

The Beast Is Not; So What Am I?

Revelation 17

#32 in our series “The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation”

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Prayer

Father, we confess that we've been looking in the mirror and kind of observing that we're getting dusty—we're getting old. Maybe we've been looking at the local news or sports stations. Father, I pray that as we preach, you—through the power of your Spirit—would reach down and turn our faces towards you so that we would see you on your throne, revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. I'm just asking that you would help us to preach, Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Message

We started preaching through the Revelation exactly one year ago today. Today we arrive at chapter 17 of the Revelation, which is an explanation of what John has seen since the Lamb opened the seventh seal on the seventh sealed scroll.



Figure 1 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

It's absolutely critical to remember that John is no longer “dwelling on earth.”

The book *starts* on earth, with John worshiping in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, when and where Jesus appears to him like a man on fire, shining like the sun.ⁱ

Jesus then dictates seven letters to the seven angels of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Each letter is a call to conquer and creates the question, “How do I conquer?”

Then Jesus says to John, “Come up here!” And suddenly John finds himself before the throne of God. He's no longer in space and time as we experience them. And yet, he's looking at space and time as we do experience them.



In the strong right hand of God, there is a scroll sealed with seven seals.
Twenty-four elders and all of heaven worship God for, by His will, He created *all* things.

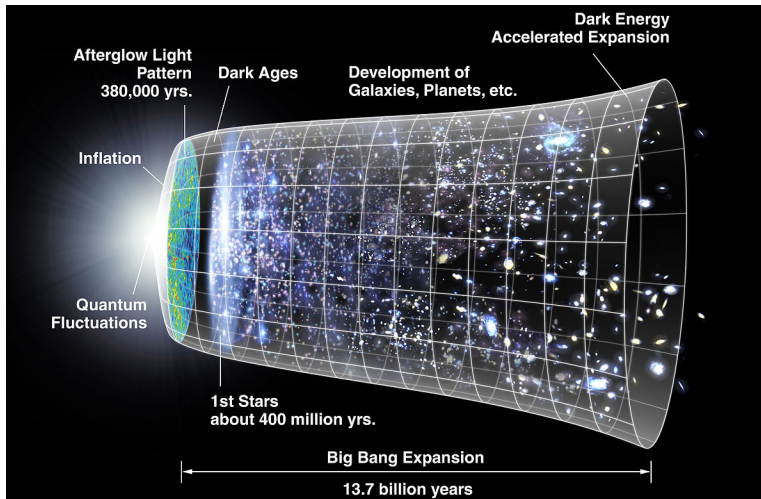


Figure 2 Image credit: NASA / WMAP science team

We saw that the scroll, appears to be all of creation.
In Scripture, the seven days are far more than seven days as we measure time, in fact, they represent all of *chronos*—chronological time.ⁱⁱ So this picture reminds us of this timeline.ⁱⁱⁱ

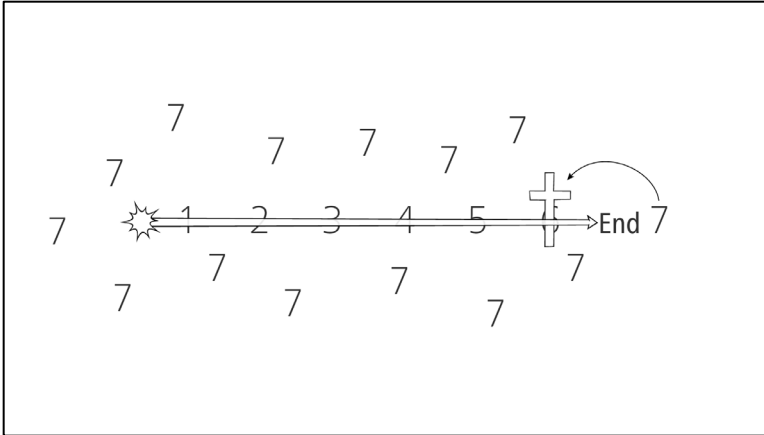


Figure 3 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

In the words of Karl Barth, *“To say that God is eternal means that God is “the One who is and rules before time, in time, and again after time, the One who is not conditioned by time, but conditions it absolutely in his freedom”*”^{iv}

In the words of the famous hymn: *“He’s got the whole world in his hands, he’s got the whole world in his hands, he’s got the whole world in his hands... He’s got space-time in his hands.”*^v



We’ve spoken about all of this. So, I’m just reminding you that John is outside of space-time, looking at space-time, in the strong right hand of God . . . who is Jesus, who is the Word, who is the Judgment, who is the slaughtered Lamb, who is opening the scroll and revealing its meaning.^{vi}

And all of this reveals something utterly fascinating about John, and about you, and about Jesus. There are at least two Johns: there is a John outside the scroll and one inside the scroll.

- It appears that John is one of the twenty-four elders around the throne in eternity constantly worshipping.
- And John is also a hotheaded fisherman, in 30 AD, in Galilee who wants to call down fire on a whole Samaritan village. He is also a John in that scroll.

Even more, John is an observer. You know? Physicists talk a lot these days about the mystery of an observer but is an observer observing both the old John and the new John.

It appears that Paul also had an experience like this. He tells the Corinthians that he was caught up to the third heaven. He saw things that he just didn't know quite what to do with. He must've seen an old Paul and a forever new/eternal Paul.

And not only that, there is an old you and a new and eternal you. John hears, *"Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is within them praising God and the lamb for redeeming people for God."* In other words, He hears you, the new and eternal you, constantly singing in eternity... But, there's also an old you, grumbling and complaining, in Denver in 2018.

That new and eternal you must be a little like the you that is awake, thinking about the you that is dreaming...You are you when you're dreaming, and yet you're not you... you're not your true self; you're a false self that you have created with your dream.

St. Paul wrote, *"Therefore it says, 'Awake oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you... He will give you light'"* (Eph. 5:14).

You'll remember when Christ appeared to John, he fell as if dead, until Jesus touched him and said, "Don't be afraid." It was as if John was waking from a dream of his own sovereignty (his own control) to the reality of the sovereignty of God (and *His* control).

You'll also remember that once upon a time, John was in a boat with Jesus on the sea, a storm was raging and Jesus was asleep and appeared to be dreaming. The disciples woke Jesus to the "reality" of the storm. Jesus seemed a bit perturbed and told the storm to stop. It does, and then the disciples wake to the reality that the storm was not reality, but more like their own bad dream . . . interfering with God's dreams.

Well, creation is God's dream, created entirely by His Will, or Word. But this is where it gets really weird: God has dreamed up some dreamers that don't always dream what God dreams.

The John outside the scroll is God's perfect dream: Man in the image of God. But the John inside the scroll is still dreaming his own dreams . . . and yet, even these must somehow be part of God's dream.

God's dreams are called reality. When John dreams God's dreams, He walks in the Way, the Truth and the Life—the Light. "All that is exposed to light becomes light," writes Paul. But whenever and wherever John simply dreams his own dreams, he sins.

Well, John hears all creatures, in eternity worshipping. But in eternity there is no sin, no beast, no Harlot, no dragon, no evil, no one interested in crucifying God, but only interested in worshipping God. You see? Sin and evil are not God's dream, but our dream, our nightmare.

I can't say this precisely, but John must realize that he exists in the scroll the way you exist in your dreams . . . You exist, and some of the things you dream exist, but that dream world really *doesn't* exist... and yet, sometimes we get trapped in our dreams.

And now, this is where the Revelation that should really blow your mind. John looks to the throne and realizes that God has entered, not only His own dreams (the creation) but also John's dreams . . . of sin and evil. He looks to the throne and sees wounds on the body of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The King of Kings received those wounds in our wicked dreams . . . And yet, those wicked dreams exist in God's good dream, which is eternal. Those wounds, purchased in time, are also an eternal fountain of eternal Life, from which pours a river of Life.

Well, I just wanted to remind you of what we preached a year ago... And that is that the Revelation is something like God entering our dreams and waking us from our illusion of control. See? That would be apocalyptic—the earth would shake, the mountains would vanish, and our reality would dissolve like a dream.

Movie Clip from *Inception*

Cobb: Dreams . . . they feel real while we're in them, right? It's only when we wake up that we realize something was actually strange. Let me ask you a question: You never really remember the beginning of a dream do you? You always end up right in the middle of what's going on.

Ariadne: I guess . . . Yeah.

Cobb: So how did we end up here?

Ariadne: Well, we just cam from the . . . uh . . . (confused)

Cobb: Think about it Ariadne, how did you get here? Where are you right now?

Ariadne: (Looking around bewildered) We're dreaming?

Cobb: You're actually in the middle of the workshop, right now. This is your first lesson in shared dreaming. [The table that Ariadne and Cobb are sitting at begins to shake. A newsstand explodes and then the reality around them begins to crumble to pieces as Ariadne realizes she is in a dream. Ariadne watches in wonder as "reality" crumbles around her.]

Ariadne: If it's just a dream then why are you with...? [Ariadne suddenly awakens to find herself in the workshop with Cobb talking to her.]

Cobb: It's never really "just" a dream is it? A face full of glass hurts like hell when you're in it. It feels real.

[Ariadne gasps for air as she recovers from her dream and tries to make sense of what she has just experienced.]

“Think about it . . . how did you get here?” I mean that’s what we all wonder, right? Do you see? Maybe in some sense, we’re dreaming. Do you remember that clip from the movie *Inception*, about new technology that allows people to enter other people’s dreams? “When you’re in it, it feels real...”

Well, the wounds on Christ’s hands and feet *are* real: maybe they’re the price God pays to enter our nightmares and wake us up. We cannot understand all of that, but we should be pondering all of that, as we read Revelation 17.

Last time in Revelation 16, at the revelation of the seventh wound, poured from the seventh bowl of the passion of God, we saw all the kings of the earth and all their armies gathered on a mountain to do battle with the Lamb of God.

He conquers them as He cries, “*It is finished; it is done,*” from a tree in a garden just outside the walls of the great city of Jerusalem. The earth shakes, the mountains move, and our old reality dissolves like a dream.

Revelation 17:1-18

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute [porne: harlot, whore] who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality [porneou: to buy or sell intimate communion], and with the wine of whose sexual immorality [porneia] the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”^{vii} And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness [outside the city], and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast [It’s scarlet just as the seven-headed dragon was scarlet.] ...scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names...

Most think that this beast with the blasphemous names is the Antichrist, and that makes sense to me. Antichrist means imitation Christ.

...and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls,

In three chapters, we’ll meet the Bride. She isn’t adorned with gold, jewels, and pearls; she’s *made of* gold, jewels and pearls.

This woman was adorned in gold, jewels and pearls, writes John, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and (or “that is”) the impurities of her sexual immorality (porneia). And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations (bdelygma) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs (the witnesses) of Jesus.”^{viii}

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel (thaumazo)?^{ix} I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is

*about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth [Do you dwell on the earth?] whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, **one is**, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven...*

The beast is a king, like a “king of kings...” Jesus rose on the eighth day, which in the Hebrew mind is an endless seventh day. The beast is like an imitation Christ... “The kings *are*, but the beast *is not*...”

As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven, [As if the seven give it power] and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw [and we have ten fingers, that's sort of how we count in this world] are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour (eat) her flesh^x and burn her up with fire^{xi} [The dragon's kingdom consumes itself.] ...burn her with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled (finished). And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

There you go! [The congregation laughs.]

Now, we'll preach more about this, and we've been preaching about this for months, but we still wonder, “Who is this woman, this city?” She's Babylon, that's obvious, for that's her name and it reminds us of the tower of Babel, when men tried to purchase heaven with their deeds.

She's Babylon, and she must be Rome. For thousands of years now, Rome has been known as the city on seven hills. In Rome, they were slaughtering Christians for sport in the Coliseum.

She's Babylon, and Rome, and Jerusalem.

- Jerusalem has already been called “The Great City,” in chapter 11. She's “the city where our Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:8).
- We'll soon read: “*In her is found the blood of the saints and the prophets and all*

who have been slain on earth (18:24).” That has to be a reference to Jerusalem, and the blood of Jesus who bleeds for *all*.

- Throughout the Old Testament, Jerusalem is called a harlot.
- In the next chapter we read, “*Her wound comes in one day (18:8).*” That must be the day that Jesus is crucified.
- Jerusalem is destroyed, and we’ll soon see a New Jerusalem coming down in her place... no longer a *harlot* but a *bride*.

Well, the Harlot sits on the peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.
She is an economy of *porneia* . . . wherever she goes.

The kings of the earth use her, and she is dependent on the kings of the earth. Politicians depend on the economy, and the economy depends on politicians. They use each other and hate each other . . . like beastly men and depraved harlots.

She’s female and the beast is male.

She rides the beast. If there’s no beast, there’s no harlot.

Kinda like, if there’s no Adam, there’s no Eve.

Kinda like, if there’s no Jesus, there’s no us... His Bride.

If the beast is the Antichrist, she’s the antibride, the imitation bride.

She is an evil entity that tempts humanity to purchase our Lord, who is Love.

So who or what is the beast?

- Preterists argue that the beast is obviously the Roman Empire. And they usually argue that the seven kings are seven emperors. It’s got to be hugely significant that 666 adds up to the name “Nero” in two different ways. Nero was the fifth emperor of Rome, if you count Julius Caesar. We just read that four kings had fallen and one is. Preterists often argue that the ten horns were ten provincial governors that would turn on the city of Rome or that did, in fact, destroy Jerusalem.
- The predominant view for the last six hundred years, primarily among Protestants, has been that the Roman Papacy was the beast and the popes were kings. And some argued that the ten horns were kings of Gothic tribes that would sack Rome.
- The predominant view in Hollywood today, and in America, is that the beast has yet to appear, but will appear as the leader of a revived Roman Empire comprised of a ten-nation European Confederacy.^{xii} A challenge for that view is that John clearly states that the fifth head on the beast “is.” That means that this fifth head, or king, was alive and kicking in John’s day.

I think they may all be right . . . to an extent. Seven is the number of our days in time. These are the kings of time.

- The beast is an evil entity that tempts humanity to take the Life of our Lord.

- The whore is about manipulating the Life and Love, and the beast is about taking Life and Love.
- The beast is political power that is especially lethal when combined with religious power.

[Image of Obama pictured as the devil with a pitchfork]

Some have recently argued that Obama is the Antichrist^{xiii}

Well, if you think he needs to save you, you just made him an antichrist.

According to NBC, last week in a closed-door meeting with a group of leading evangelical Christians Donald Trump said, *"This Nov. 6 election is a referendum on not only me, it's a referendum on your religion..."*

If your faith is dependent on Donald Trump, you don't have faith in Jesus. You have faith in the antichrist—the imitation Christ.

[Image of an angry Donald Trump parallel to an image of the "Antichrist"]

I'm not saying that Donald Trump is the antichrist, but his statement sounds like the spirit of the antichrist. You don't need Donald Trump to save Jesus or your religion. Religion that is pure and undefiled is visiting orphans and widows in their affliction. And you don't need **you** to save Jesus . . . or yourself. If you think you save yourself, you're an imitation Christ, an antichrist.

And I think that's what's most frightening about the antichrist... Maybe you're the antichrist.

Clip from *Damien: Omen II*:

A man cuts a boy's hair while he sleeps. Scary music plays in the background. The man continues to cut until he sees the numbers "666" on the boy's scalp. The music intensifies as the camera zooms in on a man's concerned face.

Do

you remember that clip?

And now I'm not just messing around: The antichrist is the beast...

- And in chapter 13, verse 3 we read that *"the whole earth... followed the beast."*
- In 13:8, *"All who dwell on the earth will worship it, those whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life"*
- In 13:14, through the false prophet, the beast convinces "all" (that doesn't have any exceptions) to be *"marked by the beast (v.16)"* and *"make an image of the beast to the beast" (v.14).*

Sometimes, I think I make myself in the image of the beast, even though I'm trying to make myself in the image of God. "*Beware when fighting the beast lest you become the beast.*" Solomon wrote that God is testing us so that we would see that we ourselves are "*but beasts.*"

Well, it's pretty easy to get stressed about the harlot, and the beast, and so we fight the beast and become beastly. But right here, in the middle of the chapter, the angel says something that we always seem to miss. Three times the angel says, "The beast... *is not.*" "*The beast was, and **is not**, and is about to rise... and go to destruction.*"

Some argue that this refers to a myth regarding Nero... that Nero would die and rise from the dead. And yet, it can't refer to King Nero if Nero is the fifth king, for that king "*is*": "*Four have fallen and one is.*" The king "*is*," but the beast "*was, is NOT, and is to come.*" John wrote that to everyone—including you.

It's like the beast exists in your past, but your past only exists in your own mind; it's the meaning that you have ascribed to events that you have experienced, but you know it's not truly real.

The beast exists in your past, and in your future, but your future isn't truly real. Your future is entirely a fiction that you have constructed in longing and fear . . . a fiction derived from your interpretation of the past.

The past is gone, the future is your fiction, but now is another matter.

"Now is the day of salvation," say's Scripture.

"Now is the judgment of this world," says Jesus in John 12

"Now is the ruler of this world cast out."

Tony Campolo writes, "Now is the non-existent point that separates past from the future. I can't describe now, because by the time I say 'now' it is already past. Nevertheless, I know that now exists because it is where 'I am.'"

Philosophers, theologians and now physicists all argue that now is the point at which eternity touches time, and time touches eternity. "All real life is encounter," writes Martin Buber. We can only know and be known *now*.

You can only live now, love now, and be free now.

You can only commune with another person now. Eternal life is *now*.^{xiv}

Well, Nero, the king, IS, but the beast is NOT.

In chapter 24, we'll read that the "kings of the earth" bring their glory into the New Jerusalem, the eternal city... But we don't read anything like that about the dragon, the beast, and the whore... in fact, no one "doing abomination (*bdelygma*) may enter" (Rev. 21:27)

Well, three times John hears the “beast was, is not, and is to come.”
And three times John has already heard, that the Lord is the One who, “Is, was and is to come.” Or “Was, is, and is to come.” You see: God is “I AM.”

You know in Scripture, there is this fundamental dualism that I think we entirely misunderstand.

<u>Duality in Scripture</u>	
Good	evil
Life	death
Light	dark
Truth	lies
Logos	chaos
Christ	antichrist
Creator	desecrator
Creation	the void
I Am	I am not

We tend to think the things in the second column are equal opposites of the things in the first column, but they’re absolutely not . . . I mean that quite literally: they are . . . NOT.

They are not equal opposites of the things in the first column . . . but descriptions of the absence of the things in the first column.

Karl Barth wrote:

Sin and evil have... a kind of being, which can only be described in purely negative terms. As, for example, I should say, 'Sin and evil, and the devil himself, are impossible possibilities.' or, if you prefer, unreal realities. It can't be helped; that's their nature because sin means living a lie...^{xv}

Sin is the impossible possibility in Scripture; it's a mystery.

- Paul wrote, “*God accomplishes all things according to the council of his will*” (Eph. 1:11).
- So God speaks His Word and creation happens, until . . . on the sixth day, someone else speaks and God’s will doesn’t seem to happen.
- In fact, God’s Word and Will is crucified on a tree... in the sixth hour of the day, the sixth day of the week, on the sixth day of creation.

It's like God dreams a dream that is you, and then you dream that there is no dreamer but you. In other words, you dream that you are NOT. (Have you been dreaming that you are not? And what would that look like?)

In John 15, Jesus says, "*Abide in me* [that is to be with Him] *and I in you...* *for apart from me you can do nothing.*" And that's weird . . . for apart from him, we think we've done a whole lot of something . . . like sin . . . But, according to Jesus that's *not* a thing, it's a *no*-thing... a terrifying *nothing*, like a nightmare, and yet, *still, nothing*. Jesus said, "*Apart from me you can do nothing.*"

Duality in Scripture

Good	evil
Life	death
Light	dark
Truth	lies
Logos	chaos
Christ	antichrist
Creator	desecrator
Creation	the void
I Am	I am not

To choose the things in the first column is the Judgment of God. The Judgment of God is Love and it's revealed to us as Grace. To choose the things in the second column is our judgment apart from God's Judgment; it's sin.

So we can add two words to our columns: Grace and sin.

Duality in Scripture

Good	evil
Life	death
Light	dark
Truth	lies
Logos	chaos
Christ	antichrist
Creator	desecrator
Creation	the void
I Am	I am not
Grace	sin

- There's a fundamental dualism in our world that isn't really a dualism because one side "IS" and the other side "is not."
- There's a fundamental dualism in Scripture and a fundamental dualism in us, in Scripture.

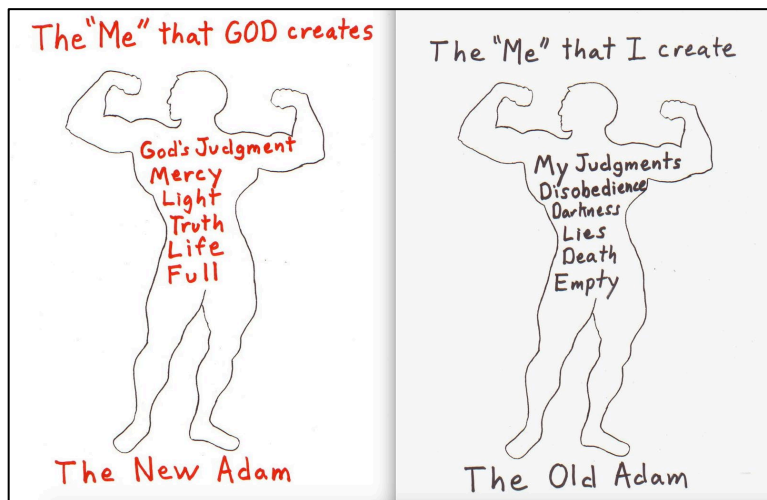


Figure 4 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

There is the "me" that God creates with His Judgment.
And the "me" that I *think* I create with my judgment.

There is the "me" that is God's dream. His name is written in the Lamb's book of life—from the foundation of the world. And there is also a "me" that is my own dream. He dwells on earth. I'm proud of his name, but he *is not*.

There is a “me” made in God’s image... and I don’t know how to comprehend this . . . but that me is eternal.

And there is a “me” that I think I made... and I don’t know how to comprehend this . . . but that me is NOT.

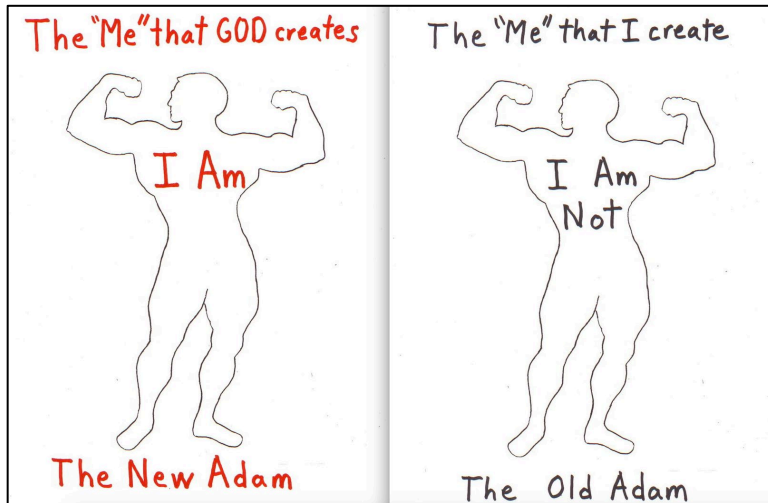


Figure 5 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

The me that God creates is who “I am” And the me that I think I create is what “I am not.” The man of sin *is not*. And the man of grace is indestructible. He may appear to be no larger than a mustard seed, but He is indestructible and you will watch Him grow . . . observer . . . He’s indestructible.

I *am* the image of God
I am *not* the image of the beast.
I *am* Light and *not* a shadow.

Now, these are old pictures that you’ve seen many times before...like when we preached through Genesis, through Ecclesiastes, the Gospels and Ephesians.

I didn’t redraw them cause I’m lazy, but also because I want you to see that I’m not making this up to make sense of Revelation 17.

- In Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans Paul refers to them as the New Man and the old man, or the True Self and the false self, the Vessels of Mercy and vessels of wrath.
- In the Synoptic Gospels, they are the Wheat and tares, or Grain and chaff.
- In the Gospel of John, they are the children of God and the spawn of the devil.
 - In John 12, Jesus says that He will “*draw all people to himself.*”
 - In John 8, he tells the Pharisees that they are “*of their father the devil.*” John knows that the devil can’t make people. The devil is the father of lies

and when we, the Bride of Christ, believe the devil's lies we receive his seed and produce an abomination.

In v. 5 we read that the Harlot is the mother of "earth's abominations, *bdelygma*."

- It's a fascinating word that only appears 6 times in Scripture.
- It's used here and in Rev. 20, where it says, "*no one doing abomination will enter the New Jerusalem... that is the eternal temple of God.*"
- Jesus uses it twice to refer to the abomination of desecration that's spoken of in Daniel and set up in the temple at the destruction of Jerusalem by the antichrist.

In Luke 16:15, Jesus tells us what it is: To the Pharisees, He says, "*You are those who justify [that means you "judge"] yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*"

Understand? Your ego, "what is exalted among men," is an abomination. And when it sits on the throne in the Sanctuary of your soul, it is the abomination of desolation, for you think you are a beast or a harlot, and not a man or woman created in the image of God. You think you must take life and earn love. You think you are a self-made man or self-made woman. And yet, with every choice you crucify the Will of God, desecrate your self, and trap yourself in outer darkness.

But now, listen to the Gospel: "The Beast *is not*." On the cross, Jesus, the will of God descended into your nightmare, disarmed the principalities and powers and revealed that "the beast is not" and He is "I AM," and death is *not* the End.

The dragon is constantly lying to you, trying to convince you that you are a beast or a harlot... but, when he accuses you . . .

You can say, "*I know you are, but what am I?*"

Better yet, say, "*The beast is not, but what am I?*"

Better yet, don't ask him, tell him: "*The beast is not, but I am... I am called, and chosen, and faithful.*"

Check out v. 14: "*They (The kings, beast, and harlot) will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*"

The Lamb will conquer them because He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

That's a biblical title for God, and it means the Lamb is God.

And God is I AM that I AM.

The very manifestation of His presence utterly annihilates I am not. Just as Light annihilates the dark, and Truth destroys lies, so *the Christ* destroys *the* antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8).

"The Lamb will conquer... and those with him."^{xvi}

You can only be “with” someone . . . now. The Lord is always with you, but you are not always with Him, for you’re trapped in your past through shame, or lost in your anxieties about the future... because you have believed the lie that you must justify yourself—the lie that you must *call* yourself, *choose* yourself, and *create faith* in yourself.

But you are called, chosen, and so, faithful. I think John wrote both the gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Listen from the gospel of John:

John 3:35 “The Father loves the son and has given all things into his hands,” said Jesus.

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father sent me draws him.”

John 15:16 “You did not chose me, but I chose you...”

Everyone that’s anyone will be called and drawn. You’re here because you’ve already been called and drawn. You couldn’t even seek God unless He chose you and called you to do so.

The whole point of election is that you didn’t choose God, God chose you. He chose to make you in His own image, the image of Love. He chose to impart faith through Grace; Your Father is Love. You are called, chosen and faithful... or... you are nothing.

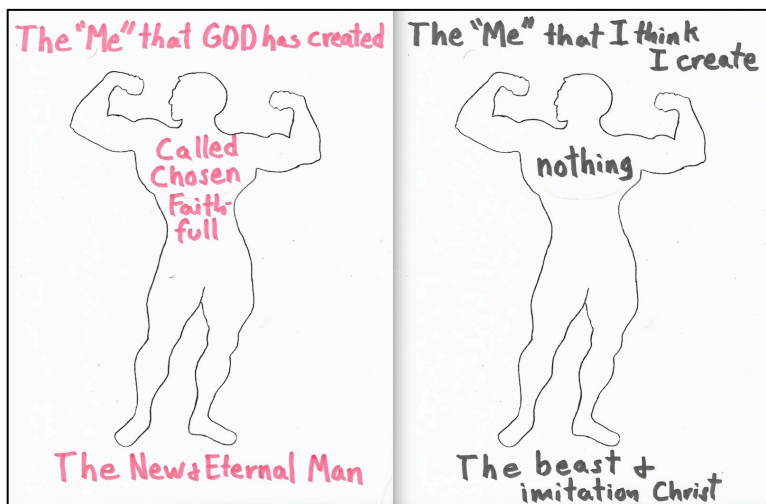


Figure 6 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

And you're not just nothing or you wouldn't be concerned about something... The truth is that in some mysterious way, in space and time, you are both: *something* and *nothing*.

- But you can't make your nothing into something, with fear that you're nothing or by striving to be something, which is only choosing more nothing.

In other words . . .

- You cannot save yourself; you can only wake from the dream that "you are salvation" and believe the reality and Truth that "God is salvation."
- You cannot create yourself; you can only wake to the reality that you have been created.
- You cannot create yourself; you can only accept yourself, your True Self, by looking into the eyes of your Father and trusting His Judgment: "The beast is not and you are called, chosen and faithful. You are my creation. My child. My beloved."

Twenty years ago, on our family vacation to Disneyworld, my two oldest children asked me to take them on a ride called "Alien Encounter." There were warning signs all over, so Jon (who was nine years old) kept asking me, "Daddy, will I be ok?" And Elizabeth (who was eight years old) kept lecturing Jon on courage saying, "Look at me Jon, I'm not afraid. I'm not worried. I'm ok!" Jon wanted my judgment. Elizabeth trusted her own judgment, for she had exalted herself.

"Alien Encounter" was one of those animatronic rides where they feed you a story and lock you in a chair. A man on a video screen explained that he was the Chairman of XS Industries, and that currently, he was on another planet on the other side of the galaxy. But now through this amazing new XS teleportation technology, he himself would be beamed through space, and materialize in the giant tube in the center of the room. That's pretty cool! And Jon and Elizabeth were doing just fine, when all at once; one of the technicians yelled, "I've locked onto another planet in our transmission path!" Then, "What if it's not him? It's an alien! It's carnivorous!" Then, "The teleportation tube is starting to break!"

Through the smoke and flashing lights, you suddenly see a huge dragon-like creature in the XS Industries teleportation module.

- I looked at Jon – he looked at me. I smiled – he was ok.
- I looked at Elizabeth – she was not looking at me. She was looking at this alien beast, and then I realized: *"Oh no! She's bought the lie."*

The technician yelled, "People of earth: Do not worry as long as the force field beams are on, the alien cannot fly out." Just then, the power failed, and the guy yelled, "It's out! Get the alien back in the tube before it eats somebody!"

- All at once, you could feel alien breath on the back of your neck.
- You could hear the sound of this beast eating someone just above you.
- You could feel liquid drip on your arms and head.
- The chair shook, and you couldn't get out.

Then Elizabeth started screaming, “We have to get out of here... Right now!” I looked over; I had never seen such a look of absolute terror ever before. I remember thinking, “She actually believes that this beast is the end of her.” And terrified of the beast, she was turning into a beast, clawing at the restraints to flee from her chair. My heart just broke for her.

If I could’ve, I would’ve, taken my heart out of my chest and given it to her—my heart “from the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18) given to her. But I couldn’t; I was locked in my chair, and so couldn’t get to her chair. So, I looked at Elizabeth and started screaming: “Elizabeth! Elizabeth!” I called to her screaming: “Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! It’s not real! It’s not real! It’s not real! The beast is not real.”

Now . . . the puffs of air coming out of the tubes in the back of her seat were real, but the breath of the beast was a lie. The water dripping on her head was real, but the idea that it was blood was a lie. The plastic in the tube that looked like a dragon was real, but the beast was an illusion, a bad dream, and an absolute lie.

I screamed, “It’s not real.” And I wanted her to believe, “I am real. I am the truth. I am love. And I will always love you.”

You know, the wounds in your hands and feet are real, and the wounds in Jesus’ are real; they are the price He gladly pays to let you know His Love is Real and He will always love you.

The wounds are real and the pain that you experience in this world is real, but the news that this is the end and you are nothing but a beast and a whore that belongs to the dragon—that’s an absolute lie.

Perhaps your entire journey through this fallen world is just like the fifteen minutes we spent on The Alien Encounter ride at Disneyworld.

Now you may wonder why a good father would take his eight-year-old daughter on the Alien Encounter ride... well, maybe a good father wouldn’t. But God is a Good Father and he put us in a garden with a talking snake and a tree of the knowledge of Good and evil, Life and death, Light and dark, I am and I am not.

To let Elizabeth think that she might be “not”—that she might be swallowed by evil was not my intention, but the way she freely chose to be with me after that ride was over was just delightful. She sat on my lap on a bench at the exit to the ride for a full half hour hanging on to my neck and she wouldn’t let go... she just wanted to be with me.

A year later she wrote this poem for me!

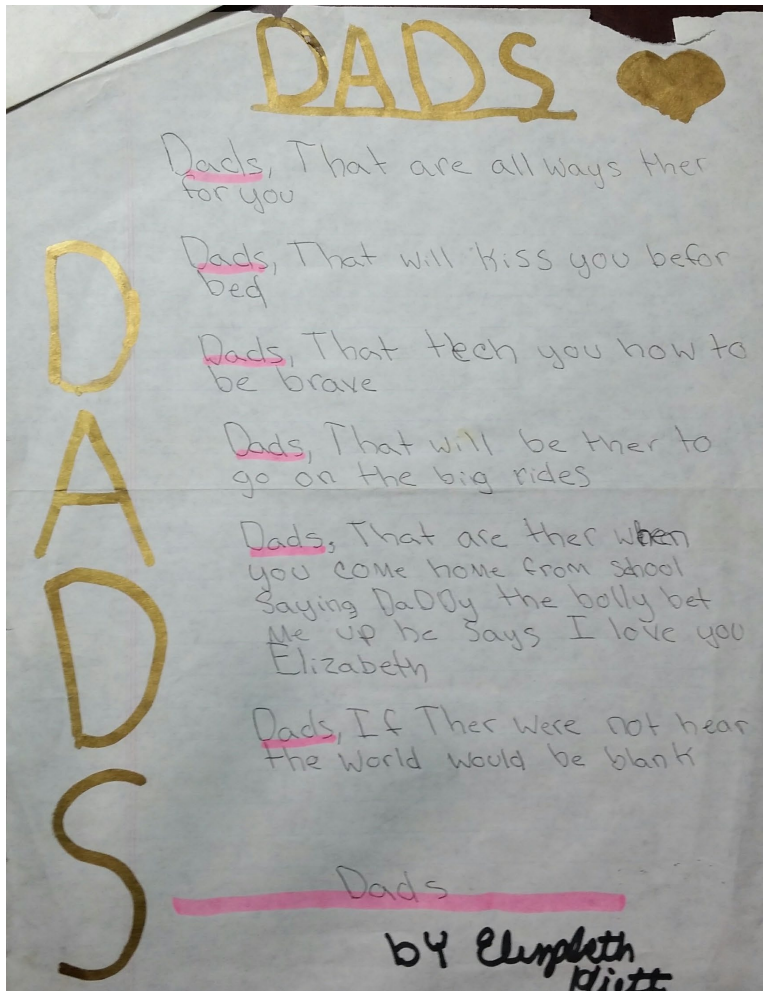


Figure 7 Image credit: Elizabeth Hiatt

You may have had a bad dad, but your Father is Good... He is *the* Good.

Communion

On the night that we *all* betrayed Him, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you. Take, eat, and do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way He took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you."

Now, look at me: the beast *is not*, but you are called, and chosen, and faithful.

[Several worship songs are sung including "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty"]

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide Thee,
though the eye made blind by sin Thy glory may not see,
only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

—by Reginald Heber

Benediction

You just sang, “All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.” You may have been singing that all your life and didn’t even realize what you were singing. It’s kind of everything I’ve gotten in trouble for, but it’s right out of the Revelation: “all thy works shall praise thy name...”

Sometimes, poorly informed people, and I think people with rather hard hearts will say, “Well, if God ultimately will save everyone, what’s the point of faith of trusting Him (dad) now?”

They shut down “Alien Encounter” in 2003; I think it’s because it was really freaking people out, but on YouTube, I found a home video of some folks on the ride experiencing just what we experienced.

Watch and listen: [A recording of the ride “Alien Encounter” is shown. As one watches and listens, the voices of people in absolute terror, especially children, and the voices of people laughing and enjoying the ride are heard.]

Did you hear it?

- Some people believed the lie—you could hear them screaming and weeping in fear.

(Sometimes, I think the devil says to us something like: “The Father loves you less than He loves someone else.” But I love Elizabeth and John the same. But when one believes the lie, my love burns even brighter towards that one than it does towards the other. And the weird thing is, God puts us all in different circumstances, with different experiences and so we can’t really judge the experience of others...)

- But some people didn’t buy the lie—you could hear them laughing.

You see? It can actually make a difference if you believe: The beast is *not*, and you *are* called and chosen and faithful.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio or video version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.

ⁱ We noted that Jesus is not less real than John and the island of Patmos, but immeasurably more real than John and the island of Patmos.

ⁱⁱ God creates all things in seven days and in case you hadn't noticed, He's still creating—On the seventh day, "It is finished" and everything is good.

ⁱⁱⁱ Time (That is *chronos*, in Greek), or these ages or age (*aion*), exist in God's age, eternity (that which is *aionios*, meaning of the age to come, God's age—that which is not subject to chronological space and time.)

^{iv} Time does not exist, Barth concludes, apart from eternity's embrace. Eternity embraces time on all sides, preceding, accompanying, and fulfilling it. To say that God is eternal means that God is "the One who is and rules before time, in time, and again after time, the One who is not conditioned by time, but conditions it absolutely in his freedom" (II/1, p. 619). . . . God's eternity is so to speak the companion of time, or rather it is itself accompanied by time in such a way that in this occurrence time acquires its hidden center, and therefore both backwards and forwards its significance, its content, its source and its goal, but also continually its significant present. Because, in this occurrence, eternity assumes the form of a temporal present, all time, without ceasing to be time, is no more empty time, or without eternity. It has become new. This means that in and with this present, eternity creates in time real past and real future, distinguishes between them, and is itself the bridge and way from the one to the other. Jesus Christ is the way." (II/1, p. 627)

The real future that eternity creates in time is the future of eternal life in communion with God. The real past, in turn, is the past of sin and death as abolished in the cross of Christ. This old reality of sin and death is "continually opposed" by the new reality of eternal life, even as the new reality "comes breaking in triumphantly" again and again (II/1, p. 628). Jesus Christ stands between the old reality and the new. "In him the equilibrium between them has been upset and ended. He is the way from the one to the other and the way is irreversible. He is the turning" (II/1, p. 628).

- George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, p. 205, 207

^v Since most of us are children of the modern age, we've been taught that this is impossible and so the song is just a metaphor... cause obviously there is nothing other than matter, space and time. Yet modern physics has revealed, matter, space and time had a beginning. And even more, matter doesn't really matter, but you do. To use very imprecise words, there's something or someone outside of the Big Bang. And there's something or someone inside of you that's more real than matter itself. Philosophers and theologians have always said this and referred to that thing as consciousness, spirit, or the breath of God. But now, even scientists refer to this "thing" and call it the "observer." The observer, in some very real sense, is more real than "reality," and, in some sense, creates reality. An observer appears to collapse the quantum state of the subatomic particles that make up all matter.

Perhaps, "I" am an observer, observing my own creation. I cannot create "me"—only a "false me"—but perhaps I can observe the creation of the "true me." Perhaps I can observe my own creation.

^{vi} Jesus is the "strong arm of God" (See Is. 51:9, 52:10, 53:1).

^{vii} This must be blood that's wine and wine that's blood. The Harlot teaches the dwellers on the earth to worship the beast, to abuse communion. When you abuse anyone, you abuse Jesus, and His blood is wine and wine that's blood.

viii That's quite a picture: the blood of the saints is blood that's wine and wine that's blood—It's Lamb's blood. When she abuses the saints, she abuses the Lamb and loses her mind. When the saints forgive the blood, it must burn her like fire.

ix John marvels, just as "all the earth marveled" at the beast in Chapter 13.
13:3 "all the earth marveled as they followed."
But the angel stops John and asks, "Why do you marvel?"

x This is something to ponder: "They eat her flesh." We've also noticed that all the blood is wine—intoxicating wine. The harlot is somehow related to the Bride. And the blood in all of us belongs to Jesus. When we abuse anyone, we break the Body and shed the Blood. "Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me," says the king of kings on Judgment day.

xi Like beasts, men consume prostitutes and then hate those prostitutes.
Just as prostitutes use men like beasts and then hate those men.
In doing so we call down fire—the Judgment of God.

xii Many modern evangelicals have argued that there will be a ten-nation European (think Roman) confederacy like the ten horns here, and the ten toes and horns in Daniel's visions in the Old Testament. This crowd was understandably excited at the formation of the European Union, but disappointed when more than ten nations were included. Recently, on the internet, I discovered that some are now pointing to a new super group of ten, said to be forming under the leadership of Macron in France . . . It just figures huh? The French!

xiii Some have recently argued that Obama is the antichrist, because he has a scary name and didn't seem to support the city of Jerusalem, which ironically, according to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, is a great harlot.

xiv The riddle of the present is the deepest of all the riddles of time. Again, there is no answer except from that which comprises all time and lies beyond it—the eternal. Whenever we say "now" or "today," we stop the flux of time for us. We accept the present and do not care that it is gone in the moment that we accept it. We live in it and it is renewed for us in every new "present." This is possible because every moment of time reaches into the eternal. It is the eternal that stops the flux of time for us. It is the eternal "now" which provides for us a temporal "now." We live so long as "it is still today"—in the words of the letter to the Hebrews. Not everybody, and nobody all the time, is aware of this "eternal now" in the temporal "now." But sometimes it breaks powerfully into our consciousness and gives us the certainty of the eternal, of a dimension of time which cuts into time and gives us our time.

-Paul Tillich, *The Eternal NOW*

"The humans live in time, but our Enemy [God] destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself and to that point of time, which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity. Of the present moment, and of it only, humans have an experience analogous to the experience which our Enemy [God] has of reality as a whole; in it alone freedom and actuality are offered them. He would therefore have them continually concerned either with eternity (which means being concerned with Him) or with the Present—either meditating on their eternal union with, or separation from, Himself, or else obeying the present voice of conscience, bearing the present cross, receiving the present grace, giving thanks for the present pleasure.

Our business is to get them away from the eternal and from the present. . . . We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the Future every real gift which is offered them in the Present.

- C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (The advice of a senior devil coaching a junior devil)

xv On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness, for this "not" is at once the expression and frontier of the positive will, election and activity of God. When the creature crosses the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world. . . .

Nothingness is that which God does not will. . . .

This being which is alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it, is that of nothingness. . . . And this is evil in the Christian sense, namely, what is alien and adverse to grace, and therefore with it. . . . The grace of God is the basis and norm of all being, the source and criterion of all good. Measured by this standard, as the negation of God's grace, nothingness is intrinsically evil. . . .

He knows nothingness. He knows that which He did not elect or will as the Creator. He knows chaos and its terror. He knows its advantage over His creature. He knows how inevitably it imperils His creature. Yet He is Lord over that which imperils His creature. Against Him, nothingness has no power of its own. And He has sworn fidelity to His threatened creature. In creating it He has covenanted and identified Himself with it. . . .

And therefore it is He as the first and true and indeed the only man, as the Helper who really takes the creature's place, lifting from it all its need and labour and problem and placing them upon Himself, as the Warrior who assumes the full responsibility of a substitute and suffers and does everything on its behalf. In the light of this merciful action of God, the arrogant delusion of the creature that it is called and qualified to help and save and maintain itself in its infinite peril is shown to be evil as well as foolish and unnecessary. . . .

As God takes action on its behalf, the creature itself is summoned and empowered. It has no arrogant illusion as to its own authority or competence. It really trusts in God, perseveres in His covenant and chooses His help as the only effective good. . . .

If our thought is conditioned by the obedience of Christian faith, we have only one freedom, namely, to regard nothingness as finally destroyed and to make a new beginning in remembrance of the One who has destroyed it.

-Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, p. 137-138, 140-141, 143, 145-146

And I thought that if sin had never existed, we should all have been pure and like himself, as God made us; and so I had often wondered before now in my folly why, in his great foreseeing wisdom, God had not prevented sin; for then, I thought, all would have been well. . . . He answered with this assurance: 'Sin is befitting.' With this word 'sin' our Lord brought to my mind the whole extent of all that is not good: the shameful scorn and the utter humiliation that he bore for us in this life and in his dying, and all the pains and sufferings of all his creatures, both in body and spirit -- for we are all to some extent brought to nothing and should be brought to nothing as our master Jesus was, until we are fully purged: that is to say until our own mortal flesh is brought completely to nothing, and all those of our inward feelings which are not good. He gave me insight into these things, along with all pains that ever were and ever shall be; all this was shown in a flash, and quickly changed into comfort; for our good Lord did not want the soul to be afraid of this ugly sight.

But I did not see sin; for I believe it has no sort of substance nor portion of being, nor could it be recognized were it not for the suffering which it causes. And this suffering seems to me to be something transient, for it purges us and makes us know ourselves and pray for mercy; for the Passion of our Lord supports us against all this, and that is his blessed will for all who shall be saved. He supports us willingly and sweetly, by his words, and says, 'But all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.' . . .

And I wondered greatly at this revelation, and considered our faith, wondering as follows: our faith is grounded in God's word, and it is part of our faith that we should believe that God's word will be kept in all things; and one point of our faith is that many shall be damned--like the angels who fell out of heaven from pride, who are now fiends, and men on earth who die outside the faith of Holy Church, that is, those who are heathens, and also any man who has received Christianity and lives an unchristian life and so dies excluded from the love of God. Holy Church teaches me to believe that all these shall be condemned everlastingly to hell. And given all this, I thought it impossible that all manner of things should be well, as our Lord revealed at this time. And I received no other answer in showing from our Lord God but this: 'What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall keep my word in all things and I shall make all things well.'

- Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, pp. 21-22, p. 86

"That which is of the devil is nothing, and can have no perpetuity and substance."..."How shall the sinner exist in the future, seeing the place of sin cannot be of long continuance?" -St Ambrose, 4th century AD

xvi About four years ago, we had a staff planning retreat. Several people had asked for it—the idea being that we would spend some time developing plans and strategy for ministry, that is, how we would conquer whatever it is that God would have us conquer. I always dread these things a bit, for no matter the strategy that we develop it always seems inadequate and, of course, we who work that strategy are inadequate. As Paul wrote, "Who is sufficient for these things." A strategy is a plan that we develop for the future based on our understanding of the past. Jesus' strategy, which doesn't seem to be much of a strategy was something like this, "I only do what I see my Father doing." His strategy was to be with His Father. You can only be "with" somebody in the present moment. In other words "The Way" is now. But a strategy is an imagined future based on an individual's interpretation of the past.

Well at the start of the retreat I had everyone spend some time in prayer asking the Lord, "What is it that you have to tell us." Right away, my wife, who really doesn't know her Bible, said, "I just heard the Lord say, 'Read Mark 3:13-15'".

"And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons."

See it? Our Job description is to "be with Him." How do we conquer? The Lamb conquers and "those with him..."