

A Call to Endurance and Faith

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we are starting back again into Paul's study on the book of Revelation, the very last book of the Bible. So if you turn there now, we're going to read this morning in Revelation chapter 13. If you don't have a Bible, there's some at the side, some at the front, some at the back. One of the stewards will be glad to bring one to you so you can have one and you can read along and see where all this comes from. Very last book of the Bible, the revelation of John, the apostle, which came to him in a great vision as he was imprisoned for his faith on the island of Patmos as a very elderly man. And we've been on and off studying this throughout the end of last year. And we're coming back now into the second half really of the book.

And we're going to read together at verse one of chapter 13, which comes right after the vision of the dragon and of Satan, that ancient serpent, the devil or Satan being cast down and defeated in the triumph of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now John says this, and I saw a beast rising out of the sea with 10 horns and seven heads with 10 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. 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 worshiped the dragon. He had given his authority to the beast and they worshiped 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 the life of the lamb that was slain. 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 the faith of the saints. Then I saw another beast arising 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 has been healed.

It 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 the earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

[3 : 52] 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.

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 its number is the number of a man.

And his number is 666. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, please have your Bible open in front of you. And we're looking at the first half of chapter 13 this morning, verses 1 to 10. Please do have Revelation 13 open there.

[5 : 08] I remember about 10 or so years ago, I was sat down in a small room in a town in North India you've never heard of, meeting with a couple of pastors you've never heard of.

And they were telling me about the persecution, the suffering they had suffered from local ruling authorities for their witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beatings, threats on their families, intimidation. That was 10 years ago. And we've been praying this morning. We've heard recently at our church prayer meetings about the continued persecution in India.

It's been ramping up. From breaking out from little local places to state, sponsored persecution of the Christian church.

And I saw there with that young pastor. He's probably the age I am now. And I could see in his eyes, perseverance, endurance, faith, even joy in the face of the persecution he had been suffering.

[6 : 19] When the pressure really comes against Christians, when persecution really ramps up, when the government really turns the screws on Christians, what do we do?

When our brothers and sisters in India face real threats on their lives, when they see their pastors being beaten, even killed for proclaiming Christ, what do we do?

What do we do when the governing authorities make life more difficult for us? Well, the message of this passage is very simple, but it's very sober.

This is a call for the patient endurance and the faithfulness of Christians. Look at verse 10, how it finishes. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

That is the message from the writer John to us this morning. It's a call for endurance and faith. The concern of these verses is that Christians would not be conformed to the world.

[7 : 33] The concern here is that we would not be changed by the godless empires of this world.

The concern here is that we would not compromise our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The concern is that you and I and dear friends around the world would endure and keep following Jesus.

This passage is a bucket of cold water to shake us from complacency and naivety about what is really going on in our world.

And it shows us what our great enemy, Satan himself, is really doing. It is showing us how Satan is really at work in this world. You see, we need to know what is actually happening in our world.

We need a firm grip on reality. Because it's through having a firm grip on reality, it's through having a clear understanding of what's going on in the world, that we'll be able to endure.

[8 : 39] Hoping for the best, sticking our heads in the sand, is a poor way to equip ourselves for hard things. The ability to endure, in part, comes from facing reality.

You think back on key moments in history, and a clear grasp of reality has been essential for the survival of entire nations.

Winston Churchill, for many years, sounded the alarm about German rearmament through the 30s. He talked about the real threat that Hitler posed for many years, but nobody would listen.

When a vote was put in the House of Commons, he and three others stood firm. The rest of the entire House of Commons went with the appeasement that Chamberlain was pursuing.

Many other politicians applauded Hitler. Did you know that the year before war broke out, the England football team was in Berlin playing, and the England football team, at the request of the Foreign Office, raised their arms in the Nazi salute?

[9 : 50] Everyone was going along with the flow. Nobody wanted to see reality. But Churchill, often a lone voice, sought to unveil the reality.

If he had failed, then who knows how things would have turned out. But it was critical for Britain and many others to face reality. And having faced the horrifying reality of what Hitler was doing, his real plans and purposes, we were able to endure.

And the same is true as we consider what Satan is really doing in the world. He is the one behind the persecution of God's people all across the world today.

He's the one behind it. And the ability to endure comes in part from understanding that reality. Being able to stand firm in the face of persecution, you need to know what's really going on, who's really behind it.

And we need to grasp reality. And we will not get an objective view on what's going on from the world's news sources. The Daily Telegraph, the Times, the Guardian, the BBC, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, they will not give you an objective reading of reality.

[11 : 13] They are not neutral. Only God can pull back the curtain of what we see to unveil what's really happening. Only God can show us what's really going on.

And that is what revelation is. It's an unveiling. It is a revelation of reality. It's not a book to confuse. That's how many people read revelation. It's confusing.

But it's not that. Revelation is here to unveil and to make plain what is really going on. And what we see in these verses is deeply sobering.

Chapters 12 and 13 show us that there is an unholy trinity at work in the world. There is an evil alliance at work behind the scenes in our world.

The great enemy himself, Satan, he is the central figure in this unholy trinity. We encountered him in chapter 12. We were looking at that on Christmas Eve.

[12:11] The great dragon. Look at chapter 12 and verse 9 with me for a moment. The great dragon. The great dragon. The great dragon was thrown down.

That ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. That is what chapter 12 was about.

This great dragon. The great enemy himself. But he isn't alone. He doesn't operate by himself. Chapter 13 introduces us to two additional beasts.

As well as the great dragon, there are two more beasts that form this unholy trinity. The first comes in 13 verse 1. Look with me there. And I saw a beast rising out of the sea.

And the second comes in verse 11. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. A beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. And the first beast, as we'll see this morning, represents the perversion of good government.

[13:14] And the second beast, next Sunday we'll see, is the perversion of true worship. So we're going to focus our attention this morning on the first ten verses of Revelation 13.

We are being shown something here of how Satan is at work in our worlds. In this age, through the perversion of good government.

This beast, which rises out of the sea, is, through the way in which he is described, a picture of the state. Of the government.

A government which has set itself against God and his people. How do we know that? How do we know that's what this is about? Well, as of so much revelation, the significance of these graphic, vivid images is found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Notice, this beast emerges from the sea, that in itself is significant. The sea is often associated with chaos and evil in the Bible.

[14:21] But notice the description of the beast in verse 2. That this beast should be taken as referring to the general idea of opposition, of world government against God's people.

That seems to be confirmed when we realize that what John saw on this occasion, this beast, is drawn entirely from Daniel chapter 7.

In Daniel 7, there is a description of four successive beasts coming forth from the sea. And in Daniel, those beasts each represented political powers.

Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. And John's vision here in Revelation draws together all the characteristics of those four beasts from Daniel into one composite picture.

It would seem that John is not speaking about any one world power in particular. Although he would certainly apply the vision to the circumstances of the time, to the Roman Empire.

[15:26] But the vision has much wider application. And it must be taken to refer to all the world powers down through the ages of history. That have set themselves up against God and his people.

Satan himself is not visible. We don't see him. But his influence is unmistakable.

That is the point of these verses. John is unveiling what is really going on in history. Who is really behind what we see. How do we explain what is going on in India?

How do we explain what's going on in many other places across the world? How do we explain what's happening in our own land? With legislation the government is seeking to pass. How do you explain that? Well, this is how.

There is something else behind the scenes going on. And John unmasks this beast of Satan. So that Christians would see his work for what it really is.

[16:28] And would therefore stand firm. Would endure. That they would not be sucked in or duped. It's a very sober message this morning.

But let's notice key features about this beast. That emerges from the sea. Three key things to notice. About what this beast is like. The first comes in verses 1 and 2.

And we see that this beast. Is powerful. This beast is powerful. The description. Is pretty terrifying.

As we see this beast described. Trying to imagine it. Is really very difficult. It gradually emerges from the sea. Bit by bit. Each moment.

As we see more and more of this beast. The more terrifying it becomes. The more intimidating it becomes. And the first thing that John sees. Verse 1. Is it's 10 horns.

[17:26] And 7 heads. They emerge from the sea. The horns. Speak of strength. And power. Imagine the largest horns you might see on a rhinoceros.

These great big powerful horns. There's 10 of them. Huge. Powerful. And the fact that the diadems. Or the crowns. Are sitting on the beast's horns.

And not his head. That's where a crown usually rests. The crowns are on the horns. And that tells us something about the way in which this beast. Exercises authority.

It's through brute strength. Power. Intimidation. And the seven heads. Well there are a clear link.

To the seven heads of the dragon. We saw in Revelation 12. Verse 3 there. I've heard the 12. This beast from the sea derives. Its power and authority from the dragon.

[18:29] The dragon wears. The crowns on his head. And the number 7 is significant. It represents all through Revelation. The idea of completeness. Of wholeness.

So this imagery together. As you put it together. It emphasizes the completeness of this oppressive power. Of this beast. It is global. It is significant.

It is powerful. Looking on to verse 2. We see more of the beast. As he continues to emerge from the sea. Look with me. The beast that I saw was like a leopard.

Its feet were like a bear's. Its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. As we've seen already.

This beast is an amalgamation. Of the beast that Daniel saw in Daniel chapter 7. In Daniel they were separate individual beasts.

[19:31] There was a leopard. A bear. A lion. And a beast with ten horns. But here they're all in one beast. This mega beast that John sees emerging from the sea.

And for those who first received this revelation. For his first readers. The application was obvious. With Daniel in their minds. As they remembered that vision from Daniel.

It was obvious what this beast represented. The Roman Empire was at times wickedly cruel to Christians. For them this beast was manifested and experienced by them through the Roman Empire.

But this beast clearly represents more than just the Roman Empire of the first century. The evil one who is behind that empire. Is the one who is behind many others that have followed it through history.

This beast represents all world powers all through history. Who oppress and persecute God's people. It is this beast that is behind all that we see all around the world.

[20:48] Wherever Christians are persecuted or harmed or threatened or intimidated. This is the beast that is behind it. And here is what John is communicating with this vision.

He is unveiling for his first readers. That it was the spirit of the devil. The great dragon himself. That corrupted and enabled Rome as a persecutor of Christians.

That is not to remove responsibility from the Roman Empire. They were absolutely responsible. But there was a greater power behind. What we merely see with our eyes. And this beast.

This beast is still at work today. He was not confined to the first century. He continues today. This beast is the one who moves every earthly authority or government or state.

That sets its sights on destroying the church. In other words, John is saying, we've got to get real. We need to know that there are spiritual powers.

[21:55] There are demonic powers behind the events we see in our world. We're not to be naive. We need to know that there's an idea of church. And that's an idea of by God.

We need to think about it. All things we see in the world. You have to be. God has given us government for our good. We have known here in the UK, much good government for many generations. For that we give thanks we give thanks don't we when the governing authorities operate as they ought to we give thanks when the authority delegated to them by God is used wisely and well, we give thanks when good is promoted we give thanks when evil is restrained and punished but we are not to naively think that government is always good revelation 13 would disabuse us of that naivety no, one of the instruments in the hands of Satan is state power and it is a power he has wielded very effectively against his church over the centuries it's subtle sometimes

it's overt sometimes in India it's pretty overt for us it's a bit more subtle at the minute but it's there be in no doubt this beast this demonic beast has great power that's the first thing we're seeing in this chapter secondly this beast it is praised by the world for its perceived domination it is praised by the world look at verses 3 and 4 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 has given authority to the beast and they worshipped the beast saying who is like the beast and who can fight against it this beast seems unbeatable and so it garners the praise of the world verse 3 paints this picture of an undefeated champion one of the heads we're told of this beast has suffered what seemed to be a mortal wound but it heals the wound was real and fatal and yet it seems that it's been healed it can carry on and so amazed are the inhabitants of the world that they worship him they revel in the strength and power they say who can fight against it and what's going on here what's this fatal wound why does the beast seem to recover well there are various interpretations about this wounded head of the beast some would seek to tie it to one of the Roman emperors perhaps Nero who viciously persecuted the church but eventually he was opposed he likely committed suicide but even though Nero disappeared from the world stage the spirit of the beast continued and every political power since in many places has continued to persecute the church a seemingly fatal wound with Nero's passing but things continue that's possible that's one understanding but I think a better understanding is to see that this mortal wound this mortal wound is the wound inflicted on Satan through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ himself that wound that was promised in Revelation in Genesis 3.15 sorry at the very beginning the one who had crushed the head of the serpent well that's what Jesus did through his death and resurrection on the cross as all through Revelation

Jesus is always the one who is seen as wielding the sword and this wound inflicted on the beast I think it reflects the death blow dealt to Satan by Christ through his death and resurrection and by the triumphant establishment of the church through the Holy Spirit Satan's wound appears to be fatal and actually it really was but the devil's continued activity through the ages makes it appear here as though he's overcome this mortal wound that was dealt through Jesus death and resurrection that's how it looks to the Christians first reading this as they considered the persecution they were enduring at the moment this persecution being dealt out by the Roman Empire it would seem that Satan had not in fact been dealt this fatal blow it would seem that he has recovered and that is the tension we live with today isn't it we know that the fatal blow has been struck through Jesus death and resurrection Jesus has won the victory on the cross Satan really has been dealt the knockout blow but we're not yet at the end of the story we await Christ's return when he will come and his victory over Satan will be seen once and for all it'll be visible but we're not there yet the beast seems to have recovered from this blow he's still at work and this passage is teaching us that Satan does stagger on for a while he looks powerful he looks as if he's recovered from this blow but we know he hasn't but even though this beast staggers on even though he's recovered it seems he is able to draw to himself a following the people of the world worship the beast look at verse 8 all who dwell on the earth will worship it everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation and the book of life the lamb who was slain see that's the reality in these last days the days in which we live corrupt and wicked rulers do seem to flourish they really do wield a great amount of power they really do persecute the church they really do put

[28 : 47] Christians in prison they really do kill Christians they really do wield magnetic power think back to the early days of world war two when it certainly looked as if Hitler was unstoppable who could push back his forces who could stand against them and similarly there in the first century the Roman empire seemed to be invincible who would have known except for God that just a few centuries later Rome would be overrun and sacked consigned to the pages of history it seemed all powerful at the time look around the world today whether it's a corrupt government whether it's India or whatever other country you want to think of a hostile culture just the way of the fallen world who can look at that and think who is like the beast who can withstand this regime who can stand against this political power who can stand against this ideology who can counteract the evils that come through various media and entertainment and the states the world around us falls into line worshipping the beast raising the flags raising the salutes paying lip service the world around falls into line who can stand against it that is hard isn't it that's intimidating there seems no end to the power it seems impossible but there is nothing new under the sun all throughout history

God's people have been living under the thumb of tyrannical powers they've always offered this question who can stand who can fight the beast as it manipulates the powers of this world to his own end seems unbeatable he garners the praise of the world that's how it might look but that is not the deeper reality his days as we'll see are numbered there is reason to be sober and vigilant Satan is still a dangerous enemy but he has suffered a crippling death blow yet there is nothing ultimately to fear because victory for God's people is assured it is in hand this mortal blow that this beast has received it is in fact a mortal death blow he might seem to have recovered but he has not his days are numbered

Christ has won the victory and seeing this secret behind history it may not keep us from pain but it should keep us from panic we may still be fearful but we shouldn't be frantic because we know who is really on the throne we know this beast really has been defeated ultimately we know where history is headed for eternity we know these things but it's hard because the beast garners a following the world worships we must stand alone and that's hard but be assured the victory is in hands third thing to see this beast hates God and is at war with his people verses 5 to 7 this beast hates

God and is at war with his people look with me verse 5 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 this beast has wicked words and wicked works this beast mouth utters haughty and blasphemous words that word blasphemous appears all over this passage the beast and those who are acting under his influence speak against God and his people but it's not just his words it's also his deeds he is allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them whenever there is a government or a state that persecutes

Christians imprisons Christians maligns mocks or murders them that is a government infused by the power of this dragon man where there is there is no doubt as to who is behind some of the actions and policies of the governments of this world and that can seem quite alarmist a bit far fetched you might think perhaps perhaps it's your first Sunday at church ever maybe you return to church after many years this all sounds a bit fantastical doesn't it let's talk about demonic activity and Satan pulling the strings seems very alien doesn't it but this last book of the Bible Revelation it unveils reality for us it tells us that there is more that we see with our eyes there is more going on than just what we see on the surface there is a deeper explanation for the terrible things that human powers have done in the past and continue to you today especially to the

[35 : 05] Christian church the institution that is responsible for the deaths of the most people in the past 100 years is the state think of Germany under Hitler's reign Russia under Stalin Uganda under Idi Amin Cambodia under Paul Potts the millions the countless millions killed through the state how else do you explain that surely there must be evil how else do you explain that revelation unveils that reality for us terrible things have been done by state governments and that is one way in which Satan is at work in this world you see Satan hates everything about God and everything that has to do with him he hates his people he hates creation he hates everything to do that God has made he wants to undo all of it Satan stands behind every assault on the church and we're to be alert to that don't be naive but having said that there is a limit to his activities he is allowed to exercise authority for 42 months and again that's a reference to

Daniel chapter 7 what God's people are experiencing in this age is exactly what Daniel foresaw centuries before yes there will be hard words and hard times for God's people but it's limited the 42 months is a reference throughout revelation in different ways but it's a reference to the days in which we are now living these days between Christ's first and second coming we're in the middle of this 42 months in other words what we're seeing here is that this will not carry on forever there is a limit there is a final judgment coming Christ will return and will bring an end to Satan's temporary reign we're not to be naive about the reality or the strength or the durability of this evil it will be an ever present reality in this age and we need to learn that for now the experience of Christians will sometimes be often very hard suffering and persecution looking back through history looking around the world today Christians have suffered they are suffering and will continue to suffer but we also know this even though the forces of evil will do all in their power to overwhelm Christians they will not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ they cannot Satan will not win the ability of this great dragon and his unholy trinity to derail the church he can't do it there is an end

point and there is ultimately victory for God's people but until then until that day what we can expect to experience will be hard sometimes very hard look at the closing words of this section verse nine 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 he must be slain here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints this this is a very sober and serious call to patient endurance even though the reign of satan is limited the emphasis here in these verses is not to soften the blow this is not to soften the blow of reality no john's vision confronts us with reality hard times may come the powers and authorities of this world do fall sometimes under the influence of satan and sometimes they will come after you dear christian be alert to that be prepared be ready to endure be ready to endure prison be prepared even to be put to death that is what we've heard isn't it in recent weeks from India that is the reality the present reality today they're preparing to face prison and death and satan has been doing this all through history this isn't new and jesus said it would happen luke 21 some of you they will put to death he said how can we stand in the face of that well what will enable us to endure is knowing that we are kept safe for eternity by the one who is actually sovereign you see christian here this morning you belong forever to god satan's reign on the other hand ultimately it's a fiction it's fading listen to these words from earlier revelation this is to the church in smyrna jesus jesus says do not fear what you're about to suffer behold the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested and for ten days you will have tribulation be faithful unto death and i will give you the crown of life we need to heed those words hear them and notice verse eight that the ones who do worship the evil beast of corrupt government are described as those whose names have not been written before the foundation of the world and the book of life of the lamb who was slain do you see the real comfort that there is here for us john's vision describes christians as those whose names have been written in the lamb's book of life from the before the foundation of the world in other words if you're a christian here this morning you belong to jesus christ the lamb who was slain and we are therefore secure for all eternity that's the implication of verse eight those who are christians do not bow down to the powers of this world and it's because their name is in the book of life you see satan's unholy trinity can do all it can to discourage and damage the church but he can do no lasting damage ultimately to god's people corrupt corrupt corrupt governments cannot derail god's plans and purposes for his church and our task is to persevere not to give in to the pressure and the persecution from this world that would seek to persuade us to compromise Christ would seek to have us deny him Satan and his beast together with their followers think us defeaters when we're put down in persecution they think they are winning yet through perseverance in faith Christians have the victory in Christ that is the call of these verses to endure to have faith as we see what's really happening as we see who's really behind what's going on in the world we endure and hear these words as we close from Isaiah these precious words from the Lord to his people he says to you fear not for I have redeemed you I have called you by name you are mine when you pass through the waters

[43 : 55] I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through the fire you shall not be harmed and the flame shall not consume you for I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel your Saviour Christian that is your God your name is in the Lamb's book of life so endure remain faithful because he is our God well let's pray and then we'll sing together Father in the light of these sober words Lord lift our eyes to unseen realities yes there is an enemy at work but the blow he's been dealt is fatal and we have hope because you are the one who reigns eternal on the throne so

Lord please help your church to endure help us to endure when difficult times come Lord help us to remain faithful to keep trusting your word and your promises how we need your help we are so weak and feeble so easily frightened but Lord keep us reading these words of promise and clinging to you because you are faithful hear our prayer for we ask in Jesus name Amen we good we'll you