



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text Revelation 13:11-18

“The Beast From the Earth”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Chapter 13 is an interesting passage about the beast and the false prophet, and it's the false prophet that we look at this week, and this is, I think, particularly interesting. People would be very curious about this portion of the chapter and portion of the book, and particularly verse 18. But we begin with verse 11:

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.

And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead,

and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this time this morning we have to come together and worship you, sing hymns of praise, and read the Scriptures, as we’ve done, and then consider the meaning of what we’re read. Some of it is very unusual. It causes us to puzzle over its meaning, and so we look to you to give us enlightenment. Illuminate the text for us through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Help us to understand the thing sthat we’ve read, and help us to know how this applies to us. These are events that will come to pass in the future; maybe the near future, maybe the distant future, we don’t know. But there are principles here that apply to the present. Help us to see those, and help us to understand how we are to live in light of them. We pray your blessing upon us as we study and we think together.

And as we do that, we pray that our hearts would be filled with gratitude to you for what you’ve delivered us from – from the deceptions, the delusions of this life. You have given us sound minds. You’ve given us understanding, and we have access to all of the wisdom that is yours. We pray that we would be men and women who seek that, and live lives of wisdom.

So may our time together be to that end – to give us a desire for that, and to cause us to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord, and to live lives that are reflective of that grace, and are representative of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we pray not only for our spiritual needs; we pray for the material needs we have as well, and those material needs often affect our spiritual condition.

We think of those who are sick. We pray for them. We have a long list of names. We pray that you would bless and give encouragement, and that you would give healing where that be your will. We know that’s not always your will, to heal; that the afflictions of life have their purpose, and sometimes they don’t end the way we pray and we hope.

But we can have this assurance, and that is that your will is perfect. It’s better than our requests, and so I pray that you would bless those who are struggling with affliction – that you would give them that assurance, and give them that confidence, and help them to rest in your perfect will. But we pray that you would give healing where it’s needed, and we pray that you’d certainly give encouragement.

We commend all of these to you, and others. So many, I’m sure, Father, whose names aren’t listed, who have great needs that we’re not aware of, and we pray for them; needs of all kinds – physical needs, but needs that regard struggles in the home or at work. Bless and give encouragement, and help us all, regardless of our circumstance in life, to continually look to you; to keep the eyes of our hearts focused on Jesus Christ.

We give you thanks for him, for his death for us, and we pray that things we study this morning would ultimately exalt him. We commit that to you. Pray that you bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] Martin Luther had a lot to say about the devil – probably more than any of the other reformers. One of his most memorable statements is found in his *Table Talk*. He told his students, “Where God builds a church, there the devil would also build a chapel. Thus is the devil ever God’s ape.” He’s God’s ape because he’s always imitating God. He imitates God because he wants to be God, and get all of the worship that is due God.

Now, that desire is revealed throughout the Scriptures. It’s revealed for example in the five “I wills” of Isaiah 14, which concludes with the statement, “I will make myself like the Most High.” He’s always trying to do that. Paul tells us that he disguises himself as an angel of light. But his greatest attempt to imitate God will happen in the future, when he deceives the world and he makes war on the saints through two men who are called “beasts.”

With them, Satan will form a trinity. It won’t be a holy trinity, but what has been called the unholy trinity, or the infernal trinity. And through these two, he will get the world’s worship. That’s the goal of all that he does – it’s to steal glory for himself. It’s the desire of men as well. We see that from the beginning. We see that with Satan’s attempt and his success in enticing Adam to sin, and giving him the promise that he will be like God.

That appealed very much to Eve and to Adam, and because of that, they fell. And that’s what drives this first beast that we looked at last week: the power over men that he will gain, and the worship of the world. He desires that, and just as the devil will have that, he too will have it. Verse 3 and 4 we read that “the whole earth will be amazed and follow after the beast. It will worship the dragon and worship the beast.”

So Satan will get his worship through this man, his representative, the antichrist, who will be Satan’s counterfeit Christ. What will so amaze the world is that he will recover, this first beast, from a fatal wound. Verse 3 describes him as slain and healed, probably through a clever deception. We considered that last week, how this might occur, and I think it’s probably through some trick that will be carried out.

But this is the description, we mentioned last week, that’s also given of Christ in chapter 5, where he is called “the Lamb standing as if slain.” It’s the same word that’s used of the beast. He will appear to have power over death itself, leading the whole world to wonder, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” He will be Satan’s masterpiece, in which he copies the cross and the resurrection to give the world his version of a savior.

But he won’t be alone. He won’t carry out this ruse by himself. He will have a partner in crime, a third member of the unholy trinity, whom John describes in verse 11, where he says, “I saw another beast.” He is another of the same kind, of the same spiritual nature and purpose, which is to serve the dragon and destroy the saints. But his origin and his description are different from the first beast.

John sees this second beast coming out of the earth. The first beast, you remember, came out of the sea, representing the nations, the Gentiles, which indicates that the first beast will be a Gentile. So this second beast coming out of the earth, or the land, may represent Israel, and so many feel that whereas the first beast is a Gentile, this second beast will be a Jew. Now, that’s possible. It’s not certain.

It may be that he’s described as coming out of the earth to signify his spiritual origin; that he is earthly and not heavenly. But this is the description that is given to him: he comes out of the earth. He certainly is earthly, and not heavenly. His appearance is also described as being “like a lamb with two horns.” So he’s not terrifying in his appearance, as the first beast is. His appearance, really, is rather reassuring, rather disarming.

He has the appearance of a gentle lamb, but it’s a ruse. It’s a deception, because when he speaks, John says he speaks, or he spoke, as a dragon, and that’s his true nature.

That’s the source of his strength. It is an evil source. He appears to have the character of Christ, being in the appearance of a lamb, but he has the nature of Satan, speaking as a dragon. He’s a deceiver.

His power is in his mouth. His power is in his speech, just as it was with the serpent in Eden. He was crafty. His speech was deceitful. He appeared as a friend to Eve, and in that way, he beguiled her. He took her into his confidence, and the second beast will be like that. He will appear as a lamb, but he will speak as a serpent or dragon. And he will speak for, on behalf of, the first beast. He will be his witness.

In fact, the two horns, it’s been suggested by some, may indicate that he is a counterpart to the two witnesses of chapter 11. Later, in chapters 16 and 19 and 20, he is called “the false prophet.” He is essentially a religious figure, a prophet and a priest, while the first beast, the antichrist, is essentially a political figure, a king, a ruler. The power of the first beast is that of brute force.

The power of the second beast is that of deception, and words, and wonders. If the first beast is a parody of Christ, then the second beast is a parody of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. That’s how the Lord himself describes the Spirit’s ministry in John chapter 16. In fact, in John 14 and John 16, he gives this great promise to the disciples.

He’s told them that he’s leaving, but he will not leave them alone. He’s going to send a helper, and the ministry of the helper is basically described there as that of teaching. He’ll lead them into all truth, and he will glorify Christ. John 16:14 – that’s his essential ministry, is to teach us about Jesus Christ, and to glorify Christ. We know the Spirit is in our midst, we know that he’s in a ministry, if that ministry exalts Jesus Christ, and gives clarity to who he is, and magnifies him.

Well, this false prophet is a parody of that, and he magnifies and glorifies the first beast. He directs attention and worship to the antichrist. That’s how his function is described in verse 12. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

Someone, I think it was F.F. Bruce, called the false prophet “the antichrist’s minister of propaganda,” and every dictator needs one of those – a Joseph Goebbels, a minister of propaganda to present in a good light the person that they represent.

That’s the function of the second beast. That’s what he will do for the antichrist. He’s a promoter, and he will promote the beast. He will do it in various ways.

He’ll do it through lying words, and wonders; through miracles; through financial pressure, and through the threat of death. It’s similar to what John and the early church experienced from the Roman empire. It had an imperial priesthood, an imperial cult, a state religion, and that state religion, because it was a state religion, used the sword to enforce worship of the emperor.

We considered that to a great extent in our study of the seven churches, early in this study of the book of Revelation. But because of that, the preterists, those who interpret this book of Revelation as having occurred in the past – that’s what preterist means, it means past, and there is a large group of interpreters of the book of Revelation that believe that the whole book was fulfilled in the first century.

And so they interpret this, what we’re studying here in this chapter, as fulfilled in the first century; interpret it as Rome’s state religion, and interpret the beast, the first beast, as Caesar, and enforced worship of him. But as George Ladd, in his commentary, pointed out, the preterist interpreters admit that it is impossible to find any ancient historical figure who is a counterpart of the second beast.

Well, they can find an historical counterpart of the first beast in any of the Caesars; Domitian, or Nero before him. But this second beast has no precedent in history. They can’t find one. So I think Rome certainly may give us the background and the color for all of this, but not the fulfillment. This is still future, and these two men, these two beasts, who will work in concert with the dragon – they are personalities who are yet to come.

Men who have yet to come in history; they are future people. Well, this, then, is the unholy trinity. The false prophet glorifies the antichrist, the antichrist rules the world, and the devil empowers them both in order to get the worship that he craves. Now, in the next verses, we’re given the methods the false prophet will use to capture the loyalty and the worship of the world for the antichrist.

In verse 13, John writes that he will perform great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. He will appear to be a second Elijah, who called down fire from heaven in the sight of everyone on Mount Carmel. He will duplicate the miracles of the first of those two witnesses that

we studied a few weeks back in chapter 11, and do that just as the magicians of Egypt, Jannes and Jambres, duplicated Moses and Aaron’s miracles.

They didn’t duplicated all of them, but as you go back into the book of Exodus you see that the things that Aaron and Moses were able to do, the magicians of Egypt were able to do. They had strange powers. They could only do it to an extent, and then the miracles of Aaron and Moses surpassed them. But this shouldn’t surprise us, that we read these things about this man to come, or about the magicians of Egypt, for that matter.

That men will come on the scene who are able to do these amazing things shouldn’t surprise us. That’s what false prophets do. In fact, you look back to the book of Deuteronomy 13:1, and that chapter, really, which alerts the nation that false prophets will arise within the nation, among the people of God, to lead them astray. And Moses says that the prophets or dreamers will come, and they will do signs and wonders.

They’ll do spectacular things, but the people will know that they are false, not by the miracles that they do – because they’ll do spectacular things. They’ll know that they are false because of their teaching, because of their doctrine. They will try to lure Israel into the worship of a false god. And that’s what this false prophet will do. He’ll do it with deception. He’ll do it with sleight of hand.

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 that the man of sin would come with all power and signs and false wonders, or lying wonders. They’re counterfeits. They’re tricks. But they’re very effective tricks. John writes in verse 14 that he deceives those who dwell on the earth. Now, those who dwell on the earth is a frequent idiom expression in the New Testament for the unregenerate.

So this is unbelievers that will be deceived; unbelievers who don’t have the teaching – they’re not grounded in the Word of God. They don’t have the Spirit of God within them to enlighten them to these things, to alert them, to convict them that what they’re seeing is not right. That what they’re seeing is false, and it’s a lying wonder. They don’t have that.

They’re not equipped with the mind of God. They’re not equipped with a teacher. They’re not equipped with sound doctrine. And so they’re led astray. They’re easily deceived; taken in by all of this. One of his lying wonders will be to

make a statue speak. To breathe life into it in some way, and it’s a statue of the antichrist that will be set up.

Probably much like a bust of Caesar was set up in the temples that were dedicated to him, in which people were required to enter and worship with a pinch of incense, and show their loyalty to the emperor. It’ll be something like that. This will be the abomination of desolation that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:15 that will happen in the holy place.

That’s what Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, when he says that he will take his seat in the temple. And what that indicates to us, while Paul doesn’t develop it a great deal, but we must draw the inference from that, that there will be a temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. And in that temple, at some point during the tribulation period, at some point, the statue of the antichrist will be made and placed there for worship.

It will be an unusual image. In verse 15, John says that the false prophet will be able to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak. Now, if that seems bizarre – and it is, it’s bizarre – it’s not unheard of. Most commentators point out that this kind of thing was not uncommon in the courts of the Caesars.

There were magicians in those days who were able to make statues speak in various ways, often through ventriloquism, but they’re very effective in doing that, and they were able to fool a lot of people. We’re all familiar with these kinds of things from our own experience. We’re all familiar with magicians and the illusionists, people who know how to carry out these kinds of stunts, and do things that defy our imagination.

We don’t know how they do them. We’re amazed at what we see them do and can’t figure it out. When I was a boy growing up in Kansas City, my father once took me downtown to see Blackstone the magician, and I watched him do amazing things. I saw him pull rabbits out of his hat, and even saw a woman in two, and I was amazed. I didn’t know how he did it. It all looked very real to me.

Now, some people know how to do that kind of thing – to produce illusions, the appearance of reality – and the false prophet will be effective in doing that very thing. These are lying wonders; these are tricks that he does. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus speaks of this, and he says that the signs and wonders of the false Christ will be so great that, if possible, they would mislead even the elect.

If possible – but it’s not possible to do that, and there is an important truth in this, and that is that those who serve God will not be taken in by falsehood, and there’s lots of that in the world today; lots of falsehood in the world today. John wrote in 1 John 2:18, “You heard that antichrist is coming. Even now many antichrists have appeared.” He’s saying, “You know about this beast.

“You know about this man who Paul has spoken of, who will come with all these powers and lying wonders. He’s coming, but know this – already people like him are in the world.” There are antichrists all around us. Don’t think that because these things of Revelation 13 are future that they don’t apply to us in the present; that this is just an interesting text, a puzzling passage that we wonder about, and that’s interesting to consider, but that’s off in the future.

No, the principles that are presented here by John are principles that are very real for us today. We live under the same influences that those people in that day will live under. They’re not as intense today as they will be then, but they are just as real. So what we see from this is we must guard ourselves from the very things that will be present in that day. We must guard our hearts at all times.

Antichrists and false prophets are out there, and they’re crafty. They’re no match for us, in and of ourselves, but they are no match for the one who’s in us, because greater is he who is in us than is in the world. They’re no match for the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. So we are to walk by the Spirit, and we’re to study the Word, and I think those two go together.

The Spirit of God leads the children of God. If you’re a child of God, you are being led, presently, by the Spirit of God, and you’re to be sensitive to his leading, sensitive to his direction. It is an internal direction, but we know it clearly through the Word of God. He leads us according to Scripture, so we must ground ourselves in the Word of God.

We must have our minds on the Word of God, and be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. And Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 5 that if we’re led by the Spirit of God, we won’t do the desires of the flesh, and we won’t be taken in by these kinds of things. So we’ll not be deceived by those antichrists in the world. And God’s people in the future won’t be deceived as well.

They will stand firm, and as a result of standing firm, many of them will lose their lives, because John writes that this prophet will cause as many as do not worship

the image of the beast to be killed. Now, that will be his second means of forcing worship from the world. That’s really what we have described here in these verses are the three means that this second beast, the false prophet, will use to get worship for the beast and the dragon.

And this second one is that of the threat of death. That’s a very strong, powerful means of getting worship from people. It’s a powerful threat. At least Satan thinks it is, and he’s the one generating this, inspiring this. But you’ll remember in Job 2:4, he appears before God, with the sons of God, with the other angels, and challenges God about Job, and says, “He’ll deny you. With enough pressure, he’ll deny you.

“In fact, if you threaten his life, he will deny you. Skin for skin,” he says, “yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.” There’s nothing more dear to a man than his wife. You threaten that, he’ll do anything to obtain it, to keep it. I think generally that’s true, but not for those who walk with the Lord. Not for those who walk by the Spirit.

Antipas of Pergamum, back in chapter 2, proved Satan wrong. He remained faithful, a faithful witness unto death. He was a martyr for Christ, and many have been that down through the centuries, and multitudes will be martyrs for our Lord. They will lay down their lives for him in the end times. But that’s a very effective, powerful means of coercing people into following the beast, just as it was in the first century, to get people to worship the emperor.

But there’s a third method. It’s described in verses 16 and 17, and this is a method that’s perhaps the most effective of all. This is a method that threatens not simply the life – maybe indirectly the life – of those that are challenged by it, but it’s the threat of financial ruin.

Verses 16 and 17: “And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.” Well, the number that we see in the next verse is 666.

Now, that is a cruel and persuasive tool of coercion – the threat of going hungry, the threat of not being able to feed one’s family. It’s one thing to face the executioner alone. That’s hard enough. But to be forced to watch one’s children

suffer and starve, that’s an even greater test. To avoid that, people have to have a mark, or a sign of loyalty.

There’s been a lot of speculation about the mark of the beast – what is it? Is it a tattoo? Is it a silicon chip that’s placed under the skin? There’s all kinds of theories about it. Is this something literal, or is it figurative? A lot of what John describes in the chapter is a parody; it’s a take-off on someone or something. The dragon, beast, and false prophet are a parody of the trinity.

And the mark of the beast will be a parody of the phylacteries that the Jews wore; the leather boxes that contain the Scripture in them, Deuteronomy 6, and they bind these little boxes to their forehead and to their hand. And that’s what this is a parody of. This is a sign that draws upon that because that phylactery, the phylacteries that the Jews wear, are a sign of dedication to the Lord.

Dedication of their mind and their deeds, their thoughts and their actions; it’s bound to the forehead, representing the Word of God and the Lord God governs their minds, their thinking. And the Word of God on the arm is a sign showing that the things they do with their hand is dedicated to him; that their lives are dedicated to God. That all that they do in thought and deed is of the Lord, for the Lord.

And the mark of the beast is on those two areas, the head and the hand, to indicate complete dedication to the antichrist. It’s the opposite of or the countermark to the seal of God placed on the forehead of the 144,000 back in chapter 7 that protects them from the wrath of God. So again, this is Satan’s imitation, and this mark will protect the worshippers of the beast from the dragon’s wrath.

Those who have it will not be punished by the dragon. Now, the seal on the foreheads of the faithful is not a visible mark. It’s symbolic of God’s protection – perhaps even a reference to the Holy Spirit and his protective ministry. We know from Ephesians 1:13 that we’re sealed with the Holy Spirit, and that may be what is being referred to by that seal placed on the 144,000 back in chapter 7.

It’s not a literal seal. And since this is a book of symbols, the seal is not visible, and it seems fair – in my mind at least – to think that this mark that’s described here will not be a visible mark. It is a symbol of the beast’s protection of his worshippers. It’s a way of saying that those who are loyal to him, those who devote themselves to the beast, will be protected by the beast from the wrath of the dragon.

They won’t be protected from the wrath of God, but they won’t meet these challenges that the false prophet will bring; they won’t suffer the dangers that the false prophet will threaten. That’s a method of coercion. That will happen in the future, when the beast establishes his totalitarian rule over the earth so extensively that he controls governments, and the economies of the world, and the religions of the world.

Men will be compelled to worship him, and they will do it because largely, Satan is right – all that a man has, he’ll give for his life. So they’ll be devoted to him, they’ll express their dedication to him. As John writes in verse 18, “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man” – or we could translate “it is the number of man”–“and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.”

One commentator wrote, “No verse in Revelation has received more attention than this one, and that’s probably true. People are fascinated by this number. What do these three numbers mean? So how do we figure their meaning; how do we interpret this, because we’re told that those who understand the meaning of this number have wisdom. This is where wisdom’s found, knowing that number.

Well, many feel that we interpret the meaning of the number by a system called gematria, which calculates the numerical value of letters, or calculates the meaning of numbers. Now, neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews had numbers as we have them. They didn’t have Arabic numerals. Instead, they used letters of their alphabet for numbers. We’re familiar with Roman numerals; those are letters.

X is 10, L is 50 – we’re familiar with all of that. That was the same with the Greeks and the Hebrews. They would use the letters of their alphabet for numbers, so it would be something like A equals 1, B equals 2, C equals 3, and so on. So letters had numerical meaning, and the letters in names added up to certain numbers, and people would sometimes hide a name in its numerical equivalent.

To know what name was hidden in those numbers, you’d have to figure them out. For example, there was an inscription that was found on a wall in Pompeii, which reads, “I love her whose number is 545.” Literally, it is “I love her whose number is” and then the Greek letters phi, mu, epsilon. Well, those letter numbers add up to 545, so if a person could figure out whose name added up to those numbers, then he might identify the girl.

That’s what interpreters try to do with 666. They come up with a variety of interpretations, but they try to figure out what combination of letters adds up to this number. I mean what name will be the equivalent of 666? And the solution that many have found is Nero when combined with Caesar. Nero Caesar – they found that that roughly comes to 666. The problem is it doesn’t come to it precisely.

It doesn’t add up correctly with Greek letters, so they get the right number by converting them into the Hebrew letters, and dropping one letter, which is not really kosher, but that’s how they do it. The fact is, as George Ladd points out in his commentary, almost anything can be done with this method of gematria, and these numbers.

And he shows how this number 666 can be shown to mean a number of names, and one of them is Hitler. You can make anything out of it you want, really. I think a better solution is not to find it there. A better solution is to see the number six in contrast to the number seven, which is very prominent in the book of Revelation and signifies completion or perfection. That’s what seven signifies.

Six, though, falls just short of that, and three sixes signify the best that man can do, which still falls short of seven. So it falls short of being adequate. Now, what this number indicates is that man always fails of perfection, and that would be the meaning of the explanation. “For the number is that of a man,” or better, “The number is that of man.” And the word for “man” in Greek is *anthropos*.

We’re familiar with that – anthropology. It’s a generic word for man – man or woman, mankind. Man, generally, falls short of perfection. In other words, John is saying 666 is a human number. Men worship the beast. They show their loyalty to the beast. But he’s just a man, and he will perish as a man, and wisdom comes in recognizing that – that our security is not in some man, no matter how powerful he is.

Our security is in being faithful to God. Well, that’s one solution. I’m not sure that anyone, myself, or any of the commentators that I have read, are able to give a satisfactory solution to this number and the interpretation of it, but its meaning, as Professor Ladd points out, will be plain when the time comes. I think that’s true. That those who are living in this time and are faced with this decision about this number or this name will understand exactly what it is.

But I think what is plain from all that’s been laid out in this chapter, and chapter 12 as well, chapters 12 and 13, is the goal and schemes of Satan. He wants

the worship and the submission of man, and he will lie and he will kill to get it. He’s doing that today. As John tells us, even now many antichrists have appeared. He is at work, and his schemes are the same in our day as they will be in the last days.

Satan’s methods never change. They haven’t changed from that day in the garden. He is a master counterfeiter. He is God’s ape, and he can make the lie look true and real. He is very effective. Jesus, in John 8:44, called him “a liar and a murderer from the beginning.” That’s what he was in the garden.

He appeared deceiving and destroying. He seeks to do the same today, to deceive us and lead us to ruin by drawing us away from the Lord; drawing us to some false god. The antichrist and the false prophet haven’t arisen yet, but there are other substitutes. There are other gods out there. They may be money, they may be pleasure, the temptation to live for self, to exalt ourselves above God’s Word.

That’s the challenge so often. It’s to believe in a false Christ of some kind, and there are lots of those. The world is full of Jesuses – different Jesuses. There’s the Jesus of the cults. There’s the Jesus of liberalism, the Jesus of philosophy, of rationalism, in which man is the ultimate authority – not the Word of God, not the Christ of the Bible, but the Christ of some philosopher or some modern theologian.

You see many examples of this. One that came to mind as I was reflecting on all of this was “the quest for the historical Jesus,” which was a great movement. Not great in a good sense, but a very significant widespread movement in the 19th century. It covered almost the entire century – of German scholars principally, but scholars from various continents seeking to know who the historical Jesus is.

They dismissed the Jesus of the gospels – that’s a myth. That’s a supernatural Jesus. That cannot exist in a closed universe, in a rational world. But there must be some historical figure – who is he? Who’s the Jesus behind this Jesus we have in the gospels? And so they had all kinds of quests, so to speak, to find who this historical Jesus was.

And they found some purely human Jesus by demythologizing the gospels, as they would put it, by getting rid of the miracles, and they came up with a simply human Jesus and called him “the Jesus of history.” And that’s who they held up for us to admire. Well, that’s the Jesus of liberalism today. He’s just a man; he’s not God. He’s not someone to believe in, he’s someone to imitate.

But that’s a false Christ, and they’re false prophets who present him. Now, they may be scholars, and they may be very urbane, but when they speak, they speak as the dragon. And we’re hearing the dragon’s voice whenever we think that we should put things above the Christ of Scripture, whatever that may be. Put our jobs ahead of Christ, put our lives ahead of Christ – that’s the voice of the dragon.

That’s just yielding to the kinds of pressure that will come in the future by this false prophet. The methods are the same. It may be financial, it may be some other kind, but it’s pressure that doesn’t come from God. It comes from the devil, and so we need to be concerned about that. We are to resist those things. We are to resist him, and stand firm, and recognize it for what it is.

And do so even if it means our lives, and there may come a time when that’s the case – when our lives are put on the line. It’s happened before. One of the great examples of that in Scripture as well as history is the faithfulness that we see of those three young men in Daniel chapter 3 – a chapter that really lies in the background of our text of Revelation 13.

Revelation 13 tells us about an image, a statue that will be raised up, and men will be called upon to worship it, and in Daniel chapter 3 we have the account of Nebuchadnezzar’s great image of gold that he set up, having had this dream in chapter 2. And he requires that everyone in his domain worship this image, and fall down at the right time, at the sound of the trumpets, and there were three who didn’t do it.

Three that he knew of; I’m sure Daniel was a fourth. But the three that refused were those Hebrew young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They would not worship. They refused, as you know, and as a result of that, they raised the anger of Nebuchadnezzar to a fever pitch, and he threw them into the blazing fire, after having stoked it to be as hot as it could be.

And yet before they were thrown in, they had some courageous words for Nebuchadnezzar. They said that God could save them from the furnace. They said, “He’s able to do that.” But they added, “Even if he does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we’re not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

They were ready to die in order to be faithful. God did deliver them, miraculously, as he delivered Daniel later from the lion’s den for his faithfulness. And what that tells us is God is able. We’ll face challenges in this life. We’ll face

challenges to worship the world, to follow its way, and there may be a point in your life when you are faced with a crucial challenge to compromise or to stay true and faithful to our Lord.

Know this: that our God is able to deliver us, and he will deliver you. Now, that doesn’t mean he’s going to spare you from hardship, and that doesn’t mean that you’ll escape death. Not everyone has escaped death. But if we don’t escape death, we do escape the temptation, and we enter gloriously into the Lord’s presence. What we must know and remember is he is God, and we must obey him, and not the world around us, and not yield to the temptations that we face.

We cannot bow to the images of the world, the gods of this age, as attractive as they may be, and as strong as the temptation may be. They’re false. God alone is true. And regardless of what happens, he will bless us infinitely and eternally for being faithful. We cannot lose anything in this world that can compare with what we will gain in the next, and that’s where our hope is, and that hope gives us courage.

But what causes us to act with courage is the knowledge of the Lord, and knowing him who loves us and gave himself for us. His death was real. It was for the purpose of saving us from a fate that’s worse than death, and making us his people with eternal life. And we have all of that as a gift received through faith. Do you have that? Have you believed in him? If not, trust in him.

Don’t settle for Satan’s counterfeits. He tries to imitate God, but he can’t give the power and the life that only God can give. He can’t give forgiveness and everlasting life. Believe in Christ, his Son. May God help you to do that, by his grace, and may he give each one of us the wisdom to see the world rightly, and to remain steadfast in it, faithful witnesses to the end. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your faithfulness to us. We read here of the challenge that will come in a future day, a challenge to faithfulness, and many will go after the lie. But those who have the Spirit of God will remain steadfast, and we give you thanks for that, and pray that we who are in this day and age will be faithful to Christ, be faithful to the end. We know we can only be that by your grace and through your power.

So Lord, encourage us to do that. Enable us to walk by the Spirit, to know your Word, and to remain faithful. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.