

Wearing the Mark; Bearing the Name

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, November 5, 2023
PASSAGES	Revelation 13:11-18; Revelation 17:9-10; Revelation 13:1-8; Revelation 7:2-3; Revelation 14:1-3; 1 Kings 10:14; Exodus 28:29; Numbers 6:22-27; Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Jeremiah 33:7-9; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 Peter 4:15-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:25:19 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The mark of the beast is a counterfeit, and Revelation is far more interested in the original: God putting his own name on his people. To bear a name is to represent someone, walk in their blessing, belong to them, and carry their reputation and their presence. Which means nobody stumbles into the wrong one by accident — this is about loyalty, and loyalty is chosen.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The words *antichrist* and *rapture* appear in the book of Revelation exactly zero times each. Our casual familiarity with this book is mostly borrowed from the culture, not read off the page.
- ◆ Jesus told us we would not have enough clues to calculate his return — that is the point of “like a thief in the night.” For solid eschatology, Matt said, look no further than the Nicene Creed.
- ◆ When you read apocalyptic imagery, highlight every place the text explains itself. Those explanations you can take to the bank; the rest should be held loosely.
- ◆ Every serious theory about 666 lands on the same territory — wicked, off-the-rails governance — and none of them can be proved. The number is not where the message is.
- ◆ Revelation is built out of parodies. A dragon parodies God, a wounded-and-healed beast parodies the slain Lamb, a false prophet parodies the two witnesses, and the mark parodies the seal of God.

- ◆ Scripture is not vague about what bearing a name means: representation, blessing, belonging, guidance, reputation, presence.
- ◆ You will not accidentally receive the mark of the beast, and you will certainly not receive it if you belong to Christ. You did not accidentally receive his seal either — you were baptized into his name and confessed it out loud.
- ◆ Bearing Jesus' name is not a reward for a spotless record. It is the reason a failure has anything at all to offer the world.

► 1:25:19

Ten Sundays into a series on Revelation, Matt opened with a quiz he specifically did not want answered out loud. How many times does the word *antichrist* appear in the book of Revelation? How many times does *rapture*? Zero, both. That gap — between what the culture assumes is in this book and what is actually printed in it — is the whole reason for the series, and it set up everything that followed.

The book we think we know

► 1:26:36

“My heart is to restore this book to a place of honor and dignity,” Matt said. “It is scripture, it is God’s word. It’s not to be avoided because it’s weird or creepy or has been disordered or misused by various sundry groups of people. This is the inheritance of the saints.” The relief when you actually read it is real: “this book is not about the UN giving people chips — this is about Christ and his victory and his preeminence and how he’s the center of all things. I actually like that better.”

► 1:28:07

He had a word of caution for the chart-makers. Jesus told us, in not so many words, that we are not going to have enough clues. He said *be watchful*; he said he would come like a thief in the night; he said it would be as in the days of Noah. The parable of the ten virgins makes no sense at all if the timetable were decodable. “If you want to have solid eschatology, look no further than the Nicene Creed. Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” What year? Christ will come again in glory. Will it be streamed? He will come again in glory. Because we do not know when, we celebrate it all the time.

And a reading rule, worth writing in the margin: go through Revelation and highlight every place the text stops and explains itself — *this means that*. Those you can take to the bank. Everything else is God speaking in mysteries, and you should be very careful not to over-literalize it.

The second beast, and a mark nobody can buy without

► 1:30:29

Last week was dragons and sea monsters — the long Old Testament motif of an ancient serpent exerting influence behind the kings and kingdoms of the earth, Egypt drawn as a monster, Daniel's empires drawn as beasts. This week picks up with a second beast.

“Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.”

REVELATION 13:11-12 ↗

Out of the earth, Matt noted, not out of the sea — “bad guy headquarters” — which is odd, and which will matter. Horns like a lamb, a voice like a dragon, a healed mortal wound. “That sounds like a parody of Jesus, doesn't it?” It performs signs, calls fire down from heaven, and gives breath to an image so the image can speak — which is worth reading the way you read the magicians of Egypt imitating God's miracles. The kingdom of darkness does not innovate. It counterfeits, and it is no match.

► 1:32:28

“Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”

REVELATION 13:16-18 ↗

What 666 might be, and why Matt would not die on any of it

► 1:35:05

Social security numbers were once a candidate, because a number in place of a name is dehumanizing. So were credit cards and barcodes. Matt remembered an Austin radio program that ran week after week on RFID chips as the mark, somehow finding new material every time. Then vaccine passports, then the vaccine itself, then ESG scores. The list never closes, and neither does the list of people who have been named the antichrist.

The number itself has better company than that. Its only other appearance in scripture is the 666 talents of gold that came to Solomon in a single year — right at the point where, as Matt put it, he was turning Sith Lord. Horses out of Egypt, obscene wealth, a great many wives: the three things the Torah had told a king not to do. And if you doubt how heavy-handed he had become, ask Rehoboam, who lost ten tribes because everyone was so angry at his father.

► 1:37:00

The popular scholarly option is Nero. Hebrew letters double as numbers, so a name can be added up; run *Kaisar Neron* from the Greek into Hebrew and you get 666, and from the Latin you get 616 — which sounds like a failure until you remember that 616 was a live textual variant that Irenaeus already had to write about. A third theory works from Roman coinage: the Vespasian coins bearing the subjugation of Judea, whose legend adds up the same way. And if the whole exercise strikes you as hokey, Matt pointed out that archaeologists keep digging up ancient graffiti that does exactly this — “I love her, whose name is 545,” scratched on a wall in Smyrna and in Pompeii. Men have been defacing walls with their affections for thousands of years.

Each theory points the same direction: not monsters, but wicked government, evil empire, rulers off the rails. As for pinning it down, Matt was content to let it go. “I’ll never be able to prove it anyway. Ask the Lord when you die.”

Zoom out, and the pattern surfaces

► 1:39:05

Better than zeroing in, he said, is stepping back.

“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.”

REVELATION 17:9–10 ↗

Two clues in one sentence point at Rome: the seven hills, and a king who *is* — presently reigning when the book was written. But beasts come and go. The reason Daniel and Revelation both draw them this way is that the dragon behind them did not retire. “Just because the United States isn’t mentioned in the book of Revelation doesn’t mean it’s not a beast that has been influenced by that wicked serpent. Just because the Chinese Communist Party isn’t mentioned by name doesn’t mean they’re not.”

► 1:40:54

Set the two columns side by side and the book starts to organize itself. A dragon with authority over its beasts and subjects, against God Almighty whose throne room is the center of all things.

The first beast is a composite — like a leopard, feet like a bear, a mouth like a lion, which is Daniel's parade of beasts conjured back up into one body — and to it “the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.” “See, that’s how he’s like a parody of God,” Matt said. Its mortal wound was healed: a parody of the Lamb who was slain and lives. It is allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them, and given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation — “that is parody language. Because who is every tribe, people, language and nation made for to worship? The Lamb.” Everyone on earth worships it whose name was not written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

The list keeps going. A beast who *was, is not, and yet will be*, against the one who *was, and is, and is to come*. A false prophet, against the two witnesses — the two olive trees of Zechariah 4, a lampstand with seven wicks shown to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor while the land was being rebuilt after exile. Confusing image, but it is one of the visions that stops and interprets itself: not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God. So are the two witnesses Joshua and Zerubbabel, or two literal men walking in power, or a ministry? “I think the point is it’s the Spirit at work bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus.”

And then the parallel this message was built on. People marked for the beast, and people sealed with the name of God — and it would seem from these stories that you cannot have both.

“Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’”

REVELATION 7:2-3 ↗

The same picture returns on Mount Zion, where the Lamb stands with 144,000 who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads, singing a new song no one else can learn, to a sound like many waters and like harpists playing on their harps. If that number worries you as far too small a rescue, Matt said, notice its shape: twelve times twelve times a thousand, a metaphor for the fullness of everyone redeemed.

What it actually means to bear a name

► 1:47:07

Here is the turn. The mark of God is not only more important than the counterfeit, it is more interesting and much clearer — the Bible says plainly and repeatedly what it means to carry someone's name. You could start in the garden, where the man and the woman are made in God's image, the prototype of the whole idea. Stranger still, the first person explicitly marked by God is a murderer: Cain, afraid of retaliation, given a mark for his protection. “Isn't that kind of weird? Yeah.”

► 1:48:10

Then Israel, made a royal priesthood to represent God to the nations and the nations to God in prayer. Aaron carries the names of the tribes over his heart into the Holy Place — as he goes before the Lord to serve, he carries them with him. So the first thing to write down is **representation**. The second is blessing, and note who it belongs to: they put *God's* name on the people, and *God* does the blessing.

“The **Lord** bless you and keep you; the **Lord** make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the **Lord** lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

NUMBERS 6:24–27 ↗

► 1:49:22

“Hear, O Israel: The **Lord** our God, the **Lord** is one. You shall love the **Lord** your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might... You shall teach them diligently to your children... You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

DEUTERONOMY 6:4–8 ↗

The hand and the space between the eyes — which is to say the forehead. The same two places the beast wants. What it carries there is **ownership and guidance**: we are his particular possession, and he tells us which way to go, and one of the ways that works is a parent discipling a child at the table and on the road. A fourth meaning is **fame and reputation**, since a name is what people say about you. In Jeremiah 33 the promise arrives welded to forgiveness — I will restore their fortunes, “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me” — and only then, “this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth,” who will hear of all the good God does for them and tremble at it.

► 1:51:35

All of it carries forward into the new covenant, where the seal becomes a person:

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:20–22 ↗

To be sealed by him is that his **presence** is with us. And it is our **identity** —

“God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: the Lord knows those who are his.” We belong to him.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

1 PETER 2:9–10 ↗ (NIV)

You will not get the mark by accident

► 1:53:33

On the side where there is clarity, nobody bumps into this unawares. We are baptized into his name. We confess the lordship of Christ out loud, that he died for our sins and rose again. “You don’t accidentally wear the wrong kind of shirt and now you wear the seal of God. It’s not because you wore a cross.”

Which cuts both ways, and this was the pastoral point of the morning. People are genuinely afraid: a tattoo they regret, a vaccine they did not want, a passport, a card. Run it back through everything a borne name actually means — representing someone with your life, exerting their influence on their behalf, walking in a pledge of belonging, carrying their fame and reputation and presence — and the fear does not survive the definition. “You will not accidentally get the mark of the beast. You will also not get it if you belong to Christ.”

None of which makes him naive about power. There may well be creepy desires to control a populace, and we can oppose them on moral grounds — though as Matt noted dryly, with facial recognition where it is, the implanted chip is already a bygone conspiracy. What does not help is externalizing the mark as though it were a piece of hardware. The real subject is dueling loyalties and a choice that takes faith: choose whom you will serve. If you have any concern at all, pledge yourself to Christ with all your heart, renounce the dragon and all his influence, and ask the Holy Spirit where a foothold has been given in your family or your behavior — and repent.

Bearing his name is not for A-plus students

► 1:57:07

“Bearing the name of Jesus is not for A-plus students only,” Matt said. “We are not at all a moralistic religion of goody-goodies. We belong to a God who saves creepy weirdo sinners, addicts and murderers and adulterers.” That is precisely the joy of it, because a borne name is not your own — we are representing him and his goodness, and in our weakness that can shine very bright.

It has practical consequences. We do not bless in our own name, which means that when you are about to pray for someone who is sick, or to open your mouth about the gospel, you do not have to stop and audit your morning first — *did I sin this morning? Can I pray this prayer?* We bless in Jesus’ name. We did not discover a promising lifestyle and hope others catch on; we are possessed by him and guided by his influence. It is his reputation on the line, not ours, and when we fail we can fold even that into the testimony — look how gracious our God is.

It also settles the question of how any of this is supposed to work. “We are not the biggest, the most popular, the smartest, or the most numerous faction in the world, and that’s how we’re gonna take over.” Jesus Christ is redeeming people by his own strength and on his own initiative. We get to partner with him and watch, and marvel.

► 1:59:51

Which brings the whole thing back to two paths, two loyalties, and a choice that will take faith. Compromise will keep presenting itself as the shortcut — partnership with the world, relief from the trouble, the obviously easiest way. “But that’s a trap.” What did Jesus say his yoke was? His yoke is easy and his burden is light. What the world offers instead, Matt said, “is actually a heavy burden that looks like a gift.”

► 2:00:30

So bearing his name may well stir up trouble in this life — and big picture, it is one of the greatest sources of honor and dignity we will ever have. Peter’s instruction for it:

“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal. But if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

1 PETER 4:15–16 ✎ (NIV)

Not a consolation prize — an opportunity to rejoice. Matt ended by running the whole list back one more time: we get to represent him, walk in his blessing, look forward to his influence and grace, joyfully say we are his possession, take his guidance, know it is his fame and reputation on the line and

that he will defend it, and go nowhere without his presence. “Therefore we walk in love without fear, knowing that whatever happens to us in this life, Christ, the risen exalted Lord, will be honored, glorified and worshiped by all tribes, tongues and peoples — and we will see it, and we will rejoice.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Matthew 25:1–13
- Revelation 13:11–12
- Revelation 13:16–18
- 1 Kings 10:14
- Deuteronomy 17:16–17
- Revelation 17:9–10
- Revelation 13:1–8
- Daniel 7:4–6
- Zechariah 4:2–6
- Revelation 7:2–3
- Revelation 14:1–3
- Genesis 1:27
- Genesis 4:15
- Exodus 28:29
- Numbers 6:24–27
- Deuteronomy 6:4–8
- Jeremiah 33:7–9
- 2 Corinthians 1:20–22
- 2 Timothy 2:19
- 1 Peter 2:9–10 (NIV)
- Joshua 24:15
- Matthew 11:28–30
- 1 Peter 4:15–16 (NIV)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What did you assume was in the book of Revelation before this series, and where did that assumption actually come from?
2. Matt said the kingdom of darkness works by parody rather than invention. Where have you seen a counterfeit of something good at work in your own life?
3. Of the meanings of a borne name — representation, blessing, belonging, guidance, reputation, presence — which one is hardest for you to believe applies to you?
4. Fear of accidentally bearing the wrong mark has driven a lot of Christian energy for decades. What has that fear cost the church, and what would have been better spent on?
5. Where have you given the dragon a foothold in your family or your habits, and what is the one thing you will renounce this week?

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=YsAkI9lSmEs&t=5119s>

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.