



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 13:1-10

“The Beast From the Sea”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

We’re continuing our studies in the book of Revelation in chapter 13, and we’re going to look this morning at verses 1 through 10 of Revelation 13. Beginning with verse 1:

“And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;

they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.

And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.”

Before I pray, I do want to make a comment on verse 8, and I’m making kind of a cursory comment here. I’ll develop it in the lesson. But I’m going to suggest a different translation. My translation is the New American Standard Bible, which reads “whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

I think a better translation of that is found in the New International Version, where we read, “All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast; all those whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that has been slain from the creation of the world.” And you see the difference between them?

It has to do with what word do we connect with “from the foundation of the earth” or “from the creation of the world”? Is it the word “slain” or is it the word “written”? The New American Standard Bible has “written” – their names were written or not written – but we could also apply that conversely to the names that were written, the elect, from the foundation of the earth.

Or is he speaking of the crucifixion? That Christ was slain from the foundation of the earth? There’s a reason for the difference of the two translations; I’ll touch on that when we come to it in the lesson. And there’s a point to be made, a point of theology. It’s not a radically important point, because either way, truth is being stated. But it’s which truth that we should focus on that’s the question.

We’ll come to that in our lesson. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness to us, and we thank you for this opportunity to be here together and worship with the saints on this Lord’s day. We come to an unusual text of Scripture, one that looks to the future, one that speaks of the coming of a man of sin, a man like the world has never seen before.

And we read of blasphemy, and we read of great sin, of destruction, and murder, and we wonder what can we gain from a text like this, other than an interesting view of the future? There’s much that we can learn here, Father. This is for us. This is a text that has a message for us, and it not only unveils the future for us, as it is intended to do, but it reminds us that you’re sovereign over everything.

And it reminds us of things about ourselves that are not particularly pleasant to consider, but things that must be considered. And so we pray that as we study this, you will help us to see ourselves more clearly, and give us a clearer understanding of you, and your greatness, and your sovereignty, and how you work all things together for our good and your glory.

I pray you’d bless us and build us up in the faith as we study this morning, and teach us the lessons that we should learn. We thank you for this hour, for that reason, for that purpose, and pray you’d bless us, but we pray also, Lord, that you’d bless us materially as well as spiritually. We consider the prayer requests in the bulletin, and know there are many other needs besides those that are listed here.

But we are reminded that there are many among us who have needs – physical needs, spiritual and emotional needs – and we pray for them. We pray that we’d remember that everything that we have is a gift from you. Every breath of life that we take, the shelter we have, the clothing we wear, the jobs we have, the friends that we have – everything is a gift from you.

And so we’re to be thankful and grateful; we pray that you’d make us that kind of people. Provide for us in the areas where we need provision, and help us to always be thinking about you. Thank you for your grace to us. We thank you for the grace that’s been extended to us in Jesus Christ, your Son, and pray that he’d be magnified in the things that we do now and the time we spend in study, and we commit it all to you in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] We’ve all heard expressions like “he sold his soul to the devil,” and you’re probably familiar with the legends of Faust, who supposedly did that – sold his soul to the devil in exchange for great powers. People, of course, can’t actually sell their souls to Satan, and there’s no need for Satan to make any deals, since as John tells us, already the whole world lies in the evil one.

Only those whom Christ bought out of that terrible bondage are exempt from the devil’s domain. But if there were any truth in the idea of a Faustian agreement, it is that

men would sell their souls for the things they lust after – pleasure, prestige, the world – if they could. They’d give up eternity in heaven to have their moment of pleasure on earth. That is the insanity of sin.

And it will someday be embodied in a man whom Paul calls “the man of sin, the son of destruction.” John identifies him as antichrist. In the language of the apocalypse, he is called “the beast.” Satan will give him great power, and he will gain the world. Men will worship him. But it won’t last; it’s all temporary, and eventually, quickly, he forfeits his soul forever.

The beast who comes out of the sea will be a real person. He’s a future person, a real person, but at the same time, I think he is, in a sense, a proverb. He is an example of the ultimate folly of following our heart’s desire rather than yielding our hearts to the will of God. Rebellion ends in either repentance or reprobation, damnation; never in victory. We either submit and live, or we continue to resist and die.

This man we examine this morning illustrates the latter. Now, we were introduced to him back in chapter 11, when he made war on the two witnesses. There, he is called “the beast that comes up out of the abyss.” That gives us a cameo of him. Chapter 13 gives us a full portrait of him and his monstrous qualities.

The chapter begins with Satan, the dragon, on earth. He has made war on heaven, been thrown down from the heights, and is now standing on the sand of the seashore. He’s there with a purpose. He’s pondering his plans to make war on the earth, and he’s waiting for someone – waiting for the appearance of the one who has been called his henchman.

He’s waiting because the appearance of the beast will not be according to the devil’s design, or the devil’s timing. In 2 Corinthians 2:7, Paul tells us that this is according to God’s timing; that this man will not be revealed until restraint is removed. And however we interpret the restrainer in that text, ultimately, it’s God who’s restraining this individual; holding him back until the right time.

And in that right time, that future time, he will make his appearance in history. That future time is described here in Revelation 13, but it has been described before, in Daniel chapter 7, which is a prophecy about this man. His description as a beast is first given there, and a brief overview of the chapter, and I think that would be helpful for us, the chapter begins with Daniel lying on his bed in Babylon, where he has a dream – he has a vision.

It was night, and he saw a great storm on the sea. Often, in the ancient world, the sea was associated with evil. It was mysterious. The ancient mind could only imagine what lurked in its depths. It was the abyss. For the Israelites, it came to symbolize the unregenerate peoples of the earth; the nations that were always in turmoil, and always a threat to Israel. And that’s the meaning of the stormy sea in Daniel’s dream. It is the nations. It’s the Gentiles.

And as he looked at this stormy sea, four beasts came up out of it. The first was like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard, the fourth was unusual. It was so terrible it couldn’t be described by an animal of nature. It had ten horns, iron teeth, and it trampled everything under its feet. Later, in verse 17, Daniel is given an interpretation, and he’s told that the four beasts represent four kings.

And then in verse 23, the beasts are called kingdoms, so they’re both kings and kingdoms. The lion represented Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. The bear represented the Medo-Persian empire. The leopard represented Alexander and Greece. The fourth beast is the revived Roman empire. The vision Daniel had is a repetition of the one that Nebuchadnezzar had back in chapter 2, when in his dream he saw a colossal statue that’s made of four metals, each representing a kingdom.

The gold head is Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian empire. The silver chest and arms were the Persians. The bronze thighs were the kingdom of Greece, and the iron legs were Rome. But the feet of the statue is a mixture of iron and clay, and they signify that there’s a change in the Roman empire. A future empire is suggested in that, and that’s not only suggested by the change of the elements there, but it’s also made explicit in 2:28, where Daniel is told that these things will happen in the latter days.

These are future events. So that’s when the final events of chapter 7 will also take place. Both chapters represent the same thing, but from different perspectives. Chapter 2 gives man’s view of human empire, and to men, it’s glorious. It’s like gold and silver. In fact, the statue is described there as awesome in its appearance. Chapter 7 gives a very different picture. It gives God’s view of human empire, and there, he sees it as wicked and monstrous.

In both visions, the end is the same. The kingdoms are destroyed in chapter 2. A stone – supernatural stone, it’s cut out without hands. It comes out of the heavens, and it’s representative of the Messiah. It strikes the image at its feet of iron and clay.

The image falls to pieces. The wind drives them away, and the stone fills the earth, picturing Christ’s future worldwide dominion.

In chapter 7, the fourth beast, with ten horns, representing ten kings, had a little horn, which is unusual, because this horn is described as having eyes and a mouth, and it utters great boasts. It destroys three of the horns, and dominates the rest. It represents the beast from the sea here in Revelation 13, the antichrist.

Later, in Daniel 7:21-22, this horn, this leader, is described as waging war with the saints and overpowering them until, Daniel says, “the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.” That happens when Christ returns, slays the beast, crushes his empire, and fills the earth with his kingdom.

That, very briefly, is the background of our text this morning – Revelation 13 – and the background for what will follow in the book of Revelation. So again, the dragon is standing by the sea, when John writes that he saw a beast coming up out of it. It’s a symbolic scene, of course, but it illustrates the origin of this man. The antichrist will come out of the nations. He will be a Gentile ruler.

In fact, we can be more specific than that, because in Daniel 9:26, he is called “the prince who is to come,” and he is described as being of the people who destroy Jerusalem. Well, that’s the Romans. And so we can say, in some sense, he’s a Roman; he has some connection to Rome. He’s described as having ten horns and seven heads, and in verse 2, having a mouth like a lion.

This is an image, a picture that causes curiosity, and you can’t help but wonder how do ten horns fit on seven heads, and which of these seven heads has the mouth that was given to him? Begin to ponder these kinds of things, and it gets a little bizarre to our thinking. But we need to remember that this is a vision given in symbolism; it is not a literal representation, and we’re not to think of the picture itself.

What we’re to think of is the meaning of it, and what is important to notice is that this is the same description that’s given of the dragon, of Satan, in chapter 12:3, which indicates a direct relationship between them. The beast is Satan’s man on earth. He is the closest thing that Satan can have to an incarnation. He has ten diadems, or crowns, on his ten horns, which again gives an odd picture.

We would have expected the crowns to be on his heads, but they’re on his horns, and that indicates something, because the horn not only represents kings and

kingdoms, but power. Horns are often a symbol of the power of a king, and here, it indicates that his rule will be gained by power, by force. And we’re told in Daniel 7:8 that he uproots three of the horns, that he conquers three of the horns, and so that’s the idea here.

The horns, according to Daniel 7:23, are kings and kingdoms, but they are the beast’s kings and kingdoms. They are his allies. He’ll conquer some, and others will willingly subject themselves to him and be governed by him, so that he will have dominion over all of them, and it will be dominion due to his power, and gaining his power by force. Earlier, he’s introduced to us.

We saw him earlier, back in chapter 6, with the seal judgments, and when the first seal is broken, a rider comes forth. You remember he’s on a white horse. He has a bow, and he goes out conquering and to conquer. That’s this man. He subdues kings. He makes his kingdom great by subduing and conquering others. So in one sense, he appears like a great and powerful man.

He’s riding a white horse. He’s gallant. He’s powerful. But he doesn’t appear that way to God. He appears to God in this form: he appears as a murderous monster. His heads are covered with blasphemous names, names making claim to deity, in the spirit of the Caesars that preceded him. Several Caesars used the word *divus* on their coins – the divine Caesar.

Nero referred to himself and was referred to by his subjects as “savior of the world.” Domitian was addressed as “our lord and god.” There have been many precedents for that in history, where men have claimed to be god, or in more recent times, modern times, states have, in effect, deified themselves by requiring total allegiance of their citizens.

You have that with Hitler and the Third Reich. One had to swear allegiance to him above everything. Same with Hirohito in Japan during the Second World War; he was worshipped as the sun god. We might think, “Well, those are unusual cases,” and I suppose they are, and you have these unusual cases throughout history, but there’s something about this not at all unusual.

Really, that goes to the very heart and nature of man apart from grace. It goes back to Adam, and what we inherited from him, because what incited his rebellion was his desire to be like the Most High, to be like God. That’s how Satan tempted

him; “You can be just like him.” It was Adam’s desire to be God, and that is in the heart of every man. We want autonomy. We want self-rule.

We want to put ourselves above the law of God, and live independently, and be a law unto ourselves. That is the heart of the natural man, and everyone has that in them. The desire to be adored, the desire to be revered, to be first, and whenever we put ourselves before others, we show that characteristic in ourselves. As I say, the only way to overcome that is by divine grace, which gives us a new heart.

That’s what grace promises; that’s the promise of the new covenant, to take out the heart of stone, the dead heart that cannot do the will of God at all, and put in a heart of flesh, that’s willing and living. And yet even then, we still struggle with this tendency, because we’re not perfect at regeneration. We’re perfect in God’s eyes, in our position with him; we’re justified, we’re righteous.

We’re clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We’re 100 percent acceptable to him, now and for all eternity. But as we are, in our condition, we struggle with sin. Paul talks about the principle of sin, that law of sin within us that he struggled with all through that chapter, as he explains his life of doing what he doesn’t want to do and not doing what he should do.

And then he gives us another look at it in Galatians 5, when he speaks of the war between the flesh and the spirit. It’s constant. It’ll be constant till we leave this world. But there is that tendency even within us who are regenerate, who are children of God, to assert ourselves, and raise ourselves up above others. It’s what we see here, in essence. But this man will be the fullest, the most egregious expression of that trait, that blasphemy.

It’s what Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where he prophesies that the future man of lawlessness will exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship. I think we’re right in seeing ourselves in that, to some extent. But this’ll be a man who’ll come on the scene and who’ll actually do that, and be the embodiment of all that is corrupt.

A description John gives of him in verse 2 is a composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7. “And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.” He has all of the destructive characteristics of the previous empires – the swiftness to kill, the strength to crush, and the cruelty to tear and devour.

He has great power. No man in the history of the world has had this kind of power. But it’s not his own power; he has a derived power. As John says, “The dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.” Evil in this world often has a human face, but behind it is always the evil one, Satan. Paul tells us that in Ephesians 6:12; that we don’t only struggle against flesh and blood.

We do struggle against people – that’s where we meet the struggle so often. Not always, but generally we meet it in the people that are opposing us. But what Paul is saying is there’s something beyond that; there’s something far more sinister than people. And you should understand that about people – that the evil one is behind this. You don’t see him, but he’s there.

We don’t struggle simply against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenly places. This will be especially true of God’s people in the last days, when the man of lawlessness comes on the scene. He will be Satan’s agent; his man on earth. And like the devil, he’ll be a great seducer. We see that in the Garden.

That’s what I think our Lord is referring to in the gospel of John when he speaks of Satan being a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He’s a murderer because he caused the death of Adam and Eve through his temptation, but he seduced them into doing evil, to committing sin, and so he’s a liar. And that’s what this man will be. He will do astonishing things.

Deceptive things, but astonishingly deceptive things, to draw the world after him; John writes in verse 3 of a kind of resurrection that he will have. “I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.” How do we explain that? Will the beast actually die and rise from the dead?

I don’t think so, and I don’t think so because of Hebrews 9:27, where we’re told it is appointed to man to die once, and after this comes the judgment. He may have a near-fatal wound, and be revived from it; that’s a possibility. Or it may be some grand deception, and I think that it will probably be that. He is a deceiver, and this deception will be very effective.

The whole earth will be amazed and follow after the beast; in fact, they will worship him. Verse 4: “They worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who is

able to wage war with him?”” Later, in verse 8, we read that all who dwell on the earth will worship him.

He will have power, dominion, and worship – what the natural man wants, he’ll have it. Last fall, I was in the British Museum, and there in the galleries, exhibiting the antiquities from Egypt to imperial Rome, is the tangible evidence of man’s desire to be god. The rooms there are filled with large, and some colossal, polished statues of pharaohs and kings, all of them boasting of their greatness and their glory.

And they boast of that by making these perfect images of themselves, and making them large – huge statues. Well, in one of the rooms was a marble head of Alexander the Great, and it’s an attractive representation of him – an idealized representation of him. You wish you could look like that. This long, flowing hair, and perfect nose, and just everything about him is idealized.

And it was done so deliberately, reproduced in this way all over his kingdom, in order to inspire worship. And it did – before he died, people actually worshiped Alexander. But it didn’t last. He died at the age of 33. What a contrast to our Lord, who died at that age.

When the devil took him to a tall mountain and showed him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said, “All these things I will give to you if you fall down and worship me,” he wouldn’t. He said, “Begone, Satan.” It shows the uniqueness and purity of Christ, because the natural man, without exception, would have taken the offer in a moment. You and I would’ve taken that offer in a moment.

And a man is coming who will be given that offer – the offer that the Lord rejected, he’ll accept, and he’ll have it. Satan will give him the world’s kingdoms, and its glory. People will say, “Who is like the beast?” That’s an interesting statement they make, because it’s a parody of Exodus 15:11, where after deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites sang, “Who is like you, O Lord?”

And those words belong to the Lord alone; they should be ascribed only to God. But the day is coming when people will take those words, and they’ll apply them to a man – to the beast. Now, they won’t think of him as a beast. That’s God’s description. The world will consider him to be great; a conqueror. No one can wage war with him. He will be just what the world admires.

Strong and attractive – that’s the profile of the world’s heroes. “Who is able to make war with him?” And he will be able to talk well, also – eloquently, convincingly. In verses 5 and 6, he’s described as having “a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies.” He will be a charismatic figure who will make great promises to people.

Now, it doesn’t actually say that, but that’s my interpretation of the description that’s given, and you see it played out throughout history. Tyrants have come on the scene, and they’ve been able to gain allegiance by making great promises. Politicians do it today. That’s how they gain power, and that’s how they’re reelected. They make promises. They can’t keep them, but they make great promises.

And that’s in my mind no doubt what is being said here – mouth speaking arrogant words, making great promises, promising them happiness, and security, and claiming to have the power to give it. And of course, if they think he’s been raised from the dead, that he can conquer death, well, they will certainly invest their confidence in a man like that. People will worship him for this.

Worship him for the promises he makes; worship him for the things that they’ll possess due to his power. Well, they’ll worship him for those reasons, I think, but they’ll also worship him because they’ll have no choice. Those who don’t will be killed. Verse 7: “It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.” The worship of the Roman emperors in the provinces was not due to devotion.

We studied that to some extent when we went through the seven churches of Asia Minor. There was the worship of Caesar that was considered in some of those churches that they had to deal with. I think all of them; all the churches had to deal with it, because it was so prominent. But the worship took place not due to a devotion to Caesar, or Caesar’s moral greatness; that isn’t what impelled people to worship him.

They worshipped him really for one reason, and that was brute force. It was commanded that they do so, and they gave homage because they didn’t want to die. And there will be that about the antichrist; that’s part of his career, getting worship and doing violence. And all of that for one reason, and that is self-exaltation. He is the supreme egotist, full of arrogance and boasting.

But it won’t last, and that tells you the end of such men and such attitudes. It won’t last. He won’t last. And all his boasting is really empty. In verses 5 and 7, it is said that all this was given to him, and given to him for only 42 months, 3-1/2 years, according to verse 5. Well, who gave him this ability to prevail? We might think that it’s the dragon, since in verse 2, it is said that the dragon gave him his throne and authority.

But here, it isn’t referring to the dragon; it’s referring to God. And I say that because that’s the meaning of the expression “was given.” All through the book of Revelation, we have this expression, and it’s always a reference to God’s giving. So “was given” is to be understood as given by God, and if that’s not clear from the expression itself, I think it’s clear from what is given to this man.

If it were the devil who gave him this great authority, he would not have given it for only 42 months, but forever. So this isn’t the devil’s work; this is God, and it’s God who allows the beast to rule, and even receive worship. There’s an important lesson in that, and that is that God is sovereign over all things. Nothing happens outside of his will. Even when the devil seems to triumph, it fits within God’s purpose and plan.

As Luther said, “The devil is God’s devil,” and we’re reminded of that here. These terrible events fit within the plan and purpose of God. And that thought will be an encouragement to the suffering saints of that future time. The beast will make war on them, but there’s a purpose in it, and it will only go on for 42 months. The Lord will limit this event.

But in that time in which it occurs, he will rise to such power that he will have what men and conquerors and kings have only dreamed about: world dominion. He will have authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. The scope of his rule makes it plain that this is not a reference to Nero, or Domitian, or to some other Caesar, as the preterists like to say.

They interpret this book – preterist means “past”– and there are many preterist interpreters of the book of Revelation. But they interpret it as all occurring in the first century. There was never a Caesar like this man. No Caesar has dominated every tribe and tongue and nation throughout the world. No king has ever done that; not even Alexander. No one’s ever had such a vast domain and authority.

This is a man of the future, and John is clearly looking to the future, because in verse 8, he describes these events in the future tense. “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.” And that explains everything. Men will freely choose to worship a false god.

And what is significant for John is that none of these worshippers have been written in the book of life. They are not God’s elect. That explains their spiritual condition. John wants the persecuted saints to understand that what matters is not brute force, but divine sovereignty. God determines the outcome of things, and those whose names have been written by God in the book of life are under God’s special care.

They will not be forgotten. They are eternally secure. Now, to go back to our reading of the text at the beginning of the hour, I’ve pointed out – and you can just see it as you look at your text if you have the New American Standard Bible – that it translates this “whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life,” which clearly teaches unconditional election.

At least it teaches it by implication, because these have not had their name written from the foundation of the earth. Those whose names are written in it were therefore written in the book of life, the book of the Lamb, from the foundation of the earth – from all eternity, is what that means. But it may also be translated “whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the earth.”

Which, in that case, the emphasis is on the atonement, so the right translation is determined by whether we take the phrase “from the foundation of the world” with either “written” or “slain.” Is this a verse that is focusing on unconditional election, or Christ’s atonement? Well, later on in 17:8, John writes of those whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

And in that verse, the Lamb is not mentioned, and so that is the right meaning. There it is clearly referring to those not elect, and by implication, those who are elect. So for a number of interpreters, that verse in chapter 17 is determinative here. They see that as indicating how we should interpret verse 8, and so the New American Standard Bible follows that. It takes its pattern from 17:8.

But there are difficulties with that. First, in the Greek text, there are 12 words between the word “written” and the phrase “from the foundation of the world.” And if you have a New International Version, you can count them, because it follows the Greek text accurately, and it has 12 words in between the word “written” and “from the foundation of the earth.”

Now, that seems like an artificial connection, to join one word with another phrase that occurs 12 words later, when the word “slain” immediately precedes the phrase, “from the foundation of the world.” So to my mind, and to the mind of the editors of the New International Version, that makes much more sense. It’s much more natural to take this word “slain” with the phrase “from the foundation of the world,” rather than the word “written.”

In which case, John here is not referring to divine election. Now, that is not denied by John; it’s taught later, in 17:8, and we find it written throughout the Word of God, and we find it throughout John’s epistles, and the gospel of John. But here, the emphasis is on something else; it’s on the atonement, and that’s what he’s expressing here when he says, “the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world.”

This is the means by which the elect will be saved to the salvation for which they have been chosen; the means of doing that is the atonement. If God had chosen a people for himself, but provided no means of atonement, election would’ve come to nothing. We’re not saved by election. Election is to salvation, but we’re saved at the cross, so we need the cross. And what John is saying here is the cross was planned from eternity.

The cross was not an afterthought. The cross of Christ was not a mistake of history. God planned it from all eternity as the means of salvation, from the foundation of the earth and beyond. Now, I think that’s what’s being taught here, but that’s clear from other texts of Scripture as well. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached in Acts 2:23 the very point.

He says that wicked men carried out the crucifixion, but that they did it, it happened by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. That’s predestination. If you don’t think so, if you don’t think that’s sufficient, well, turn a couple of pages over to Acts 4:27, where Peter is praying. And in verses 27 and 28,

he speaks of Herod and Pilate and the Gentiles and the Jews, and that they did whatever God’s hand and purpose predestined to occur.

God does not do evil. He cannot. He is holy. He is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. But he ordains everything that occurs. The devil and his henchmen are under his control. In the end, they can only accomplish his will. Their triumphs are only temporary, and they lead to the Lord’s triumph. It all results, ultimately, in God’s glory and our good.

That’s the assurance that God is giving his people here. In the worst of times, it is really the best of times, for us. We can never see that in the midst of affliction. The circumstances of life teach us something differently. That’s why we can’t live by sight. That’s why we cannot live by the circumstances around us. We can’t interpret them correctly.

We must live only by revelation. We must trust God’s Word and the teaching of it, and believe it, and live by it. And it teaches us that everything will work out for our good, and that even in the afflictions of life, they’re for a good purpose for us. And what a deep sense of gratitude that should instill in our hearts; in the hearts of all of God’s people, that God would love us this much.

That he would love us from all eternity, even knowing the kind of people we would become; and that he would love us to such an extent that he would purchase us, buy us, save us at such a great cost, by slaying his own Son, for his enemies. Well, that’s a strong defense against all kinds of temptation – gratitude and love for the Lord.

In fact, there is no higher motive in our life for anything we do than pure, sheer gratitude for God’s grace. So John writes in verse 9, “If anyone has an ear let him hear.” And what he wants us to hear is given in verse 10. “If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.”

In other words, persecution and death of the saints is inevitable, and the Lord is urging them to recognize that it is all within his decree, and not to lose faith. And don’t think that because these hard experiences have come upon them that God has abandoned them. No – this is all part of God’s plan and purpose. But it also indicates that the victory of the saints is sure as well.

Persecution will happen, but justice will follow very shortly. God is sovereign, and while life will be hard for a time – 42 months in that period – it will end. It will be temporary. Those hard times will end, and glory will follow, and glory is eternal. Now, that’s the perspective that we need as well. We go through difficulties in life. We’ll all go through difficulties in life – part of the plan.

But we should know it’s not the permanent aspect of our life. It’s temporary, and it’s for a purpose. We will go through difficulty, but sometimes – and we long for this; we long for prosperity – but sometimes prosperity is as challenging as persecution. It’s as difficult as affliction. And sometimes it can be even a greater challenge to our faith.

Now, we can become, in times of prosperity, enamored of the world, and be tempted to sell our souls for it; to adopt the world’s standards and live by them, and seek its goals. Well, the great example that we have here of the beast from the sea, the antichrist, is that he’ll have it all. He’ll even have the worship of the world. He’ll have the power of the world.

If that’s what you want, well, look at him, because he’ll lose it all. None of it will last, and what he will have for all eternity is judgment. Well, the Lord saw that. The Lord on that high mountain saw how hollow Satan’s offer was. And later he asked the question in Mark 8:36, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” to have the world’s pleasures for a moment only to lose them for all eternity.

We may go through trials in this life – rejection, persecution, privation – but only for a short time. We’re just a vapor. Life is just a moment, and eternity comes. It’s before us. We’re to live for that. We’re to live for eternity, and we have eternity through Christ, and Christ alone. But if you’re here without him, well, eternity is before you, and your end, without Christ, will be the same as the beast.

And that is destruction – eternal destruction. So look to Christ, flee to him. The moment you do, the moment you trust in him, you are saved for all eternity. You’re forgiven at that very moment, completely. You’re made a child of God forever. May God help you to do that. Help all of us who’ve done that to live for him. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this text of Scripture. It’s one of the dark texts of the Bible. It speaks of an evil man doing evil things, and yet in the midst of it, we

can see a lesson for us. A lesson about your sovereignty; you’re in complete control. You guide these events, and you’ll allow this man to come on the scene, and then you’ll do away with him. It will all fit within your glorious purpose.

You have a glorious purpose for us, and yet we must confess that we see ourselves in him. We see ourselves in this man of sin, in this beast, because there’s a beast in all of us. We have sin in us. We pray for the grace to deal with it properly and live for you. Give us undivided hearts. Give us faithfulness, we pray, and we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.