

Revelation 12: 13-17; "The Two Wings of a Great Eagle", Sermon # 87 in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 13, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The Dragon of our text is the pictorial representation of Satan's great strategies against the advance of Christ's kingdom in all 3 of the major time periods of Church History which precede the Millennium. The Millennium, I have told you, is the 4th great time period in Church history, the time when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." It will be a time when spiritually speaking, "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High." (Daniel 7: 27) It is then that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." (Daniel 7: 18) The Millennium will not be the time period of the New Heavens and Earth, for that will follow the personal, visible return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The New Heavens and New Earth will follow the Day of Judgment when in front of the eyes of all of His saints, our Lord shall purify the earth with fire. The earth and all its works shall be burned up and all the effects of sin upon the creation will be done away with and then our Lord shall speak the New Heavens and the New Earth into existence, a world totally without sin, fit for a people without sin to live in. But the Millennium will be the spiritual reign of the saints upon the earth, the gospel conquering among the nations of the world. "A judgment will be made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time will come for the saints to possess the kingdom." (Daniel 7: 22) It will begin after the downfall of the Antichristian powers, those powers which have plagued the Church of Jesus Christ for so long. In the Millennium the Dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan will be bound. But let us understand that his binding will not mean an end to sin in the world. It will mean that Satan's ability to deceive the nations through his organized oppositions of counterfeit Christianity, and Mohammedanism, and Paganism will be revealed for what they are to the world. They are deceptions which keep them from perceiving the glory of our Christ. But during that time period Satan will be prevented by our Lord Jesus Christ, our Michael, from continuing to deceive the nations of the world through that means. It will not mean that Satan's activity will completely cease. It will not mean that the temptations of the World or the Flesh will cease. No, these spiritual

battles will still be fought by the people of God through the Millennial time period. It will still be a time period of a mixture of sin and righteousness. But righteousness will prevail in a general sense and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

But today we must turn aside from that glorious time, and go back and look at the Dragon's hatred of the Church and all those who are her children. For this is what is being shown to us in the verses that I read to you from Chapter 12. In verse 7 we saw in a previous sermon that there was war in heaven. There was a great spiritual conflict that took place in the heavenly places, in regard to who would rule over the Church. The Devil would rule over the church in a persecuting, killing way in the first time period of Church history. He would do so by persecuting and putting to death those faithful Christians who would not submit to the edicts of the Emperors to worship them, or to worship false gods. We saw that Satan was cast out of this "heaven" when the Emperor Constantine put an end to the widespread persecution of the true Church of Jesus Christ and linked Church and State together for a short-lived victory over this awful strategy of the Evil One. But having been cast down to the earth, the Devil, who deceives the whole world, moved the dragon to persecute the true Church in a more subtle way. Satan would rule over the church in the second time period of Church history in the Western part of the Roman Empire, by introducing all kinds of destructive heresies and false doctrines into the church. We saw the introduction of Arianism, and Pelagianism, and we observed that roughly a third of the "stars", the pastors of the churches of those days, were "thrown to the earth". That is, they were deceived by these heresies and errors and they tried to establish them as true Christianity to the churches that they pastored. We saw that Satan was kicked out of this heaven, of ruling over the Church by false doctrine through some of the councils of the Church sitting in judgment upon these heresies. There were many true churches representing the one True Church of Jesus Christ, but there was a weakening and declension away from preaching and teaching the Word of God and a turning toward the edicts of popes and bishops to decide in what ways God would be worshiped. Many practices which were not commanded in the Word of God sprang up in the visible Church in this time period. Two of these heresies were the development of the sacrifice of the Mass and the worship of Mary. More and more, the Christian religion came to be viewed as sacramental and the doctrine of Justification by faith alone sank into oblivion. It is this point in Church history, the beginning of the 3rd time period of Church history, from 756 A.D. forward to the Reformation that the deep darkness of Satan's plans came to full fruition.

He would combine the strategies of the 1st and 2nd time periods of Church history. He would persecute the true Church of Jesus Christ by the means of Popes who would act as Emperors over the visible church and they would flood the church with false doctrine and false practice and thus destroy the souls of many. True Christians, more and more had to leave the established churches if they wanted to worship God in spirit and truth. So what I want to do this afternoon, with the remainder of our time, is to set before you what our God's response was to this ultimate strategy of Satan's.

God's Response to Satan's ultimate strategy of persecution and deception was to give to the Woman two wings of a great eagle.

(Verse 14)

"But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent." This is truly an amazing picture that is given to us to contemplate. I think that it is hard for us to comprehend in our day how terribly difficult it became in the 8th to the 16th Centuries for those who were true Christians to be able to worship and serve the Living God. I want to speak to you about the Waldenses for a few moments, because I think that it was in these dear Christian people who separated themselves from the church of Rome, that the gospel and God's witness for the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon the earth, was preserved and nourished for many centuries. I am quoting from David Benedict's History of the Baptists, "Dr. Allis, in his history of the churches of Piedmont gives this account of the origin of the Waldenses: That for three hundred years or more, the bishop of Rome attempted to subjugate the church of Milan, planted by one of the disciples; insomuch, that the bishop and the people, rather than own their jurisdiction, retired to the valleys of Lucerne and Angrogne; and thence were called Vallenses, Wallenses, or the People of the Valleys." "President Edwards, as quoted by Mr. Merrill in his Miniature History of the Baptists, has the following observations respecting these ancient witnesses for the truth; 'It is supposed that these people first betook themselves to this desert, secret place among the mountains, to hide themselves from the severity of the heathen persecutions, which were before Constantine the Great, and thus the woman fled into the wilderness from the face of the serpent, as related in Revelation.'" It would take me too long to relate to you all the persecutions of this people from Claude of Turin in 815 all the way down to the late 1600s. Suffice it to say that many of these people lived in the valleys of the Piedmont between Italy and France. They took their stand against the Romish doctrine and practice and they became hated by the

Popes and the Catholic Church hierarchy because they exposed the error of that false church. There were not only persecutions instigated against them but actual attacks and wars waged for their extermination. It has been estimated that between the years 1160 and 1530 that there were 800,000 people who made profession of being Waldenses, and this in spite of the persecutions that came to them.

But in our text we find God's response to their predicament. The church of that day hidden in the valleys and in the mountains was seen by God in all of their desire to follow Jesus Christ and to have a pure worship even though surrounded by and hounded by their persecutors. "The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place." What does this mean? Who does the great eagle represent? Well commentators have a number of answers on this, and I will not take the time to list them for you. But after having thought about it awhile, I came to the conclusion that the great eagle could represent no one but God Himself. I want to open this up for you a little, so turn with me to Exodus Chapter 19 and verse 4. Here we find God speaking to Moses and giving him words to say to the house of Jacob. He says, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself." "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." "And you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God is picturing for Moses and the people, what He was to them, and what He did for them. He bore them on eagle's wings out of Egypt. He brought them out from under their oppressions. He freed them from their slavery. And He brought them out of Egypt and into the wilderness so that they might worship Him, and that He might show them His wonders and how much He loved and cared for them as His covenant people. This is the very thing that He did also for the Waldenses and the Albigenses and many other people during that time period. He would not let them reside under the tyranny of the Pope. He would provide for them in the Wilderness. He would feed them and nourish them and teach them and help them as the Eagle does with its young.

Turn over with me to Deuteronomy 32, and verse 7. Moses is speaking to the children of Israel his swan song. And he tells them before he leaves them for the final time, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations." "Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you: When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel." "For the Lord's

portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance." "He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of his eye." "As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over it young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him." "He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; and you drank wine, the blood of grapes." Now God did all of these wonders for the children of Israel, not because they were great and holy men. He did it because He was, and He is, the faithful, loving, covenant keeping God." He found them in a wasteland, a howling wilderness, and He encircled him, He instructed him, and He kept him as the apple of His eye. This is what God does for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, for everyone who wants to do His will and prove it to be so, even to the point of being obedient when it means that you will suffer for doing so. These Waldenses knew that it was going to be difficult going against the stream of their day; not bowing to the Pope's authority; being despised and disapproved and hated by many people. But God would give them the two wings of the eagle. These wings are shown to us in this text in Deuteronomy 32. God took them up spiritually and He carried them. And He also led them and He provided for them in every way that He knew that they would need. I think that it will be very interesting to interview these dear people when we are in the days of eternity. They will tell you themselves how God carried them on Eagle's wings. Some of them suffered cruel deaths. But I am quite sure that God gave them great grace to match their sufferings and their torments. "So the Lord alone led them, and their was no foreign god with Jacob."

Sometimes it is better this way, when God deems it so. Better to have God than the approval of the World. Better to have God alone with all the spiritual blessings that Christ brings and that He gives, so that you will be born on Eagle's wings all the way through this life to the next. With God, you will "ride the heights of the earth, even though no worldly person can see how you can find any comforts or any satisfaction in this life, and they will try to point this fact out to you. You can say, "I have honey coming to me from the Rock of Christ." "I have the oil of the Holy Spirit coming from the flinty Rock of identifying with Christ's sufferings." "I have the fat of being one of the lambs under the Chief Shepherd who has died for me. "He cares for me enough that I am kept by Him as the apple of His eye." "I have

fed on the choicest wheat and I drink the blood of grapes in the sufferings of my Savior for me, and now I am willing to suffer for Him." He will carry me on His wings above the turmoils, above my sufferings, and bring me all the way to heaven to be with Him when my work is done." This is God's response to Satan's greatest plans, to Satan's ultimate strategy of persecution and deception. It was to give the woman the two wings of the great eagle. Christ gives to you of Himself, when you trust in Him. He shows you His power to carry you when you cannot make it, when you are surrounded by those who will not worship God in accordance with the truth of His blessed Word, and who will impose that false worship upon them. Let us look to our God to carry us through all of our trials and tribulations all the way to glory.