

Stories: Testifying to Life in the Face of Death
Sermon 1-14-18
By Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Revelation 12:10-12

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.

¹²Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

Message:

We’re beginning a new series today on Stories. When we look at the gospel, one of Jesus’ most effective tools was his ability to tell stories. Or you may know them as parables. And each parable has multiple lessons built into the story. Why did Jesus use Stories? Why didn’t he just use poems or always talk in intellectual terms? Why didn’t he always speak scripture from the Old Testament? Or give his latest interpretation of the scriptures? Because he knew that a story is much more easily heard and understood. In a story you can convey not just intellectual thoughts, but feelings and actions. You can identify yourself with each character in that story. As the story is told, you try to envision yourself in that story. A story draws us in and opens us up. It helps us see things that we may not normally see if it were merely an intellectual proposition. Or told to us plainly. Why do you think we like movies and TV shows in our culture? Why do you think we like reading novels? Stories have a major impact on us. They cause us to laugh or to cry. They cause us to be envious or proud. They cause us to be sad or to feel love. Why do these stories impact us so profoundly? Because their story is our story. For the next couple of weeks we’re going to explore the stories of your lives. How does your story impact another’s story? How can your story influence another story? What story needs to be discovered that hasn’t been uncovered? What story hasn’t been uncovered that needs to be told?

In our passage today, a story is being told. Will it happen? Has it happened? Is it happening now? I have no idea. But John of Patmos is trying to tell us a story. He is trying to convey a truth or a number of truths to us. And to

understand our passage deeper we have to understand the greater context. In the beginning of Revelations 12 the stage is set for a battle. A woman who is about to give birth to a child is in heaven. And then a Dragon with seven heads also appears in heaven ready to "...devour her child as soon as it was born." A child is born "...who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron." Then God takes the child to protect it. The woman flees into the wilderness. The Dragon (AKA...the Devil) battles the arch-angel, Michael, and his angels. And the angels knock the dragon to the earth. Quite an epic story. Sounds like a movie in the making. And then this is where our passage comes in. Michael gives us a proclamation song. A declaration. A victory cry. "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser [The Devil] of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death." "...they did not cling to life even in the face of death." What life is Michael talking about? I think Michael is talking about clinging to life in the physical sense. Because if you look at just this one verse there is a contrast. The blood of the lamb conquers. And what happens when we are "re-born"? We choose new life in the lamb. We choose new life in Jesus Christ. So life in Jesus Christ conquers AND it testifies. "...by the word of their testimony." Because these angels have life in the lamb and testify to THAT life, they need not cling to the life in the physical. So that's how they can meet death head-on because they know that there is life in Jesus Christ that can withstand the physical trials and challenges.

While this passage is talking about death in the physical sense, how or where else do we experience death? In general, I think of things that are ending. When a child graduates high school, it is a bittersweet occasion for parents usually. Graduation is a marker of the end or death of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. For a college student, it's a similar experience. Graduation from college marks the end or death of the college experience and the beginning of work-life. It's a new stage. Or maybe for some of us it might be when we switch jobs. There is an end or death of one job and the beginning of something new. Or for those of you who are retired, when you retired it was the death of being part of the work force, but embracing the activities of retirement or resting.

When we see death on the horizon, each of us reacts differently. Some of us decide to fight tooth-and-nail. We will do everything in our power to make something or someone survive. We don't want it to die. So we're going to make sure it doesn't die. Think of the rising costs of pet care and the rising interest in pet insurance. I know Christine used to have a co-worker who spent her entire pension for corrective surgery for her dog who eventually died. I'm not saying you shouldn't do these things to keep something living, I'm just saying that some of us

choose to fight when faced with death. Some of us choose to also, run. We ignore the reality that death is before us. We see the illness, but we ignore the illness. We seek every possible way to keep something or someone going, even though we may know that death is the eventuality. The common case that I've seen is when a loved one is brain dead and the only thing keeping them alive is machines, but the family members deny that their loved one is dying or is dead and keep asking the medical professionals to do more. There is blood flowing in the person, but no brain function. No energy. No communication between the synapses in the brain. Or in a less physical sense, to ignore that something like, childhood, is coming to an end for your daughter or son, but continuing to treat them like a child even after graduation. Denying the reality of their adulthood. The last response in the face of death is acceptance. And I think this is the hardest one. You know that something or someone is going to eventually die. Everything has a life cycle. Cars have life cycles. Houses and buildings have life cycles. Pets have life cycles. People have life cycles. Nothing lives forever. So you accept that reality. And if you accept this eventuality and reality, then what?

This is where our passage comes in. Why didn't the angels cling to life when faced with death? Because they knew that their physical life was not the end. They knew that they had the everlasting life. They knew that they had the Alpha and Omega on their side. They knew that the great "I AM" was with them. They knew that if the lamb of God was not held back by death, then neither would they. THEY did not conquer the Dragon with their might and power. How did they conquer the Dragon? "...by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony..." The only way to face death in this world is to know that you have life in Jesus Christ. And not to just know that you have that life, but to testify to that life. That life becomes more real when we testify. We take ownership over life in Christ. That even when things seem impossible and you may even know that death is in sight, that your Jesus, my Jesus, will live on. And not just stay alive in the barely stay living sense. Jesus lives on in might and power. If death did not scare Jesus, then it should not scare us. Because we know we will live on Jesus Christ. We will be with the everlasting life. We will be with the great "I AM."

When these angels fought this Dragon, I don't imagine a wimpy battle. I imagine something with might and power. Something majestic. Something that is beyond our imagination. When I hear the testimony, I think of loud sounds and them just shouting and praising Jesus' name. This is no small battle. This is Jesus coming in all of his might and glory among evil.

Even after our passage we see the power of this testimony. ¹³So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴But the woman was given the two wings of the

great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. ¹⁶But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. ¹⁷Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.” The dragon doesn’t know what its in for. Because if the angels are any example of what happens when evil tries to vanquish those who testify, the power of their testimony will keep evil at bay. Because when we have Jesus on our side, all things are possible.

As we live on this earth, I see a lot of people who feel defeated. I see people in Providence Church who feel defeated. Who feel ashamed. I see people who feel like they failed. And that’s our humanity speaking. That’s us thinking that what we do or don’t do is going to cure our shame. Is going to cure our ailments. Is going to cure our hurt. Nothing you do is going to cure any of these things, because there is someone who already did it. There is someone who has already paid the price. There is someone who already did the work. And that is our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus just wants to hold you. Like a mother or father holding their child. Jesus wants to hold you. Jesus wants to embrace you. Jesus wants to protect you. Jesus wants cloak you in His love and righteousness. For you to know in the deepest parts of your being that you are first and foremost deeply loved. Jesus wants you to know that if you tap into His life. If you embrace His mercy and grace. If you can accept His gifts of love and life, He will cure your soul. Because when we can tap into and stay connected to the life of Jesus, we can repel evil. We can testify that Jesus is truly alive and active. Hear these words from Isaiah 40:29-31, “²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

If you truly know Jesus Christ, you have a story. Maybe it’s happening now. Maybe it happened years ago. But you have a story. And your story is worth sharing. It’s worth telling. If you are still connected to the vitality and life in Jesus Christ, then you WANT to testify. This isn’t a should or ought situation. This isn’t a matter of obedience. This is a matter of knowing that you are connected to the river of life in Jesus Christ. That having relationship of vitality with Jesus Christ isn’t something that just happened in the past. But it is something that is alive, real and continually transforming. Evil wants you to give up. The best gift we can give the evil one is to stay passive. Is to choose not to connect with the

true life giver. We can choose to do nothing. To ignore that death is a reality. And it does exist. And that would be a shame. Because that would give all the power to the devil. He gets to surprise us with death. But if we know that there is life after death. That there is life in Jesus Christ, then, shouldn't that stir us to testify of life in the here and now.

Earlier in Revelations in the message to Laodicea, God says, "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." God is trying to get the people of Laodicea to wake up. He's saying, "Stop doing things half-hearted." Either be fully-in or fully-out. None of this half-way stuff. It makes Him want to spit it out. So do you know Jesus or don't you? I ask that question objectively, not critically. Do you know Jesus or don't you?

Because those who are tapped into the life of Jesus Christ, there is an energy in the air. There is buzz. People are excited and enthusiastic about Jesus. Each time they are around other believers, they get excited to talk about their faith and relationship with Jesus. Service opportunities are less about doing what they're supposed to do, but what they hunger to do. They thirst for more of Jesus. They want others to know of the life that they have Him. They want people to know that freedom and life that they have found in Jesus. They understand the depth of Christ's saving grace.

Providence Church, I want to call you to life. I want to call you to testify to life. I know that death can scare you. I know that the sight of death can make us want to give up. I believe that God wants to pour life into you so that you can testify of God's mighty work in you. You may have experienced it before. And I want you to testify to that experience. But I also want you to experience the power of Jesus Christ and His life again. Today. Now. So that you can testify in the face of evil that death is not the end. But only the beginning of something new and powerful. That God will have the last word. And the blood of the lamb will reign over all. That's why Providence Church, over the next year, I am going to challenge each of you to share your testimony with us in worship. To testify of Christ's transforming work in your life. You can do this alone. You can do this by interview style with me. You can do this by video recording. But the questions you see in the "Message Reflections" are the questions you need to answer as you form your testimony. You each have a story. What moments in your life testify to the life in Jesus Christ? The angels testified to the blood of the lamb as they casted the dragon, the devil, to the earth. The woman's children testified to the commandments of God and of Jesus even Dragon threatened to kill them. Will you testify to the life that you have in Jesus Christ? To close, I'm going to show a music video by Big Daddy Weave called, "My Story." Listen carefully to the lyrics and start to reflect on moments in your life that you can testify to the life in

Jesus Christ. (Play video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TKAN-nAsu8>)
We all have a story. And I hope we all believe in Jesus Christ. Let's get
connected or reconnected to the life of Jesus Christ and testify of the power of God
in our lives. Amen.