

## See Above

We are continuing what Sarah has called our accidental series on Revelation. I thought as I was working on this message, my New Testament professor at ORU, Dr. Jerry Horner, always made the point that it is Revelation, singular, not Revelations. It is only one Revelation, the name given in the first words of the book: **The revelation of Jesus Christ**. Sarah said if you get confused about the visions and the trumpets and the bowls and the beasts, look for the Lamb. Look for Jesus. It's about Jesus. It is the revelation of Jesus.

Revelation 11 ended with the blowing of the seventh trumpet and the announcement in heaven, **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 11:15** Great news! It sounds like we've wrapped things up doesn't it? The devastating plagues of chapters 8 and 9 have ended. The two witnesses slain by the beast have come back to life and are safe in heaven. Judgement fell on part of humanity and others gave glory to God. The 24 elders return to the stage of heaven, worshiping God saying, **“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.” Revelation 11:17** Chapter 11 ends with John seeing a temple in heaven and within the temple he sees the ark of the covenant. The ark was a sign of God's presence, a sign of God's promises kept, a sign of his mercy. It had been missing for centuries, but John sees it in heaven. It's an indication God is about to act on behalf of his people. John hears the elders say, **“The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great – and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” Revelation 11:18** Now we're getting somewhere. God's in his heaven and all is right with the world. Right? Not exactly.

It feels like we keep coming to the end and starting over again. It's finished, God reigns and then new opposition arises. In some ways John is telling us the same big, overarching story from different vantage points. N.T.Wright says, **“What we are dealing with is several different angles of vision on one single great reality: that through the awful turmoil and trouble of the world, God is establishing through Jesus a people who, following the Lamb, are to bear witness to God's kingdom through their own suffering, through which the world will be brought to repentance and faith, so that ultimately God will be king over all.” ...N. T. Wright**

(No livestream slides for this group of scripture) It seems we've come to the end but then, chapter 12. John says, **“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.**

(new slide) **And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.**

(new slide) **Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.’**

(new slide) **When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. The dragon was so enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those**

**who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.” Revelation 12:1-17**

I read this and think “this sounds like part of the Marvel Universe doesn’t it?” Like something from the Avengers. It’s not science fiction, but it is a cosmic drama being played out for John and us. Craig Koester gives us this summary in his commentary on Revelation. “The story of the triumph of God over evil unfolds on a cosmic scale. Ordinary limitations of time and space do not apply, for the warring parties traverse a battlefield that stretches from the heights of heaven to the abyss beneath the earth. A woman appears in the sky with her feet above the moon and stars encircling her head, yet she flees from heaven to seek refuge on earth. Her adversary the dragon has a serpentine tail that sweeps across the vastness of the night sky, brushing myriads of stars down to the ground. Angelic warriors grapple with the dragon and his henchmen in the skies, sending them tumbling from space to earth where the battle continues. The dragon angrily dusts itself off in order to embark on a new chase scene, and the woman who once stood above the moon sprouts wings so that she can fly away from the dragon. In what modern audiences would consider a feat of animation, a river gushes out of the dragon’s mouth, while the earth opens a mouth of its own in order to swallow the river. Modern readers may find the cosmic drama played out in Revelation 12 to be something like a movie that thrills audiences with special effects, as heroes and villains traverse the galaxies in battles for control of the universe. Such a comparison to modern popular culture does not trivialize Revelation, but actually offers a way to understand what the book is doing.”

I think Koester is correct. It’s a physical description of spiritual realities and battles we can’t see, but we feel the effects of them because we are in the battle. We are in chapter 12, in this cosmic drama. Let’s look at this image for a moment.

Who is the woman in chapter 12? We get a clue from verse 5 when it says she gave birth to a son who will rule all the nations. We take that to refer to Jesus the Messiah so that would make the woman his mother Mary, but that image doesn’t quite fit the rest of the chapter’s description. It is better to understand the woman on a grander scale. It’s not just Mary. In his commentary on Revelation, Austin Farrer in referring to the woman, writes, “Hers is the womb from which Messiah, or his kingdom, is to be born...She is that Eve who in all history and in all the generations of her race has been travailing to bring forth the Christ and the age to come. The threat to her destined offspring has been from the beginning.” From the garden, when God said

Eve's offspring would crush the serpent's head and the serpent would strike his heel, the stage has been set. The woman can represent all of the women of Israel up to and including Mary who were, in Farrer's words, "pregnant at any given time with messianic destiny," travailing in order to bring forth the Savior of the world.

John says as the woman cries out in child birth, suddenly another sign, an enormous red dragon stands in front of the woman, prepared to devour her child as soon as it's born. Dragons were always frightening in the ancient world. This one had seven heads, indicating he would be hard to defeat, ten horns, symbolic of his strength and seven crowns, symbols of power and authority. The dragon claimed to have sovereignty. He sees the woman and her child as his rivals and he is bent on killing them. John's readers would identify with the woman and the child and would be repulsed by a monster that wants to eat a newborn baby! Obviously, we stand on the side of the woman and child and against the dragon.

Instead of devouring the child, the dragon's plan backfires and the child is snatched up to heaven to God and enthroned (v5). John's vision infers Jesus' birth and ascension to heaven and the throne of God. The woman escapes to a place in the desert prepared for her by God where she experiences God's provision and protection. Let that encourage you, regardless of what is going on, God has a place he has already prepared where his presence will sustain you, a place of protection and provision prepared for you. Nothing takes him by surprise.

Jesus is on the throne of heaven so we would expect there to be peace, but instead, verse 7 says there was war in heaven! Christ is the one who is to rule all the nations, but his rule doesn't come unopposed. There is a war being fought but don't worry. John tells us the dragon was not strong enough and he loses his place in heaven. The dragon is hurled down to earth and John tells us clearly that the dragon is the devil, Satan, the one who leads the whole world astray.

In this heavenly war, Michael the angel is stronger than Satan. Make sure you see that. The devil was not strong enough. He is not invincible. Don't let him deceive you or frighten you. John then tells us the salvation and power and kingdom and authority of Christ has come, it has been manifested and again he says the accuser of the saints of God has been hurled down to the earth in defeat. What does this mean for us?

First of all it means the devil is no longer in a position to denounce us and accuse us before God. The devil lost territory. He no longer has access to accuse us before God. How? Why? It was not just because of what Michael did in the heavenly battle, but it's because of

what Jesus, the Lamb did at the cross. The bible says **Jesus, “disarmed the powers and authorities, [and] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”**

**Colossians 2:15.** Jesus Christ, the lamb that was slain to take away the sins of the world. By the shedding of his blood we are cleansed from sin and now the devil has no more access or right to stand before God to accuse us because **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!” Romans 8:1** The devil has been hurled down, defeated by the blood of the Lamb. When the devil comes against you, accusing you, tempting you, telling you to give up, to quit, telling you that you can’t win, you can’t make it, you can’t serve God, when you feel like you can’t go on because of the attacks of the enemy you remind him of what John heard a loud voice in heaven saying, **“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”**

**Revelation 12:11.** That’s us! We are “they.” We are the ones who overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb, by what he did for us on Calvary. We are overcomers. We are more than conquerors Paul says. We conquer the devil through the blood of Jesus, through his saving mercy and grace and by our faithful testimony, our trust in and reliance upon Jesus. I titled this message “See above.” Here’s why: when the devil comes against you, threatening you, intimidating you, attacking you, just say “see above, verse 11.” They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. Devil, you are defeated. I don’t even need to rebuke you...just “see above.”

The voice told John to rejoice, all of those who dwell in heaven are to rejoice, but he pronounces woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you and is filled with fury because he knows his time is short. The devil is cornered. He no longer has access to heaven and is like a trapped beast. I remember seeing a feral hog snarling, gnashing his teeth, running back and forth in this pen he was trapped in. That’s a good description of Satan at this point. Trying to do all the damage he can do because he knows his time is short. Remember, the devil isn’t raging and attacking because he is invincible, or because he thinks he’s going to win. He is attacking because he knows he’s already lost heaven and has been defeated by the blood of the Lamb and he knows he can’t defeat us either if we keep serving Jesus and trusting him.

Filled with fury the dragon attacks again. Notice verse 17, **“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” Revelation 12:17**

I told you the battle affects us because we are in it. Earlier in Revelation, in his letters to the churches John had warned of believers being imprisoned and even put to death for the faith. It might be easy to conclude that when persecution or prison or death or a hundred other bad things happen to God's people that it means the devil has won the battle but that's not the view from heaven! Previously in Revelation we have seen and heard of martyrs, those who remained true to God and his word and refused to compromise with the world, who were faithful even to the point of laying down their life for their faith. Never once was it implied they were defeated. These are the ones who came through tribulation victoriously. They won. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb. They remained true. They kept the faith. They conquered Satan because they never gave into him or his will. They share in the victory of the crucified and risen Lamb of God.

The devil will keep on threatening, keep on raging, keep on spewing things out of his mouth, he will keep on trying to attack and to defeat you but he cannot win. See Above! He knows his time is short so he is furious, but...See Above. I know you are tired and weary of the devil's attacks, but...See Above. It's past tense. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." Not "they might," "they overcame." We will overcome! By the sacrifice of Jesus, by the life and mercy and strength he gives us, we will overcome. Revelation 13:10 says, "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints." Don't quit. Don't despair. See Above! Stay faithful, endure, keep going. See Above. We overcame. If you feel like you aren't going to make it...See Above.

If you feel threatened, weary, like the devil is winning in your life, your family, I want us to pray together. I believe God wants to show you there is victory ahead for you. You aren't defeated. You are an overcomer!