

Monsters & Mayhem

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 29, 2023
PASSAGES	Revelation 12:7-11; Job 41; Psalm 74:12-14; Isaiah 51:9-10; Isaiah 30:1-7; Isaiah 27:1; Daniel 7; Revelation 13:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:14:28 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The monsters in Revelation are not a cipher for this week's headlines. They are the Bible's own long-running way of drawing the spiritual power that animates an evil empire — Leviathan, Rahab, Daniel's four beasts, and finally the dragon who gets named. Read it that way and the book stops being a puzzle and starts doing what it was written to do: hold frightened people steady.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Revelation's monsters have an Old Testament address. Leviathan, Rahab and Daniel's beasts are one tradition, and Revelation assumes you already know it.
- ◆ When the Bible explains its own imagery, the explanation is the meaning. Pharaoh's cows are seven years of plenty and seven of famine — there is nothing further to decode.
- ◆ The sea is where the monsters live. So a beast coming up out of the water is a signal, not set decoration.
- ◆ Rahab is Egypt. Evil empires get drawn as dragons because something is animating them behind the soldiers and the tax collectors.
- ◆ Which is exactly why the people in front of you are not the enemy. The vision is what lets a persecuted church bless the people burning its scriptures.
- ◆ Fear is the dragon's chief weapon. "Who can fight against the beast?" is a question designed to make you bow.

- ◆ The victors' method gets named twice over: they conquered by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not cling to their lives even to the point of death.
- ◆ God's record as a dragon killer is long and public, and the last enemy left on the list is death itself.

► 1:14:28

"You did see a bunch of pictures of monsters," Matt began. "Let me explain myself." Hope Chapel is midway through a study of Revelation, and the reason he gave for preaching it at all is worth keeping: it is Scripture, it is part of our inheritance, and it has been handed over almost entirely to people who use it for strange purposes. He wanted to restore its place of honor in our Bibles, and to let ordinary people — "normies," in his word — approach it in a way that honors the text.

Why Revelation, and how not to read it

► 1:15:08

The series so far has worked through the seven letters Jesus dictates to John. There is no textual evidence those letters ever circulated separately — they travelled together, so every church read everyone else's mail. Different encouragements, different rebukes, and underneath all of them one theme: be faithful to Jesus and stay faithful, whatever the circumstances are. Two temptations kept surfacing, and both were about fitting in — compromise with the world through idolatry, under the weight of Rome and the civic religion of their own cities, and sexual sin.

► 1:17:12

Next Sunday brings the beast, the false prophet and the number 666 — which means next Sunday brings the temptation Matt wanted named in advance. You can read this book by holding it up against a news feed: that's definitely Trump, or that's Obama, or that's the pope, and, as he noted, it is always the current pope. "That is a way you can read the book of Revelation," he said, "but I don't think it's a healthy way to do it. The best context for this book is the Bible itself." So rather than open with the beast, he started with the third character standing beside it — the dragon — who is on the periphery of the story but far easier to get at.

When the Bible explains its own imagery, believe the explanation

► 1:20:16

The pattern is consistent, and Pharaoh's dream is the cleanest example of it (Genesis 41:1–7). Cows come up out of the Nile. You could get out a dream dictionary and freelance — Matt did, briefly, for

comic effect, running from Angus beef to what's for dinner to who'll be thinner in the famine. But God gave the interpretation, and once he did, that was all anyone needed: seven years of plenty, seven years of famine. Nobody was ever meant to expect livestock in the water. "There's no amphibious cow." The imagery was bizarre on purpose, to arrest a hard heart; the interpretation was plain on purpose, to settle it.

That yields two exercises for Revelation. Where the book stops and explains itself, highlight it and take it to the bank. And where Old Testament imagery shows up, ask what it meant the first time — because that is usually a strong clue to what it means now.

Leviathan: the creature that does not frighten God

► 1:21:49

Start in Job, where God is showing Job that he is not merely a very strong man.

"Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?" Obviously not — Job could not even find the thing. And it is not a whale, whatever people want to make of it: its back is rows of shields shut up closely as with a seal, and then this.

"Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth."

JOB 41:19-21 ↗

Picture seeing that come out of the water while you are standing in a wooden boat holding an oar. You would jump overboard. You would throw up. And God's nerves would not move one bit — which is the entire point of the passage. "He's like God's pet," Matt said. "He's this little goldfish named Sparky, but he scares you." The creature is without fear and king over all the sons of pride, and he is being used as a measuring stick for somebody else's greatness.

► 1:24:06

The psalmist wants deliverance from the nations, and the hero he needs is one with monster-killing already on his résumé. Matt called him God's hype man — remember what you did, do it again.

“Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.”

PSALM 74:12-14 ↗

Notice the odd seam. Dividing the sea belongs to one story only, and Israel was not rescued from a hydra that day. So who is Leviathan standing in for? Egypt.

Rahab, and the dragon inside the empire

▶ 1:25:47

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?”

ISAIAH 51:9-10 ↗

Hebrew poetry does not rhyme at the end of the line the way English insists on doing; it works in couplets that say the same thing twice in a slightly different key. So “cut Rahab in pieces” and “pierced the dragon” are one idea, and the next verse names the event outright — the sea dried, a way made, the redeemed passing over. This is not the woman who hid the spies in Joshua; the names only look alike in English. It is a kingdom. Isaiah says so plainly a few chapters earlier, rebuking Judah for going down to Egypt for protection against Babylon — the plan, as Matt put it, was to form an alliance and make it like a gang so the big bad Babylonians would back off:

“Egypt’s help is worthless and empty; therefore I have called her ‘Rahab who sits still.’”

Which raises the question the whole message turns on. In a killer kingdom, where exactly is the wickedness located? In that soldier? That official? “There’s this kingdom,” Matt said, “but there’s also something dark and creepy that animates it behind it. If you peer close enough, you can see the dragon in that empire.” And that day is coming for it:

the same feast day when God swallows up death forever and wipes tears from every face is the day when he slays the dragon that is in the sea. Rescue and dragon-killing are not two events. They are one day, described from two sides.

Daniel's beasts come up out of the sea

► 1:31:21

“I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.”

DANIEL 7:2–3 ↗

A lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fourth with ten horns and iron teeth. Write those down, Matt told the room — they come back. Daniel does not sit calmly through this:

“my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me” — so he walks up to one of the figures standing there and asks what it means, which is exactly the move the whole message is recommending. And he gets an answer:

these four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth, and the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom forever. Same pattern as Rahab: you may have no idea what a monster named Rahab looks like, but you know exactly what Egypt looked like — chariots, horsemen, spearmen, soldiers with weapons chasing Israel down. The fourth one is called a kingdom outright, so we need not be rigid — a beast can be a king or the thing he rules. And note the address. They come out of the sea, because by now the sea is bad guys’ headquarters. That is where Leviathan lives. That is where Rahab lives. Monsters live in this thing.

Revelation names the dragon

► 1:35:36

The chapter opens with a battle rather than an explanation:

war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. The dragon fights back, loses, and there is no longer any place for him there. Then comes the loud voice, and the naming.

“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world... And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

REVELATION 12:9–11 ↗

The thread finally gets a name, and with it the engine of the whole book: a deeper and deeper revelation of the spiritual reality behind circumstances people can already see. Underline the method while you are there — blood of the Lamb, word of their testimony. That is twice now the book has

stopped mid-vision to call for the faithful endurance of the saints, and it is the same thing the seven letters were asking for. That is the pastoral payoff for a church under Rome.

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood — so the people who spit on you, steal your scriptures and burn them, kill your bishops, are not your enemies. We pray for them. We bless them. Matt compared it to one of those Magic Eye illusions: look at the empire one way and you see merchants, governors, legions; look at it another way and you see what is animating it against the message of Christ in particular. He pushed on that last phrase: “What is it in particular about the message of Christ that is so triggering to the world around me?” — almost as if there were an invisible current running against that one message. And he refused the escape hatch: “Just because the United States of America is not mentioned in the book of Revelation doesn’t mean the dragon can have no influence here.” America, the Chinese Communist Party, Boko Haram, Hamas — wherever you have seen evil governance, is the enemy that guy, or their leader, or, if you look carefully, the dragon?

The beast is made out of Daniel’s parts

► 1:40:45

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven 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.”

REVELATION 13:1-2 ↗

Leopard, bear, lion — Daniel 7, disassembled and put back together, and out of the same water. Then the crowd worships it: “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” Write one word beside that verse, Matt said: *fear*. Intimidation is the greatest weapon this dragon wields against God’s people. And just before the beast surfaces, the dragon is standing on the shore — almost as though the thing is being conjured up out of the sea.

Then he stopped and laid the pieces out. Leviathan: enemy of God’s people, in places an emblem of Assyria and probably other kingdoms besides. Rahab: Egypt, and Israel’s earlier enemies with it. These ancient serpent-dragon things: kingdoms and powers — but not *merely* kingdoms and powers. Behind the soldiers a spiritual battle was raging, and Paul states it flatly, with no imagery at all, so that nobody has to guess.

God’s record as a dragon killer

► 1:43:11

It is worth remembering that although the dragon wars against God's people, he is first of all God's enemy — and the rap sheet on the other side is long. He can kill snaky serpents. He can kill multi-headed dragon things. He can squish their heads. They terrify us and they do not frighten him at all. What Christ is doing now is reigning in the midst of his enemies and putting them down one at a time, heading somewhere specific.

► 1:43:57

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24–26 ↗

Revelation draws the same fact in costume: Death rides out as a knight with Hades for a squire, and later both are thrown into the lake of fire — which the book itself tells us is the second death. Here you have apocalyptic imagery stacked on apocalyptic imagery, so take a step back: a beast can be a king or a kingdom, so asking what it feels like for a kingdom to be tortured in a lake is asking the cow question again. Let Paul say it without the costume — the last enemy to be destroyed is death — and then let John say what it produces: death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.

► 1:45:36

And notice who does the fighting on that day. His forces win, Matt said, “because his army is mostly his own mouth.” God the dragon slayer fights single-handedly — even though we ride out behind him on white horses while the sword comes out of his mouth. Nobody in that picture is asked to be strong enough. Which is worth holding onto, because in about four minutes he is going to ask us to stay faithful to the point of death.

A sea with nothing left in it

► 1:46:38

“And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire — and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”

REVELATION 15:2–3 ↗

Start with the harps, since that is where the cartoon comes from — people sitting on clouds, plucking. It is imagery, and the better question is not the instrument but the song. Same with the glass: a sea of glass is not surf breaking into a beach of little shards that would cut you to pieces. It is glassy. Flat.

In the Greek they are not beside the sea; they are standing on it. And ask yourself what comes to mind when you look at an ocean that is completely, perfectly still. Peace — because whatever used to live in it is gone. Dead. Eliminated. Then look at what they are singing. The song of Moses was sung on the far shore, after the water was parted and dried and crossed and closed — and that, in this tradition, is when he killed the dragon. “It wasn’t like Israel fought Egypt and God helped,” Matt said. “He was their warrior.” The people who conquered the beast are standing exactly where Israel stood, as safe as Israel was on that dry ground, singing that song with the song of the Lamb laid over it.

Which is where the rider comes back:

Christ on the white horse, killing with the sword of his own mouth. We are not the victors in that scene. We are the heirs of his victory, by his blood and by the word of our testimony about him — which is why the song on that shore is a redeemer’s song and not a record of anything we did.

So how do we actually fight?

► 1:49:24

Here is where the whole tour was going. The exodus we long for is not freedom from the United States, or the Chinese Communist Party, or Russia. It is from the domain of darkness we have already been transferred out of, into the kingdom of his beloved Son. And the method was already printed in the text: how did these victors conquer? By the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, not even clinging to their lives to the point of death.

To the first readers the beast obviously meant Rome and its oppression — but Rome is not the only kingdom that ever qualified, and we have seen beasts since. So Matt closed the gap: just because we are not ancient Christians under Rome does not mean we do not know what it is like to be tempted by that beast and that dragon. The same two temptations from the letters are still on the table, idolatry and sexual sin, plus a third that hides better — the temptation “to give honor to the beast by means of being afraid of it.”

On one side of the choice there is noise: iron teeth, clanking metal, an empire that controls everything you wake up to, plus the quieter pressure to compromise from inside. On the other side there is a humble Lord whose victory looked like dying, who is a lion and also a lamb, and whose power is real but whose demonstration of it is not loud. Choosing him takes faith, because with only natural eyes the other side looks like the obvious bet — come on, look at all its heads, look at the iron teeth, what are you doing?

► 1:53:15

And we do not make a full frontal assault. “The way we wage war against him is by clinging to our Lord faithfully, even if it means death.” Our weapons are not fear — fear is his; ours is the love he has given us, and his joy, and his faithfulness. Matt was blunt about how well the other side works on us: “He loves it when we shake in our boots.” He was equally blunt about why people walk away. They look at a Lord that humble and think *this doesn’t look right* — “I don’t see him storming in with his nukes.” So the alternative to scanning the newspaper for the dragon, working out where he is and how to prep in case this or that happens, is not a better analysis. It is a person — “this million-volt source of light, Mr. Light of the World himself, the overcomer in chief. He is our greatest weapon.” Cling to him, have your eyes lifted up to the exalted Lord, follow him in faithfulness even if it costs everything, and the one who conquers sits down with him on his throne. He closed by praying for exactly what this book keeps asking for: eyes to see, ears to hear, and grace enough to drink deep of his love.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Genesis 41:1–7](#)
- [Job 41:1](#)
- [Job 41:19–21](#)
- [Job 41:33–34](#)
- [Psalm 74:12–14](#)
- [Isaiah 51:9–10](#)
- [Isaiah 30:1–7](#)
- [Isaiah 25:7–8](#)
- [Isaiah 27:1](#)
- [Daniel 7:2–3](#)
- [Daniel 7:15](#)
- [Daniel 7:17–18](#)
- [Daniel 7:23](#)
- [Revelation 12:7–8](#)
- [Revelation 12:9–11](#)
- [Ephesians 6:12](#)
- [Revelation 13:1–2](#)
- [Revelation 13:4](#)
- [1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#)
- [Revelation 6:8](#)
- [Revelation 20:14](#)
- [Revelation 21:4](#)
- [Revelation 19:11–15](#)
- [Revelation 15:2–3](#)
- [Exodus 15:1](#)
- [Colossians 1:13](#)
- [Revelation 3:21](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said the best context for Revelation is the Bible itself, not the news feed. How were you taught to read this book, and what did that do to you?
2. Rahab and Leviathan stand in for empires. When you look at an evil you could name right now, what do you actually see — the people, the leader, or the thing animating it?
3. **Ephesians 6:12** says our fight is not against flesh and blood. Who are you currently treating as the enemy, and what would praying for them instead cost you?
4. Matt named a third temptation alongside idolatry and sexual sin: giving honor to the beast by being afraid of it. Where is fear working on you — what are you afraid of that keeps you quiet, careful or compliant?
5. Matt said we fight by clinging to Christ rather than by analyzing the dragon. What is one concrete way you will do that this week instead of scanning for threats?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL8_dKVqwTM&t=4468s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.