

August 29, 2021

Revelations 13:1-18

Children's message: This morning's passage from Revelations is actually talking about the cult of personality. This happens when some people in society start to worship another person. Most of the time this happens due to a person's power or ability. I often wonder if they are worshipping these things and not really the person. Anyone could be given power or ability and people's worship would shift. Remember that as Christians we are only supposed to worship God. Either God the Father, God the Son or God the Holy Spirit. Human beings and their talents are not meant to be worshipped.

In this morning's passage we read about how in the past people were forced to worship the emperor as a God. The emperor thought that he was God and the people he governed should worship him. Sounds like someone's power went to his head. So if the people did not worship him as God then he would have them killed. Or as the readings say this morning, the emperor would not let these people trade or buy food. He is really letting these people starve a slow death and making their lives and their families lives very difficult.

This happened over two thousand years ago in a place half way around the world. I wondered if this still happens in our time? Unfortunately the answer is yes. The people of North Korea still do this. They worship their political leader like a God and emperor. He actually demands that the people worship and think of him as a God. If they do not do this he

has them killed or sent to prison camps. It sounds a lot like the story we read this morning. Some parts of the world have not changed very much from two thousand years ago.

Then I got to thinking about the celebrities and sports personalities we follow. We watch their lives play out on TMZ or Entertainment Tonight. Are we worshipping the celebrity status they have? Which is a form of power. Or is our curiosity getting the better of us?

Regardless of the personality and the power they may have at this moment, the only One we should be worshipping is God.

Adult's message: The message this morning gets even more bizarre yet. The passage talks about the beast and how he will come against the saints. In veiled language, John is warning his communities about how the Roman Emperors will attack the church. Having a good biblical commentary with cultural context from the first century truly helps. Let's get into it and unpack some of this text.

The beast that rises out of the sea is a composite of the four beasts from Daniel 7. They were the worldly kingdoms from history. For John it is Rome. They were the sea power of the Mediterranean at this time. That was how they built their empire around the area. The ten horns refer to power and the seven heads are the Roman emperors of the time. The blasphemous names were the names these emperors used to express their divinity. They would use blasphemous titles like: Lord, God and Saviour. For the Christian of the day these titles were offensive and blasphemous.

The wounded head from verse three is making a reference to Nero and how he was killed. Nero met his end by having his throat slit just like the lamb that is slaughtered in the temple. The empire continued on after his death in 68 A.D. Many at the time believed that Nero would rise again. Nero was succeeded by Domitian who was thought to be a reincarnation of Nero. This was only due to the fact that he far surpassed Nero in his persecution of the Christians.

Domitian was very cruel in the enforcement of the emperor worship. He continues to blaspheme God. Domitian demanded to be called divine. On the Roman coins during his reign, divine titles were associated with his likeness on them. Christians at the time saw emperor worship as worship of Satan. This was the ultimate offense against God. How could God's creatures worship earthly authority?

The last two verses have created much prophesy over the last two thousand years. Verse seventeen is a parody that is sometimes used as a code among Christians. It is a reference to God's seals in chapter seven verse three. It may also be a reference to the Hebrew Phylacteries worn on the left arm and forehead. To keep God's word in your heart and in your mind. We are really not told what the mark actually is or what it looks like. What we do know is that the mark is gained by worshipping the beast or emperor. There is a great economic bias against those who do not bear the emperor's mark. John reminds the Christians to be faithful to God and do not render worship to the emperor or empire.

In some bibles the number of the beast or emperor is calculated as 616 and not the popular 666. It was a common practice for rabbis to play with the letters of their alphabets and assign them numbers. Christians

did similar things. The numerical equivalent of Jesus in the Greek is 888. The numerical equivalent of Nero Ceasar from Greek to Hebrew is 666. However the numerical equivalent from Latin to Hebrew is 616. It would be safer for John to refer to Nero than Domitian. He is the present emperor and Nero is long dead. Yet in a round about way referring to Nero is like referring to Domitian since many felt he was the reincarnation of Nero.

Some scholars look at the 666 as a symbol rather than a cryptogram. They look at it as a symbol of falling short of perfection. So it is failure, upon failure upon failure. An evil trinity of failure. Remember that 7 was the perfect number for the Jews. Six just falls short of the perfection of seven. For Christians of that day the Trinity was symbolized as 777.

John is encouraging the Christian communities in his area to keep the faith. Stay away from the cult of personality that is around the emperor. Roman emperors are men and they come and go. They are not God nor divine. Stick to worshipping God and not an earthly person. In doing this sermon, I had my suspicions confirmed about the idea of reincarnation among the early church. More so about the influence of Hinduism on Judaism at this time. I am still learning and reading as I go down this rabbit hole. God bless, Pastor D