

Revelation 12:11

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[0 : 00] Now we turn back to Revelation chapter 12. I'm no kind of expert in military history at all, but I know that whenever you are fighting a war, it is always important to know how to fight that war.

And so often countries have got themselves into difficulty because they are, in a sense, fighting the last war. The Americans discovered, to their cost, that the Vietnam War wasn't like World War II. Other wars that happened, they're often very different, and there's different warfare that is needed. We live in a day, which for Christians and for the church, is a day of spiritual warfare.

We are aware that churches are under attack. It feels, doesn't it, like the world is moving away at speed from God. And His law and from His word.

And yet, as I say that we are living in a day of spiritual warfare, that is not because I'm a particular pessimist. It's because that is just true of every age and every situation that the church exists in.

[1 : 17] Paul makes that very clear, doesn't he, at the end of Ephesians, when he speaks about the armour of God, when he calls the church to pray for Him. His battle is not against flesh and blood.

And however we feel about life in 2022 as the church, and as Christians, whether we are sensing the spiritual attack, or whether we are not, it is important that we are aware of the spiritual reality of everything that we face as Christians, everything that we face as the church.

And so it is important that we are clear about how we fight, about how we wage spiritual warfare, how we take part in this spiritual warfare.

You see, the Bible is not at all surprised at the spiritual realities that we find ourselves in. No, but the Bible is more clear on that than the book of Revelation.

As John himself is under attack in exile on Patmos for preaching the gospel, the churches around him either are facing persecution or just about to be on the cusp of persecution, or themselves kind of weighed down by problems within the church.

[2 : 40] What happens? Well, John, in exile, sees a vision of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And then the curtain, if you like, is pulled back on our world.

And John sees, well, he doesn't see kind of fantasy visions. No, he is in a sense, he is led into true reality. What is really going on in our world?

What is really going on in our churches as he sees these visions of the spiritual realm? And so as we come into the middle of Revelation 12, we've got this glorious vision.

I think it's an absolutely fantastic chapter, which speaks quite clearly of the spiritual fight. Now, if you look, I mean, we're not going to look in detail, but the opening few verses, the opening six verses of Revelation 12, you might, if you've never read it before, you might think this is crazy, this is kind of science fiction.

It's the kind of strange things you perhaps see in films. And yet, when you get down into the detail, really what you've got is a Bible overview. We're used to different ways of doing Bible overviews.

[3 : 51] It's always fascinating, isn't it, when you see, perhaps for the first time, that the Bible isn't just a collection of books or a collection of verses, but there is a story, a beginning, a middle, and an end, and we see how the Bible fits together.

Well, we've got a kind of Bible overview in verses one to six in a slightly different way than perhaps we're used to thinking of it. You've got this image, haven't you, of this woman clothed with the sun who is pregnant, crying out in birth pains, and she gives birth.

But just as she's about to give birth, you've got this dragon that is ready to take the child that she gives birth to and destroy him.

And yet, he's unable to do that. This woman gives birth to this male child who is to rule all the nations. The dragon cannot touch the child, but this woman who has given birth to the child flees

into the wilderness, and who is then under attack by this dragon.

That's really what the rest of the chapter says. We might ask the question, well, how is that a Bible overview? But it doesn't take that much effort to kind of work out exactly who these stand for.

[5 : 02] The baby, the child, well, he's obviously the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't he? Verse five, this male child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, who is protected, who is not able to be destroyed by this dragon, that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see, well, this woman, who is this woman? Is it Mary? Well, I don't think it can be Mary as you look at the chapter. This woman clearly, I think, stands for the people of God.

The people of Jesus, in a sense, it's very clearly, isn't he? He is promised to God's people. He is descended from God's people. And yet, so this woman that flees then off into the wilderness is a picture of the church.

The picture of the church who are cared for and nourished by the Lord in a place of a wilderness, a place where things are perhaps difficult for a period.

Don't get too hung up on the numbers in these chapters. I think the numbers just point to the fact that there is a kind of long but limited period by the Lord. And the dragon, well, who is this dragon?

[6 : 14] Well, I think it's very clear that this dragon is, verse 8, that ancient serpent, the devil, Satan. You look through the Old Testament, what is the Old Testament a story of?

In one way, you can see that the Old Testament is a story of the devil. It's a story of Satan trying to stop the Lord Jesus Christ from coming into our world, who is going to come in and destroy the devil.

He's coming in to destroy the devil, isn't he? He's coming to save a people. For all he can do, the devil cannot. He cannot do that. So the Lord Jesus Christ, he dies.

He's risen from the dead. In doing that, he destroys the devil. The devil is out, but remember, he is not yet down. The devil, a defeated enemy, what does he do?

He turns his anger on this woman, this woman who is in the wilderness. Look at verse 17. The dragon becomes furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

[7 : 26] There's a spiritual battle as Satan wants to destroy the church. Now, so far, so depressing.

We've perhaps come here for encouragement tonight, and all I've been telling you is you've now got an enemy perhaps you've never even thought about. Who is this enemy? Well, Satan, verse 10.

Look at what he's described as.

He's described as an accuser. He's an accuser. So often when we think of spiritual warfare and we think of the devil, our mind goes to all sorts of strange things, perhaps things that we've read in books, perhaps films that we've seen, horror, films perhaps that we may have heard of.

But know that Satan is described in three ways in the scripture. His main tactics, we're not, he doesn't surprise us. No, he's a liar.

He lies about life. He lies about God and his word. He's a deceiver. And he's an accuser. What does Satan want to do?

[8 : 30] He wants to accuse us. Accuse us of our sin. Tell us that we are not good enough for God. Tell us that the Lord has not removed our sin from us as far as the east is from the west.

Perhaps he accuses us to ourself. He accuses us to our conscience. He attempts even perhaps to accuse us to the Lord himself.

But he cannot do it. He cannot do it. And so, this chapter, in the midst of the reality of the spiritual warfare, there is great encouragement. And it's the encouragement I want us to point us to tonight.

If we face spiritual warfare and spiritual battles and struggles, where is the encouragement? Well, the encouragement is right there in verse 11. This is what we need to do.

Well, not so much this is what we need to do. This is why, for all the difficulties that there are and for all the reality is that we have an enemy who wants to do all he can to destroy our faith, to destroy our churches, this is why we can have confidence tonight.

[9 : 39] Three reasons. Look at verse 11. And they, us, the church, Christians, they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, for they have loved not their lives, even unto death.

This is the encouragement I want to take you to go home with tonight. Why we can have utter confidence, even in a time of perhaps spiritual attack, and perhaps a greater awareness of the darkness of our world and the difficulties there are, perhaps in our Christian lives and in church life.

Where can we have the encouragement? Well, verse 11, you have conquered him. They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, for they have loved not their lives, even unto death.

Let's very briefly tonight take each of these three in turn. Firstly, they have conquered him, who are in a place of victory, by the blood of the Lamb.

By the blood of the Lamb. Now just notice, we start thinking about spiritual warfare, and we can think, well, okay, we need to get ready to fight.

[10:56] We need to do something very actively and to fight. And perhaps some of us, that might terrify us, for others who are a bit more kind of an activist kind of people, we think, great, let me add it, what can I do?

But notice, the point of this verse is that we are already, we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, we are already in the place of victory. We are already in the place of being the conquerors.

The war has been won. Do you see that? They have conquered him. This is so often. This is so important, isn't it? Sometimes it cannot feel like that.

This is why the devil's tactic of accusation and lying and deceiving is so, it's so important for us to notice.

We can see, well, how can we be in the place of victory when so few people are worshipping the Lord at the end of a Lord's Day, kind of relatively speaking, in our country?

[12:00] How can we say we're in the place of victory where curriculum in our schools is being written deliberately against God's word? How can we say we're in a place of victory where, when will you compare where the West is and where it was 50 years ago?

How can we say that? It's easy to get pessimistic. It's easy to get discouraged. And at that point, we get into that kind of doom loop and that doom cycle and perhaps we panic and we think, well, we need different tactics in terms of dealing with that and fighting back.

But no, we need to hold on to the fact that whatever our position in history is, if we're this side of the cross of the resurrection, we have conquered him. We're in the place of victory.

And notice when it says, they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, this is clearly pointing, isn't it, to a place and a time in history. A victory established at a point, at a moment.

Victory in fact. And it's not in the sense us that have won the victory. Not anything you or I have done.

[13:13] That's why putting our trust and our hope in political leaders is so foolish, isn't it, and so futile. Our position of victory is, well, the blood of the Lamb.

That's clearly, isn't it, pointing to the cross. The blood of the Lamb kind of rolls off the tongue if you've been a Christian for a while, but we need to think about that. That is pointing to what the Lord Jesus Christ has achieved as he died a violent death for his people.

But notice that the deliberate way in which the cross is being talked about here, it's deliberately reminding us of the imagery whereof, well, it's the Passover, isn't it?

That time back at the start of Exodus where the Lord rescued his people, where the angel of death came passing through Egypt. And if God's people had put the blood of a lamb, a blood of a slaughtered animal on the hinges, on the gates of the Israelites, then the Lord passes over.

Looked like God's people, they couldn't ever escape fairer. And yet what happened? The Lord set them free. It's that judgment came and provided a way that they could escape.

[14:40] Pointed forward, isn't it? Pointed forward to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ as judgment came down and pointed forward to the judgment which we will all face before the Lord.

And yet, and yet if we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that judgment will pass over us because it has already fallen on him. That's the place of victory.

The place where, in a sense, we can say that we have conquered. Now, notice it's a victory, isn't it? It's a victory of weakness. There's nothing more tragic than seeing a dead carcass of a dead sheep with the blood coming out.

Nothing more weak than seeing a man on a cross outside of Jerusalem. And yet it is this that sets the Lord's people free.

The cross is despised by everyone who looks on it, apart from those who know what is going on there. Apart from those who recognize that that is the great point of victory, as God, as the Lord shows his victory over the devil, and over death, and over sin.

[15 : 56] You've got to hold on to that and recognize that. Why? Well, because his victory there is our victory. As the Lord Jesus Christ dies on the cross, he is our representative.

Him, as our commander, he has dealt the decisive blow against Satan, against death, against the whole world system that is against God. It shows that that is under judgment.

It shows, ultimately, that however things might feel right now, God's people belonging to Christ and on the right side of history.

And his victory there is our victory. It's that blood that silences the accusations of the accuser. The accuser, perhaps, comes into our hearts and our minds!

And he points and says, well, what about that sin? What about that memory that you've got? And you don't tell any other people about it, but it's there, that memory of what you did or who you were 20, 30 years ago.

[17 : 03] Will the Lord ever forgive you? What silences those accusations is the blood of the Lamb. Face up to that. Like Martin Luther, the great reformer, kind of tells stories of being kind of confronted by his sin, by Satan, and just almost kind of standing up and saying to Satan, well, what about it?

I'm far worse than you could ever imagine. But the Lord Jesus Christ has died. The Lamb's blood has been shed. I have for love in our church when we say the confession of sin.

I say an assurance of pardon, and I'm sure you know it well from one John. It is striking, isn't it? We are told if we confess our sins, he is faithful and, what's the next word is?

Just. It's not faithful and merciful, although he is merciful. He is just. Because at the cross, justice has been done. If your sin has been paid for by Christ at the cross, you do not have to pay for it.

That's why the blood of the Lamb is our place of victory. Secondly. Verse 11. They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb. Secondly, they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.

[18 : 22] The word of their testimony. Now what's this talking about? Now, I think we need to recognize that that word can be a little bit misleading. We think about testimonies, and so often today, don't we?

We think of our personal stories. We think about our stories of how we became a Christian. We love, quite rightly, listening to people's testimonies of how they met the Lord Jesus Christ, or rather how the Lord Jesus Christ met them.

Some of you here, I'm sure you've got amazing stories. Some of you, more like me, grew up, in a sense, as a Christian, and that's a wonderful testimony of God's mercy. That doesn't matter. But that's actually not what is being talked about here.

This testimony isn't our testimony. This word of their testimony isn't about spending lots of time when we get home kind of writing out our personal story. No, the word of our testimony, which is, in a sense, the place of victory, is the faithful testimony, the faithful witness to the truth of the blood of the Lamb.

That's the position of victory. That's the place of power and victory we have as the church, because we speak of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done on the cross.

[19 : 41] Now, that makes sense, doesn't it, given what we've said about the blood of the Lamb.

But yet, how often do we as Christians, does the church begin to think that our power, our victory, is going to lay elsewhere?

For Christians, we are going to be doing good works for those around us. But ultimately, our place of victory isn't in our good works of mercy.

It's certainly not going to be in our political activity, although Christians should be involved in politics at every sphere. not even going to be in our, in a sense, religious activity and piety, not denying the importance of those things.

But our position of victory comes from the testimony to the blood of the Lamb. Now, the deeper challenge to all of us tonight is that the devil knows that at some level.

And so what he wants to do, the great spiritual battle, if you like, in the church, is keeping this central. The devil's greatest victory won't be from attacking the church from outside, but it's going to be getting church and getting Christians to stop trusting in and holding out this testimony to, well, to the blood of the Lamb.

[21 : 04] The Christian church not believing and not holding out, not proclaiming the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is actually a far greater danger, a far greater threat than anything that the

world outside can do to the church.

You see that really clearly in Revelation. So you've got the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. You have got two churches just about on the cusp of brutal persecution. And they are the two churches that Jesus is so positive about that he steals them for that. The other five churches, well, Jesus is very critical of in various different ways. But what are the problems in those churches?

Well, I referred to one this morning, Ephesus that's lost their love for Christ. Others have let false teaching in and false living in. That is a far greater danger to the church than anything that anyone could do from outside.

And this is a battle in the sense that needs to be fought in every generation. You need to be holding on to the importance of the word of our testimony, a clear testimony to the blood of the Lamb.

[22 : 28] This testimony that says we hold out as well as hold on to, I think those two things go hand in hand, don't they? And that means, yeah, it's going to be tough. There's going to be a point of offence, as Rico Tyson often talks about, the kind of pain barrier that you have to cross to make sure that the gospel is clear, that the testimony we are holding out is clear.

But at that point where we feel so weak, that is the point of victory. Conquered in by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and then finally, and this is very challenging, it's our willingness to suffer.

For they have loved not their lives, even unto death. This is a great challenge, isn't it?

But you see it again and again in Revelation as you see God's people laying down their lives for the Lord. Now, if we understand, if we really get the cross, we will get ultimately how it affects us.

If our sins have been separated from us as far as the east is from the west, we are safe. We are safe, joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are safe, round the throne in heaven, as Revelation constantly pictures the church.

[23 : 45] Our lives are his, whatever might happen now. And the challenge is that suffering now, in many ways, it's inevitable for the church.

It's inevitable for those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. That makes sense, doesn't it? If the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and that was the way of victory, and for those who belong to him, suffering now is the way to glory.

For Christians, though, we're not masochists, we don't want to jump into that kind of suffering. We recognize that. We get that. We sense our lives now, but adjoined to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's quite old now, isn't it? The TV series Band of Brothers. There's an episode very early on when I think one unit have just kind of been parachuted into the battlefield.

It's a TV series set in the Second World War. And one man meets another man. And one of the fighters, he confesses that he has, in a sense, been in hiding.

[24 : 57] He's been in hiding because he doesn't want to fight the war. He doesn't want to be a soldier. And the other soldier says to him, look, your problem is, your problem is that you think you are still alive.

In a sense, trying to encourage that man, that actually, that if you're going to hold on to your life, you're not going to be the soldier that you're called to be. You're not actually going to fight this war. And there's the kind of great irony of this. If we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have died and been made alive with him. And that, in a sense, feels weak.

But that is the great point of victory. This is masochism. There is fear in its right place here. But what it's saying to us is that for all of us, actually, our worst fears have been taken.

Death holds no terror for the believer. There is no way in which we will face the wrath of God coming to everyone. And so we are freed.

[26 : 02] We are free to fear God and not to man. The biggest threat to our confidence as believers is ultimately if we kind of retreat from that. If we love our lives.

Not our lives as they really are, hidden with Christ in God, but our lives as we kind of think they are. If we love our lives as we are, we are safe and sound and comfortable in the here and now. The way the church survives this kind of spiritual onslaught is, well, by recognizing we belong to Christ. By recognizing his blood has been shed. By recognizing that ultimately we do not fear death. Now it is perfectly normal, it is perfectly natural, perfectly right to fear, in a sense fear, if you like the process of dying, you wouldn't be a human being if that was the case.

But to fear death, death as a judgment, death as an end, well that has been taken by the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you are a Christian tonight, you are in the place of victory. You are in the place of victory because of the blood of the Lamb. Because of the word of the testimony. Because we have loved not our lives even to death. I wonder whether we believe that tonight.

[27 : 19] I wonder perhaps if you are like me and you kind of look around at the world and you look around at the church, very easy to get very pessimistic. Do we see the place of victory? Do we see the fact that Satan, yes, he's on the attack, but he is defeated?

Do we encourage one another in that? Do we pass that on to one another? Of course we need to pass that on to our children. Do we pass that on to our grandchildren? It's an encouragement for us tonight.

They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony. For they have loved not their lives even unto death. Let's pray together.