

SUMMER 5 - Glimpses of Glory

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[0 : 01] We praise you, Lord Jesus Christ, for in you there is victory through your death on the cross, an eternal victory, not only for us, but for this entire universe.

We praise you that we can come and hear from your word, and we pray tonight that you will feed us from your word, so that we may live lives that hold fast to it.

With patient and faithful endurance, for we ask this in your name. Amen. Over the last few weeks we've seen two or three series of seven.

Something I explained about two or three weeks ago, that throughout the book of Revelation there are series upon series of seven things. The first week we saw really an interlude or a vision of heaven, chapters four and five, that followed passages that we didn't look at, these seven letters to the churches.

Then after that vision of heaven there were seven seals being opened on the scroll. And then that gave way to a series again of seven of trumpets. And now the seventh trumpet, which we saw at the end of last week, gives way to new visions.

[1 : 22] There are no numbers here of seven, though scholars generally identify seven particular visions in the chapters we're looking at tonight. And so I've sort of divided it up like that, in part for ease of remembering and learning and understanding.

But as I say, they're not numbered, so it's not totally obvious that it's a series of seven. Maybe that's deliberate. Elsewhere in the book, John's quite insistent on this is the first, second and so on.

So maybe here there's a reason for not doing that. Remember also that we've seen in weeks past that the series are not chronological. It's not as though the first seal precedes the first trumpet and it's all in strict chronological order.

What we're getting are pictures or tableaux or views from different angles of the same thing. Someone once said of Revelation, it's like a series of overhead projection slides, you know, those white clear plastic things, each of which has a bit on it.

And gradually one is put down and then another is put down and another is put down. So they're not so much chronological as though it's one after the other, but they all sort of add to each other, compiling a big picture.

[2 : 35] So some of what we see tonight are things that, in a sense, chronologically we've already seen. But again, it's from a slightly different angle and perhaps making slightly different points as well.

The same events, remember, can lead to various avenues for teaching and I think Revelation is a good example of that. We're looking at three chapters and therefore I have to try and move a bit quicker than I have in past weeks.

So I won't read every verse. But the first, perhaps, little picture vision is chapter 12 and verses 1 to 6. Tonight we're looking at chapters 12 to 14.

And next year we'll continue. For those who have patient endurance. This first picture tonight is of the woman, the child and the dragon.

The woman was clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven, an enormous red dragon.

[3 : 40] Seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns on his head. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. It's clearly the Messiah. It's a reference back to Psalm 2, one of the Messianic Psalms.

And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1260 days.

Remember, 1260 days or 42 months or three and a half years or a time, a times and half a time. It's all the same period of time. And it's symbolic of the time between the first and second comings of Jesus.

From the time that he came the first time to the second is a limited period of time, a short period of time, relatively speaking, compared to eternity. And it's the time when evil reigns on the world, it seems, under God's reign ultimately.

[4 : 49] But evil is rampant in the world. It's the time of persecution and, as we've seen before, the time of the gospel as well. Who is this woman? Well, the child is obviously Jesus, not only from the Messianic reference in Psalm 2, but also it's clear that it's talking about a special child who's ruling the nations and so on.

He's born. So maybe the woman is Mary. And yet, what does it mean for it to say that, in a sense, as soon as the child was born, it was snatched up to God and to his throne?

I think what it's doing is compressing into just one verse the whole earthly ministry of Jesus. All that matters, for the point that's being made here, is that Jesus was born and ascended to heaven.

The rest at this point doesn't really matter. It's not denying that it happened, but for the purpose of what's going on here, it's saying that Jesus came to earth and survived the wiles of the evil one, if you like, and eventually ascended to heaven, showing that he had escaped the clutches of the evil one.

Some suggest that it is Mary being spoken about who is the woman here. And therefore, this red dragon is probably Herod the Great. Remember that Herod the Great, in Matthew 2, when he hears that this baby has been or is about to be born in Bethlehem, from the Magi, goes and kills all the children, or the baby boys of Bethlehem, up to two years old.

[6 : 20] But meanwhile, because of a dream, Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus have fled to Egypt, which could be the desert that's referred to here in verse 6. But I think actually it's something a bit bigger than that that's being spoken about.

For a number of times in the Old Testament, Israel is regarded as the mother, if you like, of the people of God. And I think that's what's being spoken about here.

That the woman is really Israel. Israel meaning the sort of Old Testament church, if you like. Because it's out of the Old Testament church of God's people, Jewish people, that Jesus came and was born.

Now Mary, I guess, personifies that. And so it's not wrong to think of Mary, perhaps, in one sense here, or even Herod in one sense. But I think that's just an individual example of a bigger pattern and picture that's going on.

And I think we'll see that with other things later on in the next couple of chapters. The picture is of Jesus being born, surviving, in a sense, ascending to heaven, and then sometime after the ascension, the scattering or the fleeing of his followers.

[7 : 36] We'll see a bit more in the next picture why this woman is not just Mary, but is a bigger picture than that. As I say, I think Mary's perhaps an individual example, but not the sole content of who this is.

She's wearing a crown of 12 stars, and that perhaps is symbolic of all the people of God in the Old Testament. The 12 tribes, remember, Joseph had a dream back in Genesis 37 of stars and moons and sun.

And it seems that this may be an allusion to that, that this woman symbolically represents all the people of God before the birth of Jesus. So it refers to the people of God of the Old Testament.

But as I say, John sees something bigger here than just one little incident. Because the big picture is of Satan, the dragon, persecuting not only Christ, the child and the human, but also the followers of Christ, as we'll see in a minute.

Mary, Herod, individual examples that fit into the pattern. But it's a big picture of persecution. And it begins with the persecution of Jesus. So Herod's opposition, if indeed he's being alluded to here, is just one example of the persecution of Satan against God and against God's people.

[8 : 56] And it began, of course, with Jesus. And it continues, as we'll see, with his followers. Now, the point that's being made there for John's readers and hearers is one of some encouragement.

They face persecution quite clearly throughout Revelation. That's the context for the vision and for the recording of the vision. The point that's being made is that persecution began with Satan persecuting Jesus himself.

We could even say Satan persecuting or attacking God. Therefore, the persecution of the church of John's day is identified with Jesus and with God.

That's why it's facing persecution. And that, in fact, is an encouragement. Because they're not isolated. They're not on their own. They are identified with God. It's because they belong to God that they face the persecution.

So there's a sort of subtle encouragement there. That facing persecution shows that you belong to God. That you're with God. That you're on God's side. And therefore, that you're not alone.

[10 : 02] God also is on your side, suffering the persecution. That you are suffering. It's saying something slightly like when Paul, remember, or Saul at that stage had been persecuting Christians.

And his vision on Damascus Road said, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? And it's saying the same thing. For the church of John's day being persecuted, ultimately it is God being persecuted.

And there's a subtle encouragement there. Because they are with God. And identified with him. They're not on their own. Well, the second picture takes this another step.

The war in heaven. Maybe this is chronological at this point. But not everybody agrees with that. So we perhaps have to be a bit ambivalent about it. But at this point, Jesus has ascended.

And if it's chronological, then what it's saying is that it's at the point of resurrection ascension. That Satan is kicked out of heaven, if you like. Remember, Satan was there in heaven in the Old Testament when he talked to God about Job and so on.

[11 : 06] Now perhaps this is sort of following on from the resurrection of Jesus. The war in heaven. Michael. Usually we think of angels being girls. But all the main angels, I'm afraid, are men.

The Bible, you see, is very patriarchal, isn't it? Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon fought back. But he wasn't strong enough. And they lost their place in heaven.

By itself, that statement suggests that the angels are stronger than Satan. And indeed, that's probably true. Does it mean that the dragon has pursued Jesus to heaven? Maybe indeed it has.

It is. But you see, in the end, this is a picture also, I think, of the first Easter. It's a picture from heaven of what happened on earth. The Gospels tell us what happened on earth.

Jesus hung on a cross, died, buried, rose from the dead. And we know as Christians that it's at Easter, in the cross and the resurrection, that God exercised his triumph over evil.

[12:07] Now we see the heavenly side of it, if you like. The same events, but seen from a different perspective. What happened at Easter? God triumphing over the dragon, over Satan.

Remember, Jesus said many things about his death. That it was the time of his triumph over Satan. Just before he dies. At the time in the pivotal point, if you like, in John's Gospel, where the hour for Jesus has come.

Jesus says to his disciples, now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be driven out. That's what we see in this little picture now of Michael and the angels and the dragon.

Exactly what Jesus said would happen because of his death on the cross, is happening in heaven. And here's the picture of it in Revelation. So the great dragon in verse 9 is hurled down.

He's called an ancient serpent. I think linking back quite obviously to Genesis 3. The ancient serpent tempted or tested Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Called the devil or Satan.

[13:14] And he leads the whole world astray. There's almost a suggestion of unlimited power here. But as we'll see, it's not unlimited. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

Satan, I guess, comes in many different guises. And we'll see that tonight. He was the serpent there in the Garden of Eden. And we'll see him tonight in various forms in the Roman Empire as well.

Leading people away from God. And away from worshipping God. I guess one of the messages of these visions in Revelation is to say that anything that leads people away from the worship of God, anything that blinds people to the truth of God, anything that leads people to the worship of something other than the God revealed in the Bible, is ultimately in origin from Satan.

It doesn't have to be sort of spectacularly supernatural for it to come from Satan. But anything that leads people away from the living God, or prevents them coming to him, is ultimately from Satan.

The defeat of Satan in heaven leads to praise in heaven. A loud voice, verse 10. Now have come the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ or his Messiah.

[14:30] For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. It's the first Easter that ushers in the kingdom of God.

Not in completeness yet, of course. We live, remember, in the tension between two ages, as we saw two weeks ago. But nonetheless, the kingdom of God is at hand, as Jesus said. It's begun through his death and resurrection.

And the hurling down of Satan from heaven suggests to us that because of the cross and resurrection, heaven itself is now secure from Satan's attacks.

Heaven is safe. The domain or dominion of Satan is restricted to the world. And only temporarily, as we see.

Satan is banished from heaven and sent to the world. And as we've already seen and we'll see again, it's only for three and a half years. A symbolic number. Meaning from the time of Jesus' first coming until he returns.

[15 : 32] Satan here is described as an accuser. One of the things that his name means. Because one of the things about Satan is that he wants us to be found guilty before God. For those found guilty by God at his judgment will be expelled by God.

That's Satan's objective. That God has no one who on judgment day will be found innocent or acquitted of their sin. Maybe the picture behind this is of Christians being accused in the Roman court.

Many would be. They'd be brought up to some court. Maybe falsely accused. Often they would have been. We know from Roman writings of the first and early second centuries that Christians were accused, because they were misunderstood, of things like cannibalism and drinking human blood.

People who didn't understand what the Lord's Supper was about. They're accused of incest because they didn't understand the nature of Christian brotherly love. and so on. Hyped up charges, maybe stemming from ignorance, probably from malice.

Satan accusing people, like the Romans accused Christians and sought to bring them to death. That's his job. And so as he attacks Christians, one of his things is to undermine our assurance of sins forgiven.

[16 : 45] When you look around the Christian church today, you sometimes think that Satan's doing a pretty good job of that. For time and time again, we Christians, I include me and all of us in this, go through great periods wracked by guilt or doubt or fear that we can stand before God on the day of judgment acquitted.

But we can. The guilt that we feel and so on is often irrational, prompted by the accusations of Satan. How can you call yourself a Christian? Look at the things you do. That doesn't honour God.

Maybe it doesn't. But the point is that through Jesus' death, our sins are totally and utterly forgiven. And we can stand not perfect, but forgiven.

And Satan's accusations or his darts will be deflected if we have a shield of faith and know that because Jesus died for us, our sins are absolutely forgiven.

It's worth remembering that. It's worth coming back to it time and time again. That Jesus' death on the cross is big enough, substantial enough, and enduring enough to forgive any and every sin of which we turn to him for repentance and forgiveness.

[18 : 04] Nothing is too bad for the death of Jesus to conquer and forgive. There's great encouragement there and great assurance for us. And the church today, meaning the church at large today, should be more confident in its forgiveness of sins and more confident in its eternal destiny in heaven.

It's not good enough for a Christian to say, I'm not sure whether I'm going to get to heaven. It's not good enough because Jesus died for us and that's why we can know we're going to heaven.

And if we say, well, I'm not sure about it, we're actually saying Jesus' death is not as important as the Bible says it is. It's that important that we can say confidently, Jesus forgives me, I am going to heaven because of his death and God's mercy.

And all the accusations that Satan might throw at us can be deflected time and time again because Jesus' death is that important and that powerful and that big.

Those who are praising God are those who have overcome, in verse 11, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. That's why they're in heaven, the blood of the Lamb.

[19 : 23] Yes, the picture of people in heaven is of a perfect people but they're made perfect after being forgiven through the blood of the Lamb. Jesus' victory and Christians' victory has the one and the same source, the cross of Christ.

It's the cross that gave Jesus victory and enabled him, in a sense, to be raised from the dead, to ascend to heaven, for Satan to be conquered and it's that same death on the cross that brings us, his followers, victory as well.

The blood of the Lamb, you see, is more powerful than all the power of Satan. Yes, this picture in this chapter and the next chapter is of a fairly terrifying Satan that looks very powerful indeed but the blood of the Lamb is more powerful.

It's a reminder too for people who are facing death through persecution, which most of us aren't, I guess, that death cannot deprive Christians of their victory or of Jesus' victory.

Death indeed is the way of appropriating that victory in the end, I suppose. I think one reason why people today have great difficulty with the book of Revelation is because we don't face persecution and also because we've lost the sense of death being victory.

[20 : 44] We live for this life and as Christians we don't live enough for the life to come. We want it all now, we expect it all now and we don't have the patience to see that God's promises are fulfilled only totally in heaven in the future and that death is the pathway to that for those who die in faith.

So the call to rejoice, you heavens, and all who dwell in them, but woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you. He's filled with fury because he knows that his time is short.

The fury of Satan, you see, is because he knows his time is short. It's ironic in a way. He's being defeated, he's being cast down to earth, it's limited domain, and his fury is because his time is short.

The picture, I think, is best described by a French theologian about 40 years ago. He likened this stage of theological history, if you like, between Jesus' death and resurrection and between his second coming as the last stages of the Second World War.

D-Day was in May, June rather, 1944, the turning point of the war. From then on, it was clear that the Allies would win.

[22 : 06] The most ferocious battles of the war were fought in that last 11 months. Germany recognised it was going to be defeated and in all its fury it fought the most atrocious battles it could because it knew that its time was short.

And we also live in between D-Day and V-Day, not an 11-month period but a 3.5-year period according to the book of Revelation. Satan is defeated but the mopping up operation is yet to be completed in a sense.

He's exercising his fury but he's lost and he's defeated. It's a good way I think, a good analogy of seeing where we are now because sometimes I think Christians move into the area of thinking well, Satan's not yet defeated.

We've got to keep beating him or defeating him but he is defeated we've got to keep resisting him through faith. Jesus has won the victory we ought to appropriate that in our own resistance.

Well, the third little vision of these chapters is verses 13-17 the end of chapter 12. Firstly, we had the woman the child then we had the picture in heaven now we go back to the woman and her flight.

[23 : 28] Dragons pursued to the earth so he pursues the woman who had given birth to the male child. Now we don't know anything in the Bible of this happening to Mary. Another reason why I think it's not just Mary that's being spoken of but rather the people of God.

We could say Israel I think now beyond the resurrection it's right to say the church. Indeed, remember as I said a couple of weeks ago the church is the Israel of God. Not a new Israel there aren't two Israels running in the New Testament there's one.

There's actually an essential continuity between the people of God old and New Testaments. Not a change or not a discontinuity but it's the one people of God. And I think that's illustrated in this one woman.

The one woman in the Old Testament is Israel in the New Testament is the church the mother church if you like. And in a sense figuratively it's the church that gives birth to the followers of Jesus. She flees she's given the two wings of a great eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert where she would be taken care of for a time times and half a time there's three and a half years again out of the serpent's reach.

Some of the imagery there the eagle the fleeing the desert is perhaps symbolic of the exodus of Egypt of Israel from Egypt 1400 BC under Moses in the book of Exodus.

[24 : 50] They left Egypt they went through the Red Sea they spent time in the wilderness a time marked above all things by God's providential care of them. Exodus 19 talks about them coming out on the wings of an eagle in a sense.

So similar words and terminology from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman but the earth helped the woman and it opened its mouth and the river just sort of disappeared.

Maybe an allusion back to the Red Sea but it doesn't totally fit. Maybe it's because what this is referring to probably at least at one point historically is that after Jesus' ascension and a bit later on in the 60s AD the Romans got fed up with the Jews and fought a war with them eventually defeating them in 70 AD and destroying Jerusalem and its temple.

Christians fled before the fall of Jerusalem and they fled to a place called Pella which is in modern northwest Jordan it's a place that's being excavated in recent years and there the Christians basically survived because it was outside the territory of Judea into what's called the Decapolis Pella was one of the Ten Towns for a time.

It's the other side of the Jordan River so maybe this is referring to that incident that first great persecution against Christians and Christians fleeing in effect into the desert to escape the might of Rome against Jerusalem.

[26 : 20] Maybe that's one of the things that's being spoken of here. The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

So it's clear there that this woman is the church the mother if you like of all the Christians who are described as those who obey and those who hold the testimony of Jesus.

If this is referring to an initial historical event as I think it probably does at one point the church in Pella continued and from John's point of view he's nowhere near Pella he's in modern Turkey or Greece he's on Patmos in fact at the time which is an island between the two but most of his time in his later years have been spent around Ephesus in modern Turkey in what was then called Proconsular Asia and it seems that from his perspective what he's doing is giving us a little history lesson of the last century of his time Jesus being born Jesus ascending the flight of Christians from Jerusalem and now the might of Rome and its persecution turning towards Asia where John in fact is I don't want to say that that's the sum total of what's being spoken about here because what we find in this chapter is in a sense a big pattern and a big pattern that is applied in historical events the pattern is of an ongoing wild but limited persecution by Satan and his agents of the Christian church which began with the persecution of Jesus so the pattern is there with the baby

Jesus and Herod and Mary but that's not the sum total of what's being spoken about the pattern is there in heaven with Satan attacking the angels and being cast out of heaven the pattern is there in 70 AD with the Christians fleeing and being kept safe but nonetheless the church being under attack and then the pattern is there a bit later on when Satan through the Roman Empire is persecuting Christians in Asia and in southern Europe and I think the pattern keeps going John expects that he's not limiting it to just one event in history but rather the events in history are sort of part of the pattern there it's occurring in that year and that year and that year and it's all part of a big picture so in part this is a history lesson chapter 12 Christmas Easter Ascension 70 AD and John's own time the dragon going off to make war against the rest the rest of the Christian church the end of chapter 12 verse 18 but in some the NIV

I think it is it's chapter 13 verse 1 so the different versions number it differently which is a little bit odd but chapter 13 verse 1 or 12 verse 18 depending on your translation says something like the dragon stood on the shore of the sea from John's perspective in Patmos or in Turkey the dragon is coming from Palestine Jordan across the Mediterranean Sea to Asia to persecute the church as I say that's not the sum total of fulfilment of what's being spoken about here but I think nonetheless what John is trying to do is help those being persecuted understand where they fit in history and why the persecution is happening it happens because of Jesus and they are identified with him well the fourth vision then is 13 1 to 10 the dragon on the shore of the sea and a beast comes out of the sea the beast is clearly linked to the dragon but slightly different the dragon it seems is Satan but the beast seems to be perhaps best described as an agent of Satan 10 horns 7 heads 10 crowns all statements of power claims to be powerful and so on and on each head a blasphemous name maybe this is a reference to the fact that in the Roman Empire the emperors were worshipped

[30 : 37] Domitian was called my lord and god Nero was called the saviour of the world Augustus before him was paid divine respect by his loyal subjects that's blasphemy worship of the emperor is blasphemy because it's not worship of God and so I think this picture of a beast is very much likened to the Roman Empire the beast I saw resembled a leopard feet like a bear mouth like a lion the dragon gave the beast his power that's made explicit the picture here in a sense derives from Daniel 7 where there's all sorts of beasts leopards and bears and so on which are all identified with successive empires that came between around Daniel's time and leading up to Jesus what I think this is saying symbolically is that all the evil of those empires Babylonian Persian Medes Greek and whatever are all summed up in the evil of Rome this is evil personified if you like this Roman beast because I think that's what it's referring to coming out of the water into perhaps

Asia an agent of Satan arrives in Ephesus in Patmos perhaps more generally of course an embodiment of Roman might very powerful that's why people followed the beast one of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound but the fatal wound had been healed it's a very odd thing to mention and scholars ponder what on earth is this talking about I must say I'm not sure I think it probably refers to something that John's readers would have understood but we don't some people most people if they try and identify it with one thing think it refers to Nero Nero was the first great persecuting emperor in the 60s AD of Christians he blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome Nero in the end committed suicide I don't think he was mourned very much but nonetheless there grew up this expectation that Nero hadn't actually committed suicide but rather that he'd fled beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire towards what's modern Iran

Parthia and that one day he would come back with his army and conquer it as years went on of course that expectation became that Nero wouldn't come back because he should have been dead by then anyway but he would rise from the dead and again take over the Roman empire so maybe this is referring to that as though he died but yet the expectation he's going to live again or maybe it's just the fact that one Roman emperor dies but the Roman empire keeps going because the next emperor is probably just as bad as the one before him men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast and they also worshipped the beast and asked who is like the beast who can make war against him it's a parody of many statements in the old testament who is like god who can compare to yahweh and so on but they see the power of the roman empire and the power of the emperor and so they worship him the emperor as their lord and god people follow the beast because of its power people like power it's the same today they chase whatever's powerful the trouble is they fail to see that real power lies in a weak death on a cross the beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for here again 42 months limited power it's given by god it's sort of hidden there but it's given to him 42 months the limit is imposed and the one who imposes it by implication is god he opened his mouth to blaspheme god maybe it's just talking about emperor worship which was rife in domitian's time and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven given power to make war against the saints and conquer them he's given authority over every tribe people language and nation this is real power but it's limited we shouldn't think that satan has no power because he is powerful he's given a lot of power but it's limited 42 months and heaven is safe it's restricted to the earth we may think that's not much of a restriction but it is because god's in control and god is safe in heaven if you like put it that way and therefore god will triumph in the end satan is really defeated of course all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast that is not all but all those whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the lamb the initiative lies with god it's god who writes the names in the book of the lamb not us we don't have to sort of get there to do it god does it there's great security and assurance for christians who are being persecuted to know that their names are written in the book of the lamb great encouragement to know that my name is in heaven and so on only christians will not succumb to the worship of the beast pretty powerful it's just like jesus temptation in the wilderness he didn't succumb and in a sense true christians are the same will not succumb to the worship of the beast he who has an ear let him hear it's like saying hey pay attention this is important if anyone is to go into captivity into captivity he'll go a bit like the babylonian exile in its imagery 600 years before if anyone is to be killed with the sword with the sword he'll be killed that's not very pleasant to hear if you're a christian facing persecution this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints it's almost an understatement isn't it if swords are flying and captivity is a real threat

but victory comes through perseverance and that's what the book of revelation is about christians persevering keeping on and not giving up something we should be praying for people who are being persecuted that they'll remain strong even to death yes we can pray that god and his mercy will spare them from death and end the persecution but if that doesn't happen we must pray that people don't give in at the end you may remember or know the story of the archbishop of canterbury called thomas cranmer one of my great heroes he was the in a sense the original architect of the book of common prayer which many anglicans revere very highly cranmer was imprisoned when edward the sixth died and mary became queen of england in 1553 he was cajoled forced persuaded in the end he gave in to recant his position of protestant christian faith having recanted therefore being free from the threat of death cranmer of course was in dire straits emotionally and spiritually like peter denying jesus before he died to his great credit cranmer recanted his recantation he died at the stake an awful death burned but in the end of course he's in heaven he's victorious if he hadn't recanted his recantation who knows his eternal destiny but ultimately victory comes not by avoiding death but through death through a faithful death so for those who are being persecuted we ought to pray for strength that they don't give in even if they die john's giving an interpretation of history here he's trying to explain the last 100 years or a bit less for his readers he's trying to show the source of persecution that it derives from persecution of god and it derives from satan it's not just merely some little christians being picked on but they're being picked on because they belong to god and therefore there is an encouragement for them in his interpretation of history satan takes a number of geysers herod the great the roman emperor empire and so on but i don't think this picture of beasts and so on is fulfilled in any one particular person it's a picture of the 42 months it's a picture of history between the first and second comings of jesus so therefore the beast is not just rome or herod the great the beast is hitler or stalin or maozi tung or pol pot or idi amin or sudanese islamic government or japan with its emperor worship it's anything that is a power that demands its worship of something other than the living god that's the beast that's being spoken about here in the end for john it was rome that was the threat it's not just about something that lies 2000 years in advance but rather for him it was the for the readers facing persecution it was rome but he's painting it in a broader picture than that he's not limiting the the attack and the persecution to rome by using this sort of language he's showing that it's part of history it's what we should expect in the 42 month period figuratively speaking until jesus comes again so the opposition that the church faces today is part of what's being described here it's not just talking about the end times before jesus returns it's the whole pattern and picture from the resurrection to the second coming the fifth little

vision in this series second half of chapter three is the beast now that comes from the earth the first the beast from the sea the roman empire now comes another beast it comes out of the earth had two horns like a lamb very deceptive given that we've already had the lamb who's jesus in the book of revelation and probably it's saying that it's deceptively weak and therefore deceptively harmless but hey it's got horns it's not really that harmless after all maybe it's meant to be looking like jesus the lamb and therefore it's deceptive in its appearance as well as in its harmlessness but rather beware remember jesus words beware false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing here's one almost literally it seems and he exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf so he's tied to the roman empire but he's an agent of rome if you like satan's the originating force of evil the roman empire is his agent and now we have an agent of the agent it's getting a bit complicated it's like get smart i guess and what we have you see is evil masquerading as a lamb wounded it looks harmless it's looking like jesus but it's not some suggest that what's being spoken of here for john's context is the local officials in asia not the emperor so much as the local officials one of their jobs especially the man who was the high priest of asia his job was to encourage people to worship the emperor he performed great and miraculous signs in verse 13 even causing fire to come down from heaven because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast he deceived the inhabitants of the earth great deception looks harmless but he's not he ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast that's the emperor who was wounded by the sword and yet lived in ephesus where john had spent most of his later adult years there was a five meter statue of domitian the emperor who was the emperor at the time of the book of revelation five meters is tall the head of it still there in sulciac archaeological museum it's very impressive the museum's not but the head is of domitian in pergamum which was one of the other seven cities mentioned in the beginning of the book of revelation that was another site of the worship of the emperor the worship of caesar pergamum's an impressive place on a very steep hill it's a steep walk up so i took a taxi and there you get to the top and there is a temple built for the worship of the emperor in the time of john and a bit later on as well revelation 2 13 talks about pergamum and satan's throne is there the worship of the emperor is the worship of satan and this is what's being spoken about here this beast this high priest of asia if that's who he is was given power to breathe to give breath to the image of the first beast so that it could speak and cause all who refuse to worship the image to be killed magic perhaps trickery perhaps probably they had strings that they could pull so eyes would flash inside statues and things people were easily duped perhaps maybe they're real miracles but of course just because it's a miracle doesn't mean it's god's power behind it deuteronomy 13 which people from holy trinity should know by heart by now warns us of the false prophet who performs miracles today so sadly christians go astray they see a healing or they see a miracle and think this is right god must be there but the warning is to test the truth of what is said because satan can perform miracles so a miracle doesn't mean it's god see where it's leading you to worship and it's not black and white half the time it's very subtle it's deceptive this passage is full of deception be careful whom we worship if we're chasing after miracles or we see them being performed what we get you see in this chapter is

[44 : 55] false government the empire and false religion the worship of the emperor combined and the pressure on christians to conform is great the end of verse 15 that all who refuse to worship the image were to be killed can hardly be more conformist or threatening to conform than threatening to kill people if they don't worship the emperor and he forced everyone small and great rich and poor free and slave that just means everyone there's no exception to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark economic sanctions are coming into force here against those who are christians unless you are part of the worship of the emperor whether it's at ephesus or pergamum or wherever it is we don't know and it doesn't matter you won't get the mark that will enable you to trade in the marketplace that's what's going on here this is further pressure to get christians to conform to give in to yield to speak lies to worship the emperor because otherwise they won't get any goods they won't be able to trade they won't be able to get food they'll eventually starve the mark is the name of the beast or the number of his name this calls for wisdom i doubt that much wisdom has been given the last two thousand years on this verse of all the verses in revelation probably more has been written about this than any other if anyone has insight let him calculate the number of the beast for it is a human number his number is 666 to think that john in revelation in about 95 ad would have a vision that we're not allowed to use bank cards the catholics in the 16th century thought it was luther luther thought it was the pope people this century think it's ronald reagan virtually every pope has been spoken about nero hitler often what happens is people think that well certainly in some cases letters stand for numbers the letter a is one b is two and so on one book i read today said that i think it was hitler is 666 well i just couldn't work that out if you add up the letters h i t l e r and you add and they stand for whatever position in the alphabet they get which is what this book suggested you don't get anywhere near 666 you get about 70 well the book thought that you should add 100 to each so it's 101 102 for b and 103 still don't get 666 i think it was getting a bit fanciful at that point it seems to me that consistent with what we're seeing through this these visions and through revelation as a whole this is not meant to be one particular thing that's too limiting rather it's a caricature of the beast of evil persecuting the church the perfect number is seven this consistently falls short of the perfect number that i think is the best explanation but i don't think it's meant to be a sort of literal number as though if we have a hymn book when it should never sing him 666 we're not superstitious people surely it's saying that this worship this evil this powerful satan falls short of divinity and falls short of god's power therefore in the end ought not to be feared whenever caesar in whatever dress demands worship he is the beast whether in

rome or modern cambodia or china or wherever render to caesar what is caesar's but to god what is god's and that is worship and it's to be exclusive to god the sixth vision in this sequence is much more encouraging the lamb and the 144,000 it's in heaven now it's the heavenly jerusalem mount zion is a name for jerusalem ironically it's outside the current walls of jerusalem but it came to stand in the old testament for jerusalem the city of god the 144,000 we already saw a few weeks ago means all of god's people it's the multitude that nobody could number but the number was spoken the vision of the multitude was seen it's all of god's people a full and perfect number and none is missing and in contrast to the 666 these are people who have jesus name and the father's name on their foreheads they're marked by him and a mark on a forehead or an arm is a sign of ownership belonging a slave would have a mark to show that he belonged to the slave owner that particular one like cattle are branded so the mark on the forehead which i think is metaphorical and figurative not literal is to show that you belong and are owned by god and satan cannot snatch you away from him verse 2 talks about various symbols of god's presence and joy the harps and a new song is sung the psalms are full of new songs probably in the last few weeks we've sung new songs but a new song usually refers to an act of redemption because god has done something we sing a new song because he's done something new and this is a song of praise to god no one could learn the song except the very musical ones no except the 144 thousand who'd been redeemed from the earth only people who were redeemed can sing the song you see the people who are in heaven are all redeemed people that means they've been saved from something they've been redeemed from something they've been redeemed from their sin it's not perfect people or good people or people who've earned their way there they're all redeemed anybody who's a person of god whether in the old testament or the new testament is a redeemed person and only they can sing this song then it talks about them being perfect they don't defile themselves with women and so on in verse 4 which looks a bit threatening because we think we don't match up to the perfect standards being spoken about here but of course we must remember that

Christians are first and foremost forgiven redeemed and by the time we get to heaven we'll be perfect too for the work of god in us will be complete and when we're in heaven we will be people who are not defiled for whom no lies found on our lips and so on this is a great encouragement to Christians in persecution that beyond death lies a heavenly reward Christians are redeemed and bought by the price of Christ's blood on the cross and god's not going to let us go he's not going to let his son come and die for us and then see us wander off or be destroyed by satan he paid the price of Christ's death he's going to make sure he gets the end product which are those for whom he has his name on their forehead as the well-known hymn says crowns and thrones may perish kingdoms rise and wane but the church of Jesus constant will remain gates of hell can never gates that church prevail we have

Christ's own promise and that cannot fail well if these three chapters follow the pattern elsewhere in revelation we come to a little interlude it's the commercial break it's the angels flying in midair proclaiming the eternal gospel we just think of the gospel why is it eternal because gospel was a word meaning a common word meaning good news augustus the emperor had a gospel the gospel of augustus proclaimed that the 23rd of september his birthday as it happened would be new year's day and it would be full of festivity and joy and that was the good news of augustus his gospel this is the eternal gospel it's not the roman empire's gospel and the eternal gospel lasts forever and it's gods and it's about fearing god verse 7 giving him glory because the hour of the judgment has come worship him now this is the last chance for the world to repent the last chance for the world to repent the angel coming and proclaiming the gospel worship god and no other and notice how god's described it's the god who's the creator because he's not an idol he's not made by anybody he's the creator of all things throughout the bible and the old testament especially when it's there's a contrast between god and idols the creator god becomes important because he made it all he's not made by human hands a second angel comes and says fallen fallen is babylon the great well we know babylon fell in 539 bc it's a bit late to tell us if it's 95 ad but of course babylon stands for the cities or the people who are opposed to god probably here referring to rome babylon is fallen the roman empire lasted another 300 years or so but he's not talking about that in god's eyes it's fallen because god is triumphant babylon the arch enemy of god babel was the first one remember the tower of babel in genesis 11 trying to get to god to get to heaven they were what a stupid failure that was same with babylon in the 6th century bc the same with the roman empire it's fallen because of the cross and resurrection third angel followed and said if anyone worships the beast in his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand he too will drink of the wine of god's fury which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath this is a counterclaim to the claims of the roman empire that said if anybody doesn't worship the beast they're going to be killed in whatever form rather this is god's statement and of course god's statement comes true those who do worship the beast and not god will face the fury of god's wrath doesn't mean an uncontrollable temper like my father who when he did something wrong in the garage would hurl things out the garage window and smash it occasionally i do something similar this is not uncontrollable rage this is the wrath of a holy god against sin it's fully under control and it's the righteous response to sin it's still terrifying it's horrifying but god's under control that person will be tormented with burning sulfur literally fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and of the lamb why in the presence of the angels and the lamb we think they'd be in hell but this is i think to sharpen the contrast to put more sting if you like into the judgment there in the face of the righteous one the victor they will be punished for their mockery their blasphemy in the face of the lamb they thought they put the lamb to death they thought that he was dead and gone they thought he was weak and impotent and woe and betide on the day of judgment there they'll be before the lamb who they thought they destroyed and they face his judgment what fools for thinking the lamb was dead the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever there's no

rest day or night for those who worship the beast in his image or anyone who receives the mark of his name seems to me to suggest that hell's a real place hell's a conscious place not just annihilation as some people think when we die there's a choice of two things heaven or hell both are real places one's without god and it's an awful place and we should never even think it'll be fun the jokes about hell i think are in vain our hell will be fun because it'll be full of all the good things of this life that aren't very nice things nobody will enjoy hell at all the proclamation of the gospel you see from these angels is in a sense good news but the good news comes with a sting in the tail salvation is a meaningless non-entity if there is if there is nothing called judgment if god doesn't judge evil if there is nothing like hell then heaven is meaningless and the good news is nothing at all but so often of course we think that the good news is just good and there isn't judgment the first thing the serpent denied in the garden of eden was the judgment of god and the first thing the christians deny tonight today is the judgment of god but deny the judgment of god and the rest of it falls down christian truth is like a circle of dominoes flip one over and the rest of them will fall down because it all hangs together take away the judgment and the rest doesn't stand this calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey god's commandments and remain faithful to jesus yes it does require patient endurance because this world is not always a nice place to be australia may be a lucky country and we may certainly be fortunate that we don't face overt persecution but i think it's growing i think it'll get worse maybe it won't get to the extent of the roman empire but nonetheless it's the same world in the same three and a half year period and until jesus comes again we cannot expect anything else but if we are persecuted for our faith then we ought to know that jesus was persecuted and it's because of him that we are persecuted the voice from heaven said right blessed are the dead who die in the lord from now on yes says the spirit they will rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them what we do is important what we do counts if it didn't then it wouldn't matter what we did at all and god would be wrong immoral the last vision is about the reaping and the the reaper the judgment itself one like a son of man on a cloud jesus himself picture of daniel 7 jesus the one who comes to judge son of man is the name he called himself and very often when he did so it was in the context of judgment he would say to people you will see the son of man coming on the clouds or seating on the seated on the clouds or whatever another angel came out of the temple the temple is where god is he called in a loud voice to jesus take your sickle and reap jesus said that he didn't know when the second coming would be he didn't know when the judgment day would be only the father knew and here you see revelation saying the same thing it's only when it comes that god through an angel tells the son to go and judge only the father knows when and anybody else who thinks they know is a fool or a fluke so he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was harvested it's jesus taking his own gathering the wheat if you like and leaving the chaff then came another angel with a sharp sickle and another who had fire coming from the altar the altar was the place where the saints cried out how long oh lord and here are their prayers being answered god has come to judge and bring justice to this world full of persecution this is the final judgment now take your sharp sickle gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine because the grapes are ripe it's time it's ready to

Thank you.