

A Call to Wisdom That Discerns Deception

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Date: 17 March 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good. Well, we come now to our Bible reading and let's turn to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, chapter 13. You'll perhaps know that Paul Brennan, one of our associate ministers, is making his way through the book of Revelation.

We were listening to parts of chapter 12, I think it was, last week. And here we have chapter 13, where we have some revelatory teaching about the effects of the beast and the power of the devil in the life of the world.

So Revelation, chapter 13, and I'm reading the whole chapter. John the Apostle writes this.

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard. Its feet were like a bear's and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it, the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

[1 : 1 3] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed. And the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

And they worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast and who can fight against it? And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words.

And it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling.

That is, those who dwell in heaven. Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation.

And all who dwell on the 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.

[2 : 1 9] If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes. If anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence. And makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose mortal wound was healed.

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

Telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast. So that the image of the beast might even speak.

- [3 : 27] And might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also, it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave.
- To be marked on the right hand or the forehead. So that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark. That is the name of the beast or the number of its name.
- This calls for wisdom. Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man. And his number is six, six, six.
- Amen. This is the word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing to us today. Well, good morning, folks.
- Good to see you. Good to be here at Bar Street. And please do have your Bibles open there. It's Revelation 13. We're in the second half of that chapter. Looking at verses 11 to the end.
- [4 : 42] Good. We've got the ringing sorted out. Not quite. Please have that open in front of you. So Revelation 13.
- And from verse 11. Now, from the very beginning, Satan has sought to oppose God and his people.
- Genesis 3. Genesis 3.15 sets the agenda for the unfolding of history as God proclaims judgments on Satan.
- He said, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.
- Now, that enmity between Satan and all his and the woman and her seed, God's people. That enmity takes many forms.
- [5 : 42] And Satan's weapons are many. But chief amongst them is deception. Above all things, Satan is a liar, a deceiver.
- His first words recorded in the Bible, just a few verses before those ones from 3.15. His words were designed to deceive. He said to Eve, did God actually say?
- Did God really say what he meant? And then he'd go on to say to Eve a few moments later, you will not surely die. Deceptive, deceitful lies.
- Satan is crafty. He's deceptive. That is who Satan was and still is. It is his deceptive nature that is the very focus of this passage this morning.
- We are considering in chapter 13 here, the unholy trinity that is at work in this present age. The great dragon himself was revealed to us in chapter 12.
- [6 : 48] Look there at verse 9 of chapter 12. The great dragon was thrown down, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.
- But this dragon, who in verse 17 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, who hold the testimony of Jesus, this dragon does not act alone.
- We're introduced to two other beasts in chapter 13. We saw the first last week who emerged from the sea, verse 1. Have a look at that, chapter 13, verse 1.
- As we saw last week, that first beast represented a perversion of good government.
- This beast, in the first half of chapter 13, represents the state that is set on persecuting the church and Christians. And in the face of such power, John urges his readers, he would urge us, to stand firm, to endure.
- [8 : 06] Look at verse 10. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. If the weapon wielded by this first beast, in the first half of chapter 13, if that key weapon is raw power, then the weapon wielded by the second beast is lies.

The second beast is introduced to us there in verse 11. Then I saw another beast rising out of the sea. It had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon.

And the message from John with regard to the second beast is not that we'd endure, but that we'd be alert. In light of this second deceptive beast, John urges, look at verse 18, he urges wisdom.

The purpose of this second beast is to get us to worship the first beast. The aim of the second beast is to deceive and to slowly but surely have God's people, then and today, loosen our grip on Jesus.

In favor of the first beast is to worship the first beast. In favor of pledging allegiance to the ungodly state, to the ungodly ideologies of this world, behind which stand the first beast and ultimately Satan himself.

[9 : 39] So this unholy trinity, its whole goal is to get God's people to let go of Christ, and to turn instead to Satan. The whole goal of Satan from the very beginning, as we saw in Genesis, the whole goal has been to woo God's people away from following God, to believe his own lies and to follow him.

And above all things, Satan is a liar. And so we need to heed John's call there for wisdom, verse 18. We need to have understanding so that we can calculate the number of the beast.

Now we'll unpack the second half of verse 18 later, but John is basically saying to his readers, to us, you need to open your eyes.

You need to be able to discern the great dragon's lies. You need to understand, to calculate. And that means that we really do need to think about what is going on in the world around us.

We really do need to ask difficult questions and be prepared to stand alone. We need wisdom in these days if we discern the dragon's lies.

[10 : 54] And that's always been the case throughout all history, that need to be able to discern how Satan is at work in this world. We've got to wake up.

Our eyes need to be open. I've been so struck by Winston Churchill's stance during his so-called wilderness years in the 30s.

You'll probably get more Churchill references. I'm reading a book about him in a minute, so apologies. But it's great stuff. But he was essentially the lone voice for years in the House of Commons as he continually warned about German rearmament.

For years, he was trying to unveil Hitler's real plans. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, and his cabinet, they took Hitler at face value.

They took Hitler at face value. They really did believe Hitler when he said he had no plans to expand the German borders. He wasn't really going to invade Czechoslovakia or Poland. But Churchill did his homework.

[12 : 01] Churchill met with key people from Germany and elsewhere to get an understanding of what was really going on on the ground. He wasn't prepared to take Hitler's word. No, Churchill sought to understand, to calculate.

But he was vilified for his stance. He was mocked, called paranoid. He took great courage to keep going. Listen to this.

He had to say this after a debate in the House of Commons. As far back as 1935, he was making the case about what Hitler was doing. This is his reflection on that speech.

He said, I felt a sensation of despair. To be so entirely convinced and vindicated in a matter of life and death to one's country, and not to be able to make Parliament and the nation heed the warning was an experience most painful.

And that was going to be his experience for the next four years, until eventually people woke up to what Hitler was really doing. And there's no doubt who was really behind Hitler's activity. The great dragon himself.

[13 : 06] And so we, like those who have gone before us, need wisdom to identify the lies. And courage to call them out. And that is the whole purpose of John in this section.

To urge God's people to have wisdom. To be able to understand, to calculate, how Satan is really at work in this world, how his deceptive lies are really playing out in this present age.

So we're going to look more closely at the second beast, and try to notice what John is really teaching us about this second beast, this third part of the unholy trinity, with the dragon of chapter 12 and these two other beasts.

How do they work together to seek to fulfill Satan's plans, which are always to deceive and pull God's people away from following Jesus?

Here's the first thing, verse 11. A deceptive identity. That's the first thing we see about this beast. A deceptive identity. A dragon in sheep's clothing.

[14 : 12] Notice how John describes a beast. Verse 11. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon.

This beast looks innocent enough. This beast looks nothing like the terrifying beast that we saw last week. That monster in the first half of chapter 13, the seven-headed leopard bear lion beast.

Terrifying. But this beast looks like an innocent lamb. And that image in itself is deceptive. It's deliberately misleading to present like a lamb.

The Lord Jesus himself is often described as a lamb, and certainly in Revelation, that image has been used of Jesus already. Revelation 5 speaks of the lamb who was slain, the lamb who is rightly worshipped.

But this lamb in chapter 13 is not that lamb. This is a counterfeit lamb. This is a dragon in sheep's clothing.

[15 : 23] The voice of this lamb is the voice of a dragon. This beast may look a bit like Jesus. This beast has the veneer of religion, but the reality is quite different.

And this is why Satan can be so dangerous. He's a deceiver. He is out to dupe people, to trick people.

At first glance, there seems no problem with this particular beast. It looks like a lamb. This beast looks the part. But counterfeit religion is always going to have something that draws people to it.

It will be attractive in some respects. It will not seem immediately obvious and false. But this lamb turns out to be a lie.

His words will lead to the worship of evil disguised as good. The issue with this beast is not power, as we saw with the beast last week, which often manifested in raw, state-sponsored persecution of the church.

[16 : 36] That's pretty blatant and obvious. This beast isn't power. It's propaganda. You might summarize this beast as being counterfeit religion, false religion that twists so as to direct people away from God and towards Satan.

It's much more subtle. Much harder to discern often. That's the first thing John is showing us here with this beast.

He's got a deceptive identity. Number two, verse 12, a deceptive purpose. The aim is the worship of Satan.

Look at verse 12. This beast exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose mortal wound was healed.

So the work of this lamb-like beast, the work of this dragon in sheep's clothing is to turn the inhabitants of the earth into willing worshippers of the first beast.

[17 : 44] they will want to worship this beast. Their arms are not being twisted. They're being seduced in. And as we've seen, the one behind that first beast is Satan himself.

The dragon stands behind these other beasts. And so the goal of this lamb-like beast is to get the whole of this world to turn away from God and to worship Satan.

The ultimate force behind all godless power Now for the original readers of Revelation, we saw some time ago the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3.

This first went to those seven churches in what we now know as Turkey. They were the recipients of this revelation at first. And for those people who first received this letter, the implications were very clear to them.

As we saw last week, the first beast for them was very clearly at work through the Roman Empire which was very hostile towards Christians at many times. Persecuted the church.

[18 : 50] And this second beast manifested itself at least in part through the cult of the emperor. A form of religious worship which showed ultimate loyalty to Rome and involved the worship of the emperor of the day, Domitian.

And it's perhaps helpful just to zoom in on one of those churches just to see how this played out for them. Consider Ephesus. Now the pressure put on that young church in Ephesus was significant as the cult of the emperor grew ever more visible.

Domitian himself had dedicated a massive eight-meter-high statue to the previous emperor, Titus. And he had dedicated this huge, probably as tall as this room, this massive stone statue to Titus in the Temple of Diana.

And the Temple of Diana was at the very heart of the city of Ephesus. It dominated physically but also its influences all over the city. And this establishment of the cult of Domitian at Ephesus with this massive statue involved the participation of the whole province.

Festivals were held increasingly often at this time whenever the emperor's birthday came around or as a particular visit, big festival. And all were expected to participate in this religious festival.

[20 : 25] One scholar writes that the city decrees to participate in celebrations extended even to people being required to offer sacrifices on altars outside their own houses as the procession walks by.

You can imagine the consequences, can't you, for Christians in Ephesus who refused to do that, who refused to set up an altar outside their house to sacrifice for the emperor Domitian.

the consequences were significant because to worship Domitian was to reject Jesus.

To worship Domitian would be ultimately to worship the dragon himself. And that is what John is revealing for his first readers there in Ephesus. You need to see what's really going on here, folks.

And we too need to learn to discern the cults, religions of our day, whether they are overtly religious or secular. It's true that often throughout history powerful totalitarian states have some sort of supportive religious structure.

[21 : 40] It was certainly true in Hitler's Germany and in Stalin's Russia it wasn't overtly religious but it was certainly an ideology that everyone was expected to bow down to. Sometimes it's obvious like that.

But even though it's obvious it's still hard to stand against. The fact it's obvious doesn't make it easy to resist. It's hard isn't it? But be in no doubt as to the religious nature of some at face value non religious ideologies in our world.

The ideological movements of our day with their annual festivities and ceremonies and marches and flags and symbols they are powerful.

They're seductive especially when everybody else around us is bending the knee. Now it's becoming increasingly overt isn't it? It doesn't make it any easier to stand against does it?

So we need to be careful. We need to be clear about the purposes of this second beast. Those religions of our world which might seem innocuous enough they are not.

[22 : 54] Who stands behind it? And what's his goal? He wants you to let go of Christ. And this beast is at work wherever Satan entices people to worship something that is man made.

To make an idolatrous image out of anything other than Christ. The aim of this beast is to deflect our worship away from the God who we cannot see who really is in control to let go of him and bend the knee to the things we can see of this world.

The authorities of this world, the ideologies of this world. But be in no doubt as to the deceptive purpose of Satan. Be in no doubt as to the one who stands behind all false religion of this world.

That's the second thing, a deceptive purpose. Number three, this beast is a deceptive prophet. Speaking of false gospel, look at verse 13 and following.

this beast performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. And by the signs that it's allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

[24 : 13] And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so 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. This is a deceptive prophet.

If verse 11 presented this beast as a false Christ, this verse presents him as a false Elijah. Elijah, you might remember, called down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifices in the presence of all the priests of Baal because they cut themselves and they cried out to heaven, they called out hour upon hour to their God who is no God.

There was no answer to the prophets of Baal because their God didn't exist. But Elijah, one prayer and fire descended from heaven burning up the sacrifice.

This beast of Revelation 13 has the appearance of a prophet. He's Elijah like. Can do impressive looking things even calling down fire from heaven.

But John is saying to us it's all lies, it's propaganda. These great signs are designed to deceive. The whole purpose is to get people to make an image to the first beast, to worship false gods.

[25 : 32] And apparently at the time that John was writing, these sorts of things were common. You think about the temple of Diana and what was going on in the cult of the Roman Empire. Apparently temple priests would conduct pseudo-magical tricks, ventriloquism, making the gods appear to speak, false lightning, and other such phenomena were effectively used in temples at John's time.

They could even make statues weep and seem to speak. It would look very impressive. The false religions then and today may have the appearance of power and life.

They may promise fulfillment and happiness and purpose and identity. But ultimately there is nothing of lasting value there. It's only through worshipping Jesus that we find truth and life.

All other schemes of thought, there's nothing really there. It's empty. And so we need to exercise wisdom. All that glitters is not gold.

All that claims to be genuine is not. All that looks like a genuine prophet of the Lord may not be. So we really do need to look past the presentation to the substance.

[26 : 59] Does this teaching, this ideology, does it lead to worship of Jesus or something else? What is really the heart of this teaching?

They're using some good words here. It sounds familiar. But what's really going on? What's really underneath this? We need to look beyond the presentation to the substance.

We need to be alert to the deceptive prophet that John warns us about here. It looks good. Sounds the part. Number four, a deceptive pressure.

Look on the verse 16. Also, this beast causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or on the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark.

That is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. Now, Sardis was another one of these churches that received this letter at first.

[28 : 12] Sardis was a city, proud of its association, its affiliation with Rome, and it was very keen to promote the rising cult of the emperor. To have nothing to do with the emperor cult could prove fatal for a businessman in Sardis.

The various business guilds and associations, they would host dinners at which emperor worship was prominent. You were expected to bow the knee, to pay homage, to do your part.

To refuse to do so, well, that was pretty financially risky. It would probably invite business failure in Sardis. If you refused to go along with that, you were going to be shunned and pushed out to the edges, your business would dry up.

To refuse to be identified with the prevailing cult of the empire, there was a real cost for the Christians in Sardis. And that is what this thing about the mark is referring to, this mark on your hand and on your forehead.

To be marked on the right hand or the forehead, it was to have an invisible seal of belonging to acceptable society. You could function, you could buy and sell, you could take part in society.

[29 : 37] Now, elsewhere in Revelation, there are references to God's people having a mark. The righteous and the believing have the Father's name written on their foreheads, we read in Revelation.

Now, we don't go around tattooed, do we, with a mark on our heads? Now, we understand that Revelation is speaking symbolically. A name on your forehead means you belong to God.

You have an invisible mark setting you apart, belonging to Him. And the mark here is another mark of belonging. It's not a physical, literal mark that goes on your forehead, but it's very real.

This mark sets you aside as belonging to the world, not Christ. Without this mark, you may find life very difficult. John is telling us that if you do not compromise with the worldly systems and patterns and ideas of this age, you will suffer.

You may find it very hard. In the first century in Sardis, as we've seen, this meant a refusal to worship Caesar, to be spiritually identified with the beast. And that meant for them persecution, discrimination, alienation.

[30 : 56] They were shunned on the outskirts of the economy. And it could mean the same for us today. In other words, John is saying, the world has a way of operating and sometimes we cannot go along with it.

Whatever it costs us, and it may cost us, it may cost you the promotion, maybe even the job, it may cost you a place on the sports team or an invitation to the neighbors for dinner, it may even cost you your very life.

Revelation 13 says that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark. So we must be prepared as Christians to face setbacks, strange looks, even shame and suffering, to say no.

We will not do that. We will not do what everyone else thinks we ought to do. Whether it's to do with how we treat our Sundays or what kind of flags we're prepared to fly or what sort of pronouns we're going to put on our LinkedIn profiles, we will not do those things, no matter the cost.

And the Lord will honor those who honor him. I've chatted with some of you recently, you've made stands in the workplace, not necessarily on some of those issues, but you've done what is right in the eyes of the Lord, and actually it served you well.

[32 : 42] Promotions have been given because you refuse to compromise. But it may not always be promotions that come as you stand firm. I think John is being realistic here.

There may be a cost. If you refuse to bow down to the idols of this world which have taken over our institutions, our education institutions, our corporations, it may be very hard.

But be in no doubt, this is one of the tools in the enemy's armory. He will seek to apply deceptive pressure. He will seek to exert real pressure on Christians by making life hard, even economically hard.

And that will be a revealing thing for many. In the face of pressure, our true colours will be revealed. Some will give in to the pressure, but others, well, they'll hold firm.

As one writer put it, half-hearted Christians do not surrender their lives for a cause in which they do not really believe. Do you really believe the Lord Jesus and what he's done for you?

[33 : 57] Now, there's great hope, as we'll see for Christians, because the Lord will hold you. And so, if you're panicked by a question like that, that's a good thing.

If you're worried, then that's a good sign. But times of testing, they do reveal. It's tough, isn't it?

But we do need to remember that we are in the midst of a spiritual war. The enemy doesn't play nice. There is more to life than what we merely see.

What is happening right now, as we gathered here, it's more than just a few folk getting together. This isn't just a horizontal, nice meeting. No, this is a spiritual event.

This is a supernatural gathering of God's people. And there's more than we can see. Revelation shows us that there is a spiritual realm, and we really are caught up in a spiritual war.

[35 : 00] We really do have an enemy. Revelation 12 pictures him as a dragon. He is active, making war on God's children, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

He's at war with us. His chief aim is to pull us away from following Jesus, and one of his key weapons, along with his raw power, is propaganda, deceit, lies.

And John has painted a picture for us of an unholy trinity, and it should trouble us. It's very sobering. What then do we do?

Let's consider lastly, verse 18, where John says this calls for wisdom, that the one who is understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

We need wisdom to be able to discern the deception. If we are to be able to discern Satan's lies, we need wisdom. But before we get to that, can I just deal with the last bit?

[36 : 12] The beast, the number of the beast, 666. Now this can get some folk pretty excited. There are many ideas and interpretations about how to understand this number, and if you want me to, I can point you to helpful resources where you can spend hours reading through the different interpretations, if that's your sort of thing.

But this whole section is detailing a counterfeit religion, a deceitful beast. This beast is an expression of false religion, revelation, and given the significance of numbers in revelation, especially the number 7, if you wanted to have a counterfeit number, something that was close to being divine, something that looked a bit like the real thing, but falls short, what number would you pick?

Well, instead of 777, you'd probably pick 666, wouldn't you? 7 is the number of perfection in revelation, of holy completion in the book. 7 churches, 7 lampstands, 7 eyes, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls, so on and so on through revelation.

It's a number of perfection and completeness. God is often associated with number 7. And so if 7 is the number of holy completion of God, it stands to reason that 6 would be the number of unholy imperfection, something that is seeking to look like the real thing, but isn't.

666, therefore, is man's counterfeit, Satan's counterfeit to the holy trinity of 777. It's a caricature, a counterfeit. It's the number of the gravestone on every fallen empire of this world.

[37 : 53] This is the number on the gravestone of every great ideology and civilization and worldview that lives without the knowledge of the true God. 666. That seems to be the best explanation, most likely, the least far-fetched.

It is the number of counterfeit religion that would seek to deceive, but is not the real thing. This beast, 666, is not God.

And for all its deceptions and seeming power and success, it can never be God. This beast cannot give humanity a way out of its sinfulness and its futility that sin brings to human life.

this beast cannot save. And so we need wisdom, don't we, to discern this beast and how he's operating in this world.

The identity of this beast will not always be obvious. Hence the need for wisdom. Satan is above all things, as he's thought about, he is a deceiver and a liar.

[38 : 58] He will not advertise himself as Satan. He will not come advertising that he's the enemy of God's people. He won't do that.

No, he'll appear as an innocent lamb. He'll perform signs and wonders that look like the real thing, but aren't. And as we look back with the benefit of hindsight, we can identify key figures in history who bore the number 666.

Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and so on. At the time, many did not see them for who they really were.

Many, in fact, applauded them, including our prime minister. They were dragon-like deceivers. They came as lambs, but they were dragons.

We need wisdom, don't we? It's much harder to observe here and now. Where Satan's at work, he's a deceiver. It's easier with hindsight often. We need wisdom.

[40 : 01] We need understanding. We need to make calculations, as John says there, doesn't he? This calls for wisdom. Let the one who understands calculate. Calculations must be made.

Brains engaged. Questions asked. So it is worth asking yourself whether it's in school or university or in the workplace, in the sports club, in the neighborhood.

What's really going on here? What's really behind what I'm seeing on my Instagram feed or on the news? What's really going on?

I do feel a bit uncomfortable about something here. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I'm a bit uncomfortable about this practice or this event or this idea. Why is that?

Do I suppress that feeling and just go with it or do I interrogate it? Is there more going on here that appears to be at first glance? Is the beast actually trying to push me into his mold and away from Christ?

[41 : 04] Might I need to stick my head above the parapet? Make a stand because I follow Jesus. These moments won't announce themselves.

These moments will not come with a ten minute warning. These moments may come shrouded in deception. We need wisdom, don't we? We need to spot the work of this beast.

We need to discern his activity. And having discerned Satan's lies, we resist him. What does James say? Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

These are sobering words, aren't they, friends? And this is a real call to us to be alert to Satan's deceptions. We need to ask God for collective wisdom as a church, as individuals in our lives.

But Revelation 13 is not all there is to say, is it? We do need to remember also that we belong to Jesus.

[42 : 17] Jesus. We belong to him and we are safe for all eternity in his hands. Satan can try his best, but for those who belong to Jesus, he cannot touch us.

He will try and pluck us from Jesus' hands, but he will fail. His destiny is destruction. Yours this morning, if you're a Christian, your destiny is eternity with Jesus.

Jesus. Just look on to the very next chapter. Revelation 14. Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name, that's you if you're a Christian, had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads.

And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of a harpist playing on their harps. And they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.

No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

[43 : 37] These have been the redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb. And in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Friends, that's the end. That's the goal. Now, Satan is at work. He's a deceiver, but that's not the whole story. We'll get to Revelation 14 next week, but I couldn't help but go there because we need that reassurance, don't we?

We belong to him. That's our destiny. But be alert. We need wisdom. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your words.

We thank you that you love nothing more than your dear church. For whom the Lord Jesus died and rose again. Father, we thank you that you do give us words of profound hope and promise.

But because you love us, you give us words of warning to open our eyes to reality so that we might endure, so that we might seek wisdom.

[44 : 58] So, Father, please give us wisdom. Help us to understand so that we might calculate the work of the evil one in this world, that we would not fall for his lies, that we would not be sidetracked by his deceptions, no matter how powerful he might seem.

Lord, please help us. Give us wisdom, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.