

The Beast

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- [0 : 0 0] It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.
- And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. So, because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth.
- It ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.
- It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.
- This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.
- [1 : 2 4] Then I looked and there before me was the lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads.
- And I heard a sound from heaven, like the roar of rushing waters, and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps, and they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.
- No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins.
- They followed the lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the lamb. No lie was found in their mouths.
- They are blameless. That's the end of our reading. Thanks for reading there.
- [2 : 3 1] We've got a fantastic passage to look at this evening. It's brilliant too. As Jamie mentioned earlier, and Martin, we spoke, it's a revelation.
- It's perhaps a difficult book to understand, but there is riches to behold from it when we dig into it. So let me pray for us, and then we'll have a look into the passage together.
- Almighty God, we do come before you this evening and ask for your blessing upon us. We do thank you for your word, the word of God. We thank you that you speak to each one of us through it, and we ask for your blessing.
- We pray that you'd teach us, that you'd rebuke us, correct us, and train us in righteousness, so that we as your servants might be equipped for every good work. We pray for our hearts, that you would mould and shape and fashion us, to be more like your son.
- We ask that you'd bless us now, in Jesus' name. Amen. Our Bible reading this evening is such an important reading, because it's there to teach us about a critical issue that we actually have in the world everywhere.

- [3 : 37] It's there to keep us from being hoodwinked by counterfeits and fakes. In the past few years, we all know the ability to spot a fake has become important to all of us.
- I think it started, perhaps, you remember this, during COVID, the overwhelming amount of fake news stories on social media.
- Post-COVID, I think we've got a little bit more savvy about what we read, but the current sort of deception that we are worried about is the development of artificial intelligence, isn't it?
- AI. It's the thing that everybody's concerned about, of deep faking, of images, films, music, that can be created by machines, and you don't know if the artist actually did that or not until they come out and tell you it wasn't them.
- You don't know whether the image or the music that you're listening to is a genuine or if it's a fake. Whether it's counterfeit or not, it's a live issue. But it's not an issue that is new.
- [4 : 44] Even if you look back 20 years ago, it was all about counterfeit money, people producing fake money. This issue goes back all the way through history of the counterfeit.
- The whole aim why people get involved in making fake stories, generating fake music, or making fake money the way that they've been...
- It's actually, we know this, it's to deceive us. It's to deceive us. And it normally comes down to two reasons. It comes down to money and it comes down to power.
- Because deception can do that. It can lead people to want to deceive so that they can have money and power. And here's the thing. If the quality of the fake is good, it deceives people to thinking that it's the real deal.
- That is what happens. Deception makes people think that the fake is the real deal. Believe the new story. Buy the music. You hold the money.
- [5 : 47] Remember, you used to hold the money up to the light and you'd have to tell whether it was a fake or not. What did we need to do with money? We needed to know how to spot a counterfeit.
- We needed to know how to spot a fake so that we're not deceived. And it's true in our world about all kinds of issues. So let me tell you, let me tell you, it's even more pressing.
- It is even more pressing. If it's important about these issues, it is even more pressing that we know how to spot a counterfeit on a spiritual level.
- It's even more pressing. It is critical that we know how to spot spiritual counterfeits. And here, in these verses that we have today, and actually in this section, what we see is the spiritual enemies of God set themselves up as counterfeits in order to deceive the world that you and I live in.
- And they're very good at it. Exceptional, you might say, at deception. The question is, for all of us, is what can we do to make sure that we're not deceived ourselves?
- [6 : 58] That's what we're going to look at this evening. Mainly chapter 13, with a bit of 14 at the end that speaks about a fantastic, glorious vision of Christ.
- It comes, these verses that we're looking, chapter 13, it comes smack in the middle of a section all about the enemies of God from chapters 12 to 14. And the big idea in this section, as you think, as you've probably picked up from what I'm saying, is about knowing God's enemy so that we're not deceived.
- To know God's enemies so we're not deceived. Before we jump into all that, I do just want to spend a few minutes about, just thinking about the book of Revelation we've mentioned, I've mentioned before.

Some of it can seem quite alarming, confusing. And I know you're going through a whole series, going through it together. The reason is because without the right tools, it can be difficult to get your head around.

And there's just three things I want to say before we jump into it. Firstly, the first thing to say is it is a prophetic book. And when we talk about something being prophetic, that means two things.

[8 : 04] It means it foretells things that will happen in the future, which is what we sometimes might associate with prophetic literature. But importantly, it does do something else.

It speaks into the current events to which John and the early church found themselves. We have to remember that it speaks to both. It speaks to future events and the events that John was writing to.

The second thing I want to say is that it's a visionary book. John really did see these visions. It's a very real experience for him about what he saw. One of the prominent things you'll notice in Revelation is John repeatedly says, then I saw, then I looked.

It's a vision. And the third and final thing before we move on to dig into the passage. The visions John sees are symbolic. Now that shouldn't alarm us really because everyone uses symbolism in everyday speech.

You'll have noticed that there's these mention of two beasts. But only the other week when watching the Six Nations Rugby Union. I don't know if you know, George Martin, he's an English forward. He's a massive guy.

[9 : 11] And I said, and I'll probably say it again, he's a beast of a man. Now everyone knows that when I'm saying that, I'm not saying he's an actual beast, but the picture language helps me to describe something of his physical frame with real clarity.

the real visions that John really sees, God gives him. And in turn, as we read it, he gives us so that we can have clarity on real things. So that we can get a truer sense and a better picture of what God is saying.

As I mentioned before, it is important that we remember that the revelation or this revelation of Jesus Christ was prophetic for the church at the time. The church at the time was living through horrendous persecution and suffering.

The Roman Empire, Nero as its orchestrator, created huge temptation for the early church to throw in the towel. And John is writing to them to keep going and to know their enemy.

However, however, we know, don't we, that the persecution of Christians didn't end when the Roman Empire ended and therefore the message John has for the church in the first century is as relevant today.

[10 : 25] And I want to suggest three things, three things that will help us when we face pressure in the world that we live in to keep going. When there's tremendous pressure, perhaps, to throw in the towel in 21st century Scotland.

The three things that John says are to be faithful, to be wise, and then finally to sing. Be faithful, be wise, and then finally sing.

I'm going to address those responses later on. But before we get, even before we get there, I want us to look at these spiritual counterfeits.

There are three counterfeits in chapters 12 to 14. The two beasts in today's passage alongside the dragon that comes in chapter 12. Their aim, their complete aim, is to deceive you and me and the whole of humanity into thinking that they're the real deal.

But what we notice as we go through it is that they are anti-everything that God is. Like the triune God, there is three of them, but rather than a unified, divine, holy trinity, they are an unholy anti-trio.

[11 : 35] The visions that we see of them are parodies of the living God trying to deceive the masses. And so we get, let's look at, to begin with, just at the first beast.

First one, the beast is called forth out of the sea by the dragon. The sea, always a symbol of disorder and chaos. The beast doesn't come from a place of harmony, joy or peace, but of disharmony and restlessness.

Called forth by the prince of the world of darkness to do his bidding. Verse three, it's the dragon, Satan, who gives the beast power and authority, making him look grand, sitting on a throne.

We then come to the strange and peculiar appearance of this beast. Lots of heads, lots of horns, crowns on horns, resembles a leopard, feet like a bear, mouth like a lion.

Sounds terrifying. This beast has an otherworldly dimension to it. And then verse three, we read that one of these heads has a fatal wound that's been miraculously healed.

[12 : 38] It's there as a parody of the resurrection that the beast is trying to deceive that it is in some way like Christ, but the beast is anti-Christ.

They counterfeit Christ. whose job is to deceive. There are lots of things we could say. At the very least, we know that this image, this vision, is supposed to portray something that has a terrifying ability to do great harm and destruction.

Verse six continues in our description. The beast blasphemes God, slanders his name, slanders his dwelling place, and slanders those who live in heaven. We get the image of the first beast.

Now, I'm going to go jump straight to the second beast because I want us to put these two together and notice the similarities and the differences and then reflect on them both together.

We notice, jump to the second beast, verse 11. We see it has a different origin. It comes from the earth. But we notice some similar attributes, slightly different appearances, but we notice horns again.

[13 : 48] We notice, like the first beast, it's given authority. However, the second beast's role is slightly different. This beast speaks. The second beast's aim is that people would worship the first beast.

It's like it's shining a light on the first beast and it does this by performing great signs, verse 14, ordering the people to set up an image of the first beast that they can look to.

The second beast is the third member of this unholy trio. It's like an anti-unholy spirit. Both beasts have different roles, but the same purpose.

To deceive you and me. And the reason I've clung them together is because what I want us to see is that there are two highly alarming things about them both.

And the first is how successful they are at deception. Second half of verse 3, look with me. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.

[14 : 50] People worshipped the dragon because he'd given authority to the beast and they also worshipped the beast and asked, who's like the beast? Who can wage war against it? Verse 8, further down, all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast.

Verse 14, the second beast, because of the signs it has given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It is deeply shocking.

people are wowed. They're wowed. It is entrancing. It has authority. It is prosperous. It has everything.

And the people worship. They look and admire, praise it. And isn't it striking that what we see written about God in the Bible, who is like our God, they say of the beast.

Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it? Even when it looks like the beast is going to die, it even appears to be resurrected. It is deeply shocking.

[15 : 53] The second alarming thing is how the beasts treat Christians. Verse 7, it was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them.

Verse 15, the second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. The emperor Nero, the Roman Empire with Nero as its leader fits all these attributes.

Prosperous, ruling over tribes, peoples and languages, blaspheming God, you know, Romans had their own gods. They were an entrancing, appealing empire to side with and to go against it was a death sentence.

The reality is, however, that whilst the Roman empire has ended, the satanic spirit of the beast is still at large and will continue to be until Jesus returns.

Rome was one manifestation of the beast. But we only have to look at the record books, don't we, to know that there has been many subsequent manifestations of real evil where Christians have been taken into captivity and killed.

[17 : 14] And it's still happening. It is still happening. And it mourns our hearts. Whenever you read of an impressive institution that is prospering, that is threatening Christians, it's the spirit of the beast and it is anti-Christ.

The believers in captivity in North Korea, the girls captured by Boko Haram in Nigeria, our brothers and sisters in the Gulag during the reign of Stalin are in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.

There's no doubt in my mind that what we see there is a manifestation of the two beasts. It is an evil spirit. This was written for all Christians who undergo that kind of persecution.

And it's written for us to warn us so that it could happen and to prepare us if it does. I take it that we're all warned but perhaps the bigger question is how do you prepare?

Well, we're told two things. Verse 9 and 10, look with me. Verse 9, whoever has ears let them hear. Whenever we read that something important is going to get said.

[18 : 27] And verse 10, if anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. And here we have it.

The key, the nugget. This cause, this cause for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people. There is no mistaking that those who endure in this way should be our heroes.

The heroes in our life are the people we admire and looked up to because of their achievements. It's normal, it's because we have a hero, don't we? Because it's someone that has seemingly done something that is impossible that we can't do.

And it could be in any area, whatever area you take interest in. I know people, you know, if you're into football, you might be, it might be Lionel Messi like a wizard with the ball at his feet. I'm reading a book called Shuggy Bain by Douglas Stewart.

It won the Booker Prize in 2020. A genius at telling a story. Famous scientists and inventors, whoever your hero is, it's because they can seem to do something that is impossible for us to do.

[19 : 41] Our brothers and sisters in Christ who throughout the history of the church have endured this whilst being faithful to him are our heroes. And we should and we do give thanks for them and continue to pray for their faith that they would be sustained in the middle of this type of persecution.

Now, I want to get really real with you because that level of faithful perseverance and endurance, as we read it together, sometimes, we read, don't we, of captivity and death, at times, can feel like it's beyond what we're capable of.

I remember a few years ago, I remember watching a YouTube clip, it must be like 2013, something like that, of Christians being led out to be executed by the Islamic State.

and I watched that thinking, if I was in that position, what would I do? There was a genuine fear in me that I might deny Jesus to save my own skin.

Whilst there may be increased pressure in 21st century Scotland, it has not reached those levels, has it? So the question is, how do we prepare for that kind of situation?

[21 : 05] there might be a genuine fear. The question we're really asking is, how do we prepare today for future faithfulness tomorrow? The only way to prepare for our future faithfulness is to be faithful in following Jesus today in the circumstances of your life, what he's put in front of you.

You can't live faithfully tomorrow until tomorrow, so you don't have to worry about that because it's not your calling to do that today. We can only focus on living faithfully right now with whatever that means, with the circumstances that we face, faithfully loving God, loving his people and loving your neighbour, denying yourself the world to gain your soul, thinking of others as more important than yourself, trusting in Christ as your only source of righteousness, putting sin to death by daily repentance.

The only way to prepare for our future faithfulness is to be faithful today. So that's the first one. Be faithful today to prepare yourself to be faithful tomorrow.

The second destruction is a call for wisdom. It comes in a similar way to how verse 10 does. Verse 18, look with me. This calls for wisdom.

Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast for it is the number of a man. That number is 666. Now this number has been, everybody knows about this number.

[22 : 39] It's been in films and all sorts. The faithful endurance, however, that we spoke of just now, I think is in some way contingent on understanding the identity of these beasts.

Throughout the Bible, but particularly in John's writings, we notice how not the number 6, but the number 7 is important with connection with God. It gives the idea of completeness.

We know that from when the world was created, it is created in 7 days and complete in 7 days. And even throughout Revelation, John addresses 7 churches.

In the judgments, there's 7 bow, 7 senses, there's 7 angels. On the lampstand, there's 7 lamps. In John's gospel, there are 7 I am statements. The 7 miracles. 7 is the number of completeness and is associated with the triune God.

But the beast is not 777. That would indicate divine origin. He is 666. He is incomplete and created.

[23 : 49] Whatever the manifestation of the beast is, whether it's an institution, whether it's a man, or even an ideology, perhaps the wisdom is this, that it has the number of a man. Whatever the spirit of the beast manifests itself as, it is created.

It is not a number that indicates divinity, but creatureliness. The wisdom we need, the wisdom is this, everything that God is, that Jesus Christ is, the beast and the dragon are not.

The beast has power, but he's not all powerful. The beast is big, with the Roman Empire covered lots of land, but he's not omnipresent.

The beast is knowledgeable, but not all knowing. The beast has authority on the earth, but does not have ultimate authority over all of heaven and earth. He is the number of a man and is under the lordship of Jesus, who, verse 8, slain from the creation of the world, came in order to save and destroy all evil.

The beast might have the appearance of power and prestige, might be entrancing and prosperous in the world, but it answers to Jesus Christ. It answers to Jesus Christ.

[25 : 00] Jesus Christ is Lord over all evil. He is Lord and He reigns as rule and He's King over all of evil. This is the wisdom to know in the face of seeing that real evil that Jesus is Lord over it, that it is created, that those things are created, and that Jesus has won and we will see the final victory and we win with Him because He's the captain of our salvation.

He is the captain of our salvation. And He wins the day over evil. And so, as we've looked at these two very real and disturbing perhaps visions, we come to a glorious vision.

And this is as important to keep us going as anything else I've said. This glorious vision, the final thing that we're going to look at, perhaps slightly more briefly, in the vision that comes in chapter 14 is that, and the one thing that I want us to know is the vision of the people of God singing.

The people of God singing. Now, everybody in some form or another loves music. Everybody has a favourite song or a piece of music that when they hear it, it transports them back to a time in their life.

If I hear Teardrop by Massive Attack takes me to Glastonbury 2008. If I hear Don't Look Back in Anger by Oasis to my Uncle Mark's wedding in the mid-90s. Even These Words of My Own by Natasha Beddingfield, singing it like a football chant in my university days.

[26 : 46] We've all got them, don't we? Songs that transport us back to a time in our life. But here we have a picture not of singing or songs to look back on but a future picture of all the God's people singing together.

All God's people singing together and just like the symbolism we had before, this is packed with symbolism. Verse 1, we have the Lamb who was slain. It's a picture telling us about Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain for us.

The crucified Saviour on Mount Zion, a fortress of safety and security. The 144,000, it's a symbolic number meaning all of God's people.

All there together. All God's people and the noise of the music and the singing. We know one thing, it is loud. It is loud, verse 2, like the roar of rushing waters, like a loud peal of thunder, like that of harpists playing their harps.

You ever been to a gig or you've been to a stadium and the noise, the whole swell of noise comes up and it lifts you and the hairs tingle on the back of your neck and here we have the picture.

[28 : 06] This is, this beats anything. Like the roar of rushing waters. Thunder, it's so loud, vibrates your whole being as you sing with God's people.

That's how loud it is. And verse 3, they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders and who is it who sings?

No one could learn the song except the complete people of God. The 144,000, the ones who've been redeemed. To join in with this song, you must be redeemed.

They follow the lamb wherever he goes. They've been purchased and offered to God as first fruits. And what do we see what they're like? Well, it tells us that no lie is found in their mouth.

It's reminding us that every single member of the redeemed people of God looks like Jesus. All of us there together, can you imagine that day?

[29 : 09] They've all, everyone there cleansed by sin, given a righteousness they don't deserve, been made holy, been claimed by God, in contrast to the mark of the beast, verse 2, they've received the Father's name as a mark written on their foreheads.

And isn't it telling that we sing to the lamb, about the lamb? Remember the beast's deception was to gain power, but Jesus, the lamb of God, gave up his power willingly to achieve victory over them.

It was through his weakness, a lamb being slaughtered, slaughtered, that he achieved victory over the darkness. The future hope of singing this song is what keeps us pressing on in the darkness.

Just imagine the noise. Just imagine standing there. And so what should we do to keep on today?

Well, sing today. Sing today. Because of the future song of heaven. We are a singing people, aren't we? And we won't, isn't it good to know that we won't stop?

[30 : 21] God's people have always someone, they always will, and it helps us to endure. Because singing connects our emotions to the truth. Do you remember what Jor uncovered when we couldn't sing in the same way?

It was awful. Sing. Sing to connect the truth of the gospel to your heart. Sing on your own. Sing together.

Sing loud. And let your heart be filled with the truth of who God is. Sing today because of the future song of heaven. It is the great hope that will sustain us, that will keep us going, that will help us to endure, and that will keep, just keep us going in this great journey we have of life with Jesus.

And so as we come in for landing, a few things that we've looked at. We've looked at the identity of the great beasts. We've seen that they are there to deceive each and every one of us.

And we've seen that they have a terrible, alarming thing to do. That they deceive people and they are there to conk to her and try Mara the way we go as we follow Christ.

[31 : 34] But be faithful today. Be faithful today for faithfulness in the future. Be wise. The enemy is created and he doesn't overcome. Christ overcomes because he's the king who is Lord over them.

And sing today because of the future song of heaven. sing in anticipation of that great day where we will all stand together where the noise will be incredible.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we do thank you. We praise you for your goodness and love.

And Lord, some of these things that we've read, it alarms us and maybe it brings fear to us and we do pray that we know that each one of us might feel those things tonight.

I pray that you would take away fear and I pray that you would give us the spirit of perseverance and endurance. I pray that you'd make us wise and I pray that you would lift our hearts to sing to you.

[32 : 40] I pray that you'd connect the truth of the gospel to who we are. I pray that you'd connect the truth of the gospel to the things that we feel and the things that we know.

That we sing of a crucified lamb, the one who was slaughtered to have victory over all evil. And we look forward to that day, Lord. We rejoice in anticipation of that great day when we will be stood with the masses of people redeemed who all look like you singing a song of praise.

And so bless us, help us. We do want to pray just now as well for all those who are suffering right now in terrible ways, persecution of real evil and pray that you'd sustain them in their faith.

Help them to keep going, we pray. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.