

Who Is Like The Beast?

Turn to Revelation 13 as we continue our look into the final book of the New Testament. Chapter 12 ends with a very angry dragon because he has been hurled down to earth, he lost face, he lost ground and now he is making war against the people of God, those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The dragon is standing on the shore of the sea when John witnesses another troubling sight. **“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast and they also worshiped the beast and asked, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?’” Revelation 13:1-4**

The ancients were terrified by monsters of the sea. Leviathan and Behemoth. Remember the disciples fear when Jesus came walking on the sea of Galilee towards them? They were afraid he was a ghost or monster of the sea. A beast coming up out of the sea is a terrifying image, but who is this beast? Who does he represent? The description John shares is reminiscent of something the prophet Daniel saw in Daniel 7: four great beasts coming up out of the sea. The first looked like a lion, the second like a bear, the third a leopard and the fourth was different, unfamiliar with iron teeth and ten horns. Daniel is told the four beasts represent four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. They were given power to war against the saints. In the end, their power will be stripped away and they will be destroyed forever and the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms will be handed over to the saints of God and Daniel is told God's kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom.

John, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, sees not four successive kingdoms, but a composite, one great wicked empire opposed to God and opposed to the kingdom of God and God's people. One beast, but like Daniel's four beasts, part leopard, part bear and part lion with seven heads and on each head was written a blasphemous name. That doesn't mean much to us, but the first century church understood. Blasphemous names? Roman emperors were good at that. The emperor Julius was called “the divine Julius.” Octavius Augustus - “son of god”.

Nero's coins were stamped "savior of the world." Hadrian – "Parousia of the god Hadrian." Domitian – "our lord and god." They understood what John meant by blasphemous names. These kings, these emperors and their empires were deceiving the world, making themselves to be something they weren't. It was an effort to take the place of the living God. A way of manipulating the masses into submission to the ways of empire instead of the ways of God, allegiance to empire and obedience to a man rather than allegiance and obedience to God. It's idolatry but instead of worshipping an idol made of wood, stone or precious metal, the people pledge their love and allegiance to the empire and the emperor. We've seen it happen throughout history. Hitler was the embodiment of Germany's Third Reich. An entire nation followed Hitler, worshiping emperor and empire above God and what they knew was right. They were willing to embrace evil and call it good and beneficial. This is what John sees. The world pledging its allegiance to and following this beastly empire and its leader.

One of the heads of this beast had what appeared to be a fatal wound but then it was miraculously healed. This beast fits the description of the one we call the anti-christ. Some think this wound is the result of an assassination attempt. His recovery is so astounding the world believes he has risen from the dead and they all follow him. He must be the next Messiah.

After he recovers, John continues, **"The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear."** Revelation 13:5-9

This beast, the anti-Christ, is an embodiment of evil in a person and an empire. When you shrink this all down it is the re-occurring theme in Revelation. Two opposing kingdoms, the kingdom of this world, this beastly empire led by Satan and his henchmen (the anti-christ and the one we call the false prophet) pitted against the kingdom of God. Whether it is Rome and one of their blasphemous emperors or Hitler and the Third Reich or more modern day rulers and nations, influencers and cultures, the point is, **In every generation, the challenge is going to be presented to the people of God: Will we serve God and be part of his kingdom or will we**

serve the empire, the world and its corrupt and evil system? Will we sell out? Compromise? Yield to the pressure of empire and culture? Who will we worship, to whom will we bow, where and with whom will our allegiance reside?

Koester in his commentary on Revelation says this beast, the anti-christ, this evil personified is “the demonic counterpart to the Lamb.” We call him the anti-christ, but not like he is “against Christ” but that he tries to be a “pseudo-Christ.” He wants to set up a pseudo-religion, like Hitler, once again worshiping empire and the emperor. Koester writes, “Many of the beast’s features are hideous distortions of those of the Lamb.” It can be seen as mockery, but then it is also kind of a perverse and pathetic attempt at substituting Satan and the beast for God and the Lamb. It’s part of the great deception. The contrast is obvious, but the minds of people are closed to the truth. “He who has an ear, let him hear” John wrote.

Consider: God in heaven sent Christ into the world as the Lamb who suffered and died for others. The devil who is kicked out of heaven sends a beast into the world to deceive the world and then make others suffer and die. The Lamb shares the power, the throne and the authority of God. The beast shares the power, throne and authority of Satan the dragon. The Lamb suffered and died so people from every nation and tribe and language could be free to serve God and worship the Creator and giver of life. The beast works to oppress and destroy people from every nation and tribe and language and to force them to bow before Satan the destroyer of life. Kingdoms in contrast, in opposition to each other. It is a counterfeit kingdom, a kingdom of deception and destruction and death warring against God’s kingdom of truth and light and life.

The beast makes war against the saints and it seems he conquers at times. There will be casualties. In Revelation 2 the church in Smyrna was told not to be afraid of what they were about to suffer, but they would be tested, some put in prison, persecution would come. Paul said **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Timothy 3:12** The beastly empire will do all it can to halt the gospel, to destroy the church, to defeat the saints of God. That’s the battle we are in. John encourages us, **“This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.” Revelation 13:10**

We are engaged in a great battle with an enemy that knows he has a limited time. We are called to patient endurance – to bear up under the pain and stress and remain faithful in how we obey and serve the Lord. As we discussed last Sunday, we overcome by the blood of the lamb

and the word of our testimony and we aren't even afraid of death. We love Jesus more than life so we remain faithful regardless of what the beast or the empire or the devil demands of us!

John sees another beast coming out of the earth. This beast is the one we call the false prophet. He is a prophet, not of Christ, but of the anti-christ. John writes, **“He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” Revelation 13:11-15**

Like the beast from the sea that we said was a distorted and perverse imitation of Christ, in similar fashion the beast from the land, the false prophet, tries to imitate Christ in order to deceive the people. He had horns like a lamb, but he spoke like the dragon, not the Lamb. He's a dragon in lamb's clothing. Since we know the dragon, the devil, is the power behind this false prophet, I suspect the false prophet sounded a bit like the serpent in the Garden at the beginning. “Has God really said? Go ahead. You won't die!” This beast, the false prophet, works signs and wonders. Listen, signs and miracles aren't enough. Look for the lamb! Look to see if the nature of Jesus is reflected in the life of the one speaking or performing miracles. He deceives the inhabitants of the earth but not God's people. Listen. Does he sound like Jesus the Lamb or Satan the dragon? Does the prophecy he gives move people to worship God and the Lamb or does it direct people to worship a false god and honor a false prophet? Is it about Jesus the Lamb or the empire and the emperor?

The false prophet sets up an image of the first beast (the anti-christ), like an idol and makes it talk and forces everyone to worship this idol, this image of the beast and all who refuse are to be killed. With the influence, deception, power, authority and trickery of the devil working through the anti-christ and the false prophet, the inhabitants of the earth are deceived. Think of this. These are sophisticated, technologically savvy, educated people as well as the simple, the uneducated, the superstitious, John says it's the small and great, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave. You would think they would be smarter than this, but they all find themselves

worshiping and pledging allegiance to the devil, to evil, to a talking idol. How foolish. “The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast...” John tells us the false prophet caused the image of the beast to speak and people worshiped the talking image. Hear the world as they ask, **“Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?” Revelation 13:4.**

Who is like the beast? The answer implied is “No one is like the beast. He is incomparable. He suffered a fatal wound and came back to life. He has power and authority and rules this world. There is no one like the beast. He wins, he conquers, he overcomes. Who can make war against him? Again the answer implied is “No one can make war against him and win. He is too powerful, too mighty, too strong. There is no point in resisting, no point in trying to fight, to protest. He will win.” That’s the answer the world gives. But John knows something different and so do we. We discovered it last week. Who is like the beast? Who can make war against the beast? I’ll tell you. One of God’s angels, Michael, took on the dragon that gives power and authority to the beast and defeated him, hurled him down to earth in humiliation. Who is like the beast? I know he is being allowed to threaten and to battle right now, but I also know what the bible says. We overcome the dragon, the beast, every enemy, every foe, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. Who can make war against the beast? We can! We can put on the whole armor of God and withstand every attack of the enemy. We can defeat the dragon because we are more than conquerors through him who loved us! Who can make war against the beast? We can! Jesus said we are the church, his church and the gates of hell, the powers of hell, the authority of hell, the demons of hell, can’t prevail against us!

For centuries people have speculated about these beasts and this vision of the ones we call the anti-christ and false prophet. Time is spent trying to figure this out, to point to a particular person in a specific time, trying to discern is this the one, is this the guy, is this the end of time? Craig Koester writes, **“...the portrayal of the two beasts does not convey coded information that will allow readers to know when the end of time has come. On the other hand, the visions may have called first century readers to resist Roman practices, but the text cannot be reduced to a political tract. Rather, the visions give readers a way to discern the presence of evil as they issue “a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:10). Instead of then asking when the beast will appear, we might better ask when the beasts’ presence is *not* apparent. When is idolatry *not* a threat? When do followers of the Lamb *not***

experience pressures to give up their commitments? “Endurance” and “faith” constituted the path that John and his first-century readers were already called to follow and it has been the path for those who have come after them. The summons to persevere is not simply a message for a generation living in the first century or at the end of time; it is a message for all generations that are confronted with idolatry and violence.” ...Craig Koester

This is a message for today and a decision is called for. Action is required. Don't worry about figuring out the future. What about right now? The beast is already at work. We asked similar questions a moment ago. Are you giving your allegiance to something or someone other than Jesus? Have you given in to pressure from the world, from friends or associates to compromise and give up your commitment to Christ and your commitment to obey his word? Have you surrendered to the influence of a beastly empire and emperor rather than to the kingdom of God and the Lamb? Endurance and faith are called for! It's time for commitment, for surrendering all to Jesus, for patient endurance, for true and unashamed devotion to Christ.

Who is like the beast? the world asks and we respond, “Who is like the beast? Who is like our God? There is no one like Him! He conquers the beast! I am committed to him. My allegiance belongs to Jesus alone. I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back!” Are you ready to say yes to Jesus today? To surrender all to him?