

St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes 23rd May 2010

'Past Imperfect Future Tense' – 'War in heaven 1'

Revelation 12

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The Nativity story is told in detail by Luke and Matthew and paints a picture of a baby born into the world with shepherds and wise men, I wonder whether you spotted that Revelation 12 is also a Nativity story! However John's Nativity Story features a monstrous dragon ready to eat the baby as soon as it is born, war in heaven between angels and the dragon's legions, a murderous pursuit involving floods spewed from the dragon's mouth and the baby's mother sprouting wings to escape! John's strictly X rated Nativity story is obviously not concerned with the exact historical facts of the birth of Jesus so much as the cosmic significance. God in Christ breaks into the world not just to teach us how to live God's ways, not just to heal the sick, not just to save our souls...he came to confront and defeat the power of evil and it is this truth that John delivers in spectacular fashion.

John does this by using the popular myths and stories of his day to communicate to spell out the reality of what Christ has done. Not far from John's prison island of Patmos is the 'sacred' island of Delos. On Delos Apollo was 'born' after Apollo's mother had fled to escape the dragon who wanted to kill this new born son of Zeus. In John's retelling of the story the Dragon represents the power of evil, the Woman God's Chosen people Israel/the Church and the Child is Jesus. With the coming into the world of Christ comes the beginning of the end of the dragon. The Church (v14) survives the desert, flood and persecution and is given eagles wings to escape. It is v 5 that is the key to the narrative - read v5. The incarnation, death and ascension of Christ ushers in the coming of God's Kingdom, the authority of Christ, and the downfall of Satan. From v 5 onwards comes victory over the power of evil. Because of Christ the powers of sin and death have been defeated. This is why heaven explodes with joy and confidence with a new hymn of praise! – read v 10- 12.

Now this is all very 'cosmic' and supernatural but how does this relate to our everyday life and experience? In the world today who has the power? Who has the authority, Who rules the Kingdom? David Cameron, Nick Clegg and even Gordon Brown have been exercising these questions over the past few weeks or so! However John would consistently tell us that no political leader will ever have ultimate power or authority – read the following texts: Rev 11:15, 11:7, 12:10. This 'Kingdom' of God is not a political kingdom.

Back in the gospels we see this in the life of Jesus. At his temptation he rejected the devil's offer of a position in government (Luke 4:5), at his arrest he called his followers to lay down their swords (Luke 19:51), and at his trial before Pilate he reminded the Roman Governor that though he stood 'powerless' before him nevertheless he had all the authority and power of heaven.

The Kingdom power and authority of Jesus whilst definitely in this world does not however take up the values of this world. It is a kingdom that says no to the demands of the powers and principalities of evil, no to immorality and idolatry, no to violence and no to injustice. A Kingdom whose King is not a Lion but a Lamb – a Lamb who was slain. If Revelation teaches us anything it is that the power by which God brings in his kingdom is the power of suffering love revealed perfectly in the cross of Christ, and this power changes lives and changes history. In the end it is only through Christ and his Church that God's Kingdom, power and authority can break through the powers of sin, evil and death that mess up the world and the lives of people in it. Look back to Luke 10 (Read 10:1-22) and we can see that Jesus gave the 72 disciples a seemingly unenviable task yet they returned with joy and Jesus himself was filled with joy as the chain effect of powers of evil was broken. No powers however evil, no sin however terrible can stand against God's Kingdom and his Church. The kingdom, power and authority of Christ changes lives and changes the world person by person. This is our Mission today as it was for the first disciples



Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. What evidence can you see for powers of evil in the world today?
2. Why is evil still with us if Christ has victory over evil? Under what circumstances have you wondered whether God was still in charge?
3. The Kingdom power and authority of Jesus says no to the demands of the powers and principalities of evil, no to immorality and idolatry, no to violence and no to injustice. What evil in the world today do you see that really offends you? What can the Church do about it? What can you do about it?
4. How would you have felt being sent out as one of the 72 disciples?