

Pulling Back the Curtain and Exposing “What Really Is,” Part I- Two Signs

Call to Worship: Psalm 78:1-25

Hymn #11 (supp)- *My Savior’s Love*

1st Scripture: Genesis 3

Hymn #26- *Our God, our Help in ages past*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 12:1-6

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Introduction:

This morning, we come to a sobering and eye opening transition in the Book of Revelation. It is the second major section of the Book. Up to this point, following his general commission to record and proclaim all that he sees, to the seven churches of Asia (in chapter 1), John has seen things that have exposed historical realities, which concern the underlying flow and purpose of history (from the standpoint of God) in conjunction with the *present* and the *future* (that is, the present and future *from John’s perspective*). John has been given a *revelation*; he has been given a message that is meant to pull back the curtain so that he (and the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ) could understand what “really is happening” as history unfolds, in the light of what “seems to be” happening from the standpoint of blind and fallen mankind. And the ultimate end in the receiving of this revelation, is to compel the people of God to stand fast, to persevere, to overcome, in light of the guaranteed victory won in the death and resurrection of the Christ, and in light of the foretold, real opposition, which will constantly come against the church throughout the course of the church age (beginning at the resurrection of Christ and continuing up to the time of Christ’s final, visible return). There will be physical persecutions for some (church members will be afflicted, maimed and even killed for the sake of the Gospel). There will be spiritual persecution for some (the constant threat of doctrinal compromise in order to appeal to the masses will come against the church). And there will be material temptations for some (all manner of lusts, wealth and the sparkling vanity of material possessions will entice the church throughout the history of the church age, seeking to sway her love away from Christ and toward the lustful worldly idolatries, presented by the sensual whore of Babylon).

In chapters 2 and 3, John had been given seven letters, which addressed the specific, present circumstances of the seven churches of Asia; issues which relate to every church of all

times throughout all of history. These letters enable us to see the very specific ways in which the enemies of Christ come against the church, seeking to flush out the light of her lampstand, so that she is rendered useless for declaring and revealing the glory of God to the world. Most of the churches were compromising in various ways; they were caving into the threats and temptations, cast upon them by the opposition. Several had some good and notable qualities, and two had *only* notable qualities mentioned, giving us patterns that we ought to follow, as we serve Christ in our own age, anticipating His final visible return, where He will bring history to an end and the final judgment upon those who remain compromised, failing to persevere and overcome. These letters revealed present day realities (during the time of John), and were to be addressed, especially in light of the future realities that were to come, in accordance with the revelations revealed in the chapters that follow.

But first, John takes a journey into the glorious courtroom of God, where he beholds two critical, *ever present* realities, which are to be adopted and embraced by the conscience of the church, if she is to ultimately persevere and overcome. First, John sees the throne of God, and the glory of the One who sits upon that throne, resting at the center of every single existing thing in heaven and on earth and everywhere. And this vision was to remind us that God is the “omni-sovereign” (the always/all sovereign) holy ruler of all things. Our glorious, holy Creator is unraveling history, wholly and completely in accordance with His righteous, divine will, and He will not; and He cannot fail. This is a pillar, upon which we are to rest our consciences and our very souls, as we strive unto godly living and holiness in the face of even great opposition throughout the history of the church age. And then, secondly, we are given a second pillar, upon which we are to rest our souls and consciences. In chapter five, we are reminded of the ultimate victory, which has been given us in Christ, the Lamb that was slain, who alone, was worthy to unfold the victorious history of God’s revealed will, given in the scroll, which was sealed and firmly held in the right hand of God’s power. It is in Christ, that we constantly find the “omni-present” (the ever present) grace, which is needed to stand firm to the end. We who are in Christ, have been sealed in Christ; we are in union with Him; we are seated with Him in the heavenly places; we are measured out in the Most holy place of God’s heavenly tabernacle; we are untouchable in the most profound sense. In other words, though our bodies; though our flesh and blood may be torn along the way; though we may lose much from the world’s standpoint, possibly up to and including our very lives...our faith will not fail! What we have in glory; our

inheritance, cannot be taken away from us, because worthy is the Lamb that was slain on our behalf!

Following this, from chapters six up to eleven (where we left off last time), we have scrolled through all of history from two different standpoints, obtaining a visual of the types of judgments that will come upon the world, while the church is heavily persecuted and oppressed throughout the entire history of the church age. The judgments, though partial in their scope of devastation, increase in intensity throughout the course of history, and culminate in ultimate, universal devastation at the time of Christ's return. The "seven seals" have taken us through many general disasters that come upon the earth, all throughout history, and right to the end. The "seven trumpet judgments," greater in their scope of judgment and more intense than the "seven seals," follow that same line of history (from a different and more severe angle), likewise ultimately leading to the final judgment that comes when Christ visibly returns.

And in the midst of these often horrendously described judgments, just prior to the final seal and the final trumpet, we are given a comforting reminder; an interlude, describing God's sovereign care for the church throughout this whole history. Indeed, the church suffers greatly; the church is attacked severely, and in the end, when God is finished with the witness of the church, her light is turned off. In a general sense, she is killed and the world; the enemies of Christ think that they have won, when in reality they have only extinguished the very light that could have saved their now, wholly condemned souls. In a very short time, the church is resurrected victorious, to the world's great dismay. Christ returns and brings judgment upon the world; He carries His glorious and complete Bride home to glory, and the life of heavenly perfection, love and eternal joy begins for the church (the Bride of Christ), while the wicked, who cannot stand in the judgment, are cast into hell forever and ever, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The church, which has suffered greatly in this life, is now at rest. And the world, which has persecuted and afflicted Christ's church, is eternally afflicted and tormented in the fiery pit of hell.

Enter chapters twelve and following. Up to this point, we have been given a very small glimpse of the evil, which operates behind the scenes of history, throughout the course of the church age. In other words, there are demonic powers and forces at work here, throughout all of history, utilizing governments and cults and false religions and material temptations as a means

of attacking the church throughout her course to glory. And God would have us well aware of these realities, so that we can get a clear view of what is really going on, and what we are really up against. We might think twice about compromising with any of our worldly opposition, when we understand “what is really going on behind the scenes.” And we might think twice about caving into the threats, lies and accusations of this opposition when we consider the end of this opposition, all of which has been and will be ultimately defeated by Christ! In chapters twelve and following, God pulls back the curtain to the heavenly realm as it were; he carries us from this physical world and into the spiritual realm, so that we can be prepared to do battle on God’s terms, while sticking close to, and abiding in the One who “sticks closer than a brother,” namely, the victorious Lord Jesus Christ, without Whom, we stand no chance in the battle.

And it is here, brethren, that a great and significant question is answered: “Why is there still warfare for the church, since Christ has already come and conquered in His death and resurrection? Why does the church suffer throughout a history of ongoing tension, catastrophe, chaos and devastation? Why is the world as it is in the present? What is really going on here?”

Well, here in chapter twelve, we take a close, visible look at the answer to these questions.

I. The Two Signs (read Revelation 12:1-6 again)

Here, we are told of two “signs,” which appear in heaven, and which John beholds. And interestingly enough, there are only three times in the whole of the Revelation, where John reports seeing a “sign,” two of which are here in our text, and the last one is found in chapter 15. And this word, “sign” in the Greek, is the same word that is used to describe the miraculous “signs” which Jesus had worked throughout the Gospels, and the lying “signs” and wonders of false prophets, and of the second beast soon to be revealed in Revelation 13:11ff, who deceives the world. Now, while I will not attempt to build a large theological argument about John’s use of the word, “sign” here in verses 1 & 3, let me at least leave you with two simple statements concerning these unique usages:

1) In every case, “signs” are meant to represent and declare something about another reality. In other words, the “signs” that Jesus performed, were meant to point people to His Messianic office and authority. The miracles/signs that Jesus performed were not meant to point to themselves, but rather to the One who performed them, authenticating His divine, Messianic authority. A now seeing, once blind man; a now clean, once leper; a now calmed, once stormy sea, were meant to lead onlookers to observe and embrace *the Christ* who performed these miracles, rather than simply amazing them with miraculous entertainment. False prophets who put forth “lying signs,” would do so, as a means of authenticating their so-called divine message. Well, likewise, these “signs” in Revelation are meant to point to, authenticate and represent some other reality. Now, in some sense, you can say this about all of the symbols in Revelation, can’t you? Well, this leads to my second point about these two signs.

2) I believe that John declares these particular visual pictures to be “signs,” because he is calling our attention to a new element of the Book, a new major section, within which he wants to renew and lay hold of our special attention. In other words, this is another means of saying, “Ok folks, catch your breath, and listen up, because there are very significant underlying realities that span all of history here, which must be brought to the forefront, if you are going to catch the whole picture of the Revelation. You have seen the end to some degree already. I have taken you there twice from two different angles. The blowing of the seventh trumpet has just brought us there. But as the smoke of that vision clears, don’t let your focus drift away, because I want to now take you behind the curtain of all of this; God wants you to see and understand something significant about all that has ever happened since the fall of man; a hidden line to be traced throughout all of history, toward which the world is completely blind.

Consider this first *great* and glorious sign: We are told of a “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars,” who was “with child,” crying out in labor and in pain, ready to give birth.

Now for the moment, we can note a few things about this woman, before identifying her with the help of other portions of this text. According to the sign, this woman is clothed with the sun; that is to say, that she is clothed with radiance, holiness, beauty and glory. She beams forth in such a way, that she stands out as prominent and glorious in the sight of God and those in heaven. And she has the moon under her feet, and on her head is a garland of twelve stars. She

stands out from the rest of the world; she is decked with royalty and beauty; she stands as an elevated presentation of the divine purpose and will of God, above the moon, central and glowing like the sun, as one who is righteous and holy; a glorious work of God, which *ought to* draw the attention of everyone else to her. She is the complete opposite of the “whore of Babylon,” whom we will consider in the upcoming weeks; the unrighteous mother of harlots, who is deemed most detestable and atrocious in the sight of God. Who then is this woman, about to give birth? Well, let’s look further into the text, to see if there are other clues that can help us identify her.

In verse 3, we are told of a second *sign* that appears in heaven, namely, a “great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.” Now right away, we turn from this glorious, bright shining woman, to this terrifying, great fiery, ferocious dragon. From the outset, by virtue of its being a fierce “dragon,” we begin to suspect that this dragon represents some form of evil, who will contend with the woman in some way. And this is exactly what we find in the verses that follow. We find this dragon, lurking before the woman in labor, waiting for her to give birth, so that he can devour her child. And the impression we are given, is that the child of this woman is a critical element in all of history, because the dragon, most of all, desires to devour the child. His mind is especially set on the child. In fact, his opposition to the woman exists primarily because of his contention with the child.

Now already, a light bulb might begin to turn on in our heads, because this is beginning to sound like something very significant that was prophesied right from the beginning, when Adam and Eve had just fallen in Genesis, chapter 3. Now, I will confirm this suspicion to be fact in a moment, but for now, consider our God’s words to the cursed serpent in Genesis 3, when the devil had deceived Eve, causing our first parents to sin. We recall the prophetic statement given in Genesis 3:14&15, “So the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this [deceived the woman into sinning against God], you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.”

These two great signs in Revelation point to the carrying out of that promise. Here, we find the “dragon,” at enmity with the woman, but especially looking to devour her Seed. And so,

we might already begin to suspect that the “dragon” here in Revelation 12 is the devil, that serpent of old, and the child, is the “Christ.” Now before we identify the woman, let me just confirm the identity of these other two symbols:

1) Notice in verse 9 of our text (which we will be looking into further next time, Lord willing), we are given the specific identity of the “dragon.” “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the devil and satan, who deceives the whole world...” And furthermore, in verse 3, we find this dragon having seven heads with seven diadems on his heads and ten horns. He bears the number “seven” here, because he is the perfect epitome of all wickedness, and he has seven diadems and ten horns because he is the ruler of all evil. Every form of evil that exists has its root in this dragon. He is the “prince of the power of the air” and the “ruler of this world,” with respect to its fallen and corrupt state. He deceives the whole world, and all who are outside of Christ are under his deceptive power and sway. And in verse 4, we see that his “tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.” Some believe that this speaks to the fact that he has caused a significant sum of the angels to fall from the beginning, leading them to rebel against God, in support of his wicked schemes. Suffice it to say that the “dragon,” the devil, is the root and core of every form of existing evil.

2) And then, notice as well what we are told about the child, to whom the woman gives birth. In verse 5, we are told, “She [the woman] bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and His throne.” Clearly, this is Christ Himself, who alone is referred to as “ruling the world with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2), and who alone, following His resurrection from the dead, had ascended “up to God and His throne.”

And so, clearly, without any argument, the “dragon” is a sign, meant to represent satan, the devil/serpent, and the “child” is meant to represent Christ. Who then is the woman? Much attention; much very relevant attention is given to the woman here, and so it is important that we rightly identify her. Now, in consideration of the prophetic statement of Genesis 3, we might suspect that “Eve” is represented by this sign. And in some sense, this is indeed the case, but when we consider all that is stated about this woman, we find that she is far more than just Eve. In fact, what we will find, when we look at the entirety of this text, is that this woman best represents the church, first in her Old Covenant sense, namely, the true Israel, out of whom the

Messiah has come, and then in her New Covenant sense, including everyone who is joined to Christ by faith, best represented in visible churches.

Notice a few things that confirm this to indeed be the case. First, in verse 6, after the child is born and ascends into heaven, we are told that the woman flees into the wilderness, where God protects and provides for her for 1260 days. Now, does that number sound familiar? Back in our interlude in chapter 11, we saw that the church [represented by those who are measured out by God (along with His temple and altar) and the two witnesses] was persecuted for this same exact amount of time (42 months in the “temple” analogy and 1260 days in the “witness” analogy, respectively). And so, here the woman is identified as being in the wilderness for that same time period. The wilderness is the place of testing and trying, and this goes right in keeping with the period within which the church is persecuted. The woman is the church. And secondly, the woman has “a garland of twelve stars on her head,” representing the fact that she ought to be identified with the Old covenant church, namely, the twelve patriarchs or tribes of Israel, through whom the Jewish Messiah would come. Now, when we come to verses 13-17 in a few weeks, we will further confirm this as well, especially since this particular “sign” is very relevant for a suffering, persecuted church, which must understand, that though she is constantly under attack by the dragon and his beastly minions, she is also nurtured and protected by God (in the wilderness) at the same time. This is, in fact, the main exhortational/motivational relevance of the text for the church, to whom this Revelation is written. [Note: How God views His church! We bear that glory in Christ!]

And so, brethren, the two signs here are the woman, who represents the church and the dragon, who represents the devil. And the child, who comes forth from the woman; the child who comes forth from this glorious woman (who is made radiant and glorious through the very work of this child), is the Lord Jesus Christ. Having these symbols in their proper perspective then, let us consider the meaning of the first six verses.

II. The Message Conveyed by these Signs

From the beginning, following the fall of man, when God had pronounced the curse against the serpent, there was indeed enmity between the woman and the serpent, and the Seed of

the woman and the seed of the serpent. Throughout the entire history of the Old Testament, the devil has done everything he could to destroy the travelling seed of the woman. He has conjured up all kinds of opposition and persecution; he has conjured up all manner of religious heresies, attempting to utterly defile and destroy the true church, and he has used all manner of deceptive lustful temptations to draw the true church away from the Lord (kind of like the means he uses to strive to destroy the church today). But the whole time, by the grace of God, the Messianic line has been preserved, there has always been a remnant by grace in Israel, right up until the Messiah was born. Be it through the intercessory prayers of servants like Moses and Jeremiah and Daniel or the powerful judges he had raised up or the preservation of the Davidic kingdom, God has secured the line of the Messiah. And out of Israel came the Messiah.

But right to the end, the devil sought to devour the child, didn't he? Through Herod, he sought to destroy the male child right from the outset, but God preserved His Son in Egypt. And the devil himself sought to tempt and defeat the Messiah, but ultimately he failed every time. And then, there was the cross, the place where the Messiah's heel would be bruised. Indeed, Christ, bearing the sins of His people suffered the severest attacks by satan and man, and most of all, He endured the full weight of God's wrath, until He successfully completed His mission and died, securing the salvation of His elect. And He was raised up from the dead three days later, given all authority in heaven and on earth, before ascending to the right hand of the Power on high, where He still reigns to this day, until He completes His work of building His church, against which the gates of hell will never prevail.

The devil; the dragon tried his best, all along, to thwart the plan and purpose of God, but he failed and his doom is now sealed and soon to be complete. So what happens now? The woman; the church who brought forth the child, still remaining on the earth for 1260 days (according to the symbol), flees into the wilderness, where God nourishes and cares for her, as she faces the fierce opposition of the dragon, who now turns his attention toward destroying the woman, since he can no longer try to defeat the child. In other words, all he has left is rage for the child, and he only has a short time to exercise it. And since he cannot touch the child, who has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God, he pours forth his vengeful wrath against the woman; the church; the apple of God's eye. And this is what greatly concerns us now.

Conclusion

Now brethren, while we will have more to say about this matter in the weeks ahead (in keeping with the remainder of the chapter), what can we immediately take from what we see here, just in the first six verses? What is the immediate message here for the church, which is represented by the sign of the “woman” in our text? Well, I think that verse six says it all:

“Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

Well, again, clearly, the woman (the church) is called to persevere, endure and remain steadfast *in the desert* for the entire history of the church age. Following the resurrection and ascension of Christ, this is *God’s plan* for Christ’s glorious bride. And it ought to lead us to the place where we are never surprised by trial, affliction, temptation and difficulty. The wilderness is not a place of comfort. It is not a “resting place.” It ultimately leads to that place of rest, but we are not there yet, brethren. It is God’s place for testing and refining us by means of the opposition that comes against us. In fact, this picture reminds us of some other significant event in the history of redemption, doesn’t it?

When God physically redeemed Israel from out of the bondage of Egypt, where did *He* lead them? Was it not into the wilderness, where they were greatly tested, and ultimately had to wander for forty years, before entering the Promised Land? And what did God do for the Israelites (especially the second generation) to keep them alive, and to preserve them for those years? He miraculously provided them with manna from heaven and he provided them with water from the Rock, so that they would be nourished and cared for, though in the barren wilderness.

And notice what God does for the “woman” here in our text, while she is in the wilderness, brethren. First, we note that God has *prepared a place for her* there. In other words, brethren, though we are in the wilderness of life (following our redemption in Christ), God has prepared a place for us even there. Even in the midst of the trials and persecutions and opposition of this world, a place of comfort and spiritual rest has been given us in Christ. And because we are in Christ, God’s special care is ever with us. We face nothing apart from His will, and everything we face is in keeping with His will, used as a means of sanctifying us, and

making us fit for *our* Promised Land, in glory (learning to *not* live by bread alone, but by faith in God and His Word)! And furthermore, our God ensures that she is fed there as well. He provides all that she needs to sustain her spiritual health and faith. Through His Word and prayer and the fellowship of the brethren and every means of grace given us in the church, God nourishes us...with Christ! Christ is our Manna from heaven (John 6), and we partake of Him daily. And Christ is our water from the Rock, who satisfies our eternal thirst, so that we thrive even in the midst of the wilderness! And so, this is meant to greatly encourage us, brethren! Indeed, we are in the wilderness, but we are always under the sovereign love and care of God. He prepares a place for us, and “they” feed us there. The word “they” here reminds us as well of Elijah, when he had to flee into the wilderness during a three and a half year drought, which he proclaimed during the time of Ahab’s reign. And how did God provide for Elijah? First, “they”, that is, the ravens, were sent by God to feed Elijah, and he drank from the Brook Cherith.

And so, again, we find our God pointing us to the rich symbols of the Old Testament, as a means of comforting us in the present, with living illustrations of the past. Indeed, the Christ has conquered and has ascended into heaven, and His bride awaits His glorious return. She suffers in the wilderness, but God provides for her every need!

Next time, Lord willing, we will continue on with this theme, in accordance with the verses that follow.

The Gospel

Benediction: Jude 1:24&25