

THE COSMIC BATTLE – REVELATION 12

Well I'll invite you to turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Revelation chapter 12. We're officially past the halfway mark in our series on the book of Revelation, and things are about to get more and more interesting as we move forward. Today we're going to be looking at this amazing vision that Jesus reveals to John about a great Cosmic Battle and he records this vision in Revelation chapter 12.

INTRODUCTION

You know, I was really intrigued by some footage that Nasa has just released of the supernova of a star in space. Terry, you'll like this illustration. For those of you who may not know, a supernova is when a star essentially explodes and fades into nothing. This particular star happened to be located on the outer edge of Spiral Galaxy NGC 2525, located 70 million light-years away. It's a distance that I can't really comprehend. But what's even more amazing is that, even though they didn't record the initial blast that occurred in January of 2018, NASA's Hubble Space Telescope took consecutive photos of this supernova for almost a year. And at its peak, the exploding star was as bright as 5 billion Suns.

It's incredible and these types of events happen all the time, without us even knowing about them. But once again, it's a reminder that there is more going on than what we realize. That's something that we have noticed in the book of Revelation, and it's certainly something that we will see this morning, in our passage today. So, let's dive into the text so that we can see exactly what I'm talking about.

1. A GREAT SIGN AND A GREAT WAR

Revelation 12, starting at verse 1. It reads; A great 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. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its 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 it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 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. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. 7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 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.

Ok, so God is revealing this vision before John. He's pulling back the curtain, so to speak, and John is seeing these great signs in Heaven. He sees a woman who's pregnant, and he sees a big red dragon, and this dragon wants to devour the woman's child. And then war breaks out in Heaven and the dragon is defeated. And what does all of this mean? I don't have a clue. No, I'm just kidding because of course we are given clues to what is going on here. You see, the first clue we have is right there in verse 1; John says that a great sign appeared in heaven.

The Greek word that we have here for sign literally means symbol. And there are a few signs in this passage, like the woman and the dragon, and these symbols point to a greater reality.

A WOMAN

For example, we're introduced to a woman, but who is this woman? Well here's what we know. It says that this woman is 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. So obviously this woman is Israel because we have seen this imagery before. In Genesis 37, Joseph has a dream, and in this dream the sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars are bowing down to him. The sun represented his father Jacob, the moon is his mother Rachel, and the eleven stars, his brothers. Jacob's name, as we remember, is changed to Israel and Joseph and his brothers are the 12 tribes of Israel. The woman here, in Revelation 12, is a picture of Israel. And we see that she is pregnant and she is crying out in labour pains. This is how Israel is described in Isaiah 26; crying out to God as a pregnant woman approaches her time to give birth.

Well, some would also argue that this woman represents Eve from Genesis 3 with God's promise that there will be enmity between the woman and the serpent and that there will be pains in childbearing. Could this also be Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, the Messiah who does rule the nations. And as such, we have Israel, Eve, and Mary all represented in this great sign of a woman. And, as we keep reading in our passage, we find that this woman is really a symbol for all of God's people, including the church. We see this clearly in verse 17. But we aren't there yet, so just slow down ok.

A DRAGON

Because we do also need to make sense of this other great sign; the dragon. Well, it doesn't take much, when we read verse 9, to see that this dragon is the serpent of old called the devil. This dragon is Satan and we see here that he means business. He is described as an enormous dragon with 7 heads – heads that would often represent great authority and complete intelligence. He has 10 horns – 10 being a symbol of his strength. And he wears 7 diadems - pointing to his wealth and power and reign. You see, this is not an enemy to be taken lightly. In fact, with his tail of deception, he swept away 1/3 of the stars, a third of the angels from Heaven.

A CHILD

But enough about the dragon, because in verse 5, we are also introduced to a child. The woman is pregnant, and she gives birth to a son, but this is not just any son. She gives birth to a child who will rule all the nations with a rod of iron. She gives birth to Jesus, the Saviour of the World. This was the one that Israel had been waiting for in Isaiah 9; for unto us a child is born unto us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder.

And it's a powerful image to think of this child and his rule with a rod of iron. The rod is a reference to a shepherd's rod, just like Psalm 23; "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me". But this not just a rod of comfort because we see that this rod is made of iron. And this points us to

the realization that Jesus will lead like a shepherded, full of grace, but it also shows us that that he will reign with that of iron strength and might.

Now, we can be sure that this child is Jesus because it says that he was snatched up to God and to his throne. And who sits on that throne with God? Revelation 5 reminds us that it is the lamb who was slain, it is Jesus on that throne.

This child is the son of God, he is Jesus. And you know what's really interesting? I want you to notice something; that when we see how John refers to this child, it is completely different than his reference to the woman and the dragon. Notice what he says in verse 1, he says; A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman. And the same is true for the dragon in verse 3 when he says; Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon." However, in verse 5 when he mentions the child, there is no use of the word sign. And that's because the child is not a symbol.

Darrell Johnson puts it this way, he writes; "The woman points beyond herself to another reality. The dragon points beyond himself to another reality. The child does not point beyond himself to another reality, he is the reality." You see, Jesus is who we need to see. Everything is wrapped up in Jesus. Jesus doesn't point to something else; Jesus is the one that all else points to. We need to see Jesus, don't miss that. Look at Revelation chapter 12 and see Jesus.

2. VICTORY IN HEAVEN, TROUBLE ON EARTH

It's all about Jesus, and the devil knows it. In fact, it's Jesus, the child, that Satan tries to devour. But he fails to do so which leads to his ultimate defeat in Heaven. And with his defeat comes victory and celebration in Heaven. Well, that's exactly what we find as we continue in our chapter, the declaring of victory in Heaven.

So let's keep reading, Revelation 12:10-17, it says this; 10 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 Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over 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. 12 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." 13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

The War in Heaven has been won, there is victory and there is celebration. We see this phrase over and over again that Satan has been hurled down, he has been defeated and he has been defeated by the blood of the Lamb. And that's why it says in verse 12; "Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them". You see, there is rejoicing and there is triumph; this is good news. But it's not all good news. Because verse 12 does go on to say; "But woe to the earth and sea, because the devil has gone down to you! And he is filled with fury". You see, the bad news is that although there is victory in heaven, there is still trouble on earth. Satan has failed, he has been defeated, he has been cast down to earth, and he is angry. It says that he is furious, and he continues to wage war against the woman and her offspring – against those who keep God's commands and hold to the truth of Jesus.

And unfortunately, this is where we come in, as the church – as the offspring of the woman. In his failure and defeat, Satan now turns his attention to the bride of Christ, to the followers of Jesus, to the church, to us. You see, Satan is still at it, still waging war, but now, we are the target.

3. SATAN'S WAR AND RAGE AGAINST US

And I wish that weren't the case, but because it is, we need to take a moment and reflect upon how he wages war against us. What is Satan up to? In his war and rage against us, what are his schemes and tactics? Well, again, our passage gives us great insight into his methods and his weapons.

DECEIVER

First of all, we know that Satan is a great deceiver. In verse 9 it says that he is the deceiver who leads the whole world astray. You see, his mission is to bring us into his defeat by lying to us and by leading us into rebellion against God. He's been a liar and a twister of truth from the very beginning. In the garden with Eve, he's tempting her, deceiving her, and twisting the truth of God's word. And that temptation, to turn away from God, continues throughout the Bible and throughout history.

Satan is such a liar and deceiver that he even deceived himself into thinking that he could battle against God. And the sad truth is that we can also have the tendency to think the same way, buying into the idea that we can stand against God, that we don't need God. The greatest deception and temptation of the devil is to convince us that we can be Lord of our own lives, that we sit on the throne of life. But to that, I say, do me a favour, go back and read Revelation 4 and 5. Put yourself in the position of John, being in the throne room of God, and you will see who rightly sits on the throne. Satan is trying to deceive us from that truth.

ACCUSER

He is a deceiver, but he's also an accuser. Verse 10 says that the devil is the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night. You see, the name Satan actually means accuser. It's in his very nature to accuse and bring guilt. He accuses us before God and before others. He hassles God's people with the accusation of guilt and shame, that we are shameful sinners and are guilty of punishment. His message in these accusations is that we are not worthy of God's love. Not only that, but he likes to use others to accuse us. Calling us hypocrites and judgemental and close-minded. And unfortunately, we often play right into

the trap, believing these accusations and even, at times, being sucked into the temptation to be accusers ourselves.

THREATS

Satan is a deceiver and liar. He is the accuser. But he also attacks us by threatening us. He makes threats upon our life and wellbeing. In verse 11, it talks about triumph over Satan and it speaks to not loving our lives so much that we would be afraid of death. And it's in these words that we see his weapons, the fear and threat of physical harm and death. It's the story of Job, isn't? Satan, trying to lead us astray and away from God through pain and sorrow and suffering. He knows that he can't stop God from delivering eternal life in Jesus, so he comes after our physical lives here on earth. And it's in these threats, he creates a fear and a panic of death itself.

EMPTY THREATS

Satan is the deceiver, he's the accuser, and he is full of threats. But with all of these threats and tactics and schemes, we need to remember one thing, that they are just that, they are just tactics and schemes and empty threats. Because that's all that Satan can do to us. These are all just weak attempts to pull us away from Jesus. We need to know what the devil knows, that he can only do so much and that he is still defeated. That's what makes him so angry, he's lost the war, he is defeated.

ATTEMPTS TO DEVOUR

In verse 4, it says that Satan wanted to devour the child. But what we can't miss, are the words of verse 5 where it says; 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. You see, it doesn't seem like there was any real battle at all against Jesus. The devil was completely unable to stop Jesus in anything, it was no contest. Jesus came, he lived his life, he accomplished his mission, he died on the cross, he rose again, he ascended to the father's right hand, and he has sat down and began to rule. It's like the devil never even touched him, he never even came close to destroying him.

But that doesn't mean he didn't try. He tried using Pharaoh, who created a law so that every newborn Hebrew boy was to be killed. This would effectively wipe out the entire nation of Israel. That doesn't work, see Moses for what I mean. In 1 Samuel, he tries to use King Saul to kill David, which would have stopped the child from coming from the royal line of David, but that didn't work either.

Time and time again, Satan tries to stop this child from being born, but he fails. So as soon as Jesus is born, he tries to use King Herod, ordering that every child, two years and younger, should be exterminated from Bethlehem. Once again, it's a plan that doesn't work. But Satan has one more idea, one more ultimate trick up his sleeve. This time, his plan would be to turn people away from Jesus. He would deceive the people into making them believe that Jesus was a threat. That he was a threat to their lives, to their society, and to their religion. And in his lies, he convinces the religious leaders that Jesus is a heretic and he deserves to be crucified. Well, that plan, that plan seemed to work. In fact, it seemed to work so well, that it continues to be

the same trick that Satan tries to pull on the people of today; that Jesus is somehow a threat to society.

Satan couldn't stop the child from being born, but his plan does work in killing off this precious child. And I wouldn't be surprised that on a Friday, at around 3pm in the afternoon, there must have been a party in Hell when Jesus' limp body was taken off of a cross and placed in a tomb. Satan must have thought that he had finally done it and that he had finally won.

But there was only one problem. You see, Jesus made a promise. He said that no man would take his life, but that he would lay down his life on his own. And not only that, but he promised that after laying down his own life, that he would have the power to take it up again. And 3 days later, he did just that. And I tell you, on Easter morning, when Satan realized what had actually taken place, there was no Easter party in hell, but there was victory and celebration in Heaven.

Satan is defeated, he knows it, and he's angry. And in verse 12, it says that he is angry because he also knows that his time is short. Jesus is coming back and Jesus wins.

4. LIVING IN VICTORY

Now because Jesus wins, the good news is, we share in that victory, we are on the winning side. But how? How do we live in victory and how do we remain in victory? Well, I'm glad you asked because that's a great question. Especially because our passage gives us that wisdom as well, the wisdom to keep Satan where he belongs, in chains, and for us to live in victory.

BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

The first, and most important way, is by the blood of the Lamb. You see, we are conquerors through Christ, by his blood and sacrifice. The victory that we have over Satan, over sin, and over death is the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. We conquer, as we see in verse 11, by the blood of the lamb. And behold, the one who is on throne is the Lamb who was slain. We have been washed by that blood and we share in his victory. That is the gospel, that the lamb was slain on our behalf and he now reigns forever. We need to keep on reminding ourselves of this good news, especially as accusations come our way. Because accusations do come our way. Our enemy is accusing us of things that are true but that are no longer ours because of the cross.

Because we are sinners and have been found guilty. And Satan is right, we don't deserve God's love. But because of the lamb, because of his blood, we are no longer in shame or guilt. We are no longer separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So we need to keep on preaching the gospel, preaching it to ourselves, the blood of the lamb. We need to keep looking and fixating on that truth and on that victory. The blood that was shed by the lamb - it begins and ends there. And when we hold on to the gospel, we hold it up into the face of our enemy when he comes at us with deceit and lies. We hold up the truth that I have been purchased, I have been redeemed, I have victory in the blood of the lamb, and I am living in that victory. Thanks be to God.

LIVING IN HUMILITY AND PERSEVERANCE

Now, another way to that we can live in victory, is in response to the Lamb and in response to the good news of Jesus. And this response is our call to live in the same manner that brought victory to Jesus – by laying down our own lives, by living in humility and perseverance.

We are called to take up our cross and follow him. Not to take up the arms of slander and of judgement. The world will know that we are followers of Jesus by the mark of the lamb and by our love and mercy. However, it seems all too easy in this day and age to practice judgement and slander instead of love and mercy – especially on social media. And to get caught up in accusations and offense is to get caught up in the schemes of the dragon. The way of the lamb is humility and grace. We can resist the devil by resisting the temptation to play his blame games.

And we resist the devil by staying faithful to Jesus in our perseverance. The truth is, just like the woman in our passage, we are in the wilderness. And just like Israel was waiting for the promised land, we are waiting for the promised return. And just like Israel's wilderness journey, our time in waiting won't be free from trials and tests and struggles.

While the people of God were in the wilderness, they faced temptation and idolatry. They faced struggles of food and water, even desiring to go back into slavery in Egypt. They faced other powers like the Philistines. Before they entered the promised land, the people faced many giants along the way. And in our wilderness exodus journey here on earth, even in our victory, we will face giants as well. In this world we will have trouble, but take heart, because Jesus has overcome the world. So keep going, stay faithful, persevere through hard times, because Jesus wins and our time in the wilderness, waiting for his return, it will only be a short while.

Satan may win a few battles here and there, but Jesus has won the war. So keep going, He will take care of us. James 4:7-8; 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

5. OUR TRUE ENEMY

There is so much more from this passage that I would have loved to unpack this morning, but we just don't have time. However, if we would stop here and think of the purpose of this chapter, we would realize that it's showing us our true enemy. Revelation 12 makes us aware of the cosmic battle going on that is behind our struggles on earth. It's a reminder to be faithful and to press on because we are a part of a much bigger plan. And when we are aware of what God has done and the victory He has won, it gives us what we need to endure suffering in these days and to the end.

I want you to remember that this Revelation of Jesus was a message that was primarily directed to 7 churches in Ancient Asia Minor. These were real churches that were facing real persecution under Rome, even to the point of death. And Jesus is showing these churches, who would often feel hopeless and tempted to turn away from their faith, Jesus is showing them that neither Rome, nor any other nation, or human, is the real enemy. There are dark spiritual powers at

work and Jesus' followers will announce his victory by remaining faithful and loving their enemies just like the slain lamb.

This is the message of Revelation 12. And in our world and in our society, it feels like Rome is all around us as well. That there is division and antagonism. There is racism and fear. The Church is constantly under attack and being persecuted. But the message of Jesus is the same message to us, that we have a real enemy.

Our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our enemy is not those who disagree with us. Our enemy is not COVID-19. Our enemy is not wearing a mask or not. Our enemy is the dragon, the devil, Satan. And he is truly defeated. But when we forget that, and we begin fighting against others or making war out of the little things of life, like wearing mask, that's where Satan gets his wins. So let's be encouraged to keep him defeated and claim the victory of the Lamb. Let's stay unified in the spirit, not divided by the devil.

6. APPLICATION

Well our application this morning is to simply look. It's the great command of Revelation. Look, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Look to the lamb and see him on the throne. And live as a witness and testimony to his victory. Because as bad as things might seem in our lives and in this world, we are reminded to look somewhere else.

To keep our eyes fixed on the unseen realities that we have in this wonderful book of Revelation. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, worthy is the one who sits victorious on the throne.

WITNESS AND TESTIMONY

That is the truth that we bear witness to. This is our testimony, that Jesus wins, he reigns, and he is the Lord of our lives. Our testimony comes in sharing the truth of Jesus and we will triumph by seeking, with our whole being, to know the truth, to speak the truth, and to walk in truth. So be a living witness and a living testimony of the love and victory of Jesus.

ARMOUR OF GOD

And my final piece of advice and application this morning, is to take a stand against the devil's schemes by putting on the full armour of God. Equip yourself and be ready, because we do have an enemy and he is crafty. So let's consider Ephesians 6:10-18 where it says;

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the

helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Well, in closing, let us put on the full armour of God and let us live in the victory of Jesus. As Satan is defeated, John hears a voice in Heaven saying; "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come."

And the word that I want to leave you with this morning, is the word "now". Now is the time and now is the victory. Today the victory has been won. Yes, the battle rages on, but the victory has already been won. And you can live in that victory, now!

Amen.