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The Child and the Dragon

December 18, 2022

Sermon Text: Revelation 12:1-6;
Matthew 2:16-18

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 2

On the Scripture Being God's Word

We are once again looking at God's Word and we must take care that we do not succumb to an error which so often accompanies *familiarity*. It is not for nothing that our Bibles are called the *Holy Bible*. This is God speaking to us. That same voice that shook Sinai and caused the Israelites to tremble in terror – He now speaks to us from a New Mountain – Mount Zion, which in Christ we may approach in full confidence. BUT, we must come in faith, believing

this to be God's Word. Listen to John Calvin on this:

I am aware of what is muttered in corners by certain miscreants, when they would display their acuteness in assailing divine truth. They ask, how do we know that Moses and the prophets wrote the books which now bear their names? Nay, they even dare to question whether there ever was a Moses. Were any one to question whether there ever was a Plato, or an Aristotle, or a Cicero, would not the rod or the whip be deemed the fit chastisement of such folly?

Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion (Kindle Locations 1599-1602). Signalman Publishing. Kindle Edition.

He continues in regard to the New Testament:

But one circumstance, sufficient of itself to exalt their doctrine above the world, is, that Matthew, who was formerly fixed down to his money-table, Peter and John, who were employed with their little boats, being all rude and illiterate, had never learned in any human school that which they delivered to others.

Paul, more over, who had not only been an avowed but a cruel and bloody foe, being changed into a new man, shows, by the sudden and unhoped-for change, that a heavenly power had compelled him to preach the doctrine which once he destroyed.

Let those dogs deny that the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, or, if not, let them refuse credit to the history, still the very circumstances proclaim that the Holy Spirit must have been the teacher of those who, formerly contemptible among the people, all of a sudden began to discourse so magnificently of heavenly mysteries.

Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion (Kindle Locations 1644-1650). Signalman Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Let us then come to this Word as it is – God Himself speaking to us.

If you have been following along in our mid-week study of the book of Revelation, you will recognize these verses as a description of Satan's hatred of Christ and his attempts to destroy him from the day of his birth and even before:

Rev 12:1-17 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (2) She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. (3) And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. (4) His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that

when she bore her child he might devour it. (5) She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, (6) and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

(7) Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, (8) but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. (9) And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (11) And they have conquered him by the blood

of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (12) 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!”

(13) 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. (14) 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. (15) The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. (16) 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.

(17) 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.

[NOTE: This 12th chapter of Revelation, incidentally, is in my opinion proof that the amillennial understanding of Revelation is correct. It shows in one verse (5) the entire earthly ministry of Christ from His birth to His ascension and then goes on to describe that all of the time that the church is in the wilderness of this world, she is protected by the Lord while Satan wars against her. This is not something that is going to happen in a future time just before the return of Christ, but it is an attack that has been happening all through the entire earthly history of the church].

Now, I want to show you this morning that the events surrounding the birth of Christ included the dragon attempting to devour the Messiah the moment He was born. Specifically, the account of Herod's attempt to kill the infant of Bethlehem. Follow as I read:

Mat 2:1-23 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, (2) saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

(3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; (4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: (6) "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.""

(7) Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me

word, that I too may come and worship him.”

(9) After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. (11) And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

(12) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (13) Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

(14) And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt (15) and

remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

(16) Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

(17) Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: (18) “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

(19) But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, (20) saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.” (21) And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

(22) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea

in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. (23) And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

We know from Revelation 12 that Herod was an instrument of the Dragon – who is Satan, the Devil, that Serpent of old. Listen again:

Rev 12:3-6 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. (4) His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. **And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.**

(5) She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, (6) and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place

prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

When Christ was born, Satan was watching to kill Him. So when we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ, we should also remember *all* of the events surrounding His birth. The Wise Men came to worship Him, but the enemy was on the move to kill Him. I suppose a more accurate portrait of the baby in the manger would not only show Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the angels, and the Wise Men (though I believe the Magi came perhaps later), but off to the side lurking there should be a great red dragon with murderous intent directing wicked king Herod as his agent.

Now, we notice also in this account the *truth that Satan is very limited in his power*. He can do nothing without the Lord's permission, but his faculties are apparently limited as well. While he is a crafty, wickedly intelligent and powerful being, notice several limitations evident here:

- He knew the Seed of the woman would be born one day who would crush his head. (Gen 3:15)
- He probably knew that Christ would be a son of Abraham?
- But even though the Scriptures plainly identified Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace –

Mic 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

...that identification of Christ's birthplace being so plain that Herod's advisers knew it... Satan did not. Through Herod, he had to ask where the Christ would be born.

- Neither did Satan know that the Lord instructed Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt where they would be protected and similarly when they returned to Nazareth in Galilee,

- It is most probable that Christ was not on Satan's radar until this:

Mat 3:1-17 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

(4) Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. (5) Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, (6) and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (7) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not

presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

(11) “I baptize you with water for repentance, **but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** (12) His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

(13) **Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.** (14) John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (15) But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. (16) And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went

up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; (17) and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

And what is the very next thing that happened? It is somewhat like that seen in Lord of the Rings where the great Eye suddenly realizes Frodo and Sam are near:

Mat 4:1-4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (2) And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (3) And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” (4) But he answered, “It is written, ““Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

For all those years after losing track of the Child, Satan is permitted by God to find Him once

more and he attacks immediately with his temptations.

All through Christ's earthly ministry, Satan worked to destroy Him, never succeeding. For example:

Luk 22:3-6 Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. (4) He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. (5) And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. (6) So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Of course Satan was behind the murder of Jesus and no doubt thought that he had triumphed:

Luk 10:17-18 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" (18) And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Joh 12:31 Now is the judgment of

this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Satan's War Against Christ's Church

Listen again now to that last portion of Revelation 12-

Rev 12:13-17 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. (14) 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.

(15) The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. (16) 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.

(17) 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.

See it? What happened in Bethlehem when the dragon tried to kill the Child, is still happening now. It has been happening ever since Christ ascended (and before). The devil knows that he cannot destroy Christ, but he does his best to destroy His people – those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The war still rages. There never has been peace on earth yet. There has never been a Christmas when real peace encompassed the entire world, and this Christmas will be no exception. The real war however is fueled by Satan's rage against Christ's people. You see it here in our own nation – and it is on the increase.

A study of church history will demonstrate this warfare – martyrs without number, the persecution of the true church by the counterfeit

of Rome, the battles fought by the Reformers and the attacks against them.

But we must always remember *and believe* that anyone who belongs to Christ will be attacked by the enemy as well. Every true church will be attacked. If we do not believe this and understand it – we will not recognize the real enemy and we will use weapons and methods that are of no effect.

Christ the Lord is born! At this we rejoice. But we must never forget that the dragon was lurking near that stable and he still rages against us today. Whenever you see a portrait of Bethlehem or some manger scene – picture in your mind that dragon lurking nearby.

1Pe 5:8-11 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (9) Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (10) And after you have

suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (11) To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

A Challenge and Encouragement

(From Joel Beeke's commentary on Revelation) -

The second key to overcoming is perseverance. Revelation 12:17 says the dragon is so furious that he will continue to wage war with believers, but verse 11 says that the overcomers "loved not their lives unto the death." We must be willing to suffer, even to die, for our Lord who died for us. We must persist in our faith, obedience, and testimony to the gospel.

We might prefer an easier way than taking up our cross and denying ourselves, but Christ has told us that this is the only way to follow Him (Luke 9:23). God will give us grace to press on, no matter how much we are persecuted. He will give us grace to follow God fully,

as faithful Caleb did after investigating the Promised Land (Num. 14:24). In the end, the mighty cause of our perseverance with God is His perseverance with us (Jer. 32:39–40). He will not forsake us, but will guard us by faith through all our trials (1 Peter 1:5). We overcome because Christ has overcome.

As Sinclair Ferguson says: "You need to persist in your testimony. You need Spirit-given courage to overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb—He has died for your sins—and the word of your testimony as one who does not love his or her life to death."

Ferguson admits that he would prefer an easier way to overcome the dragon than to give all of himself to Christ. We are prone to think, "If I can give only 95 percent of my life to Jesus Christ, I can be sure I can overcome the dragon." But Ferguson goes on to warn us that the devil has grown from a serpent to a dragon because of people who have been only 95 percent committed. "No; the only way to overcome the dragon is

when Christ has all of you and you have all of Christ,” Ferguson says. “You are only safe when He has all of you. But o, the glory when He has all of you, because then you know that you have all of Him.”

Beeke, Joel. Revelation: The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament (p. 266). Reformation Heritage Books. Kindle Edition.