



gracefellowship

Revelation

March 3, 2019

Witnesses of Jesus' Word and Kingdom

:: Revelation 10-11

The past few weeks we have been looking at the judgments of God poured out on the earth through the breaking of 7 seals on the Scroll of God and through 7 trumpets that introduce violent plagues and demonic activity on the earth. In each of these judgments so far we have seen a measure of God's justice poured out against sin, but also a measure of His mercy not to destroy everything and everyone. The purpose of these judgments seems to be in part to show people the power of God in order to draw them to Him for salvation. He is literally willing to do whatever it takes to get people's attention while also bringing an end to the reign of Satan and sin in order to establish His Kingdom on the earth and return everything to its original state.

The question we will address today is this:

The Question: What is the role of the people of God in the period known as the tribulation?

John is going to once again back up and show us things which will take place during this period of tribulation and great tribulation. In order to finish each of the 7 trumpet judgments last week, we skipped ahead to the middle of chapter 11. When we go back to Chapter 10 it's important for us to know that the events described, I believe, happen in the middle of the trumpet judgments. In fact, there is an intermission John takes beginning in Chapter 10 after the 6th trumpet and before the 7th trumpet. Let's look together at the role the church plays in our world today and will play in the future during this period of great tribulation.

:: Revelation 10:1-11

1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.

2 He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land,

3 and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.

4 And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.”

5 Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven.

6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay!

7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

9 So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’ ”

10 I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

11 Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

John sees another angel (different from the angels with trumpets), which is magnificent in appearance and is carrying a “little scroll.” People speculate different things about this scroll.

- Is it the scroll God held and Jesus opened?
- Is it s different scroll we haven’t been introduced to?
- Is it little because the angel is so big?
- Is it simply a little scroll, regardless of the angel’s stature?

We aren’t told, so it may not be that important. I would probably lean to it being the scroll Jesus opened. John says it was open in the angel’s hand, so since the seals are broken, that could be the case. It also seems to carry the message of judgment that original scroll held. But I’m not certain.

We are told that the angel comes down from heaven to earth and planted one foot on the land and one on the sea and gave a loud shout. Most likely this is a way for John not only to represent the angel’s size, but also to say that his message is for the whole world.

Next we are told that when the angel shouts the 7 thunders spoke and John tells us he was about to write down what he heard when a voice from heaven stopped him and said, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” So, it seems there is something which will play out in these last days which God did not want us to have information concerning. The prophet Daniel was also given a vision of the end days and told by God to seal up the scroll and

not let anyone see what was written. The only hint we may get of the message John heard but wasn't allowed to record is that it came from the thunder, which in apocalyptic literature usually refers to judgment. Beyond that, we have no reason to speculate what John heard or what God is doing at that instance.

Now let's look at the message we are given at the end of the chapter.

5 Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven.

6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!"

7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

9 So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but 'in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.'"

10 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

John is told there will be no more delay! The end is imminent as the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet. Yet there is an undisclosed period of time between these final two trumpet judgments. And it is during this period of time we get a better sense of the role Christians should take as we draw closer to the end of world history. John is told that in these days the "mystery of God" will be revealed.

What is the mystery of God?

:: Romans 16:25-26

25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,

26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—

:: Ephesians 3:4-6

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

“The ‘mystery of God’ is his total redemptive purpose, which includes the judgment of evil and the eschatological salvation of His people.” – George Ladd

We find in this that God is making Himself known through judgment both to punish and to call sinners to Himself- Jew and Gentile alike.

John is instructed to take the little scroll out of the angel’s hand and to eat it. This also happened in the OT book of Ezekiel, if you are interested in reading that you will find it in chapters 2-3. But notice what John is told the scroll will be like- as sweet as honey in his mouth, but sour in his stomach. John eats the scroll as he is told and that is exactly what happens- it’s sweet in his mouth, but his stomach turns sour. Then John is told, “You must prophesy again about (or against) many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” (11).

It is my opinion that John becomes in some way the representative of all Christians in this moment. He is given the scroll of God’s judgment to eat, and while it is sweet because it is God’s truth, it turns his stomach sour because of the hardship speaking His truth brings. For Christians in our world presently and during the final days of tribulation, we must embrace the truth of God’s word and be unashamed to speak up about truth and to make known the plans of God- the mystery of God- to the world around us. The full gospel of God contains both words of judgment and mercy. As Christians we should be faithful to both aspects of that message.

The scroll John eats is in our mouth as well. The message of judgment and mercy is ours to deliver. We must speak out for truth regardless of the cost. There are things in our world that are wrong and we must stand up and speak out against.

Whether it is standing for the sanctity of human life, or holding to the biblical definition of marriage, or fighting to end human trafficking and slavery, Christians must be able to stand for truth and prophesy against evil. The only way to do that is to know what God’s stances are concerning these things.

Too many people’s worldviews are informed by what is culturally accepted or what their emotions are telling them. If we want to be able to speak truthfully to a world that is being judged because of sin, our worldview should be informed by the One who created the world.

But I want to be clear this is not a social justice message that is put in John’s mouth. We are not called to be social justice crusaders- we are first and foremost

to hold out the gospel of salvation. As we do that, we penetrate darkness with light and do our part to bring God's Kingdom to earth.

Each of us, as disciples of Jesus, has a responsibility to speak God's truth no matter how difficult that truth is to hear or how negatively the audience might respond.

“The sweetness of the fulfillment of God's purposes for this world is tempered by the bitterness of suffering in the interim. Yet the suffering of the faithful witnesses is also their triumph. Following the Lamb means that apparent defeat at the hands of evil forces actually results in victory thanks to God. The cross is not the final word; resurrection is!”

- J. Scott Duvall

Suffering or persecution or death will not be the final word for Christians because we have victory in the resurrection of Jesus, guaranteeing our resurrection as well.

When we turn to Revelation 11 we see the witnesses of God's coming Kingdom.

:: Revelation 11:1-14

1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers.

2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

3 And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

4 They are “the two olive trees” and the two lampstands, and “they stand before the Lord of the earth.”

5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

6 They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

8 Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.

9 For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

13 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

When John is told to measure the Temple it is important for us to understand some things:

1. The Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the time John wrote Revelation. So he was not talking about that Temple, although it is possible (maybe even probable) another Temple will be built in Jerusalem.
2. The metaphor of measuring a city or structure has nothing to do determining its dimensions. It is a symbol of setting a city aside either for preservation or for destruction.

In some places in the OT, God would measure something to discuss its pending doom and judgment. In other OT passages, God's measurement of a city meant it was coming under His protective cover.

John measuring the Temple seems to indicate God's preservation and protection.

Some scholars believe this is a preservation of the Church, while others believe this speaks of a future turning of Jewish people to Jesus for salvation. And this scholar doesn't know the answer! What we do know is that for a period of 42 months there will be persecution against God's people. But we see his response in verse 3:

3 And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

4 They are “the two olive trees” and the two lampstands, and “they stand before the Lord of the earth.”

5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

6 They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Who are these two witnesses of God's Kingdom, who make known the ways of God and prophesy against those who seek to destroy God's people? Again there are a couple views on this:

Views on the 2 Witnesses

1. **They represent the Church speaking the word of God to the world. There are two because of the word of God and the testimony of the Church or because in Jewish Law two witnesses were required to support a teaching.**

- 2. It is two actual, historical, eschatological persons who testify in supernatural ways during the final 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.**
- 3. They are a combination of both. George Ladd says, “The flexibility of apocalyptic symbolism must allow for such possibilities.”**

I happen to believe they are two actual, historical people. But even in that there are two possibilities for who these witnesses are. Historically people believe it is Moses and Elijah. In verses 5-6 we see that anyone who wants to harm them is killed by fire from their mouths. They have the power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain (Elijah did this during his earthly ministry). They also have the power to turn water to blood and to strike the earth with every sort of plague as often as they want (Moses unleashed plagues on Egypt in the Exodus). These men also appeared with Jesus in the gospels when Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration. It is very possible God would send the historical Elijah and Moses to be His witnesses during this period of time.

It is also possible that 2 men will act in the spirit and power of Elijah and Moses during this period of time. In the gospels we saw that John the Baptist was credited with acting in the power of Elijah as he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus.

Notice what happens next:

7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

8 Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.

9 For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

John mentions the beast from the Abyss for the first time, almost in passing. We will be introduced to him in greater detail in Chapter 13. Jewish readers would have already had enough understanding about this person from the OT and NT writers that it would not have been strange to introduce this person without giving more details.

The beast kills the two witnesses, but not before they finish their testimony, and their bodies are left in the street while the watching world celebrates their deaths. Their bodies lie in the public square of the great city- figuratively called Sodom and Egypt- where also their Lord was crucified.

The great city, where the men die, is referred to figuratively here:
Sodom = Moral depravity
Egypt = Oppression and Slavery
Jerusalem = Rejection of Jesus

The response to the death of these two men is a global celebration. People will gloat that these two who brought pain and suffering are dead and the inhabitants of the earth will send one another gifts.

But after three and a half days, the breath of God will enter the men; they will stand on their feet and will return to heaven when God calls them and the entire watching world will be struck in terror. Then there will be an earthquake resulting in 7,000 deaths within the city and the survivors will give glory to the God of heaven. This phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture and seems to indicate that repentance occurs and those not killed in the city will become followers of Jesus. This may also indicate a much larger turning of the Jews to Jesus.

The question that I posed at the beginning of the message has been answered in these two chapters: what is the role of the Church in the period known as the tribulation? We are to be witnesses of the truth of God's Word and we are to hold fast to the coming Kingdom, even against persecution and hardship. This is our responsibility today and it will be the role of the Church in every age. We should never give up in sharing our faith and finding hope, even in the darkness of our world, that the gospel changes lives. God shows us glimpses of the future so we know how to stand firm as followers of Jesus no matter what happens to us.