

Sermon – Revelation 13-14

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Question: what do these images mean?

- Kangaroo and Emu, Bald headed eagle, Golden arches(!), Bear, Crescent, Cross, 90210, # 96

The vision of Revelation uses symbols to give us a picture of what's happening in God's world – past, present and future. There are a lot of these symbols in the passage today, but we have to understand them in their context, being written 2,000 years ago.

- So the first symbol we meet in chapter 13 is a beast.

This beast has 10 horns, 7 heads and 10 crowns. We can talk for hours about what those numbers mean, but let's just say it's a very powerful and frightening beast that is the enemy of God. It has 10 horns: symbolic of great power; 7 heads: symbolic of many leaders; and 10 crowns: symbols of kings and rulers. It looks like a leopard with feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion. This is a powerful and frightening beast.

And – verse 3 – it has a scar across one of its heads – a fatal wound that has healed. This beast has been defeated before, but just keeps coming back! It's unstoppable. You get the impression that if someone struck down this beast, it would just rise up again – like Swarzenegger in Terminator!

And the whole world saw the beast and they ***followed*** him!

So what's does this vision symbolise? What does it mean? God gives us world governments, and again and again, Satan corrupts those governments and turns them against God, and people follow them.

Many governments will rise up against God's people. And many people will follow them. And here is the simple truth for us today, the truth that we often don't want to hear: There are two teams. And only two teams. Jesus' team and the team of the beast. There's no in between. You either worship Jesus or you worship Satan. You can't sit in the middle.

- Verse 8: *"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have ***not*** been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain."*

Either you follow Jesus and your name is in the book of life, or you follow the beast. You can't sit in the middle because the middle belongs to Satan.

For 42 months, or 3 ½ years, the beast will make war against God's people. As Derek said last week – 3 ½ years is the symbolic number for the time we have right now until Jesus returns – between his first and second coming.

2000 years ago as people read this Revelation from John, they knew that was true. They knew these powers of the world, these governments, were out to get them. Caligula, Nero, Domitian – and as one was killed, another would rise up. Until today when we have more Christians than ever being killed each day under persecution for their faith. This beast that corrupts governments is after God's people.

“Lucky us” we often say. Lucky us that we live in a safe country. Lucky we have freedom of religion. Lucky we have the right to worship any God we want. Lucky us. But we’re wrong to think that. Because there’s another beast. The first beast corrupts the governments, powers and authorities of this world.

- But the second beast, verse 11, has two horns. It **looks** like a lamb. It looks a bit like Jesus. But he **speaks** like a dragon. And his goal is to make everyone worship the first beast.

This second beast even performs miraculous signs like Jesus. He even calls down fire from the sky. Who is this beast? He **looks** like Jesus, but he is the beast of false religion. False idols. False gods. False worship. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Islam, Scientology, EVERY religion that takes worship away from Jesus as our Lord and God. And he even corrupts the faithful church of Jesus.

This beast is at work in the church that focuses on signs and miracles instead of Jesus himself.

This beast is at work in the church that preaches that we should desire earthly wealth.

This beast is at work in the church that accepts other gods.

This beast is at work in the church through the person who gossips and slanders.

The beast is after us every day. Maybe not with a sword to cut our throats, but with the false god of money that we love, the false god of earthly security, and the false god of self centred living.

This beast is the one who **looks** like a lamb but **speaks** like a Dragon. This beast is working in the person that **looks** like the perfect model of a Christian. There at church every week, reads his Bible, serves at church. But at home, he abuses his children, ignores his wife, worships his career, worries about money, watches pornography, and puts all his effort into building an earthly kingdom of riches.

This beast corrupts from the inside. Watch out.

- Verse 16 – this second beast... *“also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead”*.

The number 666, the number of man, on everyone who does not follow Jesus.

What does the number mean? Again, of course, it’s symbolic. 7 is the number that represents perfection. 6 is the number that represents imperfection, or failure. 666 is the number that means “failure, failure, failure.”

Let’s just pause and think about what we’re reading here. This Revelation is giving us a picture of reality. And the reality is that Satan is at work in this world, through our world governments and through our churches, to destroy the people of God. He will do whatever it takes to drag God’s people away from the Lord Jesus and to make them failures. And there is only one safe place to be. With the Lamb. With Jesus. And that’s what we come to now:

- Chapter 14:

“And there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mt Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

Another symbolic number for us – 144,000.

7 is the perfect number. And 12 is the number of “completeness”.

There are the 12 tribes of Israel. There are the 12 apostles.

The number 12 is a number that symbolises the complete people of God. And in heaven, how many people are there? For those of you who are mathematically challenged, hang in there! Here it is:

12 X 12 X 1000 = 144,000.

144,000 is a complete number times a complete number times a HUGE number.

144,000 is the symbolic number for God's completely complete HUGE church.

So who is John seeing in this vision? **Us!** WE are the completely complete 144,000. You and me, marked with the name of the LAMB. The other team.

Revelation gives us the picture of two teams. The team of the beast, and the team of the Lamb.

And that's what it comes down to in life. You're either with the beast or you're with the lamb. Make your choice.

And if you're on the lamb's team, Revelation gives us this picture of reality – don't be fooled. We are safe with the Lamb. The Lamb has beaten the beast already. But that doesn't mean that life with the Lamb is going to be easy! You will face persecution. Godless authorities. Hard times. Tough times. Difficult times. Days that will cause great pain. Lives turned upside down... But only for a little while. Only until Jesus returns.

- The challenge for us in these times is in verses 6-13. There are 3 angels with 3 messages:

Angel number 1 says: "Fear God"

Angel number 2 says: "The beast is defeated"

And angel number 3 says: "Follow the beast and you will face God's wrath."

The message is clear – Fear God and don't follow the beast! Fear God and don't follow the beast!

It doesn't get simpler than that message! Yet that's the struggle of our day to day lives.

The beast of godless governments and false religions – they even LOOK like the lamb – DON'T follow them. Don't be fooled. Don't give up. Don't forget – the eternal gospel of Jesus, every day of your life.

The image of the beast is overwhelming. It's powerful. It's intimidating. And sometimes when we're under difficult times and face to face with that beast, we want to give up.

- But, verse 13 says:

"Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on... they will rest from their labour..."

Follow the Lamb. Follow Jesus and labour in the Lord. It will often make your life more difficult. It will often make your life less pleasant. And I really am sorry if this is a difficult time to hear this right now – but there will be times when you want to give up. The truth is that when we follow Jesus, Satan works harder than ever to undermine our lives, our health, our families, our marriages, our relationships, our security.

But if you give in to money, give in to pornography, give in to adultery, lust, gossip, slander, or earthly pleasures, if you give up on God's word and give up on prayer and give up meeting with each other at church ... Satan will go easy on you. Because you're already giving yourself over to him.

But purify yourself, be holy, repent of your sin and turn away from it, labour for the Lord and turn away from what the world offers, having nothing to do with gossip and slander, have no love for money and no desire for earthly rewards and Satan will attack you again and again. He's declared war on you! And life will often be spiritually and physically difficult. But every time he attacks, remember that the Lamb protects you and promises you an eternity with Him.

- There is only one choice to make. The beast or the Lamb.

Take it easy now, give in to the world's ways and face God's eternal wrath.
Or take the difficult road in this life, the narrow road – follow Jesus and have God's eternal rest.
God's eternal wrath. Or God's eternal rest. The beast. Or the Lamb.