

Revelation

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[0 : 0 0] I don't know if you've ever owned or had one of those 3D magic eye books. Tim's going to throw a picture up for me. I don't know if you remember when these first came out.

Some of you won't because you were probably born afterwards. But I remember when these first came out and you get given the book and there was just this peer pressure to act like you could see the picture.

And so everyone's passing around the book at school and you're looking at it going, yeah, I can see the boat. That's it over here, right? Yeah, I mean in the middle. That's where it is. That's the boat, right? And you're looking at it and everyone's going, it's simple.

Just look. Look again. Just fuzzy your eyes. And I'm like, how do you fuzzy your eyes? What kind of an instruction is that? And so some people are just glancing at it going, yeah, it's no worries. But when you first look at it, it's just this mess.

It's like, that's not anything, surely. It's just a mess and they're making it up to make me look stupid. You're waiting for one day. Everyone's going to turn around and go, there's no pictures. We know that you were pretending when you said you could saw the boat.

[0 : 5 9] It looks like a mess. And to see what's in there, you have to actually train your eyes to look past that first bit. To go beyond your first glance, you need to look properly and see what is really there.

Now, this book of Revelation that we've been studying to the first century church, this letter, it's a pastoral one. The bishop reminded us last week. It's encouraging in many ways.

It's challenging in many ways. But more than anything else, it's enlightening. Because this book of Revelation, what it does is it trains the hearts and eyes of Christians so that they have right perspective.

It gives them the ability to see beyond their circumstance, to not be overwhelmed by what's happening today or next week or next month, and to see into eternity. This book is designed to enable them to understand more fully the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

And tonight, we drop into chapter 12 of Revelation, which is almost like a snapshot of the whole book wrapped up in one chapter. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 kind of sit together.

[2 : 0 6] And they are really a summary of what Revelation is about without all the detail that comes in other bit. And even though this snapshot that we get is a little bit creative and maybe a little bit confusing, it is a snapshot of history and eternity.

And it's showing us that things are not how they seem, that things are not how they look at first glance. The pain and the struggle that the churches were facing, the pain and the struggle and the suffering that we face as Christians now is real and even normal.

But it's not the whole picture. When we follow Jesus. And so to give John this perspective, to give us this perspective, God gives John another vision.

Have a look with me at verse 1 and 2. A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and the crown of 12 stars on her head.

She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. So first up, we've got this woman wearing the sun. This woman is representative of Israel, of God's people.

[3 : 14] That's what the 12 stars is about. It's pointing us back to the 12 tribes in the Old Testament. And she's in pain and she's about to give birth. And there's this sense of expectation that something is going to come out of Israel.

Something is going to come out of God's people. The next bit, verse 3. So John sees this dragon, this enormous red dragon with horns and crowns and heads.

And verse 9 tells us that this dragon is Satan. This is the devil. His horns and his crowns tell us that Satan wants the power and the influence and the authority of God.

That's his desire. And we know in this vision that Satan is sitting, waiting, wanting to devour the child that will come out of God's people. Wanting to devour whatever it is that God's people will produce.

And we see what that is in verse 5. She, the woman, gave birth to a son, a male child who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

[4 : 33] The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. So a child is born. He's male.

He will rule. And we know that he won't just be any male child who will rule. This will be the saviour. The fact that he will rule the nations with an iron scepter, that points us back to a special kind of king.

That Israel is waiting for a king in the line of David. This baby, this child is Jesus. And we're told in the vision that he is snatched up to God before Satan can devour him.

He is placed on his throne and the woman flees off into the desert to be taken care of by God. And then the last bit of this vision in verse 7. So Satan pursues the child.

He's waiting there to devour him. But he misses his opportunity because Jesus is snatched up to heaven and onto the throne. And instead he is cast out by the angels and hurled down to the earth.

[5 : 56] Okay, deep breath. Seems simple enough, right? So we've got God's people. Jesus is being born. Satan is against them. Satan misses his opportunity. Jesus goes onto his throne.

Satan gets hurled down. You with me so far? I know there's a bit of weirdness. So we've got to understand when we read things like this in God's word that this is a prophetic vision.

Which means it's not precise. We can't necessarily connect every bit of this vision to specific details in history. Even though it's obviously talking about some real things that did actually happen in history.

There's kind of links and connections we can make in this vision. But we need to be careful how hard or how closely we do that. I mean, you've got a woman and a dragon or a serpent clashing.

Which points us back to the Garden of Eden when you had a woman tempted by a serpent. And listen to these words when God pronounces judgment on the serpent back in Genesis 3. He says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers.

- [7 : 0 0] He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. It's pointing us maybe to something that we are already warned about. The woman being taken off into the desert to be protected for the 1,200 days reminds us of God rescuing his people out of Egypt.
- Taking them out into the desert. The book of Exodus talks about them being carried on eagle's wings just like the woman is. And then at the same time, this vision could almost connect to the situation of the early church when they were reading this book.
- The dragon is the emperor Domitian who is persecuting the Christians fiercely. He's killing them left, right and centre. And they are at his whim, it seems.
- So there's things that we can connect through history that kind of are part of this vision. But the focus is really in a tiny little bit of detail that comes in the middle of it.
- The focus of this encounter between Jesus and the woman and the dragon is Jesus' life itself. That's the bit we need to hone in on.
- [8 : 0 5] His temptation in the wilderness, his death at the hands of the Roman authorities. In this passage, Jesus' life is summarised in 21 words. Basically, he's born and then he goes to heaven and sits on the throne.
- Those words are shorthand for the most significant event in human and created history ever. See, what this vision is telling us is that Jesus' life itself, his life growing up, his obedience to his father, his life, his death and resurrection, Jesus' life was the battle between Satan and Jesus.
- It's not something in the future. It's not something that happens out there in the heavens and we can't see it. The battle took place on earth when Jesus came. His death and his resurrection were the means by which Satan gets beaten.
- And we see that because Satan gets hurled down. Even as the angels are the ones kicking him out of heaven, it's actually the blood of the lamb that overcame Satan. It's Jesus' life, Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection that actually win the battle against Satan.
- This great and wondrous sign that John gets shown is Jesus. In all its weirdness and wonderfulness, this chapter is a gospel chapter.
- [9 : 2 5] God is opening John's eyes to look at Jesus and Jesus' victory. God is showing John that Jesus is sitting on his throne now.
- And at the same time, Satan is wallowing in defeat now. And it gets really clear for us because God gives us a clear interpretation with a voice from heaven in verse 10.
- I heard a loud voice in heaven say, Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ for the accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down.
- They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink back from death. Now salvation has come.
- This vision is pointing to an event that happened a few decades before the early church would have heard about in this letter. This letter is pointing to an event that happened thousands of years before we opened it up tonight.
- [1 0 : 3 7] This is a past tense verse. It says salvation is here now. The kingdom is here now.
- Jesus sits on the throne reigning in authority now. Satan's been defeated. The death and resurrection of Jesus have won the battle. Satan has lost.
- Forgiveness is available. And yet, is that how it looked and felt for the early church reading this book? I mean, we know that the churches were being persecuted.
- When we read the letters in the first chapters, we know they were facing opposition. They were suffering. We know that people are dying daily for calling Jesus their Lord and for refusing to bow to the pressure of the Roman emperor.

Does it feel like salvation has come in your life? Does it feel like Jesus sits on his throne in your situation?

[11 : 37] I mean, the tension is hinted at in verse 11. Did you catch it? They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Satan was overcome, but they still died. The victory was won, but they still died. Even with the victory of Jesus, even having been washed in the blood of the lamb, even being forgiven, they still died.

Many of them violently. And yet, we get this verse. We get this voice from heaven that says, they were victorious in their deaths.

The kingdom of God, the salvation that is talked about in this verse, is not what we sometimes think it should be. It's better.

A couple of weeks ago, I had a chance to go on holidays, just for a few days, to visit my sister in Dubbo. It was a trip with a particular milestone that made me a very proud dad.

[12 : 51] We mapped out when you've got to do five hours driving with a two and a half year old. You really have to pick when you're going to stop, how you're going to do it, when he's going to sleep, what's an appropriate amount of drugs to put it. No, I'm just joking.

Just how are you going to get from A to B without losing your mind and smacking your child inappropriately. And this, for us, involved McDonald's, because McDonald's has good food for me, it has good play equipment for him.

And the milestone was that our first pit stop, my son came out with the word Maccas. And basically, that is all he says when we're driving in the car now. He's just looking for the next Maccas that he can stop at.

And I'm very proud because those of you who know me will know that McDonald's is a passion of mine. But the funny thing is, we went to McDonald's multiple times and he didn't eat food once.

He's not interested. I tried to give him hash brown. He's like, no, just give me my mushy Wheat Bix or whatever. And so he thinks Maccas is just about Playland. And look, Playland is great. But because he has this limited understanding, he doesn't realise the goodness that he's on offer behind the counter at McDonald's, he's sold himself short and settled for less.

[14 : 03] And look, we have this limited understanding when it comes to the glorious future that God is preparing for us. And we need to be careful that when we dream about the kingdom of God, when we hope for our future, when we imagine what he will do and what good he will bring in our life, that we don't pull the kingdom back in and make it small and less impressive than it actually is.

The kingdom of God is victorious. But we mustn't let our understanding of what that looks like be limited by our own sinful imagination.

This verse, verse 10, that salvation has come, that the kingdom has come, was true for those Christians suffering 2,000 years ago. And it's true for Christians around the world today facing persecution in Iraq and Syria.

And it's true for Christians today in Chatswood. Facing temptation and depression and failing in their battle with sin.

We are both citizens of heaven and residents of earth. Our names are immovably etched into the book of life.

[15 : 22] God is preparing a place for us in glory. And yet right now we live in a fallen and limited and pain-filled world. This is the reality of the kingdom now.

It's there in verse 12. Therefore, because salvation has come, because the kingdom has come, because Christ sits on the throne, therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them.

That's us. But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you. He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short.

Woe to you who live on the earth. That's us. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

The woman was 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, out of the serpent's reach.

[16 : 27] The woman is rescued, but there is an ominous warning in verse 17. Then 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.

That's us. Because we live in both heaven and earth, because we are citizens of heaven, because we are guaranteed our place, because we belong to that kingdom that is not of this world, we experience both the joy that is declared for heaven and the woe that is declared for earth.

Sadness and depression are not alternatives to joy in the Christian life. We will experience both. I mean, did you catch it there?

In verse 17, we are at war in our day-to-day life. Satan is our enemy. He is a wounded enemy, but he will do anything to share the pain that he experiences with us.

There was a football game yesterday. I've been very restrained. We're 15 minutes in and I haven't mentioned it yet. There was a football game yesterday and there are some notable absences from church tonight.

[17 : 47] But there was a football game yesterday between the Sydney Swans and the Hawthorne Hawks. You all know that I support a couple of teams and whoever's playing the Swans. Now, I could have gotten up to gloat tonight.

I could have intentionally, you know, modelled my wardrobe on brown and gold. Would have been tough. But I could have intentionally dressed that way. And you can imagine the pain that that would have caused for certain people.

Like I said, the Smiths particularly may have had to take a week off to recover afterwards because of the damage to the relationship. Waving that pain back in their face would have been just exacerbating what they were already feeling.

And what we need to understand is that Satan is a defeated enemy. And every time he sees somebody who bears the name of Jesus, it's like we wave the jersey in front of his face to remind him that he lost.

He is antagonised by people who love Jesus in their day-to-day life. He is enraged every time you make a decision to treasure Jesus above the things in the world.

[18 : 51] He desperately wants to cover up that light of salvation that dwells in us.

He wants to damage our lives with pain and sin and temptation, so much so that our love for Jesus will be diluted or maybe even extinguished.

The war with Satan will not go forever. Satan is defeated and the times, time and half a time, the 1260 days, that's three and a half, which in Revelation speak means a limited time.

Satan has not been sent down here with just open slather. He knows that his time is short. But until Jesus returns, we are at war. And war is not easy.

If nothing else, reading this should make us ready for what we will face in life. If you're a follower of Jesus, you must expect that life will throw things at you that make it hard to treasure Jesus, that make it hard to put him first.

[20 : 00] One of our core values as a church is humble authenticity. It's about being real and being honest with each other. It's about not putting on pretense. This passage has just reminded us, maybe told us, that every one of us who loves Jesus is at war with Satan.

It's told us that Satan is powerful and clever and so we should assume that at any given point, some of us in this room will not be feeling all clappy and cheerful about following Jesus.

We should assume that in this room, sometimes all of us will not be particularly excited about following Jesus because Satan is pressing on pressure points in our lives. We might be struggling with doubt, maybe even anger towards God, maybe a sense of failure as we continue to fall into sin.

Humble authenticity is being honest about the fact that that's how we're feeling. It means we don't have to turn up to church and put on a show and say everything's great and yeah, I had a fantastic quiet time this week.

It's okay to say I really struggled to open my Bible this week because the reality is that will be all of us at some point and all we do when we put on a show and say everything's fine is we project that expectation and that pressure onto other people and suddenly this isn't a safe place to just be how I'm going anymore.

[21 : 25] It's the place where everything has to be fine all the time. I've got to be honest with you, for me personally, I'm feeling weary as a Christian.

I'm finding it difficult to open the Bible and be refreshed at the moment. I'm trying, sometimes more than others, but I'm feeling weary.

My Sundays are fairly epic. I get to three, three and a half services and I have to pray sometimes to ask God, don't make me switch off in this.

Don't let me be cynical in this because when I'm tired, that's where I go. When I'm tired, I start looking down at other people. I start judging other people.

I start thinking they're not really as holy as they're pretending to be right now. Now, Satan is powerful and he's clever and he will press your life in whatever way he knows you are vulnerable.

[22 : 30] It might not be pride. It's right for us to recognise that Satan is behind the persecution that our brothers and sisters face in Iraq and Syria when there is a gun pointed at them saying follow Jesus or give up on Jesus or die.

But we need to also recognise that Satan has more weapons than just guns. Satan's goal isn't to kill you. It's to make you stop loving Jesus.

It's to make you doubt that God loves you and he doesn't necessarily need a gun to do it. He can drag you down with temptation by maybe giving you the opportunity to get something that you really desire that you know God doesn't want for you.

He can distract you from treasuring Jesus with the lure of comfort by giving you something that's not bad in itself but that will be a distraction. He might attack you with envy.

He might give things that you want to the people around you just so that you start wondering whether or not God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. God loves you.

[23 : 37] God loves you. This is why knowing our hope is so important. This is why perspective matters. This is why we need to train our eyes to not just see what's right in front of us today and tomorrow and next week and next year and for the next 50 years.

God's kingdom is not about this life. and if you think it is if your hope is for a good life as a Christian then you'll probably be disappointed.

If your hope in dark times is that it's going to get better soon and by soon you mean in a week or a month or a year that's not the hope of the kingdom of God.

It's an understandable hope it's not a wrong thing to desire but it's not the hope of the kingdom of God. It's not the hope of scripture it's not the victory that is won in Jesus' death and resurrection.

For many of the Christians reading this letter in the first century reading about the victory of Christ they would either lose loved ones or die themselves under persecution. For many of them life didn't get better.

[24 : 51] They suffered every day until their life was taken from them. But ultimately it did get better because for them death was not the end it was the transition into the better place that God had prepared for them.

It was the transition into the fuller version of God's kingdom free from Satan's opposition. If our hope in this life if our hope as Christians is just about being a bit more comfortable a bit less sick a bit less poor then we make Satan's job really easy.

God never promises comfort never. It is nowhere in scripture he never promises comfort in this life and yet somehow it just has crept in and become part of our subconscious expectation of what it means to follow Jesus.

we're happy to concede we will suffer as Christians but what we mean by that is most of our life will be okay and there'll be the odd struggle to teach me something. and so when that struggle stretches out for a year or for five years or for 50 years we don't know what to do with it because we have convinced ourselves that the kingdom of God is about having a happy retirement.

last week we prayed for our sister Janine and her family as she began a round of intensive cancer treatment and we continue to pray for her and we cry out that God would intervene and that he would heal her and that he would restore her but what we have to grasp is that even if she dies even if God calls her home because she knows Jesus she still wins.

[26 : 55] That's the hope of the kingdom. The victory of God might not look like victory to us but that just means we need victory redefined. We are so focused on the here and now and God has a bigger vision for us.

He has a bigger hope than just your 60, 70, 80, 90 or 100 years on this earth. The hope that he has for you is eternal. The 3D images that I was talking about before are blurry at best.

Even when you train your eyes to see whatever sailboat is supposed to be in the picture it's still hidden in a mess of colour or pattern and it's blurry at best.

Now that you've trained your eyes there's just a picture in that blurriness. There's a little bit of clarity but there's still mess.

The kingdom of God is real and has begun but in this life we see it through a mess.

[27 : 58] We see it amidst suffering being followers of Jesus and being forgiven being part of God's kingdom now brings clarity and hope in the mess but it doesn't remove the mess altogether.

It will when Jesus comes back but right now the hope of the kingdom is not the removal of mess but it's clarity in the mess. victory.

The centerpiece of God's victory the centerpiece of God's saving work in history is the cross. It's the humiliation and mockery of Jesus as he is murdered as an innocent man and through that event he is crowned the Lord of all.

Victory in the kingdom of God is very different to the way the world around us defines victory. What God has for us is good and is better but we must understand that to a lot of people it won't look good and it won't look better.

It will involve pain and suffering and possibly even death. We need to take this idea of comfort in the Christian life and throw it away. We need to get rid of it because it is damaging our ability to see our eternal hope.

[29 : 23] Because we're so focused on what's here we're missing what is further out. We're missing what is more exciting. We're missing what is hiding in the mess. So long as we allow comfort to shape our hope then we'll be setting ourselves up for pain.

Because God just doesn't promise you comfort in this life. He does promise comfort beyond your wildest imagination but he promises it when he returns. And if you are expecting him to give you comfort now you will be disappointed.

Now don't mishear me. There's nothing wrong with comfort in itself. There's nothing wrong with the fact that you live in a house and that you can feed yourself and those sort of things but you must understand it's less than what God wants for you.

So if that is your ambition if that is your hope in dark times that you can get back to that sort of life it's not the kingdom. And it's a distraction from what God is doing.

The Christian life now, the kingdom of God now is both joy and woe. It's not one or the other. We're at war with Satan and yet Christ is on the throne.

[30 : 37] It's done, he's won the victory, eternity is sure and we have heaven to look forward to. But the key to having joy and woe rather than just woe is perspective.

The key is training our eyes to look past the fuzziness of our situation and our circumstance and to see what is eternally true. To see more than what first appears.

The whole book of Revelation is about perspective. We talked about this when we're looking at Revelation 1. It's like God tears the curtains of time back so that John can see into eternity.

He can see that God is still winning, that he is still in control and this book is designed to lift struggling Christians, those struggling with opposition and those struggling with apathy and laziness, to lift struggling Christians above their circumstance so that they can see a glorious and better hope.

So that they can see the victory of the cross already achieved and so that they can begin to run with excitement to the future heaven that awaits them.

[31 : 52] It will still hurt to follow Jesus. There will still be sorrow but when our eyes are fixed on heaven, fixed on eternity, we can endure any suffering with joy.

It doesn't mean we won't cry, it doesn't mean it won't be painful but in our pain, in our woe, there will be joy. I read a devotional book called Taste and See a couple of years ago, it's just a daily little bit and one thing that stuck with me and has really haunted me ever since was the story of a family of missionaries.

I can't remember exactly what country they're from and that family was basically rounded up and forced to dig their own grave before they were going to be executed for doing Christian ministry in this country.

It was a father and a mother and three children. So they dug their own grave with the soldiers standing around, guns ready. Just before they're about to be killed, the dad asked if they could kneel and pray first before they were shot and the soldiers allowed them to kneel down and pray and as they began to pray, the eldest son ran.

He jumped up and just bolted off into the bush and the soldiers got very aggressive and were ready to go after him and the dad asked them not to chase the son. He said, please allow me to call him back.

[33 : 24] And the dad said to his son, please come back. It is better for us to enter, eternity together today than for you to live with a regret of fleeing from faithfulness.

The question I find myself asking when I hear a story like that is how did he do that? If I was in the situation with my son, would I call him back or would I cheer and try and slow down the soldiers so that he could get away?

How did he do that? And the answer is perspective. The answer is he had trained his eyes and his heart to see more than what was in front of him.

He wasn't consumed by the soldiers and the guns and the grave and the death that he knew was coming. He had trained his eyes and his heart to see the cross first and the victory that was won on the cross and the sure hope he had for heaven.

And so even in the pain of anticipating the death of his children and his wife, there was the joy of knowing that soon they would all enjoy perfect eternity with God.

[34 : 47] the key to not loving our lives too much, to not loving the things in our lives too much, is training our eyes on the two key moments in eternity.

The two key moments that stand either side of us. The first is the victory of the cross, the complete and irreversible victory of the cross which enables you to be forgiven and loved and adopted and which enabled Jesus to ascend to his throne where he reigns forever.

And that first point points toward and guarantees the second point. We live here in the middle. You've got the cross and the second point is Jesus coming back. It's the guarantee that the king on the throne will come and gather up his subjects.

He will bring the comfort and the joy and the satisfaction. He will remove the pain and the suffering and the sickness and the death. He will fill us with pleasure beyond our wildest imagination as we spend eternity in the presence of the good and loving and gracious God.

The key is to train your eyes to see past today, to see past this week, this year, to see the cross and heaven.

[36 : 12] those two things bring joy into the war that is raging. John saw a great and wondrous sign in heaven.

He saw war and pain and suffering in this life, but he saw his risen Savior Jesus on the throne and he saw hope for the day when it would all be made right.

As you look at the mess in your own life now, as you look at the world around us, train your eyes to see the hope and victory of Jesus.

Train your heart to see Jesus because in him and in his kingdom there is joy even in woe.

There is peace even in uncertainty and there is hope even in death. Train your eyes, train your heart and fix them on Jesus.

[37 : 26] Let's pray. Father God, we want to confess that we are so quick to desire and settle for less than you have designed for us.

We want to acknowledge that we get overwhelmed by our situation and our circumstance. Father, there are many of us in this room who right now are dealing with pain and doubt and frustration when it comes to our lives following you.

God, please lift our eyes, train our eyes, train our hearts to focus on the cross, to focus on the victory that you won in Jesus. Open our eyes to see the hope that awaits us, to look forward with anticipation, to not love our lives or things in our lives because we know that there is something better that you have prepared for us.

Give us the joy and the peace and the hope that you promised that is bigger than any circumstance in our life. Give us the humility and the honesty to admit when we're struggling.

Give us the love for one another to rejoice as we overcome, as we find joy. Give us the love for one another that we might struggle together, that we might bear with one another.

[39 : 06] Father God, please imprint Jesus on our hearts and minds so that we may love you more than anything else, so that we may live wanting more than anything else to get to that future kingdom that awaits us.

And we pray, please come soon. Amen. Amen. Let's continue in prayer.

Almighty God and merciful Father, we give you humble and heartfelt thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all people.

We bless you for our creation and preservation and all the blessings of this life, but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of