



Message **Transcript**

The Cast of Characters

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Lord Jesus, we just thank you for the privilege of hearing you directly this morning. And Lord, as we pray as a church, as we believe as a church that the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates and divide both soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and judges the attitudes and intentions of the heart. We believe this word is your word, and we believe that every time it's faithfully and accurately proclaimed, Lord, that you speak, so, we're inviting you to do that right now. Lord, not only to us collectively as a church, but also to each one of us individually in this body. And so, if you are ready to hear the word of the Lord, to believe what He says about you as true, and will by faith put into practice what He shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word, amen?

Amen.

Amen. If you've ever had a chance to see a Broadway musical, you'll notice at the end of every production, there's a whole cast of characters that comes out to present themselves. And so, you get to see them in a little different light. They come out of character and you get to see who they are. And sometimes different ones get introduced at different times, and it always thrills your heart to see how they interact with each other. Or perhaps sometimes you watch one of your favorite sports teams, and then perhaps on ESPN or the NFL Network, you'll see how they do a documentary about the season that you watch. And you'll get to see what these players were like and what the coaches were like behind the scenes, and how they interacted during that

year, and what made their team so special.

Or perhaps you all remember the show, The Wizard of Oz, where everybody wanted to know, "What's behind the curtain? Who's this wizard?" Well, for us, as we're studying the Book of Revelation, there's a whole cast of characters that are behind the curtain. The first 11 chapters in the Book of Revelation begin to chronologically lay out how the end times are going to unfold, and by God's grace, we've faithfully been walking through those passages of scripture and seeing what they say to us, and navigating what God is going to do here in these latter days, and what things are going to look like. We got a truer picture of who Jesus is and all of His glory, how He walks among His churches, what worship looks like.

We took a look at the seven seals that unfolded, and what took place on planet Earth during that time. Then we looked at the beginning of the Second Coming with the resurrection and rapture of the saints, followed by 30 minutes of silence, and then the wrath of God being poured out on planet Earth. And last time that we gathered and talked about this book, we began to get introduced to some of the characters in the last three and a half years, like the two witnesses that are going to come on the scene, and who they are, and what they're going to be doing. And as chapter 11 ended, we get a picture of what the Jewish nation gets to see, and some of the people who dwell on the Earth on the very last verse of chapter 11.

Right after, we learned that the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has become His and He will reign forever and ever, and everybody says, amen. I mean, this is what it's all about. We see in verse 19 of chapter 11, "And the temple of God, which is in heaven, was opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder, and an earthquake, and a great hailstorm." God opened the spiritual eyes of the people on planet Earth, as He's beginning to rule and reign, as He's coming to take His kingdom that is rightfully His, and that's where we left off.

In chapter 12, what we're going to be getting to get introduced to is some of the characters that are going to play a significant role during these latter days. We're going to highlight five of them today, next week, you'll take a look at the antichrist and the false prophet, and we'll talk about who they are and what role they're going to play in the end times' landscape as well, but what you can understand chapters 12, 13, and 14 being, is everything's been chronological up to this point, and in 12, 13, and 14, it's a parenthetical idea. It's this, let me explain to you what's been going on. Let me give you the idea of some of these characters and who they are, and what their background is, and how they're going to play out during this seven-year period or the last three and a half years specifically. And so, that's where we are.

So, I invite you to open up the scriptures today to Revelation 12. What I'd like to do is read it out loud and you begin to look from maybe the five characters that we're going

to talk about today and see what the Lord shows you. Then we'll unpack it together. Hear the word of the Lord, Revelation 12, "A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head, a crown of 12 stars. And she was with child, and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and 10 horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

"And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth, he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God so that she would be nourished for 1,260 days. And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

"And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and satan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power of the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses

them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.'

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured out water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. So, the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

And here in this passage of Revelation 12, we see a lot of symbolism, we see a lot of imagery, and as we see all this, we're going to see this cast of characters unfold. I want to highlight five of them for you that you need to be aware of, of who's God using and how is this drama going to play out in the end. And the first we see is this, this cast of characters includes, first and foremost, Israel. This cast of characters includes,

first and foremost, the great nation of Israel. Notice this, it says, "A great sign appeared in heaven." Sign means to authenticate something that is real. That's what a sign is.

When Jesus was doing signs and wonders, when the apostles were performing signs and miracles, they were authenticating that they were indeed from God. And so, isn't it interesting that even after Jesus healed people from disease, isn't it interesting even after he cast out demons, even after His whole ministry was signed upon, signed upon, signed upon, signed, what did the religious leaders of the day say? "Just give us a sign, and that will be enough." I mean, He was even raising people from the dead, and that wasn't good enough for them. They wanted a sign, they wanted some authentication that He was indeed from God. His very person demonstrated that He was from God.

Another sign that we see in the New Testament is the sign of Judas Iscariot kissing Jesus Christ on the night He was betrayed, signaling and symbolizing, "Hey, this is the authentic one. This is the Christ. This is the one that you want to arrest. He's truly the one." That's what a sign is. So, when we see this picture of a woman, this is not a real woman, this is the sign, this is a sign in heaven. This is a picture of a sign that appeared in heaven. Some people have falsely concluded, "Well, this is Mary. This is Mary, the mother of Jesus." The reason this can't be Mary, the mother of Jesus, is as we unfold all of this, we're going to see that Mary doesn't fit the description all the way

through of who this is, but Israel does.

It's also not the church. It's also not the church. Some people try to take all the promises of Israel and just place them on the church as if the church has replaced Israel. The church has not replaced Israel. Israel is a special instrument used of God for the salvation of the world. Make no mistake about it. Israel is a distinct nation unlike any other nation on the planet. The reason we started this series that we call the Alpha and Omega Series all the way back in the Book of Genesis is so you could see who God was at the end from the beginning.

And in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned, when sin entered the world through them, what you see is, in Genesis 3:15, God says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel." And here's what you see. What you're going to see coming out of the seed of Eve is this nation that is going to be birthed called Israel. When we get to Genesis 11, God calls Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, and when He calls him, he is going to make a great nation where all the nations of the world will be blessed through him. Abram becomes Abraham. The Jewish nation is formed. The purpose of God's formation of the Jewish nation was to be a light and to a blessing to all the other people groups of the entire world.

Israel is distinct from any other nation because it's through Israel that who do we

receive the promised Messiah. So, if you study Israel's history and you understand that God selected them as a nation by His grace to bring forth the Messiah, and we watch Israel, sometimes we're hard on Israel, because we'll say things like this, "How could they be so silly? I mean, God tells them exactly what to do, and they do just the opposite, and then God has to discipline them, and then God has to bring them back to Himself. Who acts like that?" We do. But Israel has bore the weight unlike any other nation in the world, because they have been a target for the enemy because the enemy knows that they've been God's sovereign nation that's been chosen to bless all the other nations of the world.

Israel is distinct from any other nation. Now, let me be clear on this, on my passport, it will tell you that I'm a citizen of the United States of America. I love our country. I'm familiar with the Declaration of Independence. My great-grandfather, nine generations ago, was the governor of Delaware. He signed it. I love our Constitution more now than I ever have. I'm a patriot at heart, but let me tell you something, Israel is God's chosen nation, not the United States of America. They bear different weight. They bear different weight. And so, what you see is, if you look at the world today, there's about 15 million Jews, about 50% of them live in the United States of America, about 30% live in Israel, and the rest are scattered.

So, about 80% of Jewish people live in the United States or in Israel. And yet, what do we know about them? They still exist. I mean, a few weeks ago about Amalekites and

Moabites and Jebusites and all these other kind of ites, where are they? How come they're still Israelites? Because they're God's chosen people. Even when you read through the Old Testament, you see there came a time during the life of Esther where the whole nation was going to get completely wiped out. And what does God do? He spares the nation. Why? Because God's always had a purpose for Israel for the salvation of the world.

And when Israel brought into Messiah, she was travailing in pain for 2,000 years to bring the Messiah. When she brought the Messiah and gave birth through Jesus Christ, we know that all the nations of the earth can and will be blessed. Amen? So, what we see and what we're introduced to is Israel. And just as Israel has always played a role in God's kingdom agenda on planet Earth, they always will play a role. In the same way that God used them to bring Jesus through His first advent, God is going to save all of Israel before Jesus comes back in His second advent. We see this all throughout history. And so, while the Jews make up about 0.2 percent of the planet, I mean, imagine the impact that they've had. I mean, all of us know some Jewish person that's done something super significant.

I mean, you're talking about a country the size of New Jersey, that's having an impact all over the world. 0.2% of the population. And if you turn on the nightly news tonight, I guarantee you, something's going on in Israel that they're alerting you to. Why is it that many nations on the face of the earth want to wipe Israel out? Because they're God's

chosen nation for how He brought salvation into the world. Even the Apostle Paul who had repented of his sins and trusted Jesus Christ, who was a born again believer, said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto everyone who believes, first to the..."

Jew.

"Jew, then to the Gentile, then to the Greek." I mean, God's plan has always been through Israel. And that's what we see here. God wants us to understand in this cast of characters in Revelation 12 that God still has a purpose. You say, "Well, how do you know that this woman is Israel?" Notice how she's clothed. She's clothed and draped with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head, a crown of 12 stars. If you go back, you remember Jacob who had 12 sons, you remember one of his sons named Joseph who God spoke to many times but he didn't have the ability to keep his mouth shut when he had to tell his brothers what he had seen.

And do you remember what happened? He had a couple of different visions, the first vision was about sheaves of wheat bowing down to him, which didn't go over well. And he said, "Well, don't stop there, I've got another one too. Let me tell you this," and then in Genesis 37:9, he said he had another dream, and he related it to his brothers and said, "Lo, I still had another dream, and behold, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars were bowing down to me." Sun, the moon, the 11 stars represent the formation of the nation of Israel. They're representative of the nation of Israel. That's what's going on

here. This woman is Israel, who has been travelling to bring the Messiah into the world.

The enemy hates Israel. The enemy has always tried to thwart God's plan from the beginning, and you see it. And if you see it with those eyes, you will read the Old Testament differently. When I first went into the ministry about 30 years ago, I remember listening to people that were older and more seasoned in ministry, and they would say, "Hey, brother, because you're going into ministry, the devil's going to come after you more." And that just sounded like poppycock to me honestly. I'm like, "Ah, whatever." I wouldn't say that anymore. I'd say, the more you step out for the kingdom, no matter who you are, the more you're going to get a counter-attack from the enemy. You just are. There's no two ways around it.

I mean, I know, I mean, I know if I'm preaching on marriage, Kim and I are going to be at odds that week. It's like clockwork. I know if I'm preaching on the gospel, that the enemy is going to lie to me and tell me that I'm no good and lousy and shouldn't even be a preacher. And I know when I preach on who the devil is, that that week in some ways just explodes in ways I couldn't even describe, I'm like, "How did this even happen this week?" Well, because this is what happens. And it's reality that the more you step out, the more you see it. My first day at Dallas Seminary, I remember Chuck Swindoll was preaching to all of us who were first-year students, and he said, "Because you're here, there's a bulls-eye now on your front and on your back that's bigger and larger than it's ever been just because you've come here."

And I find that's true of any single person that would say, "I want to give Jesus Christ more allegiance, and I want to serve Him more." And the more you step out for him, the more counter-attack there is. The reason Israel has had such a weight on them is because they're God's nation that He chose. Now, why did God choose Israel? I don't know. Grace. Why did God choose you? Same reason, it's grace. He had to choose somebody. He had to bring His Messiah in through one group of people. He chose Israel by grace. He didn't choose them because they were awesome. All it takes is a quick reading through scripture to realize they're not all that great. He chose them because He needed a group of people who would respond to Him, who He could get the Messiah through.

That's why it's no surprise to us when we get to the New Testament to the Gospel of Matthew, that the very first thing we read about is a genealogy of the nation of Israel to demonstrate that the Messiah that's come fulfills everything that God said He was always going to do. Why? Because God's always true to His promises. Amen? And this first character that you see is the nation of Israel. The second cast of characters in this character that you see is satan. I lowercase his name all the time on purpose.

Notice this, verse 2, "She was with child and cried out, being in labor and in pain, she was about to give birth." That's Israel getting ready.

And notice verse 3, "Then another sign," it's a sign, symbolic, "appeared in heaven, and

behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and 10 horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of the heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth, he might devour her child." Who is this? Who is this? I hear a big on, "Ss, ss, ss, ss." It's satan. You got it. Okay. So, notice verse 9 says, "And the great dragon," we're going to get there in a minute, "was thrown down, the serpent of old who was called the devil and satan." That's who he is.

We see in Genesis 3 how he took the form of a serpent. Ever since satan fell, ever since that happened, what has he been doing? Trying to attack God's plan of salvation, and attack God's people. That's who he is. But make no mistake about this, the devil and God are not equal. They're not of the same ilk. Satan is a created being. God is infinite, He's not created. One of the requirements, if you ever want to be God, is that you have to have always existed, self-existed. You have to take care of yourself and rule the whole world. That's just part of, you don't grow into God. None of us will ever be gods. There's one God made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's God. Satan is not God, he's a created being.

We learn in Colossians 1 that everything that God creates, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, everything was created by Him and for Him. Now, let me just give you some words that would be depictive of who this devil is, and what he looks like. Devil means deceiver or slanderer. Satan means adversary or enemy. In

Matthew 12:24, he's referred to as a Beelzibub or Lord of the Flies. Here are some of his activity, he's referred to as a tempter in 1 Thessalonians 3:5, the wicked one in Matthew 13:19, the accuser of the brethren, that we'll see later in this text. And he's been given some authority on this planet. That's why in John 12:31, he's called the ruler of this world, 2 Corinthians 4:4, the god of this age, Ephesians 2:2, the prince of the power of the air.

And 2 Corinthians 11:14 says that satan transforms himself into an angel of light so that he can deceive people. So, it shouldn't be surprising that some of satan's greatest servants masquerade as slaves of righteousness. I mean, he's very active in the world, and I think there's two mistakes we can make when it comes to talking about satan. One is to talk about him too much, where he's under like every single rock, and any time you get a cough, "That was satan." Any time you get a sniffle, "That's satan." Any time you hurt your hand, "That was satan." Satan can cause and inflict pain, satan can cause and inflict illness, but it doesn't mean he does it every time.

I mean, some of you that got sick, I mean, it could be that he's inflicted you with something because you have unforgiveness in your life and you need to forgive somebody, and that's a result of that. But some of you are sick because we live in a sinful fallen world and you get sick. And if Jesus Christ doesn't come back in our lifetime, all of you will die. It doesn't mean that satan is all over that. That's one mistake we can make because he's everywhere. The other mistake we can make is to

say that he doesn't even exist. We don't even talk about him at all. Satan exists. He's a real created being. You say, "Well, when was he created?" Well, in Genesis 1:1, says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

And everything throughout scripture says that when God creates, He created everything. We get to Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good." Some of my favorite Bible scholars, a couple of them anyway, like to predate satan before the creation of the world and say there was cosmic disturbance that happened, and during that time, satan and all his angels rebelled, and that's when this took place. My only challenge with that is I can't find any scripture to back that, and my other challenge with that is, if that really happened, and satan is already a fallen being who's trying to deceive the world, and we get down to Genesis 1:31, and all that's happened, and God saw all that He did, and said, even seeing satan wanting to kill people, and God said, "That's very good." I got a problem with that.

I like to believe that God created the whole world in six literal days and rested on the seventh, and sometime shortly thereafter, satan fell. He's a created being. Don't give him too much power, don't give him too much age, don't give him too much anything, but recognize that he's real. That's the character you need to be introduced to because this one that's real, he is a deceiver. And what's his desire? To steal, to kill, and what? Destroy. So, let me just tell you as your pastor because I get this question sometimes, "Should I pray for satan?" Let's say it all out loud at the same time, one, two, three,

no.

No.

No. I mean, you think of the most evil person that's ever lived in the planet, and that's nothing compared to who he is. Every time chaos happens, every time disorder happens, every time something happens in your life that's bad, that's satan cheering and saying, "I'm for that. I'm for chaos, I'm for destruction, I'm for pain, I'm for hurt." That's who he is. But he knows his future too. His future is going to be in the lake of fire, which we'll talk about as we get there in this book. But this sign in heaven, notice the kind of power that he has. "You said he was this great red dragon, now, why is he red?" We don't know exactly. It's a symbol, it's a sign. But back in Revelation 6:4 when that second horseman of the apocalypse went out, that was a red horse for war. Red can be for war, for killing, for bloodshed. That's what satan's all about.

And notice what it says, "He had seven heads and 10 horns, and on his heads were seven diadems." So, there's seven heads with seven crowns, and then there's 10 horns. What do all those means? What do all those mean? People have gone to great lengths to tell you exactly what they are. I don't know that I can say authoritatively what they are. I don't know that I can. Some people say, "Well, it's the seven different world kingdoms that have been, first being Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylon, then Middle Persia, then Greece, then Rome, and ultimately, the seventh one will be the revived empire that satan himself will run. Could that be? Maybe. We're going to talk

about it a little more next week.

Seven is the number of completeness. There is coming a world empire that satan will have all rule and authority over. I mean, look around at our world right now and just think about how many people are looking for a political leader that they can give their whole heart, life, and mind to, that would just solve all their problems. There's coming a day where there will be one who rises up, we'll be introduced to him next week, he will be the antichrist that will make all sorts of promises about how he's going to solve hunger, and pain, and crime, and everything else. And the world is not only going to be, "Vote for this one," the world's going to give their entire allegiance and worship to this one, and it's coming soon. It will happen.

Why? Because it's in the Bible and God tells us it's going to happen. That's who he is. So, is that the seven crowns? The 10 horns could be the 10 kings that rule with the antichrist or under the antichrist. We'll talk a little more about it next week. When I hear people speculate or pontificate on all that, they tend to shift their positions. It used to be the European Union when they had 10 countries, and now it has way more, so, it's not that anymore. We don't know. We'll know when it happens. But what we're seeing is, satan is going to have complete power on planet Earth. He's the prince of the power of the air. And understand this, nothing that he does does he have authority on his own. Because even after satan fell, he still had access and still does have access to the throne room.

We see that he still stands before God day and night and accuses us. We're going to read about it in a little bit. Job, the second oldest book in the Bible, remember Job? Satan approaches God as he's roaming throughout the earth, and God says, "Have you considered my servant, Job?" The only way Satan is allowed to attack Job is because he's got permission from God Almighty. God either has to authorize or approve the things that go on on this planet. They're not happenstance. We have a hard time with that sometimes, because we like to say stuff like this, "God will never give you any more than you can bear." Anybody believe that? If you do, just keep breathing, you won't believe it for long.

I mean, a week ago Monday, I got a call from a friend. He and his family were coming out here, they were going to spend the whole weekend with us last weekend. I was down in Arizona on a retreat with my wife and my kids, and my wife is always on me like, "Get off your phone, quit thinking about work, just stay with us." And so, I'm like, "I'm not going to answer this. I'll see him later." And it was about an hour later, he texted me. He's got four kids, the youngest one's three and a half. He texted me, he said, "Pray for Lylah, my three-and-a-half year old," is who it was. "She fell into our pool and drowned and she'd been air-flighted. We don't know what's going to happen."

So, I immediately called him back, and here I'm talking to a guy that's my age, is a good friend of mine, and his voice is two octaves higher than it normally is. He can't

breathe, he's screaming on the phone like, "Pray for me." And I'm weeping, Kim and I are praying. His little girl died. So, Friday, we flew down to Tampa, we did the funeral yesterday morning, flew back today. So, I can't look my friend in the eye and say, "Hey, God, won't give you any more than you can bear." Here's what I would say, "God's given you way more than you can bear, and that's why God's bigger than what you're dealing with right now." Amen? We live in a world that we have to realize though that even though his little girl died, all of her days were ordained before one of them came to be.

And God used her little life in miraculous ways. As a matter of fact, her organs were donated so that two other people could live. Would that be our plan? No, no. But tragedy happens in our life and God takes what was intended for evil and God uses it for good. But understand this, satan is always about the destruction of human life. He hates your life. He hates you. That's why, for many of you, you hear lies from the moment that you wake up every single morning until you fall asleep. "You're lousy, you're no good. You should've known better. How come you call yourself a Christian and live like that? Maybe you're not even saved. Who do you think you are? Why do you even go to church?"

I mean, you hear these lies all the time, and you have to begin to recognize, they're not just happenstance thoughts that you're having in your head, it's satan who has videotape and game film on you, that knows exactly what to tell you, so that you get

discouraged, or you get prideful, where he'll lie to you and say, "You're awesome. Your husband may not know what he's doing, but he doesn't know what he has. You're great." Or, "Husbands, you're awesome. I mean, she should have married somebody else." Or, "Parents, how come your kids don't behave like the other kids? I mean, that's not very good." Or, "Hey, my kid's on the honor roll. My kid's awesome. How come your kids..." Whatever.

He'll take you to a place of pride or insecurity, and sometimes both at the same time. He's a liar. When he speaks, he lies. He was a murderer from the beginning. God wants us to know who he is. And notice what happens in verse 4, "And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth." So, what happened was, when satan fell, satan took a third of the angels with him. So, a lot of times, we like to say, "Satan's tempting me. Satan's all over me right now." And I know what we mean when we say that that's true, but the reality is, satan is a created being, is in one place at one time. So, satan can't be on me and on you at the same time. It's not satan, he's got helpers.

He's got a third of the angels that went with him and said, "Hey, we don't want the Almighty God, we want to live for ourselves." That's what you have. That's demonic influence in the world. And satan took a third of those with him, which presumably means that two-thirds stayed with the Lord and they're warring angels that are for the

Lord, and a third of them are warring against the Lord. And then what's his plan?

Standing before the woman who's about to give birth. What did Satan want to do at the moment that Jesus was born? Kill him. How do you know? Because he inspired Herod, who was inquiring, "Where is this king that I may go worship him?" And then what does King Herod do to ensure that this king doesn't ever live? What does he do? He makes sure that every baby boy under the age of two is slaughtered, infanticide.

Anytime you see someone go after kids and kill them, either in utero or outside of utero, it's satanically inspired, just so you know. Satan hates seeing young people grow up and be the fullness of what God wants them to be. That was his plan. He was waiting to devour Jesus. Did it work? No, because God's plans are always better than Satan's plans every single time. So, we're introduced to Israel, we're introduced to Satan, now we're going to be introduced to the best character in the entire Bible.

Anybody care to wager a guess who that is? I mean, you're usually about 85% right if you just say it in church. It's Christ, good job.

Notice him, "And she," that's the woman, "gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron," you can read Psalm 2 and read about that, "and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." So, what happened? Israel gave birth to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We don't get a whole picture of the gospel here, but this Messiah came. He lived on planet Earth. He died for all of our sins. He rose from the dead. He did ascend to heaven, that's where He is, and guess what He's going to

do, He's going to come back and rule the world with a rod of iron. Jesus came the first time as humble servant. Next time, guess who He's coming as, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

And He's not coming to apologize or submit to anybody, He's coming to rule over every single person and nation in the world. That's who our King is. Amen? And so, why did He come? Well, 1 John 3:8, at the end says, "He came to destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 4:4, at the end says this, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Here's what I would tell you, you need to be aware that there's a real devil that hates you, but you need to understand, you don't need to fear him because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. I've told this story before, but when I was a little boy, I used to play with all the neighbor kids because my mom would just kick me out of the house. Now that I'm older and have had my own son, I understand why she did it.

And we go outside, we play sports, we do all those things, but I was always playing with kids that are older than me. But there was one kid in our neighborhood, his name was Jay Jay. And Jay Jay was the bully in our neighborhood. And every time I saw him coming, I would try to get into my house, and then I would stand by the front window that we had and wait until he left until I would go outside. And my mom being the compassionate woman she was, and is, she was like, "Just go outside, you're fine." I'm like, "No, mom, I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying right here."

But I remember one day, I didn't get inside soon enough, and Jay Jay would always punch me, and he had this thing he would do where he would pin me down on my back and put his knees on my biceps, and he would hold my hands down, and then he would like hock a loogie down and suck it up. You know what I'm talking about. That kid, couldn't stand that kid. Love to meet him now, but that's a whole another story. Anyways, one day, I didn't get inside, and I'm down there, and you remember what it's like as a kid, when you go through traumatic kind of things, you remember what you felt like and who you were, and what you were feeling, and knew how helpless that you were.

But that day, my neighbor, Brian, came to my rescue. Because all I remember doing is, I remember hearing a sound and looking out the corner, Brian came and tackled Jay Jay. Brian beat up Jay Jay. Jay Jay started crying. Brian told him to get on his bike and go home. Jay Jay got on his bike and pedaled home crying to his mom. And I stood up and was like, "Yeah." And guess who my best friend was in the neighborhood, it was Brian. Why? Because as long as I was with Brian, Jay Jay wouldn't mess with me. Jay Jay wasn't afraid of me, but he was afraid of Brian with me. You see what I'm saying? Satan's not afraid of you, but he's afraid of Christ in you.

And the way that we defeat the enemy is not by becoming a better person and not by

working it out or making commitments to God. How many of you ever tried to pray this prayer? "Lord, I promise if you get me through this, I'll never do this again." How many of you ever prayed? What a silly prayer that is. Our prayers of commitment don't work. Our prayers of desperation and dependence do. "Lord, if you don't change me, I'll always be like this. Lord, I need you to come through my life." And that's why our identity in Christ is so important because what satan knows is where he can defeat us is when we think we got to become better, and we got to work at it. He loves that. Do you know why? Because he knows we can't change.

God knows we can't change, but God knows he can change us. And satan knows that God can change us. And the thing that God wants the most out of any of us is to be dependent upon God. And so, as Jesus Christ gets introduced, the gospel is not just that you get to be saved by grace, the gospel is that you get to grow in grace. And that God is not punishing you or yelling at you or condemning you, when God gives you conviction, it's because that's not who you are, this is who you are, and this is who you need to be. That's why I carry my Bible, and I'll make this available to you this week, it's from Neil T. Anderson's book, Victory Over the Darkness.

It's a couple pages long, front and back. It's just who am I. I've had it for years. I look at it all the time. My first five years of being a believer in Christ, I struggled, because I believed all the lies. I would read the Bible, even after being a believer, and I would say things like this, "I don't even know if I'm saved anymore." Or, how come I can't

change?" Or, "I'm sinning the same sins that I sinned before I was a Christian. I can't change myself. I told the Lord this morning I'd never do that again, and this afternoon, I did the same thing all over. I mean, what's wrong with me?" Here's what was wrong with me, I didn't know my identity.

And so, I started to read through the Word and believing that because Christ is in me, everything that's true of Christ is now true of me, even if it hasn't worked itself out yet. And so, I began to see that I'm a saint, and I'm a holy person. And I'm chosen before the foundation of the world, and I'm dearly loved. And the devil has no power over me, and he can't touch me. And I can approach the throne of grace with freedom and confidence anytime I want. And I've been forgiven all of my sins, and I'm a new creation. And the old things are gone, and behold, the new things are there. And I've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And when I began to walk around like that, everything in my life began to change, because instead of trying to become a better person and change my behaviors, I just said, "God, I can't change me, but I'm going to believe who you say that I am." If you walk around every day as a believer and say, "I know I've been saved by grace, but now I'm going to perform for God. And the devil says I'm lousy, and I am lousy. And the devil says I'm a sinner, and I am a sinner. And the devil says I'm going to sin that again, and I'm going to sin that again. The devil says I'm a horrible husband, and I am. And I'm a horrible wife, and I am. And I'm a bad parent, and I am." You walk around

like that, it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But if you walk around and you hear that lie, you're like, "That's not who I am, I'm God's son and I have royal blood running through my veins. I'm Christ's daughter and He can't love me anymore. And if God is for me, then who could be against me?" I mean, when we say you are loved at the end of the service, it's not just some idea to get you to come back to church, it's true, specifically for those of you who have trusted Christ. You're His beloved son or His daughter. He loves you unconditionally. It's why Christ is so important in our life. He's just as important as the very day we get saved. He's that way every single day.

God's not asking you to change on your own volition, God's asking you to change your volition to allow Him to work in and through you so that He can do the work. God loves you with an unconditional love. We see Israel, we see satan, we see Christ, and then who do we see? We see angelic beings. Notice verse 6 as we get into this, it said, "The woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God so that she would be there and she would be nourished for 1,260 days." We've talked about that. 1,260 days is three and a half years or 42 months with a 30-day month in the Jewish calendar. So, what we're seeing here is this picture of what satan is going to do and how God is going to protect Israel and those saints on the earth at this time as the enemy comes after them.

But look at verse 7, it says, "And there was war in heaven." Ever think about that?

"There was war in heaven," think, "Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon.

The dragon and his angels waged war and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that serpent of old who was called the devil and satan, who deceives the whole world, he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." Amen?

"Then 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 brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.'"

Now, think about those first three words, "And there was war in heaven. There was war in heaven." When you came to church today, I mean, look around, you see people, you see a pastor up in front of you, you see different things in our church. You can touch your skin, you're like, "This is real, this is reality." But what's just as real or even more real is the spiritual warfare that's taking place over us that you can't see with your own eyes. If God were to roll back the curtain, so to speak, so you could see what's going on, you would see spiritual warfare unlike you've ever seen anywhere before.

You may remember the story of Elisha when Elisha was surrounded by all the armies of Aram, and his little servant went out to see what was going on, and he was like,

"Man, we're in big trouble, Elisha. It's me and you, and there's all these armies." And Elisha said, "Those who are with us are greater than those that are with them." And the servant's like, "Bro, it's just you and I, yo." And Elisha prays and says, "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." And all of a sudden, his eyes were open spiritually, and what did he see? He saw chariots of fire and horses and all of God's heavenly hosts and armies surrounding all of their armies.

And then he was like, "Okay, you're right. I feel pretty good." There is more spiritual activity taking place than what you ever know. When we went out to Bandimere Speedway, and we were praying at Bandimere Speedway before we had Easter, I was looking over all the Hills and saying, "Lord, I would love to be able to see what's taking place here right now, and who you've dispatched, and what heavenly hosts have come to help, and what you're going to do." And I would have loved to have seen it, and I didn't see it. I would have loved to have seen the spiritual battle that was taking place over us and with us and through us as 500-plus people were coming down and responding to the gospel.

One day, we'll get to see it live. We'll get to take a look at what was going on. It's awesome. This is why when we pray, praying is one of the most important activities you can do. When we talk about first Tuesday being the most important meeting of the month, it's not just something that a pastor says, because, "Yeah, come to our prayer meeting. We like to pray." No, because I believe this with my whole heart. You get a

church of people that says, "Lord, it's not us, it's you. We're completely dependent upon you. We believe what your word says in John 15, that apart from you, we can do nothing. So, we're just going to humble ourselves and pray and seek your face and ask you to do what could otherwise not be done for your glory because there's hundreds of thousands of people in our city, and millions around the world that need Jesus, and we can't do it. Would you please do it?" And we cry out to Him.

That's where God does all the work, so goes the prayer ministry, so goes the work of God. Why? Because what's taking place in the spiritual realms happens there first before it ever happens here. And satan doesn't want you to know that. He wants you to believe that your relationship with Jesus is just you and Jesus, and show you all your sin, and then get you to try to work on it. I'll just save you a lot of time, that doesn't work. Telling God, "God, I can't change, and I need you to help me change. And Lord, help me understand your Word to change, and bring me around Christian people that can help me change. Lord, I need your help. I'm desperate without you." That will change you.

And as you look back over your shoulder, you'll realize you had nothing to do with the change, it was all Jesus Christ that changed you anyway. Which is why when we get to heaven, nobody brags about how they became better, or how they got saved, or how much better they are. Sometimes people would say, "Is he a good Christian or what kind of Christian is he?" There's only Christians and non-Christians. You're either saved

or you're not saved. You're either dependent upon Christ or you're not. And if you were saved by grace, then you continue to grow in grace because God wants to lavish you with His grace. Satan's lying to you if you're saved and saying, "Hey, you got saved by grace, but now it's the performance plan. You better start doing more of this, and you better start giving more of that, and you better start doing that, you better, you better, you better, you ought to, you should."

It's not the Lord. The Lord is, "If you don't do any of those things, I love you so much. And I couldn't love you any more because my Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross and it is finished and you belong to me." And then you begin to think, "Well, if you're going to love me no matter what, then why would I want to give you everything I have?" Bingo. That's the gospel. That's who Christ is. And what do you see with this angel? We hear about Michael. Well, who's Michael? Who is he? In Jude 9, he's called the archangel. The only other place we see the archangel described is when you're hearing about the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where you hear the cry of the archangel, likely Michael, we don't know for sure.

Who is he? He's a powerful angel, because he's got angels working under him, just like satan's got demonic spirits working under him, fallen angels. And they waged war. And you don't get this from the English, but from the original, you get the fact that satan's really picking a fight with Michael. Because during this whole time, he's able to go to the throne room, and what's he going to do? He's going to accuse you day and night.

That's what he does. All the lies he's telling you, he's also telling your Dad, your Father. But guess what, satan and his angels were not strong enough, there was no longer a place found for them, and so, he was thrown down, that serpent of old, to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

In other words, in this time and space, what is satan doing? He's called the accuser of the brethren. What does he do? He accuses you day and night. Those lies that you hear in your head about how you're no good and you're never going to make it, and maybe God doesn't love you anymore and all that, that's what he's telling God the Father about you right now, day and night, shows you God's grace that he would allow that to happen. There's coming a day where there's no longer going to be a place for him, where he's going to get booted out of heaven. He's going to get booted out of heaven, so that by the time we're there, satan's not coming accusing us anymore.

How many here are oldest children? Anybody here an oldest child? Yeah. You know what a tattletale is? That's all satan is. He likes to tell on you. He likes to go to your Father, your Dad, and say, "Dad... He didn't call Him Dad, he said, "God, you see what he did? You see what he did? He needs to be punished, he needs to be punished, he needs to be punished. She needs to be punished. You see what she did? She calls herself a Christian, she's a gossip. He calls himself a Christian, he is sexually immoral. She calls herself a Christian and she's totally greedy. He calls himself a Christian and he's rude to everybody he meet. See that? Punish him." And here's the answer, "It's

already been taken care of by the blood of my Son. He's not a Christian or she's not a Christian based upon what they did, they're believers based upon who they trust.

Amen?

That's all satan does. He's a tattletale. He stands before God, all day and all night, and accuses you of everything you did wrong, and then he lies to you and said, "I told your Daddy on you and He's mad at you. I told God about what you did, and He don't even like you anymore." It's a lie. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will never perish but have eternal life. And the eternal life is the life of His Son, that indwells you forever and ever, amen, starting right at the moment you believe in Jesus. Isn't that good news? That's good news.

So, there's coming a time in the future, we don't know exactly when it is, maybe it's the beginning of that last three and a half years before the great tribulation where he's going to be cast to the earth, and now he's going to be down on the earth, he's not going to be allowed to talk to the Father or go into heaven anymore. He's not going to be able to enter and exit and do that. And when he gets thrown, this accuser, gets thrown down to the earth, this is what takes place. Notice how they overcame him. Notice how any Christian overcomes the devil. We're going to come back to this first, I'm going to read through the end, but notice how he overcomes the devil.

"They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of

their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." How do you beat the devil? How do you beat the devil? See, he's introducing a fifth character here, not just angelic beings, he's introducing believers. He's introducing you. How can you beat this devil? Because for some of you, you're like, "I can't. I've tried for years, this sin never goes away. I've always been angry, I've always swore, I've always been immoral. I can never be pure. I've tried to give, but I just can't release my money. I can't be generous. I'm just the way I am." No, it's not the way you are.

You've been given a new identity and you're a new creation, and you can be everything that Jesus Christ says that you are, if you'll just by faith believe it and begin to walk into it. So, how do you defeat the devil? He gives us three ways. One is, the blood of Jesus. That's a number one, the a number one. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin." If Jesus Christ didn't shed His blood, you cannot be forgiven. That's why there's no other religion in the world that works, because nobody else gave their blood for you. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him, Jesus, we have redemption through His blood."

1 John 1:7 highlights some of the same things. 1 John 1:7 says it like this, "If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, if we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all of our sin." Matthew 26, Jesus is instituting the Lord's Supper, He said, "This covenant, this is my new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you." In Revelation 7:14, "They're made white with the blood." The only way

you can be cleansed from your sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ. There is no other way. Your biggest problem is your sin, because of your sin, you're going to die, and you're going to face the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory, to hear these words, "Depart from me, you worker of iniquity, I never knew you."

What saves you from that? The blood of Jesus. God loved you so much, He came and He laid out His life for you, He stretched His arms out on Calvary for you, He died for you, He shed His blood for you so that your sin no longer has to be an issue. How do you overcome the devil? With the blood of Jesus. You don't need to talk to the devil, you don't need to bind the devil, the only thing you need to do is resist the devil. You can say out loud, "Lord, I know I'm yours. I know your blood has redeemed me. I know I'm totally cleansed and pure and I'm a new creation. Old things have passed away, and behold, all things have been made new." Why? Because of the blood of Jesus. That's number one. Number two was the word of their testimony.

What's the word of their testimony? It means you're willing to speak what you actually believe. It means that you can testify, "Yeah, this is true of my life, I was dead and I'm alive and Jesus Christ did it." Romans 10:9-10 says, "If we confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in our hearts God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." No matter what comes down your way, if you can testify that Jesus is Lord, and believe that through His blood, you have new life, you're saved. And then notice this third one. This is powerful, it usually gets skipped over, "And they did not love their

life even when faced with death."

Now, it's easy on a Sunday to be like, "That's true, brother. I love Jesus more than life itself." And we probably do sometimes. "But I'm dating somebody and I'd like to get married first. But I just got a new house and I want to enjoy it. But my kids haven't grown up and I'd like to see them get married. But I put this job offer in and it's looking really promising. So, I do love that about my life. And you know what? Our team just got this new player, we can be pretty good this fall, so, I mean, maybe I'll hang on for that." Now, here's what happens, it's the blood of Jesus, the word of your testimony, and you love Him more than you love life itself. And the devil cannot beat you.

It doesn't matter what happens or what comes your way, it's the blood of Jesus, you're testifying that it's Jesus, and you don't care what happens. If the whole church around the world would say, "It's the blood of Jesus, my testimony, and I don't care what you do with me, we're still going to profess Him," this whole world would be changed. John Wesley said, "Give me a hundred men that love nothing but God and hate nothing but sin, and it is finished." See, the challenge that we have is that we can say that in church, but we have a hard time living it out because when things get difficult, we back up. God doesn't want us to back up, he wants us to keep taking kingdom ground for Him.

And here's the truth, I mean, how many know that there's a lot of confusion about

identity out there today? Anybody ever hear about that something? I'm looking at the time because I don't have time to address it, but our world's a bit confused about identity on a lot of things. But here's what I mean to tell you, Christians, we're just as confused about our identity in Christ as the world is about their identity in the world. You are a child of God. You are a son and daughter of the Most High God. You can defeat the devil if you understand that He's forgiven all your sins through His blood, you can testify that Jesus is Lord with your mouth, and you don't care what happens to you, you've got a great testimony.

And in every season of the church where the church does that, and you can look today in the world where the church has been persecuted, the church flourishes. I don't know if you know, I look at our world and I see things that are going on in the world, I'm like, "What in the world is going on? And where's this going to end?" But the darker it gets, the brighter the gospel becomes. And the more you stand up and live for the blood of Jesus in your testimony, you don't fear death. The more the world will know, "Hey, what you guys are gathering about, maybe that's actually real. Maybe that's something I need to investigate." The world doesn't need our testimony about what they're doing wrong, the world needs our testimony about what God's done right. Amen?

And that's what we see here. And we see this all throughout, how God's going to protect believers. "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens," verse 12, "and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you having

great wrath, knowing that he only has a short time." What's he saying? When satan eventually gets booted from heaven, praise God if you're in heaven, woe to you if you're still on the earth, because satan's going to know, "I've only got this much time." He can read his Bible too. Satan knows the Bible better than a lot of you. He knows his time is going to be short, so, he's going to begin to pour out wrath, and what's he going to do?

"And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child." Who is he going to go after first? Israel. I mean, what you've seen in every generation is Israel always gets persecuted. Last century, 6 million Jews died at the hand of Hitler, several more at the hand of Stalin. I mean, you see the Jews. Who's he going to go after? Israel. "And when the dragon saw and persecuted the woman," but notice verse 14, "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman," that's Israel, "so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times, and a half of time, from the presence of the serpent."

What happens? We don't know who this eagle is. The eagle seems to be symbolic to me. Psalm 91 talks about being under the pinions or the feathers of Almighty. That God's going to protect Israel during this last three and a half years in a special way. That as she starts getting attacked by satan, God's going to protect Israel because God has to have a remnant of Jews who are going to enter the millennial Kingdom of

God. And so, that's what He's going to do, He's going to protect them for a time, times, and a half of times. That's three and a half years or 1,260 days, if you're keeping track. Or 42 months.

"And the serpent..." notice what he does, "He poured out water like a river out of his mouth after the woman so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood, but the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth." Now, is that literal? Is that metaphoric? I don't know. It seems to be literal to me. Somehow, it would seem to me that satan, who is the biggest counterfeit, is in some ways going to try to use some sort of flood to scare the Jews, and God's going to be like, "No, I got this." What it also tells me metaphorically is when there's overwhelming things that come against your life, God says, "Oh, I got this." God always takes us through seasons where things seem overwhelming so we realize we can't, but Christ in us, we can.

We're not going to be able to get through this, but with God in us, we can. And that's what we see in this picture, that's what we see. And so, as Israel, as He goes after them, and they go into hiding and God's protecting them, and they're hiding out, serpent's going to try to go after them, going to try to do some sort of flood or do something, but the earth opened its mouth and helped. And notice verse 17, "So the dragon," that's satan or the devil, "was enraged with the woman," he was furious with Israel, "and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the

commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." What's Satan going to do during these last three and a half years? Attack Israel unlike he's ever attacked Israel before.

And when he can't totally get all of Israel, what's he going to do? Go after all the saints, the people that are still on the earth keeping the commandments of God. That's why that will be a time of great tribulation unlike any other time in the history of the world. Why? Because Satan is relentless and he's reckless. Reckless means, "I don't care who I hurt along the way." There was a worship song that came out a couple of years ago talking about the reckless love of God. It's a good song. I like the song. Jesus is not reckless. He's never been reckless. Satan is reckless.

He doesn't care who he hurts, he doesn't care what the outcome is, as long as people are getting hurt with the outcome. And he will continually come after you every single day that you have breath. That's who he is. He's never going to give up. You say, "Well, when do I get a break?" When you meet Jesus. And the more you stand for God, and the more you walk with Him, the more challenging things can become. That's why I don't like it when I hear pastors say, "Just give your life to Jesus and everything will be easy. You'll have more money, you'll have more peace, you'll have more hope." I'm like, "What gospel is that?" What I've found is, I used to think I gave my life to Jesus and I was going to get on the love boat and cruise for a while, only to find out it's a battleship and I'm getting hit from every single direction.

And there's those days, even as a pastor, like, "Why do I put up with this? And why do I do this? And when's this going to let up? And when's this going to be over?" When I meet Jesus. And what satan is always trying to get you to do when you step forward with God is to get you to step back and turn your back. And here's what Jesus says, "No, you stand firm and you just keep walking with me, because it's me and you that's doing the work." And the more that you walk with Christ, and the more that you love God, and the more that you do it His way, the more fulfillment you can have on the inside, the more close intimacy you can have with God, and the more God can do in and through you. Amen?

And so, what we're seeing in Revelation 12 is these three and a half years, learning some of these characters that are taking place. And we see God's purpose for Israel, we see satan's purpose against Israel. We see that Christ is greater than all. We see angelic forces that are going to be warring and doing all sorts of different things on our behalf, which is why prayer is important. And we see that we as believers, that satan's going to come after us too, but greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. And when you step by faith, and you're resolved in your identity, and you're walking with Christ, He will do more and more to glorify His name in and through you than ever before. Amen?

Amen.

Amen. Would you stand with me as we pray? Lord Jesus, we come before your throne right now and we ask you to do your work in and through us. Perhaps you're here today and you recognize, "I don't have a relationship with Jesus. I don't even know what that means. I just know I don't have a relationship with God. What do I do?" Here's what you do, you can pray right where you are and say, "Dear Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm going to die apart from you, but I don't want to. I repent of my sin, and I turn to you. Just come into my life, forgive my sin, and be my Lord." And Lord, for those of us who know you, I pray a prayer of blessing over all of us that we would live out our identity, that we would live out our faith.

That the testimony we have is your blood on Calvary shed for us, the testimony we have that you've done it, and that we would not fear anything including our very own lives that you would get all the glory. Lord, use BRAVE Church as a way to reach this city and this nation and this world with the good news and hope found only in you. We give you all the praise and glory in Jesus' name, amen, and amen. Can we praise God this morning for who He is?