

Pulling Back the Curtain, Part III- The Woman in the Wilderness

Call to Worship: Isaiah 40:28-31

Hymn #145- *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

1st Scripture: Exodus 19:1-6

Hymn #151- *O Come, all Ye Faithful*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 12

Hymn #147- *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Introduction:

In this one chapter of Revelation, we have basically spanned through an entire world history, pulling back the curtain of our natural senses, so that we would be able to see what is really going on behind the scenes, from the standpoint of heaven.

We began by going right back to that most significant and traumatic event, where the serpent had deceived Eve, ultimately leading to the fall of our first parents and their universal posterity. In Genesis chapter three, God addressed the problem, in part, by cursing the serpent, setting enmity between the woman and the serpent and the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And the Seed of the woman would ultimately crush the head of the serpent, leading to the utter downfall and eternal destruction of the serpent, who would only bruise the heel of the Seed of the woman in this epic battle.

And all throughout history, the serpent, the devil, represented in our text as the “dragon,” did all that he could to contend with the woman, especially trying to destroy her travelling Seed, in order to flush out the Messiah and thwart the purposes of God. And in the first seven verses, here in chapter 12, we have seen that the dragon has failed. The Messianic Child and Ruler of all nations has come. He has accomplished His redemptive mission in full and He has ascended to the throne of God.

Then in verses 7-12, we were given a detailed description of how the Messianic Seed actually defeated the dragon, from the standpoint of heaven. Having conquered sin and death by means of His own suffering and cross, the devil (the serpent of old, the adversary and slanderer) was left powerless in his ability to accuse the beloved elect of God. And so, there was war in heaven, and Michael and his angels defeated the dragon and his angels, casting them out of

heaven and down to the earth, because there was no more place found for them in heaven. The adversary was shut down. He could bring no legal argument against the people of God, no matter how sinful they have been, because the cross of Christ now stood in the defendant's corner, as a sign of justice being fulfilled on behalf of God's elect.

Recognizing that he has been defeated and that he is incapable of destroying the Messianic Seed, the "cast out of heaven" dragon then turns to direct his attention toward the "woman" (the mother of the Seed; the church) and vents out his wrath toward her, seeing that his time on earth is short. He is a defeated foe, bearing in his own being, his inevitable coming destruction (represented by his crushed head), and so, he aims to do all that he can to spew forth his wrath against Christ, by contending with His glorious bride, the church.

And so, the woman, the church, flees into the wilderness for 1260 days (a symbol for the duration of the church age), where God prepares a place for and nourishes her.

This morning, we continue on with this theme, getting a better picture of what happens to the woman, the church, while she is in the wilderness. And this is especially relevant for us, because it provides us with a general understanding of what history will look like, following the earthly ministry of Christ, especially from the standpoint of heaven and the church. You see, in the span of the last 2000 years, the world has given us an interpretation of history that fails to elevate the life of the church to its proper central position. From the standpoint of heaven, the church is the center of history; it is the focal point of God's plan of redemption, and everything else in this world ultimately exists to serve in the building of Christ's church. The cover page articles in our newspapers and magazines, and the front row events and people, documented in our news forecasts, are all secondary and minor issues from the standpoint of heaven. Heaven's eye is fixed on the church, and Revelation chapter 12 confirms this.

All that being said, what then happens to the woman, the church, when she flees into the wilderness?

I. The Woman in the Wilderness

Revelation 12:13- “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.”

Again, here we are given a further opening up of what we were told in verse 6, “Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

In verse 6, we were not given the specific details as to why the woman fled into the wilderness, because John had to first explain what had happened to the dragon in verses 7-12. And now in verse 13, coming to realize that the serpent was conquered by Christ and cast down to the earth, we are brought back to the narrative of verse 6, where the reason for the woman’s fleeing is made clear. The dragon, seeing he has been cast down to the earth, begins to persecute the woman, and she flees, not by her own means, but under the protective care of God, who “gives her two wings of an eagle,” enabling her to fly into the wilderness to her place (her God ordained, divinely prepared place) where God nourishes her for the entire duration of the church age. And the entire duration of the church age is designated by the two “time symbols” of 1260 days (in verse 6) and a time, times and half a time in verse 14. A time, times and half a time is the same as saying 3 ½ times, which is 3 ½ years or 42 months or 1260 days. In other words, all three of these time symbols represent the same exact time period of the church age.

When we considered verse 6, two weeks ago, we saw that the whole idea of the woman fleeing into the wilderness is pictured by the Exodus of the Jews (recorded back in the Book of Exodus), where God had brought His people out of the Egyptian bondage and into the wilderness, where He cared for them and nourished them by such miraculous means as “heavenly manna” and water from the Rock. Here again, we are brought back to that Exodus analogy, when we are told that, “the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place.” Listen to two texts, which speak of the Israeli Exodus in very similar language:

1) In our first Scripture reading, we read Exodus 19:1-6, which states, “In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.””

2) And then, again in Deuteronomy 32:9-14, we are told, “For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. “He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him. “He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; and you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.””

Clearly, thoughts about God’s care for Israel in the wilderness; tangible history, showing God’s power, ability and willingness to protect and nourish His people, even in the wilderness, is meant to penetrate the hearts of God’s New Covenant church. Illustrations of God’s previous care for His people throughout all of history are meant to calm and comfort the hearts of God’s people today, as we face our own battles, in our own spiritual wilderness, longing for glory.

And so, though the dragon, the devil, seeks to persecute the church, we are comforted first by the reminder that God provides her with wings, as it were, sets her apart in the desert and nourishes her with the fellowship and love of Christ! And she is protected from the devil’s onslaughts. This was especially sensitive to the early church, which the devil would gladly have flushed out, right from the outset, before it could ever have anything remotely close to the world-wide impact it presently has. We see such fierce attacks, coming upon the church, especially in

the first century, recorded in the Book of Acts. And when we come to see Stephen, the beloved deacon evangelist stoned to death and James the brother of John thrust through with the sword by King Herod, and the church in Judah, fleeing for her life as persecutions greatly increased, we are tempted to think that just maybe the church is gasping for her last breath. But as Luke shows us, such persecutions only cause the church to spread out into Samaria and all over the “then known world.” God gives the woman wings to flee, and in the process, the Gospel seed is spread and planted unto the building of churches all over the world. And brethren, we ought to be greatly encouraged that God’s protective care for the church is fixed for the entire duration of the church age (the whole 1260 day time period).

Recognizing that he cannot immediately destroy the church and her witness by way of persecution, we find that the dragon then takes other steps to flush out her light. Continuing on in verses 15 & 16, we are told, “So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.”

Here we find the serpent using another means of attack in seeking to destroy the church, again, especially during, but by far not limited to, the infant stage of the church in the first century. He spews forth “water out of his mouth like a flood...that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.” And the implication here is that the devil seeks to infiltrate the church with false doctrines, heresies and teachings, which would contaminate the Gospel message and thereby destroy the light and witness of the church. He would seek to carry her away in a flood of lies; significant self-destructive lies, which would serve to collapse the church, the pillar and ground of God’s truth. Throughout the Epistles, we find the writers contending with all manner of heresies and false teachings, which were beginning to infiltrate the early church, because the writers knew very well that doctrine is critical. What you believe, will always affect how you live. And so, we find John the Apostle (in his Epistles) contending with an influx of Gnosticism and teachings that deny the humanity of Christ, seeking to strip the church of her Gospel power. We find the Apostle Paul defending the critical doctrine of “the resurrection of the dead” in his letter to the Corinthians, and “justification by faith and trust in Christ alone” in his Epistle to the Galatians. We find the author of Hebrews fighting to exhort

his readers to repent of their present inclination toward turning away from Christ and turning back to the Old Covenant rituals and ceremonies for their hope of salvation. All throughout the ages, the enemy has sought to carry away the church by floods of lies, infecting her foundational doctrines with poisonous, life threatening heresies. And while the danger was perhaps more dangerous from the outset, we still contend with all manner of cults and even subtle poisonous doctrines that have infiltrated the evangelical church of our time.

But we find that God always provides His protective care for His true church. While many cardboard churches will fall and be carried away by a flood of lies, the true Bride of Christ will always stand, because the earth opens its mouth and swallows up the flood which the dragon spews out of its mouth. God exposes, and then drains the poisonous heresies of their power, protecting His true church by the Scriptures, which they unflinchingly stand upon, even at the expense of their very lives.

Especially at her infant stage, such care from our sovereign God was critical. And so, the church was faithfully and securely established on the Rock of Christ's victory and the testimony of the apostles and the prophets. The dragon's attempts at seeking to destroy the church as a whole (as even a concept), from the beginning, have failed. When such attacks fail; when the church comes of age, the dragon is enraged. And where then does the dragon turn his attention?

II. The Dragon Wars with the Woman's Offspring

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 17).

The church is birthed; her influence spreads; the Gospel is worldwide; churches are planted all over the world; the Body of Christ has come to age and has impacted the whole world...the dragon was incapable of flushing out the whole concept and reality from the beginning, and so, he turns his attention then, especially toward persecuting her individual members. He moves from a broad sweep attack, to attacking individual members of the body, attempting to put out whatever light he can. He sees those who are serious about the things of

Christ; He sees those who do not simply provide lip service, but who actually strive to keep the commandments of God and who have the true testimony of Christ within them, and like a fierce lion goes after its prey, he goes after them. He afflicts, he persecutes, he sows seeds of discord and envy and pride among brethren; he sets them up as wrong doers before the eyes of the world; he uses every *physical* attack possible, striving to destroy them or to make “Job curse God.”

And brethren, this is where we are today. We are in the wilderness, we are attacked as a church, we are attacked as individuals...but God promises to nourish and care for His true elect, as they endure even to the expense of their own physical lives and well being. In the chapters ahead, you are introduced to the dragon’s main weapons of warfare, namely, the beasts of physical and spiritual persecution, and the “whore of Babylon” who entices and drags away lustful souls by means of her worldly allurements. And we are called to be ready, to stand fast in Christ; to look unto and live in light of His return...to overcome, in light of what we know to be true underneath the surface of a grossly deceived and fallen world! And only those who, “love not *this life* to the end,” can possibly survive the attacks of the enemy. His attacks are all directed toward “this life” realities. That is his only means of infiltration. And so, if we are seated in heaven with Christ, we will stand firm to the end and overcome. If our hold is on Christ and not this world; if Christ is truly our portion and inheritance, then the enemy, whose attacks are “this world” attacks, will truly be powerless against us. But on the contrary, if we are holding on to this life, his attacks will penetrate our armor and frustrate both our growth and our ability to shine forth the light of Christ, as a lampstand in a dark and fallen world.

Conclusion

Brethren, let me leave you with some conclusive thoughts, not just with respect to Chapter 12, but with respect to the whole of this series, which at least for the time being, will be put on hold, in accordance with what seems to be the expressed present need of our church.

Indeed, the Revelation is full of many difficult and complex symbols, but the general message is clear, and many of the symbols even, can be understood when they are decoded by the history and events, which are recorded and found in the Old Testament. God has intentionally given us apocalyptic language, borrowed from OT realities, so that timeless truths

could be presented to us in a very effective and powerful way. We live in a world of deception, where our greatest enemies pose as “angels of light,” and the Revelation strips away the façade; it strips away the façade, which normally and naturally grabs hold of our attention, in order to expose things as they really are. And all of this is to compel us with a repeated and yet all too often neglected message, namely, “Set your minds on things above where Christ is; run the race of faith, bearing your cross for the glory of Christ; be aware of the opposition, take note of its many forms of attack; be prepared, fight the good fight and overcome!

You see, brethren, even in the twelve chapters we have gone over, we have been given the blueprint for all that ultimately matters. We have been given the deeper principles, which every single area of our lives must be cast upon.

And in a time when our morality is failing as a nation; in a time when the church is hardly a flicker of light in our nation; in a time when our economy is spinning further and further down the drain; in a time when there is a great stir in our global, worldwide economy; in a time when at any moment, another World War can start; in a time when we stand on the brink of utter chaos, having every ounce of stability completely taken away from us; in a time when at any moment our whole nation could collapse, leaving a “once very comfortable people,” running in circles, frantically stepping on everyone else, in order to survive...in a time such as this, brethren, we desperately need to apply the general message of the Revelation. We, of all people; having seen behind the curtain; having seen the glorious sovereignty of our reigning God and the victory we have in Christ, and having seen the inevitable outcome of all of history, we of all people, must be ready...for anything.

I would never, ever, in a million years have naturally chosen to preach through any of this Book. It is too difficult and it is often looked to, as more of a “curiosity tamer” than anything else. But I believe with every single fiber of my soul, that we have been called to study at least what we have gone over, up to this point. Whatever needed to be said, up to this point, has been said. You have the blueprint! The curtain has been pulled back! You know where you stand at this very moment. What we have gone over in these twelve chapters will be very, very relevant for *your* lifetime. I believe that with every ounce of my being or I have never been called to be a preacher/pastor.

Don't lose sight of it, in the busyness of everyday life. Apply it! Pray through it! Meditate on it. You do not have to have a full understanding of all of the symbols, to lay hold of and stand upon the basic and main theme of this Book! Fight the good fight and overcome! For you have an enemy who hates you and who is set upon destroying you at every moment. But he is powerless in the face of the cross! Live at the cross! Live at the feet of Christ! Live there, brethren! And be ready!

Lastly, brethren, hear this: Make it your daily habit *now*, to be in the Word of God and in prayer; walk closely with Christ *now*, in the present, as your utmost priority, and you will overcome! Don't get taken off guard! Secure yourself in Christ and in every means of His grace, and the enemy will not touch you there! Your only safety is in Christ!

The Gospel

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25