

The Decisive Moment

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Revelation 12 verse 7 And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come.

For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. For they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them. But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.

We're looking at the three episodes in this chapter. Last week we looked at the first episode. This week we're looking at the second episode from verse 7 to verse 12. And next week, God willing, we'll look at the final episode in this chapter.

[1 : 42] The first episode concerned a woman pregnant. She was clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and her head a crown of twelve stars.

And we saw that this woman was the people of God. You can call her the Israel of God if you want to think about it in terms of the Old Testament. But we also have to think about this woman in terms of the people of God in the New Testament.

Because she didn't disappear. Whilst she had to flee into the desert at the end of the first episode, she didn't disappear altogether. She still exists.

So, the woman is God's people in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament was all about the coming of Jesus into the world.

And the purpose of the woman was to bring forth God's son into the world. But the woman, as God's people, as God's New Testament people, is still in existence today.

[2 : 45] Now, we also saw that there was the dragon. And his objective wasn't the woman. He hated the woman, but he only hated the woman because of the child she was about to give birth to.

And he positioned himself in front of the woman in order to destroy the child if he could. But as soon as she gave birth to the child, the child was caught up to the throne of God in verse 5.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Have you ever been reading a book and you've been tempted halfway through the book or a third of the way through the book to go to the last pages to find out what the end of the story is?

I guess we've all been in that position at some point in our lives. Especially if you're avid readers and if it's something exciting. You want to know how the story unfolds.

But it's important not to do that. Because the unfolding of the story is important also. Not just how the story ends. In many respects we know how the story is going to end.

[3 : 58] But it's important, and it was important for John, to know how, what was taking place at the present moment. And it's important for us not to jump on to verse 13 asking, what in the world happens to the woman?

What becomes of her? Does the dragon ever find her? And is he able to destroy her? It's important to read the chapter from the beginning to the end in the order in which God has given it.

Because God is saying to John and to us, now don't rush ahead. I've got something important to say to you. Meanwhile, before we go back to the woman and to find out, because that's what we have in the third episode, what happens to the woman in the desert?

Is she protected? Does she survive? Does she continue to live? Because we're told that the dragon saw her and pursued her and made it his business to try and to destroy her with all the resources that he could bring together.

But God is saying at this moment, before we move on to that, there's a second episode that I want you to see and I want you to understand. There's also a pause. Between verse 6 and verse 7, the pause is there for a very important reason.

[5 : 11] It was important for John to know the current situation in which he was. That is, that he is, he is part of that woman, the people of God.

And they are in the desert, not knowing for sure where God is going to take them, just like the children of Israel in the wilderness. They woke up every morning, they didn't know which direction God was going to take them.

They had to live by faith. And it's not easy to live by faith, is it? It's not easy to live by faith. And it doesn't get any easier either. Even those of us who have been on the road for many years will be able to say, it's not any easier than when we first began, not knowing what God is going to do with us.

And it was important for John to stop at verse 6 and to realise that he is in the wilderness and he has to live, he has to trust in God.

Now God is going to show him a completely different vision altogether. And now his attention is directed, not to the earth, but it's directed to what the Bible calls war in heaven.

[6 : 18] Now, your first question will probably be, in what sense does war possibly take place in heaven?

How can there possibly be war in heaven? After all, heaven is surely the place where God dwells. And it's the place that he has promised to give to his people and to bring his people into when he perfects them after the day of judgment with new bodies.

The new heaven and the new earth will be established where there will be no conflict and where there will be no sadness and no sickness and no tears. How can there possibly be war in heaven?

And that gives rise to other questions as well, like for example, how does this war take place? Normally war takes place where there is fighting and bloodshed and death and where one side wins and one side loses.

But even the side that wins has to suffer casualties where some of the men, some of the army die in the process of that warfare. Is that what's being suggested here?

[7 : 26] How can there possibly be in the place where God himself dwells in perfection? How can there be bloodshed? How can there be hostility? How can there be death in the place where there cannot be death?

How can there be darkness and suffering in such a place? Well, these are perfectly legitimate questions and if you're asking them, then I think that you're responding in precisely the way that we ought to respond when we read.

Don't ever skim through the Bible. Don't ever just rush through reading the Bible. Stop for a wee moment and ask yourself, how can this be? There's nothing wrong with asking these questions because it's through asking these questions that we grow in our knowledge of God's Word and very, very often God comes in and He shows us something that we never expected to find even amongst the questions that we ask.

So don't be afraid of asking these kinds of questions. Don't be afraid also when you don't know what the answer is. And I'm going to confess to you that the answer to these questions I have absolutely no idea.

I don't know how this war takes place and you know the reason I'm saying that is because the Bible doesn't tell me. And where the Bible doesn't tell me I would not dare to speculate or to guess.

[8 : 43] We mustn't guess what we don't know. We simply take that there was war in heaven. The other subject that this passage raises is the subject of angels because we're introduced in the book of Revelation to this being called Michael and his angels.

Now if you know your book of Daniel and if you know your book of Jude you'll know that Michael is the name that is given to one of the angels. And you'll also know that through reading the Bible that angels appear in several places.

Angels are created beings. They're not like us. They are like us in some respects and not like us in other respects. They are created beings. There was a time when there were no angels.

But angels, God's angels are those who serve him perfectly. They've never fallen. They've never sinned. Their function is a spiritual one.

They don't have bodies. They can assume bodies. They can take the appearance of having a body. They can appear on earth. Their function we are told is twofold.

[9 : 50] First of all they are in heaven to serve and to praise and to worship and to glorify God around his throne. Like that great vision in Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah was given to see the seraphim flying around the throne of God calling out Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.

And they do so not because they're forced to in any way but because they don't want to be anywhere else. They love every moment that they are there. And they don't want to do anything else. They don't want to look at anything else except gaze on the face of God as you and I hopefully one day will if we're in Christ that's what the promise is to you and I.

But the angels have another function as well and that is to support and to provide for God's people here in this world. Now don't ask me how they do that because I don't know.

But if I believe tonight that I am created by God and you're created by God as the pinnacle of the creation process bearing his image and his likeness that's what Genesis tells us that we bear the image and the likeness of God why is it so difficult for me to believe in angels?

Perhaps it's difficult because I've never seen an angel. Well there are plenty of things that I have to accept by faith because they're written in God's word and it seems to me to be quite laughable how there's so much God has told us that just in the same way as he has created us he has created angels.

[11 : 43] We don't know exactly when they were created but we know that they were created and we know that amongst the angelic beings and I don't want to spend too much time on this because there's a real danger in spending time focusing on the wrong thing.

Whilst it's interesting to think about angels and to wonder what they do and what they look like and what their function is etc. It does us no good whatsoever because it wasn't an angel that came into the world to save us from our sins.

Our focus this evening same as this morning must be on the Son of God. So that's why we're here and that's why we don't want to spend too much time on this but in any case amongst the angels there's a hierarchy there are specific angels you know what the name of one of them is it's Gabriel the one who announced the birth of Jesus but here we have another one Michael Michael and he is called in Daniel the prince of Israel which seems to suggest that his specific responsibility has been the guidance and the protection of God's people.

Now I don't know how he does that I am not sure to what extent the Holy Spirit guides us and to what extent angels guide the people of God I'm not sure at all but the Bible tells me they are ministering spirits sent by God to give support to those who inherit salvation that's what Hebrews tells me and I accept I'm happy to accept that by faith.

By far I believe the more important question is this one in what sense was Satan in heaven in the first place?

[13 : 26] I can answer that far more clearly than I can answer in what sense was there war in heaven and the second question that arises as a result of that is in what sense was Satan cast out of heaven and what was it that cast him out?

What was the moment and the key and the place where he was cast out? Why was he cast out? In verse 10 we read now in many respects that word is the kingpin of this whole passage now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and authority and of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down and that these words are the answer to the question that I just asked in what sense was Satan in heaven in the first place?

Well we're told in this passage he was there as the accuser of God's people and in fact the accuser of the world. If you think about it like this think about heaven as God's courtroom by which there has to be perfect justice and if you think about it it makes absolute logical sense that if God is God he must judge the world he has to judge the world because he is the God of righteousness the God who cannot look at sin or iniquity in any form whatsoever and the picture is this and you have it given to us in elsewhere in scripture for example the book of Job is a prime example Job chapter 1 we read that when the angels came to present themselves to God Satan was amongst them and there was this conversation and I don't believe it's a hypothetical conversation at all I believe it was a real conversation between Satan and God in which Satan's purpose was to undermine the character of Job by accusing him and this was what he accused him of he said you see see that man

Job you say he's righteous and he's consistent and he's obedient but I know that he's only obedient because you've made him rich you've given him strength and wealth and you've made everything easy for him you take it away and he will curse you to your face and of course the whole book of Job was about when God allowed Satan to do that this passage gives us what it tells us what Satan does and why he was in heaven in the first place appearing as the accuser of mankind now here's the logic here's the conversation the conversation goes something like this I brought sin and death into the world God the people the men the man and the woman that you created to be your image and your likeness they listened to me instead of doing what you said they did what I said and he's right and as a result of that sin came into the world and affected the whole of the human race and he's right and you look at all these thousands of people and millions of people in the world today they all belong to me you look at that one and he's got deceit written all over him you look at that one he's got hypocrisy all over him you look at that woman and she's got selfishness self-centeredness written all over them and they've always been like that from the moment that they were born they have been scarred and tainted and stained with sin and his right now says Satan you are the God of justice and he's right you see Satan can tell the truth and he knows his Bible and he knows his God he knows everything that you and I know about God he knows how holy and righteous God is and he knows that there are certain things that God can't do and he's right you say well how can you work that one out well there are certain things that God can't do I make no apology for saying that of course that's true and you say well surely God can do anything God cannot make black white God cannot make a square circle God cannot ignore sin he can't just do away with sin and I'm quite sure many of you have asked this very important question why is it that God if he really wants to solve the world's problems why can he not just do away with sin all together he can't because these things that God cannot do for him to do them the reason he can't do them is because if he were to do them he would be contradicting himself

[18:22] God cannot deny himself he cannot contradict himself and I'll tell you why because if God was going to do away with sin he would have to destroy his own justice and then he wouldn't be gone sin brings guilt and guilt brings punishment that is the perfect justice of God and that's why the Bible says the wages of sin is death and God is absolutely completely committed to himself and to his own perfect justice that cannot be any other way and Satan knows that and he says there you are the whole world is mine and they're all they're all in my kingdom they belong to me and one day you will have to send them to a lost eternity you have to do it because there is no other option and he's right that's what this passage means by the accuser of the but it's not just that he's pointing out to God what God knows already of course he is but he is his function and his whole objective is to destroy and to hold people captive in their sin until the day when God sends them away according to his perfect justice you see that's the state that the world is in today that's why we talk about a lost world a world that is condemned by God because God in order to be true to himself and to his own justice he must condemn sin he must but there is a way of salvation and the key is the child and it's no coincidence that it's when the child is taken when the child is born and taken up to heaven now remember what I said about that that that encapsulates the life and the ministry on the death of Jesus

Christ and you remember of course what that involved it involved the Jesus being born it involved him becoming a man it involved him going to the cross and on that cross the son of God himself became sin for us as the only way of our salvation the only way you see all along from all eternity God planned this one way there could only be one way God could never choose a human being and say right you're going to be the sacrifice for sin why could he not do that because that human being was guilty himself he couldn't have chosen he couldn't even choose the very best of the human race because even the very best I don't know who that possibly could have been but even the very best of the human race was himself a sinner and was himself condemned so he had to be punished for his own sins there was only one way and that was for God himself to come into the world to enter into our world as a human being capable of suffering and capable of dying on the cross so that by his sacrifice we could escape and so by escaping from sin we could escape from Satan's clutching and from that very moment there was no place in heaven for Satan anymore we could say he was evicted he was thrown down have you ever seen have you ever noticed how many times in the

Bible that there is referenced we don't think about this often enough we think about the death of Jesus in relation to our forgiveness and our being born again but we don't think it often enough in

relation to the destruction of Satan Luke chapter 10 verse 18 you remember when Jesus sent out the disciples to go into all the cities and the villages preaching the good news and they came back and they were rejoicing at the number of people who had listened to them and they said this Lord even the demons are subject to your name and Jesus said listen to this I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven now what did he mean by that he meant that as a result of his death which he was about to suffer in Jerusalem and as a result of their going out with the message of the gospel and as people changed as they saw the gospel as they followed Jesus their lives were changed he saw as a result Satan's power just evaporating and he was thrown down to earth

John chapter 12 and verse 31 on the very eve of his being taken and his arrest this is what Jesus says now is the judgment of this world now will the ruler of this world that's Satan be cast out and when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself in other words in drawing people to myself I am releasing them from the power of Satan and from the condemnation which they would otherwise one day suffer I am setting them free from Satan's kingdom by taking them into and there's only one way of doing that I if I be lifted up from the earth what did you mean by that that was a reference to the cross in which he was going to be lifted up from the earth he was going to be crucified that was the only way in which men and women like you and I could be set free from the prison of Satan's prison and into his kingdom Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14 listen to this he himself since therefore the children share in flesh and blood he himself

Jesus likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death that is the devil and deliver all those who through fear of death was subject to lifelong slavery 1st John chapter 3 and verse 8 the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil no wonder when the devil is thrown out as a result of the death and resurrection that's the key the death and the resurrection of Jesus that's the key that's what makes the difference that's what purchased men and women for God that's what released them from the devil's stronghold no wonder in verse 10 I heard a voice not just a voice look at verse 10 I heard a loud voice in heaven you know when we read something like that in the bible it's not just a single person or a single being who decides to raise his voice

[25 : 24] I want you to think of perhaps a football match the kind of voices you hear there and the rapturous applause that's what it means by I heard a loud voice in heaven why because the moment has come the decisive moment has taken place where Jesus the son of God in our nature has laid down his life and been raised again and been ascended up to heaven and now everything is different no longer are we held captive but now we can be set free by trusting in the son of God now verse 10 the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ has come for it says in verse 10 the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before God and they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony this worship song in verse 10 contains good news and bad news it contains good news first of all that Satan has finally once and for all been cast out he is a defeated enemy and that means tonight that what you and I as Christians what we face in this world by way of his temptations and persecutions however he assaults is evidence of his defeat as we read later on that when he saw that he had been thrown down to earth he pursued the woman and next week we are going to look at the final episode in this story chapter 12 of how having been thrown down to earth he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child and we are going to look at how what happens to the woman as he does so but for the moment for the moment

I think that we want to just dwell upon these words therefore rejoice oh heavens therefore rejoice and if ever there is a reason why the church on earth ought to be lifting up their voice and praise and thanksgiving it's when we when we discover the victory that Christ has won over the power of the evil one tonight we have every reason to sing to the Lord to thank him to praise him and to go out and to live for him with every confidence that he has won the victory in his son we also have every reason to go out and to share our faith how many times as we've gone through the book of Revelation have we been reminded of what the work of God's people is we're to be the light of the world we're to let our light so shine in the world that people will see our good works and praise and glorify our father in heaven and here once again once again look at the way it's put here they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb now who has conquered him the brother people of God have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony you see the death and the resurrection of Jesus and the message of the good news it has to go hand in hand because the death and resurrection of Jesus is no use to anybody if they don't hear it what's the use of

having a gospel if we're not prepared to go and to share it in a lost and a broken world and we know that the gospel is the answer the bible tells us the answer we haven't many of us in here tonight have experienced the change that God brings on a person by hearing the gospel but here is what here is what Paul says how then will people call on Jesus whom they have not believed and how are they to believe of whom they have not heard and how are they to hear without someone telling them preaching and how are they to preach unless they are saved we are tonight to pray the Lord of the harvest and he will send laborers into his harvest field believing that this message of the gospel is today the power of God to salvation it is as much the power of God to salvation tonight as it ever was but whenever you pray that prayer pray the Lord of the harvest that he will send out laborers into his harvest field whenever you pray that prayer be very careful because you might be one of them

I hope we all are in our own small corner prepared to say to tell to share what God has done for us and as we share and as people hear Satan's kingdom is destroyed let's pray Father once again we pray that you will guide our thoughts through your word and give clarity where there are perhaps questions and there are many many questions when it comes to these difficult passages in your word we ask Lord that despite these questions that you will lead us in the way of truth and that you will challenge us not only instructing us and educating us but challenging us and changing our lives at the same time in Jesus name Amen