

Well, good morning, everyone. I like that song. I. I was not made for the grave. I love that.

I was made. I was born and raised to a new life. This is an amazing thing. How many of you guys can say amen to that? Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Okay, well, if you're visiting for the first time on this Sunday, I feel like I need to do a little bit of an explanation. First of all, welcome.

We are so glad you're here. Secondly, we're in a study of the Book of Revelation. And I know for many of you, like, oh, my word. I only show up to church when they preach about money. And then I only show up to church when they preach about Revelation.

That's not all we preach about here, I promise you. But you picked a good day. So we've been going through this series of Revelation. I'm telling you, I've gleaned a lot. I asked Allen to do this series because he loves the book of Revelation and he knows it pretty well.

He's got some definite perspectives on this that I don't have. So it's like, this is really good. I want those. Want people. I want you to share those.

So as we've been going through this, I've really just gotten a lot from it. I love. I love history books. So I love the books of Genesis and the Samuels and the Chronicles and Acts. I love sort of those history books in the Bible.

I love the Psalms. I'm a worship leader at heart. And so the Psalms, David's songs, just really have always resonated with me. From a young child, of course, the Gospels, where it talks about Jesus's earthly ministry, his life here, those. I mean, who you.

The Gospels are really where the centerpiece and the reason we're here is because of the message of the Gospels. Then I love Paul's letters. I mean, Paul gives us so many insights in the beginning of the church and what the Christians were going through and how they were managing this new thing called the church that we now are part of here over 2,000 years later, those are amazing insights into just the practical workings out. But if I'm being honest, books like, well, Daniel, with Daniel's dreams and prophecies and weird imagery and the Book of Revelation with sort of its. Its hidden meanings and its obscure imagery, it can be a little bit intimidating.

Am I the only one in the room that feels that way? Or is there other people who feel like, ooh, the book of Revelation. I'll just leave that to the experts. Anyone else I see some head nodding. I see some head nodding.

That's alright, that's all right. Because John and the angel's instructions are, can we just be honest in front of God? They sound a little crazy, don't they? It sounds just a little crazy. There's candlesticks, there's dragons, there's a woman giving birth, there's her little child, there's bowls and scrolls and I'm telling you, the four horsemen, I mean those are the stuff of crazy dreams and nightmares.

And this stuff oftentimes leaves me with at least a furrowed brow and sort of a shrug shoulder like, I don't know, maybe this.

Alan, however, has led us through this. The overarching themes of the book. And I hope as you've processed this with me, as Alan has led this, I hope that you've seen Jesus instructing his church, leading his church, protecting his church through, through all of it. He has done a great job, but he can't be here today. So he said, I'm going to be gone that week.

Which, which, which theme in Revelation do you want? And like, I don't know, honestly, it's all the same difference to me. He goes, okay, I'll leave you, I'll leave you. I'll tell you what you're going to preach on.

So I saw, well, you were here two weeks ago when he said, oh, you're preaching on the beast, the Antichrist, the mark of the beast. I'm thinking, are you kidding me? This is what you left me with? I want to preach about heaven. Let's talk about heaven.

I want to talk about the tree with the fruit and the, and the beautiful river flowing through the city and the throne of God. Let me preach about that. No, no, no, you got the beast, the Antichrist, the mark of the beast. I go, okay, okay. The one topic I always dreaded when the preacher would get up to preach on Sunday night.

Oh, but we're going to do it. We're going to dig right in. Are you ready? So here's what I want you to do. We're going to.

We're going to. We're going to. We're going to. We can't go deep today. We're going to skim some stuff.

But I'm going to, I really want you to do this. If you've got your, I want you to turn to Revelation chapter 12 or chapter 13. We're going to be tagging those two a lot through this. If you got your Bibles, turn to Revelation 12 or 13. Revelation is the Very back book, last book in your Bible, 12 or 13.

If you've got your phone app, if you've got your Bible app, all that stuff, open it up. Because I really. It's important today that you are reading what I'm talking about, because I'm going to, I'm going to give some broad pictures, but if you are intrigued, I'm going to give

you permission to just ignore me for whatever time you want to ignore me, to dig a little deeper into the actual word of God. So I'm going to pray and then we're going to dig right in. Heavenly Father, today, as we open your book, open your word to us, open this, this picture that you give us about, about both the life that is present and the life that is to come, and even the life that's come before us, the reality that exists apart from what we can see with our eyes.

We pray that you would instruct us from it and don't instruct us. I mean, I'm not telling you how to instruct us, Lord, but, but, but the, the point of instruction, we know, is to give encouragement and strength and wisdom, insight, and to cause us to persevere and be faithful. And so these are the things that I pray that we glean from your word that this morning and I pray this in Jesus name, Amen. Okay, if you got your bibles, open chapter 12 or chapter 13, either one, you're close enough. We'll be bouncing back and forth again.

When I was a kid, when the preacher said, we're going to be in the book of Revelation, it was like, oh, dear Lord, can I go to any other church tonight? Why am I here? It was always the perfect fodder for getting people the altar. Just scary stuff. Preachers love scary stuff.

I don't. So, so we're, we're going to dig through this. But just mentioning the beast, just mentioning the mark was terrifying as a young kid. And there was always this interest in like, like, like defining who this was. So when I was a kid, you know, who was the beast?

And the preacher would spend a lot of time describing this beast and making some, some suggestions or some ideas or, you know, some proposals that, you know, the beast was Russia. I don't know any Catholics in the room. I'm going to apologize to you right now, but for a lot of my growing up years, the Pope was the Antichrist. Did anyone else grow up in a church where the Pope was probably the Antichrist? Okay, the rest of you are lying, but I don't believe the Pope is the Antichrist.

But listen, Ronald Reagan was also proposed as the. Remember Ronald Reagan? Yeah, Ronald. R o n a l d 6 Wilson w I l s o n 6 Reagan. R e a g e n 66 6.

Oh, Ronald Reagan is the Antichrist. Okay, the rest of you are going. What in the world are they talking about this morning? Well, this all comes from the book of Revelation, chapter 13. But 13 follows on chapter 12 in Revelation, which is just as wild and crazy.

But I'm going to give you a little synopsis right here. So if you got 12 open, you can sort of follow along, skim it. So chapter 12 talks about this pregnant woman who's about ready. She is ready to pop.

Ready to pop.

Now this would be exciting except for the fact that there's this weird mutant dragon with like multiple heads and multiple horns and multiple crowns. And that dragon is just pounced and ready to devour that baby as soon as she has it. Now what happens is heaven sees this. Heaven got an investment in this woman and her baby. And so heaven is ready.

And as soon as she has the baby, heaven rushes in and rescues the baby out. Well, this infuriates the dragon. The host of heaven and the dragon have this epic, epic battle, all out war. The dragon is cast down to the earth, defeated and hurled to the earth. And you would think, okay, the dragon goes off, licks its wounds and figures out something else to do with his life.

But no. Revelation, chapter 12, verse 17 says this. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring. Those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus, that's key. He can't have the baby, he can't have the woman, but he goes after his followers.

Now if you read on, read in Revelation 12, verse 11, the followers are protected by two things says this. They triumphed over him, that dragon, by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony. Those two things, the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. Now get this. This isn't going to be important.

They did not love their life so much as to shrink from death. We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. Just staying committed to following Jesus no matter what. So that's where chapter 12 leaves us, with the woman escaping and the dragon pursuing the followers of her son. So chapter 13 now opens.

We're still with the dragon. We know by now it's Satan, so no surprise there. Aha. That's a spoiler alert. But the dragon is Satan.

So Satan is standing on the side of the seashore and he's looking out across the water and he calls from the water what they call a beast. So this beast is, is sort of. Again, it's got multiple heads, it's got multiple crowns, it's got multiple horns. In many ways, it is a. It's a clone or a duplicate or at least a deputy of the dragon, which is Satan.

Now this particular beast, interestingly enough, John says, had some sort of wound where it died and then seemingly came back to life. People were amazed. It seemed miraculous. In fact, it was almost. It's replicating or duplicating or mimicking Jesus.

But in fact, this beast is virulently opposed to everything about Jesus and everything about his followers. He is anti Christ. That's

where we get that term, antichrist. Everything. Verse 5 and 7 says everything this beast speaks is blasphemy, slanders against God.

But he has this global authority and he uses that authority to oppress and repress and go after Christians. Verse 8 says this. All inhabitants of the earth end up worshiping this beast. All except all those whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book alive. In other words, Christians who are committed to following Jesus don't.

The lamb who was slain from the creation of the world, those who follow the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world are not caught up in this Antichrist schemes. But verse 10 and 11, if you're following along, Christians will be taken captive and even killed.

So what does John, well, what does Jesus tell John is the appropriate response to all of this? Take up arms, fight, do what you can to push back against the devil. Satan and his schemes. No. Revelation 13:10.

And if you've got a Bible with something you can actually mark on, this is a good verse to underline. If you, if you're using a Bible app, this is a good, good verse to highlight. Revelation 13:10 says this. This calls this reality. This calls for what?

Patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people. Okay. Faithful endurance and faithfulness. Patient endurance and faithfulness. So let's leave that there because we think we're done with the beast.

We' there's another one coming. This one looks like a lamb. Now what have we just been talking about? The lamb that was slain. Again, another one that sort of mimics Jesus in some respects.

But make no mistake, this is the dragon's beast because it forces people to worship the first beast and it too performs miracles and fools everyone into worshiping. It. And if they refuse, they are killed. And now we get to the part where, as a kid, oh, my word. We spent many hours talking about this right here.

Revelation 13:16. I think we've got it on the screen. You can read along if you want to look up. So this second beast forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands and 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. Verse 18.

This calls for wisdom. Remember what was called for before. Patient endurance and faithfulness. Well, now, John says this calls for wisdom. That the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man.

That number is 666. Now, what are we to do with this? I'm going to call on those who have never been to this church before. You just tell me what you think. Are you thinking, oh, my word, I should have gone to First Baptist?

You probably should have. You probably should have. You probably should have, but you didn't. You're here. So what are we to do with this?

Well, Alan has been demonstrating a lot of what Revelation is describing can be placed in a historical context. So the early believers who first read this, this, this Apocalypso, or this letter, this, this sign of the times letter that would have gone around to all the churches, those first Christians, those early believers, would have understood because they were living in this place of intense persecutions. The Christians who received John's letter would probably have been able to tell you the name of the person they thought was the Antichrist. They would have said the Roman emperor Nero. It's obvious Nero is persecuting the church.

He's, he's going after Christians, he is. He's burning places of worship. He is, he's casting all kinds of political blame on these Christians. They're the ones who are oppressed. Well, a few years later, Nero's gone and there's another round of persecution.

So those, those Christians would have said, oh, it's, it's got to be Emperor Domitian. After all, Domitian is the one who exiled John to the Isle of Patmos where he actually wrote this letter. Some people say that this, this emperor Domitian actually tried to boil John alive and did not succeed. And when he didn't succeed, he had him. He had him exiled here.

I, I don't know for sure, but that's an interesting little tidbit. So they said, oh, Emperor Domitian is absolutely Antichrist. Domitian hated Christians because they refused to say Caesar is Lord. They refused to worship him. But there were others that Christians thought could be the beast because after.

After that guy, another emperor, Decius, he hunted Christians like he actually just set them. He would chase them down and hunt them and force them to make sacrifices to him. And then there was Diocletian, and people say that he was probably the worst of all. He was like all them combined. And so, oh, my word.

We've got several historical figures who we could say were Antichrist, were beasts. But then in Saudi Arabia, when a prophet named Muhammad came along and began killing Christians, they thought he was the Antichrist or the beast. There was a. There was a Islamic leader named Saladin that many thought was the beast. Well, when the Protestant Reformers began back in Germany, they were confident, and this is

where this comes from.

They were confident that not only was the Pope the Antichrist, but the whole papacy system was the beast. Look up some Martin Luther stuff. There are still Christian denominations that, as part of their creed, they. They claim the. The Catholic Church system to be the Antichrist.

That is not my position. And again, like I said when I was a teen, oh, Mr. Reagan, bless his heart, we thought he was the Antichrist. Oh, he thought he could be. I say all this to.

Just to. To call, to help us push pause, push pause on the temptation to try to sort out who the Antichrist is. Because as we'll read later, John says there have been many, and there will be many Antichrists. So the beast isn't something just somewhere in the future. The Antichrist, the beast, is always present.

Here's the point that I think is very interesting. Any system, any person, but any system, political, economic, any. Anything that stands in opposition to Jesus and his church and his people is Antichrist. Any system that demands our attention, demands our loyalty, demands our obedience when it comes to being opposed to Jesus is anti Christ. Maybe it's a person.

There's my furrowed brow and my uplifted shoulders. Maybe it's a person. But maybe. Maybe it's this system where we identify our value and our place. We define ourselves by what we own.

The next thing, the bigger house, the next level, where the more we get, the better we feel about ourselves, the more we get a sense that we are, we are something and someone. Maybe it's that we call that consumerism, but that seems like a tepid word compared to the damage it can do to our lives when we focus on that over and above Jesus, maybe, maybe it's patriotic pride. I don't care which country you come from. When the loyalty to your own home nation exceeds that of your loyalty to the eternal kingdom of God, then those two things become in opposition. And as, as believers who are both loyal to Jesus and we love our country, this is a point of tension that we naturally wrestle with at times, don't we?

We have to figure out who will we serve, Will we serve God, or will we serve the country that we love and call home? Hopefully those never become insurmountable divisions, but they just might. Maybe, and I'm telling you, this is, this is where it strikes home for me. Maybe it's technology, because I don't know about you, but I spent a lot of time scrolling on technology. And what was sold to us was that this technology was going to connect us to everyone.

We were going to be so connected around the world, we were going to be able to connect and be best friends with people in places we would

never be. What has ended up happening? And if you will amen me on this, I know you get it. If you disagree with me, talk to me later. But here's what happens with technology.

More and more, we find people living in isolation, feeling loneliness, feeling disconnected from the world around them. I love livestream. If you're watching us on livestream, I love livestream. But livestream does not substitute for the encouragement you get when things are going good and the encouragement you get when things are going bad that you receive from being present with other believers, connecting and engaging in relationship with them. And with God, technology can become an antichrist.

Amen. Okay, I won't preach on that any longer. Here's what Paul warns us. He says in Romans 12:12, number 2, and this is 12, verse 2. This is from the new living translation.

Paul tells the Romans this. Be careful, he says, don't copy the behaviors and the customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Don't let other things change the way you think. Let God change the way you think. And then as you learn God's way of thinking, you will be able to discern and know God's will for you.

His good and pleasing and perfect will. There are a lot of Antichrist. There are a lot of beasts out there wanting to pull us away from Jesus, wanting to demand our loyalty. This is what I referenced earlier. First John, chapter two.

He writes this. Dear children, this is the last hour. Now, any time between Jesus exit from this world. And Jesus eventual return from this world is considered the last days. Dear children says, this is the last hour.

These are the last days. And if you've heard, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now, many, many Antichrists have come. We live in the last hour. That's what John says. This is how we know, because we see so many opposed and trying to pull us away from loyalty to Jesus, trying to figure out who or what those Antichrists are is interesting.

And we spent some time talking about what that may be in your life. But it still may miss the point, because the point is this. And it goes back to what we talked about in Revelation 13, verses 10, and then Revelation 13, verse 18. 1. Here's the point.

All of this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people. Don't give up and keep showing up. That's what Paul's saying. Don't give up and keep showing up. This is what John saying, not Paul.

And apply the mind of Christ to all of it. This calls for wisdom, patient endurance, faithfulness. This calls for wisdom. All of this combines to what we would say is this holistic approach to worship. It's not just showing up and singing songs and giving some money that is worship, but the entirety of our lives where we are showing up for what God, where God wants us to be.

We are not giving up. We're not falling away. We're not getting discouraged. We're not letting ourselves slip out the back door. And when no one's noticing, we don't let that happen to ourselves.

We keep. We keep on top of it and we think like Jesus. We keep our minds in the right place. All of this is worship and worship. This is the point.

Worship is the mark of God. Worship is the mark of the true and faithful believer. And. And this is important. When God rescued the children of Israel from slavery, the Jews from slavery in Egypt, we got to go way back to the Old Testament.

God used Moses to take them out. And then God took them into this place where he instructed them. And one of the instructions he gave them was found in Deuteronomy, chapter 6:4 through 8. I'm going to read the whole thing. It's long, but it's good.

And here's what Moses said to the people that God told him to say, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words that I command you Today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. You shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise.

Do you get it? Says man, this should be all consuming for you. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. Do you see something there? Do you see something there?

The mark of the beast is a mimic of the mark of God on us. We also have the mark of God right here and right here. God wasn't asking them, however, to tattoo anything on their hand or their or their face. He was asking them to let him define who they are and let His Word define how they live. In Revelation chapter 6, you may remember this, Jesus tells the church of Philadelphia that He would put a mark on them, the mark of God, because they were faithful.

They faithfully persevered through persecution, through tribulation. In Revelation chapter six, though, there's an announcement that God will then receive those who are sealed on their foreheads as servants

of God. And in all of these places, the seal of God is not a visible mark. It's not something implanted under the skin. The seal of God is not a mark.

It is a spiritual distinction. And what is that distinction? Well, I believe that distinction is patience, faithfulness and wisdom. These things that mark us, that John calls us to then that mark us as believers. These things that become worship that are worship in our lives.

This is the Word. Remember what Revelation says. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. This is the word that allows us to overcome. Right there.

Patience is not just about waiting, about waiting with trust. Waiting with trust in God through hardships, with the confidence that he is in control. And this wisdom, this discernment, is just understanding what pleases God and moving in that direction. Prioritize worship. Make time to make time together with God a priority in your life.

Surround yourself with a community of believers who can support you in good times and bad. And when troubles come, what do we do? We don't panic. We don't freak out. We just worship.

We stay faithful. We keep going. And we apply the mind of Christ to all this stuff. We pray. We ask grace for God for grace to endure and strength to trust in his timing.

And then we dive into His Word. We stay connected to His Word and we seek his wisdom in all that we do, no matter what comes our way. Does that make sense? Does that make sense? So here's the Deal.

The systems and the cultures of this world will always be beast. They will always be Antichrist. They'll always be trying to separate you from what you know to be true in Christ. Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no. Don't give them an inch.

Don't give it an inch. I want everything. I want your whole heart. I want your mind. I want your strength.

And so this week, what are we going to do to give all that to him? How are we going to worship? Even if we're not sitting in a pew on Sunday morning, how are we going to worship this week? How are we going to practice patience? How are we going to seek wisdom?

Because here's the deal. If we miss this, then we're going to miss out on the peace and joy that Jesus wants for us, even as we endure hard times. I'm going to pray. We're going to share communion together. Then we're going to continue on with the service.

Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for the lessons in Revelation that I'm learning. There is still so much that is obscure to me. There's numbers and signs that I don't know, that I really understand. But what I do understand, I am. I'm obligated to.

And so when. When you tell John that we should. We should patiently endure, that we should remain faithful, that we should apply the mind of Christ man. We want to do that in the midst of our. In the midst of our trial, in the midst of just the beautiful, delightful things of life.

We want. We want you to be the center point of our lives and our decisions. So we. Again, we just pray the Holy Spirit would continue to fill us and guide us as we navigate through these challenges, as we share now in this time of communion. This is really the place where we.

We celebrate the victory that you have won. We do not need to fear the enemy. We overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb that we're going to celebrate and remember now and by the word of our testimony. And this. This time, together with the bread and the cup, is a time where we recommit to this testimony that you have called us to.

We recommit to faithful endurance. We recommit to trusting patience. We recommit to the mind of Christ and the wisdom of Jesus in our lives. So as we take the bread, we take the cup. We remind ourselves that we belong to you.

We have your mark. We are marked by God. And we thank you for that. In Jesus name, amen.

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