



**FIGHTING FROM (NOT FOR) VICTORY**  
**Revelation 12:1-15:4**

*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

*Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"*

*And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.*

*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was*

*like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"*

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.*

*Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

*Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.*

*Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."*

*Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*

*And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."*

*Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*

*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

*Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.*

*Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.*

*And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev. 12:1-15:4)*

If you have Bible and I hope you do, turn with me to Revelation 12. Before we jump into an understanding of this text that we've just heard, I want to take us back to Bihar, India, for just a moment. Last Sunday, I was 24 hours removed from getting off a plane after about 2 weeks in Bihar, as well as the Middle East, and this week has given me more opportunity to reflect on what I saw, particularly in Bihar (this state in India). God gave me—and the brothers with me—a great gift in what we saw. And I want to steward that gift well. Whenever I go overseas, into another context, I'm always praying and listening for what the Lord has to teach me, and for what we have to learn as a church from our brothers and sisters around the world.

I shared last week how some of the things we saw in Bihar were some of the closest scenes to the church in the New Testament that I have ever seen. I shared about two of our brothers in Christ, Rajesh and Deepak, who went into one village three years ago where there were no Christians, no church, and they shared the gospel with people who had never heard it. Within a couple of weeks, around 20 people had believed. And those 20 people started going into other villages, doing the same thing, and people in those villages started believing. And today, just 3 years later, over 300 different churches in 300 different villages have begun. And we saw these churches, we worshiped with these brothers and sisters, we encouraged and were encouraged by them. So this week, in processing all of this, I found myself asking, "What does the Lord have to teach The Church at Brook Hills through this?"

## **Eight Reflections From Bihar...**

And I believe He has much to teach us. There are some specific things that I want us to consider in the days ahead, but if you were to ask me to summarize those things in a general way, this is how I would summarize them. Eight reflections from Bihar.

This is what I saw in Bihar, and this is what I pray for Brook Hills, for our faith family. Number one, ordinary believers. Ordinary, very ordinary believers. Rajesh is a school superintendent. Deepak is a chicken farmer. All the pastors in all these churches have different, ordinary, hard-working jobs. None of them have professional accolades or academic degrees or many material resources. Bihar, India, is one of the poorest places on the planet.

There are children everywhere with no clothes and communities with no clean water. Electricity is not always accessible. One of the people groups in which these churches are multiplying right now is among the poorest of the poorest of the poor. The Musahir people are slaves in impoverished villages. The Musahir work for people in villages, but they're not allowed to stay in the same village because of how unclean they are perceived to be, and there's a church planting movement going on among the Musahir.

Ordinary believers with seemingly nothing in this world doing extraordinary things. From a church to 350 churches in 3 years in a place that is 0.1% Christian. Just to give you a picture of Bihar. One hundred million people are spread across 45,000 villages in a state the size of Tennessee. Imagine 100 million people in Tennessee! 45,000 villages, and these guys have a plan for reaching them all!

Ordinary believers doing extraordinary things with God's Word. Everything they're doing, they're doing simply because the Word says to do it. They use Luke 10 as a model. In Luke 10, Jesus is sending His disciples into different villages. Jesus told those disciples to do it, so why don't we do it? And when they get there, they're preaching the gospel. And once people

believe, they're starting churches according to the pattern of Scripture. It's simple, pure Word of God.

Ordinary believers doing extraordinary things with God's Word for God's glory. Only God can get the credit for what's going on in Bihar, India, right now. To listen to these guys talk, and they'll share how even five years ago, these same villages were resistant to the gospel, but now they're responding. These guys estimate that out of every 10 people they share the gospel with in Bihar right now, at least three of them will come to faith in Christ. This is happening in an area where for generations, for centuries, they'd never heard the gospel and had resisted any advance of the gospel. They are now responding to the gospel!

Ordinary believers doing extraordinary things with God's Word for God's glory making disciples. That's all they're doing. Now get the picture. These churches have eight, ten, twenty believers in them. These are not mega churches like we might picture. But here's the beauty behind that: there's no spectator mentality in these churches. Every single disciple is expected to make disciples, and they're doing it. Every week when they get together, they ask each other, "Who did you share the gospel with this week? How did it go? What are the obstacles to that person coming to faith in Christ?" They're all asking each other this. You can't hide in a church of eight, ten, or twenty, and that's a good thing. Who would want to hide from the mission of Christ?

They're making disciples and multiplying churches. And it makes sense! When every disciple makes disciples, the inevitable result is multiplying churches—every time. Think about it. What if every disciple that is a part of this church made one disciple over the next year? What if all 4,000 or so Christians (followers of Christ, disciples of Christ) in this church made just one disciple of Christ over the next year—which God has equipped, called, empowered us all to do—just like them? What would happen? We would have 8,000 people next year, which would mean either we'd have to spend millions on a bigger building (which we're probably not going to do) or we'd have to multiply churches.

That's the point! The point is not for you and I to coast out our Christian lives in one comfortable church. The point is for us to make disciples and multiply churches all over the place. This is Christianity! Oh, we've so missed it, haven't we?

They're making disciples and multiplying churches knowing that the cost is great. When you spread the gospel in the heart of Bihar, where the adversary has held men's hearts in sway for centuries with false gods, you will be met with the force of hell. And we talked with brothers and sisters who are facing persecution, who've been beaten, who have endured all kinds of different trials. They know the cost is great, but they believe the reward is greater.

So that's the picture I saw in Bihar: ordinary believers doing extraordinary things with God's Word for God's glory, making disciples and multiplying churches, knowing that the cost is great, but believing that the reward is greater.

And this is my prayer for The Church at Brook Hills. God, make us a people filled with ordinary believers doing extraordinary things with God's Word for God's glory, making disciples, multiplying churches, knowing that the cost is great (knowing that if we do this, we can't keep doing business as usual), but believing that the reward is greater. And the reward is greater! God, may it be so.

And this is what the book of Revelation is all about! There is a spiritual battle raging in Bihar and in Birmingham and everywhere in between—a spiritual battle that is raging for the souls of men and women in eternity. Church, we are not living in peacetime. Don't let the luxuries of this community lure you into thinking that everything is okay. This is wartime. There is a

battle for your soul and for the souls of people all around you and all around the world. So we fight to hold fast to your faith, and we work to advance the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.

## **Seven Visions From Revelation...**

That's the point of this book, and it's particularly the point of the passage we've just heard today from Revelation 12 to the beginning of Revelation 15. I want to show you how these three chapters are divided into seven visions. You might underline these transitional statements. I want to show you seven times where John says he saw a sign or a particular vision. This is going to frame our time together.

Revelation 12:1 starts with the appearance of a great sign, so you might underline, "*A great sign appeared in heaven...*" Then, Revelation 13:1, John says, "*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea,*" so this is his second vision. Then Revelation 13:11, John says, "*I saw another beast rising out of the earth,*" so that's the third vision he saw.

Then Revelation 14:1 says, "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." That was his fourth vision. Fifth, Revelation 14:6, John writes, "*Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead...*" This is a vision that leads to two other angels, as well, so that's the fifth vision. It leads up to verse 14, where John says, "*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man,*" and that introduces the sixth vision.

And then, Revelation 15:1 introduces a sign of seven angels with seven plagues, which we'll technically talk about next week, so I'm going to save that vision for then, but when you get to verse 2, John says it again: "*I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire...*" What we're going to see in a minute is that this vision seems directly tied to what we just read in Revelation 12-14. So this vision, starting in 15:2, could technically go with either the material in Chapters 12-14 or the material in Chapters 15-16, but for reasons I hope will be clear later, I think it's appropriate for us to tie it in as the seventh vision that John saw in this section of Revelation.

So we've got seven visions or signs that John saw—starting in 12:1, 13:1, 13:11, 14:1, 14:6, 14:14, and 15:2—that frame this passage. What I want to do is simply to go through each of these visions one by one and collectively see how John brings them together to illustrate the spiritual battle that has been waged, is being waged, and will continue to be waged in this world. That is the picture I want you to see.

I want you to see that everything that happens on earth is part of a cosmic war being waged in the heavenlies. All of earthly mankind is caught up in a heavenly war between Christ and Satan. What we see day to day in this world is part of a larger picture that extends to heaven and hell. Nothing in our lives is ultimately natural. It's all ultimately tied to the supernatural. Your battles with sin, your struggles in marriage, your fears, your frustrations, your worries, your temptations, everything in your day-to-day physical, emotional, relational life is a part of a spiritual war being waged in the heavenlies.

We in the West have such a hard time even imagining this. In our rationalism, we virtually ignore the supernatural, but it is there, and we need to see it. We need to understand that we have a spiritual enemy called Satan who leads legions of demons in the spiritual realm,

and they are opposed by God and heavenly hosts who do his bidding. And everything that happens on earth is tied to things going on in the heavenlies. So that's what I want you to see in these visions today.

Again, they're not chronological, as if John is saying, "Well, this is going to happen, and then this is going to happen, and then this is going to happen." Instead, these visions are collectively giving us symbols and signs and pictures that point us to the supernatural, and that encourage us amidst our fears and frustrations, worries and temptations, struggles in marriage and battles with sin on a day-to-day basis. It's like these visions are pulling back the curtains of life in this world to see the battle that is raging behind the scenes. So with that image in your mind, let's pull back the curtain with John and see what he sees.

**Satan has been conquered by Christ the Savior and is being conquered by Christians as they suffer.**

First, God shows John and us that Satan has been conquered by Christ the Savior and is being conquered by Christians as they suffer. This is the first vision—Revelation 12. If you were to ask me to sum up this chapter in one sentence, this would be it: Satan has been conquered by Christ the Savior and is being conquered by Christians as they suffer.

Now, in order to understand this chapter, we've got to understand the characters that are involved. We have a woman, a dragon, and a child here. So who do they stand for? Well, let's think about them in the order they appear.

First, the woman. This is not just a woman. As much as the Catholic church throughout history has tried to say that this is only Mary, the mother of Jesus, clearly that's not all that's being portrayed here. This woman is described with imagery that's used all over the Old Testament to depict the twelve tribes of Israel, the old covenant people of God. Then, even after this woman gives birth to her child and he is taken up to heaven, the woman flees into the wilderness, where she is nourished for 1,260 days, or three and a half years, which is the time of tribulation and affliction that we've seen ascribed to the church, God's new covenant people.

So it makes sense to equate the woman here with the entire people of God spanning from Old Testament Israel to the New Testament church, and at the center of this people is her child. She is pregnant, verse 2, and her child is described in verse 5 as *"the one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,"* one who *"was caught up to God and his throne."* These are clearly references to Christ. Now obviously, Mary gave birth to Christ, but this woman symbolically stands here as the entire Old Testament people of God from whom Christ came, and the entire New Testament people of God who follow after Christ today.

Attacking them both is this *"great red dragon,"* verse 3, *"with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems."* John tells us in verse 9 that this great dragon is *"that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world."* He comes forth from the sea, the abyss of evil, and he's described in vivid detail through various images and titles. He's a dragon who seeks to devour the child. He's the ancient serpent, taking us back in our minds to the snake of Genesis 3 where sin entered into the world. He's the adversary of God's people, the accuser of our brothers, and the deceiver of the whole world.

Revelation 12 consists of three different sections: verses 1-6, verses 7-12, and verses 13-17. Together they combine to depict how Satan has been battling the people of God all throughout the Old Testament leading up to the coming of Christ, how we sought to defeat Christ himself, the promised Messiah of Israel, and how he seeks to defeat the church

today. The imagery Revelation uses is of a heavenly war between Michael and the angels of God and Satan and the demons of hell.

And the overall picture of this war is clear. (I put it all here in one line, but I want us to think about them one by one.) First, the birth of Christ declared the death of the ancient serpent. This picture of a pregnant woman crying out in birth pains with a dragon standing before her, ready to devour her child, explains everything we read in the Old Testament. Everything.

In Genesis 3, when sin entered the world, God promised to send a son, born from the seed of a woman, to crush and destroy the serpent, and from that point on, Satan fought to prevent the coming of that son. Immediately in Genesis 4, murder was introduced into the world, which spiraled out of control by Genesis 8, where it seemed that all men were evil and deserving of God's wrath. But there was one, Noah, whom God raised up to preserve mankind.

Yet after that, man drifted back into idolatry, and God mercifully saved an idolater named Abraham and promised to bless his seed. It was through his line that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And in the pages to come, time and time again, we see barrenness and infertility, first with Abraham's own wife Sarah and with subsequent women after that, each circumstance threatening the continuation of the family line. Yet time and time again, in miraculous ways, the line continued.

All the way to the birth of King David through miraculous stories that include Moabites like Ruth. Then God spared David from the hand of Saul, and raised him up as the King of Israel; the line was preserved. But soon after that, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel had a daughter, a queen, who decided in her heart to destroy the entire line of King David. She carried out her wrath, but unbeknownst to her, Joash, one of David's descendants, was hidden and lived. The line was once again preserved.

Years later, foreign armies assembled against Judah, and the line was threatened again, but God promised His people through the prophet Isaiah, *"The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14). *"...The government shall be upon his shoulder ... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore"* (Isaiah 9:6-7). After this, the book of Esther tells us how at one point every single Jewish man, woman, and child was decreed to die, and it looked like that was going to happen until God raised up a woman for such a time as that to save His people from extinction.

All of that then led to the day when a child—the child—was finally born in Bethlehem, and the king declared that all children his age should be slaughtered. And God provided a way for this child and his family to escape to Egypt in time to be saved.

See the Old Testament from the perspective of this war. Over and over and over again, this dragon (Satan) worked to keep Christ from coming onto the scene, but he could not stop Him. And the birth of Christ on that day in Bethlehem inaugurated the death of this ancient serpent, just as it had been promised back in Genesis 3.

The birth of Christ declared the death of the ancient serpent; the death of Christ defanged the adversary. Satan, of course, did not give up once the child was born, and he fought against the Son throughout his life and ministry, tempting him to not carry out the mission



the Father had given him. But Jesus faithfully set His face toward the cross, where he decisively and decidedly took down the devil and all his demons.

Paul says, *"Having disarmed the powers and authorities, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"* (Colossians 2:15). At the cross, Jesus defeated sin through sacrificial obedience, and the blood of the Lamb, Revelation 12:11 says, became the basis by which Satan was ultimately conquered.

The birth of Christ declared the death of the ancient serpent; the death of Christ defanged the adversary; and the resurrection of Christ demolished all his accusations against the church. In the end, death could not hold down this King. He was brought up to God (verse 5), and in return, the accuser was thrown down (verse 10).

Now, what does all this mean? Let me summarize very simply. From the very entrance of sin into the world, God promised to send His Son in the form of a man, born from woman, to defeat the devil. This God did in the person of Jesus, who was born, just as He had been prophesied for centuries.

Jesus did what no one has ever done or will ever do on the pages of human history: He lived a perfect life, free from sin, never once giving in to the temptations of evil. And then He died on a cross to pay the price for sin once and for all. And then, three days later, He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death and the devil himself so that all who believe in Him, all who trust in Him will be saved from their sin. So that when the devil accuses you of being a grievous sinner, you might look back and say, "You're right, but I have a great Savior and because of His blood shed for me, I am safe from your accusations forever!"

I remember the first time I flew on a trip overseas with somebody who had enough airline miles to get into the exclusive airline lounge—the crown room, I think they call it. I walked with this guy by all the "common travelers," where they're sitting on the floor and crammed into uncomfortable seats in the airport, and we walked through these double doors that opened into a room with comfortable chairs and a buffet line of food and drinks. As I walked in, the woman behind the desk kind of snootily looked at my ticket and said, "You don't have the credentials to come in here." And as soon as she said that, the guy I was traveling with put his credentials on the table and said, "It's okay; he's with me." I looked back at that woman with a smile on my face and walked right past her into the crown room.

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, when you try to enter into the presence of God—the heavenly crown room—and the adversary will sharply look you in the eye and say, "You do not have the credentials to enter in there." And he's right. You don't. But ladies and gentlemen, the joy of having the Christ come up behind you, slap his credentials down on the table, look squarely in the face of the devil, and say, "It's okay, he's with me." And you smile as you walk right past the adversary into the presence of God. The birth, death, and resurrection of Christ have demolished all the devil's accusations against the church.

Have you trusted in Jesus as your Savior? This is the most important question I could ever ask and you will ever face. Is your life aligned with him? How else will you stand against the accusations of the evil one? Will you really try to stand on your own merits, stained as they are with sin? Will you cling to the merits of some other religious teacher? What other religious teacher in all of history has the credentials of Christ—a perfect life, a sacrificial death, and a triumphant resurrection? The only way to overcome the accusations of the adversary is by the blood of the Lamb. Trust in Jesus today!

But notice in verse 11 that those who conquer Satan conquer *"him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they love not their lives even unto death."* Now what does that mean?

See it in the context of Revelation 12. Once Satan figures out here that he cannot stop the Christ, he turns to attack the church—the woman—the people of God who believe in Jesus. It says in verse 13 that he pursues them. The word John uses there is used for persecution and opposition in other places in Scripture. Verse 15 says that he pours out water like a river from his mouth to try to sweep her away with a flood. The imagery is Satan going after God's people, working, fighting to strike them down. It's what was going on in the first century; it's what's going on in the twenty-first century. The adversary, the devil, that ancient serpent is still fighting Christ by opposing and persecuting the church, making war against her offspring, verse 17 says. But don't miss the point of Revelation 12. He is a defeated foe!

That's why I put "Satan has been conquered by Christ the Savior and is being conquered by Christians as they suffer" in your notes. Because the battle that is being waged today in the world is a battle that's already been won. Did you hear that? Let me say that one more time: the spiritual battle that is being waged today in the world is a battle that's already been won. This is life-changing, testimony-emboldening news for every Christian to hear.

It's why John is urging persecuted Christians in the first century not to give up, to hold fast to their faith, and to proclaim the gospel. And it's why I'm urging this church never to give up, to hold fast to your faith amidst suffering, to proclaim the gospel to the nations. Because amidst all the different battles we face, we know that Christ has won the war!

Remember this story. On the morning of April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee met with Ulysses S. Grant to sign an agreement marking the end of the U.S. Civil War. The war was over. Peace had been accomplished. But just south of where we are sitting today, from Montgomery to Mobile, the battle still raged. Even though the Civil War was technically over, the Battle at Fort Blakeley still took place. And the fighting was just as real. Soldiers were just as committed to destroying their enemies. The guns and bayonets were just as devastating, and death was just as brutal. The war had been decided, but the fighting wasn't over. And the fighting was just as deadly as it had always been. Peace had yet to be enforced to its designated end.

This is not a perfect picture, but it does capture a bit of what we see in the war we find ourselves in. Victory has been accomplished. Satan has been defeated. What continues to be at stake, though, is the lives of those who are still fighting. And just as peace had yet to be enforced completely in lower Alabama, Jesus' victory has yet to be enforced completely in this world. One day He is going to come and enforce His victory finally and completely, and evil will be totally abolished. Yet now, we find ourselves in the midst of battle, and the strategy of the adversary is to prevent people from experiencing the peace that has been bought for them.

So we fight this battle, not for victory—victory has already been won! We fight this battle, not for victory, but from victory. Satan could not stop Christ and Satan cannot stop the church. And even the suffering he brings to Christians, the persecution he brings to Christians, will inevitably result in our victory.

Hear this: When Satan attempts to use suffering and persecution to defeat Christians, he ultimately contributes to their eternal delight and his own eternal destruction. Do you see this? When Satan attempts to strike down the church through suffering, he only contributes

to our greater delight. This is Paul in Philippians 1, right? *"To live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:21). Kill me, Satan, and it's gain! Satan, in persecution, only contributes to our eternal delight and his own eternal destruction, for one day all his efforts to destroy the church will ultimately turn upon himself, and we who died in Christ will reign over Satan forever and ever. Praise God! Verse 12, *"Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you dwell in them...for Satan's time is short."* Oh, we've got to move on, but this chapter is so key.

**Satan works through government that functions as divine authority instead of under divine authority.**

Alright, onto Chapter 13, second vision, and we're going to pick up the pace real quickly here. Here we go. In this second vision, God shows John (and us) how Satan works through government that functions as divine authority instead of under divine authority.

Starting in Chapter 13, we see how Satan (the dragon) rages against the woman (the church) in the world. And again, it's not chronological—this happens, and now this happens. Instead, here in Chapter 13 we see a picture of how the battle in Chapter 12 is being waged (and will be waged in the days leading up to the return of Christ) between this dragon and this woman in the world. So starting in Chapter 13, we see a beast rising out of the sea, under the authority of the dragon.

Now there's all kind of speculation about who or what this beast stands for. Is this beast a physical person, a particular empire, or an evil spirit behind earthly systems? First-century readers would have almost certainly identified this beast as the Roman Empire, the state-ruled government that was mandating the worship of the Roman emperor. Many may have even associated the beast with the Roman emperor, be it Nero or Domitian.

Beyond this, many twenty-first century commentators associate this beast with the antichrist who is mentioned in John's other letters: a series of leaders leading up to one primary leader who would lead people astray through antichristian government. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul describes a *"man of lawlessness,"* a *"son of destruction,"* who will exalt himself *"against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."* So many equate this beast here with that man of lawlessness.

Still others don't limit this beast to any particular person or empire in history, but point to various antichristian governments and leaders who oppress and persecute God's people while leading the world astray. One can't help but to think of various governments in history and in the world today, who much like the Roman Empire have oppressed and beaten down the church, setting up laws that forbid people from becoming Christians or following God's Word or preaching the gospel.

I lean toward this interpretation—that throughout the history of the church, from the resurrection to the return of Christ, there have been and will continue to be governments and leaders, systems and structures that the devil uses to oppress the church and deceive the world. That doesn't necessarily rule out a specific person or empire (a specific antichrist or man of lawlessness) to come in the days ahead, but the overall point is that Satan works through government that functions as divine authority instead of under divine authority.

Romans 13 is clear that government has a good place in the world under the authority of God, but when government begins to assert itself as god, then government goes terribly wrong. There's a massive difference between leading under God and leading as god, and the latter is extremely dangerous as evidenced throughout oppressive governments in world history and around the world today, oppressing the church and deceiving people by the millions. Yet don't miss this: even when governments do this, unbeknownst to them, though

they think they are setting themselves up as God or even against God, they are ultimately under the sovereign hand of God.

The picture here in Revelation 13 is clear: God permits the beast to curse His name, crush His people, and control the nations. We underlined these verses a few weeks ago, but let me remind you here. Verse 5, *"The Beast was giving a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months."* Verse 7, *"It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given to it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it."* (This is a reference to non-Christians here whose names are not written in the book of Life.)

God allows, permits, gives authority to this beast to lead people into blasphemy (to curse His name), to crush His people, and to control the nations. This is much like Romans 1, when God gives sinful people over to themselves. It is a frightening thing when God gives people over to their sin, and these are the effects.

But don't miss the encouragement here. To suffering saints in oppressive states all around the world today and even to saints in this country that is in some ways is becoming increasingly hostile to the church, do not fret or fear. God is in control. Trust in Him. Hold fast to Him. Do not be surprised when government begins to operate as divine authority instead of under divine authority. Hold fast to your faith, even though the cost becomes greater and greater. Do not be deceived and pulled away.

**Satan deceives through teachers who look like friends yet speak like enemies, stimulating idolatry while slaying the innocent.**

Which leads to the next beast, where we learn that Satan deceives through teachers who look like friends yet speak like enemies, stimulating idolatry while slaying the innocent. Satan deceives through teachers who look like friends yet speak like enemies. All the language John uses in these visions of the dragon, the first beast, and the second beast is intended to be a parody or a mock treatment of the Trinity. These figures (the dragon and the two beasts) are described in language that's eerily similar to how God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are described.

The first beast is said to have a mortal wound that has been healed, as if this beast has died and come back to life—an imitation of Jesus' death and resurrection. When you get to verse 11 and the second beast is introduced, John says, *"I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb..."* There are 29 times in the book of Revelation where a "lamb" is mentioned, and 28 of those times the "lamb" refers to Christ. The only other time "lamb" is mentioned without reference to Christ is here, where the second beast looks like a "lamb," a picture of his effort to copy Christ. This second beast performs signs and miracles to draw people to worship the first beast.

And so we see the dragon, the first beast, and the second beast working alongside one another in a concerted effort to deceive people. They look like what they do is right and good, yet they are leading the world into idolatry and immorality.

Many understand that first beast as antichristian government, and subsequently they understand the second beast as antichristian religious and economic and social systems associated with antichristian government. Those who see the first beast as a specific antichrist see the second beast as a false prophet arising even from within the church that encourages devotion to the antichrist.

Reading this from the perspective of first-century hearers, you can't help but to think about how the Roman Empire was surrounded by an economic and social and even religious system that supported—even mandated—worship of the emperor. We've talked about how in order to have business in a certain trade, you would have to participate in a certain guild and go to feasts where food was sacrificed to idols or outright emperor worship took place. And teachers were rising in the church and saying that was okay to do, that it was okay for the sake of making money to worship other gods and to bow before the emperor.

Bring this over into our day, and you think of false religions and cults that exist around the world, as well as the secularism that pervades our culture—where success is worshiped as God and money is sought as they key to satisfaction. Some, as I mentioned, believe that in the future, a particular false prophet will arise and mandate worship of the antichrist.

But whether this is generally applicable today or specifically applicable in the future, the picture is clear when it comes to Satan's deception through false teachers and leaders. He massacres all who refuse him. Notice the ultimate sovereignty of God here in Verse 15, which says, *"It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain."*

Mark it down. There will always be a price to pay for believers who do not worship the idols of this world. Life will not be easy in this world when you fight the idolatry of this world. Plain and simple.

He massacres all who refuse him, and He marks all who follow him. Literally hundreds of different possible interpretations have been proposed for what the mark of the beast is here—from a literal mark given to people in the days before the final coming of Christ to a symbolic picture of those who identify with the ways of this world and thus set themselves up against God.

And why is it "666"? Well, we've already seen (and will see again in just a minute) that the church has the name of God symbolically written on their foreheads, and the church has a number (144,000) to symbolize the completion of God's people, so it makes sense that those who set themselves up against God in Christ would also have something symbolically written on their heads, associated with a number not of completion (like seven or four or ten), but incompleteness (like 6 repeated over and over again).

But don't miss the point. Every person in all of history leading up to the end of history either belongs to God in Christ or to this world and its ways. And Satan, all throughout history and continuing today, is deceiving many through friendly words, enticing ideologies, appealing economic policies, and attractive religions that all subtly yet eternally pull people away from worship of the one true God. This is how the dragon works through these beasts, and just when these visions take us to a low point, John looks up and behold, he sees the church.

**Faithful followers of Christ will one day stand boldly with him, sing loudly to him, and be satisfied completely in him.**

Vision number four. Faithful followers of Christ will one day stand boldly with him, sing loudly to him, and be satisfied completely in him. All of a sudden, a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and the sound of loud thunder reverberates as the people of God (symbolized by 144,000 here, just like we saw in Revelation 7) stand with Him and sing to Him as they are satisfied in Him. Yet again, John gives us a glimpse of the church in the midst of the challenges of this world, and he does this for a reason.

Look at verse 4. John writes, *"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins [we'll come back to that in a second]. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes"* (Rev. 14:4). John is encouraging readers then and readers now to faithfully follow the Lamb amidst the idolatry and immorality of this world.

It's why, even back in Chapter 13, right after the first beast was described, John stopped and said in verse 9, *"If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword he must be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints"* (Rev. 13:9).

John's saying, "It is and will be costly to follow Christ in this world, but don't compromise! Even if it means you're being slain, hold fast to your faith. Even if it means you lose your job and all your money, hold fast to your faith. Even if it means ridicule and oppression and isolation or imprisonment or death, follow the Lamb!" And one day you will stand with him, you will sing to him, and you will be satisfied completely in him.

This is the reward of uncompromising purity in the world. That's what is meant by not defiling themselves with women. This is not a literal, physical picture of celibate people but of Christ-followers who have not given their hearts, minds, and lives over to the gods of sex, success, and power in this world. They've held fast to Christ amidst the temptations and enticements of this world.

This is the reward of uncompromising purity in the world, and this is the reward of unapologetic proclamation of the gospel. Verse 5 says, *"...In their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."* This is a contrast with the false teaching at the end of Chapter 13. Here in Chapter 14, these are the saints who have proclaimed the truth of God and the gospel, who have faithfully witnessed to the Word of God in a world full of lies.

### **Who we worship on earth determines where we go in eternity.**

Faithful followers of Christ will one day stand with him, sing to him, and be eternally satisfied in him, which leads right into the fifth vision, where we learn that who we worship on earth determines where we go in eternity. These three angels cry out, "Fear God and give him glory...worship him who made heaven and earth, for the gods of this world will show themselves to be empty and will lead you to eternal death." These verses set up quite a contrast.

We learn that all who indulge in the enticing wine of this world will one day drink from the everlasting wrath of God. Now, I want to be careful as soon as I say that, to emphasize that I am using imagery from this text in this statement. I am not saying, nor is Scripture saying, that if you drink a glass of wine, you will experience the wrath of God.

But when you look at verse 8, and you see "*Babylon the great*" mentioned, you see an image that we're going to see more of in the rest of Revelation, where Babylon symbolizes the intoxicating immorality of this world in all of its forms, particularly in the form of sexual immorality. This picture is exactly what we see all over our culture: people who indulge in, who drink down the sexual pleasures and temporal pursuits of this world, thinking this is where satisfaction and delight are found. And Revelation is shouting loud and clear: that cup will prove empty! It will not satisfy!

In fact, it will do the opposite. You indulge in the wine of this world, and you will one day drink from the wrath of God. The imagery is strong.

*"[You] will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and [you] will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of [your] torment [will go] up forever and ever, and [you will] have no rest, day or night..." (Rev. 14:10-11).*

This is the destiny of all who live for the enticing indulgences, sexual pleasures, material possessions, and selfish pursuits of this world. Don't buy the idea that your actions today don't have consequences tomorrow—everlasting, never-ending, soul-tormenting consequences tomorrow. *"The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever...no rest..."*

George Whitfield, a great preacher from centuries ago who would speak to crowds by the thousands in a day where they had no sound systems, used to urge those crowds to consider "the torment of burning like a livid coal, not for an instant or a day but for millions and millions of ages, at the end of which you will realize that you are no closer to the end than when you first begun, and you will never, ever be delivered from that place."

Men! Women! College students! Teenagers! To every person within the sound of my voice, turn aside from the enticing wine of this world (in all of its forms), for it only leads to the everlasting wrath of God!

Revelation 14:12 says, *"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints!"* It's as if John is saying to people in the church: "Wake up! What are you doing? Don't compromise with the ways of this world; they lead to everlasting wrath!

And then he shows us the contrast in verse 13. *"I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.'"*

All who indulge in the enticing wine of this world will one day drink from the everlasting wrath of God, but all who endure amid the trials and temptations of this world will one day enter into the rest and relief of God. From torment day and night to rest forever and ever. One of only two times where the Spirit of God directly speaks in this book, and He says: "Endure. It's not easy in this world to turn from the enticements of this world, but endure, endure, endure and one day rest will be yours, for your enduring deeds will follow you."

Who you worship on earth (not just with your lips, but with your life) determines where you go in eternity. And eternity is coming.

### **The judgment of God is inevitable and intense.**

The sixth vision. The judgment of God is inevitable and intense. You have two visions of harvest back-to-back here—a grain harvest and a grape harvest. The picture is clear that Christ will one day harvest all the saints who trust in Him. He will bring all true followers of his to Himself.

And at the same time, He will tread every sinner who turns from him. That's strong language, but it is language that is necessitated by this text. Is there any more graphic portrayal of the judgment of unbelievers than the picture of grapes being crushed in a winepress to flow out for miles like blood?

Ladies and gentlemen, don't get confused by all these verses and all these symbols throughout this book, for the essence of this book and the essence of these visions is clear. Every single person in this room will one day come face-to-face with God. And you and I will

either stand before God alone in our sin, or we will stand before God with Jesus our Savior. We will either have lived for the ways of this world, or we will have endured in the Word of God. Which will it be for you on that day?

If you have never trusted in Jesus as the only One who can save you from your sin, I urge you to do that today—even right now in your heart. Trust in Him as the One who has taken the wrath you deserve in your place, and cling to Him, follow Him, as your Lord and your life.

And Christian, if you are today in any way wavering from Christ, wandering toward the ways of this world, I urge you to repent. Repent, for the wrath of God is coming to those who indulge in the wine of this world. Repent and endure, Christian. Endure even when it's not easy, even when it's most difficult.

**Soon all the saints throughout all of history will rejoice together in the song of the redeemed.**

Hold fast to your faith for—seventh vision—soon all the saints throughout all of history will rejoice together in the song of the redeemed.

The backdrop for the song of the redeemed in Revelation 15 is the song of Moses in Exodus 15. When God had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and He brought them to the Red Sea and it looked like the Egyptians were about to overtake them, God split that sea in half. He sent His people through the middle on dry land, and then those waters overtook the Egyptians. Safe on the other side, Moses sang,

*"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously... The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name.... Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty, you overthrow your adversaries... The Lord will reign forever and ever!" (Ex. 15:1, 3, 6-7, 18)*

And that's the song we'll one day sing. One day soon conquering Christians will shout as they consider God's incomprehensible works. *"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!"* (Rev. 15:3). One day, Christian, we will look back and see how all of history finally unfolded, and we will praise our God for the way He brought all of these things to pass. We have questions today about why this or that in this world, but on that day in the future, we will see that in it all, God was great and amazing in all His deeds.

And on that day conquering Christians will sing as they behold God's incomparable worth. *"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed"* (Rev 15:4).

\* NOTE: A list of additional resources to assist you in further study of the book of Revelation and eschatology are available as a PDF download at [Radical.net/Revelation](http://Radical.net/Revelation). Click on the "Materials" button under any message in the series for this and other weekly resources.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)