

# The Beast's Persecution

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Date: 10 March 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. It's good to be with you and worship with you. It's great to see some new faces in the audience, but also some old faces I haven't seen in a while.

And it's good to always to see my church family every week. So it's good to worship with you guys. Please turn with me to Revelation chapter 13.

If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring you a copy that you can have. Revelation chapter 13. It's the last book in the Bible for those of you who are new to the Bible and familiar with it.

Revelation chapter 13. I'm going to cover the first 10 verses today, chapter 13, but let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Heavenly Father, you sent your only son to bear witness to you and to the kingdom of God and to the good news of salvation that he accomplished through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

[ 1 : 32 ] And Lord, you have taught us in your word that just as Jesus suffered, just as he was persecuted, that those who follow him too will face tribulations.

As we look at the bare reality of that this morning in Revelation 13, won't you feel your precious people, my brothers and sisters in Christ, won't you fill us all with hope, with faith, which remind us of your sovereignty, of your care, of your love, that we might endure faithfully till the end.

Amen. Grant us endurance as we hear your word.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word from Revelation 13. And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

[ 3 : 31 ] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

And they worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? And who can fight against it?

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words. And it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months.

It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. And it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation. And all who dwell on earth will worship it. Everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

[ 4 : 38 ] If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to be taken captive to captivity, he goes. If anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 prophesies about the Antichrist, saying that before Christ's second coming, the man of lawlessness will be revealed, the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called God or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

But that same passage, which teaches about that Antichrist that is coming, also teaches us that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

The Antichrist is not here yet in his fully-fledged form, but his rebellion, the mystery of lawlessness, is already at work.

This is confirmed by 2 John 7, which says, Many deceivers have gone out into the world. Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, such a one is the deceiver and the Antichrist.

[ 6 : 08 ] Already many deceivers and many Antichrists have gone out into the world. Revelation 13 is John's prophetic vision about the Antichrist, and I do think it predicts in the end, at the climactic end, a single individual Antichrist will appear at the end.

I think Revelation 17 is a little clearer on that front. But I think for the main application, it's inclusive. While it's inclusive of that end-time Antichrist, I think in the same way that the woman that we saw in chapter 12 was a corporate representative and a symbol for the people of God, I think this beast is also a corporate representative, a composite picture of the worldly kingdoms and kings that are in rebellion against God and persecute God's people.

And this happens during the entire church age between Christ's first coming and his second coming. And why does Scripture contain warnings about these Antichrists?

Because God doesn't want us to be caught unawares. He wants us to be aware and prepared and equipped. He doesn't want us to be blindsided by fierce persecution.

He wants us to endure with faith till the end. In the game of American football, I would just call it football, but we've got some British people here.

[ 7 : 32 ] And in the game of American football, quarterbacks and running backs and wide receivers seem to get the most attention and appear to be the most important players in the game.

But if you look at the average salary, not the individual salaries, but the average salary across the board for each position, it's the left tackle that actually gets paid more than any other position, including the quarterback.

The unnoticed job of the left tackle is to protect the quarterback's blind side. Because most quarterbacks are right-handed. They turn this way, square up this way, and throw the football this way.

And so they can't see anything on their left side. And so the teams usually put their best blockers on that left side because it doesn't matter how good your quarterback is. If he's not protecting his blind side, he can get crushed underneath these, I don't know, three, four hundred pound behemoths and get injured, which has happened many times before.

And they can't do anything. And so what Revelation 13 is doing this morning is it's playing left tackle for us. It's protecting our blind side and warning us against what is coming.

[ 8 : 42 ] Because if you can see this three, four hundred pound man running after you, trying to tackle you, you can do something about it. You could try to run away or you could at least brace yourself for impact.

But if you're blindsided, then you're totally defenseless and vulnerable to injury. And here God teaches us to brace for and endure the persecution of the worldly kingdoms, trusting that God is sovereign overall.

There are three, I think, main exhortations for us here. First, we are to repudiate the blasphemous beast. Second, we are to worship the sovereign lamb. And third, we are to endure even unto death. At the end of chapter 12, we saw that the great red dragon had emerged from his bottomless abyss, the sea, and stood on the sand of the sea. And now this beast also rises up out of that same sea. And as I mentioned last week, the sea is often in scripture a symbol of chaos and disorder. And that's why at the end of Revelation 21, after Christ comes and consummates his kingdom, the sea is no more.

[ 9 : 50 ] Jesus is the prince of peace. They came to give us peace, as we talked about in the assurance of pardon, Romans 5. But this beast comes to make war on the saints. He's the prince of chaos.

And we know that this beast is cut from the same cloth as the dragon that we looked at last week, because like the dragon of chapter 12, this beast has 10 horns and seven heads.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. And we can say that this beast is the image of the invisible dragon. Just as the lamb of God representing Jesus in Revelation 5, 6 had horns symbolizing his authority and power, likewise this beast also has horns.

Just as Jesus in Revelation 19, 12 is described as having many diadems, this beast has diadems on his head. But this beast is just a cheap imitation of Jesus.

We're told in verse 17, we were told in chapter 12, verse 17, that the dragon makes war on the rest of the woman's offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. The dragon makes war on the saints.

[11:00] Now we see exactly how Satan makes war against the saints by using these proxies. Including this beast. He says in verses 5-7 of our chapter that he was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months and make war on the saints and to conquer them.

Remember the 42 months, if you don't know what I'm talking about, you can listen to the previous messages. The 42 months is the 1,260 days and that is the three and a half years prophesied of in Daniel 12, 7.

And it's the period of the church's witness to Jesus where they are spiritually protected by God, but it's also the period of intense persecution by the beast of the saints where they are physically vulnerable and sometimes even killed.

And so we see here the dragon last year, I mean last chapter, and then we see here the beast and then in the rest of chapter 13 which we'll cover next week, we'll see the false prophet, the second beast.

And these three form an unholy triad in mockery of our triune God. The beast as we have seen and we'll see some more is the image of the dragon and just as Jesus' image of the father and the false prophet, the second beast we'll look at next week, bears witness to the beast in the same way the spirit bears witness to Jesus, God's son.

[12:19] In the same way that the Holy Spirit seals God's people with the name of God, this false prophet seals the followers of the beast with the name of the beast.

in the same way the Holy Spirit performs signs and wonders to verify the proclamation of the gospel by his servants. Likewise, this false prophet will perform signs and wonders.

So the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are very intentionally parodying the triune God. And this is the very nature of evil. Satan is incapable of being original because he is not the creator.

He is only an imitator. He can only produce cheap knockoffs of the real thing. His kingdom is a bootleg kingdom. His glory is a bogus glory.

And his name is a phony name. Theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr. explains this imitative nature of evil this way in his book, not the way it's supposed to be.

[13:23] To do its worst, evil needs to look its best. Evil has to spend a lot on makeup. Hypocrites have to spend time polishing their act and polishing their image.

Hypocrisy is an homage that vice pays to virtue. Vices have to masquerade as virtues, lust as love, thinly veiled sadism as military discipline, envy as righteous indignation, domestic tyranny as parental concern.

even Satan who looks heroic to rebels must masquerade as an angel of light in order to look merely plausible. This infernal embarrassment, Satan must appeal to our God-given appetite for goodness in order to win his way, suggests a significant feature of evil.

To prevail, evil must leech not only power and intelligence from goodness, but also its credibility.

We can see now why the very identity of this beast and what he says and does are all blasphemous.

There are blasphemous names on its head, verse 1 says. His mouth utters haughty and blasphemous words, verse 5 says. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, says in verse 6.

[14:44] To blaspheme is to slander someone, to speak against someone in a way that damages that person's name and reputation. It means to revile a person or defame a person.

You know, Titus 3, 2 commends us not to slander anyone. That word slander is the exact same word as the word blaspheme here. But usually in our English Bible translations when it says blaspheme it refers to speaking against God or something that is sacred and holy.

In Matthew 26, 64 to 66 we see an example of this. Jesus claims to be the son of man prophesied of in Daniel 7 that we read in the cult worship who receives authority from the ancient of days and sits on his throne and reigns over all the nations and then after hearing that the high priest tears his robes and says he has uttered blasphemy.

What testimony do we need? We should kill him. He deserves death and condemnation because he's blasphemed. Well, Jesus wasn't blaspheming because he actually is the son of God.

But if anyone who is not worthy of that title and anyone who is not befitting of that glory claims to be that that is blasphemy because it's injurious to God's name and reputation to be compared to or to be likened to such inferior beings.

[16:11] No matter how great this red dragon is we saw in the last chapter no matter how many diatems are on its head no matter how powerful or how much authority it has upon the earth.

This beast is just a flea compared to the glory and authority of Christ. That's why it's blasphemous for him to claim such things.

There's an Aesop's fable entitled The Donkey and the Lion's Skin. I'm sure many of you have heard of this growing up as a child. It goes like this. A donkey found a lion's skin left in the forest by a hunter.

He dressed himself in it and amused himself by hiding in a thicket and rushing out suddenly at the animals who passed that way. All took to their heels the moment they saw him. The donkey was so pleased to see the animals running away from him just as if he were King Lion himself that he could not keep from expressing his delight by a loud harsh bray.

I wish I could sound a bray for you but I can't. A fox who ran with the rest stopped short as soon as he heard the voice. Approaching the donkey he said with a laugh if you had kept your mouth shut you might have frightened me too but you gave yourself away with that silly bray.

[17:33] This is the story that C.S. Lewis takes in the last battle and uses. The moral of the story is this. A fool may deceive by his dress and appearance but his words will soon show what he really is.

This is exactly what the Bible teaches. How do we identify and expose antichrists for what they are? By their words.

1 John 2.22 says this is the antichrist he who denies the father and the son. 1 John 4.3 every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God this is the spirit of the antichrist which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

2 John 1.7 says that many deceivers have gone out into the world those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Anyone who refuses to confess Jesus Christ as Lord as the one who came in the flesh the son of God to redeem us is the antichrist and like the donkey spray antichrist reveal themselves by their words for no good tree bears bad fruit and no bad tree bears good fruit for each tree is known by its own fruit.

Those who are evil cannot speak good because out of the out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. That's what Jesus taught in Matthew 12 and the beast is no exception.

[19:05] like the harsh praying of the donkey he utters blasphemous words because that's what he is he's a counterfeit Christ.

Don't be deceived by the counterfeit Christ in this world. Jesus told us in Matthew 24 if anyone says to you look here's the Christ or there he is do not believe it for false Christ and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray if possible even the elect.

See I have told you beforehand so if they say to you look he is in the wilderness do not go out if they say look he is in the inner rooms do not believe it for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west so will be the coming of the son of man.

Wherever the course is there the vultures will gather. Jesus' second coming is going to be unmissable like a lining that shines in the lights of the entire sky it's going to be unmissable from the east to the west that prophecy seems to get twisted by every like Messiah false Messiah claiming especially the ones from Asia they're like look it comes from the east I'm the true Messiah I'm the Christ no that's not it's not about you that's not what they're saying Jesus' coming is going to be unmissable if you missed it already that's not the Messiah where the body is the vultures gather when Jesus comes he says in Matthew 24 30 to 31 he will gather all of his elect to himself if that hasn't happened then he has not yet come I think this beast as I mentioned earlier is primarily a composite symbol and a corporate representative of all the worldly kingdoms that oppose God and persecute people and here's why I think that look at verse 2 it says the beast that I saw was like a leopard his feet were like a bear's and his mouth was like a lion's mouth and to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority note that all the animals that this beast resembles the leopard bear and lion are all ravenous and ferocious wild beasts it characterizes the way the beast makes war on the saints the beast is an allusion to Daniel 7 where Daniel sees a vision of four great beasts that rise out of the sea like this beast that rises out of the sea in Revelation the first beast looks like a lion second looks like a bear the third looks like a leopard but

then there's a fourth beast which is terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong that's how Daniel describes it that is different from all the beasts that were before it and it had ten horns so notice that this Revelation 13 beast has ten horns and it looks like a leopard and a lion and a bear if Daniel 7's vision matches

[ 22 : 06 ] Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter 2 which is what most people think then the lion like beast represents the Babylonian empire the bear like beast represents the Medo-Persian empire and then the leopard like beast represents the Macedonian empire and then the final beast the fourth beast terrifying beast represents the Roman empire and so this beast in Revelation 13 is not one of those beasts but a composite picture of all four of Daniel's beasts it looks like all of them and this is why I think he has also seven heads if you add up the number of all the heads of the beasts in Daniel's vision they have seven heads total so it's a composite picture also because seven symbolizes completeness beasts it represents all the worldly kingdoms and kings that oppose God the ultimate hybrid beast the sum of all beasts later in Revelation 17 we're told explicitly that the seven heads represent both seven mountains and seven kings which shows that these symbolic pictures can have multi-layered meanings multiple meanings and one of the nicknames for Rome was a city on seven hills or a city of seven mountains so I think the Roman empire is clearly included in this composite picture of the beast we're also told that the ten horns on the beast's seven heads are ten kings who have not yet received royal power in later

Revelation 17 and that's where it wears diamonds on those ten heads the number ten signifies completeness and so and later at the end of the end times we're currently in the end times since the coming of Christ but at the end of the end times these ten kings who will later receive royal power will hand over all their authority to this beast that in Revelation 17 is described as the eighth because it's the one that comes after the seven that represents all the worldly powers I think that will be the most devilish antichrist that ever comes and nothing will be like it but even now that this beast is active and if Satan's authority the dragon's authority is behind this beast which represents world's governments and powers then we should not be surprised when God's people are marginalized and persecuted by nation states the beast's crude imitation of Jesus the true king of kings continues in verse three one of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound but its mortal wound was healed and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast one of its heads means one of the kings

John is likely making imaginative creative use of the Nero legends that were popular in his day Nero Caesar was emperor of the Roman empire during 54 to 68 80 during which he was notorious for his vicious persecution of the Christians but when he was eventually deposed by the Roman senate and declared a public enemy he committed suicide the next day by falling upon a sword and later in verse 14 we're told that this beast was wounded by the sword and yet lived but because Nero's death was shrouded in mystery and there were very few witnesses popular legends were built up around Nero and many people in those days believed that Nero would return so this is called the Nero return legend or the Nero living again legend Nero kind of resurrected legend and this is there were sibling oracles like Oracle of Dolphin you've probably heard of it they wrote down oracles and one of the oracles did say that Nero would return to life to take vengeance on those who deposed him and retake the kingdom and so

I think John is making creative use of that legend to show what basically the end time Antichrist is going to be like and what the beast is like throughout the age this legend was so popular that Dio Chrysostom a first century Greek historian says quote even now everyone wishes that Nero were alive and most people actually believe in it even by the fourth century Augustine the Christian pastor writes that some people believe still that Nero now lives in concealment in the vigor of that same age which he had reached when he was believed to have perished and will live until he is revealed in his own time and restored to his kingdom so Nero was popular with the Romans but not with the Christians for understandable reasons Roman historians like Tacitus note that Nero most likely instigated the great fire of Rome so that he can clear the grounds to create so that he can build the golden house that he had been dreaming about dreaming about the golden house but then afterwards he blamed the Christians as scapegoats oh they're the ones who did it and burned him alive several ancient writers including

Tertullian described Nero as the first that persecuted Christians and the Christian doctrine and so Nero is a very fitting kind of a ready-made type of figure of the Antichrist and John uses him and the narrow returned legend as a literary foil to Christ to show how this beast is just a crude imitation of

Jesus the lamb is said to have a mortal wound and that word in verse 3 the word wound is the exact same word that's used to describe how the lamb was slain later in verse 8 and just as the lamb earlier in chapter 5 verse 6 was slain but nevertheless standing referring to his resurrection of Jesus so now this hideous beast imitates the lamb who had a mortal wound that was healed and later in verse 14 it was said that he was wounded but yet lived which is resurrection language just as in chapter 5 after the lamb is seen the heavenly host fall down before him and worship him and they praise him for how he ransomed people for

[ 28 : 15 ] God from every tribe and language and people and nation but now here after this mortal wound of the beast is healed he says the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast and they said authority was given to go for every tribe and people and language and nation and all who dwell on earth will worship him the beast is imitating Christ in order to rob him of his worship Jesus was afflicted with the mortal wound so that he died on the cross so that he might make atonement for our sins so he might bear our punishment to bear the wrath of God and extend to us forgiveness and freedom he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him with his wounds we are healed but in contrast this beast this beast mortal wound serves no salvific purpose it's like a it's an entirely self-serving trick like a magician who creates an illusion a death defying illusion to get applause from people and get people to follow him this beast his wound is just a crude imitation

I do think that at the end of the end times as I mentioned that there will be a singular antichrist who will conquer the people of God like never before I explain that more when we get to Revelation 17 but this beast I think it's resuscitation coming back from healing from the mortal wound I think it's probably best understood in the main application as the repeated rise and fall of states and kingdoms that oppose God and oppress God's people because they keep coming back don't they first was the Egyptians and then it was the Persians then it was the Babylonians then it was the Macedonians I think I flipped you over there a little bit the Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire massacred 4 million Christians 12-14 AD Tamerlan and his Timurid Empire killed about 4 million Christians in 1358 late 1800s and early 1900s 1.2 million Armenians Muslim Christians killed by the Ottoman Empire about 12 million Christians killed under the Soviet Union among the 6 million Jews that the Nazis killed 1 million Christians were also killed in death camps according to Open Doors a ministry that keeps track of persecuted Christians and tries to help them 360 million Christians throughout the world face high levels of persecution hundreds of millions of Christians face extreme persecution in countries like North Korea Somalia Yemen Eritrea Libya Nigeria Pakistan Iran Afghanistan Sudan and India again and again this beast seems to rise again and it's this seeming indestructibility of the beast that leads people to worship the dragon and the beast saying in verse 4 who is like the beast and who can fight against it this too is a parody of the worship of the saints because repeatedly throughout the scriptures we see the people of God marveling at who God is in this manner in Exodus 15 11 who is like you oh Lord among the gods who is like you majestic in holiness awesome and glorious thief doing wonders only God is incomparable only God has no equal only God is transcendent and sovereign overall but this donkey in a lion skin the pretender the imposter the fraud dares to receive the worship that belongs to Yahweh it's blasphemy it's a travesty does it grieve you brothers and sisters that God is not given the worship that is due to his name does it grieve you that the whole earth marvels as they follow the beast that's why we have our mission to go to our neighborhoods to the nations with the gospel of

Jesus Christ this worship of the beast is also a mockery of the church who worship the true Christ Deuteronomy 33 29 says who is like you and this time it's not referring to God it's referring to God's people who is like you a people saved by the Lord the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph I don't know if Chris Tomlin knew about this first when he wrote that song that we were singing we talked about God is our shield and sword there is no one like the people of God on earth no one as precious as the saints on earth who have been saved by the Lord there's no one like us for whom God himself is our shield and God himself is our sword but the beast and its worshippers mock us that's why it says in verse 6 he not only blasphemes God's name he also blasphemes God's dwelling that is a reference to those who dwell in heaven meaning the heaven dwellers those who have their citizenship heaven in heaven those who are right now spiritually seated with Christ at the right hand of God in heaven as it says in

Ephesians 2 that's us the dwelling place of God the temple of God 1 Corinthians 3 16 says the beast slanders God's people speaks against God's people saying you will be destroyed not saved you are not the chosen people you are not the favorite people of God but these are lies and we must repudiate the beast verse 8 reminds us of who we really are it says and all who dwell on earth will worship the beast everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the lamb who was slain the book of life is mentioned a total of six times in revelation it's the census book of the new heavenly Jerusalem it's the invited guest list of the eternal wedding feast of the lamb and if you are a Christian then your name has been written in that book before the foundation of the world it's an amazing thought before there's a lot of people pregnant in our church were having babies before their first child is born expecting father and mother will often take weeks and months and maybe before some people have trouble conceiving even years to prepare their house for the baby to prepare the baby they start purchasing furniture get the crib get the changing table they might even paint the room and in this day and age of course with non-toxic paint that's safe for the baby and they'll buy diapers and other supplies like onesies and swatting cloths and of course a car seat and when that child is born she's welcomed into a world that has been waiting for her and she's already well loved the parents have been waiting and expecting and preparing for all those many months but that is nothing compared to how long

[ 36 : 35 ] God has been preparing for his children Christian brothers and sisters your name has been written in the book of life of the lamb before the foundation of the world before the heavens and the earth were created before the sun and moon and the stars were put in their place before time began in the eternal past God planned that he would create you by name and that he would save you and adopt you as his own child in the eternal past God chose you and wrote your name in the book of life so that you might share eternity with him that's who we are we're so loved and it's this sovereignty of God that gives us hope and enables us to endure despite intense persecution from the worldly powers look at verses 5 to 7 the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words and it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months verse 7 it says it was also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer and authority was given it this is what we've seen throughout revelation and throughout much of scripture what we know as the divine passives instead of attributing the direct action to

God it implicitly attributes this to God by using the passive tense to show God's ultimate sovereignty even over evil even the beast blasphemy against God even the beast war against the saints even the beast authority over the world they're all given in an ultimate sense from the sovereign hand of God this is why the beast's time is limited and it's short he's allowed to exercise authority for 42 months that's a defined period of time that will surely come to an end neither the dragon nor the beast can take even an inch more than what God gives and this is wonderful assurance for us even when the world seems upside down even when we can remember that God is still seated on his throne even when we are tempted we can remember that God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability but will provide a way of escape so that we might endure it our destiny has already been decided our names have already been recorded in the book of life the end of the story has already been written and it's a happy ending if you are not yet a follower of

Christ do you want to know if your name has been written in the book of life of the lamb who was slain there's only one way to find out put your faith in the lamb who was slain so that you might live confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that he died for your sins and was raised from the dead and then you will be saved and then you will know that your name has been written it had been written in eternity past in that book of life it says in verse 9 if anyone has an ear let him hear this is the invitation that was affixed to the end of all seven letters that Jesus writes to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 it's a reference to Isaiah 6 9 to 10 simultaneously a warning and an invitation those who reject God's message prove themselves to not have the ear to hear but those who receive God's message and believe show that they do have a year to hear that God has given when you hear the word of

Christ and believe that's when you find out that your name has been written in the book of life divine election is best understood in hindsight and note that there are only two sides in the spiritual war all who dwell on the earth will worship the beast everyone who says whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world the book of life the lamb will slain you're either worshipping Jesus or you're worshipping the beast to remain undecided is to have already chosen the beast because that's the default mode of sinful humanity in which you start human beings are hard wired for

worship and you will in the end all be worshipping something either the real Christ or the counterfeit Christ there's no neutral zone no Switzerland in this spiritual war and if you're already a follower of Christ the fact that God is sovereign over our lives and that our names are written in the book doesn't mean that we don't have any more responsibility verse 10 tells the part we must play if anyone is to be taken captive to captivity he goes if anyone is to be slain with the sword with the sword must he be slain here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints this is a paraphrase of Jeremiah 15 2 where the prophet prophesied of Judah's coming exile and this confirms that in this world that is in rebellion against God we are spiritual exiles and persecution will not be foreign to us verse 10 pulls no punches this is about as matter of fact as it gets some of us will be taken captive for our faith in Jesus open doors says last year alone 4542 Christians were arrested for their faith do you love Jesus more than you love your freedom last year alone they estimate that 5621 [ 42 : 53 ] Christians were murdered for their faith throughout the world and he says we will be slain with the sword do you love Jesus more than you love your own life verse 10 calls for endurance and faith of the saints endurance is the capacity to bear up under suffering and hardship and persecution athletes that do sports that require you know bursts of explosive strength you know like power lifting or that they focus on muscle building for strength so they can lift as much weight as possible in that short moment of exertion but athletes engaged in endurance sports long distance running cycling cross country skiing rowing they focus on sustained repeated movements over an extended period of time without giving up right the 100 meter dash record right you saying bolt 9.58 seconds just under 10 seconds the world's best marathoners run the 100 meter dash in just over 17 seconds but they do that 422 times in a row that's endurance we must not be like a kindling that just bursts into flame and then dies in a few seconds it must be like the coal that burns for hours and hours and hours with that steady amber and in order to do that we also need faith we are people who walk by faith and not by sight faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen but we do not yet see the resurrected

Christ we believe in him and wait patiently for his return that we do not yet see our eternal rewards we believe the promises of God and live with that in you I haven't mentioned this book in a while you guys used to make fun of me because I mentioned it so many weeks in a row in the book *Insanity of God* the author Nick Ripken becomes the story of Dmitri the Christian pastor who was in Soviet Union was an inspiring example of both endurance and faith during the persecution of Christians under the Soviet Union when his small church founded a small house church and they were meeting for worship and they were warned you need to stop meeting if you keep doing this bad things are going to happen to you well they keep worshipping because God commands it and they do it discreetly but they get caught and they and then pastor Dmitri is jailed he is carted away 600 miles away from his family so he can have no visitors and he is placed with around 1,500 hardened criminals it's a squalid prison which is literally the size of probably our closets everything toilet you know little sink door little cot all right there and there are two things he says that kept him faithful during his time in prison two spiritual disciplines that he had learned from his father and his grandfather the first thing he would do is that every time he could he came across a scrap of paper as he's wandering the prison compounds he'd pick it up and then he'd go to his cell and find the stub of pencil that he had stowed away or the little piece of charcoal and he would write as small print as he possibly can all the bible verses that he remembered all the bible stories that he remembered and all the songs of worship that he remembered and then he would put it on the column the stone column the pillar that was in the cell and it would stick because it was a leaky cell and the water would drip down the column all the time and he'd just stick the paper on there every time he'd do it he'd find a scrap of paper do it the guards would come and see what he has written because he was arrested for being a Christian obviously he would be punished for worshipping God in the prison he'd get beaten but he'd do it again and one day he says he received a special gift from God he found an entire sheet of paper with a pencil laid next to it and he grabs it he takes it to his cell fills it top to bottom front and back and puts it on his pillar gets beaten for it again the second practice that he did was that every time he woke up when the sun was rising he would go to the edge of his cell where the bars are and he would look to the east and he would stand attention and lift up his two arms raise his arms to the heavens and he would sing what he calls his heart song a song that resonates in his heart worship song that he has made his personal life anthem he'd sing that every morning at sunrise and as he does that he would be mocked and jeered by the fellow prisoners saying you're knowing go back to sleep they'll sometimes throw things at him throw

leftover food sometimes they'll grab feces from their own toilets and throw it at him but he kept doing it kept praising

God and he did this for 17 years eventually the guards are exasperated and they decide that you know we're just going to kill you because we can't break you we're going to kill you so they start to drag him out to the execution yard but as they're dragging him out the fellow prisoners who have been mocking him pay homage to him as he's going out to get killed by all standing up by their cell bars standing up attention raising up their arms and singing the very hard song that he's been singing for all those years because by this point every single one of those is a song by heart and then the jailers are just scared out of their mind they're they're like what in the world who are you and then

Dimitri says I am a son of the living God the God I worship is Jesus Christ the jailers are so scared that they halt the execution put him back in his cell and they're worried that he's converting the entire jail compound and so they release him and he goes back to his back it's endurance it's faith Jesus said a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will also persecute you so let's look to the pattern that Jesus set for us the path that he has blazed for us and weather the persecution of the worldly kingdoms with endurance and faith let's pray lord lord lord jesus you you are worthy of that kind of allegiance you are worthy of that kind of worship you are worthy of our faithfulness even unto death who is like you oh lord there is no one like you you deserve the worship of every tongue and every knee about how to you help us to endure to the end as faithful witnesses to your name until that day when you come back to gather us to yourself to vindicate us to show just how much you love us lord we wait for that day in jesus name we pray amen