Mary Domenicelli was 75 years old when she came to faith in Jesus Christ. It was down in Texas. A short time later she started coming to this church as she lived across the street at Tilden House. Mary’s body was failing her, especially her back and legs. We would send a car across the street to bring her over. Then she got the electric wheelchair that you have seen me running around in for the past few years. Her family graciously gave that to us after Mary died—little did we know I would need it to advance Jesus’s ministry here just a short time later.

Mary often felt bad about waiting so long to repent of her sins, believe Jesus died on the cross for her and rose bodily from the dead and then surrender to go God’s way in the Bible instead of her own way. She would look at her bodily weaknesses and feel like she didn’t have much to give to Jesus as she was mostly housebound. By the way, she was invaluable to our church family because she called all the volunteers for a given Sunday the week before to remind them of their responsibilities. Something Joanne Montour is currently doing. I kept telling Mary that the reason we functioned so well as a church on Sundays had more to do with her than me! You would be surprised how easy it is to forget a responsibility you only do once every 4-6 weeks.

Now, unless we personally die quickly, we will all hit a point in our lives where we will never be stronger or have fewer physical problems than at that point. In other words, it really is “all downhill” physically after that so our encouragement cannot come from the prospect of getting better in this lifetime. That is part of getting older in a broken world and having a finite human body that decays. BUT I believe God has a lot of encouragement for Christians, when physically things will never get any better. As Mary struggled just to get into a bed or move from the wheelchair to anything, I used to smile and say, “Mary, just remember, when you are in the millennium you are going to do handsprings down the sidewalk and into the worship service.” And she was look at me and say, “Pastor you have such an imagination.” But then she would smile! If we, as believers, really do understand the millennium, it will bring great encouragement into our lives when little else will.

For me personally, the millennium did not start as something that brought encouragement, but something one argued about. Are you Pre-mil, post-mil or a-mil? Pre-mil means that Jesus is going to bodily return before (or pre-) the millennium and physically rule over a renewed earth for 1,000 years. Post-mil means that Jesus will return AFTER (or post) believers have brought in the millennium by bringing peace to the whole world through the church. A-mil means there is NOT a separate period of history called the millennium but it is symbolic for the victory Jesus had over the devil and the curse through His death & resurrection on the cross. I am not going to spend any more time debating – but simply know everything else I say today is from my pre-mil perspective which is based on Revelation 20 actually happening after chapter 19 and before chapter 21 as it straightforwardly says.
The millennium will be a thousand year period where the curse on nature will be removed, Jesus will righteously rule, people as a whole will obey God, there will be worldwide peace, and even animals will be at peace with one another. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that predict this golden age like in Isaiah 11:6 & 9 where it prophesies, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf, and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them... They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord. Interestingly in the Old Testament, this future world both seems different and yet similar to our world today, while eternal heaven as well as the New Heavens & Earth in Revelation 21 are very different.

My picture of the millennium as something people argued about didn’t change until I was around 35 years old. Then I started to sense deeply, not just intellectually, the incredible encouragement God wants to bring into our lives through understanding this aspect of His future plan. That positive encouragement of the millennium became even clearer and more special as I worked with Christian leaders overseas who will never see the comfort, freedom, esteem, food or health care we have in America. It became clearer as my own body started deteriorating more and more. It became clearer as I stood with Christians whose kids had tragically died. It became clearer as I saw more and more Christians become enslaved to materialism, selfishness and comfort. Today it is one of the major encouragements in my life spiritually and it really helped me be content a year ago when my body was so broken.

PROPOSITION: God’s plan for our future after death covers far more areas and involves far more blessings than we could ever imagine.

I. Characteristics of the millennium
(More detail in the Old Testament anywhere it talks of Messiah’s rule & reign as well as physical future reward)

A. After Jesus returns, antichrist/all Jesus’ opponents defeated & earth renewed Rev 19
So let’s start by looking at some of the characteristics of the millennium in Revelation chapter 20. Why can this particular picture of God’s plan in the future be so encouraging now? The first thing that we see is that the millennium described in Revelation chapter 20 comes after the events of Revelation 19 which include Jesus Christ’s bodily return to this earth (what we call the 2nd coming) and the defeat of the antichrist and his earthly power. So the time right before the millennium will be a most terrible time, especially for any followers of Jesus.

B. NO satanic or demonic deception/negative influence Rev 20:1-3
The 2nd thing that we see is that there will be no satanic or demonic influence during that thousand years. READ v 1-3. The abyss is the temporary imprisonment place of the demons. Not all demons (that is angels who rebelled against God) are currently active in the world around us. A number have been imprisoned in the abyss since the time of Noah. During the final 7 year tribulational period before Jesus returns, the abyss will be opened and those additional demonic forces will be released to deceive...
people and nations. Notice in verse 3 that after Jesus bodily returns to earth satan is locked and sealed in the abyss to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore. Image for 1,000 years no one is going to have thoughts in their heads to kill or hurt others, disobey God, be selfish, or have harmful things happen to them like Job. No deception or evil spiritual forces for 1,000 years!

C. It lasts 1,000 years

The 3rd thing that we see is that this time period will last 1000 years.
- Notice v 2, “bound him for a thousand years”,
- v 3 “until the thousand years were ended”,
- v 4 “reigned with Christ a thousand years”
- v 5 “until the thousand years was ended”
- v 6 “will reign with Him for a thousand years”
- v 7 “When the thousand years are over”

This period of 1,000 years is mentioned in 6 consecutive verses. I believe that’s what it means. The word “millennium” simply refers to any 1,000 year period. That means whatever good we experience during this time is going to last 12 times longer than our life today! The world will work better and we will enjoy things on this earth far longer – that’s exciting!

D. True believers will have resurrected bodies

The 4th thing that we see is that true believers today will have resurrected bodies at that time. READ v 4. Here is it only speaking of those who were killed for not taking on the sign of the antichrist. That is referring to those who died in that final 7 years before Jesus returns. They came to life – they received their resurrection bodies. I believe the reason the rest of the believers aren’t mentioned in this context is because the NT tells us we get our resurrected bodies at the rapture which happens before Jesus’ bodily return.

Can you even begin to think what it will be like for our bodies to be made new and then work right for 1,000 years? No cancer, acne or migraines. I can’t imagine that, but I try! 😊 When we feel ugly, insecure, uncoordinated, weak, slow, or in physical pain, God wants us to picture 1,000 years where we will be in an environment that is similar to our world today yet our bodies work right and look good! That is going to be super enjoyable! Yes, you may be doing handsprings down the sidewalk into a worship service with Mary!

E. Jesus will reign over earth

The fifth thing we see is that Jesus will reign over the earth. Look at the end of v 4, “They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will literally rule over a renewed earth for 1,000 years. It is not that this time is perfect, like eternity in heaven. But it will be a time of outward
justice & fairness - where good is rewarded and wrong is immediately taken care of. That will be special indeed!

F. It will be a time where what was lost for Jesus is enjoyed

The sixth thing we see is that the millennium will be a time where what was lost for Jesus in this life will be enjoyed in the next. Read v 6. Notice it says, “Blessed are those who share in the first resurrection.” All of us who die in Christ – that is we have committed our lives to Jesus as our Savior and Lord by repenting of our sins, believing in His death and resurrection and surrendering to go God’s way in the Bible instead of our own. All of us who die in Christ will be resurrected – that is we will receive a new resurrection body as we mentioned before. But before that, when a Christian dies, their soul goes right to heaven into the very presence of God – then we get our resurrected bodies when Jesus comes at the rapture. So this blessing in v 6 is not the blessing of the presence of God or a transformed character which will all happen before that. A key part of this blessing in the millennium with our new resurrection body is that we are going to be able to do & experience things that we gave up for Jesus in this life. Jesus clearly stated that anything we give up now for His sake, He is going to return 30, 60, even 100 times as much. That happens in the millennium on a renewed earth without evil spiritual forces, corruption in nature or a broken down body. So you haven’t missed out on anything in this life that you give up for Jesus since you will enjoy something similar in a paradise for a thousand years.

G. True believers will lead with Jesus (reign, priests)

Now this is not just a glorious vacation but we will be doing very important and valuable work! The seventh thing we see is that during the millennium true believers will lead with Jesus. Read v 6b. Not everyone in the millennium will have resurrected bodies – those who come through the great tribulation and don’t die or take on the mark of the antichrist will still have their original physical bodies. They are not perfected. Our responsibility will be to lead the world in a time of peace, prosperity and concern for others. We will wake up everyday excited about the possibilities before us.

H. It will be a time of outward justice but not all are perfected

The eighth thing we see is that it will be a time of outward justice, but not all people are perfected or genuinely surrender to make Jesus their Lord. Read v 7-8. So despite being in paradise with justice for all for 1,000 years, Many of those who are not ruling with Jesus – who came over through the great tribulation and still have their fallible human bodies – many of those will follow satan to fight against God when the devil is released. So even though the millennium will be a time of good morals, bullies dealt with immediately and no need to lock things, not all humans will be perfected.

I. It happens before the final judgement and eternal (new heavens & earth)

Finally we see that this 1,000 year period happens before the final judgement of all people in Rev 20:11-15 (what is called the “Great White Throne” judgement) and
before eternity in Rev 21:1-8 (what is called “a new heaven and a new earth”). Clearly the millennium is pictured as a separate period between Jesus’ Second Coming and the final judgement.

II. Great encouragements from the millennium

Let’s spend the rest of our time seeing how God’s bigger plan of a 1,000 year millennial period on a renewed earth where the curse on nature is removed and Jesus physically rules can bring such encouragement into our lives right now!

A. Shows both God’s fairness and grace

First this gives us an incredible picture of BOTH God’s fairness and grace. None of us deserves this paradise for a 1,000 years, yet those who sacrificed the most in this lifetime will experience even greater blessings than those who haven’t. This is where the first will be last and the last will be first. We don’t miss out on anything in this life serving Jesus because we get to experience something similar in the future in a better environment and for a longer time.

B. Breaks bondage to materialism

Second, an understanding of what God is planning for the millennium helps us break our American addiction to materialism. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard Christians say, “Well if I don’t buy that now, I never will,” or “if I don’t do that now, I never will” – these words are not used to speak about prayer or a witnessing opportunity or helping someone spiritually. These words are used to excuse our buying more for ourselves now or our NOT serving the Lord now, but just doing things for ourselves. When we picture God’s plan for the future we see how false those claims are. I haven’t missed anything by being generous to God now and having less “stuff” than the people around me. I am NEVER missing out coming to worship services with others instead of the beach – because I am going to enjoy something similar for a longer time in a better environment during the millennium! It is much easier to combat our cultural materialism when we understand the millennium. I doubt I will have the chance to take a worldwide cruise in my lifetime here, but the ones I get to do in the millennium will be so much better without mosquitoes, terrorist threats or sunburn!

C. Encourages sacrifice for Jesus

Third, an understanding of what God does in the millennium actually encourages sacrifice for Jesus now. Whatever we sacrifice for Jesus now, we get far more of for 1,000 years in the millennium – Jesus said 30, 60, 100 times. That means any sacrifice is actually only temporary. Instead of lamenting what I gave up, I can rejoice in how much 30, 60, 100 times that looks in a place that works well for 1,000 years. The first 3 centuries of Christians understood this and boldly sacrificed all for Jesus! Sacrifice is always for a higher purpose – Jesus also includes more of what we sacrificed in the future.
D. Helps us truly put Jesus first

Fourth, an understanding of what God does in the millennium helps us truly put Jesus first. This is the flip side of sacrifice. There is a part of us that wants what we want, when we want and how we want NOW! So we become good at making fine sounding excuses when the truth is we just want comfort, ease, or fun. But when I realize I'm going to get to fish many more times in the millennium than here and the fish will probably be larger (at least according to the book of Ezekiel) - then I don't feel as frustrated with all the times I gave up fishing to serve Jesus. It helps us be “foreigners and exiles” in this life passing through to our real home - strangers and aliens in other versions. The next time you are confronted with - should I serve Jesus or do what is easiest - picture the 1,000 year millennium of peace on a renewed planet where you have important responsibilities and genuinely help bring good to others. Is it worth having more resources there or not? It is much harder for the demonic to deceive you into thinking selfishness is good and serving Jesus isn’t important!

E. Makes ‘rewards’ exciting

Fifth, an understanding of what God does in the millennium makes Jesus’ teaching about rewards super real and super exciting! In our day, the Prosperity Preachers promise that if you send them money God will make you wealthier now. That leads to materialism, selfishness and greed. I remember many years ago a man gave $40,000 to a Christian ministry (that would be like $100,000 today). Four months later he contacted them and wanted his money back - but they had already spent it as this was a small, bare-bones ministry. When asked why, the person said he had expected God would give him $400,000 by then (or a million today). He wasn’t giving to God, he was playing the lottery. Jesus does promise to take what we sacrifice here on earth and multiply it 30, 60, even 100 times - but most of that is in the millennium. It is fun to imagine what 30, 60, 100 times your giving to the Lord this past year will look for 1,000 years! The last (those who gave up much) will be first and the first (those who had everything but kept it for themselves) will be last!

F. Fulfills promises to Jewish people

Sixth, an understanding of what God does in the millennium fulfills literally what God promised the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Some say those promises are fulfilled spiritually through the church, but when God stated them, He gave every indication He meant the Jewish people would actually receive those, not the Gentiles. If God is that faithful to fulfil those promises in such an abundant way, imagine how great His fulfilment of all the promises in the NT to dedicated Christians.

G. It means NO true believer misses out in life …

Seventh – the bottom line is that NO true believer actually misses out in this life. PERIOD. God is fair and generous, just and full of grace

- Those who have less now, don’t miss out – Jesus will richly reward in the millennium in a way we can enjoy similar to today.
• Those with physical challenges, don’t miss out – our resurrection bodies will not have deformities – for 1,000 years we will be able to do what we can’t do now and the environment will be so much better!

• Those in bad circumstances, don’t miss out – sometimes we look at others and wonder why our circumstances in life couldn’t be more like theirs. Don’t worry this is not the only life you have. God not only promises us heaven for eternity which will be very more amazing than we can imagine, but the Lord also tucks in 1,000 years of paradise where we can experience similar activities to what we have now.

• Those without freedom, don’t miss out – they might not have the freedom we have in the US, but they are going to have far more for 1,000 years in the future.

• Those who die early, don’t miss out – it is a tragedy when a child dies, but they don’t miss out. They will be riding bikes, playing instruments, hiking mountains for 1,000 years without the troubles and pain we have in this life.

So when you are discouraged or just having a bad day – let your mind wander and picture the millennium. A renewed earth – at peace – totally just & fair – with new bodies that work – but being far more similar to our world now than eternity in heaven will be. Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus!