



We live in a world that's fascinated with heroes. For some reason it's a very human tendency to put certain people on a pedestal. Sometimes it's sports heroes like Drew Brees or Tiger Woods (so much for that). Sometimes it's political or social leaders like Martin Luther King, JFK or Ronald Reagan. Even Hitler enjoyed incredible popularity in his early years as leader of the Nazi party. Sometimes it's religious or philosophical leaders like the Dalai Lama, Ghandi or even Billy Graham. And then there are all those people in the entertainment industry. There is something within all of us that wants to elevate certain people to a kind of divine status.

This morning I want to tell you about two of the most compelling figures that will ever appear in the history of the world. Their popularity will be off the charts. They won't just be household names in America or Germany, but throughout the entire world. Their influence won't only be in a single realm like politics, religion or entertainment, but will involve every aspect of our lives. These two figures are described for us in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Revelation.

The apostle John has been describing a time at the end of the age when a climactic struggle will take place between God and Satan. Even though Satan is already a defeated foe, he's allowed at the end of time to wage one final convulsive war against God's people. In chapter 12 Satan was depicted as a great red dragon who furiously sought to devour a woman and her offspring, who represent the people of God. Now in chapter 13 we see specifically how the dragon wages war. He raises up two beasts. But don't be fooled by this. They won't appear as beasts; they'll appear as the most amazing, powerful, wonderful and inspirational people on earth.

The Beast from the Sea will be a political leader

John says the first beast will come out of the sea. The sea was a scary, foreboding place to the Jews. Notice several things about him.

"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" (verses 1–2).

First, he is given great authority and power. John describes this beast in such a way that he bears a striking resemblance to the dragon, who also had seven heads and ten horns and ten diadems on his horns. This makes sense because his power and authority comes from the dragon. These horns symbolize strength and power. Ten is a symbolic number representing all the world's political and military might. The seven heads may very well represent the seven hills of Rome and the blasphemous names remind us of how often political leaders take on the titles of deity. Certainly John is thinking about Roman emperors like Nero who was worshipped as "the savior of the world" and Domitian who was addressed as "our Lord and our god." The beast also has fierce features resembling a leopard, a bear and a lion. In Daniel 7 these represented three successive world powers. Here in Revelation they show us this beast will combine all of these dreaded attributes of ferocity.

"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?'" (verses 3–4).

He also becomes the object of fascination and worship. Here something strange happens. In a kind of parody of the death and resurrection of Jesus, one of the beast's seven heads has a fatal wound and is then healed. People are amazed! It's interesting because the emperor Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68. But there was a rumor or legend developed that he had come back to life. This may be in the back of John's mind. But whoever it is he's seen as someone not just to be admired, respected and feared, but also worshipped.

"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" (verses 5–6).

The beast is given the freedom to blaspheme God. This will only go on for a limited period of time—42 months or 1260 days or 3-1/2 years. Some take this quite literally as the last half of the seven-year period called The Great Tribulation. Others see this as the entire church age between the two comings of Christ. I see this as symbolic number for a limited period of time at the

end of the age when evil will be given free reign. In Luke 21:24 Jesus called it *"the times of the Gentiles."* But, more importantly, notice the words, *"he was given."* This reminds us that God is still in control. Even though this beast is allowed to say and do things which are incredibly insulting to God and all that's holy, God is still in control. And it won't last forever.

"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" (verses 7–8).

Finally, he is allowed to conquer God's people. God also allows him to make war with the saints and even to overcome them. He becomes quite literally a ruler over the entire world. But don't miss the fact that there are still two very distinct groups of people on the earth. There are those who worship him and there are the saints. The saints are just people like you and me who put our hope in Jesus and refuse to worship the beast. Notice how John also speaks about a book. He calls it the *"book of life of the lamb who was slain."* Inside the book are the names of all who follow the lamb and worship him; all who refuse to worship this antichrist.

You might be wondering, Who is this beast? Is this a man or is this a nation like Rome? Most scholars agree that for John the beast was the Roman Empire and its emperors as the persecutors of the church and those who demanded worship and claimed divine authority. But the beast is more than the Roman Empire. John's vision grew out of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfillment won't come until the end of the age. The beast will be the final, intensified manifestation of evil. And I believe this will take the form of a man, a person, a counterfeit Christ. In one of his letters John wrote, *"Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen..."* (1 John 2:18). Paul wrote about a time in the future when *"the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God"* (2 Thess. 2:3-4). Jesus pointed to the same event in Mark 13:14.

The Beast from the Earth will be a religious leader

But what most people don't realize is that there isn't just one beast but two. John describes another beast in verses 11-18. As a matter of fact, when you combine these two beasts with the dragon in chapter 12 you have a false Trinity. We worship one God who throughout eternity has existed in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But here is a false Trinity; the dragon,

the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth; together a parody of the true God, a counterfeit.

The primary difference between the first beast and the second beast is the first seemed to embody secular power and military might. The second beast is different. He embodies religious power; the power to deceive and seduce. Look at verses 11–15.

"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."

He looks very different than the first beast. Instead of an impressive show of power with ten heads and seven horns, he's modest. He only has one head and two horns that are lamb-like. He's masquerading as the true lamb, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, his voice is still loud and menacing like the dragon.

More important than his looks is his ministry. His whole purpose is to draw attention to the first beast, especially in light of the fact that the first beast had seemingly come back from the dead. He makes the people of the earth worship the first beast and he performs miracles of magic to deceive people into doing so. He orders people to set up an image of the first beast and even makes the image breathe and speak. Again, God's people pay dearly for refusing to go along with all this.

"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" (verses 16–18).

He also forces everyone to wear the mark of the first beast. There have been all kinds of fanciful and imaginative interpretations about the mark of the beast. Will it be a tattoo or an embedded microchip? Some people think this is the number of a person. For example, the Hebrew letters for "Nero Caesar" can be converted into numbers which total 666. But numbers in Revelation are almost always symbolic. Since the perfect number is seven

and six falls just short of it this number may represent sinful imperfection and failure. The bottom line is we don't know what it means.

What we **do** know is that this mark will identify people as belonging to the beast. It's important to remember back in chapter 7 God's people were given their own mark or seal which identified them as belonging to God. Again, Satan has never had an original thought; this is just another way for him to mimic God. Notice also this mark is used to place financial pressure on people to worship the beast. If they don't wear it, they can't buy or sell. In an age where the almighty dollar rules so many of us, it's not hard to believe that our bank account could be the thing that forces us into submission.

Some of you may think all of this sounds pretty far fetched. I don't think so. Listen to what Grant Osborne says about this: "While at the present period of history it seems unthinkable that such a state of affairs could occur, we must remember that we are only seventy years removed from the rise of Hitler and Stalin, and it is pure arrogance to think something similar could not happen again. If anyone could solve the terrorist crisis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the unrest in Africa (not to mention the world economic crisis), people would rush to worship such a person."

Taming the Beasts

John doesn't tell us about the beast to pique our curiosity as to the beast's identity. He tells us about the beast in order to help us in our walk as believers; to tell us how to live in the midst of a beastly world. Don't forget that Revelation is a pastoral letter. It's a pastoral letter from Jesus, the Lord of the Church, to the church. It's a pastoral letter from John to seven specific churches whom he knows and cares deeply for as a fellow sufferer during his exile on Patmos. So right smack dab in the middle of this passage, sandwiched between his description of the two beasts, John gives believers like us pastoral advice on how to respond to the beast. Look at verses 9-10.

He starts out, "**He who has an ear, let him hear.**" This is a call to listen up, similar to the call at the end of each message to the seven churches, "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**" What word does John have for us?

It comes in the form of a Proverb: "**If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed.**" I believe this is talking about Christians who will undergo the beast's persecution. "If a believer is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes." John is saying to believers that resistance to captivity is futile. If that's what God has in store for you, you have to accept that; there is no use fighting it. The second part reinforces that: "If any believer kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." This is a warning to the church not to defend itself with the use of force. By the way,

the church has tried to do that from time to time throughout history and always with disastrous effects. Remember when Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to defend Jesus? He lopped off the ear of some poor slave! Jesus said to him, "**Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword**" (Mt 26:52).

This is difficult for us, isn't it? We want to take matters into our own hands. We want to give people a taste of the pain they've inflicted on us. We want pay back and we want it **now!** What John tells us doesn't just apply to people living at the time of the antichrist, it applies to us now. As John said, "**even now many antichrists have arisen.**" How do you respond to those who oppose you or criticize you or want to harm you? How do we respond now to those who want to destroy the church or even just to limit our freedom to worship? Jesus said don't fight it, turn the other cheek. But that's not all. He also told us to actively love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Listen to what Paul said, "**Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good**" (Rom 12:17-21).

On the morning of October 2, 2006, a troubled milkman named Charles Carl Roberts barricaded himself inside the West Nickel Mine Amish School, ultimately murdering five young girls and wounding six others. Roberts committed suicide when police arrived on the scene. It was a dark day for the Amish community of West Nickel Mines, but it was also a dark day for Marie Roberts, the wife of the gunman, and her two young children. But on the following Saturday, she experienced something truly countercultural while attending her husband's funeral. That day, she and her children watched as Amish families, about half of the 75 mourners present, came and stood alongside them in the midst of their own blinding grief. Despite the crime the man had perpetrated, the Amish came to mourn Charles Carl Roberts. Bruce Porter, a fire department chaplain who was there, broke down and cried when he saw their love and forgiveness, and so did Marie Roberts.

We wonder, what is it that is really being called for here? What will allow us to be this way towards people who want to destroy us? The second part of v.9 tells us, "**Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.**" You see, that's how we'll need to respond, not with vengeance but with love. We'll need perseverance and faith.

Perseverance. With the Olympics starting this weekend we will hopefully see many examples of perseverance. Someone said that perseverance is courage stretched out. It's hanging in there when things get tough. We need perseverance in our jobs, our

marriages, our diets, our studies, and our parenting. But most of all we need perseverance in our life as believers. We need to hang in there and continue to follow Christ when there doesn't seem to be any payoff, only trouble. This is why the health and wealth gospel is such a sham. If God gives you everything you want now, why would you need perseverance?

The thing that will allow us to persevere is what is mentioned next: faith. Faith is trusting God when all the tangible reasons for trusting him have vanished. Hebrews says, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"* (Heb. 11:1). When the disciples panicked because a terrible storm was about to capsize their boat, Jesus simply asked, *"Where is your faith?"* Faith is the thing we need to allow us to persevere through the storm without falling apart.

Perseverance and faith work together. Back in the Winter Olympics of 1988 in Calgary American figure skater Paul Wylie set up for the first jump in his program, but as soon as he was in the air, he knew something was terribly wrong. A flash later his hand touched the ice; the blade didn't hold. He started slipping and he fell. As he collapsed to the ice all he heard was the groan of what seemed like a million voices. He struggled to get up and continue with thoughts racing through his mind that there is no way of erasing a fall from the judge's minds, no way to jam the television transmissions to the living rooms of family and friends watching back home.

But here is what he wrote, "I have four minutes left and one important choice to make. Either skate through the rest of the program believing that something constructive will come of the mishap, concentrating and performing through to the end, or continue to dwell on the fall and its consequences, inviting more mistakes caused by a negative frame of mind. A Scripture flashes through my mind that helps me with my decision: 'The righteous shall fall, but they shall not be utterly cast down.' I suddenly grasp God's perspective: he will use our successes and our failures to teach us about ourselves and to show the world his

glory. 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...' (Romans 8:28) I move on, accepting a new role. I admit imperfection and decide to skate 'heartily as unto the Lord' for God's glory rather than my own results."

He finished tenth, but his lack of success at the 1988 Games didn't deter him. He continued to compete in figure skating and eventually won the silver medal at the 1992 Olympics in France. That's perseverance and faith.

Conclusion

There are times in our walk with Christ that we fall or we're knocked over by some beast who is out to destroy us. What do we do? We don't retaliate. We love our enemies. We pray for them. And we don't give up. As Paul once said, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed"* (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Our faith allows us to persevere.

Like St. Valentine. Do you know his story? In the 3rd century the Roman emperor Cadius II interrogated him and tried to persuade him to convert to Roman paganism. He refused and instead tried to convert the emperor to faith in Jesus. Eventually that cost him his life.

Of course, no one exemplified this better than Jesus. Perseverance and faith. Betrayed, arrested, mocked, punched, spit upon, whipped, and nailed to Roman cross. Yet all he could say was *"Father forgive them..."* Peter, who witnessed it all, said, *"while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously"* (1 Peter 2:23).

You and I may not ever meet up with beasts as fearsome and tenacious as the ones in Revelation 13, but there are many beasts we face today. Instead of fighting back, will you entrust yourself to him who judges righteously? Will you respond with perseverance and faith?