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Revelation: The Dragon and the Beasts

Revelation 13

Prayer: *Father, I just thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for just what a joy it is to see all these little ones singing in front here and it just reminds us of the joy that exists in you. And Lord, we're looking at a fairly joyless part of your word, a difficult part of your word that has to do with the world that's all around us right now. So I want to pray that you give us the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, direct us as we get into a difficult and complicated book, the book of Revelation. We just continue to pray that you would guide us and give us your grace and again give us the ability to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we are heading into new territory now. This is the start of the new material. This is chapter 13 which starts out in Revelation 13:1, saying this: *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was*

like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

Well, any time you come across a scripture that starts with the words "and I," you know you're in the middle of something. So chapter 12 and chapter 13, they both go detail about -- it's really about the enemy's attack on Christ and his kingdom. If you remember I pointed out last time if you were to list the three things that the god of this world detests the most, it would be Jesus the Messiah, it would be Israel, the source of the Messiah, and the church that came from the Messiah. Those are the three most threatening things to Satan and he passionately hates them.

If you remember chapter 12 details Satan's attack and it ends with these words. It says: *"Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"* And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth

after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Well, the male child here is obviously Jesus Christ and the dragon is obviously Satan who's also referred to in verse 15 as the serpent. If you need more info on that, you've got to go back and listen to some of the other messages. But he's making war and he's making war not just on the child but he's making war on the rest of the woman's offspring who in verse 17 we learn are: *Those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.* So that woman is clearly and obviously us, the church.

And what we're going to find in this chapter is the whole story of the gospel and it's recapitulated in the form of fantastic images because this is where the church finds itself today. You see, we are waiting in the wilderness, so to speak, for what's next. In a sense we're just like Israel parked outside of Gaza waiting for the right moment to proceed.

So again it says: *But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.* Well the church right now is waiting in that desert, in that wilderness, in a place prepared by God awaiting the next move of the enemy.

And as I mentioned the last time, Baker's New Testament Commentary says: "Three factors emerge from spending time in a desert: a person is completely dependent on God to provide the material and spiritual necessities of life; the desert is always a temporary place; and last, the desert is a place where God trains his people spiritually and prepares them for service. Thus, the members of the church depend on God to be their provider and protector; they also realize that their stay on earth is but temporary; and they know that they are being trained for more extensive duties."

And again that statement hits the nail on the head. What it basically says is our stay on earth is temporary, we are here right now being trained for more extensive duties.

You see, you might have been led to believe that the Christian life basically consists of agreeing with a set of propositions about life and God and what the afterlife is and then coming together

once a week to listen to some songs and hear a talk, but that's not what Jesus had in mind for his church. This was Jesus' final words on earth; this is what he said in *Matthew 28*. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Now many of you know those last words are called "the great commission" but what you should note is that Jesus never called the church simply to make converts. I mean, that's the Holy Spirit's task. Instead what he called us to is to make disciples. Go therefore and make disciples. Well, J.S. Shaw made a comment about the difference between converts and disciples. This is what he said: "The most interesting thing about the Great Commission is that it does not command us to make converts of Christianity. Instead, we are to make disciples of Jesus. The difference between convert making and disciple making is crucial. Converts change religions. Disciples change masters. Converts follow a system. Disciples follow a Person. Converts build Christendom. Disciples build the Kingdom of God. Converts embrace rituals. Disciples embrace a way of life. Converts love conversion. Disciples love transformation."

You see, the gospel to a disciple, it's not this set of intellectual agreements, it's instead the guiding principle that drives his life. This is what Darrell Johnson says about the book of Revelation and discipleship. He says: "Revelation is essentially a book on discipleship. Over the years, and especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people approached the book of Revelation as though it were some kind of crystal ball. But it is not a crystal ball, it is a discipleship manual. Yes, it is written in this really strange way, in this apocalyptic way that uses symbolism and imagery. But written this way to help disciples of Jesus be disciples; to help disciples of Jesus remain loyal to him and keep their cool in the ups and downs of history. The purpose of the last book of the Bible is to encourage loyalty and obedience." (Johnson, Darrell W.. *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (p. 230). Canadian Church Leaders Network. Kindle Edition.)

So again I want to read *Revelation 13:1-4* just again noting that it's a perfect example of that symbolic approach. It says: *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of*

its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

Well first we have to understand just what kind of picture God is trying to paint with these images. We already know that God said there's a blessing not just to reading the book of Revelation but to reading it aloud. If you remember all the way back to *Revelation 1*, it kind of opens up by saying: *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.* And the reason why God says that is because the Spirit of God is literally trying to paint visual pictures with words.

Darrell Johnson points out that the similarities between the language that Revelation uses to paint a picture and the pictures we often see in editorial cartoons, so I kind of dug up an editorial cartoon, if you show up that picture there. I don't know if you can make out all the details. But what the cartoon is doing, it's depicting the Russian bear and Uncle Sam and all of the NATO, all of the minor NATO parties are kind of gathered under Sam's legs there. The illustration shows that this confrontation

is taking place between the two superpowers at the time, it's between United States and Russia. And you can see the role that these subordinate countries have, the little ones at the bottom there, the role that they have in slowing down Russia's aggression. The cartoon is trying to tell you that in spite of all the other parties involved, the conflict is really just coming down to two parties, the United States and Russia. It's actually telling you a whole lot in one simple image.

But just picture the problem that I would have if I was John and I was trying to put this in the language that John is using to try to understand what he was seeing. So I'd looked at this and I'd be saying, well, I saw a tall, skinny man in striped pants with a bunch of little men at his feet and he was standing in front of a huge bloody bear who had blood on his muzzle and his claws. Say, what the heck is that? I mean, it's crystally clear to those of us who know the background and the politics and what it's trying to illustrate, but it would be absolutely baffling and spectacularly unclear to people like us with this point who don't know enough to fill in all the other details.

So far we know from the end of chapter 12, the beginning of chapter 13 we're coming across what's described as three different monsters. The first one is a dragon, and it's a dragon, he's

sitting at the feet of a woman waiting to devour the child as it's born. Well, we know that that dragon is Satan.

In chapter 13 we're going to be introduced to the antichrist and his prophet. Again, two very different beasts, monsters. One arises out of the sea, the other arises out of the earth. And the first beast has multiple horns and heads and has the characteristics of a bunch of different animals: a leopard, a bear and a lion. Well, that might ring a bell about a similar beast that was seen way back when by Daniel, in Daniel 7, because the monster that he saw back then also resembled a leopard, a bear and a lion.

This is how Daniel described it back in *Daniel 7*. It says: *Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.'* After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its

back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

So here you see Daniel and he's seeing essentially the same kind of monster and the four beasts, and again, he speaks about a lion, a bear and a leopard and then something so terrible, he says, I can't even describe it. Well, we happen to know for a fact that these animals represent four different political realms that succeeded each other historically, and we know that because Daniel told us so.

In *Daniel 7:17*, he says: *"These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth."*

So that's our clue. This is what's telling us this is political. This is about governments. So this first beast in chapter 13 of Revelation, we find out he's empowered by the dragon and remember, the dragon is Satan. This first beast that we're going to discover in chapter 13 is the antichrist. And again, we need to point out this is not Satan himself, this is someone empowered by Satan. And he's represented here in chapter 13 as this beast that comes out of

the sea. And it and the second beast, this is the beast coming out of the earth, that represents the role that governments have in this cosmic battle that I speak about this all the time. I'm constantly saying that we're in the middle of a proxy war between two kingdoms: The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. And frequently throughout history, the enemy -- that is obviously Satan depicted here as the dragon -- the enemy uses governments to advance his kingdom. That's what chapter 13 is talking about. It's talking about basically two beasts that are directly empowered by the dragon. And the dragon again is Satan and those beasts are governments that he's using to attack the kingdom of light and advance his kingdom as the end approaches.

And this is the important thing to get from what 13 is telling us. The way he attacks the kingdom of light is through mimicry. You see, over and over again what the enemy does is exactly what Paul warned us he would do in *2 Corinthians 11*. He said: *Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.* You see, the dragon is the one empowering the beast and the beasts are engaged in mimicking the kingdom of light.

The very next thing that we learn about this first beast coming out

of the sea is what? He receives a mortal head wound. Now that might sound familiar to those of us who are familiar with the very beginning of scripture, the fall of Adam. If you remember, after Adam and Eve had been tempted by the serpent after they had all fallen, they all stand before God to receive their sentence. And back then at the very dawn of humanity, Satan is told what? He would receive a mortal head wound. It would happen at the cross. This is what God told Satan back in *Genesis 3:14*. It says: *So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

Well, what do you know? Here we have the dragon also referred to in chapter 12 as the serpent who's empowering a beast that represents the role of many different governments in attacking the kingdom of God and in this particular case, this beast happens to have suffered a head wound that should have been fatal. Again *Revelation 13:3*: *One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.*

Here again we have God telling us how the enemy is going to approach this warfare. What he's saying is he's going to empower governments to actively work against the kingdom of God and in the process he's going to mimic God. He's going to mimic how God works. God said back in Genesis he was going to crush the enemy's head and here's the enemy saying he's received a mortal head wound that he's been able to miraculously heal. Well Satan uses this head wound to mimic the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here's the beast receiving a wound that kills him, miraculously we find once alive -- once again it comes alive. Whatever it is that God is doing you can be sure the enemy's going to imitate it.

If you remember back in Revelation 5 it describes all of heaven erupting in spontaneous worship at the wonder of the lamb who was slain. Well here in chapter 13 we see all of Satan's kingdom -- and that's us here on earth -- it's erupting in similar worship at the fact this beast has survived this mortal head wound. Verse 4 says: *And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"*

Just see how this mimicry goes on in Revelation 5, we're invited to see a worship service erupting in heaven where every tribe, tongue and nation is giving honor and glory to the Lamb that was slain.

Here we see the enemy mimicking the polar opposite of that, for the kingdom of darkness. Where we have light and love and celebration, he's celebrating darkness and hatred and slander.

We go to verse 5. It says: *The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. Sound familiar? All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast -- all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*

What we find here in this and again this is describing a particular time in the tribulation where there's no middle ground, there are those who worship the beast and those who will not, there are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life and those whose names are not to be found there, but right now that's not the case. Right now there is this huge middle ground. You know, politically and spiritually we like to refer to these people as the undecideds. That means there's still time for those undecided to move from one camp to the other, but at some point that luxury's going to

disappear.

And so far we have this dragon, we have Satan himself according to chapter 12 empowering these two beasts in chapter 13. And one rises out of the sea, it's this all powerful human known as the antichrist. And if you remember he's considered the world's greatest hero; do you remember why? The reason why he's such a hero is because he killed the two prophets. If you remember Moses and Elijah, they were the ones who prophesied for three and a half years and they made this world miserable. Well, the antichrist rises up and kills them both. And after this antichrist again the beast from the sea, after he slays those two prophets, he's revered. He's considered literally somebody who saved the world. He's the one who receives the mortal head wound, and he miraculously recovers from it. And again he represents power, he represents government power as the primary weapon that the enemy uses to advance his kingdom.

And what we see expressed today on multiple fronts is government doing just that. We see China launching an all-out assault on the church, imprisons church leaders, it destroys church buildings. In North Korea if you're caught with a Bible or just a sample of scripture, it's a capital offense. You will be executed. India's in the process of cracking down on any religion that's not Hindu, and Christians are feeling that more and more. We learn that from

Pastor Papaf. And again I'm grateful to The Voice of the Martyrs for keeping us posted on the advances of government persecution of Christianity.

And it's amazing how all of this lines up with scripture. And you would think -- when the see anarchy everywhere, you would think a faith such as ours, such as Christianity which talks about the importance of giving honor to government itself, you would think that would make Christianity a friend of government. I mean *Romans 13* says: *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*

Well, Christianity states unequivocally we are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But government's not going to find that acceptable. You see, it wants the second part of that statement as well. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar and also to Caesar the things that are God's. And we know the government wants the things that are God's to be rendered to it as well and that's flat-out worship, and that's exactly where the beast is taking things.

Good citizenship is something that God clearly endorses, but every one of these governments which are deeply represented in Revelation as being part of the beast, they see in Christianity an ultimate threat to their presence, to their advance. Government represents the kingdom of this world and Christianity represents the kingdom of God, and they will never be able to coexist. Hence all governments, any government is going to eventually demand that Christianity be stopped or at minimum be curtailed, and that certainly includes our government whose attacks on Christianity are growing more and more vociferous every single day.

And what chapter 13 is telling us, what Revelation is telling us is we need to grow in our ability to handle that. And that's why the book of Revelation is frequently referred to as a book about discipleship. I mean it's accused of being incredibly hard to understand and it's not easy, but in reality it's there to increase our understanding of just how this war against the kingdom is going to be played out. And God says watch the mimicry. Watch how much it imitates the kingdom.

It's defined first by the dragon whose hatred of Christ and his church is symbolized by his waiting for the woman to give birth to the child so he could destroy it. He represents a wicked version

of the father. And he empowers the second person of the trinity by giving power to the beast that rises from the sea and that beast represents the power of government turned inward on itself as it rebels against God. It's literally the power of hatred put into action, and as such, it represents the upside down version of an evil son in this trinity. And finally we're about to be introduced to the third part of this trinity and that's the beast that rises from the earth. That represents the Holy Spirit, or should I say the unholy Spirit.

But before we get introduced to this second beast we have a sobering reminder from God himself. It's kind of an interlude. Verses 9 and 10. God says: *Whoever has ears, let them hear. "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."* This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

I think it's no secret, I lean toward the pre tribulation rapture position because I think it fits the biblical God at best. I'm certainly open to changing that position. But one of the worst reasons that I hear for people giving for why they believe the church is going to be raptured away before the tribulation is that God would never put his church through these kind of difficulties.

I hear that, I say try making that claim if you lived in North Korea or China or Afghanistan or any other parts of the Middle East or parts of Europe, Africa, South America, there are believers in those parts of the world that are suffering and dying virtually every day simply for acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You have to understand, we serve a God who was mocked, beaten, stripped, flogged and crucified in order to produce salvation that any of us can have simply by putting our faith in his sacrifice.

And he had something to say to his followers about suffering. In fact he was emphatic that if you are one of his followers you can expect difficulties, you can expect struggles, and you better expect persecution. In *Matthew 16*, it says: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."* And then in *Matthew 5:11*, it says: *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

So here's God, again he's calling his people to faithfulness and patient endurance because that's just what it's going to require

when the devil in government itself drops all of its pretenses and declares all out war on the kingdom of God.

So we're at this third element, this third element of this wicked trinity, this is the beast that rises up from the earth. It represents the unholy spirit because its job is basically to promote and uplift the first beast who rose from the sea, and that's the antichrist. So put the three of them together, we have a wicked trinity. The dragon represents the demonic version of the Father, the beast from the sea or the antichrist represents the antithesis of the Son, the beast that now rises from the earth represents the unholy spirit whose job is to promote the dragon in the first beast. And the weapon the enemy uses, it's not power; it's deception. It's lies.

I mean this unholy spirit, the second beast who comes out of the earth itself winds up being the prophet of the antichrist. Just as Goebbels was the propaganda master to the Nazis so this beast that rises out of the earth will be the propaganda master to the antichrist. He's the antichrist's prophet. As a twisted image of the Holy Spirit, he exists to promote the antichrist and the dragon, not through truth, not through light but through lies and deception. Verse 11 says: *Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a*

dragon. So here's the enemy, this second beast looking like a lamb speaking like a dragon, it's clearly the Spirit of Christ and at the same time it's using its appearance as a lamb to hide the fact that it's speaking poison, deadly poison to the world.

You know, it's no longer just going to be the cults like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses that are speaking lies wholesale to the world. There are many now within the church itself that are jumping on that very same bandwagon. I mean, I read all the time about churches that are going apostate. Previously sound doctrinal churches are abandoning truth and embracing doctrines considered inconceivable only a few years ago. Revelation gives us the opportunity, the insight to see how the enemy is operating.

It even applies to what we are looking at when we turn on the news at night. The attack by Hamas on Israel has exposed in ways nobody could have anticipated exactly how the enemy uses lies and deceit to attack the kingdom. I mean I mentioned just last week that in the aftermath of Hamas's attack, the virulent anti-Semitism on many college campuses was exposed. We had some 80 different student groups come out saying that Israel was 100 percent to blame for the attacks because it oppressed the Palestinians. And yet those on the ground know that nobody, nobody oppresses the Palestinians like Hamas does.

I had a conversation with somebody just the other day who knows a lot more about what's going on there than the average person does, and he said, I got news for you, you criticize the Hamas government, they'll take you out on the street in front of everybody and shoot you dead. Hamas has no love for its own people.

And every once that while a situation like this establishes some moral clarity, if only by accident. We look at this, we see here's a group of terrorists who obey no rules whatsoever concerning human morality, who think nothing of cutting off the heads of babies while ravaging women and the elderly and yet the response of many in the elite class at American universities is essentially to say, "Well, they deserved it." Many were absolutely appalled to realize that the average college campus is now a place so foreign to decency to wonder if it's in the same moral universe as the rest of this country. I mean how much do you have to hate a people to celebrate their murderers arriving on para gliders? How did such a thing even happen?

We have to give credit where credit is due. As Revelation points out, there's an unholy spirit who revels in lies and deception, who's done yeoman's work in turning the hearts and minds of many

young people into haters of the very people group that Jesus came from for reasons that have no rational basis whatsoever. Well, what do you know, that's exactly how the beast from the earth operates. It looks like a lamb but it speaks like a dragon. And frankly, this may be the beginning of the end, as Jesus said, or it might be the end of the beginning and it may have thousands more years to unfold.

The text goes on to say of this second beast, this beast from the earth in verse 12: *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. 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 honor 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.*

So we have this unholy spirit that inhabits the prophet, this second beast, and it's determined to have the world worship this first beast. Well, that beast is government itself. And this is

government that's going far beyond anything we've seen. It's using false miracles or maybe even genuine miracles like we saw amongst Pharaoh's magicians when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt.

If you go all the way back into history to the time when the Israelites were trying to escape from Egypt and there's this confrontation back and forth between Moses and Pharaoh and at one point they both do competing miracles. Well, we look at some of the miracles that the magicians for Pharaoh did and they seem to be almost miracles. Let me just read to you what happened back then.

This God saying to Moses: *"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."* So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. So Moses' miracles, they clearly overwhelm the miracles done by Pharaoh's magicians but those miracles at least appear to be miracles nonetheless.

So we see this second beast, he orders the world to set up this

image honoring the first beast or the antichrist who had suffered that mortal head wound and apparently at some point this beast is going to come to life. It's going to appear to be given life itself. We don't know whether that's manipulation or some dark miracle. We do know by this point things have gotten so bad that it also adds that anyone who refuses to worship this beast will be executed.

And finally the chapter ends with a discussion of the one thing that just about everybody has heard about including people who know nothing about Christianity or the Bible or the book of Revelation and that is the so-called mark of the beast. This is verse 16. It says: *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.*

Well, there is no shortage of explanations of the mark of the beast. There's dozens, I mean there's all kinds of -- there's mathematical games, there's mathematical puzzles, there's ways of taking the numbers and turning them into letters and making the

letters spell out it was Nero or the pope or dozens and dozens of different people. And for what it's worth, what really matters to us is I do not believe that this is a tattoo and I don't believe it's a microchip, I don't believe it's anything of the sort. I think we need to go back to what we've already learned. We've seen in chapter 7 God's describing putting a seal on believers to protect them from the coming judgment. This is what the angels say back in *Revelation 7*. It says: *"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."*

So I asked back then, was that a mark; was that a chip? Was that a tattoo? I don't think believers are going to be walking around with a Jesus tattoo or a chip. Instead I think the seal that God gives is an expression of the sealing of the Holy Spirit. We learn back in *Ephesians 1*, it says: *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.* And we know that that seal is a reflection in a character of life, a redeemed, reborn life that mark marks out any and all believers. And so if your understanding here that the beast's desire is to constantly mimic God, then you can see that this seal that marks out his own people would also be the character and the actions that reflect him and his evil just as believers'

character and actions reflect Christ. And the fact that the mark is to be on the forehead and the wrist indicate that the thoughts and the actions, they'll all line up not with Christ but with those of the beast.

So you say well, how in the world is that going to happen? Well the other thing that we're learning is as governments grow more and more powerful in their ability to control the lives of their citizens, we're seeing the rise of what's called "soft totalitarianism" and that's a totalitarianism that grades citizens on how well they toe the party line. And our classic example of this is China.

In China if you want to shop at the best grocery stores, if you want to have access to the latest electronics, the latest goods, if you want your kids to have access to better schools and universities, then you will toe the party line and they will know exactly what you're doing, because they use facial recognition, they use artificial intelligence to monitor every single aspect of your life. And so if you want to get a good score, if you want to be a "good citizen" -- quote, unquote -- you'll avoid the religious affiliations in churches, which they will allow, they'll technically make them legal, but they'll be untouchable. Because if you do, if you go near them, you'll start to lose your social

credit. Well that lines up perfectly with the idea of being able to neither buy nor sell. And whether or not you have to make a physical commitment to a mark, I don't know but I do know the mark of the beast is going to be something that everyone enters into knowingly and willingly.

I hear all the time people are genuinely afraid of actually doing something that winds up accidentally getting them marked permanently with the mark of the beast. I don't think that's ever going to happen. Those who have the mark of the beast will be those who willingly, openly and publicly acknowledge that their loyalty is not with Christ and his kingdom but with the beast.

So where does this leave us? Well, if you believe that the book of Revelation is really a book about discipleship, then what should become more and more obvious as the focus of the church is that we need to be making disciples. I said at the beginning of this message, Jesus has never called the church simply to make converts, I mean, that's the Holy Spirit's task. Instead he called us to make disciples.

And the gospel and once again, I said to a disciple, it's not a set of intellectual arguments, instead it's the guiding principle that drives his life. I said right now there exists this huge middle

ground. You can worship the kingdom of light, you can worship the beast or you can be like the vast majority of those folks outside that door, they're the undecideds. But I tell you that period is rapidly disappearing. And at some point we're going to get to that part of the tribulation where there is no middle ground. There will be those who worship the beast and those who will not. Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life and those whose names are not to be found there. But the good news is that has not happened yet. And the vast middle ground of undecideds is a crop literally ripe for the harvest. And it's those who are bewildered by what's happening in this world all around them. Their only hope is God, and God's greatest weapon is disciples. Let's pray.

Father, I just again, I thank you for this incredibly difficult book filled with such incredibly bizarre images. And Lord, what I want us to get out of this is basically a number of things: number one, the enemy works through government; number two, the enemy works by mimicking the kingdom of God. And Lord, what I see you telling us is that we need to up our discipleship, we need to up our understanding of how the enemy works, how his mimicry works and so I pray that we would get a renewed sense of the importance of discipleship and that you would give us the ability not just to disciple or to be disciplined but to disciple others, every single one of us. If you've been saved for ten minutes you can disciple

*somebody who's been saved for five minutes. If you've been
disciplined for fifty years, you can disciple somebody who's got the
whole panoply of different experiences, but the point of it is is
we need to be making disciples especially at this time. I pray you
would give us that grace, I pray you would give us that insight, I
pray you would give us those marching orders; and I pray this in
Jesus' name. Amen.*