

**Apocalypse Now?**  
***Who's Afraid of TMOTB?***  
**September 19, 2021**

Good morning, everyone!

I'm so glad you're joining us whether you're here on campus or watching online as we continue in our series *Apocalypse Now?* – with a question mark – because ...

... as I said last week, the number one question that comes up whenever people *think* about “The Apocalypse” is ...

- Is it happening (or about to happen) *right now*, at this point in history?
- Do the events we're seeing and experiencing in our world point to the reality that “the end is near”?

And given the increasing level of chaos we're seeing and experiencing, it's no surprise that there are a lot of people these days thinking about that possibility.

But not just Christians.

As I said last week ...

As I said last week, there are more than a few people who believe the world must be nearing its end because of things like ...

- Climate change
- Overpopulation
- Nuclear weapons
- Artificial intelligence

Point being that wondering about, worrying about, obsessing about and even warning about “the end of days” is not just a “religious phenomenon.”

***That said ... it’s undeniable that interest in and concern over the possibility of “the end” from a Christian point of view has risen dramatically since the advent of COVID-19.***

And there are more than a few reasons for that ... all of which come down to a basic *lack of trust* in the “powers that be” – our government at all levels.

## **A Lack of Trust**

We’ll see why that’s important in just a minute but, first, let me give you a couple of examples.

And just to be clear, let me say that I’m not stating an opinion on any of these. I’m not

assessing their validity. I'm just trying to paint the picture for you of why Christians might be thinking about this.

First of all, and maybe most importantly, a lot of Christians – and I'm talking at least nationwide if not worldwide ...

**1. A lot of Christians felt that government officials greatly overreached by forbidding churches to hold public services starting in the spring of 2020, deeming their operation “unnecessary.”**

Quite frankly, if I hadn't experienced it myself, I would have never believed such a thing could be possible for such a long period of time here in the United States.

I'm not saying it was a bad thing or a totally unnecessary thing, especially at first, but make no mistake: it was a big deal – a really big deal – that raised a lot of concerns.

Furthermore, at the same time ...

- Other businesses were allowed to be open (like those “necessary” casinos in Nevada) ...
- And other “causes” (like Black Lives Matter) were allowed to hold public events that clearly violated COVID guidelines.

**2. This led some Christians to suspect that non-Christian government officials were using COVID as an opportunity to be hostile to Christianity and churches.**

Now, try to keep those two points in mind as we fast forward to what happened when vaccines finally became available ...

... because they form the backdrop to the well-documented “vaccine hesitancy” among evangelical Christians.

What's the hesitancy?

**3. For one thing, many Christians were concerned about the use of harvested fetal tissue in vaccine development ...**

... so much so that the Vatican had to issue a statement saying that, given the circumstances, it was morally acceptable for Catholics.<sup>1</sup>

**4. Then, Federal officials repeatedly said that there would *never be* any kind of a vaccine mandate ...**

... only to be followed by the recent order requiring certain employers to *require* vaccination of employees or be fined \$14,000 per violation!

In addition, as research more and more seems to show that natural immunity (from having COVID) is just as effective as a vaccine, there is no acknowledgement of this

fact from "the powers that be."<sup>ii</sup>

**5. Instead, there is only a repeated and heightened insistence that everyone (even those who have had COVID) get vaxxed, with our President even calling out those who choose *not to*.**

Now, again, I'm not trying to say that any of these concerns are 100% accurate or legitimate. I have an opinion about some of them, but that's not the point.

The point is that when you put it all together, this is why more than a few Christians wonder if there is some other hidden agenda at work.

In addition, if you *do* wonder and then get labeled as (at best) "un-American" and (at worst) a "conspiracy theorist promoting fringe ideas" ... that does *not* build trust.

And, again, as I said a few minutes ago ...

It's the lack of trust in "the powers" which is, in my opinion, the reason why interest in and concern over the possibility of the biblical "Apocalypse" *has risen dramatically* since the advent of COVID-19.

## **Two Beasts**

Of course, the question then is ... why would *that* – a lack of trust in government – lead some Christians to think that maybe "the end is near?"

And to be clear, I mean in addition to all the other chaos in the world which we talked about last week. Without that chaos, the lack of trust isn't really that big of a deal – at least not as it pertains to this issue.

But *together* – between the chaos and the suspicion that the "powers that be" are up to no good with a secret and nefarious agenda



...

That's enough to get the attention of any Christian who takes seriously what Jesus and the early Christian leaders had to say about the Apocalypse.

But why?

I think it comes down to one word ...

***Revelation.***

Meaning ... the biblical book of ... Revelation.

And, by the way, it's not the Book of *Revelations*. It's the Book of *Revelation*, singular.

Anyway, in the middle of the Book of Revelation there is a story – actually, a vision – about two beasts.

The first beast, according to the vision, is given power by Satan (who appears in the vision as a dragon) ...

The first beast is given power to rule over all of the earth – every tribe, people, language and nation.<sup>iii</sup>

**As a result ...**

*The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.*

*People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" Revelation 13:3-4 (NIV)*

Obviously, this beast is meant to represent

some kind of massively powerful political entity.

And basically, everyone just kind of gives in and does whatever the beast – the powerful governmental entity that rules the world – says.

Everyone that is, except for followers of Jesus. *They* do not.

And, therefore, as the vision goes, the beast wages war against them, to conquer them.<sup>iv</sup>

Of course, the question is ... how did this “beast” come to have such worldwide power? What would lead all the peoples of the world to go along *even to the point of worship*?

According to the vision, it happened through a *great deception*, which is where the second “beast” – also known as “the false prophet” –

comes in.

### **According to the vision, this beast ...**

*It had two horns like a lamb ...*

... which means that it *seems* to be gentle and peaceful ...

*... but it spoke like a dragon.*

*Revelation 13:11*

*(NIV)*

In other words, whatever this beast is – whether it's an individual or some kind of governmental organization ... whatever it is ...

- It appears "as an angel of light" but, in reality, it's up to no good ...
- ... deceiving the nations of the world by performing great "signs" (like causing fire to come down from heaven to the

earth in full view of everyone<sup>v</sup>) ...

- ... signs that seem to validate whatever the first beast says and does, so that people go along with it.

Now, everything we've seen to this point in the vision is fairly generic. There aren't a lot of specifics.

A reader or an interpreter could make all of this "fit" many situations that have happened or are happening somewhere.

It's what comes *next* in the vision that has given more than a few Christians reason to wonder ...

- That maybe "this is it" ...
- That maybe we're in the end times ...

- That maybe some of the stuff that's happened in recent days pertaining to COVID and the pressure to get vaccinated is about *more* than just "your good health" and mine.

What comes *next* in the vision is the statement that the second beast, the false prophet ...

## **slide**

*It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads ...*

*... so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. Revelation 13:16-17 (NIV)*

Now, the key words and phrases in that

passage which cause you to sit up and take notice (if you take the scripture seriously) are “forced” and “all people” ...

... as well as the reality that, in this particular situation, you cannot participate in commerce – you can’t go into a store, you can’t do business, maybe can’t even have a job – without “receiving the mark” ... whatever that mark might be.

And if you read that and think about that for a while ...

And it seems eerily similar to what *all people* (even those who have natural immunity to COVID) are being coerced (if not *forced*) to do right now – to take “the jab” ...

And it makes you go “hmmm” ... it makes you wonder ...

I wouldn't say that you're crazy.

After all ...

- Coronavirus has led to a massive governmental intrusion into the privacy and personal lives of all people all over the world.
- Governments all over the world are increasingly dictating where people go, whether they can be employed, as well as how – and *if* – they worship.

In addition ...

- People are being encouraged to snitch on others who are not following the rules.
- Tracking and surveillance systems are being discussed and even rolled out to keep tabs on everyone's vaccination



status ...

*AND* ... and this is the important part for today ... these systems are exactly the kind that would be needed to enforce TMOTB – The Mark of The Beast – as it's described in this vision.<sup>vi</sup>

So, if you're a Christian and you're just a little bit concerned (or maybe even a lot concerned), I don't think you're crazy. I *get* why you might suspect that the vaccine might be more than just a vaccine.

That said ...

- I *don't* think that the vaccine is TMOTB or somehow the precursor to it. Specifically, I don't believe there's a chip embedded in it.

For what it's worth (which might not be

much), if you *don't* have natural immunity and you don't have some other medical issue, I think you *should* get the vaccine – especially if you're older like me.

- And I *don't* think what's going on with COVID means we're living in "the end times" and that the Apocalypse is now.

I mean, we might be, and *it* might be, but I don't think is what's being described in this vision from the Book of Revelation.

- And more importantly, even though the Book of Revelation makes it pretty clear that those who do get TMOTB – The Mark of The Beast – are making a grave mistake with eternal consequences<sup>vii</sup> ...

...if you're a Christian, I don't think you should be afraid of TMOTB, whatever it

might be.

## **Understanding “Revelation”**

And to understand why I say all of that, we need to take few minutes to talk about the Book of Revelation because this seems to be where it always goes back to.

So, what is *The Revelation* and how are we to understand it?

Well, that’s not an easy question to answer because for as long as the church has existed, there’s been great debate about it and great confusion and frustration about it.

The great Christian reformer John Calvin supposedly said, “Only God knows what it means.”

Martin Luther had an even more dubious take

on it. Supposedly he said, "Revelation reveals nothing" – at least nothing intelligible to the readers of his day and time ...

... which is a clue about where we should start.

**To understand Revelation, we must ask:  
"why would Jesus give John (the author)  
this vision and what did it mean to those of  
*his* day and time?"**

Was it given so that John could write down a bunch of stuff – unintelligible to him and Christians of his day – that, at some point in the distant future, would make finally sense to people who read it?

I don't know about your experience, but the church in which I became a Christian as a teenager took that approach, as well as the churches I was part of as a young adult.

They – we – were very intent on trying to map all of the visions and symbols and happenings in Heaven and on the Earth that John describes to events and people and locations of our day and time ...

So, we read a lot of books by people like Hal Lindsey (who wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth*). And we soaked up the *Left Behind* series of books and movies.

And it was awesome.

Not necessarily because it was the *correct* approach but because it reinforced that great expectation laid out again and again by Jesus Himself – that He's literally coming back someday!

And when He does, it's going to be a big deal like the world has never seen before.

And there will be an Apocalypse in which everything both ends and begins again.

And, friends, I cannot wait for that day.

And I am so grateful for the way in which I was taught to think about “the end times” and Revelation and the hope that it has brought to me over the years.

But – and this isn’t meant to be a criticism, just a fact – the one thing we never did was to ask that question:

“Why would Jesus give John (the author) this vision? And what did it mean to those of *his* day and time?”

I don’t think you can accurately interpret Revelation (or, in fact, any scripture) without understanding at least something of what it meant to those first heard it or read it.

And that's not to say that it can't mean something different for us than it did for them. Prophetic scriptures like Revelation often do have multiple fulfillments.

So, let's give it a go.

Why did Jesus give John this Revelation? What did it mean to Christians of his day? To John himself?

That's not an easy question to answer!

But it's much easier for us than it was for people living say 500 years ago (in Luther's day) or 1,000 years ago.

It's easier because we know a lot more about the history of Christianity and what was happening in that part of the world – particularly in Rome – than they did.

And there are lots of ways I could try to explain that to you, but I don't think I can do any better than the guys at the Bible Project ([www.bibleproject.com](http://www.bibleproject.com)).

They have a highly engaging 22-minute presentation that goes all the way from the first verse of Revelation to the last.

I'm not going to show you the whole thing today (it *would* be worth you watching it later), but I do want to show you the first three-and-a-half minutes in which they describe ...

- The type of writing this is.
- The purpose behind the writing
- And the historical setting in which it was written.



All of which are key to at least beginning to understand what it's all about.

So, let's check it out.

## **Video Clip – Revelation Intro**

I think that's a great introduction because it highlights two very important things.

Number one that this book is "The revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>viii</sup>

Let me say that again.

**1. This book is the revelation of *Jesus the Messiah* ... not the revelation of the dragon and his wrath.**

Sometimes well-meaning teachers and interpreters get so focused on what's happening in the middle of the story and trying to map that to our day and time that it can seem like Revelation is primarily about

revealing the satanic.<sup>ix</sup>

But that's not what the Book is about.

The book is about revealing God's heavenly perspective on history and current events so that the present (*John's present and ours*) could be viewed in light of history's final outcome ...

... which is that Jesus overcomes and makes all things new (which we'll talk about in a couple of weeks).

The second thing highlighted is that ...

**2. The book is also about the basic challenge of being a follower of Jesus in everyday life.**

In the middle of all the crazy stuff that happens – the seven bowls of judgment and the seven trumpets and the seven seals ...

... the theme that runs through the story from the very beginning is that it's hard to be a follower of Jesus in a world that is anti-Christ.

And, therefore, the choice that is always present before Christians (whether in the first century or today) ...

The choice that is always present is between compromise to fit in with the world system and being faithful to Jesus ... regardless of the outcome, even to the point of death.

And if you understand these two big ideas, you can begin to understand the rest of John's vision (or visions – there's actually several recounted in the book) ... including the vision of the dragon and the beasts which we read earlier from Revelation chapter 13.

With that in mind, I want to show you a short

portion of the Bible Project's explanation beginning with chapter 12, because that's where we learn the backstory of the dragon.

Here we go, let's watch.

### **Video Clip – Revelation Dragon and Beasts**

I'm not sure I agree with everything in that interpretation, but two things are very solid (in my opinion).

First, what you just heard in that concluding sentence was the idea that prophecy sometimes has more than one fulfillment because there is a repetitive pattern to history.

That pattern has always been the same.

- God calls a people to himself.

- They are persecuted at some level for their faith by “the world” which is under the dominion of Satan and his forces.
- They must choose to remain faithful or to compromise by taking TMOTB.

That’s what Daniel of the Old Testament experienced.

“When you hear the sound of the musical instruments, Daniel, you and your people must bow down and worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar. You must declare your allegiance to him above all else or face death.”

If you know the OT you know that Daniel refused.

And what John was saying to the Christians of his day was “we are faced with the same

choice. Will we bow down to Rome and worship the Emperor and his ways? Or will we stay faithful to Jesus at the cost of our lives?"

And I know that may sound a little dramatic but it's really what happened.

One author writes that ...

If you want to reconstruct the historical context of Christian people living in first-century Asia Minor, you must take into account the Roman imperial cult.

But what do I mean by "imperial cult"?

For starters, Roman emperors were often deified after they died, becoming "gods" for Roman citizens to worship.

For example, after Julius Caesar died,

he was deified. Then his adopted son, Augustus, took for himself the title "son of god."

The logic was simple. If his father became "god," then he got to be called, well, you guessed it: "son of god."

Though it was true an emperor would be deified after he died, many Greeks living in various cities throughout the eastern parts of the empire jumped the gun; they would worship the Roman emperor while he was still alive.

Furthermore, the more despotic emperors of the first century sought to be recognized as gods while they were still living. Nero was one such emperor; Domitian was another.

If you were a Christian, [staying faithful

to Jesus would have been cause] for angst, fear, and uncertainty.

After all, Nero was infamous for murdering his own mother, as well as killing innocent Christians by turning them into tar-covered human candles to light up the night.<sup>x</sup>

So, this is the pattern which will repeat again and again until the day when Jesus finally returns (which is what we'll talk about next week) ...

God's people suffer at the hands of "the world" – and if you're not experiencing that right now, know that it is the anomaly not the norm.

Second thing that I think is solid is "that neither Rome nor any other nation nor any other human is the real enemy.



“There are dark spiritual powers at work, and Jesus’ followers will announce Jesus’ victory by remaining faithful and loving their enemies just like the slain Lamb.”

**John writes ...**

*They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

*Revelation 12:11 (NIV)*

And I think this is so important for Christians to understand.

We are in a battle, whether that’s the final battle that’s going to happen someday before Jesus returns or whether it’s just another iteration of the pattern of human history.

We are in a battle but it’s not against flesh

and blood.

It's not against other people ... because other people are sometimes deceived by the dragon and the beast and the false prophet of whatever day and time that they're living in.

And the dragon is always at work and there is always a beast and always a false prophet.

And because the battle is not against people, if you're a Christian, it's foolish to "do battle" with the weapons of this world.

- You don't overcome a spiritual enemy by organizing a religious voting bloc.
- You don't overcome by getting a political party – left or right – to adopt your agenda (or adopting theirs).
- You don't overcome by getting your guy

or gal into the White House or City Hall.

- You don't overcome by slamming people on social media.

Those are power moves.

And when Christians try to advance the Kingdom of God by powering up, ironically, they show themselves to have more in common with the dragon and the beast of Revelation 12 and 13 than with the Lamb who was slain.<sup>xi</sup>

Someone has said that "Christians don't just *proclaim* the message of the Gospel – we *are* the message."

And if we will suffer persecution like Jesus suffered – loving those who have been deceived into being our enemies instead of powering up – our suffering will be a

testimony to “the nations” just like His was.

And our loss will be used by God for their gain, just like Jesus’ loss was used for our gain.

AND ... whatever suffering and loss we experience will be redeemed by God, just like it was for Jesus.

## **About That Mark**

Now, I could probably stop here because I think I’ve given you a pretty good overview of what Revelation is about and maybe some assurances that the vaccine isn’t TMOTB.

But I know that some of you are still wondering about that Mark of the Beast thing. If it’s not the vaccine, then what is it?

It might be helpful to know (or maybe not) that

throughout the centuries, people have thought that ...

- social security numbers
- credit cards
- barcodes
- Implanted microchips
- And oddly, worshipping on Sunday instead of Saturday

... were the mark of the beast.<sup>xii</sup>

Obviously, they were wrong. So, what could it be?

Well, let's follow the principle of what it meant to the first readers and see if it can point us in the right direction.

Historians believe that back in John's day, while there was great persecution (and Rome and its emperors served as "the beast"), there was no literal mark that allowed one to buy and sell.

However, in many cities of the Roman Empire, in order to participate in the local economy, you had to have a certificate that proved you had engaged in the cultic practices of the local trade guilds which held regular feasts that featured the worship of idols as well as worship of the Roman Emperor.<sup>xiii</sup>

If you refused to engage, if you refused to "take the mark of the beast" by participating in the economy at the expense of your faith, you would not get a certificate which meant you could not buy or sell.<sup>xiv</sup>

That might be what John was talking about,

but I think there's a little more to it than that.

In John's vision, he sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, waiting attentively to receive their instructions from the One on the throne.

### **And those instructions are ...**

*He said, "Don't damage the earth, the sea, or the trees until we have put a seal on the foreheads of those who serve our God." Revelation 7:3 (NIV)*

See, there are actually two marks in this story.

There's the mark of the beast which is the sign that a person has chosen to follow the ways of the world and worship the things the world says ought to be worshipped.

And then there is the mark of the Holy Spirit

which is the sign that we have chosen to trust in and follow Jesus and worship Him alone.

And you can't see that mark which is why a lot of commentators think that TMOTB when it happens in the final days won't be a literal mark either. It will be what it's always been.

I'm not sure if that's true or not.

**But I do know that if you're a Christian, you should not fear TMOTB because you already have TMOTS ... the Mark of the Spirit.**

And that mark is yours – that seal is yours – not because you're perfect and never compromise but because you trust Jesus and his mercy and grace when you're not perfect and you do compromise.

And you do not turn away from him. You always come back to him to receive what He has already given you.



# Communion

Jesus gave us a little ceremony to help us do that.

And as we close today, we're going to take a few minutes to experience that.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-do-the-covid-19-vaccines-contain-aborted-fetal-cells>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/09/15/natural-immunity-vaccine-mandate/>

<sup>iii</sup> Rev 13:7

<sup>iv</sup> Rev 13:7

<sup>v</sup> Rev 13:13-14

<sup>vi</sup> This list is from <https://www.thetrumpet.com/22230-coronavirus-and-the-mark-of-the-beast>. Note that I do not agree with their conclusion on what "the mark" is!

<sup>vii</sup> Rev. 14:9-12

<sup>viii</sup> Rev. 1:1.

<sup>ix</sup> See <http://academiclogos.wpengine.com/covid-19-and-the-mark-of-the-beast/>

<sup>x</sup> From <https://academic.logos.com/the-covid-vaccine-has-666-written-all-over-it-and-why-that-doesnt-matter-according-to-revelation/>

<sup>xi</sup> <http://academiclogos.wpengine.com/covid-19-and-the-mark-of-the-beast/>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/what-is-the-mark-of-the-beast-actually>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://drtscott.typepad.com/markedbythelamb/>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://academic.logos.com/the-covid-vaccine-has-666-written-all-over-it-and-why-that-doesnt-matter-according-to-revelation/>