

Revelation 13:11-18 – The Image of the Beast

I hope you didn't come to church this morning. I hope instead that you came as a church to hear the Word of Jesus. I hope you came because of Christ. Jesus called us to come to Him, personally. Not to church, not to singing songs, not to pastors, but to come to Jesus.

A word is worth a thousand pictures. I wonder if you've ever noticed that Christianity puts a lot more emphasis on words than on signs? A Harvard professor wrote that this is because God revealed Himself to Israel in words more than in sights: "No man can see God and live, but he is known in his speaking. By contrast it is the gods of the nations that are mute, and their visible images are dumb."ⁱ So the prophets say, "the word of the Lord came to me," and John wrote about Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word," and Paul wrote, "faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ," and he told Timothy, "preach the Word" and "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture..." And yes, God gave John a vision of signs, but Jesus told him to write it all down in a book, the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:11). Pagan religions emphasize sights and signs and visions; The Christian Scriptures mention those things, but puts the emphasis on God's speaking, the writing of Scripture, and the preaching of that Word. So what? What does this have to do with you, or with a prophecy about the image of the beast and 666? The image of the beast is an image, a picture; the followers of the beast are dazzled by signs they see. But those who follow Jesus, in verse 9, are expressly warned, in words, not pictures, [**read** v9]. That warning was very appropriate for the dark times symbolized by the rule of the beast in Revelation 13. The past 2 Sundays, I've explained this beast stands for a revived Roman Empire under the rule of a pastor who became a king—the Popes of Rome—to whom the 10 kingdoms of Western Europe submitted for over 1000 years. In these next verses, we are going to learn how the Popes relied on the appearance of power to control people instead of teaching God's word to people. Today, I want to show you, in verses 11-13, people worship what impresses; in verses 14-15, they are deceived by signs; and in verses 16-18, we are called to wisdom and understanding.

People will worship what they see (vv11-13)

[Read V11]. Another beast rises up alongside, in the presence of, the first beast (v12). In the book of Daniel the beasts were empires. How could two empires share the same space? It seems impossible--until the fulfillment comes to light. But first see the phrase "like a lamb"? It strongly suggests this empire is a Christ-impersonator. Jesus is the true Lamb in Revelation (e.g., 5:6-8). The beast rises "from the earth," from the "inhabitants of the earth" (v12), the people of the Roman empire: its origin is Roman. And it comes up from the ground as if it is climbing up from the place it was buried. In my sermons on the seven letters in chapters 2-3 we kept seeing how, in John's time, Christians were pressured to worship the Roman Emperors--the Imperial Cult. Their temples were scattered all over the Empire with a priesthood that made sure good citizens gave their worship to the Caesars.ⁱⁱ The beast is "like a lamb," impersonating the Messiah, and in verse 12, making people worship the first beast. John's readers would think of

the Imperial Cult and its priesthood. It was obvious for them because that was the official state religion up until Constantine. This is predicting the old emperor worship will rise again where it fell, from the people of Rome. Now that Christianity became the official state religion by 400AD, a pseudo-Christian priesthood (the second beast) makes people worship a pseudo-Christian emperor (the first beast). Looks are deceiving: the appearance of a lamb that speaks like a dragon. Not Christ, but Antichrist. A wolf in sheep's clothing indeed: [read Mat 7:15].

[read V12]. This beast doesn't replace the first beast, but "exercises its authority" "in its presence." And what for? This priesthood makes "the earth" worship the first beast; not just the earth but also its "inhabitants." Dirt doesn't worship. So again, this reminds us to take the "earth and its inhabitants" as symbols for the empire and the people in it. They worship the leader who *seemed* to *revive the empire* under Rome. They worship because it appears powerful, the power of Rome with the religion of the Catholic Church. Its people were not allowed to hear the preaching of Good News of grace; they were not taught to trust the power of the resurrected Saviour—they glorified earthly power instead, while looking at pictures of a crucified and dead Christ.

[read V13]. In Mark 13:20-22, Jesus predicted *pseudo-christs* would arise and perform signs and wonders to lead people astray. As Jesus predicted, the beast deceives with great signs. Look at those words, "even making fire come down..." In Greek, this is a clause that expresses the beast's purpose, whether he actually accomplishes it or not. 1 Jo 2:1 does the same thing as here, "I write these things in order that you might not sin"--it's a statement about his purpose, not a prediction. So in verse 13, literally, it reads, "it does great signs in order even that fire might fall..." The same purpose clause as 1 Jo 2:1. This means the beast does great signs *trying* to make fire fall down.ⁱⁱⁱ Maybe like 1 Kings 18, when the prophets of Baal danced and shouted and cut themselves trying to get fire to fall to earth. But the next words, "fire might fall from heaven" is like Luke 9:54, where this same, but very young John, and his brother (in teenage indignation) wanted to nuke a village that didn't respect Jesus. Jesus rebuked them. Jesus didn't go around calling fire down on people, and neither should those who minister the Gospel in His name. Which shows us this priesthood isn't following Jesus at all. That phrase, "in front of people," in the NT, is always about impressing people.^{iv} Verse 13 just means people are impressed by the appearance of power; by the threats of judgement from Heaven.

11-13. We've already seen that first century Christians reading this would expect a revival of the cult of emperor-worship, with a priesthood impersonating Jesus, the true Lamb. This fake priesthood would also promise to take away people's sins. An army of hundreds of thousands of Roman Catholic priests have been impersonating the Lamb for centuries. And verse 13 shows it leads people astray, making them worship the popes by its miraculous signs. Setting souls free from Purgatory would sure seem like a miracle to a medieval farmer. And turning bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus? Or all the miracles people supposedly did before they could be called "saints"? Is there any doubt the Priesthood fulfilled these predictions, and did it in order to make people obey? And those who didn't bow to their authority were

excommunicated--condemned by the Roman Church like the disciples who wanted Heaven to firebomb that village.

People are led astray by signs (vv14-15)

[read V14]. This scene comes from Daniel 3, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace when they refused to bow down and worship the golden “image” of King Nebuchadnezzar. There’s no furnace in v14, but the fire was threatened in v13. If you read this prophecy, don’t miss the call for endurance and faith, like verse 10 says. Most people will bow to the image, just like in Babylon. Only a remnant of saints will endure and believe in Jesus alone, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. People will believe their eyes instead of using their ears to hear the Word of God (v9). Take a look at that word “image.” The Greek word is “eikon.” Like icons on your phone. Images are more eye-catching than words. The second beast, the priesthood of Rome, tells people all over the empire to make an “image,” a likeness to inspire people all over Europe to religious obedience.

The most dangerous kind of preaching is the sort that is impressive, that doesn’t explain what the Bible, God’s Word, means, but uses the Bible to tell you what the preacher thinks. You should not ever settle for a preacher’s opinions. You must insist on preaching that points you over and over to the actual words, the grammar, the plain meaning you can discover when you read carefully and think about the Scriptures. But what do you think most people prefer? Impressive, flashy preachers, with attractive opinions illustrated by lots of pretty pictures? Or ordinary Bible teaching?

[read V15]. When God created Adam, Gen 2:7 says that He breathed into him “the breath of life.” This is meant to show that the beast is a fraud, a counterfeiter, a pseud-Christ, a false-prophet. The word “breath” also means “spirit”, but it is not the Spirit of God that makes the image speak. The authority with which it speaks is not God’s authority because it does not come from God’s Word. That’s how you can identify how this is fulfilled: an image of the pseudo-Christian ruler that speaks, but speaks with the popes’ authority instead of from the Bible. And it uses that human authority to cause the deaths of those who won’t worship the beast.

14-15. These verses require people scattered throughout ten kingdoms somehow to build something they can all look at and worship where they are. All over Europe, Roman Catholics built cathedrals. But most Protestants don’t realize what those buildings represent. The word “cathedral” comes from the Latin word, “seat”—a cathedral is where the pope is represented by a local bishop on his “seat” of power—his *cathedra*. The top Cathedral, the Pope’s own seat and centre of his rule is the Lateran Basilica in Rome.^v His authority is legally projected wherever a bishop represents him in a cathedral. These cathedrals started popping up in the 4th century, but by the 12th century there were cathedrals blanketing Western Europe. That’s the image the people were told to build. Every week for centuries, millions of devout gather and bow down to the church, the image of the Pope’s power. And it speaks. When all those bishops

gather together in a Council presided over by the Popes, the decisions they speak, called “canons” express the Pope’s authority. In his presence.^{vi}

[We are called to wisdom and understanding \(vv16-18\)](#)

Verse 9 says, “If anyone has an ear let him hear;” so it’s not surprising that people are deceived by their eyes. In verse 8, we are called to remember the Lamb’s “book of life”; and in verse 10, we are called to endurance and faith—faith which Paul said comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). So when we see the same pattern of words in verse 18, “this calls for wisdom,” we remember the call to believe the Word about the Book of Life, and we use the ears God gave us to hear the voice of our Saviour in this warning for the saints. We heed God’s Word.

[read V16.] In ancient Rome, for example, slaves were marked on their hands with their master’s symbol.^{vii} That’s what’s behind the symbolism in Revelation 7:3, where the saints receive a seal on their foreheads. Not a visible, literal mark, but a spiritual sign they belong to God,^{viii} and are under His protection.^{ix} The mark of the beast is the counterfeit of God’s seal of protection. How are Catholics identified as loyal? By receiving the mass. Just as the idea of a tattoo on the hand comes from common practice in ancient Rome, the idea of a “mark” on hand and forehead is from the Old Testament. But even there it’s not a literal mark. In Exodus 13, the “mark” is the Passover Feast. **[read Ex 13:6, 8-10]** The feast is the annual reminder of God’s salvation—my NIV BSB explains that the “mark” was a figurative reminder.^x Like a reminder saying “don’t forget this,” and also showing that Israel belonged to God. Ex 13:9 says, “as a sign... as a memorial”—not a physical mark. This counterfeit reminder is therefore a counterfeit Passover Feast—a regular, religious ceremony, the Mass—in which people are led astray to imagine they feast on the body of the Passover Lamb.

[read V17]. In the canons of the Pope’s Councils, it was long ago decreed that if someone didn’t accept the Pope’s authority, he was excommunicated, which meant he couldn’t receive mass, i.e. “communion,” and was cut off from society. The Third Lateran Council in 1179, the Synod of Tours in 1163, and “the bull of Pope Martin at the Constance Council” decreed it illegal to buy, sell, or do any business with a heretic.^{xi} Nobody was allowed to give him shelter, or even to bury him if he died. And he was outside the protection of law, so anyone was allowed to kill him. That’s the punishment in history for refusing the mark. But receiving communion, the Roman mass, meant you belonged—like a slave wearing your master’s tattoo. **[read V18]** There are a lot more than 666 theories about what 666 means. Irenaeus was an early church pastor, born around 30 years after John died. He came up with a solution to this that many Protestant historical scholars have agreed with over the centuries. Sir Isaac Newton also “calculated the number” and reached this same conclusion.^{xii}

In the original language of the NT, letters were used for numbers. Wikipedia has a good chart of how ancient Greeks used the alphabet for numbers. Every letter equalled a number. And names of gods were often written as numbers on hands and charms for protection.^{xiii} The Egyptian

god, Thouth was 1218; Jupiter was 717; Apollo was 608.^{xiv} Two Christian pastors, Barnabas and Clement, connected 318 with Jesus' crucifixion; Tertullian said 300 was the number of the cross.^{xv} For early Greek Christians this *is* how they understood the number of the name of the beast.^{xvi} So the church fathers, Irenaeus and Hippolytus, and later Isaac Newton, and many others, calculated 666 as the sum of the 8 letters in the Greek word for "latin man," *λατεινος*, a man from Rome.^{xvii xviii xix xx} The revival of the wounded head (cf, vv3, 12, & 14) hints that the beast would be another Latin ruler. After the sixth head of Roman government was wounded—when the empire fell and foreign tribes took over—it seemed a miracle when once again a Latin Man of Rome became head of Western Europe.^{xxi xxii} This is not a call to break a code. This is a call for endurance, faith (v10), wisdom, and understanding (v18); to heed God's Word (Rev 1:3).

Our sermons in April are about the *true miracle* of Jesus' death and resurrection. As Spurgeon once preached, if you want to know Jesus, come to Him. Don't stop at the door of the Church; don't stop at singing songs to Him; don't stop at taking communion. You are called to come to Jesus, not to any substitute or counterfeit, but to Jesus Himself, and in faith, cling to Him. Hold on to Him in your failures; hold on to Him in your shame; hold on to Him in your weakness; hold on to Him in your dying. He is alive. He is strong. He will hold on to you.^{xxiii}

ⁱ Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964; reissue, 1971), pp 1-2, 9-15. Excerpted in Richard Lischer. *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Kindle Locations 4910-4911). Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), p.316

ⁱⁱⁱ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p.472. BibleWorks Edition.

^{iv} C.f. Lk 12:9; Lk 16:15

^v Wikipedia, "Archbasilica of St. John Lateran" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbasilica_of_St._John_Lateran. Accessed March 29, 2019.

^{vi} "From the first Lateran Council in 1123 down to that of Trent, the Western General Councils, while professing to be the representation and image of *Western Christendom*, were, to every... Important intent and purpose... The representation and image rather of the *Papal mind*." (Collins, 325; citing Elliott, 3.332)

^{vii} Collins, p.318

^{viii} c.f. Schreiner, p. 672

^{ix} MacArthur, John. *Revelation 1-22 MacArthur New Testament Commentary Two Volume Set* (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) . Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition. Loc 4249 of 14829

^x See Ex 13:9, 16 and study notes in Carson's NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible: "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead. In later history some interpret this figurative language literally (along with Deut 6:8), hence the Jewish use of phylacteries (see Matt 23:5 and note). But the Lord's intent is that this festival remind the Israelites of their commitment to him." (NIV BTSB) (also see the NASB Study Bible)

^{xi} Collins, 326

^{xii} Isaac Newton, *Observations*, 320.

^{xiii} Elliott, Vol. 3, p. 245

^{xiv} Elliott, p242

^{xv} Elliott, pp242-243

^{xvi} Elliott, p244

^{xvii} Irenaeus wrote: "Lateinos (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence]." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. Book V. XXX.3. Philip Schaff, ANF01. BibleWorks Edition.)

^{xviii} Hippolytus agreed: "With respect to his name, it is not in our power to explain it exactly, as the blessed John understood it and was instructed about it, but only to give a conjectural account of it;¹ for when he appears, the blessed one will show us what we seek to know. Yet as far as our doubtful apprehension of the matter goes, we may speak. Many names indeed we find,² the letters of which are the equivalent of this number...But, as we have already said,³ the wound of the first beast was healed, and he (the second beast) was to make the image speak,⁴ that is to say, he should be powerful; and it is manifest to all that those who at present still hold the power are Latins. If, then, we take the name as the name of a single man, it becomes Latinus. Wherefore we ought neither to give it out as if this were certainly his name, nor again ignore the fact that he may not be otherwise designated. But having the mystery of God in our heart, we ought in fear to keep faithfully what has been told us by the blessed prophets, in order that when those things come to pass, we may be prepared for them, and not deceived. For when the times advance, he too, of whom these things are said, will be manifested." (Hippolytus, 50. Phillip Schaff, *Early Church Fathers*, BibleWorks Edition.)

^{xix} This spelling, with *ei* instead of *i*, was the one assumed by the Greek fathers Irenaeus and Hippolytus, as well as by later poets, as one of the two ways to spell Latin's long "i" in Greek. C.f. Elliott, pp249-250

^{xx} Wikipedia, "Latins" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_\(Italic_tribe\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_(Italic_tribe)). Accessed March 30, 2019.

^{xxi} From then on, as one scholar observed, the empire of the popes was totally Latin: "It was the Latin world, the Latin kingdoms, the Latin Church, the Latin Patriarch, the Latin Clergy, the Latin Councils." Elliott, 253

^{xxii} "They Latinise in everything. Mass, prayers, hymns, litanies, canons, decretals, bulls, are conceived in Latin. The Papal Councils speak in Latin... The Scripture is read in no other language under Popery than Latin... In short, all things are Latin." (Dr. More, in Elliott, 254, c.f. Fn1.)

^{xxiii} Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Certainty and Freeness of Divine Grace," Sermon No.599; A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 13, 1864, BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.