

The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

“The Dragon Slayer”

Revelation 12

6.13.21

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ² and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. ⁴ And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth, he might devour her child. ⁵ And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. ⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

⁷ And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, ⁸ and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ Then 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 brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. ¹¹ "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. ¹² "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time."

¹³ And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. ¹⁴ But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵ And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. ¹⁷ So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

We're looking at the Book of Revelation...and TRYING to stay fixed on the Big Ideas of the book. Every verse seems to have symbols and metaphors and images that require interpretation BUT we can't stop to interpret it all – so we're staying “on-point” – keeping the Main Thing the main thing!

Today, a few *new* characters are introduced: a woman clothed with the sun, her child and a red dragon. Today we consider evil...the battle of good vs. evil.

A few years back Will Ferrell starred as Harold Crick in a movie called *Stranger Than Fiction*. He's an IRS auditor, immaculate, disciplined, mildly "OCD."

One day, he's up early, brushing his teeth and he hears a voice...Is it in his head? Are other people able to hear the voice? And in time he realizes the voice is a kind of narrator telling a story *and he's interested in the story being told*...until he realized the story is HIS OWN LIFE... and everything he does or even thinks is being described in this beautiful literary voice of a British woman.

And then... in time he learns that the author has never met him but is writing *HIS* life... *AND* that it will apparently have a TRAGIC ending...UNLESS he can find this unknown writer and change her mind.

Well, St. John is writing a story to these First Century Christian Churches, a very curious, enthralling story, *a fantasy* with monsters and angels and symbols and at some point they realize THIS IS THEIR OWN STORY!

"It's our story... we're somehow IN the story and we have to wonder: Will this be a comedy or a tragedy? How does this story end?" How does YOUR/OUR story end...?" We can't get the *Author* to change His Mind... *but we can benefit immensely by knowing the story* AND by seeing what role EVIL will play in our own life-narrative and the meta-narrative into which we were all born... and the one we enter by faith.

- So let's: 1) Marvel At the Story**
2) See the CRUX of the Story
3) Take Our Place In the Story

When we say, "marvel" at the story, we're thinking of the fact that there are signs that St. John sees... AND the fact that in some marvelous way the story of this 12th Chapter is *somehow* the story of the whole world history from start to finish.

There's a woman who is like the queen of creation. She's clothed in light (the sun) and stands on the moon and is crowned with twelve stars. She's royal. But who IS she?

Some say she's Eve...others say she's Mary the mother of Jesus...others say Israel and still others the Church. And all of these are correct.

Maybe the best way to look at her is to say that *she's an ideal picture of the Church in all ages both before Israel, before Christ and the Church IN Christ*. She is God's believing people in whatever age. She's the woman whose Seed would crush the head of the serpent (as was promised after the Fall – Gen 3). She is Israel wearing the twelve tribes as stars in her crown.

She is Mary, who is in the line of Israel and she carries in her womb, in the womb of Israel, the Seed, the promised Messiah. She is “with child” and in great pain as Israel was so often persecuted by the kingdoms of the world.

The Child she carries is v. 5 the One who will “rule all nations with a rod of iron” (Ps 2.9) – that tells us that He's the Messiah.

Then another MARVELOUS sign – a “red dragon” – red like Edom (one of Israel's perpetual enemies), red like the clothes of another woman we'll soon meet, the Harlot, whose clothing is purple and red with the blood of the saints (17.1-4).

This dragon is extremely powerful, knowing and impressive (“on earth is *not* his equal”). It has seven heads because “two heads are better than one” and seven are better than two (a show of complete knowledge). It has ten horns (total strength) and many crowns like the True King (19.12). His tail sweeps 1/3 of the spirits with him and hurls them to earth.

The monster wants to eat the woman's child (how horrific is that?) But suddenly the child is born and in just a few words the life of Jesus Christ – the Child born to rule all nations – in a few words we move from Christmas (birth) past Good Friday and Easter *right to His ascension*. It's the life of Christ summarized in a few words. “*Her child was [not devoured but] caught up to God and to His throne*”.

The woman fled into the wilderness – like when she left Egypt (to escape the dragon whose name was Pharaoh). Or the one whose name was Jezebel (1 Kings 19). (There in the wilderness, the Church will be nourished for a definite period of time (1,260 days – 3½ years) – nourished in the wilderness (as in the Exodus – or Elijah fleeing Ahab/Jezebel: note the pattern – PATTERNS!)

After the Child is “caught up to God and His throne”, there's war in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting the dragon and his angels, who lose and are ejected from heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down – and if there was any doubt about his identity now he's named four times – great dragon, serpent of old, the devil and Satan (v.9).

We get the dragon's job description – while he's on earth he deceives the whole world with his messengers. And then, a song (vv. 10-12) – seems like a good place for SONG!

The whole Chapter ends with the woman who once gave birth to the Child being persecuted by the dragon... Now she has other children and she's given eagle wings to fly away to her place of

safety. We remember Moses was told by God: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, *and how I bore you on eagles’ wings*, and brought you to Myself.” (Exo 19.4)

And again how Moses summarized the whole Exodus (Deut 32): “He found Jacob in a desert land, in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the apple of His eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions.” (10-11).

OR that famous passage from Isaiah (CH 40) – “They will mount up *with wings like eagles ...*” (31)

The dragon fights on – spews a river out of its mouth (*a flood of deceptive words*) but the earth helps the woman, the Church, and swallows the flood... But the dragon persists against those who “keep the command of God by holding to the testimony of Jesus.” (John 6.28)

Are you marveling yet? Because here is *the whole story of everything* put into a sci-fi, fantasy story only seventeen verses long. This is the meaning of life and the whole world and all of human history. Imagine some people miss it and think that planet earth is about human progress or getting wealthy or colonizing the solar system... they miss the whole point.

But the hinge on which the whole story turns – the CRUX (cross) of the matter is ...the Crux (cross).

The Child born to rule the whole universe with an unbreakable grip – the Monarch we saw last week – kept the commands of God (*as no one ever had ever done before or after*). He was then sacrificed as a Lamb (a sacrifice for sin) and yet death could not hold Him.

He rose from the dead and ascended to the Throne of God where He, Jesus Christ, the God-Man reigns. The cross and resurrection are the crux of history. It’s not the invention of the wheel or electricity or the telephone. *It’s not the Wars of Alexander the Great* or WW2 or the American Civil war or the Industrial Revolution – it’s the resurrection of a dead Man.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the turning point of all human history. It’s the way God is reclaiming this fallen planet and making things right. A sinless Man lived on behalf of all His people to clothe them with His record of righteousness (He lived in my place). And He dies for what I deserved *and He rose from death just as He promised...and that changes everything!*

As a result of His crushing victory – Michael the archangel is enabled to throw down (his counterpart) the dragon, this enemy of goodness and of God.

By the cross and resurrection of this Child, born to rule, all the powers of evil have been exposed as defeated. Colossians 2.15 – “*When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross.*”

And now all creation HAS to acknowledge Him - "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 brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night." (12.10)

And what remains for us is to enter in and take our place in this Story of all stories (as we've often said, history is His-Story). He shares His crushing Victory with all those who despair of making their own way and receive, as a gift, HIS WAY AND HIS STORY.

In this wonderful song that so beautifully interrupts the chapter (the way Jesus Christ interrupted history) in the song, we learn that the death of Jesus Christ is the door through which we enter His Story and enter into Life.

"And they overcame (the dragon) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony and they did not love their own life even when faced with death."

HIS victory (which came through a bloody death) becomes OUR victory by grace through faith. Think of how this echoes John's Gospel CH 1: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the status of children of God – i.e. to as many as to those who believe in His name."* (1.12)

This is how weak/sinful people "overcome" – we participate in the triumph of the Dragon Slayer and by receiving Him, by trust, *by our testimony we become overcomers*. We become Dragon Slayers. We enter the Story that actually makes sense of the entire history of this planet.

What happens is: you begin to see yourself as a spiritually, morally failed and guilty person. You and I have, in many, many ways conspired and cooperated with the dragon – we have believed his lies and become both accused and accusers.

We have not lived as God commands. We have not loved God with our whole self (as He deserves). And YET, Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again for guilty people. He offers us relief from our crimes, selfishness, shortcomings, sins and from the accusations of conscience and accusations of the dragon (the evil one).

And when we simply trust Him, He tells us, "My record is now yours and yours is Mine – I will live for you and die for you and I have silenced the enemy forever."

And those on whom that DAWNS – whoever see it and embrace it as a gift, they come to see that this treasure is infinitely valuable. It means more than life itself, "they did not love their life even to the point of death."

See, the people who are able to face martyrdom are people who see themselves as big sinners who have received BIG FORGIVENESS. They're the ones who hold to this testimony and by

continued trust they find rest *and yet energy to LOVE God and LOVE people in a new and living way.*

In Him, we've overcome and yet... we do fight... because while the accuser is thrown down and though, "his doom is sure," he still wants to accuse us, to deceive us, to persecute and discourage us. He knows his time is limited and he's seems extra frenetic right about now. "But, Satan, your kingdom must come down – we've heard the Voice (Ps 29) of Jesus say, Satan your kingdom must come down."

And over and over again, we run to our Place, in the wilderness away from the dragon – *washed in the blood of the Lamb*. Clinging NOT to our own right-ness but holding to this testimony, "that I am a great sinner and Jesus Christ a great Savior." And in worship and in trust, we mount up on wings like eagles; the Church waits on the Lord and she is nourished. (12.14)

You can adopt this testimony today... You can run to this place today...maybe for the first time.

QUOTES:

This is a story about a man named Harold Crick and his wristwatch. Harold Crick was a man of infinite numbers, endless calculations, and remarkably few words. And his wristwatch said even less. Every weekday, for twelve years, Harold would brush each of his thirty-two teeth seventy-six times. Thirty-eight times back and forth, thirty-eight times up and down. Every weekday, for twelve years, Harold would tie his tie in a single Windsor knot instead of the double, thereby saving up to forty-three seconds. His wristwatch thought the single Windsor made his neck look fat, but said nothing.

- "Kay Eiffel" (played by Emma Thompson) in the 2006 film,
Stranger Than Fiction (Director: Marc Forster; Writer: Zach Helm)

The things He says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, "This is the truth about the Universe. This is the way you ought to go," but He says, "I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life." He says, "No man can reach absolute reality, except through Me. Try to retain your own life and you will be inevitably ruined. Give yourself away and you will be saved." He says, "If you are ashamed of Me, if, when you hear this call, you turn the other way, I also will look the other way when I come again as God without disguise. If anything whatever is keeping you from God and from Me, whatever it is, throw it away. If it is your eye, pull it out. If it is your hand, cut it off. If you put yourself first you will be last. Come to Me everyone who is carrying a heavy load, I will set that right. Your sins, all of them, are wiped out, I can do that. I am Rebirth, I am Life. Eat Me, drink Me, I am your Food. And finally, do not be afraid, I have overcome the whole Universe." That is the issue.

- C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p. 160