

Believe and Engage//Revelation 12:1-11

I have some really good news... the property I am currently standing on and that I am broadcasting from now officially belongs to the Summit Church!

- On Monday morning, for just a few brief seconds, \$11.2 million touched our bank account and, just as quickly... it was gone.
- Tim Jackson, our CFO, got rid of it before I could think of something else I wanted to do with it...

So, this place I am broadcasting from... we now own it...

God has given our church a very clear mission... that is to take people far from God and introduce them to Jesus.

- That starts with people right here in our community... neighbors and classmates;
- There are 5 areas we have identified... *HOPUD*
- Also means we want to plant 1000 churches

Well, owning this property is a big part of that strategy...

- like I've told you before, I plan on being here for 35 more years unless God kills me, and it makes sense that in the scheme of all we are doing we will own a hub campus we do everything else from, and this is about the most efficient option available on that...

In addition to that... we made public 2 weeks ago that we are opening a N Raleigh campus later this year...

- We had a ton of you came out to an interest meeting about that...
- We found out about 20% of our church travels from N Raleigh...

- N Raleigh is a huge, growing area... it's got over 200,000 people in it and about 5000 new people move into it every year. (The only place growing faster than N Raleigh is the BC area right here)

So we've got some great ministry in front of us... some great doors open... we've got a great congregation in DD at WCC; ND at CMC; Hispanic campus... I hope the day comes that you can't drive 15 minutes anywhere in our city w/o encountering a vibrant community of believers in RDU.

I wanted to take this week to set the stage... kind of give you a behind the scenes look at what we are doing and why...

- I want you to understand that we are not growing as a church just for the sake of growing.
- I know all of you think every pastor's dream is to have a big church... (I've heard that every pastor's dream is a **pretty little wife** and a great big church. Usually what he ends up with is a **pretty little church** and...)
- This isn't about the Summit, or about me. We've got a message that is too important to make it about us. It's about taking people far from God and introducing them to Jesus.

You say, "Well, what about other churches? You think you're the only show in town?" Absolutely not. We want to bless other churches and help them grow.

- **Several times in the recent past we have given financially to churches right here in our own backyard...** business models would look at that as competition, but we see ourselves as on the same team... we know that it's going to take more than the Summit to get the job done. And so we want them to grow, too.
- **But while we want other churches to grow, we also want to do everything we can do to reach people.** There's too many people who need Jesus in RDU to play turf wars. The Triangle area here is 1.7 million people and grows by about 20K a year,

which means even if our church grew by 10K next year, we would only have reached half of the new people moving into the area! So yes, we got a big job to do.

So, if you have your Bible, and I hope you do, I want you to open it to the book of Revelation. Last book of the Bible... go all the way to the end... if you're looking at the maps or a picture of the Med, you've gone too far... go back to the unlined pages.

The word "Revelation" literally means, in Greek, "the unveiling." The book of Revelation shows you what is happening "behind the scenes," what "the Man behind the curtain" is up to. Now, this is a strange passage of Scripture, so... be ready.

Revelation 12:1–11 ¹And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

- The dragon is a reference to Satan: 7 and 10 are the numbers of completion, so the 7 crowns and 10 horns represent his control over all the kingdoms of the earth.

⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

- When Satan rebelled and was kicked out of heaven at the beginning of time, he took a whole 1/3 of all the angels in heaven with him.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,

- Obviously the male child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron is Jesus

- Did you catch that the dragon stands in front of the woman about to give birth ready to devour the child? *How many of you have this piece in your manger scene?* *Wouldn't that be great? *In the live manger scene that's what every kid would want to play ... the dragon... until they learned it was Satan...
- This woman is not Mary, the woman represents the whole nation of Israel. Did you notice in vs. 1 it said this woman had a crown of 12 stars? These are the 12 tribes of Israel.

...but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, (talking about the Resurrection)

⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. I'll come back to that

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but the dragon was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

¹¹ 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.

¹² *Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!* How many of you are in heaven right now? Nobody... that “rejoice” doesn’t apply to you. The next phrase does:

But woe to you, O earth and sea, (that’s you) for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!
¹⁷ *...Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

So, you’re like, “What is this about?” (Some of you video-techie are like, “Now this is what I’m talking about... Man-eating dragons, cosmic battles... this is like the opening sequence for ‘Worlds of Warcraft.’”)

- As I mentioned, the book of Revelation is an “unveiling.” This is what is going on behind the scenes in our world.

Now, there are some details in this passage that theologians argue over... things like the 1260 days... Is it something in the past, future? Some kind of metaphor? And this may disappoint some of you... but I’m going to skip over those questions. (I’ve got my opinions...) Because we are going to focus on what this passage shows us about God’s people in all places and all times.

B/c see, it is clear that this chapter is describing a struggle between Satan and the people of God that spans all of history. See how **vs. 17** says that the dragon makes war with all the woman’s offspring, with all those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus? *If you keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus, this describes your struggle. A struggle not with flesh and blood or politics or the media or with your college professor or with your husband but with Satan himself.*

This is the 1st thing I want you to see: life is not a game. Heaven and hell are real... Eternity is real. Jesus really died to open up a way for us to be saved and there’s no way to be saved apart from him. And there

is an enemy who is out to destroy the testimony of Jesus and keep people away from faith in the one true God. I feel like a lot of us are playing at church... ***we’re asleep in the light.***

Now, I know as I say all this that the elephant in the room is, “Seriously, in an educated society... you actually believe in a real devil and demons... diabolos?”

- **So let me be clear...** and I make no apology for this... Yes. If God tells us that this is what is going on behind the scenes, then I believe Him.
- You say, “Well, have you ever seen a demon... you know, been talking to somebody and all the sudden they look at you and say, “I am LEGION?””
- No... but it actually makes sense to me in our rather proud, skeptical society that if there is a Satan he would work behind the scenes... right? Because in an age of unbelief he wouldn’t want to draw attention to himself... but that doesn’t mean he’s not there.
- I always think of here what Shakespeare said in Hamlet, *“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your little philosophy.”*

This is what is going on behind the scenes. Well, what exactly is he up to? These chapters show you 3 main things he is doing. The next chapter, chapter 13, describes 2 beasts which Satan raises up...

- *1 is from the sea...* beast from the sea... Is that like Poseidon or the Loch Ness Monster? Bad Japanese horror movie? No, the sea in the book of Revelation is a metaphor for political powers, nation states.
 - One of the ways Satan has worked against humanity for years is by raising up political empires so bent on destruction that you know that something is behind them...
 - Think Nero; the Inquisition; Innocent III; Hitler

- This beast is given an interesting description in chapter 13: It says this beast was given a *“fatal wound and yet lived.”*
 - If it’s a fatal wound, how could he live? Most theologians think this is whenever these murderous political powers get put down, another somehow gets resurrected in its place. For example, Hitler’s 1000-year Reich only lasted a little over a decade... but after that, ***in the most educated society of mankind***, there was Stalin, and Mao, and Pol Pot, and Rwanda. Do not ever think that the forces behind mass violence are over. That beast lives. Though fatally wounded, he will rise again.
- A 2nd beast Satan raises up is a religious leader is a false prophet that deceives everyone. So, get this... in addition to straight- up killing the church, Satan joins the church in the form of false teachers to try and deceive it from within.
 - Satan’s 1st words in the Bible were, “Has God said?”
 - And that’s still the question he poses... sometimes in seminary classrooms and sometimes even from people claiming to speak in the name of God. *They say, “Your Bible is full of errors, you can’t really trust it; the Gospel and its worldview is primitive. Be a Christian, but be sophisticated.”*
 - The other day I heard someone on the news referred to as a “Bible-believing Christian” and I was like, *“Is any other kind?”*
- Violence, deception... here’s a 3rd thing Satan does in these chapters (**12:10**) this one’s really interesting when you compare it to the other 2: ***“...for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”***
 - Did you catch that? So, in addition to violence and false teaching, one of his main roles is to accuse the people of God, day and night.
- Isn’t that odd? I get violence and false teaching... but inward accusation?
- If our enemy can destroy hope in you, he’s destroyed everything.
 - His is that voice inside of you telling you that you’re not worth anything.
 - ...that certain mistakes you have made are fatal; that certain character flaws you have are permanent and that you have not future.
 - His is the voice telling you that that your marriage has no hope and that you are damaged beyond repair.
 - It is Satan’s voice pushing you that direction.
 - Make no mistake... for some of you, his is the voice telling you to take your life and end it all. In a church our size there is somebody here on the brink of suicide.
- Some of you might have even thought it was God making you feel bad about stuff in your life. You say, “The things I am feeling bad about I have actually done... so, that must God making me feel bad about that stuff.”
 - Martin Luther had a Latin phrase about the Gospel *“simul iustus et peccator.”* For those of you that are not Latin: Simultaneously justified and a sinner. **The way we say it:** The Gospel is that though you are wicked than you ever imagined, you are more loved and accepted than you ever dreamed, at the same time.
 - So, when God points out your sin, He does so in the light of what He has done for you in Christ.
 - ***Both Satan and God point out sin in your life. Satan accuses and condemns. God calls out and redeems.***

- **Satan starts with what you did and tears down who you are; God starts with who He has remade you in Christ and rebuilds what you did.**
- This is how you tell the difference in their voices.
 - God tells you that though you have been the prodigal, you are His beloved child (Galatians 3:22).
 - He tells you that there is no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1);
 - that He has separated your sins as far as East is from the West (Psalm 103);
 - that He has raised you in Christ (Col 3:1)
 - that He has a purpose and plan for you... to give you a future and a hope; to use your life for good and not for bad; to make you into something beautiful and productive for Himself.
- **Illus.** Kharis and Allie. “Oh my... I was the voice of Satan, Allie, my daughter was the voice of God.

So, according to vs. 11, how did they overcome the work of Satan?

These are great. You need to etch these on your heart; they are etched into the mission of this church.

12:11 “...by the blood of the Lamb” (Gr: on account of). How did they overcome Satan’s accusations against them? They anchored themselves in the blood of the Lamb.

- Jesus is called a Lamb here because He died like one of the Jewish sacrificial lambs in our place.
 - Every year in Israel the father of a family would take a lamb to the temple and lay it on the altar and confess the sins of the family over it and while he was

confessing the priest would slit the throat of the lamb and the lamb would die for the sins of that family in the place of that family.

- Jesus died that way. Jesus’ death on your behalf shows you two things that make an anchor for your life:
 - A) How much God valued you and B) anything that could separate me from God, God has forever removed.
- **If you grasp, really grasp, the Gospel, you can overcome every spiritual attack Satan throws at you.**
 - For example, you’re depressed... (you feel like nobody likes you, your life isn’t worth anything, everything you touch turns to disaster, your future holds nothing but more pain and hardship since that is what the past has been like). If you believe that, one of 2 things has to be true about you...
 - Either (a) you don’t understand how much God loves you, the plans He has for you, to give you a future and a hope, to make you into something beautiful and to really use you in His plan,
 - Or, (b) you don’t give that reality enough weight in your life. It’s like you know it, but God’s feelings about you don’t matter that much. Someone else’s opinion matters more than His does... **Simon Cowell**
 - (There are times depression has a physiological root, but a lot of times it goes back to one of these things).
 - It’s the same thing with guilt: If you struggle with guilt, either you...
 - Don’t understand what Christ has done for you—that He has put your sin as far away as the East is from the West, and remade you into a new creation—

- ...or you don't value God's opinion of you enough.
 - **Sometimes people will say to me, "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself."** My response is always: "Why does your forgiveness of yourself matter more to you than God's forgiveness of you?" What they mean is that "I've failed some standard that I set for myself." And I say, "So, you've got a higher standard than God? What you think about yourself matters more than God?"
- **Bold statement (I'll get kickback):** *All of our spiritual problems come from either not understanding God's love for us or not valuing it enough.* **Unbelief/idolatry.** And thus, you can overcome almost every Satanic attack—fear, depression, guilt, worry—by preaching the Gospel to yourself over and over.
 - **The gospel not only saves us from our past and rescues us from our future it delivers us in our present.**
 - I do this every single morning. Example.
 - And I'm not talking about silly affirmation talk... "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough... but doggonit people like me." That's silly because a lot of times it's not true, sometimes you're not good enough or smart enough, and the people who like you today will probably hate you tomorrow.
 - The Gospel is "I'm not good enough, I'm never been smart enough, but doggonit Jesus died for me and He has plan for me."

So, they overcame him in their lives by the blood of the Lamb...

- **"...by the word of their testimony"**
 - They countered the work of Satan in the lives of others by the word of their testimony.
 - The word "testimony" in Christianese often means your personal story... but that's not what this means.
 - Testimony here means the story of what Jesus did on the cross. The word Gospel means "announcement." **Illustration.** Gospel is an announcement, that Jesus has won the battle against our sin and all the forces of evil and has been raised to begin new life in us.
 - As you testify to that victory, as you declare it, and people believe it, the work of Satan is overcome in their lives.
 - Our message at this church to our community... is not "fix your life." Or "we can help you fix your life" or "come be like us..."
 - Durham **PICTURE:** "SELF HELP." That is exactly the opposite of the message of the Summit Church.
 - We don't preach a message of what you should do for God, but of what God has done for you.
- I want you to hear this because it really speaks to the mission of this church. **We will overcome the work of Satan in RDU by testifying to Jesus.**
 - Our enemy is at work in the lives of people in RDU.
 - He's in the skepticism and temptation on our college campuses.
 - He's in the drugs and violence of our ghettos.
 - He's in the despair of the unwed mother who walks in to the abortion clinic to destroy the life of her child as well as her own
 - He's in the materialism in RTP and the broken relationships and dysfunctional families in our suburbs.

- How do we counter that? By preaching the Gospel in all places in all times to all peoples. And so the mission of this church is empowering people to preach the Gospel in our community.
 - **Summary of Craig's story:** heard a story recently about a young professional guy in our community who didn't believe in God at all but he had this financial need arise and one of our small groups found out about it and took...
 - That's why we want to grow. So we can multiply groups like that all over the city!
- Our mission is **not**...
 - **Building buildings:**
 - Buildings are just tools to help us grow the church, preaching the Gospel to people is the mission... we want to have small groups like that everywhere!
 - This is also why we have chosen to pursue the multi-campus approach. Not building one big building... *Because we believe churches can preach the Gospel best when they are local!*
 - Ever try to invite someone who lives far away...? Some of you love this church so much... super sanctified. Guy at Starbucks doesn't.
 - It also helps us to perceive the needs of the community better.
 - So we tell people, stay where you are, serve where you live, be the church in your community.
 - **Here's something else: Our mission is not just doing social ministry:** we bless the community... 19 different organizations in the city; several thousand of you volunteer each

year... the point of all that we do is to preach the Gospel! Our mission is not to paint walls, it is to preach Jesus.

- **These 5 areas we've identified:** we will overcome the darkness in these areas by preaching the Gospel in them.
 - The H-O-P-U-D need not only to be fed and clothed and housed, they need to know they have an eternal Father who loves them, and Who died to reconcile them to Himself, and has a great plan for them. **I don't want to just put food into their stomachs, I want to put Jesus into their hearts!**
 - You ever heard that statement, "*Preach the Gospel, if necessary use words*"? That is truly one of the dumbest statements ever conceived. Like saying... **Tell me your phone #; if necessary, use digits.**
 - Only the announcement of the Gospel of Jesus can overcome the work of Satan.
- And could I use this opportunity to talk about **Easter**? Easter is one of the best times of the year to get people in a place like this to hear the Gospel. Here's what we're doing... we will have 19 services; I will preach a disgustingly simple Gospel message, and then we will be baptizing! It will be chaos.
 - Challenge: Don't go see your family, get your family to come here! "I like to go to

Grandma's house on Easter. She makes a ham and I get a chocolate bunny."

- Seriously, of all the holidays, this is the one where you definitely should not sit around thinking about what you want to do...
- ***What did Jesus do on Easter weekend?***
He went through a brutal crucifixion and then lay in cold dark grave for 3 days. So, I think you can stand up to grandma, step out of your comfort zone and invite someone to come with you.
- **"... they loved not their lives to the death."**
 - Not only did they believe the Gospel in their own lives and preach the Gospel to others, they poured out their lives for the Gospel.
 - Some of them, it's saying, even died in an effort to get the Gospel to go forward, because they loved the spread of the Gospel more than they loved their own lives.
 - This is very sobering, and I want you to hear this, and to get it, because it runs exactly contrary to the American dream. American dream is acquisition; that's what you're pumped full of in college.
 - But this book says that God's work goes forward in the world through the sacrifice and death of His people.
 - Jesus purchased our salvation by His death; there are people whose salvation will only be purchased by our death.
 - Of course, we're not dying for other peoples' sins like He did; Jesus was the one sacrifice for all times.
 - But, in order for them to know about Him, to hear about Him, we have to

"love not our lives, even to the death."
When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He tells us to come and die.

- What does that mean, to "love not your lives to the death"? When I say that... a lot of us think about somebody being martyred for their faith. Certainly it includes that.
 - But how about the person that gives up a career to go live overseas in an unreached people group or an impoverished area? **Some of you need to love the spread of the Gospel more than you love the American dream.** What if He had laid out His options and angled Himself for maximum personal benefit? No, He leveraged His life for God's glory and our good?
 - Or how about the person who sacrifices the kind of car they drive, the house they live in, or part of their retirement so that a church like ours can position itself to reach our city. **You live on less so you can give more so your church can reach its community. Isn't that also a kind of death?**
 - But, don't even stop there.... how about stepping outside of your comfort zone to get to know a neighbor, or to invite someone with you at Easter... I had a friend who explained that they weren't getting to know any more people b/c ... honest, we all feel that way. Would you be willing to die to yourself by getting to know someone outside of yourself for the purpose of the Gospel?
 - Nobody should come alone at Easter... everyone should bring somebody. That may not compare to being burned at the stake, but it is still dying to yourself.

- **You get the point? Don't just read "they loved not their lives to the death" as physical death...**
 - In fact, here is a question: ***Is it harder to die for Christ or live for Jesus?***
- That's our final point: Satan is overcome and people are saved through the church loving the Gospel more than they love their lives. **Do you get that your stuff can be used to help set other people free? Your stuff can deliver people from Satan and change someone's eternity!**
- Here's what is important: for our church: We are entering a time where we need to give... we're poised. God has blessed us more than we ever dreamed.
 - This campus... I need you to give
 - Plant a new campus.
 - We've got some needs for these things and other things at our campus...
 - We need a huge offering on April 10–11 to get going.
 - Some of you, what you give you'll never experience the benefit of yourself... Some of you will never go to the NR campus or the BC campus... but you get a chance to give like God gave to you...
- So church, this is it... we're in the middle of a war. It's all around us. Sometimes people wonder, "When is this all going to be over? We're always taking up money here, being stretched to give and serve here..." It will always be that way.
 - If your idea of a church is a country club where you can see all your friends... you come in, you sit in a little swiveling, reclining **seat**, where you can order a mocha **latte** off the screen... music is zippy and poppy and your kids come down a slide after being taught by **Sponge Bob Square Pants** himself to have good manners... sermons last about **22 minutes** and their never about sin but just what we struggle with in this

day and age... this church is not for you and never will be for you.

- "I want to be at a church where they don't ask for money." What you want to be at is a church is not on mission. Where you can come and have your needs met in a room and have someone else pay for it.
- That will never be this church. It's not about you. It's about the mission.
- As long as our enemy is at work and people are held captive... as long as there are UPG's... we are never retiring! (funeral sermon?)
- I can't promise you it will ever get easier at the church... but I can promise you it will always be exciting. My house, always chaos... but I welcome it. I want kids and grandkids always running around here...

On the weekend after Easter... I'm going to ask you to give a huge offering. And I wanted you to know why...

To people who don't know Jesus:

- I'm not talking to you. You are our guests.
- I do want you to know that you're sitting in a room where some people have given up massive amounts...
- 2 people who have given up 2nd homes to help build this church
- We have families whose kids are in Afghanistan...
- These are people "loving not their lives to the death"

Why? There is something they think is more valuable even than life. That is the message of the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is that all of us, because of our sin, stand condemned before God. But because God loves us more than we've ever dreamed, Jesus came to die in our place and suffer our punishment, and if we will turn from our sin and receive Him as Lord and Savior, He will save us. That message is worth living and dying for to us.

Bullpen:

- Satan's strategy is to deceive people in the name of truth.
 - Think about it long enough, and it will almost make you despair.
 - When I lost my intellectual innocence
 - How do you overcome?
-
- College students who will come to our city to go to school and they will lose any faith they had and never find it again...
- Families who need Jesus
- HOPUD: show God's love!
- We're entering another phase where we have to take a big, expensive step...
- The church is formed for a mission. If your idea of a church is a country club...
- "The church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning."
-
- Sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more
 - You can't defeat an enemy who is not only willing to die, but for whom death means winning. I want you to sacrifice, and give!
 - God is willing... would we die?
 - Lord of the Rings: Aowyn (?) Merry the Hobbit... when he saw she was standing alone against the evil demonic force: "something so beautiful should not die alone." (this

reference was in Tim Keller, Preaching class at Reformed seminary, Session 8 Q&A, 1–16, at about 3:30 in).

- If he died for me, will I not die for them?
- Sacrifice is giving up... this is what this church is. We are trying to free our city... all of it, from the captivity to the evil one.
 - Drunks
 - Prostitutes
 - HOPUD: show God's love!
 - College students: depression