

We face many dangers today, Christians, but the greatest danger that we face is not the danger of violence, though there are some who have suffered violence because of what they believe. And the greatest danger that we face is not the danger of prison, though there have been some thrown into prison because of what they believe. The greatest danger that we face is the temptation to compromise, to give in under the pressure of the world. And we are tempted to give in, Christians, because we don't want to deal with that pressure. We go along and bend the knee just a little bit so that they'll leave us alone, so that we can live the way that we want to live. If we just do what they ask or just keep quiet, then we'll be just fine. But we must not compromise, Christians! We must not give in. We must hold firm, even when it is so hard for us to do so. And we can do that because we know that God is going to set all things right. God will give us the victory, so that no matter how dark it seems right now, we know what is to come. Our short time of suffering will give way to a joy that will never come to an end. That is the message of the book of Revelation, and especially of our reading for today.

Because in the previous chapter, Christians, in Revelation chapter 13, John paints a very dark picture of the world that we live in. He paints a picture of two great beasts, one coming up from the sea, the other coming up from the land. And the beast coming up out of the sea John describes as being like a leopard with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. This beast is a symbol of worldly authority, of governments which set themselves up against God. And the dragon, we are told, gave his authority to that beast, the dragon being a symbol for Satan. Satan uses worldly powers, he uses worldly authority in his war against the Church. Oh yes, Christians, the beast fights against the Church. He's doing everything that he can to bring the people of God down. And the world follows after the beast and worships it as if it was God. Revelation 13, verse 4, tells us: "They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?'" So what are we supposed to do in the face of that kind of power, in the face of that kind of pressure from the world? Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?

But the second beast, we are told, comes up out of the land, and John describes this beast as having two horns like a lamb, but speaking like a dragon. He has two horns because he wants to look like Jesus, who is the Lamb of God, but he speaks like a dragon. He speaks like Satan. This beast is a symbol of false religion, especially churches claiming to be Christian, but turning away from God. They speak lies in his name, trying to deceive the nations and trying to deceive the Church. And the second beast serves the first. It wants to make the world follow after the first beast, to fall down before it and worship it, especially the Church of God. What can we do against that kind of pressure? Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?

In the face of such power, Christians, there is always the temptation to compromise, to give in just a little bit so that the world will leave us alone. In John's day, that temptation went like this. They said, "Say that Caesar is Lord. Say that the emperor is a god, and we will leave you alone. You don't have to say that he's the only god. You don't even have to do all that much. All you need to do is say that Caesar is a god, and we'll leave you alone. You can be the Christians you want to be after you do this one little thing." That was very great pressure that Christians had to deal with in John's time.

But our temptation to compromise comes in other ways. We are tempted to compromise and say that the Bible is wrong on certain points. Just say that the Bible is wrong about this one little thing, the world says. Say that the world is right, and we'll leave you alone. You can be the Christians you want to be. All you have to do is soften it up, make it say something other than what it clearly says, and you'll be fine. Everything will go well for you. Or we may be tempted to compromise with not speaking at all. The world says, just be quiet! Don't say anything. We don't want to hear what the Bible says about this or that. So just be quiet, leave it alone, and we'll leave you alone. You can be the Christians that you want to be. And it is so easy, Christians, to give in to that pressure, to give in to that temptation. All it takes is one little thing, and all the pressure of the world will be gone.

But Christians, this is not a time for compromise. This is not a time for being quiet or going along or giving in. It is a time for us to speak up, no matter what the cost may be. A time to speak for the truth, even if it hurts us to do so. Because honestly, Christians, the world is never going to leave you alone. Yeah, they might ignore you for now, but they'll come back, and they'll pick at something else to try to get you to compromise. You gave in on this, so why not this? You didn't say anything back then, so why are you saying something now? You went along with it before, so go along with it now. The world will keep picking at us. The world will never leave us alone. So it is not a time for us to hide. It is a time to be bold for the truth of God. And we can be bold, Christians, because we know that the victory is ours through Jesus Christ. And our time of suffering will come to an end. And the world which tries so hard to get us to compromise, to give up on the truth of God's Word, will be judged for their sins.

This is the message that the three angels in our reading bring to us today. Because we see that first angel going through the sky, proclaiming a great message to all people: worship God, and give him glory! Fear him who made heaven and earth, because his judgment is coming! And when God judges the world, he will judge the world in righteousness. Every knee will bow before him. And all those who want us to compromise, who try to get us to go the way of the world and turn away from God, will fall. So worship the Lord who made all things. Worship the Lord who is greater than the world, and give him glory, because he is the one you should fear. He is the one you must follow. Listen to him alone!

And the second angel which follows the first brings another message: Babylon the great is fallen! Babylon being a symbol of the second beast, the symbol of the world which tries to get us to go astray, false religion which tries to lead us into sin. Babylon leads the nations away from God, but Babylon will fall. We know that. It is certain, because it says it twice: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" It will happen. So why would we listen to what it has to say? Why would we compromise with those who deny the truth? Listen to God to whom victory belongs, and follow him without wavering.

And the third angel which follows the second warns us, Christians, against the danger of compromising with the world. Because the third angel shows us the judgment that waits for the beast and those who follow after it. He shows us that God's wrath will be poured out upon those who reject him and turn away from him. And if we compromise, Christians, we run the risk of falling under the same judgment. So let us not compromise! Let us not give in and be like them. Even if it costs us something to follow after God, let us pay that cost! Because compromising

with the world is never worth it. It is easy now, but it costs so much in the end. This is why John says in verse 12 of our reading: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." Hold on, Christians. Keep God's commandments. Believe in Jesus, because your time of suffering will soon come to an end.

But remember that your suffering will not be in vain, Christians. Verse 13 of our reading says: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'" Blessed indeed are those who suffer as Christians in this life. Blessed indeed because their suffering will come to an end. God will give them a peace which will never end. Blessed indeed because their deeds follow them. God remembers the things that we suffer for him. So every time when we spoke the truth and it costs us a friend, God remembers what we have done. Every time holding on to God meant that our lives became that much harder, God remembers what we have done. And God will remember it also in eternity, Christians. What we do for God follows after us, to the everlasting glory of God, even as all the things that we suffer now come to an end. So follow after God, whatever the cost may be, because God has given you the victory through Jesus Christ, his Son.

And as one last example, Christians, especially on this Reformation Day, let us remember those who have gone before us, those who did not compromise, even when it cost them so much to do so. I want you to especially think of the Lutheran princes who were at the city of Augsburg, Germany, on June 25, 1530. Because the Holy Roman Emperor wanted them to compromise. He wanted them to bend the knee. Be quiet, he said. Stop your preaching! Stop what you're doing! Come back to the authority of Rome, and we'll leave you alone. Everything will be just fine if you do. But the princes didn't do it. They stood up to the emperor and gave him the document that we call the Augsburg Confession, something that we as Lutherans still hold on to today. They gave that confession knowing that it was going to cause trouble. They gave that confession knowing that a war was going to result because of it. And it did. A war broke out in Germany because of it, and many people died for their faith. But they did not compromise. They did not give in. They spoke the truth, even when it costs them so much. So may we on this Reformation Day and in all days to come, Christians, follow in their footsteps. May we not give in. May we fight the good fight of faith. May we hold onto the truth and never compromise, because the victory is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you know all the things that we suffer in this life for your sake. Help us always to hold on to the truth, so that we may stay close to you, to your everlasting glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.