

Revelation 12 Satan 1 Peter 5:7-9, James 4:7

1. This is an impossible sermon because the chapter we read is about satan. How can this be gospel? It will be a risky sermon, for all Christian preaching should be about Christ.
2. We said at the start of this series: prophecy is not prediction, is not looking into a glass ball. Prophecy is rather shedding God's light on the world. In this chapter John revisits history and he goes back all the way to the birth of Jesus. The child born here is Jesus. We should thus not try to read Revelation chronologically.
John uses tales from other peoples and religions, so these other peoples would have recognised elements of his story. But John baptises these foreign elements.
The woman who gives birth has been identified as Israel, as the people of God, as Zion and as Eve. John is consciously ambiguous here.
The adversary, satan, is the new element here in chapter 12. He is the terrible opponent of Jesus and his community. His seven heads identify him as maximum evil.
He is defeated but he subsequently attacks the church.
3. But can we really speak about satan in 2021? In our time he is 'out'. He is offensive to outsiders and to liberal Christians. We are tempted not to believe in him. But that's a miscalculation.
On the other hand, he should never be a subject in itself. We believe that he exists but we do not believe in him. There are no songs about him.
4. The chapter is upbeat: satan has been defeated, he has been thrown out of heaven. Jesus was victorious on the cross and on the Easter morning! Yet at the moment, ever since that time, satan is making life so difficult for the church. Why? In heaven he can do nothing anymore. Remember: he persecutes us not because he is more powerful, but because he is already defeated!
5. In Afghanistan they know this, and in Saudi Arabia, Haiti, China, the Maldives, Myanmar. Believers are dying as martyrs. John prepared his readers for persecution by the Roman Empire; the worst persecution was around the year 300, just before the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.
But with us in the West he takes a subtle approach: he uses prosperity, divisions and discouragement to tempt us. Note how verse 9 says that satan 'leads astray', that is, he tries to deceive God's children. This was described very well by C.S. Lewis in his book 'The Screwtape Letters'.

For us this means:

1. Let us not get obsessed with satan. Some Christians see a demon behind every tree, but that is not good. He is the defeated enemy. Yet let's avoid Halloween, that celebration of darkness. It can't be good for anyone's mental health to celebrate the darkness.
2. Satan has a short time; verse 14 mentions 3.5 years or days, which is half of seven, and so a short period! Even though to us it seems long, from God's perspective it's short.
3. He has already been defeated! In faith we are living by the promise that the Lord Jesus is coming again soon.
4. Verse 11 says that we, the believers, are defeating (overcoming) him! We are not passive in history: the seven letters in chapters 2-3 have promises to 'the one who is victorious'. The meek are not the weak. Martyrdom is victory! Just as the cross of Jesus is victory.

