



Sunday, February 25, 2024
Revelation 12

As we step in to Revelation 12 this morning, there are a couple of key points I need to make before we actually start getting into it. And the first thing I need us to understand is that, although this is the next thing that John sees in his vision, it's not necessarily the next thing that actually takes place in a chronological fashion. The whole book of Revelation is written like this. It is constructed as a cosmic theatrical performance of sorts with various scenes and acts that are ultimately all connected in revealing to the reader information about Jesus Christ that we had not previously seen, but has always been there as He places Himself firmly in the past, present and future. And although this might be a hard concept to grasp, I think I can help a little bit with the example of a planetarium. Last year my family and I visited a planetarium in the states, and as we sat in the theatre, the screen was this massive dome that stretched in front and above, to the sides and behind. There were scenes of various groups of stars and galaxies and closeups of planets that were being played simultaneously, and everywhere you looked there was a different scene that was connected somehow to the overall story in the skies. And depending on which way we were looking, we were seeing some scenes happen before other scenes, but this didn't necessarily mean that what we saw next was actually happening next.

And so, over the past few months we have looked at various scenes and today we will look at yet another scene. Similar to last week, the focus will be on the church and the redemptive plan of God for humanity - but this time from another varying yet connected perspective.

The second thing I want you to see is that although this isn't the next thing that happens but the next thing that John sees, chapter 12 is still very much connected to the last part of chapter 11 in

the sense that the last thing that John sees in Chapter 11 is the Ark of the Covenant in the grand throne room of God. If you remember your Old Testament theology a little bit, the ark of the covenant was the place where the presence of God dwelt. It was literally buried in the temple in a room, called the holy of holies that was separated by a massive veil that was close to 60 feet high and 1 foot thick. No one was allowed in there except the high priest and only once a year. The point being that in our reading today, the symbolism of the ark of the covenant in John's vision is significant because it means that we are being invited behind the veil - symbolizing that, that which was once hidden, is now being revealed. We are going to be allowed into a depth of this vision that we have not yet seen until now.

If you have your Bibles....

Revelation 12:1-17 (NKJV)

12 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. 2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. 5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. 6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Satan Thrown Out of Heaven

7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down

to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

The Woman Persecuted

13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. 14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Every time I read this chapter, it gives me ‘Lord of the Rings’ vibes, and I can’t help but have this picture of the dragon from the abyss and the woman with the crown or the cosmos being on full display in my mind as I read this. It is an epic tale. It is a tale with three main characters, however. Each one playing a significant and specific role, and as we will see, each one is connected to the larger, broader picture of Christmas. Yes, that is correct often times we read the Christmas story as presented in one of the gospels, however, perhaps next time we read the Christmas story on Christmas Eve we choose to read Revelation 12 instead, as this is a glimpse of the story that has always been there, but just has not been revealed as such until now.

And so, as John is sitting in this heavenly planetarium of sorts and his gaze shifts upward towards the ‘sky’ we read that he starts to see a number of signs unfold before him. And these signs all represent the main characters of this next cosmic scene: the woman, the dragon and the child.

Now, because these are described as ‘signs’ it’s important to understand that these characters are not necessarily to be taken literally but symbolically and figuratively - similar to the scene of the two witnesses we walked through last week. Not necessarily two individuals per sé but symbolic of the faithful church as it walked through a season of persecution by the ungodly.

Right from the onset, it seems that this woman could be Mary, and the child is Jesus. However, I want to show you today that this woman in the skies actually better represents the people of God both before and after the coming of Jesus, all at once.

We know this to be true, because of the identifying characteristics that are given to her. Again, for

those of you that are well-versed in old testament theology, her description would be reminiscent of the dream that Joseph the patriarch had centuries earlier. In Genesis 37:9 we read that Joseph had a dream in which he also looked up to the sky and amidst the things he saw, he clearly saw 11 stars which represented his brothers. He would have been the 12th star. History teaches us that he and his brothers formed the 12 tribes of Israel so the 12 stars in John's vision clearly point to the woman wearing the crown as representing the People of God in the Old Testament - Israel. But because she is seen giving birth to a child that we later learn is the Messiah, we can also see how the 12 stars could then also represent the 12 apostles of the New Testament church. So in this one scene, we can clearly see an overlapping of generations - that it's not an either/or situation but a both/and - that the entirety of this image represents the church: past, present and future.

The next character we are introduced to is the all too infamous dragon. The term dragon here would have struck fear in the heart of the reader because this imagery would have conveyed images to the first century reader of the Leviathan of old - who was often described as a mighty sea dragon associated with chaos and evil forces. In our reading today, there is no doubt that this dragon represents the devil or Satan. He is red which symbolizes blood and has seven heads and ten horns. Both the number seven and ten are the numbers of completion. Heads are a symbol of authority and horns are a symbol of strength. His tail sweeps away 1/3 of the stars which speaks to his influence over humanity. The fact that Satan has seven heads and ten horns speaks to the level of power and authority that he embodies. That his authority is subject to no-one or nothing on earth. That no human being on earth can subdue this beast - except of course for One.

Enter.....The child. (Play mandalorian music and show image of baby Yoda)

No not that one.....

(Show baby Jesus in a manger)

Yes, that one!

Now, I want you to notice how the child here is introduced. In both the introduction of the woman and the dragon, John prefaces their character, by making mention that this is a sign in the heavens. However, the introduction of the child is not preceded by this mention of a sign. This is important, because we're not talking about a literal woman in the sky with a crown of stars. Nor are we talking about a literal dragon with seven heads and seven thorns. This is all figurative and symbolic language - that is meant to point the reader beyond the image, to another reality as we just

discussed. The woman is symbolic of the church past, present and future. The dragon is symbolic of Satan. However, when it comes to the child, this is as literal as it gets. This is a very literal child and not symbolic like the other two. This child does not point beyond himself to another reality - for He, Himself is the reality.

And He is none other than Jesus, the Messiah - the saviour of humanity.

According to our text, there are three things that happen next:

1. The Child is born and before the dragon can devour and destroy Him, He is caught up to heaven. The woman experiences a season of trial, persecution and oppression (as represented by the number 1260 in verse 6 and a time, times and half a time in verse 14) but God places her in a season of protection.
2. Cosmic battle in heaven where the archangel Michael goes toe to toe with the dragon - now referred to as Satan/the Devil and casts him down to earth.
3. While on earth, the devil goes after the woman (seemingly again) and all those that follow the Lord - the church. But the Lord's protection was there.

Now this can seem confusing because you may be tempted to read this linearly and chronologically. However, all of the information that is being presented here is up in the planetarium in various scenes. If we were to put this together, then we would see that this scene starts with the heavenly cosmic battle in verse 7-12, where the devil gets cast out of heaven, and thrown to the Earth. The next thing that happens next would be verse 1-6 where He seeks to devour Jesus the Messiah, but death could not hold Him, the grave could not contain Him, and He arose, and ascended to heaven. In verse 13-17, the devil, then places his attention on the people of God, the church. And because he can't touch, Jesus, he attacks his followers which is what we see starting to happen in verse 6. So verse 13-17 is actually an expanded description of verse 6.

So chronologically, the Bible teaches us that somewhere in the Genesis account, there was this massive cosmic battle, where Satan and his legion were cast out of Heaven. This is what the cosmic battle we read of today references. At that point, the Lord had already put in motion His victory over Satan. Satan tried to fight back by killing Jesus, but Jesus' death and resurrection ultimately and emphatically declared victory. Yet another reminder that Satan had already lost. And so when we come to the final battle later on in Revelation where Satan and his followers are cast into the Lake of Fire, this seals the victory. But it's important to understand that the road to victory was already set fully in motion when Satan was cast out of heaven. The moment that happened, he was engaged in a losing/hopeless battle and so all of his efforts are last ditch, futile efforts to bring down

as many people with him as possible. This can be a hard concept for some of us to grasp but if you remember in the opening of my message, today, I commented that this whole chapter reminds me of an epic scene from the Lord of the Rings. well, interestingly enough, the Lord of the Rings does a great job of portraying this same concept in their first film:

<https://youtu.be/mJZZNHekEQw?si=Ldfo7mZkz9d6rz6o>

The minute this demon creature stumbles on the bridge and falls, it is doomed. There is no hope whatsoever. The act of his whip, however, trying to lash out and grab whatever it can, is a great picture of what Satan is doing, and has been doing since his fall from heaven. He is doomed. He is on his way down. The heel of Christ is coming down on his head and he is thrashing about in his death spiral trying to take anyone he can with him.

This is the picture of the woman in the wilderness. Since Satan knows he has lost the battle and can't touch Jesus, he goes after His followers - the church - trying to turn as many of them as possible against Jesus: a last ditch effort to get Christians to embrace sin instead of reject it. His name means the great deceiver and as such, he does what he always does....he spews false accusations and lies - pictured as a flood coming after the woman in the wilderness - trying to drown us.

In particular, he tries to accuse us of our sins. Even though Jesus the Lamb who was slain has paid for our sins and has forgiven our sins; Satan will keep throwing our sins back in our face trying to make us feel guilty for those sins that we have already been forgiven of.

Whereas Jesus has embraced us as His own; Satan will keep whispering that we do not deserve Him. Whereas Jesus is at work making us whole, freeing us from addictions; Satan will keep tempting us to draw us back into his trap.

Whereas Jesus is drawing us ever deeper into intimacy with Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit; Satan seeks to divert us by getting us preoccupied with the things of the world - things that ultimately don't matter.

For "a time, and times, and half a time" – verse 14. For 1,260 days – verse 6. Again, as we learned last week, these are symbolic numbers that represent the nature of that period of time as being a time of oppression, trials and persecution. How long is that season? No one knows because it is symbolic of the time between Jesus' comings. Symbolically reminding us that in this time frame, the enemy - the dragon - knows that He has fallen but his whip is still flitting about seeking whom he may devour. The dragon will do his diabolical best to snatch us away from Jesus the whole time the church is in the world.

And so how is the church - past, present and future - supposed to handle this ongoing attack of the enemy?

Verse 11 says it best - and it might very well be the crux of this whole chapter:

Revelation 12:11

‘And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.’

But listen to the language that John is using here. Notice that this is not future-tense language. This is past-tense. ‘They overcame...they did not.’ So this verse is not new information for the reader here. John is reminding any and all who read this that since the coming of Jesus as a babe in a manger until the return of Christ as warrior, this is how the church overcomes the enemy of our souls...

‘...by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.’

Practically, this verse says three things to us today about overcoming the enemy:

First, we overcome the dragon by claiming the saving power of the blood of the Lamb. We say to the dragon, “You are right, I am a sinner. You are right, I am not in-and-of myself worthy to belong to Jesus Christ. But I’m so thankful that the blood of the Lamb covers all my sin. You see, the blood of the Lamb covers all of our sins, not just some of them. The Blood of the Lamb has paid the FULL price for every sin that you and I have ever committed and ever will. And when His blood is applied to the doorposts of our heart, there is nothing that the enemy can do against that protection except to try and deceive. Saying that your sin is too great.....that you will just do it again.....that Jesus can’t forgive you... But this flood of lies is all swallowed up in creation because all of creation speaks to the nature of God’s redemption. So when those lies start flooding your soul, you and I are to respond accordingly. We are to speak the truth saying: ‘Yes, my sin is great, but His Grace and forgiveness is greater.’ Yes, I am a sinner, but I am saved by Grace. We are to speak confession: ‘that if I confess my sins to Him, He - and He alone - is faithful and just to not only forgive me every single time I sin - but also to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

Second, we overcome the dragon by testifying to the truth. This is what is meant by ‘the word of your testimony.’ Jesus says this another way in John 8:32 - ‘that you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’ The truth of Jesus Christ becomes our testimony when we accept His

salvation and become a part of His family and start growing in relationship with Him. It may help to understand this by looking at it through the perspective of parents and kids. When I was a child, I didn't know how it all worked, but I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that my parents would protect me and keep me safe and had my best interests at heart. This wasn't just words that someone else told me, but something that I knew implicitly based on the relationship that I had with them. And so, in that same vein, when we grow in our relationship with the Lord, so does the trust, so does the knowledge of the powerful truth of salvation and redemption. The truth is that Jesus Christ has saved you and redeemed you, and there is nothing that Satan can do about that. So, when he spews his lies, you just start reminding him that nothing can now separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. His accusations hold no power over us because they mean nothing to Jesus. We belong to Him and to Him alone!

Third, we overcome by being willing to die for the truth. That we might be a people that would stand in times of severe persecution like our brothers and sisters in China, Africa and India... that we would not deny Christ because He did not deny us. Sure, we may lose our lives, as many have and are today. But when we lose our lives we do not lose, just as when the Lamb died on the cross, He did not lose.

In our part of the world we may not be facing the threat of death for following Jesus and that may never actually happen in our lifetime. By contrast, in Western society, the tactics of the enemy often take on a subtler form. Instead of overt persecution, there's a pervasive atmosphere of secularism and skepticism that can make individuals feel embarrassed or even ashamed of their faith. The devil's strategy here is to erode the commitment and boldness of believers by fostering an environment where faith is seen as outdated, irrational, or irrelevant. If we buy into this, then we become our own worst enemies as this can lead to self-censorship and a reluctance to share one's beliefs openly, and a gradual drift away from a vibrant relationship with God. So, while the challenges may differ in nature between regions, the ultimate goal of the enemy remains the same: to undermine faith and hinder the spread of the gospel.

We overcome him by being willing to face this head on and not to cower to the strategy of the enemy. We overcome by being willing to be called naïve; by being willing to be judged as seemingly unintelligent and uninformed. We overcome when we say: "Be that as it may be, I am still going to speak His name and announce His good news." You see, we may never be able to eloquently convince the hardened heart of this world - it was the same story with Moses and Aaron in Egypt - but at the end of the day when we are willing to stand for truth, the Lord will ALWAYS give us the strength that we need to lean on Him. And no one can ever take that away from us. Especially not

the enemy! The more that you are in relationship with Him, the more powerful your testimony becomes as it becomes steeped in conviction. The more time you spend in His Word, the more knowledgeable you become about the things of God. The more time you spend in community with other believers, the greater your sense of belonging and sense of family that wars against isolation.

This is good news indeed. Good news for the whole cosmos. A Child has been born. And has been installed as King of the universe. And down goes the dragon.

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

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