

Sermon series: the Book of **R e v e l a t i o n**

Living in a Spiritual Battle Zone

Revelation 12 & 13

Let me ask you a question: Think about your life from the moment of birth up until now. How many of you ever find that your life is difficult, at least for a moment or two, raise your hands, would you? Today, in the 2 chapters in the book of Revelation we are focusing on, John, the author says to us: "You shouldn't be surprised." "You shouldn't be surprised that life is hard, life had trouble, because we're in a battle."

So what we are going to do today is talk about your spiritual battle because you are not at war against flesh and blood. I want to bring it down right home. I want to talk about your struggle with the evil one because it's real.

We are going to go through and explain some of these images in these two chapters that are real strange to us. Then, we will bring it home to your everyday life by pointing out three strategies that the evil one uses, and I want to walk you through each one of these strategies.

How many of you have served in the military? I have to commend you. That's quite a sacrifice to give up years of your life so that I and others like me can live in a free land. Thank you for your service!

Maybe some of you have seen combat. That's another level of commitment and sacrifice. I know my father-in-law came home from World War 2 and he did not speak about what he saw and experienced. It was that traumatic. Most soldiers who have been in combat feel the same way. I have a friend who has 3 Purple Hearts – he was wounded 3 times. Once in Vietnam, and twice in Iraq. I can't image the horrors of war that he has gone through.

In the Bible book of Revelation, chapters 12 & 13, John who wrote it describes life here on earth as a battle, a war zone. It's a battle between God and the Evil One, Satan. John sees all of history – from beginning to end, and he says all of it is a war zone.

John uses a lot of symbolism. He mentions a pregnant woman. The best understanding here is The woman represents God's People, the Church of all time -- Israel in the Old Testament and now Christians wherever they live throughout the world.

The male child this woman gives birth to stands for the Messiah, Jesus. To make sure we understand this, John quotes a Psalm, a prophecy of the Messiah, "*He'll have a rod of iron to rule the earth.*" *Psalm 2:9*

Then John uses very dark images in these 2 chapters. The dragon John directly and clearly tells us The dragon is the devil, Satan. He is thrown out of heaven and came down to earth in great wrath.

The First beast mentioned in chapter 13 is anything human Satan uses against God's people. Satan can use Governments to hurt God's people-- like Rome back then, and today there are 60 countries in our world where it is illegal to be a Christ follower. Satan can use Religions against God's people. When John wrote this book, everyone had to worship the Caesar as god, or be killed. The devil can use Philosophies like Atheism, which says there is no god, no spiritual realm. So just get over religion.

The first beast John mentions represents anything man-made that Satan uses against God's people. Then the Second Beast is the anti-Christ -- a person or *any* person throughout time -- who deceives people that he has divine authority. Many people through the centuries have claimed to speak for God, and demanded obedience because they say God sent them. They claim they speak with God's authority. Mohammed claimed that. Martin Luther believed the Pope was the anti-Christ because back in the 1500's the Pope insisted that his word had the weight of God's authority and must be obeyed, or else! Joseph Smith the founder of the Mormon church claimed that. Cult leaders like David Koresch of the Branch Dividians in Waco, Texas claimed that God spoke through them alone.

The most famous symbol from the book of Revelation is the number 666. A lot of people have speculated about the anti-Christ,

and 666. People have speculated who John means by the antichrist whose number is 666. Some scholars say that John meant Nero Caesar. Others say John meant all of the Caesars. Other names that have been suggested as possibly being the anti-Christ are Hitler, Stalin, Ronald Wilson Reagan -- and the reason given for that one is because there's six letters in each one of his names -- 666. When she was doing her TV show, some said Oprah Winfrey because she had so many very loyal followers. (I'm not kidding.)

The best explanation for 666 is that just as seven in Revelation is the perfect number, six is one less than 7, and a parody of 7. So 666 represents the opposite of the holiness and perfection symbolized by the number 7. 666 represents pure evil in our world. And John puts up another unholy Trinity, a parody of the Trinity, the dragon and these two beasts -- there's 3 of them. They are a trinity of pure evil.

John's concern is not that we try to figure out WHO is the antichrist, but that whatever happens today or in the future, we are to walk so closely with God that we can discern evil, flee from evil, and fight evil. That's John's concern -- that your faith doesn't fall prey to evil deception.

Friends, through these symbols -- 666, the dragon, the beasts -- John is saying to believers of every generation down through time including you, that there's a battle going on. It's a spiritual battle, between good and evil, between life and death, between heaven and hell, between God and the evil one. It is real and it is desperate, and it matters more than you can possibly imagine. John says, "It is terribly important for Christians to understand this." You must understand and expect your life -- your life -- to involve spiritual battle so that when it does, you're not discouraged by it, and you're not defeated by it.

John shares with us today three strategies that the evil one uses to attack you and ruin your faith. So I want to talk about these strategies in your, in your spiritual battle.

Several times in these two chapters it is mentioned that the devil is a deceiver. In chapter 12 we read, "*The great dragon was thrown*

down--that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. Revelation 12:9

1. The first strategy of the evil one is deception. The evil one is, by nature, a deceiver. Jesus said, "***He is a liar and the father of lies, and the truth is not in him,***" John 8:44. So here's what will happen in your spiritual battle: In order to get you to engage in sin, the evil one will begin by painting a false picture in your mind. Thoughts will begin to occur to you as if out of nowhere. These thoughts come to mind every day. He'll do it so subtly that you may not even be aware that it's happening. But every chain of sin begins with a link of deceit, every one.

So, to fight this battle, I need to see through the deceiver. I need to not fall for the lies of the evil one. And here's what I would suggest: When a thought enters your mind that could lead you toward sin, you need to ask this single question, "Is this true? This thought, this scenario.

Is it true that if I give in to this temptation it will give my heart's desire?"

"If I engage in sexually immoral behavior, will it really take away my loneliness? Will it really? Is that true?"

"If I power up on somebody to get my own way -- as the evil one will whisper for me to do -- will that really satisfy my need for significance?" Really?

"If I go ahead and lash out in anger because there's this thought that comes that it will feel so good, will that really heal the hurt I feel? Will it really? Is it true?"

Friends, I promise you this: You know when you ask that question -- the truth question -- you know the truth question never comes from the evil one. He is the deceiver. It is his nature to lie. He will never prompt you to pursue truth. So you can know anytime you ask the question, "Is it true?" that question is not from the evil one. Don't buy the lie of the evil one. He is a deceiver.

2. But he doesn't stop with deception. He has another tool that's talked about in these two chapters quite a lot, and it's pressure or intimidation. That's another strategy of his, to intimidate us into sin. Revelation 13:4 says, *People worshiped the dragon because he had given*

authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, -- now listen to this -- "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" It's no use. No use to stand up against evil. Why bother trying?

I've come to the conclusion that for me, the greatest sins in my life are not the wrong things that I do. But often the greatest sins are the right things that I leave undone: Courageous words that just stick in my throat. Generous gifts that never leave my pocket. Bold witness that remains silent. Acts of service to the poor that go undone all because the evil one whispers, "You better not risk it. You're not strong enough. You can't beat the system. Why bother trying? You'll never make a difference!"

So friends, I'm telling you, just determine now, "I will stand up to the intimidator. I will see through the deceiver. I won't cave."

In Scripture, huge amounts of sin involve people who knew better but just caved in. That's why Aaron worshiped the golden calf. That's why a strong man like Samson gave into Delilah. That's why Peter denied Jesus three times. He didn't want to do it. He just caved to the social pressure.

Christian writer, Dallas Willard says: ***Most people want to do right, but they're prepared to do wrong.*** When they're under pressure, most people want to tell the truth, but when pressure comes they're prepared to lie if they think they need to.

That's why if you want to stand up to the intimidator, it takes a decision before the pressure comes. You need to say, "I will stand up to the intimidator under pressure. God and I can handle it. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

In Revelation 13:10, John instructs us: ***"This is a call for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people."***

John is saying, "Decide now. You may be imprisoned." John was, he was captive. "You may be killed, but you don't have to be intimidated. You can stand firm." So friends, when you face a situation where you know you'll be under pressure to sin -- a lie that would get you out of trouble at work, gossip that would help you break into a circle of people that you want to be a part of -- decide

before the pressure hits, "I will be faithful. I will endure. I'm going to stand up to the intimidator." That's a spiritual battle.

3. Satan's first strategy is deception. The second is intimidation. Then comes the third strategy and this is brutal. It's accusation. God guided John to write for us: *For the accuser -- speaking of the evil one -- of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night*" Revelation 12:10

This one is so ironic. The evil one deceives us, intimidates us, uses all the power at his disposal to get us to do wrong. Then finally when we do, we give in, as soon as we do, he jumps sides and takes on the role of the accuser.

"Look at you," he'll say. "You call yourself a Christian?! You're involved in open disobedience! You're not a real follower at all." Have you ever heard that voice? That's the accuser. That's spiritual battle. He'll say to you. "If people knew the actual truth about you, they'd recoil from you. You have no right to minister, to serve, to pretend to love God. You're just a phony."

The Evil One will do everything he can to get you to think: "God could never forgive me. Besides, I'm probably going to fall again. I might as well give up, get out of the game." Today some of you are living under those accusations and all that guilt.

The only way to silence the accuser is to look to the cross of Jesus. Firmly believe what Jesus promises He has won for you in His death on the cross. Trust His promises with all your heart and never let them go. Live at the foot of the cross. Stay there. Let the cross of Jesus be everything to you. When your attention or your dreams turn you away, always come back to the foot of the cross.



"Christ once for all freed us from sin forever.

He did this by offering his own blood." Hebrews 9:12

The Bible promises that Christ offered His blood for you. He did that ONCE. It was enough to free us all from sin ... **FOREVER.**

His payment on the cross doesn't need to be repeated. His payment doesn't need to be added to. It was *ENOUGH!* It was enough – *forever!*

Because of that, because of what Jesus has done for you, Paying for all wrongs ONCE for ALL FOREVER, Paul says, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" Romans 8:1 There is NO condemnation. No accusation left! There is no accusation that the Evil One can throw at you that is strong enough to stand against the cross.

¹¹ They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

That's why there's this wonderful song in chapter 12:11. It says that the evil one who fought in heaven and was thrown down, who went after the woman and her son – the Messiah, Jesus – but was turned back. The devil on earth now goes after our brothers and sisters, but they conquered him -- "*They triumphed over him*" HOW? Not by cleverness, not by strength, not by will power to change their lives, not by raw courage. They conquered him how? "*By the blood of the Lamb.*"

That's enough. The blood of the Lamb -- that's enough for me. That's enough for you. And by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death, they would not be intimidated. "*Rejoice then, you heavens and you who dwell in them!*" That's us. That's you and me. We're part of the kingdom of heaven now.

"But woe to the earth and the sea" -- and here that means those places that are outside of the kingdom of heaven -- "because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short."

I want to give you a picture of how John can say that the evil one has been conquered and his time is short, even though evil goes on in this world. Every day evil goes on in this world. How can he have been conquered?

One of the most powerful 30 minutes of film I have ever seen is the opening sequence of the movie "Saving Private Ryan." Have most of you seen that? Veteran's Groups say it's maybe the most realistic picture ever given of the brutal suffering that soldiers faced on D-Day, June 6, 1944. An unbelievable price was paid to gain just a toehold, just a few feet of Omaha Beach in Normandy. And that price was paid in blood.

At the end of D-Day, as the sun set on June 6th, in one sense, really nothing had changed. The majority of Europe was still as it had been the day before, under the power of the Nazi swastika. There was only this one little plot of ground, a few feet of sand on an obscure stretch of beach in one country, that was not under the domination of the enemy. But that one tiny stretch of land, that one tiny little beach, that was enough.

The truth is, at the end of that one day, everything was changed because now there was an opening. The opening was small at first, but it would get a little larger the next day, and a little larger the day after that, and a little larger the week after that.

There still was a lot of fighting to do and a lot of suffering and a lot of dying. But from that day on it was just a matter of time. Then the day came when Paris was liberated. And then the day came when all of France was liberated. Then the days came when the concentration camps were set free. Then the day came when Hitler destroyed himself. And judgment came to that particular beast --as it always does, as it always will. And then came V-E Day, victory in Europe. And then victory in the Pacific and the soldiers could come home. The war was over, and the enemy was defeated.

But the truth was that really victory was all sealed on D-Day. It just took a while. After D-Day, V-E Day, then total victory -- that was just a matter of time.

John says this earth has fallen under a dark power of evil, and then one day a woman gave birth to a son, a male child, Jesus, our Savior.

He lived a life that every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve had always dreamed of but hardly ever thought was possible.

Evil's grip looked so permanent. Then one day, at a cost that none of us will ever fully understand, Jesus took upon himself, on the cross, all the brokenness, all the suffering and all the sin and pain of the entire history of the human race.

And on an Early Sunday morning, after it looked like God's Son was defeated, and left for dead in a grave, when His friends went to care for His body, the stone was gone. And in one sense, nothing had changed. Pilate and the chief priests were still in charge. Caesar still reigned in Rome. The Herods and the Neros and the Hitlers would come and go, and pain and suffering and death go on as they always had. And nobody knew at first except a couple of women. Nobody knew it, but that was D-Day.

But now there was an opening-- no bigger than the entrance of an empty tomb. Evil had actually been defeated, but just needed to be pushed back until it was completely gone. And the truth is, friends, every time you resist sin, every time you proclaim the Gospel, every time you give a portion of your resources for the spread of the kingdom, every time you offer a cup of cold water in Jesus' name to the poor, you are, with the power of the Holy Spirit, pushing evil back farther and farther. That's why we exist as a church. That's why we are called to struggle and pray and work and suffer and labor because one day complete and total liberation will come, make no mistake. There will be a lot of fighting and a lot of suffering and a lot of dying, but D-Day already happened. And at the end of that one day, everything was changed, and now it's just a matter of time. So John says, "Hang on."

Folks, you're in a spiritual battle, so Hang On.

The victory is already guaranteed by Jesus.

So every time you fight the Evil One, every time you resist sin, every time you work & pray & give to spread the Kingdom of God, you are engaging in a spiritual battle that ultimately means everything. This battle means everything to you. It means everything to your friends. It means everything to this world.

So Hang On! Victory is guaranteed! Amen.