

Lesson 22 Lecture
Revelation 13:1-18
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My favorite hymn is Amazing Grace. The music is so moving, and the words express such heartfelt humility and reverence for God. Another reason I love the song so much is that it speaks to one of my favorite components of God's character – His grace. While by itself, God's grace *is* amazing, when you set it against the backdrop of God's holiness and goodness, His grace is amplified. For those of us who have had an MRI medical test for the purpose of seeking to reveal a deep-rooted injury, some MRIs are given "with contrast" – meaning dye is injected into the area of the injury to help make the injury more pronounced. Without the contrast, the issue you're having isn't so easy to see.

In today's reading, we're introduced to two characters – the Antichrist and the false prophet. They are the 2nd and 3rd components, along with Satan, of what let's call the "unholy trinity." These beings are the personifications of evil, and the obviousness of their evil intentions and actions should be apparent in today's reading. Yet, the line between good and evil can be blurry at times, can't it? Have you ever wondered why that is the case? Let's take a quick journey from this end of the Bible to the beginning to the first time we learn of the word "evil." In Genesis chapter two, God is providing instruction to Adam as to how he is to live in the Garden of Eden. In verses 16 and 17, God says to him, "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*"

The question of why God put this tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden is one that has been haunting people since the beginning of humanity, and it's too big a topic to discuss for this lecture. Up until this point in Scripture, there is nothing but God's goodness in His creation. There's no mention of any shortfall in God's provision – because there is no shortfall. In chapter 3, though, our very first introduction to Satan shows Him questioning God's complete provision. Satan does two things in verses 4 and 5:

1. He denies the truth of God's word, "*You will not surely die.*"
2. He challenges the truth of God's goodness of His complete provision, "*For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" Satan's intent is to make Eve think that God is withholding something even better than what He has provided.

Satan, through his evil-minded deceptions, has been seeking to challenge God's goodness by appealing to our sin nature since his introduction. He is a master at painting evil and what is bad for us into something that appears good. Perhaps at no time in history compared to today have we seen such blatant deception seeking to blur the line between good and evil. Immorality is running so rampant today that for those of us who dare to take a Biblical position for God's moral standards, we are instantaneously vilified as "haters" and out of touch with the "progressive" goodness of modern society.

The reason I'm sharing this with you is I believe just as an MRI needs contrast to make the injury more visible – more obvious, we should inject some "contrast" into today's reading via a character study comparison of:

- The Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
- The unholy trinity – Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet

My objective is to shed some light and bring more definition to good vs. evil. Hopefully, through a better awareness of recognizing evil and its destructive agenda, we will develop a greater appreciation of, and devotion to, God's life-giving holiness and goodness.

In verse 1, we find the dragon, which is Satan, standing on the shore of the sea. While this may be a real sea – possibly the Mediterranean - per Revelation 17:5, the sea symbolizes the Gentile nations. The beast described in this verse is the Antichrist, so we can assume that the Antichrist will be a Gentile. We're first introduced to the Antichrist in Revelation 6:2 – he is the rider on the first of the four horses of the apocalypse – the pale horse. The rider of this horse is described as "*He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*" Notice his intent – to go out conquering and to conquer.

Antichrist can be interpreted as "in place of Christ" or one who is against Christ and the one who imitates Christ – a counterfeit Christ. The Apostle John spoke quite a bit about the antichrist. Let's take a look at a few verses:

- 1 John 2:22: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son."
- 1 John 4:1 & 3: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."
- 2 John 7: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

What are some of the key identifiers of the antichrist in these verses?

- He's a liar
- He denies the Father and the Son
- Does not confess Jesus has come in the flesh

This beast had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. This beast sounds very similar to the one described in Daniel 7:7-8, "*After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. It was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.*"

Most commentators agree that the ten horns on the beast speak of a ten-fold division of a great empire at the time of the Tribulation. The horns are believed to symbolize the ten kings who rule over these divisions. This is confirmed in Revelation 17:12, "*The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.*" As for the seven heads, some commentators believe they represent seven mountains (Rev. 17:9), and since Rome was built on seven hills, this could be a veiled

reference to that powerful city (Rev. 17:18). Therefore, this great empire is quite possibly a revitalized Roman Empire.

According to Halley's Bible Handbook, the seven heads may symbolize the seven empires that are, or were, under the control of the beast who receives power from Satan. John tells us that five (empires/kings) are fallen, one is and one is yet to come in Revelation 17:10. Some believe that the five fallen empires are the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Grecian empires. The one that "is" is generally thought to be the Roman Empire. Others believe these seven heads represent the five kings who reigned up to John's day, the sixth king that was in power during John's life, and the 7th is yet to come – the Antichrist.

Dr. Robert Jeffress agrees the seven heads represent all the world empires in history from John's perspective. The one empire that was yet to come would be the ten-nation confederacy over which Antichrist will preside. The Antichrist possesses the quality of 3 fierce animals – from Daniel 7, these animals represented the empires of Greece (leopard), Medo-Persia (bear), and Babylon (lion). Warren Wiersbe makes the interesting observation that John saw these animals, or kingdoms, in *reverse* order since he was looking back, while Daniel was looking *ahead*.

The beast, or Antichrist, is Satan's masterpiece. He will be highly intelligent and likely very attractive. Verse 2 tells us Satan, the dragon, will give the Antichrist his power, his throne, and great authority. Verse 3 speaks of an incident where there will be an assassination attempt on the Antichrist, and it will appear to be successful. Yet, he will be miraculously brought back to life. As a result of this, the world will marvel and choose to follow him. Zechariah 11:17 offers some insight into this assassination attempt, "*Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock! A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye; his arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded.*"

Verse 4 speaks of the things people will say in their worship of the Antichrist, "*Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?*" There is nothing original about Satan and his followers. Everything we're reading about is a cheap and lesser imitation of God and His Word. Listen to these *truths* about the one true God.

- Psalm 113:5: "Who is like the Lord our God, Who is enthroned on high."
- Psalm 89:6: "For who in the skies is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord,"
- Exodus 15:11: "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"

Verse 5 tells us Satan gave the Antichrist authority to continue for forty-two months. The fact that we're told he was given authority to continue for forty-two months (3 ½ years) tells us that we are at the mid-point of the 7-year tribulation period. We are now entering the last 3 ½ years – known as the Great Tribulation. This will be confirmed later in this chapter.

Verse 6 continues describing what is coming from the Antichrist, "*Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.*" What are blasphemies? Merriam-Webster's online definition says they are *the acts of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God*. What's the worst thing you can do to verbally insult or attack a person? You speak lies about them – you make misrepresentations about their true character. The Antichrist will speak lies about God, His name, the tabernacle that he personally negotiated to allow it to be constructed, and those in heaven. The Apostle Paul

wrote about the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, “*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*”

Verse 7 states, “*It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.*” The Antichrist will have great power and will prevail against the saints. He will even kill the two witnesses who, up until then, had been invincible. There is good news in this horror story – at least for us as part of the church. This verse tells us that the Antichrist will overcome the saints, but these saints are not the church. How do we know this? Listen to what Jesus said to Peter after He confessed Jesus is the Christ in Matthew 16:18, “*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*” The church cannot be overcome, so it must not be here at this time in history as the saints are being overcome. This is another point in favor of the pre-tribulation rapture argument.

Verse 8 tells us, “*All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” There will be world-wide Satan/Antichrist worshipping at this time. But those who will be doing so will have gone beyond the point of return of hope of redemption. We know this because we’re told those doing this are not written in the Book of Life. What is the Book of Life? It is a book that God prepared before the foundations of the world, and it lists those who will live at peace with God in His kingdom for eternity. The Book of Life, in my opinion, is a strong testimony to God’s omniscience and foreknowledge of each life He creates. There are some who say that every human is included in the Book of Life, but their choice as to whether or not receive the truth of Jesus dictates whether or not their name will be blotted out from the book. We don’t know, but if you’re a confessed believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, your name is permanently written in this glorious book.

Verse 10 offers an important promise of reaping and sowing for those who will be persecuting and martyring the saints during the tribulation, “*He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword.*” For those of you who have been persecuted or suffered for your faith, please remember we serve a righteous God. Yes, it is sometimes a tough mystery as why God allows those He loves to undergo painful circumstances as a result of their faith in Him. During those rough moments, we must remember what happened to Jesus – the perfect and holy one. He was completely innocent, yet He was crucified. He never asks us to deal with anything that He hasn’t dealt with. But there is a day coming when all the injustice of Christ-related persecution will be dealt with. He sees our tears, and He does not forget them. We may not see the justice, but we can see in this book of Revelation it will happen.

In verse 11, we’re introduced to a second beast and third member of the unholy trinity – the false prophet. “*Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.*” We know this is the false prophet as he is also referenced in Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. What are the things that distinguish the false prophet from the Antichrist?

- He comes from the earth as opposed to the sea. According to J. Vernon McGee, the earth is believed to be symbolic of Palestine, so it’s quite possible the false prophet may come from Israel.

- According to Warren Wiersbe, the image of the horns in verse 11 suggests that the false prophet has authority, but the absence of a crown indicates his authority is not political. Most commentators believe he will be a religious leader
- He will be to the Antichrist as the Holy Spirit is to Jesus. He will be a promoter of the Antichrist – he will get people to worship the Antichrist.

Verse 13 tells us the false prophet performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. Once again – nothing original here. We've seen the two witnesses call down fire from heaven. However, look at the response of the people to their signs and wonders as opposed to the two witnesses in verse 14, "*Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth.*" I'm always amazed at what people will reject as the truth and what they will, without hesitation, accept the lie. This pandemic has demonstrated people will believe anything if it protects their sense of normalcy and world view.

The second half of verse 14 provides the setting of what will be the abomination of desolation – this is the mid-point of the tribulation. The false prophet ordered the people to set up an image in honor of the beast. This image would be placed in the temple, and verse 15 tells us the false prophet will be given power to give breath to the image of the first beast. The image will be able to speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. With the advancements in technology today, the idea of an image being given life-like capabilities isn't so far-fetched anymore, is it?

Verses 16 and 17 explain the false prophet will force all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads. This was done 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. This mark is the mark of the beast, and it's a big deal. This mark will be required if you want to transact any commerce. If you want to buy food or anything, you will only be able to get it if you have this mark. Again, with technology today being designed to read things like fingerprints, voice, or eyes, the capabilities to have such a mark are in place. Verse 18 speaks that this mark will include the number of the beast – 666. There is much debate as to what the number 666 is, but many commentators suggest that the number 6 is the number of man – one short of 7, which is for perfection. The three 6's could simply represent the unholy trinity.

There's a major problem, though, with this mark of the beast. For those who take it, they will have crossed the proverbial line with God. Any hope of salvation will be eliminated for those who take the mark of the beast. For those choosing to follow Christ at this time and reject taking the mark of the beast, they will be struggling to feed themselves and worse.

As I noted early in the lecture, sometimes recognizing evil isn't as easy as it should seem to be. The following are some observations, or contrasts, of the members of the Holy Trinity and the unholy trinity:

- God is the holy Father, Satan is the cheap and evil imitation of the Father. Jesus is the Savior, the Antichrist is the destroyer. The Holy Spirit testifies to what is true, the false prophet seeks to deceive.
- The world did not receive Christ, but it will receive the Antichrist (John 5:43)
- The world would not believe the truth (John 14:6), but they will believe the lie (2 Thess. 2:8-12)

- Jesus spoke words of salvation and hope, and the world turned a deaf ear. However, the world will listen to the blasphemous words of the Antichrist and the false prophet.
- The world will not worship Christ, but they will worship the Antichrist.
- People do not believe the signs Jesus performed as testimony to Him being the Son of God. People will believe in the Antichrist with his counterfeit signs.
- Jesus' resurrection was into a glorified and eternal body. The Antichrist's resurrection is counterfeit – he merely comes back to life as a human.

Jesus got it right when He said in John 3:19, "*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

The ultimate contrast of good and evil is found at the cross. Can you think of a starker comparison of good vs. evil? – A collision of the purest light vs. the blackest darkness? God's goodness, God's love, God's mercy, God's grace, and God's forgiveness appear to be defeated by evil at the Cross of Christ. Yet, we know that what appeared as a crushing loss in reality was the ultimate victory of good over evil. That's the message we must constantly remind ourselves – good *always* wins out over evil. With the way things are deteriorating morally as well as the lasting effects of the pandemic – coupled with the rapidly escalating issue with Russia and Ukraine, it is easy to go to the negative and become fearful. We may not always recognize the good, but we can be assured it will prevail. If you're not sure about what is evil or what is good, test it against the Scriptures – the truth. Even though God is not fully knowable, His Word provides more than enough testimony to His true character. We're going to make mistakes at times to know what is good and what is evil, but as followers of Jesus Christ, we have a safety net – the amazing grace of God. We can rest in those beautiful lyrics, "*Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*" Amen? Let's pray.