

The Two Beasts

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Date: 03 February 2008

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to Revelation chapter 13 and we're going to consider the whole of this chapter. We're going to try and make a comparison, try to make some sense out of what is a very mysterious vision.

I can confess to you that this probably for me anyway was the most difficult part of the book that I've come across so far. I don't believe the rest of the book is going to be as difficult.

Even the very most learned scholars, qualified men and women who spend their lives in universities and write books on biblical languages and all the rest of it, they tell us that this is probably one of the most difficult chapters in the whole of the Bible to try and understand.

And so we want to try and do that in as straightforward a way as possible, which is going to be very difficult. There are two beasts in this chapter.

You'll remember if we recap the previous chapter was about a dragon or a serpent, sometimes called a serpent, sometimes called a dragon. And the objective of this being is to destroy a woman as she gives birth to her child in chapter 12.

[1 : 17] He hates the child and wants to do away with it as soon as it's born, but he's not able to. Because as soon as the child is born, the child is caught up to heaven. Then he turns his wrath and his hatred out on the woman and all those who belong to her.

Once again, having used every resource that's available to him and all out of all his hatred against the woman, he fails. And we come to the end of chapter 12 and we have this pathetic, what I think is a pathetic verse.

And he stood on the sand of the sea. He stands, I believe, in desperation, having totally and utterly failed in what he's trying to do.

And hoping that there's something else he can use or something else he can do to destroy the woman. We saw that the woman was the people, represented the people of God.

We saw that the Bible is all about two peoples. It's about people who love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength and who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and as the only way to be saved.

[2 : 28] And then there is another people as well. People who have refused to trust in the gospel. People who do not want anything to do with God. Now, the interesting thing is this.

That the people who don't want anything to do with God, it is a total myth to believe that these people are somehow, they're quite happy to live and let live. That's maybe what they say.

That's the propaganda. That's the spin. It is just not the testimony of human history that those who do not love God and do not love Jesus are quite content to let Christians thrive.

They are no such thing. The human history is a history that records conflict and strife and bloodshed and persecution against those who have followed Christ.

And all you need to do is to work your way through the history of the part of the world in which we live. You think of the Reformation. You think of the history of Britain.

[3 : 32] And I'm afraid I'm going off even now onto a tangent. And I'm determined not to go off on a tangent because we've got no time and we can't afford to do so.

The time in which John lived was one of those times where if you were a Christian, if I was preaching to you at the time that John lived in the Roman Empire, and I was once again reminding each one of us of what Jesus did and inviting you to come to Christ as we frequently do in this church and as every Bible-believing church did, I would have to say to you something like this. Come to Jesus, but if you do so, I have to warn you. The moment that you trust in Jesus, your life is in danger.

The moment you trust in Jesus, you're stepping out into the unknown and it's very more than likely that if you continue to worship and pray and sing and meet together as a fellowship, you will be arrested, you will be taken, you will be imprisoned, and you will be put to death. No question about it. Now, it wasn't always as bad. Sometimes were a little bit easier than others. If you read through some of the Roman emperors, some of them are a little bit easier on the church than others.

[4 : 52] Others utterly hated the church and all the wrath and the fury was vented against Christians. And of course, the more that there was persecution against the Christian church, the more the gospel spread.

It was quite incredible, actually, in the environment in which the gospel spread in the Roman Empire. The more that emperor after emperor would try and stamp out the Christian faith, the more the Christian faith spread.

Because people throughout the empire were saying, what is it these Christians believe? Why is it that there's so much hatred against them? Why is it that we're going to see these faithful people? And there would be thousands of them in the amphitheatre watching them as an entertainment being torn to bits by lions and gladiators and being burnt at the stake and all kinds of the most horrendous executions.

And they would watch these Christians and they would walk out and they would be willing to die. And these thousands of people would be saying, why is it? What is it about these people that is so willing to face death for?

And of course, as time went on, they would find out about how, what is it they believed? And they would start reading. They would start reading Paul's letters. They would start secretly meeting, talking with Christians and asking them.

[6 : 04] And they discovered an entirely different religion to what they had been used to up in that time. And it was a religion. It was a faith in which God promised peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And not only did the message go out, but you could see in the lives of these Christians, even in sitting in a prison, even as they went out to their deaths, you could see that they had something that no one else had.

And that's always been the case with the Christian faith. And that is that in Jesus, he promises, he absolutely promises peace with God and everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

But there was a price to pay in John's time. And in order, once again, to try and understand whatever it is we're trying to understand, we have to ask, how would the people of John's day have understood this passage?

We are not, once again, I've said this before, we are not to read the book of Revelation in terms of Russia, or in terms of China, or in terms of new technology, or in terms of Big Brother, or all of these things that people do.

[7 : 15] You know, all you have to do, by the way, I don't advise you to do this, but you can do it if you want. You type Revelation 13 into the Google search. And you will come up with thousands of different organizations and people and theories and all of these things, and all of which try to give meaning and sense.

But what we have to do in order to be sensible about it, is we have to say, well, you have to ask, what did the people of John's day make of it? Not what we make of it, but what do we think of it, what did the people of John's day make of it?

And to my mind, there's no question at all, but that these two beasts, particularly the first one, with all its ferocity and its might and its power and its utter ruthlessness, represented the Roman Empire. There's no question to my mind, because John's letter, the book of Revelation, would have gone to the church who were trying to survive, and to try to survive, despite the persecutions and the dangers that there were in the Roman Empire.

And so to me, I don't think there's any doubt whatsoever. But the second beast is, I think, what gives rise to the greatest amount of intrigue, and it has done throughout the centuries, because it involves perhaps a greater mystery.

[8 : 39] And the mystery is all about this mark. And it's all about this number, the number that the chapter closes with. And it closes so mysterious, it leaves us hanging in the air, wondering what in the world this beast is, and wondering how the number equates to the beast, and how it's possible to decipher or to determine what the meaning or who the meaning of the number is.

Let's first of all, then, look at the first beast and try and look at the description that there is. First of all, it comes out of the sea.

Let me just go through this very quickly. Comes out of the sea. Ten horns, ten diadems on the horn. Seven heads, each one of the heads with blasphemous names on them.

He's like a leopard. Feet like a bear's, mouse like a lion's. The dragon, in chapter 12, the dragon who's the mastermind, and who's utterly determined to stamp out the message of God and the gospel, and everything that Christ stands for.

He gave power. This is what the dragon was waiting for on the sand. He gave power to it, and his throne, and great authority. One head seemed to have a mortal wound.

[9 : 51] I'll try and suggest what that mortal wound was in a few moments' time. A mortal wound, but was healed. Then the effect of this beast was that the whole earth, trembling in fear, marveled.

They were transfixed as they gazed at the might and the authority and the ruthlessness of the... And they worshipped the dragon.

They worshipped the beast. They said, who is like the beast? And who can fight against it? The beast was given a mouth, uttering haughty and blasphemous, proud words, and was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months.

He opened his mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling. Those who live in heaven. He was allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them.

Persecution.

Authority was given over every tribe, people, language, and nation. And all who dwell on the earth will... People and languages and everyone whose name was not written in the book of life worshipped the beast.

[10 : 59] What does that mean? Well, there's every indication. As I said before, that this beast represented the power that was existing at the time of John the Apostle.

Remember we said before that the sea figures a lot in Revelation. The sea with all its changeableness and uncertainty. And all of those who study the book of Revelation, they all seem to be agreed that the sea represented the powers that have arisen and fallen throughout the whole course of human history.

Whether it was Babylon, whether it was Alexander the Great, whether it was the Roman Empire, whether it was the Chinese Empire, whether it was the Ottoman Empire, whether it was whatever empire it was.

The sea. And if you look at... If you were to do an overview of human history, it would be like the sea, which sometimes is calm, sometimes it's raging. Just like the sea between here and Ullapul. It prevents the ferry from sailing sometimes. You don't know. Sometimes you wake up in the morning, you expect to find the ferry sailing, and it's not sailing. Because you don't know how to predict. Even in today's world, sometimes the ferry sails and has to come back again.

[12 : 05] Because the sea is so unpredictable. That was the way it was. And that's always the way it is. We think we're in a civilized part of the world where everything is hunky-dory and everything is predictable and we can predict with our computers.

We are shamefully wrong. We just don't know how precarious our life is. Next week could be very different from this week.

The problem is, for the last few decades, there has been relative peace in the area of the world where you and I live. But that's only short... We don't know what is going to happen.

It's always been the same in the history of humankind. For a stretch, you have peace and security. You have a time of civilization. And then out of nowhere, for no apparent reason, comes carnage and chaos and death and war.

All you have to do... The problem is that most of us here, we haven't seen the two world wars that our forefathers... They would be able to tell me all about how unpredictable life is.

[13 : 10] We have lived... You and I, who are mid-life and under, we've all lived in a time where there's been relative peace. So you become immune to it. And you become...

You think, well, we've arrived. Human history has arrived. And we now know what civilization is. Don't kid yourself. The Romans thought exactly the same thing at some times.

Until the next chaos. That's what the sea represented. Who knows what is going to happen next week, next year, in the next decade. And it's out of the sea that this gigantic hulk, hulk, this fearsome monster, arises.

And he's got every semblance of authority on him. The horns, the diadems, the heads, the seven heads, indicating the completeness. This is a monstrous being.

He's like the serpent. And he wants to be... You see, what's happening is that the serpent, who we've identified in chapter 12 as the devil, he's delegated his authority to him.

[14:17] Now, I want to tell you this. If you take God out of the picture in someone's life, then all you've got is authority. What is there left to live for in this world except power, if you take God out of the picture?

If you live for yourself, for what you can get, for what you can achieve, for what you can be successful at, then the more authority and power and might that you have, the more, the stronger you'll feel and the more successful you'll be.

That's human nature. That's sinful human nature. And it's been around since the very beginning of time, since the very beginning in Eden, when the serpent said to Eve, you shall be as God.

I can tell you, that's what got to her. You shall be as God. Imagine that, eh? You shall be as God. Men and women have been living like that ever since.

If only I can get popularity. If only I can be the center of attention. If only I can get more. More. Whether it's covetousness or greed or lust or power or hatred.

[15:26] Humankind in his sinfulness lusts after power. He wants more and the more he has. And all you have to do is you have to read something.

I'm not an expert on the Roman Empire, but I know that there was a lusting, a constant striving after power and authority. And all you have to do is read some of the lives of the emperors and the struggles against one another, the plots that used to take place.

Because everybody wanted to be the top. Everybody wanted to be the man of the moment, to sit on the throne. Now, the serpent says, okay, if you want it, you can have it. That's interesting, isn't it?

That he said the same thing to Jesus. He said, if you fall down and worship me, you can have it. You can have all the authority. I don't actually, it doesn't bother me at all.

Because you see, if you're in a position to give it to someone else, then you never lose it. And so this beast is given the authority and he loves every moment of it. And the Roman Empire suited this description very, very perfectly indeed.

[16:28] It was swift, the feet like a bear, mouth like a lion, ferocious. The dragon gave power to it and its authority and its grave. One head seemed to have a mortal wound.

There's been all kinds of suggestions, all kinds of theories as to what that head or who that head would have been, the mortal wound. There's two suggestions, I'm just going to suggest them to you. Again, relating to the Roman Empire, there was an emperor called Caligula, a very deceitful man.

He at one time suffered a serious illness. Everybody thought he was going to die. And then he recovered, made a remarkable recovery from that illness. But listen to this, he attempted, just before he died, he attempted to set up his statue in the Jewish temple.

See, he wasn't content with just political power. He wanted absolute power. And if you want absolute power in this world, you're going to have to persuade all of these millions of religious people to turn their attention to you.

And that's what he tried to do. He also tried to set up other altars to himself for his worship. You see, once you've got everything, what more do you want?

[17:46] You want the hearts, the worship, the adoration of the world. The lust for power can never, ever be satisfied. It goes on and on and on.

Again, you have to read some of the history of human beings to discover that. He wanted to encourage universal worship. So some people suggest that it was Caligula. Other people, most people, they think it was Nero.

I'm sure that everyone here has heard of the Emperor Nero. He's probably the most ruthless, most notorious emperor that ever walked the face of the earth. He gained the throne by treachery, the treachery of a scheming mother.

In 64 AD, he instituted a savage persecution. He turned against Christians en masse. And he took his own life. By the time he took his own life in order to escape the disgrace of capital punishment, everyone was so afraid of him but they believed that when they heard that he had died that he hadn't really died but they had fled to Parthia.

Very few people believed that he had died. They thought, it can't be. And they kept waiting for him to come back again. They were so utterly terrified of this man that they kept waiting for him to come back.

[19 : 04] And some people, afterwards, they came back pretending to be him. Reincarnated or something like that. Or having come back. And some years later when another ruthless emperor reigned, Domitian, he began to persecute Christians and this could easily have been seen as the fulfillment of the head that had a mortal wound and then had been healed.

Because you have to remember that it's the whole beast that we're looking at here. Not just one particular part of it. The whole earth marveled as they followed this beast.

You know, part of the prophecy, you have to sit down and you have to imagine what this must be like. They worshipped the dragon. They worshipped the beast. They said, who is like the beast? He was allowed to exercise authority. And I want you to notice that the power was given. He was allowed to. Ultimately, God is on the throne.

And that's the message that runs all the way through the book of Revelation. that God is on the throne. And God ultimately will triumph in the end. Jesus will come.

[20 : 14] God will gather his people to himself and he will bring this world to an end. But meanwhile, whilst we are alive in this world, there will be strife and conflict and hatred.

and there will be there will be the kind of situation that is described here.

Now let's quickly turn to the other, to the second beast. Let's describe him. He rises out of the earth. This time he has two horns like a lamb.

Very different. Very, very different to the first beast. Spoke like a dragon. But yet there's a relationship between the two beasts.

One is for the other. One supports the other. They're in league with each other. It's quite clear. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence. And he makes the earth.

[21 : 15] Somehow he's got the influential power to make the whole earth. Now we're talking the whole world here. And its inhabitants worship the first beast whose mortal wound was healed.

He performs great signs. Even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. By the signs allowed he deceives all those who dwell on the earth telling them to make an image for the beast.

He was allowed to give breath. Somehow there's an image and somehow he's able in some way either symbolic or otherwise to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast might even speak.

I don't know how I don't know what that's meant to convey. Everyone now here's the bit and anyone who would not worship the image of the beast was to be put to death.

And then he causes everyone to be marked on the right hand or the forehead so that no one can buy or sell until he has a mark the name of the beast or the number of its name. Now then I want us to give a brief comparison of these two things.

[22 : 23] Now remember we said that the key word in the first beast was force and ruthlessness and power and might. The key word in the second beast is deception and influence and persuasion.

Very different aren't they? I wonder what's the most effective. I wonder which one of these strategies is going to gather more following.

I believe it's the second one. I want you to notice that he has all the appearance of innocence and harmlessness in the first instance.

he looks like a lamb. Very different from the bear and the lion and the leopard. Very different from the ten heads the ten horns and the seven heads.

This is an ordinary lamb. This beast is very different in his approach. He wants to attract people.

[23 : 34] He wants to woo them. He wants to mesmerize them and entertain them and gather a following. Have you ever read the fable of the pied piper of Hamlet? Where he gets rid of the rats by playing his pipe but then because they don't pay him enough he gets rid of all the children by wooing them and attracting them and taking them off into a mountain.

That's the same picture as this second beast here. So totally different from the first beast and this second beast works not against the church but from within it looks very like.

The second beast is called the false prophet later on in Revelation chapter 16 verse 13 chapter 19 verse 20 chapter 20 verse 10 he's called the false prophet and a prophet was someone whose message went to the people who were religious in the world.

a very very different strategy altogether. He spoke like the dragon. Surely you might say well surely it's a dead giveaway that if he speaks like a dragon we'll be able to identify him.

Not so because if you look at chapter 12 the dragon is sometimes called the serpent and that puts a different color on things altogether. If he speaks like the serpent then you go back to Genesis chapter 3 how did the serpent speak to Eve?

[25 : 03] Was she able to recognize that he is trying to destroy her? No she wasn't. She fell for it. She listened to the serpent and she said to her did God really say that you must not take touch of the tree?

He questioned God's word. Questioned God's authority. Questioned God's reliability and his promise. And that's the kind of strategy that the second beast is going to employ because he wants to win people over not by force but he wants them to be willing to give them his heart.

And he has a measure of success. What is all this about tonight? It's about the fact that there are two forces we need to be aware of.

There's the force I spoke to you before about and that is persecution and hatred against what we are. We need to respond no matter how much we are ostracized and misrepresented and misunderstood just like they were in the first century.

We need to respond as Jesus wants us to respond by displaying the love of God in Christ. But there's another thing we need to be aware of and that is the fact that in this world there are voices that are so similar and yet so different to the truth and we need to be on our guard as Christians tonight.

[26 : 48] we need to be careful that we make sure that we listen to the right voices. Because in this world there are wrong voices and the problem is that sometimes those wrong voices are so similar to the voice of God that before you know it you're going down the wrong road.

You're believing the wrong things. You're accepting the wrong things. You're swallowing the wrong things and before you know it you've left your first love. The love that you had for Christ.

You've left what you once were before. And just as in John's day there was deceitfulness and false religion so in every age and that's why I don't believe that revelation is only about what's going to happen in the future.

I believe revelation is as relevant for today to a lesser or greater extent whatever part of the world you live in as it ever was. And I believe that I said this to you before in some parts of the world your life is in danger because you're a Christian.

We need to pray and we need to support our brothers and sisters in these situations and we need also to be ready for when things change the sea of change comes perhaps in the part of the world where we belong to but then there's also deception there are voices which are not the voices of truth.

[28 : 20] How do you recognize the voice of truth? Well Jesus tells us this. He says my sheep hear my voice. We need to keep listening to the word of God.

The word of God the Bible needs to be absolutely central in our lives. And as soon as you begin to either deny God's word or change it in some way or add to it so as to take away the truth of the gospel you've gone down the wrong road.

It doesn't matter how attractive it is. You know there are some very uncomfortable things about the Bible. Some things that don't sit well with the world like when Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. And there you have exclusive message of the gospel that says there is no other way to God other than Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is God incarnate. God in the flesh. He stands alone in amongst all the other voices in the world that tell us and that draw us and that seek to try and invite us to listen to them.

[29 : 38] Jesus is the only voice. Now the easiest thing in the world. Popular religion today, the kind of religion that everyone would want to follow is the kind of religion that says look, as long as you're sincere about what you believe then you have the truth.

And there is every possibility that in a world full of increased communications and where the world is becoming smaller all the time that those who believe in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, I am the way and the truth and the life, will be more and more and more ostracized as those who don't play the game.

We already see it to some extent. This calls for the endurance and the faith of the saints because once you lose sight that Jesus is the only saviour you've lost the message to take to a lost world. Remember that that very world amongst which we live tonight is a world that needs to hear the gospel and our job, our task is to take the gospel to that world and to win people for Jesus. And sometimes the problem is you become so obsessed with the detail of revelation that you lose sight of the work that God has given you to do. And that is to make Christ known, whatever it takes, and whatever the opposition might be.

[31 : 24] As for the 666, 666, I have no idea. Some of the suggestions are, it's a very interesting number actually, very, very interesting number.

If you're a mathematician, you'll be able to play and do all kinds of very strange things with the number of 666. In ancient times, like when the book of Revelation was written, letters of the alphabet served as numbers.

So it wasn't as strange to the people of John's day as it might be to us. And to decipher a number was like a challenge, like Sudoku is today. It's like the kind of challenge that they would rise to. And people were known by their numbers. They were known, they were identified by their numbers. I was reading that there's a piece of graffiti found in Pompeii that reads this.

And I kid you not, I love her whose name is 545. That was what they wrote. Amongst the Jews, this practice was called gemetria.

[32 : 35] And so it seems clear to me that the people of John's day would have had much more of an idea as to what John meant by this number than we do today who have lost sight of this practice.

No verse in the whole of the Bible has attracted more attention than this number. There's no consensus whatsoever. Some people say the initials of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian equals 666 if you sum them all up.

Some people say it was the full Latin title of Domitian, one of the Roman empires. Some people play on the fact that it's a triangular number and they become very suspicious of any time they see a triangle as a symbol.

36 is the number at the top of the triangle and it's a square number so people see all kinds of implications in square numbers. It's the sum of all numbers on a roulette wheel.

The Roman numeral 666 is composed with six Roman numerals in descending order. I, V, X, L, C, D. Some people see it. The fact is we are not sure.

[33 : 48] We don't know. We don't know. But one thing is one of the most useful attempts to explain it is it comes from those who say that 666 is one shot of perfection.

In other words, every attempt Satan makes to destroy the kingdom of God, no matter how fierce and ferocious and ruthless and devastating, will always fail.

At the end of the world, Satan will be destroyed and Jesus will have built his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

and there will be that one final separation between those whose names are in the book of life and those who are cast outside.

There's one thing the book of Revelation does for us. It challenges us as to whose side we're on. Whose side are you on?

[35 : 07] let's pray. Our Father, once again we give thanks for this Lord's Day evening.

When we're able to gather here this evening and we're able to try and wrestle with some of the most difficult parts of your word. Lord, we pray Lord that something of what was said this evening will strike through into our hearts, will challenge us.

Lord, we give thanks that you are on the throne and that you are a God who is worthy of our praise and our adoration. We give thanks Lord that if we have Christ we have everything and no matter what we have to face in this world then we face it with Jesus on our side.

And we pray that whatever else we go out with this evening that we will go out with Jesus as our Savior for we ask in his name. Amen.