

Christmas 2019: One Who is to Save and Rule

Revelation 12:1 ESV (Pg. 599) And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. **2** She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. **3** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. **5** She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, **6** and 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.

- I. Two weeks ago Tom Hall told us how the people in Old Testament times were promised Christ **would** come. **Genesis 3:15 ESV** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The incarnation fulfilled this promise when the “head-crusher” appeared to redeem humankind and destroy the devil’s power¹.
 - A. Last week I shared how Christ **did** appear, emerging from a real family line in actual human history. Though that family was filled with bad guys and deeply flawed good guys, humanity’s sins and flaws were the point of Christ’s coming!
 1. **1 Timothy 1:15a ESV** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...
 2. I want to build on this today, discussing how the events set in motion by Christ’s 1st coming, while rooted in history, are divine in purpose, progressive in nature, cosmic in scope, and eternal in duration.
 - B. May we all enjoy the celebrations of next week (sharing gifts, breaking bread, connecting with family and friends), with a great sense of reflection and worship. May the gospel invade our Christmas, and God be glorified in all we do.
- II. First, see how the story of Jesus taking on humanity was **divine in purpose**. God ordained and was sovereign over those events, from Jesus’ birth, miracles and teachings, to his sacrificial death, burial, his glorious resurrection, and triumphant ascension to God’s right hand. Consider this prophetic passage on this point...
 - A. **Isaiah 53:10 ESV** Yet it was **the will of the Lord to crush him**; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; **the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.** **11** Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, **make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.** This was written 600 years before Jesus’ birth!
 1. All of Jesus’ suffering was according to the “will of the Lord”. And yet, the will of the Lord prospers in Christ’s Hand! Though crushed, He will see his offspring. Though he suffers, yet He will be satisfied. How are these things not contradictory? Because the Lord’s guiding hand is at work in the actions!
 2. The will of the Lord was that many would be accounted righteous. Only Jesus could accomplish this for us by bearing our iniquities, as Isaiah says.

- B. The point is that everything about Jesus' life was scripted in advance according to divine wisdom, to accomplish a holy mission. John began our text by saying, "And a great sign appeared in heaven.." Heaven is the seat of God's authority. This means that God alone was calling the shots, unfolding his plan in Christ despite appearances, and the hellish threats from the devil and wicked men.
- III. What God has done in Christ is also progressive in nature. Things that begin small, and seemingly insignificant often become more powerful and impressive with time. People rarely see the possibility of a mighty oak when they look upon the acorn!
- A. To apply this to Christ doesn't mean there is some undone saving work left for Jesus to accomplish. He meant what he declared from the cross. "It is finished!"
1. But it is like how shifting tectonic plates under the ocean cause a tsunami. At first the effect is unseen, but it eventually builds to a tidal wave that crashes into the shore, devastating everything in its path with destructive force.
 2. The kingdom of God is similarly on the move, even if at times we feel like we don't see or feel much in the visible realm of here and now where we all live.
- B. The central character in John's vision is a woman who was "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars".
1. Although there are similarities, this was more than just a vision of earthly Mary, but of all who, like Mary, "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus".² She represents Israel - the people of God.
 2. Her association with Israel is clarified when we remember Joseph's dream in Genesis 37, where he describes his father, mother, and brothers (the patriarchs of Israel) as "the sun, the moon, and eleven stars"³; exactly the same things that the woman was adorned with in John's vision.
- C. "She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth" We see her imminently about to give birth. This is important!
1. Pregnancy always means anticipation! In days gone by, pregnant people were said to be "expecting". Expectation is the theme of Advent! But in the case of the woman in the vision, the waiting is over! The time has arrived.
 2. Pregnancy also means newness. An older generation makes way for a new. Things change and are reset. With this comes palpable excitement.
- D. But there was another character in the vision; "a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems". The dragon is the devil.
1. The multiple heads the diverse forms evil takes. The 10 horns mean that he is vicious, armed and able to attack. The crowns indicate that he is vested with power, both legitimately through human sin, and illegitimately by deceit.
 2. We see that he has succeeded in influencing others to join in his evil. "His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth"
 3. But the most macabre element of the dragon is his wrathful ravaging. "And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child" The dragon stands by, licking his lips, waiting to consume the child.
- E. Then the child is born! This corresponds to the nativity story. **Luke 2:7 ESV** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

1. So we see this drama between the child and the dragon played out throughout Christ's life. The dragon wants to devour him by jealous Herod's evil decree that all male children his age be murdered; or by tempting him during those hungry days of fasting in the wilderness; or even in the contempt of his hometown, as his neighbors tried to toss him off of a cliff.
 2. Nothing has changed in the bloodthirsty nature of Jesus' enemy. He even hates us! **1 Peter 5:8 ESV** *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*
- IV. Every scheme of the dragon failed miserably. Herod died while Jesus was hiding with his family in Egypt. He withstood every temptation in the desert by clinging to God's word. He walked right through the angry mob in his hometown, unscathed.
- A. So the enemy had one last tactic. If he couldn't devour him through external means, he would attack his person, like he did with Job in the Old Testament.
 1. He would incite the religious leaders to hatred of Jesus, inspiring them to fabricate charges against him. He would motivate the Romans to comply with the Jews' demand for the death penalty, to keep the peace. He would insure Christ would die a shameful, painful, public, and utterly unjust death.
 2. But what he could not have fully understood is that Christ was destined to be **"one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron"**. This rod is not a royal scepter, but a shepherd's club used to protect the sheep! Psalm 2:7 prophesied of Christ in these same terms, "You shall break them (the nations) with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
 - B. If find it interesting that John does not give vivid imagery to describe the crucifixion or resurrection here. Instead, while the dragon is intent on devouring the child, John sums all of Christ's redemptive work up like this, **"her child was caught up to God and to his throne"**.
 1. We may not think much about Christ's ascension, naturally tending to place more emphasis on his crucifixion and his resurrection, and both are vital!
 2. But it was in Christ's ascension where he was crowned victorious, exalted by God the Father! He was vindicated in his suffering. He didn't just "go to heaven", but he ascended to a throne to rule and make intercession for us!
 - C. This means the dragon completely failed, and the child he was intent on devouring was exalted to the highest place at the right hand of God Almighty.
 1. The dragon would make no feast of the child. But he would be defeated by him as we read later. **Revelation 20:10 ESV** *"the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."*
 2. Both the Jews and Gentiles that assaulted him, and rejected his grace would be judged and ruled by him. **Matthew 25:31 ESV** *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*
 - D. This is what I mean BY the "progressive nature" of God's purposes in Christ.
 1. The dragon, threatening with horns on his crowned head has been stripped of his victory and is now powerless to do Christ (or any of us!) real harm.
 - a) Martin Luther sang mockingly of him in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God":

- b) “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us / We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us / The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him / His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure / One little word shall fell him.”
2. The infant seems so vulnerable, helpless, subject to rejection and weakness. **Isaiah 53:2b ESV** he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- a) But then Paul tells us in Philippians that God has exalted him and given him a Name above all others! One day at the annunciation of that name, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord!
- b) He is not a child, a child shivering in the cold, and he does not need your silver or gold! He is a King! A KING! And he deserves your obedience, your trust, and your love and devotion. He has made a place for you at his table! Don’t despise his grace, now freely offered on your behalf!
- V. This tells us that Christ isn’t one God among many. He is the only God, coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christianity isn’t one belief system among many reasonable options. Paul says the church is “pillar and foundation (or buttress, ground, or support) of the truth”. The absolute truth of the Gospel’s claims, and the universal Lordship of Christ speak to the cosmic scope of God’s purposes in Christ.
- A. Many may disagree, and that’s OK. We are responsible to boldly, persistently proclaim truth (in love and gentleness) and let the Holy Spirit do the persuading.
1. But first we preach the gospel to ourselves everyday. If we don’t, we not only won’t proclaim it to others, but we’ll barely believe it ourselves!
 2. The cosmic scope of Christ’s authority and victory is a great place to try our hearts and see where we need to grow in our faith and trust in the Bible.
 - a) If we believe Jesus is Lord, why are we withholding anything from him?
 - b) If we believe he is all-satisfying, why are we chasing many other things?
 - c) If we believe he reigns, why are we building our own kingdoms and defending our own reputations, instead of building his kingdom, and upholding his reputation? Which do we really believe will last?
- B. There are few (if any) religious traditions and moralistic adjustments that will make any impact on the lost around you, but if we live in ways that demonstrate we have a loose grip on this world, the world will stand up and notice. They may be convicted, or they make mock, but they will notice and give account to God.
- C. Moreover, if we believe that we are protected by Jesus’ victory, why wouldn’t we take more risks for his glory, instead of being like the fearful man who buried his talent in the sand rather than investing it for his master’s profit?
1. **“the woman (the people of God) fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days”**. The dragon cannot ultimately harm you. This is because God has prepared a shelter, a place of protection for you in Jesus! He will nourish you there.
 2. The place he has prepared for you is called **grace**. The devil can’t harm you in grace. The law can’t condemn you in grace. Your own sins can’t disqualify you in grace. Grace will teach you to obey and please God more and more.

- VI. Lastly, God's purposes in Christ are eternal in duration. **Revelation 11:15 ESV** Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and *he shall reign forever and ever.*"
- A. Everything I have declared to you this morning is what Jesus stated in the simple statement he made immediately before his ascension when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."
1. "All authority" speaks of the cosmic scope of God's purposes in him.
 2. "given to me" speaks of the divinity of those purposes.
 3. The progressive nature of God's purposes is seen in that Jesus won this authority on the cross. Everything changed when Christ died and rose again, and because of that obedience, He is now exalted to the highest place.
 4. The eternal duration of God's purposes is clear when we see Christ enthroned. **Revelation 4:9 ESV** And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated *on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10* the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is *seated on the throne* and worship him *who lives forever and ever*. They cast their crowns before *the throne*, saying, *11* "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
- B. And to think that all this is because of a baby born while his parents were out-of-town and unsheltered! No one noticed, except a mama who treasured these things up in her heart, a stand-in daddy who had heard promises from the lips of an angel, and a bunch of blue-collar shepherds who heard an angelic choir.
1. But as I said last week, we don't get overly sentimental about a baby in a manger. But we get really excited about a boy who grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. We have cast our hopes on the miracle-worker, the wisdom teacher, the Pharisee confronter, the demon ejector, the master of the wind and sea, the one who raises the dead, and walks upon the water.
 2. We love him because, while no one could take his life from him, he laid it down willingly, as a perfect sacrifice for us while we were still sinners. Yet death couldn't hold him, so he rose again on the 3rd day and soon after ascended to the right hand of his Father, where he sits enthroned today!
- VII. Today, we celebrate his incarnation around the table, remembering all he did in his earthly life ("My body broken for you"; "the blood of a new covenant"); as well as all he has promised to do ("proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes"). We celebrate the grace that shelters us in the wilderness of this world.
- A. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

B. **Benediction: Luke 2:8 ESV** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹ 1 John 3:8

² Revelation 12:17b

³ Genesis 37:9