

## NO MORE DELAY

The Victory of the Lamb, Part 6: Revelation 10&11  
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 2/19/23, Matt Heerema

### WHERE WE'VE BEEN SO FAR

- **Chapter 1:** John to first century churches: "your brother and partner in the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus." Blessed are those who read these words aloud, those who hear, and those who keep what is written in it. Glorified Jesus shows up
- **Chapter 2-3:** Jesus to John: "Write down what you have seen, what is, and what will soon take place." - Letters to seven churches: Jesus is walking among them, sees, them, knows them, and urges them to keep the faith, repent from idolatry, and persevere. Promises a reward to those who overcome.
- **Chapter 4 and 5:** "Come up here!" And shows what's going on in the heavenly realm. HEARD: The lion of Judah has conquered! SAW: A lamb who had been slaughtered, but lives again. Jesus is worthy because he has conquered by dying, and being resurrected. Setting us a pattern. Massive worship service in response.
- **Chapter 6:** Unsealing the seven seals, partial judgement on the world only 1/4 of it affected...
- **Chapter 7:** Interlude: sealing God's people, HEARD: 144,000, SAW: a vast uncountable multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Sealed in protection from the wrath of God.
- **Chapter 8-9:** Seven trumpets blow (well, 6 anyway), same cycle of judgements from a different angle. Still only partial, only 1/3 of the earth affected, increasing severity.

### WHERE WE ARE NOW: THE CENTER OF THE BOOK

What we're going to see today, in the sixth and seventh trumpets, is another interlude like chapter 7, and we're going to see again that the main message of this interlude, like the other, is that God's people will be protected. Their eternal, spiritual status is secure, but another note is added that will become a theme in the rest of the book: it may involve oppression, persecution, and possibly even martyrdom at the hands of the world in rebellion against God. But, like our Lord and Master, Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, though we may be killed in this life, though we will die in this life, we will be resurrected, victorious, for eternal fellowship with our God and with our brothers and sisters.

Some have noticed that our passage today is at the center of the book of Revelation, and some have argued that, like climbing up a mountain, we are now at the peak of the message, which comes with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Let's dive in.

# THE MIGHTY ANGEL

## **Revelation 10:1-7 (CSB)**

1 **Then I saw** another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head. His face was like the sun, his legs were like pillars of fire, 2 and he held a little scroll opened in his hand. He put his right foot on the sea, his left on the land, 3 and he called out with a loud voice like a roaring lion. When he cried out, the seven thunders raised their voices. 4 And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders said, and do not write it down!" 5 Then the angel that I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6 He swore by the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, **"There will no longer be a delay,** 7 but in the days when the seventh angel will blow his trumpet, then the mystery of God will be completed, as he announced to his servants the prophets."

What an amazing picture we have here. Note the details: "a mighty angel" is an unusual wording. The description of this mighty angel bears a lot of resemblance to the description of the one seated on the throne in chapter 4. Note that he is standing on the sea and the earth often a gesture noting ruling over, and hand held to the heavens. This messenger is encompassing all of creation. It could be that this is an image of Jesus. Or perhaps "the messenger of God" John refers to in chapter 1, verse 1.

**What is up with the seven thunders?** We don't know, and we have to be okay with that. We get to know the contents of seven letters to seven churches, the meaning of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls, but the seven thunders are unknown to us.

The important thing is what the gigantic angel says: "there will be more delay. When the seventh trumpet is blown, God's mystery will be completed." So far, the seven seals and six trumpets have only been partial judgement, but what is contained in the seventh trumpet: the seven bowls, will be the final judgement. It will all be complete after that.

Then John is commissioned, re-commissioned really, to carry the message of judgement.

# JOHN COMMISSIONED

## Revelation 10:8-11 (CSB)

8 **Then the voice that I heard from heaven spoke to me again** and said, "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 and eat it; it will be bitter in your stomach, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth."

10 Then I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I ate it, my stomach became bitter. 11 And they said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."

He is told to take the scroll from the angels hand. It's possible this is the unsealed scroll that Jesus took from the one on the throne in chapter 5. It does say "little scroll" though, so it might mean a miniature version of the original scroll, perhaps only containing the final series of seven: the seven bowls. That detail is a little inconsequential though.

John is commissioned in exactly the same way as Ezekiel and Jeremiah, told to eat the scroll, and the effect is the same. The word of God is sweet in his mouth. The word of God is bitter in his stomach. The message is sweet, but the judgements he is called to proclaim are not so much fun.

Then the scene shifts. John goes from having this *vision* of the angel, to *hearing* something else described to him:

# THE WITNESSES

## Revelation 11:1-13 (CSB)

1 **Then I was given** a measuring reed like a rod, **with these words:**

"Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those who worship there. 2 But exclude the courtyard outside the temple. Don't measure it, because it is given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. 3 I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and consumes their enemies; if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6 They have authority to close up the sky so that it does not rain during the days of their prophecy. They also have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague whenever they want.

7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war on them, conquer them, and kill them. 8 Their dead bodies will lie in the main street of the great city, which figuratively is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And some of the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will view their bodies for three and a half days and not permit their bodies to be put into a tomb. 10 Those who live on the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and send gifts to one another because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 But after three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet. Great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." They went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies watched them. 13 At that moment a violent earthquake took place, a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake. The survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

### **What in the world is going on here?**

Let's look at the details. John hears about the following. I think its significant that he hears but does not see these things.

- Measure the temple and the altar, and count those who worship there.
- Outer courts are being trampled for 42 months.
- The outer courts are being "trampled" by the unbelieving nations (defiled), but the temple and the altar are kept safe (measured) along with those who are inside it.
- Two witnesses prophesying for 1,260 days (that same time period).
- They are invincible until they finish their ministry,
- When they finish their ministry they are allowed to be killed.
- They are resurrected 3.5 days later, and their ministry shakes the city to its foundation.

### **What's with the temple?**

Is this a literal temple? Is he seeing a vision of the temple that was just destroyed in the year 70 AD? Was he writing this book prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD? How do we make sense of all these details?

I'd like to remind you of an interpretation key that is very important for understanding this type of literature.

We need to ask: **where have we heard this before?**

- The things we are meant to understand will be clear:
- Some will be explicitly defined by John.
- Some is such an obvious Old Testament link that we're meant to call it to mind.
- Some is a clear reference to other New Testament teaching.
- Some of the imagery in Revelation is meant to be an obvious cultural reference that the original audience would have understood, and that we are still aware of today.
- What about the rest? Remember, this is a picture book, and John is painting pictures and setting moods. Perhaps we're not supposed to get so specific about what the blazing eyes mean, and what the significance of his voice sounding like 'cascading waters' is. Maybe we're just meant to get a picture in our mind.

With this in mind, we find a clear reference to Ezekiel 40-48. I don't think he's talking about a physical temple, I think he's reminded by the voice from heaven of Ezekiel's vision, itself an apocalyptic and prophetic message. The message to Ezekiel is that God will cleanse and protect His temple from false worship, false Gods, unbelievers, and idolatry. He will protect the people within from the corruption and abuse of power that caused them to be exiled in the first place.

Simply: Measuring the temple and those within it was a mark of protection for those inside God's temple.

### **Who are the two witnesses?**

One prominent view, is that this is a glimpse into the future where two very remarkable individuals have a unique and miraculous ministry in Jerusalem, in the streets near a rebuilt temple. This ministry lasts for 42 months, or 1260 days, or 3.5 years, during the first part of what is known as the tribulation period. In this view, the two individuals are usually thought to be a return of Moses and Elijah (because of the description of the miracles), a return of Enoch and Elijah, because neither of them were said to have died in the OT, or two other unique individuals who are as of yet unknown. These two have a miraculous ministry, and are a way that God extends mercy and the offer to repent and receive the gospel message one more time before final judgement.

Another prominent view, and one I personally find more plausible, is that John is using symbolic imagery to speak of the ministry of the church during the time between Jesus's resurrection, and his return. I think this is most likely for a few reasons.

- John often uses symbolic imagery to refer to groups of individuals. Lamps for churches. Coming in chapter 12, a woman to refer to the nation of Israel, and so on.

- And therefore it's very possible that "two witnesses" aren't referring to two literally individual people, but rather are an image of the two witnesses required by the law to establish the truth of a charge.
- The witnesses are said to collectively (not individually) carry the authority of Moses and Elijah, meaning the law and the prophets, or the scriptures.
- The beast is said to "make war" on these two, which is unusual phrasing if we're talking about one man facing two others. But in chapter 12 we find this same phrasing of the dragon waging war on the offspring of the woman, during the same exact time span 1,260 days. More on her in a couple weeks.
- The pattern of having a ministry to carry out, during which time they are invincible, later to be martyred or to die when it is their time, and then to be resurrected, is the pattern Jesus set, and his people follow.
- Most importantly, the two witnesses are explicitly identified:
  - **"The two olive trees and two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. " Where have we heard this before?**
  - Two lamp stands: the churches from chapter 1
  - Two olive trees: A clear reference to another prophetic/apocalyptic book in the Bible from which John has already been drawing a lot of images: Zechariah 4 - Joshua and Zerubbabel - God's anointed priest and anointed king.
    - Every view acknowledges this obvious reference, but they do different things with it.
    - Here's what I see: Several times elsewhere in the new testament, but especially Revelation 1:6 & 5:10 say that now believers in Christ are a "kingdom of priests".
  - Between the lamp stands from chapter 1, and this reference to Zechariah 4, it seems most plausible to me that the two witnesses is referring to the ministry of the church.

The message of 11:1-13 is basically a replay of chapter 7.

It's message: God's people will be kept safe from God's wrath during judgement, their spiritual safety is secure, inside the temple. And though their earthly power may seem insignificant next to the beast and the powers of the world – the image is just two individuals standing in a street, preaching, versus much of the world watching and hoping for their downfall! – they will be kept safe during their mission on this earth, even through the persecution and opposition. And as soon as their earthly mission is done, even if they suffer martyrdom at the hands of the beast and his forces, they will be resurrected by God, taken up to dwell with Him forever!

**Church, our mission is sure, and our eternal destiny is secured, even though we face opposition, persecution, and potential martyrdom!**

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

And now we come to the climax of our passage, the center point of the book of Revelation, and quite possibly the central theme of the book. The Seventh Trumpet Blows, and history comes to its conclusion, ushering in a new age in which King Jesus finally rules the whole world, forever and ever.

### **Revelation 11:14-19 (CSB)**

14 The second woe has passed. Take note: The third woe is coming soon!

15 The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying,

The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,  
and he will reign forever and ever.

16 The twenty-four elders, who were seated before God on their thrones, fell facedown and worshiped God, 17 saying,

We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty,  
who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

18 The nations were angry, but your wrath has come.

The time has come for the dead to be judged  
and to give the reward to your servants the prophets, to the saints, and to those who fear  
your name, both small and great,  
and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth.

19 Then the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail.

Jesus takes His throne once and for all. The heavenly choir sings praise, announcing that judgement day is here. The temple of God in heaven is opened, the ark appears in the heavenly temple, signifying God's presence, and the old testament imagery of judgement: lightning, thunder, earthquakes, and hail begin.

And we'll pause the action there. To be continued...

# APPLICATION

## **Notice the authority of Christ**

Throughout the book, we see that Christ is absolutely in control of the unfolding of events. He is the one that opens each of the seven seals. He is the one that authorizes the blowing of the seven trumpets. He sits on a throne. Nothing is happening apart from his notice and permission. The seven thunders here are a reminder to us, He did not allow John to write them down, meaning that they are never to happen.

## **Notice the severity of judgement**

In our passage today, John is commissioned as a prophet to talk about the coming judgement, the consequence of our rebellion against God. In our pride and self-sufficiency, we have not acknowledged Christ as Lord of our life. We've sought to do things on our own, apart from him.

### **Romans 1:28-32 (CSB)**

28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. 29 They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. 32 Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

### **Romans 6:20-23 (CSB)**

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness. 21 So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. 22 But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life! 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Notice the expectation of persecution**

Revelation is realistic about the reality of oppression and persecution. Because sinful mankind is in rebellion against God, just like each one of us were at one point in our life, and just as some of you here today still are, the world is a hostile place toward Christ's followers. As we proclaim his

message, do the work he has for us to do, we can expect opposition. Some of us may even face imprisonment, and possibly even death.

Perhaps the reason this seems like such a distant reality to us is not because our country is such a peaceful place for Christians to live, but rather because we are not forward enough in proclaiming our faith. I don't think we should go looking for trouble, and we should be wise in our approach. It is possible to suffer for being foolish too, but I wonder if its far more likely that we're being left alone because we simply aren't speaking up.

### **Notice the security of His people**

In chapter 7, God's people are sealed with a seal that protects them from His wrath. A clear reference to Ephesian 1, the sealing of the Holy Spirit inside, guaranteeing their salvation and status as a child of God. In our chapter today, those who are securely in the temple worshipping, those who are in Christ are "measured" - secured from those who are trampling the courts. His two witnesses cannot be overcome while they are carrying out the ministry God has for them to do.

### **Notice the victory of Christ**

So far in Revelation we have seen that Jesus has conquered death, by dying on the cross in our place for our sin, and was raised by God to rule over all creation.

#### **Ephesians 1:18-23 (CSB)**

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength. 20 He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens—21 far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

### **Yeah, but what does this have to do with me?**

The pictures painted in Revelation, and the concepts discussed can be so big, so otherworldly, that its a little hard to know how this affects Monday morning. I wonder if some of you might be thinking that about now. "This is all very interesting, but so what?"

And here's the thing. I can't answer that for each of you. I think part of the way The Holy Spirit wants to work in you is to help you dwell on these big picture concepts and apply them to your moment by moment experiences. Its my job as a teacher to help you understand what the text means, but the best I can do in terms of the significance of this for your personal life, is to give you some start, maybe a handhold or two.

So I just want to start by saying that all these big concepts: The Authority of Christ, The Severity of Coming Judgement, the Expectation of Persecution, the Security of God's people, and the Victory of Christ – those bit picture things ought to impact the way you see your daily life.

What does it mean for you at work to know that Christ is absolutely in control of all events. That judgement is coming and is severe, that his people are safe?

I think that if you take any given situation you are facing, and remind yourself of these big truths, they start to bring things in perspective.

Are you struggling with a situation at the office?

Are you stressed out about school?

Are you worried about something going on in your family?

Are you unsure of what you're supposed to be doing with your life?

Are you having trouble in a friendship?

Are you struggling with your faith because of circumstances in your life?

Christ sees you, He's in control, yes there is a huge spiritual war going on, which is part of the reason you are suffering, but he knows what he's doing, and He loves you. The connections may not seem immediately obvious, but I guarantee you, if you are a believer, and you pray to Him about your situation, and meditate on these, He'll help you connect the dots, and bring you peace and encouragement, in any situation, up to and including someone threatening to kill you for your faith.

Let's pray.