

## Sermon – 16/09/2007 am

### Beast from the Sea

Study Text: Revelation 13:1-10

The dragon, *that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan*, was cast out of heaven. He was cast to the earth where in the short time that he has, he is making war against faithful Christians and the church of Christ. But how does Satan wage this war? We do not see Satan shooting at us or dropping bombs on us. For one thing his attacks are often more subtle – more like guerrilla war. And secondly, he has many agents leading the attack for him. One of these agents is revealed in this passage.

#### Agent of Satan

John saw the dragon cast down to the earth and straddling the land and the sea. It was as if he was rallying his forces, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. In the symbolism of this book, the sea is a cesspool of evil. There is no sea in the new heavens and the new earth. There is no new sea!

As the beast emerged from the water John saw ten horns and then seven heads. This was one horrible and terrifying beast! He looked like the dragon himself (12:3), except that on his heads a blasphemous name was written, and his crowns were on his horns rather than his heads. Ten crowns are better than seven. Any crowns at all were of course pretentious for a beast that had been defeated.

As the body comes into view John saw what looked like a leopard with feet like a bear and a mouth like a lion. This beast is characterised by its big mouth. He *was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies* (13:5, 6). He blasphemed against God, against his name, against his tabernacle, and against the people of God.

The features of this beast remind us of the vision which Daniel had when he was exiled in Babylon (Daniel 7). He saw a lion, a bear, and a four-headed leopard coming up from the sea. It is as if these are all rolled into one beast in John's vision, this beast being like the dreadful and terrible fourth beast with ten horns that Daniel saw. The little horn on the fourth beast had a mouth speaking great things, just like the one John saw.

Daniel was told that these four beasts stood for four kingdoms and that the ten horns stood for ten kings. The fourth beast is understood to represent the Roman Empire. The little horn is understood to be Antiochus Epiphanies the ruthless king who calling himself *theos/god*, overran Jerusalem (167BC) and set up the 'abomination of desolation' in the temple, but this fulfilment does not exhaust this prophecy.

The beast of the sea had seven heads symbolising a claim to be all powerful, just like the dragon. Satan lusts after power seeking to be omnipotent like God. He thought Jesus would have a similar lust for power, and so he offered him all the power in the world if he would worship him, that is Satan. *All authority I will give to you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish* (Luke 4:6).

The dragon gave power and great authority to the beast of the sea, so much so that the 'earth dwellers' all worshipped this mighty and powerful figure. He was given authority over every tribe,

tongue and nation. ‘This formula for humanity refers universally to all unredeemed people throughout the created earth as in Daniel 7:14, and has the same all inclusive scope as in 5:9 and 7:9 where it refers to redeemed humanity throughout the cosmos’.

While the dragon gave this beast his power, ultimately it was God who gave him this power. His power was limited in extent and time. He was given authority for 42 months – Satan would not have imposed such a limit. Moreover, there was a predestined number who would worship him. There are those whose names have been written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world who will not worship the beast (13:8). Nevertheless, in this limited time the beast will make war with the saints with fierceness like that of a lion separated from her cubs.

One of the heads of this beast looked different to John. It had a distinctive scar from a mortal wound, a wound inflicted by a sword (13:3, 14). What does this feature point to in this vision? Many scholars think it points to Nero, the first persecuting emperor of Rome, and to his suicide in AD68. His suicide was clouded in mystery and a rumour spread that he had just disappeared (to Parthia) and would one day reappear, as if from the dead – the theory of Nero *redivivus*. Some believed that the emperor Domitian was a reincarnation of Nero.

But a closer look at the facts shows that this wounded head is a parody of Christ, the Lamb on the throne *as though it had been slain* (5;6). The Lamb had seven horns, the number of completion – the beast tried to be more powerful with ten horns. The beast is ‘taking off Christ’ in order to get people to worship him. Just as the true Christ has a death wound, having been slain to redeem people to God, so the false Christ, the anti-Christ also has a head wound. From another perspective this bruised head is a fulfilment of the Eden prophecy that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3: 15).

### **Anti-Christian Government**

Just as the dragon was seen as the power behind earthly kingdoms, so this beast of the sea is even more closely associated such evil kingdoms. He symbolises political and economic powers in this world that oppose God and oppress God’s people.

The beasts of Daniel’s vision represented the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, kingdoms that oppressed the people of God. John was writing this letter during the period of Roman rule. Roman governors arrived in Ephesus in ships decorated with images of Roman gods. John’s first readers were living under the rule of Domitian, a king who demanded to be addressed as ‘Lord and god’. Domitian set up images in temples dedicated to himself. Here was blatant blasphemy in the style of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.

But neither Nero nor Domitian ruled over all people, tribes, tongues and nations. While their anti-Christian rule was a manifestation of the beast of the sea, the power and authority of this beast was not limited to Rome. It encompasses the entire globe and continues throughout history until he is finally cast into the lake of fire (19:20). The beast’s recovery from its mortal wound could be linked to the rise and fall of oppressive states, world systems and social structures. World rulers come and go and many leave their terrible footprint upon the church of God.

The world is currently judging nations and their rulers for their environmental footprint. But the footprint that God sees is that of rulers who persecute the people of God. This beast goes forth trampling the poor and the people of God. He demands to be listened to, he demands to be worshipped, and woe to those who stand against him.

The beast may act by stealth as we have seen in modern history. Anti-Christian governments did not cease with Rome. Millions were killed by Stalin in his attempt to eradicate the church of Christ. Millions were killed in Cambodia, and men and women are still suffering unto death in openly anti-Christian regimes today.

Just as the Christians in Asia were to see Satan's hand behind their persecution by Domitian, so we today are to see Satan's hand behind anti-Christian regimes. It was not by might nor by power, but by prayer that the Soviet Union fell. Are you praying against evil regimes today? Many of your fellow Christians are suffering at their hand; under the crushing feet of the beast.

Political and economic powers often go hand in hand. The British first came to India to trade. The East India Company refused to let Christians take the gospel to the people of India for fear their trade would be affected. William Carey was not allowed to settle where this company held the power.

Globalisation is going on a rapid rate today. Global companies wield great power over people and nations. Christians who believe the Bible are not welcome by such companies. They must trade on Sunday to make more profit, they must exploit the poor to get more profit, they must promote gambling to get more profit, and they must do embryonic stem cell research to get more profit. We hear the mantra 'market forces' will determine the future; we hear the mantra 'technology' will determine the future. We would do well to read such mantras as 'Satan and the beast of the sea' will determine the future. *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life (13:7).*

## Anyone to Hear

What must the saints do when the beast declares war on them? Are they to take up arms and fight back? God has allowed the beast to make war and even to overcome the saints (13:7). How can this be? The Bible says that all authorities that exist are appointed by God (Romans 13:1). How can God allow evil regimes? What are believers to do when such regimes start to persecute them? This question was very real for John's first readers and for many readers since.

*Patient endurance and faith* are commanded by God (13:10). This is not the way of the world and it is not the message people want to hear. Each of the seven letters sent to the churches concludes with the words *he who has ears to hear let him hear* – hear what – hear what the Spirit says. Christians will suffer but let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him as doing good as to a faithful Creator (I Peter 5:19).

John adopts words from Jeremiah (Jeremiah 15:2, 43:11) declaring that if anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he will go, if anyone is to be killed with the sword with the sword he shall be killed. God's sovereign purposes will not be thwarted by Satan or his agents. His eternal purposes will be fulfilled.

God will preserve your soul even if Satan kills your body. God preserved Daniel in the lions den and his friends in the fiery furnace. But remember their confession – even if it is not the will of God to save us from the flames we will not worship the beast. God is glorified through the death of his saints, when they remain faithful to the end. Will you remain faithful to God to the very end?

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