

10. Recognising the enemy

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[0 : 00] Now, before we look at Revelation 13, let's have a word of prayer. Come then, with prayer and contemplation, see how in Scripture Christ is known.

And indeed, in this great book, at the end of the canon of Scripture, it is indeed Christ that we want to see. Like those people long ago, we want to see Jesus.

And we pray that through these mysterious verses and through these awesome chapters, that you will remind us that it is Christ himself who is the first and the last, the first word and the last word, that you will guide our thoughts, you will stir our hearts and open our eyes.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. So, Revelation chapter 13.

I'm very fond of detective novels and detective films. And one of the scenes you very often get in such books and such films is a scene in an inquiry room where a suspect is being questioned.

[1 : 18] Very often the technique adopted is the tough, hard, aggressive detective and the gentle-spoken, apparently friendly one.

Far more dangerous, of course, because the aim of both is the same, to secure a conviction. Now, reminded of that as we see these two beasts in the chapter, and I'll come back to that.

Here we have the devil's two agents whom he summons, as he, chapter 12, 17 says, make war on the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Why is it so hard to be a Christian? Why is it so difficult to live the life of faith? Or, to put it another way, as Willie was saying this morning, why is it so hard to reckon ourselves dead to sin?

It's a reality. So, why is it so hard to live that reality? And here we have the answer in these two chapters. Look back at chapter 12, verse 12.

[2 : 28] The devil has come down to you in great anger, because he knows that his time is short. Now, a couple of introductory comments. First of all, what we have here is a parody of the Holy Blessed Trinity, because the devil's aim is always to imitate, to parody God.

And the devil, and the devil here, calls two agents. The dragon, like God, wants universal worship. Verse 4, they worshipped the dragon.

And he calls from the sea a beast, who is a parody of Christ. This is the Antichrist, the one who parodies, who imitates, who is hostile to Christ.

And then, from the earth, he summons a second beast, who is a parody of the Holy Spirit. Because, just as the Holy Spirit glorifies, honours Christ, and quickens people's hearts to believe in him, and to give their lives to him, so this second beast honours and glorifies the first beast, and wants people to give them his allegiance.

Elsewhere, this beast is called the false prophet. So, we have a parody of the Trinity. The devil always imitates. The dragon always parodies God.

[3 : 53] But secondly, we must know our enemy. That's my title for this evening, recognizing the enemy. How are we going to find his strategy?

Paul says, we are not ignorant of his devices. And here, John is telling us what the devil's strategy is. He's exposing the strategy of the dragon during the last days.

This is part of the Advent story. John, in his first letter, says, The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Which is why, back in chapter 12, when he appeared, the dragon tried to destroy him. And the instrument he used was Herod on that occasion. And now he tries to destroy those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

And the devil has a two-fold strategy represented by these two beasts. Let me just mention them first, and then we'll look at them. His first strategy is destruction and persecution.

[5 : 01] Open attack. That's verses 1 to 10. Destruction and persecution, which is his open attack. But his second strategy is deception and propaganda, in verses 11 to 18.

Which is his subtle attack. So we have an open attack, and we have a subtle attack. So let's look at these then. Let's look first of all at destruction and persecution.

In verses 1 to 10. This is the power of the state engaging in active violence and destruction. Like I said last week, that this is not just against the church.

Of course, his particular attack is against Jesus, and therefore against his followers. But the devil wants to enslave the whole world. And that's the point of verse 4.

They worshipped the dragon, who had given his authority. And then in verse 7. Authority was given to it over every tribe and people. And language and nation.

[6 : 07] So, who and what is this beast then? Now what's his origin? I saw a beast rising out of the sea. Now the sea in scripture, in the Old Testament, is the haunt of evil.

The haunt of darkness. The haunt of evil powers, such as the sea monster, Leviathan, the dragon. And we read about in the book of Job, and in some of the Psalms, and in the book of Isaiah.

The place where the hostility to God is concentrated. But also the sea is the raging nations. Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine vanity?

Rage there, the word rage there, the metaphor is of the raging sea. So this beast arises out of the sea, out of the place of darkness, but also out of the sea of the nations.

And the imagery is taken from Daniel 7. Four beasts arise out of the sea. And this beast has elements of all four. Savage, dangerous creatures, leopard, bear, lion.

[7 : 12] These beasts which are destructive, those beasts which are formidable. And he has ten horns, and on these horns are diadems.

Now, the reason he has the diadems on his horns, the diadems which are symbols of authority, I suggest, is because this is where he gets his authority from.

He gets it from brute force. And that's caused so much misery, sadness, and downright despair among the nations of the world, and still does, when authority is wielded by brute force.

When tyrants simply lay down the law and use military force to establish their policies. In the immediate context, when John is writing, it probably refers to the emperor Domitian, at the end of the first century, we have mentioned this before, who launched a very savage persecution of the church, and whom we know called himself our Lord and God.

That's what Domitian, the emperor, called himself. And he had this on his coins, for example. So, here we have the devil using persecution, the devil using destruction.

[8 : 33] The dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. What about verse 3? One of its head seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

Now, surely this is a parody of the resurrection. See, the devil is, you see, the big picture of salvation. The devil wants to have his own version of that.

Well, if God sends his son into the world, he dies and rises again, I'm going to send this beast into the world who will die and rise again. A parody of the resurrection. But it is a reminder that this beast rises again in every generation.

In every generation, there is powerful, destructive regimes, and in every generation there is worship of power and brute force. That's what the whole world marveled, the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

The personality cult that builds up in totalitarian regimes. No dissent is allowed. No opinion is to be expressed. And the leaders of those regimes are to be treated as if they were God.

[9 : 46] And we're right back at the beginning of the story. You will be like God. What happens when human beings try to be like God? They become like the devil. Because human beings are not to be trusted with power.

That's why Churchill said, democracy is the worst form of government ever invented, except for all the others. You see, there is a romantic and rather silly idea of democracy which goes something like this.

We're all so wonderful. We're all such tremendously good people. We all need to be given our say. Now that's the romantic idea of democracy. I think the realistic one is saying, none of us can actually be trusted with absolute power.

Therefore, there's got to be checks and balances. But this is the state power without checks, without balances. And they worship the beast saying, who is like the beast? Who can make war on him? A deliberate parody of Exodus 15. Who is like the Lord? Who is like Yahweh? Who can fight with him? So you see what the devil is doing?
[10:51] He's writing his alternative script for the history of the world. And he's deceiving people. We'll come to this section in a moment or two. Who is like?

Who can make war on him? Well, if we read chapter 12, we know the answer to that. Verse 7 of chapter 12, 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. As we saw, not only did Michael defeat the devil, but Christ's followers defeated him as well.

Verse 11, By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. Because Jesus died, gave the devil his death blow. The message of the gospel as it's preached and it's proclaimed throughout the world makes inroads into that dark empire.

So what is his activity there? He comes from the sea, from the abode of evil. He comes from the raging nations of the world. He embodies this.

[11:54] See, that's why I think we get more out of this chapter than some people do. We want to project this right into the future and say it's only going to happen at the very end of the last days. Of course it's going to happen then.

But when we see this is happening all the time, this is Satan's strategy that we need to be aware of. Then we'll get far more out of this. So what's his activity?

Verse 4, The beast was given a mouth. And it was allowed, verse 7, to make war on the saints.

Now, it's very important we understand what's happening here.

The devil gives him his throne. The devil gives him his authority. But behind that and above that and beyond that is the providence of God who allows him to do this.

For 42 months, verse 5, I've already said several times this 42 months, I believe, is the whole period between the comings, the first and second comings, referring back to the period that Daniel speaks about, looking forward to the second century and the Syrians, occupied Jerusalem and tried to turn it into a godless, blasphemous, anti-god state.

[13:09] You see, he is allowed, he is given, and authority was given to it. Now, of course, the devil has no authority over every tribe and people and language and nation unless it's given to him.

The temptation in every age is the same temptation that Jesus himself faced in the desert, isn't it? The devil says to him, All the kingdoms of the world will I give to you if you will bow down and worship me.

You see, the devil rewriting the script, claiming to be God and sending his agent into the world.

Verse 8, 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 that was slain or perhaps everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life the book of life of the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

Either way, it's plain. There are two powers demanding our allegiance. There are two masters we can obey. There are two allegiances we can own.

[14:21] The devil is going to use force. The devil is going to use power. And of course, many of our brothers and sisters throughout the earth know very much about this first beast, don't they?

We read about it in the Barnabas Fund. We pray for them in our prayer meetings. Those, our brothers and sisters who are suffering the rampage of this first beast. The persecuting godless power of the state.

When the state claims to be God then it becomes the devil. When the state claims to exercise the power of the Lord then every freedom every freedom we enjoy every liberty that has been fought for for years simply disappears.

Anyone has an ear let him hear. Notice he makes war against God those who, verse 6 those who dwell in heaven the spiritual temple his people he makes war on the saints.

Verse 10 echoes Jeremiah chapter 15 meaning that this is going to happen during these 42 months. There is going to be captivity there is going to be killing there is going to be persecution but there is also eternal security isn't there?

[15 : 36] I mean verse 9 verses 8 verses 8 balances verse 10 doesn't it? We've got verse 8 everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life and then verse 10 this is the kind of thing that happens to some whose names have been written in the book of life.

Nevertheless this is a call for endurance and faith of the saints because there is eternal security for the saints. Now in many ways all this is fairly straightforward isn't it?

The devil raging throughout history using tyrants dictators militarism despotism to crush every freedom and of course crushing freedoms indiscriminately.

He particularly hates the Christian faith but he hates any kind of freedom any kind of expression of liberty and we need to be aware of that device.

Now brothers and sisters in this country and in the west for the past 200 years we've known very little of the power of this first beast.

[16 : 45] But we certainly know about the second beast and it's this beast I want to turn to now verses 11 to 18 the beast of deception and propaganda the subtle attack.

That is the beast that the devil has used so successfully in the west in the last two centuries. Now who is he? Notice he comes from the earth and I think there's a deliberate reference back there to chapter 12 suggested last week in chapter 12 that the phrases in heaven in verse 1 and in verse 7 were the controlling factor what's happening then the dragon is thrown down to the earth.

This beast is not of heaven. This beast is not of God. This beast is of the earth. This beast is purely limited in its viewpoint.

And elsewhere in chapter 16 in chapter 19 and in chapter 20 he is called the false prophet. This second beast and I see he's a parody of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ brings honour to the Father so this second beast brings glory to the first beast and glorifies the dragon their master.

[18 : 04] And he seems much less daunting. It had two horns like a lamb. This beast doesn't usually come with the jackboot and the military dictatorship.

This beast often comes with the smooth tongue well turned out but he spoke like a dragon.

When he opens his mouth you recognise his master's voice. This is the beast of deception of propaganda both in the world and in the church.

Think of the great lies of the century that's just passed the 20th century. Think of Nazism Communism Humanism Secularism Think of the misery these lies brought to millions upon millions of people who were given false promises.

they sounded like a lamb. Hitler came to power by making promises. This is how people so often deceive.

[19 : 09] Promises are made the utopia is held out then we end up with desperate disappointment. And think of course of the false teaching in the church which has destroyed it so much from the inside.

This beast the beast of false teaching. Now of course this beast sounds like a lamb. It would be very easy if a false teacher were to come into church wearing a t-shirt saying I am a wolf.

I am the beast from the earth. That's not the way it happens of course isn't it? The way it happens is that these false teachers speak in a pleasant in a reasonable manner and they draw disciples after themselves.

And of course if the devil can also make sure the truth is taught by angular and difficult people then he's got a double whammy to use a theological phrase.

That's so often the way the devil works. Make sure error is taught by well presented attractive people and if you can make it make sure that truth is taught by awkward and difficult people.

[20 : 27] So how does this beast operate? Because we really as I say in this country we really need to guard against this beast. In some ways persecution is obvious isn't it?

You know when you are being persecuted you know when the state when the community is against you. This one is so subtle. First of all he operates by bogus miracles.

Verse 13 it performs great signs even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people and by signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth.

Like Elijah he calls down fire from heaven. If you read in Exodus 8 and following you'll find that Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform miracles it wasn't just Moses who if you see somebody who looks like a miracle there are always different explanations of it.

It could be the power of God. It'd just as easily be trickery or even the work of the devil. That's why Paul tells us to test everything and John tells us to test the spirits to see whether they are of God. [21 : 44] And in verse 15 in particular it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast 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.

The background here is probably what happened in many pagan temples where the pagan idols seemed to speak through a kind of ventriloquism and deceived people.

That's probably the actual background. But I think a point that's true of every age as well is that it is always reappearing in new forms.

Just as the persecuting beast always reappears so does the deceiving beast the beast of propaganda. False teaching continually getting a new access of life give life to the image of the beast.

In the early church it was things like Gnosticism the Nicolaitans were mentioned at the beginning of this book and of course one of the ways in which false teaching is so deceptive is by pretending it's new.

[22 : 55] So many modern heresies are really just old fashioned Gnosticism kind of thing that plagued the early church in the first century. Liberal teaching is always hailed as new and exciting.

We've turned our back on all this old dreary bible stuff. We've got new and exciting things. The trouble is these new and exciting things have emptied the churches. When you have liberalism preached or such preaching as liberalism produces because liberalism does not believe in proclaiming the word so people have continually to invent new things it empties the churches.

No one has converted. No one's life is changed. Because that is the essence of the false prophet isn't it? One thing a false prophet will never tell anyone they need to do is to change.

False prophet will always be affirming. Always be building people up. I'm not saying that there isn't a place for that in its right sense. Of course there is building people up in their faith.

Building people up in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's not what this beast does. This beast continually tells people you're fine the way you are.

[24 : 08] Sometimes openly sometimes simply by innuendo and so on. This beast that works bogus miracles it always seems to be there.

Get rid of it and then it reappears. Verse 15 to 17 this beast demands conformity. Here it's economic boycott. denying of true freedom to those who will not conform.

One of my great sadnesses is the word liberal has been hijacked by such people. Liberal ought to mean open ready to listen willing to consider different points of view.

But liberalism that's not the way false teaching works in the church. What liberalism does is it will take a minority view and then say it must be tolerated. We must listen to it.

And before long that minority has become the dominant majority. And those who disagree are marginalised regarded as bigots and so on.

[25 : 10] That's the way it operates. The minority bully others and refuse any view but their own.

It's rather like in society as well. The media is dominated by a liberal minority who impose their views on others and think how successfully this second beast uses modern technology the internet all the devices we have nowadays how many many more opportunities this beast has to impose conformity.

So this beast bogus miracles always springing up again always offering something new. This beast enforcing conformity there is no heresy according to these people except to believe there is heresy. That's the only view that's not permitted. But thirdly this beast operates by obscuring the revelation of God.

This calls for wisdom. Verse 18 This calls for wisdom says John. What does he mean here? He means that if you are going to tackle this beast if you are going to defeat this beast you'll only defeat him by listening to the wisdom from above.

James tells us there's two types of wisdom. There's a wisdom from beneath which is devilish earthly. That's the wisdom of this second beast. The wisdom from above is peaceable and brings the fruit of the spirit.

[26 : 42] In other words if we're going to defeat this beast we need to listen to the word of God because that's what this beast is determined to do to suppress the word of God and to suppress those who proclaim the word of God to put instead a kind of humanistic and a kind of religion that

does not glorify God that does not convert people.

And that brings us of course to the number and to the mark of the beast. I hope you're not expecting some brilliant revelation about this number which no one else has ever thought up before.

I'm not suspicious of such things if no one's thought of something in 2000 years probably that's because they're asking the wrong questions. Let's look at it. Verse 17 No one can buy or sell unless he has the mark that is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

Remember I said Satan always paradise. Back in chapter 7 verse 3 the people of God are sealed. They're identified and then again at the end of the book in chapter 22 verse 4 his servants will serve him.

They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. Does Satan say well I'm going to put my name on my people's foreheads? And his number is 666.

[28 : 10] Now in both Hebrew and Greek the letters of the alphabet are used as numbers as for example alpha would be one, beta would be two, gamma would be three and so on.

And if you read the commentaries on Revelation you'll find page after page after page of suggestions as to who this beast might be. Many have suggested Nero.

Nero of course at an earlier stage but still remembers a terrible persecuting force. Trouble is if you're going to get Nero out of 666 you've got to put his name into Hebrew you've got to take a Greek put it into Hebrew and miss out a letter and then you'll get 666 and nearly all the attempts to find the name have floundered on that sort of thing.

I want to suggest to you something else. What is this verse saying? What is 666 in the apocalyptic symbolism? What's number 7 in the apocalyptic symbolism?

It's the number of God, the number of completeness. the seven spirits before his throne, the seven churches and so on, ultimately coming from the seven days of creation.

[29 : 23] Remember where this beast comes from? He comes from the earth, comes from humanity. is John saying, you'll recognise this beast because he just simply doesn't make it.

It's not good enough. Even triple six doesn't make seven. This is not a voice from heaven. This is a voice from earth.

It's not good enough. And that I think is at least a reasonable way of looking at this mysterious number and certainly far more profitable than trying to speculate which figure throughout history from Nero to Saddam Hussein, who has been a recent candidate of course for that, as has Mugabe and Chaychewski and Paul Pott and all such dictators who undoubtedly of course are evidence of the persecuting power of the first beast.

But it seems to me, what's being saying is, this beast speaks with a voice that is totally earthbound. I said already, an alternative script, another telling of the story of salvation, a story that promises but leads nowhere, a story that promises the earth and gives you nothing except destruction and despair.

So we're going to stand up to this beast. We need wisdom. We need to listen to the word of God. Verse 9, if anyone has an ear, let him hear. And remember, this is the word repeated to the seven churches.

[30 : 58] Remember this whole book is a message to the seven churches. John is saying to the churches, look, these two beasts are raging throughout the world. Some of you are experiencing persecution.

Some of you are experiencing propaganda. For both of these, you need wisdom. You need to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Advent, this season, is saying to us not just that Christ has come, but he will come again.

In the early church, when the season of Advent was instituted, it was not primarily building up to Christmas, not primarily counting how many days to Christmas. It was seeing these two great events, the coming in great humility and the coming at the end of time in glorious majesty as one event.

it was preparing for that event when he shall come again. And when he comes again, the other passage in the New Testament where we read about these beasts is 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. This is what we read. The man of lawlessness, whom the Lord Jesus Christ will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

[32 : 10] So in this time of Advent, as we live between the comings, as we battle with the world, the flesh and the devil, the principalities and powers, let's recognize his strategy.

Savage, open, godless persecution and subtle, ungodly rewriting of the script, false teaching which will only bring harm and destruction.

Christ has come and Christ will come again. And when he comes, he will destroy all his enemies and reign as Lord forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Almighty God, give us grace to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light here in the time of this mortal life when our Saviour came to visit us in great humility, so that on the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may be made like him in his eternal coming where he lives and reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. Amen.