation 20 (and we'll talk about this, in the future, but turn there for a moment – Revelation 20) clearly does describe two resurrections. Notice verse 5 says, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection...." That clearly implies there will be a what? A second resurrection. And here in this context, they are separated by a thousand years. So, there is clearly Scriptural teaching that there are multiple resurrections and not merely one general revelation. So, I don't believe that argument stands either.

Another argument that would be used against the position we hold, and this is really a key one, is that there is only one passage where premillennialism appears to be taught and that's in Revelation 20:1 - 6. Now how do we respond to that? Well, first of all, (and this is obvious, and they would agree with this), there only has to be one passage that teaches something for us to embrace it. If I ask, "How many of you believe in the division of languages at the Tower of

Babel”, I trust every hand would go up. And yet, that’s only taught in one place in Genesis 11. It only needs to be taught one time for us to believe what God has said.

Beyond that, is there a reasonable explanation of why the millennium would be most clearly taught in Revelation? Let’s assume for the moment that it is taught there. We’ll get to that. But assuming it is taught there, is there a reasonable explanation for why it would be taught there and not so clearly in other places in terms of the timeframes especially? The reign of Christ is taught earlier, but in the last book of the New Testament, the last book in the New Testament written, and the book on last things – wouldn’t it be appropriate that it would give the fullest treatment to the millennium, that it would be there, that you’d find it in Revelation? Doesn’t that make sense? It obviously does. This by the way is really the crux of their argument. They would say this, “Look, premillennialism is essentially built on Revelation 20:1 – 6, and it is an obscure, hard to understand passage.” Louis Berkhof puts it this way (he’s an amillennialist). He writes, “The only Scriptural basis for this theory is Revelation 20:1-6 after an Old Testament content has been poured into it.”

So, how do amillennialists interpret Revelation 20? What do they do with it? If it’s not teaching what it appears to teach to us, what do they say? Well, they have some problems. They have several troublesome issues in dealing with this text. I have read their explanations, and there are men that I respect greatly, men like Robert Reymond – you’ve heard me quote his “Systematic Theology”. How he can handle Revelation as poorly as he does I have no idea. The same thing would be true for other amillennialists that I respect in other areas of their doctrine. What do they do with Revelation 20?

Well, there are several problem issues there. One of them is it begins by telling us in verses 1 - 3 that Satan is bound. They would say that happened during Jesus’ earthly ministry. They would quote verses like Matthew 12 where it says, you know, He went into the, He went into the strong man’s house and bound him first so that He could spoil it. They would say, “See, Jesus bound Satan.” And, and by bound, they mean bound in the sense that he doesn’t deceive the nations anymore because now the gospel’s going to be preached. So, they would say Satan has already been bound. Really? Is that what the Scripture teaches about Satan? Compare that with what the Scripture actually says about Satan now. He plants hypocrites in the church according to Acts 5.

He schemes against believers according to 2 Corinthians 2:11. He disguises himself in false religion to mislead people according to 2 Corinthians 11:14. You could also add that he blinds the minds of unbelievers according to 2 Corinthians 4. He attacks believers in 2 Corinthians 12:7. He hinders those in ministry according to 1 Thessalonians 2:18. And he must be resisted according to James 4:7. He even leads believers astray according to 1 Timothy 5:15. It is very hard to reconcile that list with Satan being bound.

Another problem they have in Revelation 20 is the phrase, “they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” If there’s no millennium, then where are these saints reigning with Christ? The amillennials would say they’re reigning now in heaven. But when you look at Revelation 20, it’s clear that the binding of Satan and the reigning of the saints happens at the same time. So, and it’s clear that the Satan’s binding has reference to the earth. He’s bound in terms of having free reign here. So, it seems clear that the reigning must also be occurring on the earth. Also, if you go back to Revelation 6:9, we say, we see these same tribulation martyrs clearly in heaven. And in that scene, they’re certainly not reigning. They’re represented as souls under the altar crying out for God to avenge their deaths, and they’re told to wait for God’s time. There’s no picture of any reigning with Christ in heaven.

The third problem for the amillennialists is the mention of two resurrections with a thousand years between. What do they do with that? It’s clearly a first resurrection and therefore a second resurrection, so how do they interpret that if they only believe there’s one general resurrection? Well, they do some, I think, fairly serious gymnastics with the text because they would say the first resurrection isn’t really a resurrection from the dead. Instead, it is either the new life that comes when a person is born again (so it’s regeneration), or it’s when a believer dies and goes to heaven. That’s the resurrection. Well, that’s giving a whole new definition to the term when just a verse later, they agree that the second resurrection is an actual resurrection of dead bodies to life. So, they’ve redefined a term a verse away that has one standard meaning through all of the New Testament.

Now when I come back to Revelation 20, the next time we come to this issue, I want to take a closer look at this passage because it’s the crux of the arguments both for premillennialism and

against premillennialism. So, we'll come back to this. I've just barely touched on it tonight. So those are the arguments against the view that we hold.

What then are the arguments for? What are the arguments in favor of premillennialism? And I think these are conclusive obviously or I wouldn't be teaching you this. First, a normal historical grammatical approach to the text – in other words, interpreting the text of the Bible like you would interpret the epistles, interpreting prophecy like you would interpret the epistles and interpreting all of the Bible like you would interpret any other document - leads to the premillennial view. There are a lot of texts in the Old Testament about, that touch on the millennium. And I'm not going to go through them tonight. I hope to touch on them some next time. But I've just throwing up here on the screen so you can see there are a lot of texts involved. And when you look at those texts and you interpret them in their context literally, it leads naturally to the premillennial view of things – that there's going to be a literal, earthly reign of Jesus Christ for a thousand years.

And by the way, I'm not the only one saying this. Even those who disagree with us would have to give this point. For example, postmillennialists agree. Loraine Boettner writes: "It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel and the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations." So, here's someone who disagrees with us says, 'You're right. If we interpret the prophecies literally, that's where we will come.'

Even the amillennialists agree. O.T. Allis writes, "Literal interpretation has always been a marked feature of premillennialism." And Floyd Hamilton adds this, "Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures." So, if you're going to approach it literally, that's where it's going to lead you. And I think that is a very strong argument for the position that we hold.

Secondly, I would say another argument for premillennialism is that the early church fathers were primarily premillennial. In fact, before the fourth century, they were exclusively premillennial. And again, I don't want to quote those who agree with us. Let me give you a quote, and this is a lengthy quote, but I want you to listen carefully, from Louis Berkhof. Louis

Berkhof is an amillennialist, wrote a great systematic theology. I love what he says about the doctrine of salvation and some of those things, but he's an amillennialist. Listen to what he has to admit about the early life of the church. He writes,

The view of Irenaeus (Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons in the second century), the view of Irenaeus) may be given as that which best reflects early Christian centuries (okay, he's saying this view is, describes the view of early Christian centuries and then he goes on to describe it. Listen carefully. See if this is what you believe). The sufferings and the persecution of the pious will greatly increase until finally the incarnation of all wickedness appears in the person of the antichrist (so far, so good). After he (that is, the antichrist) has completed his destructive work and has boldly seated himself in the temple of God, Christ will appear in heavenly glory and triumph over all His enemies (again, okay so far, check).

Berkhof goes on to describe Irenaeus' position,

This will be accompanied by the physical resurrection of the saints and establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The period of millennial bliss lasting a thousand years will correspond to the seventh day of creation, the day of rest. Jerusalem will be rebuilt. The earth will yield its fruit in rich abundance, and peace and righteousness will prevail. At the end of the thousand years, the final judgment will ensue and a new creation will appear in which the redeemed will live forever in the presence of God.

Amen and amen. That's Louis Berkhof, who disagrees with us, describing the view of Irenaeus writing in the second century.

Then listen to how Louis Berkhof finishes, "In general outline, this representation is typical of the eschatological (that is, the view of the last things) of the early Christian centuries." He has to admit this is what the early church embraced. In fact, I would go a step further, and he would have to agree with this. All of the church fathers, all of the church fathers until the fourth century who addressed the issue, without exception, were premillennial - not one single exception of those who addressed the issue.

Another argument for the view we take is that a number of passages in Scripture promise a future period greater than this time and this age, but not as great as the eternal state. In other words, there are passages that describe this time far better than where we are now and yet not as great as eternity will be. There are a number of them, and I'm not going to take time to walk you through all of them, but I do want to turn to just a couple.

Turn with me to Psalm 72, Psalm 72:8. Solomon writes speaking of the reign of the righteous king,

May He also rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Let the nomads of the desert bow before him, and his enemies lick the dust. Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before him, all nations serve him (this is obviously greater than any kingdom David ever had or Solomon ever had). For He will deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, and him who has no helper. He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, and their blood will be precious in his sight.

Now what's going on here? Well, you have a worldwide reign in which the righteous king will rule. And yet, notice that there are still the needy. There are still enemies who lick the dust (verse 9). Verse 12, there's the needy who cries for help, there's the afflicted. Verse 13, again there's the poor and needy. Verse 14, there is still on occasion oppression and violence. That is not heaven, folks. Nor is it now because there's no worldwide reign of a righteous king. And so Scripture speaks of this period of time that's greater than now, but not as great as eternity.

You see the same thing in Isaiah 11. In Isaiah 65:20, we read,

No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed.

Now again, in heaven, there will be no death. So when is this? It's not now. When is it? It's in a renewed earth in a millennial kingdom. And you can see that, by the way, in the context of Isaiah

65. Verse 17's talking about the creation of a new heavens and a new earth and verse 25 is talking about the millennium. There are these juxtaposition of the perfect, the new heavens and the new earth, and a kingdom which is much greater and better than what we enjoy now, but not yet full and perfect perfection.

Again, a number of other passages – Zechariah 14, 1 Corinthians 15. In Revelation 2, we read,

He who overcomes [Jesus says, he who] and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE WILL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I have received *authority* from My Father.

Now you tell me why in the eternal state, in a perfect new world, would there be a need to rule over people with a rod of iron to keep them in check, to keep them in control, and those who wander from that path are crushed like broken pottery? Why would that happen in eternity? It doesn't, but it doesn't happen now either. It's instead describing a different time. The same thing is true in Revelation 12 and Revelation 19:15.

Another argument in view of premillennialism is other miscellaneous passages that tend to fit the premillennial view best. And I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, but let me just breeze through them. Matthew 19:28, Jesus talks about the disciples sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. If you're an amillennialist, what is that all about? Luke 13:29, Jesus will eat and drink with the disciples in the kingdom. That one is a little more questionable. You can walk your way around that. Luke 21:24, Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until (the time of,) the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The clear implication is there's a time coming (after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled) when Jerusalem will no longer be trampled down by the Gentiles. That best fits the view that we hold.

Acts 1:6-7, the disciples after those forty days before, after the resurrection, before the ascension, ask Jesus, "[Are you going at this time to restore] ... the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus did not say to them, after forty days of pumping them full of everything they needed to know, 'How stupid could you be? Of course, I'm not going to restore the kingdom to Israel. You missed the point.'

Instead, “He says to them, ““It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority.””

First Corinthians 15 (while not explicitly about the millennium), does make some very interesting points. It mentions a sequence of resurrections with time between them. In fact, turn there with me for just a moment. Let me show you this, 1 Corinthians 15. Of course, in this context, Paul’s talking about the resurrection and he says in verse 20,

... Christ has been raised from the dead, [that wonderful response after he said how terrible it would be if He hasn’t been, verse 20, He has been, and He is] the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. [now watch verse 23] But each in his own order [again, there’s an implication here of more than one resurrection]: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming.

Notice the phrase “after that”. It’s a particular Greek word that implies chronology. It implies a chronological order, a time sequence. In fact, look carefully at verse 23, and you have Christ’s resurrection, and then you have the resurrection of believers at His coming. That means that little phrase “after that” describes a time separation of at least two thousand years because Jesus was raised back in the early - there’s a debate of course about when exactly He was raised (it was either 30 A.D. or it was 33 A.D.), but regardless, early in the first century. And here we are at 2007, and Jesus still has not returned so there is a gap between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of others at His coming of at least two thousand years and it’s simply described as “after that”.

Look at verse 24, “then (this is a related Greek word) comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom.” Also then, there could be a gap, and we believe it is a gap, of some thousand years between the second coming and the resurrection of all believers (and the resurrection, or excuse me), and the handing over of the kingdom to His Father in verse 24 when He’s abolished all of His enemies. So, that also best fits with the millennial view.

Finally, I would say that sort of the crown jewel of why we believe what we believe is Revelation 20:1 - 6. I like what Wayne Grudem writes and this is absolutely true. "A major objection to (the, to) amillennialism must continue to be the fact that it can propose no really satisfying explanation of Revelation 20." That's exactly right. Revelation 20 is the Achilles heel for amillennialists. When we go through it in a couple of weeks, you will see that there is absolutely no defense for the position that they take when you look at the text in its context and you interpret it according to a literal, historical grammatical approach, which we will do together.

Now, Lord willing, the next time we discuss these things together, we will look at Revelation 20 in some detail. We'll also look at the nature of the millennium. What will it be like? What will we do during that time? We'll also briefly look at some of the stickier problems like where do the inhabitants come from and where do those people who are going to rebel come from at the end of that time? And what about a millennial temple? Will there be one and, if so, what will happen there? Will there be sacrifices? Really after what Hebrews says? Let's look together at those things in a couple of weeks.

Now, let me just tell you and remind you of what we talked about when we began prophecy. The millennial issue is not a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. I have good friends who are amillennialists. But it is more important, while it's not a fundamental doctrine of the faith (and keep that in mind, don't let it be a dividing point between you and brothers and sisters in Christ) at the same time, the millennial issue is more important than the rapture issue for two reasons.

One - because there is far more biblical evidence that can be amassed to defend the millennium. And secondly and related to that, there are simply far more passages of Scripture affected. I showed you just a few of those Old Testament prophecies. If you take an amillennial view, you have got to do something entirely different with those passages than a literal, grammatical historical approach to those texts. And so, because of that, it's a more important issue. Again, not rising to the issue of salvation or the deity of Christ or the virgin birth, but more important than the rapture, still not worth separating from brothers over, but worth defending.

I want to remind you as we close tonight why it's worth fighting for, because our Lord and the apostle Paul promised us that the day would come when we would inherit the kingdom. You

have an amazing, amazing promise that God has made to you, and that is someday you will inherit a kingdom on this world over which Christ rules. That too, as we learned this morning, is nothing but grace. You won't reign with Christ because you deserve to nor will I. We'll reign with Him because He has lavished grace upon us, and we will enjoy righteousness. There will be a world in which righteousness reigns, in which all injustice is banned, in which there will be peace, in which there will be joy, in which there will be our Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, Lord Jesus, come.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You, Father, that we can study it together, we can investigate its doctrines. Father, I thank You for brothers in Christ, even some here tonight, who would disagree with the position that I've taught. I pray that You would help us to dwell together as brothers in unity for the gospel and for the sake of Christ.

And yet, Father, I pray that You would help us to search out these things. And for those who have come to the same understanding of Scripture, Father, may we together embrace and be excited about the reality that Christ will someday reign where e'er the sun doth his successive journeys run.

Father, until that day, keep us patient. Help us to tolerate with anticipation all of the sinful things that go on around us, that even become normal to us, because we're tainted by the world in which we live.

But Father, help us to long for a day in which true righteousness reigns in the person of the righteous king, our Lord Jesus Christ. And may He come soon.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.