

## A Woman, a Dragon, and a Deliverer II Revelation 12:7ff.

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Steve DeWitt

There are many different ways to gauge the effectiveness of a sermon. One would have to be if people go home and make significant adjustments to their home nativity scene. If you weren't here last week, our Christmas messages are from an unusual place, Revelation 12, which pictures Jesus' birth and ministry with symbols. ***This symbolic realism is describing spiritual realities that lie behind historical events.*** Part of that symbolic realism is a massive red dragon symbolizing Satan, right there in the manger ready to devour Jesus. So I just put it out there that I had never seen a nativity scene with a giant red dragon hovering over it.

We have people at Bethel Church who take such a thing as a personal challenge. Apparently a lot of people! I hardly had gotten done with third service before the texts and Facebook posts started flowing in (See below).



These strike us as humorous because a dragon at the manger seems preposterous. Awkward. Weird. One of our campus pastors suggested these sermons be entitled, *Christmas at Jurassic Park*. This is the power of apocalyptic literature. It grabs the imagination with disturbing and graphic images that drive the author's point home. Let's review what we saw last week.

*"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."* (Revelation 12:1-2)

Who is she? It was pointed out to me that there is not unanimity on her identity. Good people have differing views. My take is that she is the true Israel of the Old Testament. The real covenant people. She gives birth to a male son. This child is Jesus. Enter now the dragon that John identifies in verse 9 as Satan himself. As the woman is about to give birth, the red dragon awaits. He is the assassin in the birthing room. He is ready to devour the child. But just before he can, God takes the child to heaven out of Satan's reach, or in this case, teeth.

History from the perspective of Scripture and redemption could be described as Satan seeking constantly to "devour the child;" to thwart the purposes of God, which are for salvation and healing through the Christ, the gospel, and the church. Satan is a parasite and a destroyer. Not only is he at the manger, he and his influence are anywhere God is at work. He is the enemy of God. He hates God. He is absolutely and completely evil. He can't hurt Christ, but he can hurt Christ's church. Peter describes him as a *"roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:8) Lion. Serpent. Dragon. Effective visuals. We left this last week in verse 6. *"...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."* (Revelation 12:6)

Wilderness to us sounds terrible. But to Israel this reminds them of the most amazing days in their whole story. God brought them out of Egypt with wonders and miracles. He walked them across the Red Sea on dry ground. He fed them every day with manna. He gave them water from rocks. Revelation 6 is about God nourishing and providing and protecting his people. This is a theme that we will return to. This passage is largely describing Satan's two-front war.

## **Satan's Two Front War**

### **Satan's war in heaven (Revelation 12:7-9)**

*"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."* (Revelation 12:7-9)

This war is for the right to be present in heaven. Verse 8, after his defeat *"there was no longer any place for them in heaven."* Apparently even after the curse in Genesis 3, Satan still had access to heaven. He went there as the accuser of the brothers (verse 10). A picture of this is Satan slandering Job in the Old Testament. We don't have time, but Satan is described as slandering Job and questioning his commitment to God. The whole book of Job plays out as a test of Job's character by God against the accusations of Satan.

So this war breaks out in the heavens. Dare I call it the real *Star Wars*? (I had to work that in somehow as I'm totally excited to see *The Last Jedi* tomorrow.) This war takes place in the heavens. It's not so much "up" from us as in another dimension from us. The chief warrior for God is Michael. Michael is the archangel; the most powerful created angel other than Satan.

There is an interesting passage in Jude which says even Michael wouldn't slander, or we might say, trash-talk Satan. This indicates the power of Satan; even Michael wouldn't mess with him. But here Michael goes to war, and with God's help and power, expels Satan and the demons from heaven, or better, from having any access to heaven. Their sphere of freedom and movement and activity is greatly limited. They are limited to this created realm.

This is like putting a great white shark in a home swimming pool. And he's really mad. We are the little fishes in the swimming pool that remind the great white shark of the person who banished him to the swimming pool in the first place.

We will come back to verses 10-12. So it was a two-front war. Heaven and earth. But after Jesus' victory over Satan on the cross, heaven is lost to him, leaving him only earth; only the swimming pool, to wage his war.

Look at verse 12. "*Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows his time is short!*" I think this describes Satan presently. This is not the future. This is now. Woe to whom? Woe to us. So what does Satan do?

### **Satan's war on earth (12:13-17)**

*"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." (Revelation 12:13-16)*

Like a wounded bear, Satan goes after the woman who birthed Jesus in the first place. If you can't kill the child, kill his loved ones. Last week I listed many examples in Scripture and history where Satan directly or indirectly tried to destroy Israel or the church. I won't list them again because the focus here is on Satan's pathological blood thirst and God's provision and protection. In the first example God gives the woman wings like an eagle. She is able to fly away and escape to the wilderness. This is a repeat of verse 6. She is there for a time (year), times (2 years), and half a time (6 months). Add those up and it's the same as the 1,260 days of verse 6. This is likely describing the first half of what is known in prophecy as the Great Tribulation as Satan's wrath against God is poured out on God's people.

God's provision outwits Satan's attacks. If a dragon is after you, what might be helpful? Wings like an eagle sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

The second example is grotesque but easily understood. In this symbolic imagery, Satan spews a river at the woman but the earth opens up and keeps the river from reaching the woman. Satan is the "Father of lies" and this likely refers to all manner of false teaching and heresy and false religions. Out of his mouth Satan aims a heretical flood at the woman. Yet

God protects the doctrinal purity of the church by opening the earth to keep the false teaching from the woman.

*"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."* (Revelation 12:17)

His failure to kill the woman and God's protection of her causes him to turn all his venom on *"those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."* Who? Christians. The church. Us. You. Your family. Your home. Your well-being. Your witness. Your testimony. Whatever good thing you see in your life, Satan is furious about it. He's the dragon at the manger and he's the same dragon at our dinner tables.

Rather than this being depressing, John intends it to be an encouragement. He writes Revelation to seven churches in desperate need of encouragement. They were being persecuted. They were discouraged. It felt to them like the enemy was winning. What might encourage a Christian who feels like they are losing? How about a safe retreat nourished by God? How about eagle's wings? How about the very earth opening up to protect you? As powerful as Satan is, he's not God and God is committed to protecting us. As the old hymn says, *"This My Father's world/ O let me ne'er forget/ That though the wrong seems oft so strong/ God is the ruler yet."*<sup>1</sup>

## **How Do We Overcome Satan's Fury?**

### **Trust in the ultimate protection of God (Revelation 12:6, 14, 16)**

Satan tries to devour us and drown us. God gives wings and God opens the earth. These symbols show God's protection of us from evil. Thinking that an enemy like Satan might keep us locked in our houses for fear is exactly the opposite of what John wants. No matter what Satan throws at us, God is there to protect us. Sometimes wings get us out of danger and we flee temptation. Sometimes God's providences keep us from being overwhelmed. Sometimes it is the truth of God's Word counteracting Satan's lies. Most often it is God's love and grace that allow us to endure suffering that evil brings to us.

*"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."* (1 John 4:4)

As powerful as Satan is, he is not God. This isn't some kind of dualism between a powerful good and a powerful evil and both struggle for supremacy. We don't tap into a force that is all around us (ala *Star Wars*). God is personal and all-powerful. He is sovereign over Satan as well. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)

### **Live in the already victory of Jesus (Revelation 12:10)**

*"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.'" (Revelation 12:10-11)*

I'm sure you've seen video near the end of some game where the camera pans the benches of both teams. You could have it muted and not know the score and still tell which team is

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<sup>1</sup> Maltbie Babcock, "This is My Father's World," 1901.

about to win. The losing team has towels over the head. They are moping around. There's no energy or excitement. They simply want it all to be over. But the winning team is all smiles. Teammates are hugging. The coaches are beaming. If it's a big game, before it's even over, they douse the head coach with the Gatorade bath. There is lots of enthusiasm even before the game is over. *Wait, the game isn't over yet. There's still 30 seconds.* Yeah, but the one team is far ahead and the victory is certain. That certain victory energizes them even though the game isn't over yet.

Isn't that what we see here? "**Now** the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come." (Revelations 12:10, emphasis added). Not someday. Now! They have conquered by the blood of the Lamb. It's a past tense victory yet we are only in chapter 12 of Revelation. The game isn't over. The beast and false prophet of Revelation are about to rise out of the Sea in chapter 13. There are terrible things yet to come. There are seven chapters yet till Jesus returns. How can we be excited while living in chapter 12?

When Christ died in our place, there were no more accusations that Satan could make against us. Why? Christ took all that guilt that Satan rightly pointed out and died for it. Now there is no more sin Satan can accuse us of. Jesus shut him up and we conquered him by the blood of the Lamb. The victory is already won.

In terms of teams, we are on the sideline of the winners, yet it seems to me that too often Christians and churches act like we are losing. It's like we don't realize the score. If we did, shouldn't we have a greater sense of joy? Smiles? High fives? Hear God's announcement: you are on the winning team!

### **How? Fearless confidence toward the future (Revelation 12:11)**

*"...and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."*

See the repetition? How do we overcome? *By* the blood of the lamb (the actual victory) and *by* the word of their testimony (the lived-out victory). *We* haven't won; we live a victory won by *someone else*. In this way, we are more like the fans in the stands cheering and enjoying the victory. Ask a fan of the winning teams what happened in the game. They will say, "We won! We won!" Actually, they didn't do anything at all. But the fan identifies with the victor and lives out the victory by another as if it is his own.

Christianity is living out the victory won by another as if it is our own. By faith, it is our victory, which should give us incredible optimism about the future, even when we are about to die. Here's the NLT translation of verse 11, "*And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.*" (Revelation 12:11 NLT)

How do you know if you really get that Christ has already won the victory? When you hear the words, "You have cancer" and it doesn't change your confidence at all. When you watch your dear Christian loved one's life ebb away—not with ultimate despair—but rather in faith that this is not the end for them. When our confidence in ultimate victory keeps us resolute and rejoicing even in the face of death, we overcome the shark in the pool, and the dragon at the manger.

This brings us back to this male child who was born. Was his birth the victory? No. The cross was the victory. But his arrival signaled the beginning of the end for Satan's dominion on earth. We call that Christmas.

The nativity of our hearts rightly includes shepherds, animals, and Joseph. But also, a woman, a dragon, and a deliverer, who is Christ the Lord.

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