

SERMON 4

Beauty and the Beast: The True Story

(Revelation 12:17)

INTRODUCTION

The popular children's story *Beauty and the Beast* presents the fantastic story of a prince who, because of a spell, was turned into a monster. His enchantment would only end when someone could love him as he was; that finally happened when a cute villager came to her castle to look for her lost father. The story ends when the spell is broken and the young people get married and are very happy, as all the stories end.

Revelation presents us with an impressive story: the true story of Beauty and the Beast. In this story the original



the beast reaches its state not because of a spell, but as a result of its disobedience to God; and does not fall in love with the protagonist but pursues her for selfish purposes. The ending is happy not because there is marriage, but because beauty triumphs over the beast.

DEVELOPMENT

Please join me in Revelation chapter 12 and let's read the first three verses:

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. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

In Revelation, chapter 12, two symbols stand out: the woman and the dragon. It is interesting to see that both the woman and the dragon are mentioned eight times throughout the entire chapter. Remember who the dragon is? In our previous message we identified him as Satan, the ancient serpent (Revelation 12:9).

Now, I would like you to understand that Satan works through gadgets. Therefore, the dragon is also a symbol of all power that opposes God's work and makes war against him. But what does woman symbolize?

Before answering this question, let me quickly show you a simple rule of biblical interpretation that will help you understand the book of Revelation. Are you ready? This rule says: *The Bible is its own interpreter.*

To interpret the Bible the only thing you need is the Bible itself, so it explains itself! Similarly, to understand prophetic symbols all they have to do is research the Bible itself. With this in mind I invite

you to read a few verses that explain the symbol of the woman:

- *Husbands, love your **wives**, just as Christ loved the **church** and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water by the word (Ephesians 5:25-26).*
- *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a **pure virgin to Him** (2 Corinthians 11:2).*

A pure woman, as it appears in Revelation 12, represents God's people or the true church. Therefore, the drama we see in this chapter is Satan's war against God's people or the church.

The church? Does Revelation speak of the True Church? That's right, dear young people, and I think it is of the utmost importance to stop here to study the subject of the church, as presented in the Bible and especially the book of Revelation.

When we talk about the church, the first thing we must ask ourselves is: Does God have a church on earth? The answer to this question is found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verses 17 and 18:

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you

*by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build **my church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Did you notice it? God has a church and calls it *my church*, but in the world today there are more than 30,000 Christian denominations and they all claim to be the “church of God.” And how can we know which one is true?

Revelation 12 reveals at least five characteristics that make it possible to identify the true church. Do you follow me? Let’s evaluate each of these features separately:

FEATURE #1: THE TRUE CHURCH BELIEVES IN THE GOSPEL

Revelation 12:1 presents the woman as “clothed with the sun.” What does this mean? Remember the rule of biblical interpretation? The Bible is its own interpreter! Read with me Malachi 4:2: “But for you, who fear my name, the *sun of righteousness* will be born, and, in its wings, it will bring salvation. You will go out and jump like calves from the herd.”

The true church accepts that salvation is solely and exclusively by grace (Ephesians 2:5-8). It also believes

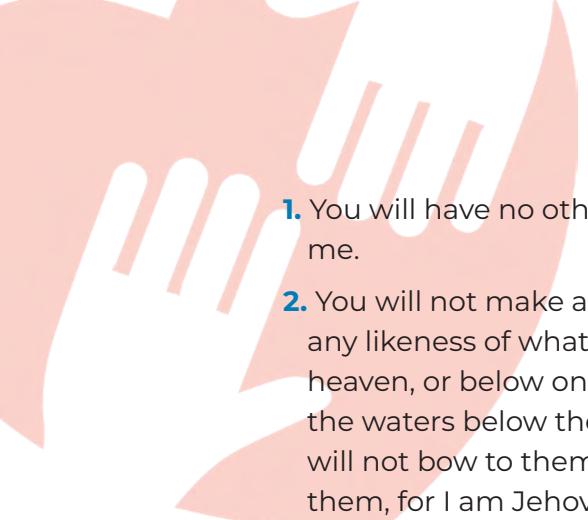
that forgiveness is received not by good work, but by faith. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

CHARACTERISTIC #2: THE TRUE CHURCH LIVES THE HOPE OF THE SECOND ADVENT

Revelation 12:2 presents the woman with “labor pains” and being in the “anguish of childbirth.” Similarly, Matthew 24:8 evokes the same image of the “pains of childbirth” to speak of the signs that announce the soon return of Jesus Christ; that is, that the pains of childbirth speak of the prompt appearance of the child. In other words, the true church lives in the expectant waiting for its Savior.

CHARACTERISTIC #3: THE TRUE CHURCH IS OBEDIENT TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

Revelation 12:17 says that the offspring of the Woman are characterized by *keeping the commandments of God*. The true church is obedient to God’s commandments! But to which commandments? To the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20, verse 1-17:

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1. You will have no other gods before me.
 2. You will not make an image or any likeness of what is above in heaven, or below on earth, or in the waters below the earth. You will not bow to them or honor them, for I am Jehovah, your God.
 3. You will not take the name of Jehovah, your God, in vain, for he will not give for innocent Jehovah who takes his name in vain.
 4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Six days you will work and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for Jehovah, your God.
 5. Honor your father and mother, that your days may be extended in the land that Jehovah, your God, gives you.
 6. You will not kill.
 7. You will not commit adultery.
 8. You won't steal.
 9. You will not say false testimony against your neighbor.
 10. You shall not covet the house of your neighbor: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything of your neighbor.

CHARACTERISTIC #4: THE TRUE CHURCH BELIEVES IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

In the same verse 17 of Revelation chapter 12 we are told that the true church has the “testimony of Jesus.” Additionally, in Revelation 19:10 the testimony of Jesus is the “spirit of prophecy” or the “gift of prophecy.”

FEATURE 5: THE TRUE CHURCH IS A TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

The woman in Revelation 12 has a “crown of 12 stars” (Revelation 12:1) and the crown in the Bible is a symbol of victory (Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:8).

Dear young men and women, the Seventh-day Adventist Church possesses the characteristics that identify the true people of God:

- As a church we believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that outside of it there is no salvation.
- The “Adventist” denomination testifies to the hope we have in the advent of Jesus Christ a second time.
- We hold that the Ten Commandments remain in full force and are the test of Christian character.

- We believe in the gift of prophecy and that it was manifested in the ministry of Mrs. Ellen White. Her writings are a source of counsel, instruction, and correction for the church, and they clearly state that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and all experience must be evaluated.
- We trust that in Christ we are “more than conquerors” and that thanks to his life, death and resurrection victory has been assured.

Revelation 12:17 clearly says that the dragon is filled with anger against the church, that is, that Satan will seek by all means to destroy God’s people. But we should not fear because Jesus Christ is the keeper of the church, and He has never lost a battle.

CONCLUSION

Dear young people, *God has a church that believes in Jesus as its only savior and lives obediently to his principles.* Some time ago a young woman came to one of our congregations who for years had been struggling with depression and anxiety. She had very few friends and spent most of her free time locked in her apartment; she didn’t go out anywhere except to work and the nearest shop to buy beers and cigarettes. Her life, as

she herself recounts, had no meaning or purpose; solitude was her only company.

One day she received, through a co-worker, the invitation to attend one of our church services. At first, she made some excuses, but her colleague’s insistence was so great that she agreed to visit the church “only for once, to try.”

Finally, she attended the Sabbath service and spent much of the day sharing with us. She enjoyed a delicious lunch, and, in the afternoon, she went out with a group of believers to deliver food to people in need. In her own words, “that day was very special”; she had not really enjoyed such a welcoming atmosphere before, and so she did return the following week.

This time the young people invited her to a social activity in one of their homes. She was willing to go and realized that Christians enjoy life in a healthy way, without alcohol or drugs. She said, “I couldn’t believe what was going on and felt accepted and valued.”

Weekly she received text messages with motivating verses from the Bible. A group of sisters included her in a special prayer line; she had no time to feel alone. Six months after her first visit she asked to be baptized. Before her baptism she told her testimony and said that the love shown to her by children, youth

and adults had helped her overcome loneliness.

Today she is completely free, she abandoned the vices of tobacco and alcohol, but above all things, she enjoys a special relationship with God and with others.

If you are not yet part of the church, I invite you to join it as soon as possible!

REFLECTION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1.** What does the woman described in Revelation 12 represent?
- 2.** What is the main rule we should consider when studying the Bible?
- 3.** Discuss the five characteristics of the church according to Revelation 12.
- 4.** Why do we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church possesses the characteristics of God's true people?
- 5.** What is the main reason we believe the church will succeed?

