

Jesus Glorious Return!
(The Millennial question)
Revelation 20:1-6 on May 30, 2021
Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

Please read Revelation 20:1-6 before going further in this transcript.

Today's sermon is a little different than usual. Our goal is the same as always, to be strengthened and built up in our faith. But I want to let you know right up front, that there's another goal behind today's sermon topic; and that's what makes it a little different than usual. Part of today's goal is to present you with some information that's related to changing our church's 10-point Statement of Faith, by just one word. At the end of this transcript, you'll find the "EFCA Statement of Faith" (Evangelical Free Church of America). This is our church's Statement of Faith; it's the "Confession of Faith" that you'll find in Article 3 of our Constitution. This 10-point Statement of Faith contains over 700 words, and we're only talking about changing 1 word; but words matter. The word we're considering changing is in article 9, "Christ's Return." Specifically to change the word "premillennial" to "glorious." We plan to vote on this particular word change at our Congregational Meeting in August.¹ Let me reassure you, if this change doesn't occur, our church will be just fine. This one word will NOT make us or break us.

Part of what's prompting this potential change in our church's SOF, is that this change has recently been made at both the national and district levels of our EFCA family. You can read an article that explains all of this by going to this link: https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2017/09/the_proposal_to_amend_our_statement_of_faith-a_rationale_for_the_change.pdf

Just to be clear, we do NOT have to follow this change. We are an autonomous local church, and both the national and district offices respect our church's right to govern ourselves. That said, I think this was the right move by the North Central District and by our national office. In fact, as an ordained pastor with the EFCA, I had both the privilege and the opportunity to vote on this change back in 2019. And in the spirit of full disclosure, I want you to know that I voted in favor of this change, at both the national and district levels. Furthermore, I'm personally in favor of this change for our church. However, even though I am the Lead Pastor at E-Free Bemidji, the authority to make this change, or not make it, doesn't rest with me; it rests with the voting membership of this local church.² I just get one vote, like every other member. Now, if you are not a voting member of E-Free Bemidji, you may be wondering what this sermon has to do with you. Well, this sermon is important for all of us, members or not, because it comes right out of God's Word, from Revelation 20. This sermon matters to all of us, because Revelation 20 talks about Jesus' authority to lock up the

¹ And, because it's part of our church's constitution, if the August vote passes, then we'll need to vote on it again at our Annual Meeting in January. Both votes need to pass in order for this change to occur.

² Making a change to our Constitution requires a 2/3s vote, both times. See Constitution of the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji, Article IX, "Amendments," p. 5.

devil, and to rule and reign over this earth. So, today, we're going to dig into Revelation 20 in order to strengthen and build up our Christian faith. Please turn or click in your Bible to Revelation 20:1. As we look at these 6 verses, we're going to approach them from a Premillennial viewpoint.³ We can break them down into two main sections: In verses 1-3, the devil is locked up for 1,000 years. In verses 4-6, Jesus reigns on earth for 1,000 years. This happens after a whole bunch of other things, in chapters 1-19, including the Great Tribulation, and the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, and so on. But, we don't have time to get into all that.

1. In Revelation 20:1-3 the devil is locked up for 1,000 years. Revelation 20:1-2 begins, "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." The Key to the Abyss represents Jesus' complete authority; the risen Christ has conquered not only death, but also the devil.^{4 5} Colossians 2:15 says that "[Jesus] disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." You see, Satan is NOT limitless in his power; God has a chain big enough to hold him. In fact, it keeps him bound for a thousand years. These 1,000 years are where we get our word "millennium" or "millennial." Millennium comes from the Latin word mille, which means 'thousand.'^{6 7} For 1,000 years Satan is locked up and sealed up in the Abyss. God keeps him there to keep him from deceiving the nations.^{8 9 10}

Now 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."¹¹ But, this won't be the case during Jesus 1,000-year earthly millennial reign; the devil will be locked up and unable to mess with people, unable to blind them from the light of the gospel. And that's what makes the end of verse 3 so surprising! Revelation 20:3 says, "He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time." After this 1,000 years, the devil "MUST be set free for a short time." Now, why would you do that!? Once you've got the devil chained up and locked away, why not throw away the key? Why release him? Well, we're not really told why, we're just told that that's the

³ More specifically, I hold to a historic premillennialism, which means I lean toward a post-tribulation return of Christ. But I admit I hold this pretty loosely and I am continually refining and rethinking how all of this fits within the broader context of so much other Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments.

⁴ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2621 footnote on Revelation 20:1.

⁵ In Revelation 1:18, Jesus says, "I hold the keys of death and Hades." See also Revelation 3:7, 9:1 and Isaiah 22:22.

⁶ "It is taken literally by some as 1,000 actual years, while others interpret it metaphorically as a long but undetermined period of time." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2174 footnote on Revelation 20:2.

⁷ This 1,000-year reign is mentioned explicitly, 6 different times in Revelation 2:1-7, but nowhere else in the Bible. Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 do talk about a thousand years, but only generally, and not regarding any specific reign or time period.

⁸ **Satan's very nature is to deceive, to lie.** In fact, the Bible calls him the father of lies. **John 8:44** says "...the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

⁹ See footnote on Revelation 20:3 in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2621.

¹⁰ One of the primary reasons for this 1,000-year imprisonment, is to free up any hindrance to the gospel spreading to all nations. It also vividly demonstrates Jesus' power and authority, and it vindicates Him as Lord and Ruler of all. Some would also argue that it fulfills certain promises and prophecies from the Old Testament. We just don't have time to get into all of this detail.

¹¹ See 1 Peter 5:8-9.

way it MUST be. One thing to keep in mind though, is that the Abyss is NOT Satan's final judgment; his final judgment will be in the pit of hell.

It's helpful here to jump ahead to Rev. 20:7-10, "When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown [back in Revelation 19]. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." So the Abyss is NOT hell.¹² ¹³ Rev. 20:10 is hell, where the devil is "thrown into the lake of burning sulfur."¹⁴ ¹⁵ Well, ok, we jumped ahead there. Let's get back to Revelation 20:4.

2. In Revelation 20:4-6 departed Christian souls come to life and reign on earth with Jesus for 1,000 years. Revelation 20:4 goes on "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God.¹⁶ They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." We're not expressly told whether these thrones are in heaven or on earth.¹⁷ In fact, this is one of the things that the various millennial views debate over: whether this 1,000 years of reigning with Christ, is happening SPIRITUALLY from heaven, or PHYSICALLY on earth.

These martyrs in verse 4 were physically killed, they died when they were beheaded, but their souls lived on.¹⁸ So when verse 4 says that they "came to life," it seems to be referring to receiving their new, resurrection bodies; bodies that would allow these souls to now physically reign with Christ on planet earth. Romans 8:23 reminds us, "...we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our

¹² The Abyss is "the subterranean abode of demonic hordes and Satan... This Greek word means 'very deep' or 'bottomless.'" *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2161 footnote on Revelation 9:1.

¹³ Abyss (Greek ἄβυσσος) = "Ⓜ a transcendent place associated with the dead and hostile powers, netherworld, abyss, especially the abode of the dead Romans 10:7 (Psalm 106:26) and of demons Luke 8:31; dungeon where the devil is kept Revelation 20:3." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 2). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

¹⁴ Only after this one last final battle, is Satan finally, eternally judged, and cast into the fires of hell. Amillennialists believe **the battle in Revelation 20:8** refers to the same battle we find in Revelation 16:13-16 and 19:17-21, but for premillennialists, this is a separate, later battle." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2622 footnote on Revelation 20:8.

¹⁵ If we think about this battle in vv. 8-9, that means that despite their opportunity to live under Christ's earthly reign for 1,000 years, many people will still flock to Satan's side at the end of the millennium. In other words, after enjoying an incredible time of peace and safety under Jesus' reign, like nothing ever seen before, many will still be deceived, and chose to join Satan's side in this final battle. It feels like the Garden of Eden all over again: mankind has it SO good, but still they are deceived into turning against God!

¹⁶ For those of us who've been tracking along through our sermon series on Acts, we can't help but think back to Acts 12:2, when the Apostle James was beheaded. He too was beheaded because of his testimony about Jesus.

¹⁷ See footnote on Revelation 20:4 in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2621. Those who hold to a premillennial view, understand this 1,000-year reign with Christ, as something that happens physically, on planet earth. To be clear, God's rule and reign extends to both heaven and earth, in fact, to all of the universe!

¹⁸ These souls coming to life, highlights an important feature of our humanity; there is an eternal essence to our being. Consider Ecclesiastes 3:11. Each one of us has a soul that lives on, even after our body dies. One of the things that we humans need to recognize is that when our physical bodies die, our souls live on. In other words, the most important part of us is not dead.

bodies.”¹⁹ This all points to a physical, earthly existence, and reigning with Christ on planet earth for this 1,000-year millennial period.^{20 21}

Verse 4 points out that those who’d been beheaded had not received the mark of the beast.²² We don’t have time today to dig into the various debates over the mark of the beast. What’s significant for today’s message, is what this indicates in terms of the timing of the 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ. In other words, the 1,000-year reign of Jesus, seems to come AFTER the Great Tribulation, because the mark of the beast happens DURING the tribulation. Therefore, since the Great Tribulation has not yet happened in human history, that would indicate that Jesus’ 1,000-year reign has not yet happened either.²³ In fact, one of the most basic and compelling reasons that I’ve found for holding to a premillennial view, is that it’s the most common-sense reading of a difficult section of Scripture. In other words, it takes the more plain meaning of the text. One author explains it this way: “The events of [Revelation] 19-22 are by their very nature...sequential. The glorious coming of Christ (chapter 19) must come before the final judgment (20:11-15) which, in turn, must precede the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth (chapters 21-22). The millennium (20:1-10) fits into this sequential series of events and is best seen as coming after Christ’s return and before the final judgment.”²⁴ So for this reason, and several others we don’t have time to get into, the Premillennial view makes the most sense to me.

The Premillennial View can be summarized this way: Jesus will reign on planet earth, during a literal, visible 1,000-year period of peace and righteousness.^{25 26} However,

¹⁹ In John 5:28-29 Jesus taught, “...for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” The fact is, every single person on the planet, whether righteous or wicked, will participate in a resurrection and face God’s final judgment. Douglas J. Moo, “The Consummation,” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2696.

²⁰ **Revelation 20:5** says that, “(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)...” “The rest of the dead” either refers to every other person except for the tribulation martyrs, or just to the wicked. (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2174 footnote on Revelation 20:5.) In other words, there are reasons to think that the souls of all of God’s people may come to life and reign with Jesus during these 1,000 years, right alongside these tribulation martyrs. See discussion in *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, bottom of p. 218. Revelation 19:7, which precedes the events in Revelation 20, refers to the bride at her wedding. This could very well be a reference to the church being united with Christ. The fact is, there are places throughout God’s Word where we just don’t seem to have quite enough information. As much as we’d like to know every detail and decide on every point of theology, some items simply must be held loosely. Sometimes, a wise and trusting “agnosticism” is our best option, simply admitting that we can’t know everything because we just don’t have enough information. Yes, let’s keep faithfully probing and seeking after good answers, but let’s NOT demand anything from God that we don’t need to know. We are on a “need to know basis.” He will tell us if/when we NEED to know.

²¹ All of this begs the question: what is the point of them coming to life and reigning with Jesus for 1,000 years? What does this accomplish? We’re not really told why, just that this is what happens. At the very least, this is yet another demonstration of how God chooses to include us in His plans. God consistently uses human beings to rule and reign over this earth. And now, at least a portion of God’s people are included in reigning “with Christ a thousand years.”

²² **The “Mark of the Beast” is a fascinating piece of End Times theology.** We could probably do a 2-3 sermon series just on this. However, what really matters to today’s text, is that we **recognize 2 things: 1 These believers were faithful to the very end.** They did not receive the mark, they didn’t worship the beast, but rather they were faithful to Jesus to the very end. Even though it meant losing their very lives. **2 These believers died DURING the Great Tribulation.** The Great Tribulation is a 7-year period of intense judgment on sin and terrible suffering for those who are still alive during this time in history. This is another fascinating piece of End Times theology. We could probably spend several months on a sermon series covering this; but we won’t, at least not right now.

²³ A primary difference between premillennialism and the other two views, is that both postmillennialism and amillennialism believe “that the ‘thousand years’ happens during, or at the end of, the church age.” Douglas J. Moo, “The Consummation,” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2696.

²⁴ *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 218.

²⁵ “...in space-time history.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2174 footnote on Revelation 20:2.

²⁶ Either just the tribulation martyrs, or perhaps all believers, who’ve received their resurrection bodies, will reign alongside of Christ. **Revelation 20:5-6 tells us**, “...This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” This reign will be over the survivors from the battle of Armageddon. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2584-2585.

3. Some Christians hold an Amillennial or Postmillennial View. In fact, there are a good number of Bible-believing Christ-followers, who prefer a different millennial view. In fact, some very well-studied and godly people have held differing views throughout church history, including names like Augustine²⁷, Luther, and Calvin.²⁸

The Amillennial View can be summarized this way: Jesus is spiritually reigning from heaven right now. Rather than a literal, visible earthly reign, Amillennialists believe that Satan was bound when Jesus died on the cross and rose again, which now prevents him from “deceiving the nations and hindering the gospel’s spread during the church age.”²⁹ For example, they might point to Matthew 28:18, where Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18 is right before Jesus’ ascension to heaven. Therefore, a reasonable argument can be made that the millennial reign of Christ has been going on for some 2,000 years already. Now, this would require us to agree that the 1,000 years isn’t a literal or exact 1,000-year time period, but rather a way of expressing a REALLY long period of time. Given the common symbolism used all throughout the Book of Revelation, this is reasonable. The Amillennial view does have one PRIMARY thing in common with the Premillennial view: it looks forward to Jesus GLORIOUS return! When God’s enemies will face final judgment and Jesus will usher in a new heaven/earth.³⁰

The Postmillennial View can be summarized this way: Preaching the gospel will win the world to Christ and usher in a future Golden Millennial Age of peace and prosperity. This view has become particularly popular in church history, during times of great spiritual revival.³¹ The crescendo at the end of this Golden Millennial Age will be Jesus GLORIOUS return! This return will happen POST-millennial. So, we also find that the Postmillennial view has one PRIMARY thing in common with the Premillennial view: it looks forward to Jesus GLORIOUS return!

I must admit that there are parts of the postmillennial and amillennial positions that are particularly attractive to me. There is something incredibly exciting about recognizing the many ways that God’s kingdom reign, is already happening in the here and now. In fact, even the most staunch Premillennialist has to admit that there are certainly at least SOME aspects of Jesus’ kingly reign, that are already at work in our world.³² There’s also something incredibly exciting about the optimism and hopefulness of the gospel’s success in radically transforming our world, right now, in our own lifetime. How energizing and encouraging is that!?

The thing about the Book of Revelation, is that it is written in an apocalyptic genre. That means, that by its very nature, much of the book of Revelation is symbolic, rather

²⁷ “AW guh steen”

²⁸ See pp. 222-226 of *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011.

²⁹ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2585.

³⁰ See discussion in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2585.

³¹ Some have also pointed out, that even in our current day and age, the gospel is having wonderful success in certain parts of the world other than North America.

³² All of our “NT eschatology is...marked by a tension between the ‘already’ of promises fulfilled and the ‘not yet’ of promises yet to be fulfilled.” Douglas J. Moo, “The Consummation,” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2695.

than literal. The sheer volume and complexity of verses help to explain why it's difficult to neatly fit everything together the way we might like to.³³ One author explains it this way: "The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, relating to heavenly visions full of peculiar creatures and extraordinary events, with serpents coming up out of the sea and locust-like armies invading from the east, culminating in the arrival of a rider on a great white horse... John [the author of Revelation] speaks in models and metaphors, not literal descriptions. But the book, nonetheless, uses this symbolic language to convey truth about what is real. The battle of good and evil is real, the final victory of God is real, the new heaven and the new earth is real...."³⁴ So Revelation's apocalyptic genre is one of the key reasons why there is such a diversity of millennial viewpoints, even among orthodox believers, believers who share an equally high view of Scripture. All of this should lead us to hold our particular Millennial view loosely.^{35 36}

4. Regarding the Millennium, it seems best to major on the majors.^{37 38 39 40} The fact is, the word "Premillennial" doesn't even occur in the text of Scripture. Nor do "Amillennial" nor "Postmillennial." But there is a word that DOES occur in Scripture: "Glory!" "The Glorious Return of our Lord Jesus Christ" is much more in keeping with what the Bible ACTUALLY declares MOST clearly. Titus 2:13 reminds us of what we are waiting for: "...we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."⁴¹ With this in mind, let's take a look at how Article 9 of the district and national SOF now reads: "We believe in the personal, bodily and GLORIOUS return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy⁴² and, as our blessed hope, motivates the

³³ This being said, we can't afford to miss the fact that many of these passages consistently weave in very practical messages of encouragement, urging believers to hang in there, and keep faithfully serving Jesus. We need to spend more energy on these practical messages and give them our greater attention and focus, rather than growing exhausted or discouraged in areas that are less clear and less helpful to living out a vibrant faith.

³⁴ "...and, we believe, the intermediate kingdom of Revelation 20:1-10 is also real." *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 217.

³⁵ Theological distinctives are an INCREDIBLY valuable thing! In fact, they're vital to a well-grounded faith. (Pastor Albin is going to preach on the importance of Sound Doctrine in 2 weeks.) Every church and Christian ministry NEEDS to define what it believes, what it is teaching, and what makes it distinctive from just any other old "truth" that's out there. Therefore, removing a theological distinctive isn't something that any of us should rush into or do lightly. The final vote by the EFCA in 2019 to officially change Article 9 was preceded by years of prayer, study, and spirited debate and dialogue.

³⁶ As Christ-followers, we do well to hang on tightly to the gospel essentials, but also to hold loosely to those things which are not essential. It would be wise for each one of us to share our particular understandings of End Times details in loving tones, with a reverent attitude of humility.

³⁷ One author gives a nice, simply summary of Revelation 20:1-6, and the debate over various millennial views: "Interpreters have long debated this important and difficult passage." Brian J. Tabb in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2621 footnote on Revelation 20:1-6.

³⁸ When it comes to questions and concerns about things like the millennial reign of Christ, that's a good time to have a good study Bible. One of my favorites is the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015. It has helpful resources like an overview of the various Millennial Views (pp. 2584-2585) and articles by godly people like Douglas J. Moo on "The Consummation" (P. 2695).

³⁹ Let's make sure that we learn one of the MOST HELPFUL end times theology phrases: "I could be wrong, about certain details." NOT wrong about Jesus. NOT wrong about His impending return. "I could be wrong, about certain details." Details having to do with the exact order of how the various end times events will unfold. "In Essentials Unity, in Non-Essentials Liberty, in All Things Charity." This quote is "Often attributed to great theologians such as Augustine, it comes from an otherwise undistinguished German Lutheran theologian of the early seventeenth century, Rupertus Meldenus. The phrase occurs in a tract on Christian unity written (circa 1627) during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), a bloody time in European history in which religious tensions played a significant role." <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/essentials-unity-non-essentials-liberty-all-things/>

⁴⁰ E-Free churches have a long and healthy history of majoring on the majors and minoring on the minors. This is one of the distinctives that many of us appreciate most about the E-Free. Ultimately, requiring a premillennial position over and above a postmillennial or amillennial position, just doesn't seem like something that needs to be a major. Changing our Statement of Faith to the word "glorious" makes good sense to me. But that's just how I feel about it. Each of you can make up your own minds. And, those of you who are voting members, will have the opportunity and the responsibility of voting on this in August. There's a writer named Josh Benner who articulated his own summary of this decision to change "premillennial" to "glorious." I was drawn to it, because it summarizes well, where I personally land on this decision: "I'm no less premillennial today than I was yesterday. Neither are the people who voted for the change. That's part of the irony. People who are premillennial took premillennialism out of the Statement of Faith. And many in the EFCA are staunchly premillennial. Yet they also had the wisdom to realize that it didn't need to be an issue that needed to cause division." Josh goes on, "It doesn't need to be an issue that keeps God-honoring, Bible believing pastors from serving in the EFCA and pursuing ordination." And "With the change, I now feel that the EFCA is a denomination which truly majors in the majors. Theologically, the EFCA has always been a big tent." The Josh Benner Blog, June 20, 2019. "EFCA Removes Premillennialism from Statement of Faith." <https://joshbenner.org/2019/06/20/efca-removes-premillennialism-from-statement-of-faith/>

⁴¹ See also Matthew 24:30-31, 25:3; Luke 9:26; and Daniel 7:13-14.

⁴² If nothing else, our uncertainty about some End Times details, should help us maintain a posture of constant expectancy.

believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”⁴³ **So, Brother or Sister in Christ, can we agree on GLORIOUS!?** Wherever we may land on this millennial debate, and even if we don't really care about this debate, I hope that all of us can at least agree that Jesus' return will be GLORIOUS!!! This should fill every Christ-follower with a sense of hope and anticipation: Jesus is coming again!⁴⁴



EFCA Statement of Faith

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:

- 1. God** - We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.
- 2. The Bible** - We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.
- 3. The Human Condition** - We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.
- 4. Jesus Christ** - We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

⁴³ One thing I personally really appreciate about this change to “glorious,” is that now, rather than focusing on debates over “premillennial,” we can be freed up to focus on those last three ideas: godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission.

⁴⁴ **The ramifications of Jesus' 2nd coming, are that we should be ready, that we should be watching and praying; that we should be well-prepared for His return.** And, the ramifications are also that we should be encouraged, we should be filled with steady hope and anticipation. Each day we are one day closer: not long now! 😊 And so we wait... and we watch... and we PREPARE for Jesus' coming return. **James 4:7-8**, “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.” **1 John 2:28**, “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18** **says it this way**: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

5. The Work of Christ - We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

6. The Holy Spirit - We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

7. The Church - We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

8. Christian Living - We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

9. Christ's Return - We believe in the personal, bodily and **premillennial** return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

10. Response and Eternal Destiny - We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.