

Revelation 12

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[0:00] Well, good morning again, everyone. It's a real joy for me to be here this morning to teach from God's Word. And I'm really grateful to Callum for the opportunity to be able to preach and to teach. It's a joy to be able to do that in English.

And it is not to say that preparation time is not important in English, but it takes a lot longer when you're having to do it in your second language. So I'm really grateful for the opportunity to be able to share this morning.

Please do open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 12, which we read from earlier on, because it will be really helpful for us to have that there, especially with a chapter like this.

It really helps us to focus in on what's taking place in God's Word. And as you turn there, let me pray and ask for God's prayer, the only true hope of every person throughout the world.

And so we ask, Father, grant us your Spirit to teach us now. And may our minds and hearts be changed and transformed more to be like Jesus, for he is the King who will rule forever.

[1:08] And it is in his name that we pray. Amen. So I don't know about you. I was reading this this morning in my kitchen with my boy Josh. And we were a bit like, yeah, what's going on here?

It's a bit shocking and it's a bit strange, isn't it? You would read this and you think, okay, so we've got dragons and angels. We've got falling stars from the heavens and we've got flying females. What on earth has this got to do with my life?

Why on earth is this in the Bible? Surely this just proves Christianity is just up there, out of touch with the reality of the life that I lead.

Well, actually this passage does have things to say to our lives today. And it speaks directly into every single person's life here, just either in this room or who are tuning in online.

This speaks with authority into our life because John, the person who's writing this book, this book, letter, whatever you want to call it, he is speaking about a conflict of epic proportions which cuts through everything that every one of us experiences in life.

[2:15] It is the conflict of good and evil. And this particular chapter is speaking about how we overcome evil in our lives.

Now, some of you who are here or who are listening in online are saying, yeah, that's very good, mate, but surely that's a bit childish, isn't it? Surely you, as somebody who's a little bit older, you're not super old and you're not super young anymore, you've had enough experience in life, you know that things like that are just a little bit, you know, for the babies, for the kids.

Good and evil, great for Star Wars, wonderful for Lord of the Rings, but not true in life. Well, is it? A lot of it depends on how we define evil.

Isn't it? I think most of us would use the word evil to describe big ticket things, sins of epic proportion, murder, genocide, sexual assault.

And I want to pause before I go any further because in a room with this number of people, there are people here who have experienced horrific evil. Horrific evil, either yourself personally or people that you know and that you love.

[3:28] And I do not want to step aside of that at all. I want to recognize that that is something that will have happened. And this section of God's word actually speaks into that deep pain, which has crossed the path of your life and points you to the one who says to you, I have made an end of evil and I have taken everything away.

And there is a day coming where the rule and reign of the King of Glory will make up for absolutely every tear that has been shed. It is true that evil does cover these big things, these huge big ticket sins.

But it is also true for us to recognize and take a step back and see that the Bible actually goes a little step deeper than the surface reality that we maybe see in our everyday lives.

And this is the point where it hits home to all of us this morning, because evil as it is defined in the Bible is the rejection of God's character and the purposes of the Lord over absolutely every single detail of life in this cosmos.

Evil is a reordering of creation where the creator is seemingly replaced by the people that he has made. That is how the Bible approaches this subject.

[4:42] It comes to us and it says, have you thought clearly on this and actually your role within this? And how actually each of us within our own hearts have such horrific evil right there?

There's a wonderful quote by Alexander Stolzson. It shows that I'm very educated, doesn't it? No, it just shows that I know how to Google things. Where he describes his experience reflecting on his time in the Gulag.

And he makes this point that actually the dividing line between good and evil doesn't run between states or political parties or anything else. It runs right through the center of the human heart.

And that is a man who has experienced great trauma and evil in his life. And he says, I recognize that this dividing line is right there through the center of me. And how I look at that prison guard who's opposite me.

It's true for all of us. The dividing line runs right through the center of who we are. Now, that means all of us to a greater or lesser extent are struggling with this problem in this room.

[5:46] Maybe it's because we boldly want to call the shots in life, if anything. And you see, God is actually too good to let us do that to ourselves.

He raises up the curtain. He raises up the curtain on the drama of eternity. And he shows us that in the cosmos all around about us and in our own hearts and homes, we are right in the middle of a cosmic conflict of absolutely epic proportions.

And he is directly aiming this at believers. You've got to remember that. This is a letter that's been written to churches and it's saying to them, do you realize how easy it is for you to forget that you're in the midst of this mass conflict, which is all around about you?

Remember those believers back in the first century, they are concerned. And rightly, they're concerned. They're concerned about their own security. And sometimes they're even concerned about their own social acceptance within their city.

That's why you've got chapters two and three, where Jesus is talking about how this impacts you in this particular location. They're thinking through, what does it look like for me to follow Jesus in every day of my life?

[6:58] What does it look like for all of these details to come underneath his lordship? And actually, they were struggling and often they were failing. And you see, we will never be a people who can ultimately overcome evil in our hearts or actually within the world around us if we are craving and chasing a really comfortable, cushy life.

So how, therefore, is my question to the guy at the front, how do I overcome evil? Well, I want us to think about three things that come out of the passage to help us.

Number one, there is provision, or to put it another way, what God has done about evil. Provision, what God has done about evil. Protection, what God is doing about evil for his people.

And then thirdly, priorities. What are our responsibilities? What are our responsibilities in the midst of this great conflict that is taking place? Provision.

What has God done about it? Well, our passage takes us back to the Garden of Eden. All of the book of Revelation is drawing on so many areas of the Old Testament. Honestly, this chapter of Loughton, I could take you to this place and that place and the next place.

[8:09] And actually, we would be here for hours just getting to the bottom of what is coming out here. But what we're seeing is that we are being taken back to the Garden of Eden, to creation, where God outlines that there is a raging conflict which is going to now engulf the world as a result of sin.

You see in verses 1 and 2, there is a great sign that appears in the heavens. And there is a woman. And there is then something else which comes in the heavens. I want you to notice a really simple little word that's missing in both of them.

But in reference to the woman, it's a great sign. And then within reference to the dragon, it is another sign. There is a great sign which comes and then there is another sign that appears. So

right from the very beginning, we're being told that even though this is a conflict which is of epic proportions, it's actually never, it's always one-sided.

There is something which is greater and there is something which is lesser. The dragon is always lesser. And I want to suggest to us that in this section, the dragon is Satan, the accuser of the whole world.

Verse 9 of the passage tells us that. The great dragon was hurled down, the ancient snake called the devil, Satan, who leads the world astray. But then we have to think through, well, who is the woman?

[9 : 20] Different people have different perspectives on that. But I would argue that the woman is presented here to us as an image of the people of God, of the church, the people who have faithfully followed the word of God.

And this becomes clearer as we move through the passage, I suggest to us, because from the woman comes the long-awaited king. You see that verse 2, but also in verse 5.

She, the woman of verses 1 and 2, gave birth to a son, a male child who, to quote Psalm 2, will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

This child, however, does not remain on earth. Who is this child? Well, verses 5 and 6 are an absolutely amazing summation of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth.

However, this child does not remain on earth. He is caught up to the throne of God. And this is where I pause and I say, so you said that God had done something about this.

[10 : 23] How on earth, how on earth does a disappearing saviour actually provide a conqueror? How does that actually conquer? How does that overcome evil? He's just disappeared.

It's as if he's just coming and gone again. How does that actually lead to the overcoming of evil? Did you see it? Or remember from our time reading it? Verse 11 of the chapter gives us the reason.

A saviour God has given us the Messiah that he had always promised. And he's saying to us that this king doesn't just stay up in heaven and doesn't just disappear. In the intervening part of his life, he walks onto the battlefield of this huge conflict and he dies.

And his blood has been spilt on that field of battle so that his people can overcome. What John is saying to us and what God is saying to us is, remember what happens to Jesus.

He dies on the cross in the midst of this raging conflict so that you and I do not need to die that death that we deserve. And we get all of the righteousness that was his and none of the punishment that we deserve.

[11 : 37] How do we overcome evil? We turn back and we look and recognise there is a saviour who God has actually provided for us. That should strengthen us in our central being.

It should remind us that God was faithful to his promises. He said he would send one and he did. And not only that, he actually did overcome. The saviour did overcome.

Taking one step further, it is wonderful that he is no longer here because he has ascended and he is at the right hand of the Father. He is no longer physically present on earth.

He is in the presence of God. And we are told throughout the Bible in different sections, he lives to intercede for those who are his brothers and sisters. That is kind of skipping into the next section of what he is doing presently.

But it also is one of these amazing things about what God has done about evil. That there is a man in heaven. And that means we can be there too.

[12 : 46] In going to the cross and rising again, Jesus has destroyed evil. Which is why Satan, the great dragon, verse 12, third part of verse 12, he knows his time is short.

But he knows that it is all over because he knows that the absolute victory is assured. And he is living for us in the presence of God, enabling us as the people of God to overcome evil.

Okay, provision. What God has done about evil. He has sent his son and he has provided the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And he has dealt with that for us.

But in the present, what about now? That's where we think about protection and what God is doing about evil in order to help us to overcome. The original listeners were asking similar questions.

They wanted to compromise their Christian faith. Because life would have been more comfortable for them in their social context. It would have been easier for them.

[13 : 47] Again, we make reference to chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. It would have been more comfortable for them if they had compromised on their faith.

And the thing is, it may also be like that for us as well. It may seem in the short term that actually a little bit of compromise here or there for us in our faith will lead to a degree of safety, security, possible comfort.

It means things are not going to be difficult. But it will only be like that for a little while. It is only ever like that for a little while. If I compromise, life will be easier.

I'll be safer. I'll save faith. Save faith. Save faith. And things will be better for my family. And although this is something which is understandable, the Bible explains for us that this is a choice in which we are choosing to side with evil.

Choosing to walk the path which goes alongside the one who is deceptive, alongside the one who has lied from the beginning, the accuser of the brothers and sisters, Satan.

[14 : 55] Is it really though? I mean, Martin, I'm not really murdering anybody here, Martin. You're saying that that's kind of an evil thing. That seems like a great overreaction to... Well, remember, we've already done the work on that.

We've already done the work on that earlier on, thinking about the human heart, the dividing line that comes right here in the center, where ultimately, where we choose to replace God, we are siding ultimately with the one who wants to overthrow God.

I'm glad to hear that you're not murdering anyone. That's a great positive. It means I can get my water safely at the end. Remember, evil at its core is the rejection of God.

The rejection of his perfect character and his wonderful purposes. And the rejection of his Lord and Messiah as the king over every detail of our lives. That is our pretensions to universal sovereignty over our lives, where we get to just do what we want.

It's just really difficult and it's really hard, and I just don't know exactly what's going to happen going into the future. However, when we try to overcome evil on our own, by our own efforts, potentially by giving in to our own lust or substances, by chasing after success or experiences or whatever it may be, we fundamentally miss the point and we get it wrong.

[16 : 19] The sad irony is that we desire security, but we end up entrapped. And we fall for the very thing which is the root of evil, which is that I get to be king and we don't actually come under the rule of the one who is the king, who gives himself for us, so that we will be able to live in step with him and come under his protection.

So how do we overcome this problem? How do we overcome our problem of seeking to protect ourselves, of seeking to chase after things which make the world around us or the difficulties within us not seem quite so difficult anymore?

It comes from recognizing that God is right there with us, that he is here right now amongst us as his people and with us when we are by ourselves and he is delighting to provide and to protect you as his child.

Look at the passage again. It's filled with it, absolutely filled with it. Satan seeks to destroy the church in verse four. He wants to destroy the Messiah before he's able to accomplish that work of salvation.

And the thing is, we can see from the gospel accounts that he seeks to do that with the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem. But God has prepared a place for his church. Did you see that?

[17 : 35] The woman fled into the wilderness too where a place prepared for her by God. He seeks to protect the church because he loves his people.

That's why his son came to earth was to die and to purchase a people for himself. The wilderness may not sound like a pleasant place, but if it is the place that God has provided for our protection, it is the perfect place for us as his people.

It is what he has given to us and it is what he has provided. We're picking up again on these images of the exodus where God is providing for his people in the midst of a wilderness and it goes on for a long time and a long time, but he ultimately provides what they need every single moment of every single day.

We're then shown a snapshot either at the point of Christ's coming or before time, it depends which way you take it, of a war rising in heaven, verses 7 through 12.

And Satan is rejected. Notice that God provides a place for his people in verse 6. And then you get to verse 7 and it says, war broke out and there was no place for the dragon.

[18 : 44] The dragon has no place. God provides something for his people and he says this thing is not fair for Satan, for the dragon, for evil. When evil is unleashed and it pursues the people of God, there is the provision of protection which comes from God.

And the church throughout the world can testify to that in so many ways about the fact that God is the one who has kept them even though they have suffered greatly. The church has then gifted wings to soar in the midst of turmoil.

Verse 14 of chapter 12. Let's look at that and read it. The woman was given two wings of a great eagle so that she might fly to the place what prepared for her in the wilderness so that she'd be there for the allotted time God had given.

God again provides more nourishment for his people because he seeks to protect, he seeks to provide, and he seeks to care for them. Although there are unrelenting evil pursuits coming in verse 15 of this chapter, the mouth of the snake spewing waters out, seeking to overtake, seeking to destroy the women, ultimately the church, but it ultimately fails because God provides protection for his people.

The earth helps, verse 16, the women by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. The Lord of all the earth has purposed that his son would die to bring a people to faith in his son that he will keep for all of eternity.

[20:17] Do you not think that the one who can keep the stars in place can also keep us protected under his sovereign grace? Do you see what John is telling this group of Christians who just don't know sometimes where to turn because they want to compromise?

God hasn't just done something about evil. He says he is actively involved to sustain us as we face evil in the everyday realities of our lives.

I know for some of us, you'll appreciate Kevin Bridges, comedian, Glaswegian, probably not many references. When the fires are raging and when the ocean waves whack against our lives and it seems overwhelming, he says, I'm right there in the middle.

I've never left you. I've never forsaken you and I never will. Danger is on every side, but this is where the faith component comes in, isn't it?

Danger is on every side, but protection is right there in the danger and that's the challenge. That's why it's so much easier for us to say, I think I would opt for a nice comfortable life, thank you very much because it doesn't require faith.

[21:32] If I can order and organize every detail of my life down to the last moment in my diary and sort everything out, it doesn't actually require faith in one sense, does it? But when we give ourselves over into the hands of God and we say, Lord, I am yours, I am your blood-bought child and I'm yours to do with as you please, that does require faith because that means he can ask us to do things and move us and shake us, challenge us and change us.

The rally car driver only knows that the roll cage ultimately works to protect them. When? When something bad has happened. In the danger they experience that the thing which has been put there to protect them actually does work.

The astronaut when they get into zero gravity and there's no oxygen around about them realizes, hey, wait a minute, this suit that I've been provided for my protection actually works.

But for many people they don't see this and I think this is where the challenge comes to us as believers is this, we don't experience that partly because we're unwilling to venture out into that. We all desperately want to know the provision of our father in that sort of way. We think it would be a wonderful thing to see and to experience provision and protection in this sort of way but we're scared to step out into that.

[23:03] Ray Ortland is a pastor over in America and he's written a book recently and it's really, really helpful. It's called Good News at Rock Bottom and he is just looking at this concept.

Where does God dwell? God dwells with those who are right down there at the very bottom, right down there at the place where they've got nowhere else to turn and he said the challenge is that for the majority of people, believers, is that we love to use this phrase, live in the mushy middle where everything's under our own control and our own sovereignty and our own care where we don't really actually need to cast ourselves to Jesus where we can kind of control things for ourselves and he says, you know, see, the preference for compromise may seem appealing and the comfort that comes with it may actually be nice for a time but it is the opposite path to overcoming evil now and eternally.

We have to cast ourselves before the Lord and say, Lord, I'm yours. Do with me as you please because I know, I know that you will protect me and never leave.

How do we know that for certain? Well, we've already looked at it, we've already touched on it, haven't we? There was one whose blood has been shed and what happened to him? Did God say,

oh, it was great that he did that, just leave him there in the grave?

No. Father, let not my will be done but let your will be done. I trust you. I know that you will see me through and I know that I will rise again in glory.

[24 : 36] I know that you will raise me from death to life because that is the promise you've made for me, your son, the Messiah. And that is the inheritance that we have as people who believe.

That is the promise which is ours in Christ Jesus. Are you trusting that promise today? Whether you're a believer and you've walked with Jesus all your days, are you trusting that as much as you did all those years ago?

And if you don't yet believe in Jesus and you're listening to me right now, that is the promise for your life right now. He's gone right through death. He will protect you, he has provided for you and he will never leave you or abandon you.

You don't need to compromise. You can come to him and he will never abandon. Finally, priorities. What are our responsibilities that come in this passage?

How do we overcome evil? Listen again to the voice that thunders out of heaven. Verse 11, second part of it. You see in verse 10, there's a loud voice that comes from heaven saying, now have come the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah.

[25 : 47] Therefore, the accuser of our brothers and sisters who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down. We unashamedly rejoice in the cross of Jesus Christ and we have an unrelenting commitment to the mission of God throughout the world.

We have an unashamed rejoicing in the cross of Jesus Christ and an unrelenting commitment to the mission of God in the world. Those two responsibilities, let's think about those and finish up. A big part of the reason why we begin to live compromised lives is that we forget all that has been accomplished for us in Jesus Christ.

What does the voice from heaven say in verse 10? It says, the accuser's voice against you is gone. It is silenced because the blood of Christ has ended his accusations about you before the face of God.

More than that, more often than not, we live as though our sins have not been forgiven. I don't know if that's true of you but certainly there are points in my life that has been the reality.

I forget that the blood of Jesus makes me free. That the cross and the grace of God has set me free to life in all of its fullness.

[27 : 05] If the cross of Jesus Christ is effective for me, it is effective for anyone. And that is so, so important to remember. Maybe it comes up in your mind that particular thing you did, that thing that you thought, that thing and it just is there.

I want you to hear this morning so clearly. Rejoice in the gospel because Jesus has paid it all. Jesus has finished that accusation against you.

You are free as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is good news for all of us. The accusation is gone because of everything Jesus has done.

Whatever it is, Jesus has dealt with it and Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the accuser could ever speak. He may try and tie you up in knots about all these things and Jesus says, silence.

Silence. Rejoice in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. You overcome that evil within and you overcome that evil without by rejoicing in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 17] Again, we go back to comfort can never outweigh eternal joy. You may compromise in the moment and it may feel okay for that time but actually it never ultimately outweighs eternal joy.

The cars, the status, the grades, the looks, the experiences, whatever it is that you think it's worth sacrificing or compromising for, they will let you down in the end. The person will die, they will go, the thing will stop.

So let it go and rejoice in the crucified saviour Jesus Christ because he is never going to fail you. That's how you overcome. That's how you become an overcomer.

You sit and you say his promises are true and it actually is effective for me right now and on the day when my last breath goes from my body. And then second thing of our commitments or responsibilities an unrelenting commitment to the mission of God.

We overcome evil not only just because we believe the gospel but because we declare the gospel message to the one, the child who rules all the nations. Do you see that in verse 5 of chapter 12?

[29 : 23] There is always this huge cosmic angle at play within the book of Revelation and particularly to all the peoples wherever they are found throughout the world. There is no surprise

that this is something which disappears when we seek to compromise and to chase comfort in our lives.

It was a challenge for those churches and it remains a challenge for us today. The mission of the church of Jesus Christ from that point until now is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus throughout the whole world even though it is costly.

but this passage is telling us and this book actually is telling us even though it is costly it is worth the cost every single time.

Every single time. Because he is worthy of the greater glory not me. He is worthy of the greater glory not me.

We are also being told here that we need to look and backward engineer our lives into the right perspective. Do you see that? Chapter 12 verse 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

[30:36] They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Now let me pause here this is not me saying oh go out and be a martyr that's not the point. It is not to glamorize death it's simply to recognize that one day this reality is coming across your door and right now you need to be crucified and risen king over all the nations and all the earth.

What is he going to look for? Oh Lord I know that you asked us to move there but man it's really polluted and I don't really like that. It's really busy and people are annoying.

But the kids where are they going to go to school? What are they going to do? The climate the resistance the spiritual temperature oh I just nah not for me.

Or Lord you've asked me in my context in my community here to witness to this person in work or at school or at university but I don't know if I want the social rejection that's going to come with this.

I don't know if I want the relationships to start not functioning properly the dynamics to change I don't know if I want this. I don't know if I want to deal with the community rejection that I'm going to face if I'm going to reach out to this guy or girl who's in my sports team or wherever it is that you go pick your example pick your resistance and King Jesus will come to us on that day with nail pierced hands and say dear child I never said the mission was easy look at my body and the scars that I bear on my body are of obedience to see you set free I said that you had to trust me and to obey me to recognize that I will protect you through it and that I have already provided the greatest thing that will sustain you all the way.

[32:27] How do we overcome evil then? By recognizing what God has done about it sending his son to die and to kill death so that we do not face that on that last day.

second by recognizing that we don't need to find alternative protection in the midst of this raging cosmic conflict because God is the one who protects us in the midst of the chaos and finally by recognizing that we have been given clear responsibilities as God's people from the Lord Jesus to rejoice in his death and resurrection and to proclaim this gospel until our dying days and on that day we will see him face to face and with tears of joy we will say oh Lord it was all worth it.

Let me pray. Lord these are such high things and holy things and of ourselves we can't do these things which is why it's so wonderful to know that Jesus Christ lives to pray for us and he is in your presence right now his great provision of dying for us is effective all the way till we see him.

Lord where we are compromised in our faith where we are unwilling to really step out and allow you to do as you please with us we pause now and we repent we say sorry and we ask Lord for your powerful provision protection to lead us into the priorities that we should have with the life that you've given to us thank you Jesus that you are the one who rules the nations and you are the one whose nail pierced hands will welcome us into the presence of your father and our father on the day when we see you face to face lord sustain us to that day enable us to be people who overcome evil in our lives enable us to be people who are gospel men and women to live for your glory and father sustain us we pray in Christ

Jesus to that moment where we shed tears of joy and say father it was all worth it thank you we pray this in Jesus name amen