

## Sermon – 05/08/2007 am

### A Beastly Death

Study Text: Revelation 11:7-10

*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel* (Mark 1:15). With these words Jesus began his ministry. *When the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son* (Galatians 4:4). God sent his Son into this world at the time determined since the beginning, according to his divine timetable. Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth.

In the garden of Eden Satan effectively captured this earth when he led Adam and Eve to disobey God. They listened to and obeyed Satan, thereby acknowledging him as king and becoming his subjects. As such they exalted themselves against God their creator and true king. Such rebellion reached a peak at the tower of Babel. Such rebellion is seen all around us today and even enters our own hearts if we give way to the tempting voice of Satan.

Satan even tempted Jesus when he came into this world. He offered Jesus world dominion by giving him all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5). All worldly kingdoms belong to Satan. Jesus did not come to set up an alternative worldly kingdom. Jesus is not out there in the market place of religions as so often portrayed. He did not even come to set up a dominant worldly kingdom. It is not just that Jesus is a better king than all others. He is King of kings.

Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God and to do this all other kingdoms must go. *The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever* (11:15). All other kingdoms will be destroyed. We know this for certain because of the victory of the Cross. Do not be deceived by the power and glory of earthly kingdoms today.

### Time Fulfilled

The two witnesses, who symbolise the church in these last days, prophesy for 1260 days, a long but definite period. They prophesy with power and cannot be harmed, even though 'earth dwellers' take offence at their words (11:10). They are divinely protected for the divinely ordained period of prophesying. When this time is completed the scene changes. They come under attack from the Evil One and are overcome (11:7).

Such a scene is reminiscent of the ministry of Jesus. 'Just as the three and one half years duration of Jesus' ministry is identified with the course of the witness's ministry (11:2-3), so also the time of his apparent defeat at the end of his ministry is associated with the conclusion of their period of ministry' (Beale). Jesus came declaring 'the time is fulfilled'. *Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing* he announced in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:21).

Jesus came in this world and he ministered every day according to the divine timetable. No one could touch him until his hour had come. When that hour came Satan entered Judas, who went out to betray his master. *Behold the hour is at hand and the Son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners* (Matthew 26:45). The ministry of Jesus ended with him

being killed by his enemies, the enemies of God the Father. He was killed by those who rejected him because of the words that he spoke.

No one can harm the servants of God unless God allows. The apostle Paul walked each day in the light of this great truth. He went up to Jerusalem knowing the hostility that awaited him there – even death (Acts 21:13). It is still the same with ministry today. Do not be discouraged but be assured as you witness the truth of the gospel that the Lord is with you. He will give you words to say and keep you from harm until the day he has determined (Luke 21:15).

## **Witnesses Killed**

*The beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war against them, and overcome them, and kill them (11:7).* This is the first mention of the beast in this book, although we have come across the abyss in chapter 9. We saw smoke coming out of this pit, and horrible tormenting locusts in this smoke. The leader of these was an angel called Abaddon or Apollyon.

The beast is probably a different symbol for this same angel. The beast will feature more in later chapters. This destroyer comes from below, not from above. He comes to make war, not peace. Such features are fitting for the enemy of Christ and his church.

OT readers, like those to whom John sent this letter, would have been familiar with the figure of the beast from the vision of Daniel (Daniel 7). Daniel saw four beasts coming up out of the sea to make war against the saints. One in particular *will persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time, times and half time (Daniel 7:25).*

The beast of Daniel 7 represents an evil king and kingdom that persecutes the saints. In the immediate context this refers to Antiochus Epiphanies who attacked Jerusalem and desecrated the temple in 168-164BC. Further, in New Testament times it refers to the destruction of the temple and dispersion of the Jews when the Roman ruler Titus overran the city in AD70. Jesus was mindful of this as he spoke of the future (Luke 21).

But the ultimate fulfilment of Daniel's vision is the same as that of John's vision. Not just the agents of Satan but Satan himself will enter the world to make war against the saints. He will attempt to exterminate the church at the end of the church age in a brief period of intense persecution. This final onslaught is seen in parallel visions in Revelation (17:8, 20:7).

The depraved and evil nature of this beast/Satan and his followers is seen in the way the dead bodies of these witnesses are treated. The ultimate indignity inflicted upon a person in the ancient world was to refuse burial. Bodies of criminals would be left in the open for dogs and vultures to devour.

To add to this dishonouring of the dead, the 'earth dwellers' will actually party and send gifts to one another as the bodies of these saints lie exposed in the street. These people come from every tribe, tongue and nation (11:9). This is a formula meant to include the entire human race. We saw it earlier with the gathering around the throne in heaven. There it was of men and women rejoicing in the salvation of God. Here it is of men and women rejoicing in the death of God's servants.

The enemies of Jesus mocked him even as he hung upon the Cross. They probably rejoiced when they finally saw him dead. They would not have taken him down except for the Sabbath. They would have cast him into a common grave after taking him down from the Cross. Gloating over the suffering of others is a mark of evil. God will judge such evil (Ezekiel 25).

## The Great City

*Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city* (11: 8). Connecting this phrase with the final phrase of the verse – *where also our Lord was crucified* – leads many to conclude that this great city is Jerusalem. But we must note the words in between. Moreover, Jerusalem is called the holy city, not the great city (11:2). In Revelation the great city almost always refers to Babylon (14:80) – but still it is symbolic not literal.

This great city is *spiritually called Sodom and Egypt*. Sodom was destroyed by God because of corruption and immorality. Egypt was destroyed by God because of its harsh oppression of God's people and rejection of God's word. These names came to represent such forms of wickedness and the judgment of God upon such sin.

Jerusalem, the city where our Lord was crucified, was no better than Sodom or Egypt. Spiritually it was like them. It opposed, oppressed and killed the Son of God. This great city represents any city hostile to the word of God. Such a city will come under judgment just like Sodom and Egypt. Babylon and Rome are also seen as corrupt and persecuting cities in Revelation. For New Testament believers Rome was the seat of the Caesar, and the city from which persecution flowed upon the church. Peter and Paul, and many others were killed in Rome (64-65AD).

The victory celebrations of the beast and his followers will be short lived according to this vision. It will last for only three and a half days, a short period compared to the three and a half years of their ministry, and very short in the light of eternity. Like the smoke that came out of the abyss with Satan, so he will soon disappear. *The court shall be seated and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever* (Daniel 7:26).

Do not be afraid, dear child of God, when you see revelling over evil in the streets. Mardi Gras parades and political rallies will be short lived. The kingdoms of this world are disappearing. Jesus Christ is coming to establish his eternal kingdom. It has already been inaugurated; the victory has already been obtained at the Cross and resurrection.

As Jesus ate the last Passover with his disciples he told them 'I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (Luke 22:16). He went on to say *I bestow on you a kingdom just as my Father bestowed upon me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Luke 22:29-30). As you eat the bread and drink the cup today do you look forward to this kingdom and to eternity at the table of the Lord in heaven?

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