

Revelation 13
Isaiah 44:6-20
Psalm 115

“You Need Wisdom”

October 20, 2019

Isaiah shows us the folly of idolatry.

How can a person worship something that he himself has made?

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 115, goes on to say,

“those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”

We become what we worship.

Whatever we are devoted to
is what we will increasingly reflect!

Sing Psalm 115
Read Revelation 13

Last time we saw that we need faith – and we need patient endurance.

Here’s that same word “patient endurance” again.

As you hear about the rule of the beast –
as you hear about the suffering that he inflicts on the saints –
you are called to endure patiently.

You are called to believe in Jesus!!

I know – sometimes it looks a whole lot more like tribulation and endurance –
and not very much like “kingdom”!

When do the good times start, Lord?

Are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6-8)

But Jesus says, it is not for you to know times and seasons,
that the Father has fixed by his own authority,
but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”

And ever since Pentecost,
the power of the Kingdom has gone forth in the apostolic witness.

And that power is made known to you today!

Because Jesus *is* Lord.
No, we do not yet see everything under his feet.
But we see Jesus – we see him by faith –
sitting at the right hand of God,
crowned with glory and honor –
because he suffered – he endured –
he tasted death for everyone!

In the first part of Revelation we saw a lot of trinitarian images.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the sevenfold Spirit before the throne)
were frequently seen together
In chapters 12-13 we see a counterfeit Trinity:
the Dragon falling from heaven,
the Beast rising from the Sea,
and the Beast rising from the Land.

1. The Dragon Falling from Heaven (12:7-17)

In chapter 12, John showed us a picture of a pregnant woman who gave birth to a male child.
There was a Dragon who sought to devour the male child –
but the male child was caught up to God's throne –
and the woman was given a safe place in the wilderness.
Then the Dragon was cast down from heaven –
and because the Dragon couldn't touch the Woman,
therefore he went off to make war against her children –
namely, those who keep God's commandments
and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

In other words, John has set forth a picture of the inviolability of the church
even in the midst of persecution.
She is the pure and unblemished Zion,
and no attack of the dragon can threaten her.
But at the same time, while John is calling the church to be comforted
by the security she has in her corporate identity,
he is also warning his readers of the attack upon her children –
those who obey the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.
Our greatest enemy--the dragon himself--cannot touch our Mother.
She is preserved and nourished by the grace of God.
Therefore we must persevere as her faithful children,
because we will one day participate in that rest
which has already been granted to her
in the male child which she bore,
our elder brother, Jesus Christ.

- ### **2. The Beast Rising Out of the Sea Is a Mockery of Jesus (13:1-10)**
- a. It Has the Dragon's Power, Throne, and Authority (v1-2)**
 - b. It Is Healed of a Mortal Wound (v3)**
 - c. It Is Worshiped by the Whole Earth (v4)**
 - d. It Preaches Against God (v5-6)**
 - e. It Wars Against the Saints and Rules Over the Nations (v7-8)**
 - f. The Call for Endurance and Faith of the Saints (v9-10)**

The first beast had ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems – ten crowns – on its horns.

Remember the dragon?

The dragon had seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems.

The beast from the sea has seven heads, ten horns, and *ten* diadems – ten crowns.

In other words, the beast is the image of the Dragon.

(Like the Son is the image of the Father).

The beast is a kingdom.

The *horns* – and in Revelation 13 – the *heads* may be individuals –
but the *beast* is a kingdom.

So we have a kingdom (a beast) that is the image of the Dragon (the devil).

The basic point of the first beast is that this beast is a mockery of Jesus.

Just as the Father has given his power, his throne, and great authority to the Son,
so also the Dragon has given power, throne, and authority to the beast.

And so also, the second beast is a mockery – a parody – of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Beast Rising Out of the Earth – the Unholy Spirit (13:11-18)

a. It May Look Like a Lamb, but It Speaks Like a Dragon! (v11)

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

Why does it say that this beast has “two horns like a lamb”?

Partly it is a parody of the Lamb who was slain.

(Although remember that the Lamb had *seven horns!*)

So a two-horned lamb will remind us of Daniel’s two-horned ram in Daniel chapter 8.

Again, we are dealing with “beastly kingdoms” –

kingdoms that are opposed to the Son of Man.

And that is why this beast that somewhat resembles a lamb

speaks “like a dragon.”

Already in one verse you know enough to beware of this critter!

It is a beast – which pretends to be like Jesus – but speaks like a dragon!

This beast is often called ‘the false prophet’ (16:13, 19:20, 20:10) –

because it speaks like a prophet – and does the signs of a prophet.

Our passage lays out what this beast does.

First:

b. It Exercises the Authority of the First Beast (v12)

¹² *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence,^[c] and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.*

Just as the Holy Spirit is the presence of the risen Christ with his church –
just as the Holy Spirit enables us to worship Christ –
so also the false prophet – the second beast –
exercises the authority of the first beast “in its presence” –

In other words, the false prophet is the presence of the ‘exalted Beast’ with his people.
And the false prophet draws the earth and its inhabitants
to worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.

As we saw last time, the first beast is clearly identified in Daniel
as a kingdom unlike all other kingdoms.

Some have tried to say that it was the Roman empire.
And that the head who was wounded was Nero.
And there is *some truth* to that.

John almost certainly would be thinking of Rome –
and the legend of Nero – that Nero would come back from the dead –
almost certainly would have been familiar to John’s hearers.

But behind Rome – and behind Nero – John is seeing a bigger pattern.
There is something going on in history that is bigger than any one particular country.
(That’s why in Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7,
we here that this beast is a kingdom unlike all the kingdoms of the earth.)

This is the kingdom of man – or better, the kingdom of Satan.
This is the kingdom that seeks to overthrow the kingdom of Jesus –
the Dragon – after all – sought to destroy the woman and her child.
And when he failed, he went to make war against the rest of her children –
those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

And what did the Dragon do first – when he went to make war against us?

He stood on the sand of the sea –
and called forth the Beast from the sea.

And now there is a second Beast – a second kingdom, as it were –
that arises from the earth and supports the beast from the sea.

What is this beast – this second kingdom –
this earth-based beast that supports the kingdom of man?!

You can see the reason why it is called the false prophet in verses 13-14:

c. It Performs Great Signs that Deceive the Earth-Dwellers (v13-14)

¹³ *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,*
¹⁴ *and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of^d the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.*

Notice the signs.

“even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people.”

Do you know the story of Elijah at Mt. Carmel?

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a test!

Whichever God responds by sending fire from heaven is the true God!

The prophets of Baal spend all day crying out – asking for Baal to send fire from heaven.

Nothing happens.

Elijah starts to mock them – “Shout louder – maybe he’s asleep! – maybe he’s going to the bathroom!!”

Then when Elijah calls upon the LORD,
the LORD sends fire from heaven that consumes the sacrifice,
along with the wood and the altar – stones and all!

That was amazing!

But don’t try that one on *this* false prophet!

This false prophet has the power to call down fire from heaven.

Okay – at this point you are probably thinking –

“That’s not fair!”

If God let’s false prophets have the same signs as true prophets,
how are we supposed to tell the difference?!

The same way you always have!

Who does it tell you to worship?

In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Moses told Israel to beware of this!

Listen to what Moses said:

*“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,
² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass,*

[Notice that Moses himself said that false prophets can do signs and wonders!

So how do you know whether to follow someone who does signs and wonders?!

and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,'
³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams.

For the LORD your God is testing you,

to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him
and keep his commandments and obey his voice,
and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death,
because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt
and redeemed you out of the house of slavery,
to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk.
So you shall purge the evil^[a] from your midst.

So clearly, signs and wonders are not a reliable guide to whether someone is from God!

What are they for?

Signs and wonders authenticate the message.

Signs and wonders tell you *this message is from its sender*.

Think about the signs and wonders that came in Moses' day.

Think of Pharaoh's question – who is Yahweh that I should set his people free?

So Yahweh authenticated the message –

sending signs and wonders (the plagues) upon Egypt.

But signs and wonders do not bring faith!

Think of the Israelites!

They saw the signs and wonders.

Did that produce faith in them?

No.

They saw the Red Sea parted in two.

They were fed with manna in the wilderness – with water from the Rock –
and that Rock was Christ!!

But they did *not* believe.

They rebelled and turned away from the living God.

They had signs and wonders *every day* –

but signs and wonders do not produce faith.

What produces faith?

Faith comes by hearing – and hearing by the word of Christ.

Signs and wonders are not *intended* to give faith.
They are intended to authenticate the message.
The question is then: *what is the message of the beast?!*

The message of the second beast is that you should worship the first beast!
And so it deceives those who dwell on earth,
“telling them to make an image
for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lives.”
There are clear parallels here to the Roman practice of worshipping Caesar –
and offering sacrifices to the image of Caesar.
We are told that the Emperor Caligula even tried to place an image of himself
in the holy of holies in the temple in Jerusalem.

But the second beast goes a step further:

d. It Gives Breath the Image of the Beast (v15)

¹⁵ *And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.*

“Allowed” is probably not the right word here.
“And it was *given* to him to give breath to the image of the beast”

“Allowed” makes it sound more ambiguous.
No, “it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast.”

John wants you to understand that *none of this* happens
apart from the Lamb who sits on the Throne!
Jesus is not sitting up there saying,
“Oh, wow! What is that beast up to now? I guess we’ll let that slide –
We’ll *allow* that...”

In the book of Job, it was the LORD who asked Satan,
“Have you considered my servant Job?”
And it was given to Satan to test Job – to prove whether God was right about him!
It may not feel all that comforting to know that God has given the beast this power!
But how much worse would it feel if we were told that God was doing his best to stop it!?

I totally get it.
The sovereignty of God is – in some respects *not very comforting!*
You mean to say that God is in control of *this?!!*

Yes, it was given to the second beast to give breath to the image of the first beast...

so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship

the image of the beast to be slain.

Nebuchadnezzar had made a great image of himself
and caused all the world to bow before it or perish!
 Except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego –
 They refused!
But God delivered them from the fiery furnace!
(An important lesson for us as well!)

But now the second beast goes a step further than Nebuchadnezzar or Caligula.
He gives breath to the image of the first beast.
We now have a talking image.

This was not unheard-of in John's day.
 Ventriloquism or other magic tricks could be used to make images "speak."
And if someone is able to call down fire from heaven,
 making a lifeless image speak is not all that strange!

But if you only think of this second beast as a magician,
 you will misunderstand its true nature!

Because notice what else it does:

e. It Causes All to Be Marked with the Mark of the Beast (v16-17)

¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave,^[e] to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

In verse 17 it becomes clear that this beast has economic power.

If you don't have the mark of the beast on your right hand or your forehead,
 then you cannot buy or sell.

Remember that John is writing to the churches in Asia Minor –
 the churches around Ephesus.

The emperor Domitian established the imperial cult in Ephesus –
 and the people of Ephesus built a temple in his honor –
 with a great statue of the emperor.

We know that a number of other cities around Ephesus participated in this –
 and early church tradition says that Domitian banished John to Patmos at this time

And ordinary citizens were required to get involved:

 "City decrees to participate in the celebrations
 extended even to people being required to offer sacrifices
 on altars outside their own houses as the festival processions passed..." (B, 713)

And what happens if you don't?

 What happens if you do not participate in the worship of the Image of the Beast?

You might be killed.
Or, you might just be ostracized – forbidden even to buy and sell in the market.

And the point of the “mark” is that the beast wants to *know* who is loyal – and who is not!
The term translated “mark” was used for the emperor’s seal on trade contracts,
or “the impress of the roman ruler’s head on coins.” (B 715)
If you have the “mark of the beast” –
that means that you have the “stamp of approval” of the beast –
which he only gives to those who worship him!

If the first beast represents the kingdom of man – the political power –
the second beast represents the cultural institutions – the economic interests –
that serve the state.

The beast from the sea represents a foreign power.
The beast from the land represents the home-grown institutions that support the foreign power.
And yes, emperor worship would have been the particular version in John’s day.
But John chose to use language that points beyond just “emperor worship” –
so that his vision of the Dragon and the two Beasts
winds up applying to all sorts of situations in church history!

During the middle ages, as royal power increased –
as the kings of earth grew in stature –
some popes and churchmen sought to be faithful to Christ.
But others followed the Dragon and preferred earthly power to heavenly glory.

That’s why, in the late middle ages,
there were many who started to say that the pope was the Antichrist.
And when you watch the ways in which late medieval and early modern popes
often oppressed (and killed) the faithful in order to build their earthly kingdoms –
you can see how they were more like the Beast than they were like Jesus!

But the cultural and economic power no longer resides in Rome.
Paris, London, New York –
Moscow, Beijing –
all of these cities represent various aspects of the Beast.

When I was growing up, many thought that the Soviet Union was the Beast –
but I daresay that the United States has just as much likelihood as anyone else.
The worldwide economic system that controls the nations is the American one.

Now, what we do make of this “mark of the beast”?
Some people have gotten all worried about modern technological methods of marking.

But that misses the picture here in Revelation –
which has already been given in chapter 7, verses 2-3:

“I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God,
and he called with a loud voice to the four angels
who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying,
‘Do not harm the earth or the sea, or the trees,
until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’”

They have been marked with the seal of the living God.
We will see them again shortly in chapter 14 (actually, the very next verse!!).

If you have the name of Jesus placed upon you –
then you will not accept the mark of the beast!

Is the mark of Jesus a physical mark?

No.

In the OT it was – circumcision.

But in the NT, baptism leaves no physical mark.

The mark of Christ is invisible.

And in the same way, the mark of the Beast is also invisible.

You might say, “but it says that they will be marked on the right hand or the forehead” –
yes – and two verses later, chapter 14 verse 1 says that the 144,000
have the name of the Lamb and the name of his Father
written on their foreheads.

If it was just a matter of getting the right physical mark,
that would be great!

I’m getting a tattoo with the name of Jesus on my forehead!

That way I know that I’m in good!!

But think back to Deuteronomy 6 –

where God told Israel that the Law would be

a “sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead.” (Dt 6:8)

Did that mean that Israel was supposed to tattoo bible verses on themselves?

No!

It meant that they were supposed to hide God’s word in their heart –
and practice it in their lives!

So what does it mean when someone gets the “mark of the beast”
on their forehead or their hand?

It means that they are as devoted to the Beast as we *should be* to Christ!

The words of the Beast are written on their hearts –
and they are faithful in doing what the Beast commands.

f. The Call for Wisdom: Calculating the Number of the Beast (v18)

¹⁸ *This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*

Many have suggested that this is using a form of gematria –
where you calculate the number of a name
based on the numerical value of each letter in a name.

Before the advent of “arabic numerals” – each language would generally use letters as numbers.
Roman numerals, for instance, use particularly the I, V, X, C, L, and M.
But in Hebrew and Greek, every letter had a particular numerical value.

It is tempting to try various names and figure out how to make them work!

The Hebrew of “Nero Caesar” works –
but did John really expect his *Greek speaking readers*
to figure out *Hebrew gematria*?

There are several names throughout history that can be made to fit!
Some (like Nero) are truly beastly!

We shouldn't be surprised.
There will be many whose names fit the pattern.

But does that mean that if someone happens to have a name that can't be made to fit into 666,
therefore we don't have to watch out for that one?!

What's going on here?
Remember that when John talks about numbers he generally uses them *figuratively*.
We heard about the 144,000 – who turned out to be a countless multitude.

What does 666 mean?
If 7 is the number of completeness,
then 6 is fundamentally *incomplete* –
and 6-6-6 is radically and entirely incomplete!

In the early church, they didn't use gematria to explain 6-6-6.
Irenaeus said that 666 was a “summing up of the whole of that apostasy
that has taken place during six thousand years” (quoted in B, 722).

Think of the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, the sixth bowl...

At the end of the *sixth* the story is incomplete.

“the triple repetition of sixes connotes the intensification of incompleteness and failure that is summed up in the beast more than anywhere else among fallen humanity” (B 722)

The triple repetition also has the effect of highlighting the complete failure of the unholy trinity.

“Though the beast attempts to mimic God, Christ, and the prophetic Spirit of truth, he falls short of succeeding.” (B 722)

(And if you look forward to 15:2, the number of the name of the beast is equated with the beast and its image).

All of this is to say:

when verse 18 calls for wisdom,

it is not saying that you need some esoteric knowledge

that can only be given by some wise leader who will give you the secret truth!

(No, that sounds far more like the beast to me!!)

Rather, when verse 18 calls for wisdom,

John is telling you exactly what you need to know!

You are not supposed to be running around looking for a key to the puzzle.

You are supposed to see the picture of these horrible beasts –

and say, “Wow! The number of the beast is the number of man.”

And man’s number is always falling short.

Man’s number is 6-6-6.

If I follow the beast – I will fall short too!

Therefore, I don’t care what the beast does to me!

I want to follow Jesus!

There is one possible gematria that I think could actually have been intended.

The name of Jesus has a numerical value of 8-8-8.

Jesus rose from the dead on the 8th day – the first day of the week.

If 7 is the number of completeness,

then Jesus is as far superior to completeness as the beast falls short of it!

You will need wisdom to remember this!

It is so much easier to just follow the world’s path!

If you follow Jesus, if you refuse to let your life

be driven by the political and economic agendas of the age,

then you may well suffer!

But remember Jesus – remember the one standing on Mt. Zion (14:1)