

The Politics of Evil Revelation 12-13

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” (C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters)

Here in Revelation 12-13, Jesus protects us from both errors. For one thing, he refuses to let us believe that evil is simply a matter of our imagination. He unveils for us its personal and rebellious root as well as its hideous and counterfeit fruits. At the same time, however, there is no hint of weakness as if Evil might finally triumph. No, these chapters reveal to us a conquering King where Evil does not stand a chance.

Main Entry: **pol-i-tics**, Pronunciation: 'pă-l&-tik's, Function: *noun plural but singular or plural in construction*, Etymology: Greek *politika*, from neuter plural of *politikos* political, **1 a** : the art or science of government **b** : the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental [policy](#) **c** : the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government

When we think about politics we make a mistake if we think of it merely as the governance of nation states. In the same way, it would be a huge mistake to think that politics is about the narrow concerns of one's political party—if I am a Democrat or a Republican. Politics is about the **power to execute one's will**.

During the last Presidential election much was made about the divisions within America. There were the “Red” states and there were the “Blue” states. But what made such political distinctions so significant was that there were, in the minds of most Americans, winners and losers. Winners were those political personalities and programs which were thrust in the positions of power. Losers were those personalities and programs which were rejected at the ballot box. Power had been lost.

What does it reveal about America, or should I say, what does it reveal about the human spirit, that it places so much trust in the **politics of power as the world gives power**? Whether it is the democratic process where vote-getting is reduced to spinning the issues or a complete totalitarian process where the might of the gun defeats one's enemies, **power is the key to one's politics**. Get the power and implement your politics.

Such an obsession with power reminds me of something which C. S. Lewis once wrote about power, “The descent to hell is easy, and those who begin by worshipping power soon worship evil.” (C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 188.) We all know the saying: absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is why it is so important for us to consider how Jesus relates to power. When Jesus rejected the devil's offer to become deputy director of world power in the wilderness, rebuked James and John for wanting to call fire down from heaven upon their enemies and ordered Peter to put away his sword during Jesus' arrest in the Garden, Jesus was rejecting politics of power because he knew that the politics of power as we understand power is **ultimately the politics of evil**.

Caveat: Don't misunderstand me. I'm not denouncing the democratic process. I'm not attacking our civil liberties. No; my point is simply for us to recognize that worldly grabs for power are ultimately rooted in our own evil impulse and in the impulse of the Evil One himself.

In fact, it would be a mistake to think Jesus is rejecting power in all of its forms. After all, he taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come...” Surely, Jesus is presenting us with an alternative to power structures as the world presents them. Eugene Peterson writes,

The gospel of Jesus Christ is more political than anyone imagines, but in a way no one guesses. The “kingdom of God,” an altogether political metaphor, is basic vocabulary in understanding the Christian gospel. It is, at the same time, responsible for much misunderstanding. The political metaphor, “kingdom,” insists on a gospel that includes everything and everyone under the rule of God. God is no religious glow to warm a dark night. Christ is no esoteric truth with which to form a Gnostic elite. The Christian faith is an out-in-the-open, strenuous, legislating, conquering totality. God is sovereign: nothing and no one is exempt from this rule. (Peterson, Reversed Thunder, pp. 116-117.)

No; Jesus is not rejecting power in all of its forms. His point is that there is only one who can truly exercise power. That one is the Lord himself. All other world systems of power ultimately become captive to the evil impulse of this world.

There is a reason for this and that reason is given to us in Revelation chapter 12-13. Here again a new scene within John’s vision opens which sheds further light upon the condition of the last days, the period between Christ’s ascension and his return. Here Jesus reveals what Paul himself alluded to in Ephesians six, that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, the authorities and the cosmic powers of this present darkness. (Eph. 6:12). Paul’s point, as is the point of Revelation 12-13, is to illumine the cosmic conflict present in this world between the **politics of evil and the politics of the Kingdom of Christ**.

Whose politics shall rule the world? Who shall rule our lives? There can be only one answer! There will be only one answer—the Lord Jesus Christ shall rule, but not without a battle.

Let’s see if we can understand these two very important chapters.

1) Root of the Politics of Evil: The Who of Evil (12:1-18)

- **War Begins: (1-6)**

Firstly, the passage orients us to how the war with evil begins.

- ❖ The woman—clearly signifying True Israel or the one people of God throughout the ages.
- ❖ The dragon—representing Satan (12:9). His purpose is singular, to overthrow and kill the Son. Clearly the attempts on Jesus’ life, whether Herod, those in Nazareth or by the Jewish leaders, all are being summarized by these words here.
- ❖ The son—obviously pointing to Jesus. The reference to him being caught up to God represents his ascension and the fulfillment of his earthly ministry.

As our bulletin reminds us, “This is not the nativity story we grew up with, but it is the nativity story all the same. Jesus’ birth excites more than wonder, it excites evil.”
Eugene Peterson

- **Decisive Battle is Won (7-12)**

Secondly, we learn about the decisive battle for victory. Pictured is a mighty war in heaven where Michael and his angels battle against Satan and all his demons. But the critical piece of information comes to us in verse 11, “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb...” In other words, Satan has fallen from heaven to the earth because the decisive battle has been won on the cross. Jesus, during his earthly ministry, looked ahead and saw this victory. In Luke 10:18 after the disciples returned rejoicing in the powers of the Kingdom, Jesus affirms that he saw Satan fall as a star from heaven.

- **Even so, the War Rages on (13-18)**

Nevertheless, though Satan is a **defeated foe he is not a debilitated one**. His rage continues. And even though he cannot finally thwart God's saving purpose, he does seek to frustrate our confidence in such purpose.

Verses 13-18 teach us that the Evil One set his sights on the woman, that is the Church, to frustrate her and her offspring, "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

What should we take away from chapter 12?

- **Roots of evil are personal and malevolent.** Evil is not the impersonal force of Star Wars or the balancing component of Yin and Yang. No. It springs from the personal and very real character of the Devil, a spiritual being whose sole purpose is to frustrate God's politics. In other words, the Devil is the definition of Anti-Christ. And, all those who oppose the Lord Jesus are Anti-Christ because their solidarity is with Satan.
- **Satan is a defeated foe.** There are some who imagine Revelation speaking of some future cosmic battle with the Evil One as though the future were not certain. Clearly verse 11 of chapter 12 settles such a question. As Luther's reminds us, "his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him." That word, my friends is Jesus Christ. He is our conquering King.

2) Weapons of the Politics of Evil: The How of Evil (13:1-18)

But this vision of evil at work in this world is designed to give us more than simply an accounting of the Devil's opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ its purpose is to reveal **how the politics of evil seek to undermine the purpose of the Kingdom**. John's vision reveals the two primary weapons used to assault the people of God in the devil's assault on this earth. They are the **intimidation and deception**.

- **The Beast of the Sea (13:1-10)**

John sees a beast rising from the sea whose depiction is hideous and horrifying. With ten horns, seven heads and ten diadems, he is said to be like a leopard, like a bear and like a lion. Clearly this imagery is revealing that the Beast is a counterfeit Jesus Christ. He is adorned with the power of the dragon.

Yet unlike the Lord Jesus Christ whose power was exercised through sacrifice illustrated through Jesus becoming a lamb, the beast's only images are one's of predators. The sole purpose of the beast of the sea is to devour and destroy the people of God through the exercise of raw power.

According to verse 4, such power is impressive, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" While hideous, the beast maintains allegiance through its exercise of raw, evil power.

Illustration: Steven Garber shares in his book *The Fabric of Faithfulness* the story of Hans. Hans was a German university student during WWII. While in school the connection between his beliefs about God and his actions in the world became clear. Along with other students he declared, "We are Christians, and we are Germans; therefore we are responsible for Germany!" This conviction became crystallized for him when he was invited to a social gathering of university professors, one in which he was the only student present. As was the case throughout Germany, politics was a subject

often left out of conversation. However, on this occasion, instead of discussing literature, politics came up. All in attendance believed that the state of German culture had been declining under Nazi leadership. **Nevertheless, one individual said that the “only way to cope with the situation - The Nazis - was not through protest but simply by hanging on, tending to one’s cultural obligations and tasks as scholars and just waiting out the nightmare.”**

And as Garber relates the story, “At that point a medical student broke in with a caustic remark. A dark and scowling Hans Scholl said, ‘Why don’t we rent ourselves an island in the Aegean and offer courses on worldviews?’” His shocking point was well understood and one professor rose up and said, “Something must be done and it must be done now!” One could not leave their convictions on the sideline and watch thousands of innocent people be murdered and idly sit by while a dictator satiated his lust for power. One’s beliefs must bear upon one’s actions, especially in the midst of adversity.

It was here that a secret newspaper was born, *The White Rose*. Eventually, all of the students involved in creating and distributing this newspaper were killed for their faith. And while they knew they would never overthrow Hitler through simply their newspaper, they stood in the face of adversity and were used by God to advance the Gospel. Hans, as well as those Christians who stood with him learned the all important truth that the Gospel advances amidst adversity. For it was the adversity of the Nazi government which God used to awaken many German people to the truth of the Gospel.

Make no mistake about it: Intimidation always succeeds in making people confront evil.

- ❖ Evil of nation-states like Nazi Germany, Communist China or Southern American racism.
- ❖ Corporate corruption whose power insulates them from attack like in a company like Enron.

All such evil are modern manifestations of the Beast of the Sea. Another name for the bully down the street is simply the Beast of the Sea.

- **The Beast of the Earth (13:11-18)**

Yet, John reveals a second beast, this one rising from the earth. In contrast to the first beast, this one does not first create such a horrifying reaction. He has horns like a lamb. Even so, he speaks the voice of the dragon. It is only by the words of his mouth that we can detect his evil politics. Whereas the Beast of the Sea, political powers were ever apparent. Who can miss intimidation? Yet, the Beast of the Earth operates at a more subtle level. His primary weapon is not intimidation, but deception. Notice verses 13-14:

“It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast...”

This clearly points to the deceptive character of the Beast of the Earth. Even as the Beast of the Sea was a counterfeit Jesus, so the Beast of the Earth is a counterfeit Holy Spirit. His mission is to witness to the evil of the Beast and make as many people follow the Beast as possible. **False worship is his aim and deception is his game!**

The Number 666: We can readily handle the number of this Beast. He is numbered 666 quite simply because as the vision recounts, this is the number of man. This Beast falls short or misses the mark of divinity. He is almost, but not quite and so he is evil.

At a pastor's screening of *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson was asked why he used a veiled female figure to portray evil. His response was illuminating, "Evil 'takes on the form of beauty. It is almost beautiful. It is the great aper of God. But the mask is askew; there is always something wrong. Evil masquerades, but if your antennae are up, you'll detect it."

So rather than obsess about who this Beast is, our approach should be to see it as the principle of deception at work within this world. Could this deception be positioned within a particular person in history? Absolutely. But it would be a mistake to see that as its only fulfillment.

Application: In fact, I think we can see two primary fulfillments of the deceptive work of this beast in the world today.

❖ **Religious Confusion**

❖ **Technological Advance**