

Heavenly Visions to Encourage Our Faith

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever had a dream that was so vivid and powerful that you were actually relieved when you woke up safe in your bed? Many of us have had dreams that were action-packed, scary, and triggered fight or flight responses. When we woke up, sometimes in a startle, we took a few short breaths, and as we calmed down, we were glad to notice that we were okay. John is having a fantastic vision, but he is not sleeping. Jesus is revealing something to him that can also trigger a response, but for John, that response is relief. He is relieved by this vision because it is a reassurance of who Christ is and what he has done. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will look at the parts of this vision, and hopefully we can be comforted by the fact that, no matter what happens, we worship a God who has it all under control. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part four of our six-part series on the book of Revelation; and we have been having a good time explaining all the things that have happened. We gave some background in the first episode, and we talked about John the person. We had Jeff Weima come in, a professor at Calvin Seminary, to talk about the seven Church letters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then in the third episode, we talked about the beginning of John's visions and the songs he heard in Chapters 4 and 5; the first song an ode to creation: You are worthy, for you created all things; and then the second song, the famous: Worthy is the Lamb, for you redeemed all things. That was the previous episode; now in this fourth episode, we are going to move into the middle part of the book, and we are going to have to skip a lot. There is a lot in this book, and we are only in a six-part series, but we are going to go first to Revelation Chapter 7, and this is what John sees there:

⁹After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

DARRELL DELANEY

¹³Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where do they come from?" ¹⁴I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is quite the vision; and I am sure, for many of us listening to this program, those words of Revelation 7 bring to mind a great classic hymn: *By the Sea of Crystal*. We often sing it at funerals, but at other times, too, because the lyrics of the three stanzas of *By the Sea of Crystal* come right out of Revelation 7 here. So, there is a lot going on here, Darrell. It is not a very long passage, but there is a lot to take in here.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott, it is; and I wanted to start first with the multitude of people that no one can count. We talked about, in an earlier episode...episode three I think it was...where this image of the slain Lamb is on the throne. We have the twenty-four elders around; we have the angels with the eyes all over them and the wings crying: Holy, holy, holy; and then we have this great multitude. So, the number keeps expanding of everyone who is worshipping around the Lamb, who is Christ. So, it is a beautiful thing to see that picture. Remember, this is apocalyptic literature, so this is a symbol of what needs to happen in all creation. We are all created to glorify and honor him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we see that John is very explicit. The people who are ultimately going to be in God's new creation are from every tribe, language, people, nation. He piles up every word he can find in the Greek language to refer to a diversity of people. So, there is great ethnic diversity—racial diversity—everybody that God made in his own image, and that is all people, are going to be there. We had said before, and we are going to note it particularly again in the next episode...in episode five, when we go to Revelation 21...we are going to see that John will see the glory of the nations being brought in. The good things of this world are not going to be scrapped; and so, all the ethnicities with all their distinctive and wonderful characteristics are all going to be part of God's new people.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am so glad to hear you say that, Scott, because I am thinking about the different beautiful things that cultures bring, like baklava and collard greens and pulled pork and jerked chicken and jambalaya and empanadas and fried rice and sushi and Creole and fufu and pad Thai. There are so many different foods, and that is just foods. We are talking about clothing, we are talking about customs, we are talking about languages and dialects; and all of them are going to be around the throne worshipping God. It is a beautiful thing to think about how God is going to bring that stuff; and he is hitting the refresh button on some of the things that have been created by our hand, that he has given us opportunities to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; another interesting thing here is the robes that John sees. They are white robes, and yet, the angel showing John this vision says that they are white robes because they were washed in the blood. It is like, well, wait a minute. Things that get washed in blood don't come out white; they come out red and crimson. These white robes come out of something that shouldn't turn them white, but they do because they are forgiven—they are renewed.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the redemption language that John is going for. Now, just imagine, John is on this island. He has been exiled there because of his faith in Jesus; and they think he is guilty of whatever crime it is when he is persecuted for his faith; so that is a crime against Caesar. So, they consider him guilty as far as Roman government goes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

They put him on this island, but he is justified; he is righteous; and he has been washed in the blood that you just mentioned; and he has hope in Christ because he knows that Christ will acquit him in the days that come after this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; John, too, will have his robe washed in the blood, and it will be shining white when it comes out; and as you just said, Darrell, what a great comfort this is. We have noted elsewhere in this series, the irony that Rome and the Romans authorities...maybe the emperor Domitian...this might have been during the time of Domitian, who persecuted the Church terribly in the First Century. You know, they threw John on the island because they were sick of this Jesus stuff and they wanted to, you know, kind of remove John, you know, from Jesus; and yet, the irony of the island of Patmos for John is that he finds Jesus there; and in a way, he has never really seen Jesus. I mean, if this is John the disciple, he had spent time with Jesus on earth, but seeing the Lamb on the throne and seeing these visions, indeed, had to be just so heartening for him. Rome didn't get the last word here; Jesus and the Lamb on the throne does. So, he sees these saints. They are carrying palm branches. It kind of reminds you of Palm Sunday, maybe, right? Palms of victory in their hands. So, John just had to be so, so very encouraged.

DARRELL DELANEY

I would be encouraged too, because I could see him actually crying while he is writing this, and he is writing where he is going to wipe every tear from our eyes; and I think that is something that we need to hold onto when times get hard in our own lives...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But when we continue, we are going to talk more about what is happening in the book of Revelation. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to dig right back into the book of Revelation, and we are going to jump ahead a few chapters. We were just in Revelation 7 in the first segment of this program; but now, we are going to jump ahead to Chapter 12; and here, Darrell, we have a vivid story of a woman giving birth. This is a very, very interesting take on something that is very, very familiar; and we will talk a little bit more about that after we hear it; but let's just hear these words from Revelation 12. It goes like this:

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of 1,260 days. ⁷Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸But he was not strong enough, and

they lost their place in heaven. ⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

DARRELL DELANEY

There is a lot going on in the passage, like you said, Scott, but I just wanted to allude to the fact that John knows his Bible; and he usually puts something in that alludes to or echoes back to something either he wrote or that it is in the Old Testament or in the scriptures; and I call them Easter eggs because you have to find...when you look in, you find them, and it is a beautiful thing when you find them. So, this passage about the woman who is giving birth and the dragon who is trying to devour echoes back to even Genesis...Genesis 3 actually, where the Word says I (God) will put enmity between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed...the serpent being Satan, the woman being Eve; and this actually has Messianic proportions to it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; in fact, I remember years ago in his regular column in Christianity Today, Philip Yancey...around the December issue of Christianity Today...he said this is the Christmas story you don't read in Luke 2. This is what the birth of Jesus looked like from the heaven's perspective, that Mary gave birth to a child who will rule the nations with an iron scepter, John refers to here. So, this is the Christmas story that you don't sing in a Christmas carol. This is what it looked like from God's perspective. The devil was there to try to devour the Son of God made flesh, born in that manger in Bethlehem, and that scene was, you know, silent night, holy night, you know, all of our twinkly stars above and the cattle are lowing. This is a very, very scary Christmas story because it reminds us of what the stakes were when Jesus was born.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is actually the passage of the nativity that you don't see; and then the part where Lucifer or Satan has swept a third of the stars out of the sky and how they are hurled down. That actually is something that Jesus alludes to in Luke 10, where he says: I saw Satan fall like lightning; and also, in Genesis when the Spirit is hovering over the waters right before creation. I am assuming in that chaos and in that brokenness, that is where Satan has been hurled down to, but you don't have to look that far back to see the brokenness, because when you see war, when you see famine, when you see poverty, when you see racism, that sin there...the enemy is behind that; and that is in our world each and every day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and also, the third of the stars that he sweeps down and also hurls to the earth, we think...again, this is apocalyptic literature; it is very hard to interpret correctly, but a lot of scholars have thought for a long time that that represents the fallen angels...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Maybe some of the angels created by God, these were creatures of God, but who fell...who rebelled along with Lucifer, perhaps long ago. We don't know when, but there is the devil and there are lots of demons and those third of the stars that were hurled to the earth as the dragon's tail swept them there, may represent those spiritual powers. So, that is exactly a reminder of what Jesus said, as you said, in Luke 10, but also Paul's frequent...and other New Testament writers...frequent allusions to that our battle is not against flesh and blood...against the powers...the spiritual powers and principalities and so forth. That is all about what is going on here.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in these next verses that come after this, you see how God deals with Satan and the effects of sin going on. So, picking up in verse 10, it says: Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accused them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹They triumphed over him

by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹²Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹³When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and a half time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

So, bad news! The dragon didn't get the male child, whom we believe is Jesus. He didn't get Mary; but he is after us!

DARRELL DELANEY

So, yes; because he is a sore loser and he knows his time is near, he is going to turn his attention to us. He tried to destroy Jesus; and if you think of scripture, you could think of the crucifixion and death being the spiritual way that Satan tried to destroy Jesus; but then the resurrection happens; so he lost that battle. Now, he is turning his attention to every single believer on earth. Wonder why you are having hard times? Wonder why you are having persecutions? I am not going to blame very single thing on the devil, but I am going to say that there is a spiritual opposition to those who follow Christ, because Christ promised that we would have trouble in this world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you mentioned the resurrection, which is a great parallel here, Darrell. So, we just saw in Revelation 12 the passage where, you know, the dragon is there, mouth wide open, ready to devour the child as soon as the woman gives birth; and he snaps shut his jaws and just gets air. The child has been whisked away safely. So, you know, he tries that; and there is a theory...one of the theories of the atonement is that in the death of Jesus, maybe the devil thought he had another chance because death is it, right? Death is his biggest tool; so once again, at the cross, he snapped his jaws at Jesus, but then on the resurrection he came up empty again. He got away again; and that was the decisive move. So, the devil couldn't stop him from being born and he couldn't keep him dead. Jesus has ruled, and Jesus has won the victory.

Well, coming up in just a moment, we are going to look at another one of John's visions; and as we wrap up the episode, we will see what this all means for our lives. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, this has been the episode with great, fantastic visions in it, and we have been doing our best to try and explain a little bit of what is happening figuratively; and if we really unpacked every single thing in this book, we couldn't do it in six episodes...we really couldn't. That is why we have been encouraging people to read the whole book in its entirety to get the full context of what John is trying to communicate.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we were just in Revelation 12, and suffice it to say that for most of the chapters after that until the last two chapters of 21 and 22, which will be the last two programs in this series, we get depiction after depiction of basically a history-long war between God and evil; and evil is sometimes the dragon, but evil will also be referred to as *Babylon*; and Babylon will be referred to often as a whore—a prostitute; but it is God versus Babylon—the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of this world, and that occupies a lot of this book.

In Revelation 13, which we are not going to look at specifically...Revelation 13 ends with one of the more famous parts of this book, when we are told about the mark of the beast...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are given that famous number: 666; which for fallen people is sort of like tattooed to their forehead as a sign that they are part of, not God's kingdom, but the dragon's kingdom...Babylon's kingdom. So, that is in Chapter 13; and then we can move on to Chapter 14.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, let's pick up right here in the beginning of the chapter. It says: Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. ⁵No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we just said at the end of Chapter 13 there is that symbolic number for evil: 666. One short of the perfect number of 7 in the Bible, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now here we see those who are not part of that have a different thing tattooed to their foreheads. It is the name of the Lamb and of his Father. Again, this is symbolic. We don't anticipate actual tattoos; though there has been so much speculation in history about this. Then we also have this number of 144,000. Clearly, all the other visions in Revelation tell us we aren't supposed to take that number literally...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, John has seen multitudes beyond numbering of those from every tribe and nation and tongue, right? So, the 144,000 is the number of perfection. It is like the twelve tribes of Israel: 12,000 people per... It is just a symbolic number. There are not going to be only 144,000 people in heaven. There have been some religions that have taken off on that and said: Oh, apparently the door really is narrow. There are only 144,000. You better work hard to get in there. No; we take that symbolically as a round number of perfection to stand for everybody who worships the Lamb of God and who will be in the new kingdom.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is kind of an echo again because Jesus says: I have not lost anyone except the one doomed to fulfill scripture; and so, no one who God determines to be saved will be lost. He is batting a thousand when it comes to that. I think the more important thing to focus on is the fact that all of these people are making a public profession of faith. They are singing a new song. I like the verse that says they are singing a song that no one else can sing except the ones who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. I heard an old choir song that said that: I have a song the angels cannot sing. I have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. It is really powerful to see that after the war and all the fallen angels and such, they overcome by the blood of the

Lamb and the word of their testimony; and that is going to be very powerful for them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is a song of great triumph, and it is all focused on the Lamb, because, indeed, it is all by grace alone. This whole book is the climax of the whole Bible and of the whole New Testament; and what we see here are people redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They have those white robes, which we said earlier ironically were washed in the blood, and yet, they came out white. They have endured.

Again, as we have said earlier in this episode and throughout this series, Darrell, John is on a lonely island. He is by himself. He was exiled, but he is not by himself.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God and the Spirit of God is with him; Jesus is with him; and so, he is comforted to know that he will be among that number, even though his life has been disrupted, and even though he may yet lose his life for his faith, as most of the other apostles did, and so many others in the early Church. Nevertheless, on the other side of that worldly loss is great, great victory.

DARRELL DELANEY

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain, and that is Paul writing from Philippians Chapter 1. In this passage, it is important for us to know the context around it that says John is on this island, not because he is a criminal. Even though according to Roman standards, he is a criminal because he broke the law that says Jesus is Lord and not Caesar is Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But he is there because of his faith; he is there because he follows Christ, because he refuses to be ashamed of the Gospel because he shares his faith unapologetically. That is why he is there. In the famous words of a dearly departed congressman, John Lewis, he got himself in some good trouble. Good trouble is what happens when you stand up for righteousness; good trouble is what happens when you stand up for truth; when you do justice, love mercy and walk humbly you will endure that because Christ said that the ones who follow him will be hated by the world, and that is what is happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and as Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount long ago in Matthew's gospel, those who bear the Beatitudes, live upside-down lives. The people who are truly blessed are the ones the world thinks are truly losers, you know; they think they are out of step; but Jesus basically said the more out of step you are with the world, which in Revelation and in these middle chapters of Revelation is symbolized as Babylon...if you are out of step with them, good; because then you will be among those who have had your robes, your soul, your whole life washed in the blood of the Lamb. You will be part of that symbolic number of perfection, that 144,000 who will worship the Lamb forever and ever. John was encouraged; we can be encouraged, too. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study and discuss the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21.

Connect with us now at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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