

## Revelation 20:1-10

One of my favorite plays is “The Fantasticks,” a two-act musical fairy tale. In the first act, two best friends, pretending to be bitter enemies, forbid their children (a son and a daughter) to see one another. Sure enough, just as the friends had planned, the boy and girl fall in love! Next, the fathers stage a phony kidnapping, with the boy “rescuing” the girl and so winning her father’s “grudging” approval. As the first act curtain closes, the cast is frozen in a smiling, hugging tableau: happy ending! In fact, when I first saw this play, I turned to my wife Wendy and asked, “What could possibly happen now?”

Act two begins with the characters still frozen in their happy-ending poses. But they can’t hold the pose for long. Soon the group hug breaks apart. The best friends discover, now that they are in-laws, a dozen little things they can’t stand about one another. The boy and the girl lose their infatuation, and break up. In short, “The Fantasticks” turns out to be about what happens *after* the happy ending—just like today’s text from Revelation.

John’s vision describes what certainly looks like a happy ending for our world: Jesus has returned, Satan has been bound, and a thousand years of peace on earth ensue. But then, as the vision unwinds, the enemy is released. Why? Perhaps because, even after a millennium of kingdom rule, the enemy can still find a multitude ready and willing to turn on God in rebellion: a vast host, “as numerous as the sands of the sea” (Rev 20:8), assemble behind Gog and Magog.

On a personal level, this vision addresses a universal experience: everyone knows what it’s like to be blindsided by failure or tragedy at the very moment when everything seems to be under control. Life doesn’t have closing-act curtains: the action continues, for better or for worse, and we must deal with whatever comes. The rise of Gog and Magog, even after a thousand years of Christ’s reign, underlines the power, pervasiveness and perversity of sin. Perhaps one lesson of John’s vision, then, is simply, “Don’t get cocky!” Overconfidence is a dangerous error, for even the best of us fail. Then again, in John’s vision, the enemy is not destroyed by human effort, but by “fire. . . from heaven” (Rev 20:9). Ultimately our salvation depends, not on our success or failure, but on the Lord’s faithfulness. Now that’s a *real* happy ending!

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we think we have it made. Remind us that the play is not over: keep us attentive, and responsive, and obedient to you. Then again, sometimes we think that we are finished. Remind us that the end of the play is in your hands, not ours, and teach us to trust you to bring about our happy ending. In the name of your son Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, Amen.