

S042615 Rev 13 Battling with Beasts

Date: Sunday, April 26, 2015

Place: Ross Road Community Church

Series: The Apocalypse

Topic: Battling with the Beasts

Text: Revelation 13

Theme: Followers of the Holy Trinity require endurance, faithfulness, and wisdom to be victorious over the unholy trinity.

Aim: To equip believers to prevail against coercive political power and deceptive religious power.

Key word: politics, religion

INTRODUCTION:

We're trying to be more imaginative than analytical as we read and ponder the Apocalypse. Last week we imagined Revelation 12 as a scary, apocalyptic movie. That movie continues until Revelation 15:4.

Our reflections on Revelation 12 began in a very sobering fashion but then turned very reassuring and empowering. Revelation 13—"Battling with the Beasts"—to me feels more sobering and upsetting than reassuring and empowering, but that doesn't mean we should avoid it. We need its challenge. Its challenge is pertinent to your life and mine right now—this very moment and each and every day.

The story told in the Revelation 12 movie segment revealed a very frustrated dragon.

- He failed in his attempt to devour the child.
- Michael and his angels hurled him and his angels out of heaven.
- Despite his day and night accusations against followers of the Lamb, they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by being loyal to the Lamb even to the point of death. In fact, dying for the Lamb was a victory over the dragon, not a loss to him!
- He was unable to overtake the woman who was given eagle wings to get out of his reach.
- When he tried to sweep the woman away with a river of spit from his mouth, the earth swallowed the river.
- All of which left him filled in a rage, ferociously waging war against those who keep God's command and hold fast their testimony about Jesus, because he knows that his time is short.

Eugene Peterson writes in *Reverse Thunder*, “**By this time the dragon appears a bit bedraggled...The failed dragon stands on the shore of the sea and contemplates his failures. Obviously, he needs help...If he is going to wages war on the people who ‘keep the commands of God and bear the testimony of Jesus,’ he needs a means by which he can either conquer or subvert their life of faith.**”¹

Revelation 13 is the part of the movie in which the dragon tries both—to conquer and subvert. He tries to frighten and coerce the Lamb’s people into disobedience while simultaneously seeking to seduce them into deception. To pull off these two schemes, he recruits two ugly beasts.

The beast from the sea is the beast of coercion. The beast from the earth is the beast of deception. Together the dragon and these two beasts form an unholy trinity. The dragon is a “wanna be” God the Father mimicking the true God (of Revelation 4); the sea beast is a fake Lamb, an ugly distortion of the true Lamb (of Revelation 5); and the land beast is a phony Holy Spirit pretending to possess the power of the true Spirit of Revelation (seen in Revelation 1, 3, 4, 5, & 11).

As the movie progresses, John sees and we see that each of these beasts calls for a distinctive response from us. When we respond as indicated, the dragon is once again thwarted!

So let’s view these two movie clips one at a time. As we do, we’ll ask God to show us what we should be hearing—and living.

I invite you to stand to read responsively the first segment with me as though you were auditioning for a voice-over part in the movie industry. As we read, let us listen to and see what the Spirit reveals.

The Beast from the Sea

*The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. **2** The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.*

3 *One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the*

¹ Peterson, *Reverse Thunder*, p. 122.

² Peterson, p. 123.

fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. 4 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?"

5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

7 It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.

*10 "If anyone is to go into captivity,
into captivity they will go.*

*If anyone is to be killed with the sword,
with the sword they will be killed."*

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

The Beast from the Sea—Observation

Let's review the facts:

- Like the dragon, the beast is a sign, pointing beyond itself. This is not a literal beast.
- It has ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns, with a blasphemous name on each head.
- Eugene Peterson sees "an unmistakable touch of the ludicrous" in the sea beast's description: "The sea beast is a patchwork job, assembled from left-over parts of leopard, bear, and lion."²
- The dragon gave the beast his power, throne, and great authority.
- One head had a fatal wound, but it was healed.
- The whole world was filled with wonder at the beast and worshipped the dragon and the beast.

² Peterson, p. 123.

- The beast utters haughty words and blasphemies.
- The beast was given authority for 42 months, another way of indicating 1,260 days or a time, times, and half a time (3 ½ years). We said these expressions symbolize the length of time it took Israel to travel from Egypt to the Promised Land and the length of time it takes the church to travel from Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem (from Jesus' first coming to His second coming).
- The beast's authority extends to every tribe, people, language, and nation. This is global!
- The beast was given power to wage war against God's holy people and conquer them.
- Everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life worships the beast.

The Beast from the Sea—Identification

What did John and his readers make of these beasts? What should we make of them?

The Apostle John and his readers familiar with the Old Testament may have immediately identified the beast from the sea with the Old Testament sea monster Leviathan described by God Himself in Job 41 and mentioned in Psalm 74 and 104. Isaiah 27:1 speaks of Leviathan as a gliding, coiling serpent, a sea monster that will ultimately be defeated by the fierce, great, and powerful sword of the LORD Himself. Leviathan was a monster with seven heads in Mesopotamian myth, a monster that Isaiah used as a metaphor for the terrifying enemies that oppose God and His people.

John and his readers would also have thought of Daniel 7:1-14 where four beasts are described as coming out of the sea, the ever-changing Gentile world.

1st—Like a lion, wings of eagle, feet like a human's, human mind

2nd—Like a bear, 3 ribs in its mouth

3rd—Like a leopard, 4 wings, 4 heads, authority to rule

4th—A monster so terrible it defied identification with any real animal. Large iron teeth, 10 horns, a little horn, eyes like a human's and a boastful mouth

Daniel's beasts represented four earthly kingdoms, mostly still future to Daniel, kingdoms that would reject God and become bestial—the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires.

John's beast from the sea has elements of each of Daniel's beasts—leopard, bear, and lion. When John and his readers in A.D. 96 sought to identify the sea monster in their generation, they almost certainly thought about the Roman Empire. Up to the time of the Revelation, the empire had had seven emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. Yet the beast wore ten crowns because, in addition to these 7 emperors, during a mere 18 months, three different men had briefly held power: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. The heads were labeled with blasphemous names. These emperors, over time, claimed divinity. Domitian, the current emperor, demanded that loyal Romans acknowledge him as Lord and God.

One of these heads had a fatal wound and yet it was healed. Many see a reference to Nero here. Nero came to the throne through the conniving of a murderous mother whose one ambition was to get her son on the throne. For the first five years, things went well. As Nero busied himself with painting, sculpture, music, and theatre, others governed the country well. Then things changed. He became brutal, wildly immoral, and lawless. He deliberately burned Rome in A.D. 64 so he could have the glory of rebuilding it.

He blamed Christians for the fire. He had them sewn into the skins of wild animals and set savage hunting dogs on them. He put them in sacks with stones and threw them in the Tiber. He coated them with pitch and set them alight, still alive, to light his gardens. He murdered his rivals and officials and even his mother. People were terrified of him.

Finally, the senate declared him a public enemy and he committed suicide. When he died in A.D. 68, people actually danced in the streets, but then a strange thing happened. A rumour grew up and became a legend that Nero was not dead, that he was in Parthia in the east, and that he would return at the head of a horde of Parthians to retake his power. Various pretenders claiming to be Nero rose up over the years.³ So perhaps Nero is the head that was wounded and revived.

If John and his readers would have identified the beast from the sea as the Roman Empire in all its bestiality, with what might we identify the beast?

Darrell Johnson suggests that the beast from the sea is the state when it becomes the servant of Satan—human kingdoms when they

³ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Revelation of John*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1966), pp. 115-119.

eject God from the centre of their worldview. In this scenario, the dragon goes after the disciples of Jesus through dragon-manipulated political powers. Political powers do not set out to be bestial. But they become beasts when they reject God.

Eugene Peterson agrees. Although the authority of government is to be exercised to maintain order and do good, governments can be infiltrated by the dragon's ideas, to lesser and greater degrees.⁴ We've said the sea beast is the beast of coercion. Examples abound.

- In our own lifetimes, Nazism became a demonic force. It was followed by communism, and it's been followed by nationalism, all infused with beastly thinking. The Middle East—and even the whole world—is groaning under nationalism at present.
- You may have heard references on the radio this week to the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, because the start date of that awful event is held to be April 24, 1915. In 1915, the Muslim Ottoman Turks, desperately hanging onto the vestiges of a vast, 100s-of-years-old Empire, systematically turned on Armenians—and encouraged others (the Kurds) to turn on Armenians. Somewhere between 800,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were killed. Many more were scattered around the world. The Armenians were orthodox Christians.⁵
- Pol Pot led the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia from 1963 to 1997. During a four-year period from 1976 to 1979, he served as prime minister, imposing a radical form of agrarian socialism. His government forced urban dwellers to move to the countryside to work in collective farms and forced labour projects. The combined effects of executions, forced labour, malnutrition and poor medical care caused the deaths of as much as 25 percent of the Cambodian population. In all, an estimated 1 to 3 million people died (out of a population of slightly over 8 million) due to the policies of his four-year premiership.⁶ Most Cambodian Christians lost their lives during this time. Most rural Cambodians continue to live in deep poverty, haunted by these memories. According to the Bible League Canada, 8,500 villages in this hurting nation have no Christian witness.

⁴ See Eugene H Peterson, "The Last Word on Politics," *Reversed Thunder* (New York: HarperOne, 1988) pp. 117-128.

⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Genocide

⁶http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pol_Pot

- Just a couple of months ago, in a 9-0 judgment, the Supreme Court of Canada, in *Carter vs. Canada*, declared that the Criminal Code's absolute ban on assisted suicide goes too far. The court said its attempt to protect the lives of "vulnerable people" also prevents competent, consenting adults suffering "grievous and irremediable medical conditions" from making core decisions about how they live and die, (and so breaches three of the most basic rights: to life, liberty and security of the person, all enshrined in Sec. 7 of the Charter, and is not justified in a free democratic society.

The ruling set out circumstances where the country's top court said assisted suicide is constitutional — under a physician's care, for consenting adults who determine they cannot tolerate the physical or psychological suffering brought on by a severe, incurable illness, disease or disability — a stunning reversal of the court's 21-year-old ruling in the *Sue Rodriguez* case.)

Our Canadian government has a year to rewrite the law.⁷ One hopes doctors will not be forced to participate in ending the lives of their patients. This would not be the only example of the coercive mentality of the sea beast infiltrating our Canadian democracy.

The Beast from the Sea—Response

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

Our response to the sea beast is critical, so critical that we are called to attention by the alert, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*" This is the only time in Revelation apart from the letters to the seven churches where this warning is given. The whole point of Revelation is not to scare us but to help us be loyal to our Triune God.

Before the call for patient endurance and faithfulness at the end of verse 10, we also read.

⁷ <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/02/06/supreme-court-rules-strikes-down-assisted-suicide-ban.html>

10 *"If anyone is to go into captivity,
into captivity they will go.
If anyone is to be killed with the sword,
with the sword they will be killed."*

This is an allusion to Jeremiah 15:2 and 43:11. You remember that Jeremiah suffered unspeakable injustices for standing against the coercive power of ungodly, unscrupulous kings and officials. We are reminded here that God does not promise to protect His people from imprisonment and death. In fact, remember what Josef Tson said, "Killing is your biggest weapon...but don't forget that dying is my biggest weapon!" Sometimes participating in the victory of the Holy Trinity means imprisonment and death for us.

Whether the cost of loyalty to our God is that expensive or not, we are all challenged to embrace two vital qualities: **endurance and faithfulness**.

"Patient endurance" translates a single word in the original. Sometimes this word is translated patience and sometimes endurance. Here, for some reason, the translators have used both words.

The word in Greek is literally "to remain under." It is the quality of the person who remains under adverse circumstances but does not give up. Patient endurance is perseverance and steadfastness.

The church in Ephesus was commended for its perseverance (Rev. 2:2). So was the church in Thyatira (2:19). And the church in Philadelphia was promised a reward for keeping Jesus' "command to endure patiently" (3:10).

William Barclay points out that endurance "does not simply mean passively bearing things; it means courageously accepting the worst that life can do, and turning it into glory."⁸

The writer to the Hebrews inspires us to such glory by comparing our endurance to that of Jesus and urging us to keep our eyes on Him:

*And let us run with perseverance (**There's the word!**) the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured (**There it is again!**) the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12*

⁸ Barclay, p. 127.

To the call for patient endurance, Jesus adds the call for faithfulness. Interestingly, faithfulness is the same word as faith. The two ideas are strongly linked: to be faithful to a person, I must first believe in that person. We are faithful to the Holy Trinity because we truly believe in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Faith and faithfulness connote being persuaded, convinced, committed, and confident. For example, being persuaded that the only means of triumph over the dragon is the blood of the Lamb, we believe in the Lamb and we are faithful to the Lamb.

Endurance is not enough on its own. The church in Ephesus was commended for its perseverance yet it had lost its first love. The church in Thyatira too was persevering, yet it tolerated immorality and idolatry.

Endurance is important but not enough. A husband that does not sleep around but doesn't love his wife as himself either is not a faithful husband.

When we are faithful, we not only persevere. We are fully persuaded. We believe with all our hearts. Faith overflows with love and obedience.

When we live patient endurance and faithfulness, we are not hanging onto our faith for dear life; we are loyal and obedient to Jesus in everything. We are giving our faith away to others!

Sometimes, even with our relatively easy experience of living for Jesus in Canada, we doubt that we are up to this. Let's reject this doubt! Both endurance and faithfulness come from God. Romans 15:5 reminds us that God gives endurance and encouragement. Galatians 5:22-23 remind us that faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit! We keep our eyes on Jesus!

The sea monster is not the dragon's only partner in crime. The bedraggled dragon, desperate for a win against God by getting at us recruits a second monster, the land beast. Let's stand and read together about him.

The Beast from the Land

***11** Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. **12** It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants*

worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.

13 *And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 14* *Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.*

15 *The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. 16* *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,*

17 *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.*

18 *This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.*

The Beast from the Land—Observation

Let's once again summarize what we've been told:

- The second beast comes out of the earth.
- It has two horns like a lamb
- It speaks like a dragon
- It exercises authority for the first beast in order to get people to worship the first beast.
- It performs miraculous signs by which it deceives people.
- It even brings to life a lifeless image of the first beast.
- And it forces all people, regardless of socio-economic status to receive a mark on their right hands or foreheads without which they cannot buy or sell.
- The mark is the number of the beast, a human number, 666.

The Beast from the Land—Identification

If John and his first readers thought of Leviathan when they pictured the first beast, they thought of Behemoth when they pictured the second (Job 40). Again, God Himself, in challenging Job to believe that He is more than capable and completely worthy of Job's trust, refers

to Behemoth, some sort of fearsome land animal. Some wonder if the animal referenced in Job, perhaps the oldest book in the Bible, was a dinosaur.

The sea and land beasts of Revelation 13 are not real beasts. They are symbols of evil. As we've seen, the earth beast is the propagandist of the sea beast. His job is to get people to worship the sea beast.

The land beasts' role is religious. Later in Revelation (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) John labels him as false prophet.

If the first beast is dragon-manipulated political power and institutions, the second beast is dragon-manipulated religious power and institutions. Just as the state is meant to be good and do good, as God's servant (Romans 13), yet it can become evil, the worship of God is good, yet worshippers can be seduced into worshipping that which is not God.

We've already noted that the Roman Empire gradually fell into emperor worship. Ironically, this worship was not so much imposed on the empire by the emperors. In Asia Minor (Turkey), city after city competed for the privilege to erect temples to Rome, to Caesar Augustus and subsequent Caesars. There was a group of people in Asia Minor called the "Commune of Asia." The "Asiarch" officials mentioned in Acts 19:31 were members of this group.⁹ Their role was to get people to worship Rome.

The Commune of Asia often used trickery. They used hidden pulleys, for example to cause statues to move. They used ventriloquism to deceive people into thinking that statues spoke. They used astrology and magic.

False religion did not begin or end with Rome. It continues to this day. Often it is allied with the state.

A week or so ago Indian Prime Minister, elected last May, visited Canada and was accompanied by our Prime Minister. Modi is a member of a Hindu nationalist party that supports Hindu supremacy. He is a controversial figure domestically and nationally, in part because of his failure to prevent the 2002 Gujarat riots in which thousands of people were injured and maybe as many as 2,000 were killed. This was Hindu

⁹ See Johnson, p. 243, where he references Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's "The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Social-Political Situation," *SEMEIA*, 36, 1986.

anti-Muslim violence which some claim were premeditated ethnic cleansing.¹⁰

Modi's BJP Hindu-nationalist party has strong ties to RSS, another political organization that believes that India should be purely Hindu. Seven states in India have anti-conversion laws. Hindu radicals actively force "reconversions" upon those who become Christians. Last May, for example, 100 Hindu militants surrounded the rapidly growing "Baamaseen" church in Uttar Pradesh state. As a crowd of 300 villagers stood idly by, the radicals began attacking unprotected Christians. They spared no one, not even children, many of whom fell and were trampled in the chaos. Despite continued attempts of forced "reconversion," only one family from the Baamaseen Church has returned to Hinduism. The congregation, no longer safe to meet openly, now meets in small groups during the night.¹¹ This is the work of the land beast.

There is something we need to learn here that is even more upsetting than anything that I have or could share about false religion and false prophets. Revelation 13's emphasis on religious deception takes us back to Revelation 2 and 3. There we are reminded that the false prophet operates even in the church. His goal in churches is to turn genuine relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit into mere religion. If he can reduce genuine relationship with God into mere church attendance, or mere belief system, or mere keeping of rules, or mere good-luck charm to ensure our safety and blessing, then the beast wins!

There are so many false religions we could ponder, but I want us to acknowledge one more false religion before we move on. It's probably the most deceptive and largest false religion in the world. Its adherents don't think it is a religion. Yet this religion claims many adherents even among Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians. It is the religion of affluence: love of money rather than love of God. You don't have to be wealthy to be seduced into this religion. You just have to love money.

Jesus said, "You cannot love God and money. You will either serve one or the other" (Matthew 6:24 and elsewhere paraphrased).

The Apostle Paul wrote, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and*

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narendra_Modi

¹¹ *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, April 2015, p. 10-11.

pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). He didn't say that money is the root of all kinds of evil. It's not; money is just a tool. It's neutral. It's the *love* of money that is the root of all kinds of evil.

Let me give an example. Naomi Klein is an award-winning journalist and syndicated columnist. Her books include *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, published worldwide in 2007. It's one of the most disturbing books I have ever read, yet one critic (Rachel Maddow) called *The Shock Doctrine*, "The only book of the last few years in American publishing that I would describe as a mandatory must-read."¹²

In the book, Klein takes the reader through country after country, Chile, UK, Poland, China, South African, America, Russian, Iraq, Asia and more to tell story after story about how the rich and powerful influence public policy and use their power to take what little the poor still have away from them—and how disasters give them this opportunity. She tells, for example, about "the second tsunami," in Sri Lanka in which the wealthy resort owners were able to use the tsunami to displace the fishing people from their villages and their beaches so that more resorts for people like you and me could be built. Lives were ruined so a few could be rich. I wish she was exaggerating, but I'm afraid she wasn't.

You might wonder how I got from the land beast and its seductive false religion to money as God. Revelation 13 makes the connection between religion and economics.

16 *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,*
17 *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.*

Just as the Lamb puts his name and his Father's name on the foreheads of their people, as we saw in Revelation 7 and will see again next week in Revelation 14, the land beast puts his mark on his people. The seal of the Lamb is the Holy Spirit and the very character of God imprinted in our souls. Those who have that seal, can't have the beasts' mark too. The mark on the forehead symbolizes buying into the beasts' ideas and the mark on the right hand symbolizes living out that ideal in

¹² <http://www.naomiklein.org/meet-naomi>

action. We're told here than unless we do this, we will be hampered financially in our ability to buy and sell.

The number, we learn in verse 18, is 666. Theologians and mathematicians have played with that number for 2,000 years, trying to identify its owner. The truth is that I don't know what the number means, but I'll happily share a possibility that makes sense to me. Darrell Johnson and some other commentators take this approach.

- This is not the number of a particular man. It is a human number given to a supra-human force.
- Six is one less than seven and seven is the number of completeness.
- Six then is one less than complete—the number of incompleteness.
- John refers to the Holy Spirit as the seven Spirits of God (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The Holy Spirit is the complete Spirit. The beast from the earth is a fake. He falls short.
- The best false religion can do is a six, never a seven.
- Three is also a number of completeness. Three sixes signify that the beast is completely incomplete!
- Or we might point out that all three of the members of the unholy trinity are woefully incomplete. They are 666.
- We might say the Holy Trinity is 777!

So how do we respond?

The Beast from the Land—Response

18 *This calls for wisdom.*

Wisdom, *Sophia*, is the ability to see things as God see them. We need wisdom to see through the coercions and deceptions of these beasts so as not to fall for them. Not to give into the pressure or coercion or respond in kind—and not be led astray from wholehearted devotion to the Triune God!

Where do we get this wisdom? We get it from the word and the Word!

In Psalm 19 and 119 King David exclaims again and again with delight that God's Word is the ultimate source of wisdom.

The Apostle Paul informs us in Colossians 2:3f that *“in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...that no one may deceive you with fine-sounding arguments.”*

The wisest thing you and I can do every day is spend at least a few minutes with the Word in the word! There is absolutely no substitute for this! Doing so equips us to perceive what’s true and what’s not and to make the multiple decisions we must make every day.

Here’s one piece of critical wisdom we need. It is imperative that we do not label Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists, or Wiccans or atheists as the enemy. They are not. They are precious people created in God’s image and likeness just as we are. He loves them just as He loves us. Jesus died and rose again for them, just as He died and rose again for us. They are not the enemy. The enemies are the dragon, the coercive sea beast and the deceptive land beast. We love people; we oppose the dragon and his many attempts at coercion and deception.

We also need wisdom so that we recognize truth and reject non-truth wherever they are found. And we need wisdom so we can keep our relationship with God from becoming mere religion.

Here’s more wisdom that we need. Apparently, if we don’t wear the beasts’ mark—that is buy into and live out their creed and character—it will affect us financially. Then so be it!

But this means that we need huge wisdom in our financial dealings to ensure that we are not making them in line with the beasts’ values.

- When we buy what we buy, who are we supporting and how is it affecting others? Do we love the good deals we get on clothes manufactured in sweatshops? I don’t like having to research this! It’s hard to even know how! I’d rather not, but don’t I need to ask, “Is there anyone losing out so I can have this?”
- I’m not saying that we shouldn’t go on cruises. In fact, I’d really like to cruise the Mediterranean. But I don’t mind saying that it really bothered me that the crew that I talked to on our Caribbean cruise, the only cruise I’ve ever been on, couldn’t raise their own children because they were serving me and people like me for months on end! Yes, it was a better job for them than no job or a low paying job in their homeland, but is there no better way?
- And then there are our investments, investments we make so we can retire. Where do we begin to make sure that the companies we’ve bought into have values that are closer to those of the Holy

Trinity than those of the unholy trinity? I don't like having to figure that out either, but I think we should as best we can.

CONCLUSION:

The caption on the poster advertising the Revelation 13 movie reads like this: **Followers of Holy Trinity require endurance, faithfulness, and wisdom to be victorious over the unholy trinity.** From Revelation 12 we were impressed that **in Jesus we have everything that we need to triumph! Then let's look to Him!**

Triumph is not merely holding on! Triumph means sharing the love and good news of the Holy Trinity with hearts full of love for God and our fellow humans. We can't win by being defensive! We must go on the offence and help people find and follow Jesus.