

## **Revelation: The Hope of Glory**

The Life of the Christian and the Coming of the Kingdom

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### **THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM Revelation 8-11**

*When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*

*Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.*

*The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.*

*The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

*The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.*

*The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*

*Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"*

*And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. They were told not*

*to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.*

*In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.*

*The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.*

*Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.*

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

*Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him 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, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.*

*Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."*

*Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

*These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

*The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.*

*Then 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 shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

*Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. (Rev. 8-11)*

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to Revelation 8. It is good to be home from a couple of weeks in South Asia and the Middle East. I bring you greetings from our brothers and sisters in India.

Some of you know, but some of you may not know, that part of the Radical Giving in our budget here has gone to help train and equip church planters across India. We have made cuts in our budget here, set aside comforts in church here, to help fuel the spread of the gospel there, and I want to share with you the effects of that. I mentioned two weeks ago before I left that I was going to Bihar, a state in a region of India where every day 5,000 people die, 0.1% of whom are Christian, which means that every day, 4,995 people in this region plunge into an eternal hell. I had heard about the massive spiritual and physical poverty in this region, but in the time that I and a few other brothers were there week, we saw massive hope.

Let me tell you about two particular church planters: Rajesh and Deepak. Three years ago, these two brothers were at the end of their rope and ready to quit ministry altogether. They were living in the middle of spiritual darkness and not seeing any fruit in the gospel. But at one of these trainings, they were encouraged to find a totally unreached village, go into that village, greet people in Jesus' name, and ask if they could pray for the homes in that village.

Truth be told, Rajesh and Deepak didn't think it would do any good, but they thought, "What do we have to lose?" so they went. The first village they came to, no one paid them any attention, until they had almost gotten through the entire village, and a man came up to them and asked them what they were doing there. Rajesh and Deepak went through their pre-scripted lines, and as soon as they mentioned the name of Jesus, this man said, "Jesus? I have heard a little about him, and I want to know more." So he invites Rajesh and Deepak into his home, where this man gathers his family and friends to hear Rajesh and Deepak share.

Long story short, within a couple of weeks, about 20 people in that village become followers of Christ and a church begins. And it gets better from there, because Rajesh and Deepak start mobilizing those new Christians to go and do the same thing in other villages. Three years later, 350 different churches have been started in 350 different villages from these two villages.

Jim Shaddix was on the trip, and his comment was, "This is some of the closest ministry to what is going on in the New Testament that I have ever seen." And you're apart of it, brothers and sisters!

It's worth it—to do things differently here for the spread of the gospel there, praying, and giving, and going from here. This works! People, families, tribes who for centuries have never heard the gospel are hearing it for the first time, and they're responding and it's turning villages upside down.

The quote of the trip in India was when one new Christian, a member of one of these new churches, said, "Our village was like hell until we heard the gospel."

So that was India and then the Middle East. We have a couple of long-term church planting teams that we are preparing to send there in the days to come. One of them will be led by our college minister, who shared with you when he preached this summer that around January, he and his wife and their four boys will set out to lead the way for a church planting team among a people group that is about 20 million strong and yet there are somewhere between 200 and 1000 believers total. There are at least twice as many Christians in this room this morning than there are in this entire people group of 20 million people. The need is great. And the cost is great.

It was particularly interesting to be in the Middle East during this last week amidst everything that's been going on there. If you have followed the news, you know that there were attacks on embassies in Egypt and Libya and Yemen. It's a bit concerning when you're in the Middle East, and you open up the news online and it says, "Violence Spreads Against Americans in the Middle East." It hits you that you're an American in the Middle East.

We spent a good bit of time talking with brothers and sisters who are living there, and we asked them about the state of the church in some of these countries. The word they used was "fear." We have brothers and sisters from these countries (not Americans) who are very afraid right now with the Arab spring and the rise of the Muslim brotherhood in places like Egypt, other fundamentalist Islamic movements in other countries. Christians are afraid. Some are starting to flee their countries because it's not safe for them there. There has been violent destruction of churches and persecution of Christians.

And as we were praying for them and planning how we can best come alongside them in the church, I was so reminded that this is who the book of Revelation was written to. Brothers and sisters who were afraid. Brothers and sisters who were facing attacks and threats against their lives and their churches. They were wondering, "What do we do? Do we stay? Do we flee? How do we stand in our faith in the middle of all this?"

The whole situation for the church in countries like Syria and Iran and Iraq and Yemen and Egypt just brought Revelation home in a very real way, and it leads right into where I want to start.

## **Let's not miss the point.**

### **The purpose of Revelation is not to promote speculation about the future.**

I want to say to us from the start this morning, yet again: let's not miss the point of this book. Let's not miss the point of Revelation. The purpose of Revelation is not to promote speculation about the future. When we read about these trumpets today, the purpose is not to get us thinking about what this image or that symbol might mean in our day and wondering on what date this or that is going to happen. That is not the point.

Think about it with me. What are these trumpets? Two weeks ago, we talked about how these visions in Revelation are not necessarily arranged chronologically, but cyclically. Together, they're like a spiraling story, repeating one another and building toward a climax. In Chapters 6-7, we saw seven seals, and now here in Chapters 8-11, we see seven trumpets, and soon we'll see seven bowls. These seals and trumpets and bowls are repeating symbols of God's judgment upon a world full of sin, and they're progressing in intensification, all leading up to the final judgment and the return of Christ for His people.

Now the specific symbolism of these trumpets is significant. Throughout Scripture, trumpets were blown to warn of coming judgment or to announce victorious salvation, and Jesus specifically says in the Gospels that with a trumpet He will gather together all people for judgment or salvation at His return. Trumpets symbolize judgment and salvation all throughout Scripture.

Specifically, most scholars see a deliberate reference here in Revelation 8-11 to two stories in the Old Testament. One is the plagues that God poured out upon Egypt. Most of the images there (hail and blood and darkness) recall God's judgments on Pharaoh and the Egyptians for holding His people in captivity. God sent those plagues as judgments for the sin of Egypt and the rebellion of Pharaoh. The other Old Testament story behind these trumpets is Joshua and the battle of Jericho. You'll remember that God commanded seven priests to sound seven trumpets for seven days, at the end of which they would shout, the walls of Jericho would come down, and the Israelites would officially enter the Promised Land. The imagery here is eerily similar as seven trumpet blasts progressively and ultimately pronounce judgment upon sinners and victory for God's people as they enter into heaven.

When you put this Old Testament background together with Revelation 8, you see the first four trumpet blasts depicting systematic physical judgments across creation. We talked a couple of weeks ago about how the essence of sin is the worship of created things rather than the Creator. Here we have a figurative picture of everything in all creation—from the land to the ocean to the rivers to the sky—systematically being destroyed.

In the first trumpet, you have hail and fire coming from heaven, burning up the earth and the trees and the grass. In the second trumpet, a mountain is hurled into the sea, destroying a third of the world's oceans and all of its life and trade as the waters turn into blood. See the parallels here with the Egyptian plagues, with hail in the first trumpet and now water turning to blood in the second.

In the third trumpet, a meteor-like star falls from heaven, inflicting the earth's rivers with poison and causing death to those who drink from them. And then, in the fourth trumpet, a third of the sun, moon, and stars were struck so that they provided a third less light taking us back to the plague of darkness in the book of Exodus, the last Egyptian plague before the Passover. The picture is clear here of coming darkness upon the earth. And again, you see this imagery intensifying as it repeats itself. With the opening of the fourth seal, the pale horse whose rider's name was Death was given authority over a fourth of the earth. Now here, with the fourth trumpet, judgment comes to a third of the earth.

And the overall point of these first four trumpet judgments is clear: do not put your ultimate hope in created things. All things—even what you think are the most secure things like the light of the sun—all things in heaven and on earth are passing away.

So we have systematic physical judgments across creation then, in the fifth and sixth trumpets, we see terrifying personal judgments for idolatry and immorality. And terrifying is the right word. The imagery here is frightening. It's not just judgment on physical creation anymore; this is judgment upon people.

Look at Revelation 8:13, and read there with me. John writes, *"Then I looked and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth'"* (Rev. 8:13). If you'll remember, that phrase—"those who dwell on the earth"—is used to describe unbelievers who have turned to God and are living for this world.

This is a threefold pronouncement of woe and misery upon all who turn from God to live for this world.

Then in Chapter 9, we begin to see demons torturing such unbelievers in a violent depiction of God's judgment. With the fifth trumpet, the sun again is darkened, a picture of the spiritual darkness of men's hearts, and for five months locusts (again, remember the plagues in Egypt) from the pits of hell terrorize unbelievers. Smoke rises from the abyss as the bottomless pit of hell is unlocked. Legions of hell are unleashed upon the earth in the form of locusts that look like horses prepared for battle with human faces and lion-like teeth and breastplates of iron. They come with the speed of chariots, and they sting with tails like scorpions. They torment unbelievers for a set period of time under the direct authority of Satan or one of his lieutenants, and all of this takes place under the ultimate authority of God. These demonic locusts are fierce and horrific. They cause people to long for death.

Then the second woe is introduced in the form of the sixth trumpet as a third of mankind is wiped out across the earth. (Again, this doesn't mean that chronologically this happens next; the imagery is just building.) In this bloodcurdling vision, we see a cavalry of 200 million (literally two myriads of myriads) demonic warhorses released across the earth. With breastplates like fire and heads like lions and tails like serpents and smoke coming from their mouths, they come to kill and destroy.

Now look at Revelation 9:20-21. Don't miss this. Even in light of all of this, even in light of all of these judgments upon physical creation and upon people, John writes:

*"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (Rev. 9:20-21).*

That's what I mean by terrifying personal judgments for idolatry and immorality. Despite the harmful, destructive effects of idolatry and immorality upon people's lives in this world, people continue to trust in the things of this world! Unbelievers here are depicted like Pharaoh, who despite judgment after judgment, plague after plague, continue to resist God in sinful rebellion. This is the picture of mankind. Men and women who know and see and feel the effects of sin, and yet go running back to sin time and time again. They refuse to repent. Sin kills, yet men and women do not turn from it.

Robert Mounce said of these two verses at the end of these two chapters,

*"Nowhere will you find a more accurate picture of sinful humanity pressed to the extreme. One would think that the terrors of God's wrath would bring rebels to their knees. Not so. Past the point of no return, they respond to greater punishment with increased rebellion. Such is sinful nature untouched and unmoved by the mercies of God."*

There is no more tragic picture of human depravity than this—to refuse to repent even in the face of the horror of sin.

Now all of this leads to the seventh trumpet, which I've not included here in your notes because it actually doesn't come until the end of Chapter 11. Most scholars agree that these six trumpets are ultimately setting up the seventh trumpet, which is the final judgment of God upon a sinful world.

We'll talk about that more at the end, but at this point, in light of our quest not to miss the point, let's ask the question: Why do we have these trumpets? And the answer, in light of all that we've seen, seems clear.

On one hand, God is giving the world warning. In God's judgments upon sin in the world today, God is warning us to turn from sin. In physical destruction, spiritual deception, and natural death all around us, we are seeing the effects of sin.

This last week, we remembered September 11 when the Twin Towers fell at the hands of terrorists. If you'll remember from our study in Luke 13 on a couple of different occasions, a similar thing happened in the first century as a tower in Siloam fell and killed 18 people. People were thinking, "Maybe those people had really sinned and were receiving God's judgment." And Jesus looked at the crowds and said, "No, such a horrific occurrence is not intended to be an indictment of those people's sin; such a horrific occurrence is intended to cause you to see your own sin, for you deserve the judgment of God, and you need to repent."

Oh, see the effects of sin in the world—whether it's terror or tumors, personal disease or physical destruction or painful death—see the effects of sin and repent and be reconciled to God today before it is too late.

God is giving the world warning in His judgments, and at the same time God is calling the church to war. Now I want to be careful here not to imply in any way that this is a call to war in an Islamic fundamentalist sense, or even in the sense of the Christian Crusaders from the past. No, absolutely not. But the picture is clear in Revelation 8-9 that there are spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, and we are not in peacetime in this world. We are in wartime. Just like the imagery we talked about with Joshua and the battle of Jericho, each passing trumpet announces a new stage in the battle for God's people to enter into His promise. So here it is.

### **The purpose of Revelation is to compel action in the present.**

The purpose of Revelation is not to promote speculation about the future. The purpose of Revelation is to compel action in the present. The effect of these trumpet judgments is not to cause us to sit here and debate what the lion's head and the locust's tail mean and how that relates to the political future of Iran and Israel. No, the effect of these trumpet judgments is to cause us to turn from our sin and to spend our lives fighting against demonic deception and destruction around us in two particular ways, based on Revelation 8-11.

We're going to unpack both of these, but let me go ahead and put them out there. Two particular ways that Revelation 8-11 is beckoning us to act. Number one, Revelation 8-11 is beckoning us to fervently pray for God's kingdom to come. After reading Revelation 8-11, the first thing we should do is fervently pray for God's kingdom to come. And then, the second thing we should do after reading these four chapters is to fearlessly proclaim God's gospel to all.



## **Let's fervently pray for God's kingdom to come.**

### **Our battle is fierce.**

Think about both of these with me. First, Church at Brook Hills, Christian, in light of Revelation 8-11, let's fervently pray for God's kingdom to come. As we've already seen, our battle is fierce.

Don't miss the point of all this imagery. There are demons who want to destroy you. There are demons who are working to deceive you into thinking that sin satisfies, and their aim is to kill your soul.

There are forces that are fighting you. Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms that are organized, powerful, terrifying, and destructive. They will use idolatry in all its forms, whether it's false gods made of metal, wood, and clay across India or the idolatry of money, possessions, power, pleasure, sex, success, and sports here. And subtly, almost unknowingly, demons are warring against you and me and the people around us and the peoples around the world.

When we confront these powers of darkness, particularly through the proclamation of the light of Christ, we will be met with the force of hell. It will not be easy, and it will be costly. Remember our brothers and sisters in the Middle East right now. Imagine John speaking to them here, saying, yes, the battle is fierce.

### **Our prayers are effective.**

Our battle is fierce and can sometimes seem overwhelming. Don't forget that all of these trumpet judgments that we've just read about in Chapters 8 and 9 are actually a response to the prayers of God's people described at the beginning of all this. Look back at Revelation 8:2. John writes,

*"Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them" (Rev. 8:2-6).*

See the connection here. All of these divine judgments that are ultimately bringing about the consummation of God's kingdom in the world are coming about in response to the prayers of God's people. One writer said, "[These chapters are] an astonishing tribute to the enormous historical importance of prayer."

Get the picture here in Revelation 8. Our cries go up. "Your Kingdom come, O God! Your just will be done. Hallowed be Your name in all the earth! Fill the earth, O God, with the knowledge of Your glory like the waters cover the seas. Bring an end to sin and suffering around us. Usher in redemption and restoration and full and final reconciliation." These are the cries of the church.

And as our cries go up, Revelation 8 teaches us that His kingdom comes down progressively, in the hearts of men and women who trust in Christ and live out the life of

Christ in this world. Oh, Church at Brook Hills, as you have prayed for people in India, the kingdom of God has broken into villages and transformed lives.

Our cries go up, and His kingdom comes down progressively, and then ultimately, in the day to come when Christ will return for His people. Every time you and I cry out to God, "Your kingdom come," every one of those prayers is taken, figuratively, to a heavenly throne room. And one day, all of them collectively are going to usher in the consummation of God's kingdom in this world.

One commentator said:

"What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny? Here is the astonishing answer [from this text]: the prayers of the saints and the fire of God. That means that more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in [this] world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth."

### **Our God is faithful.**

We fight the battle against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms first and foremost from our knees knowing that our battle is fierce, our prayers are effective, and our God is faithful in response to the prayers of His people. This is what we've seen in all of these trumpet judgments.

God will demonstrate His power over the gods of this world. Remember, that was part of the purpose of the plagues in Egypt—to show God's power over the gods and idols of Egypt. The same is true here. As we pray, God will show the gods of this world as utterly unworthy of worship.

He will demonstrate His power over the gods of this world, and He will vindicate His people amid opposition in this world. Brothers and sisters in Rome in the first century and brothers and sisters in the Middle East in the twenty-first century, keep praying! God will vindicate your trust in Him. If you'll remember, that was the thrust of the prayers of the saints in Chapter 6—that God would vindicate His people and show His trustworthiness to those who trusted in Him.

God will demonstrate His power over the gods of this world, He will vindicate His people amid opposition in this world, and He will extend His mercy to sinners around this world. Revelation 9:20-21 (the verses we read earlier) makes clear that amidst all these judgments, God is urging people to repent of sin and trust in Him.

If you are not a Christian today, see the effects of sin within and all around you. We live in a world where we have turned from our Creator and we have worshiped created things ultimately that center around ourselves and our sin leads to pain and hurt and emptiness and ultimately death. See the effects of sin in and around you, but know that God, being rich in mercy, has sent His Son to experience His judgment in our place. Though He Himself was completely innocent of sin, Jesus died on a cross for our sin, and anyone and everyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Him will be saved from God's judgment and safe in God's grace forever.

I urge you today, in view of the effects of sin in and around you, repent! Turn from your sin and trust in Jesus. Know that today, God is extending mercy to you, and at the same time, know that this opportunity to repent will not last forever.

Repent in your heart now, and trust in Jesus as God, Savior, Lord, and King. For one day, God will fully and finally uphold His justice amid sin in this world. If Revelation 8 and 9 are teaching us anything, they are teaching us that God will fully and finally judge everyone who lives for this world and refuses to give Him the worship He alone is due. Let's fervently pray for God's kingdom to come.

Let's pray. God, demonstrate your power over all the gods that are being worshiped right now in India and in America. God, vindicate your people's trust in You as they live contrary to the ways of this world. O God, extend your mercy to sinners around the world, drawing men, women, boys, and girls among all the peoples of the earth to faith in Christ (pray for this!). And God, we long for the day when You will assert your supremacy as the righteous Judge of all, and You will make everything right.

### **Let's fearlessly proclaim God's gospel to all.**

Let's fervently pray for God's kingdom to come, and let's fearlessly proclaim God's gospel to all. So Chapters 8-9 portray the first six trumpet judgments, but then, much like we had in Chapter 7 in between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, here we have an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets that shows all of this from the perspective of God's people who have trusted in Him.

The key word in Chapters 10-11 is "prophet" or "prophecy." It's mentioned six different times. You might circle them, if you want. I want to show them to you.

Revelation 10:7, *"... But that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets"* (Rev. 10:7). Then you get down to verse 11, *"And I was told, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings'"* (Rev. 10:11).

Revelation 11:3, *"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth"* (Rev. 11:3). Verse 6, *"They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying ..."* (Rev. 11:6).

Verse 10, *"... And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth"* (Rev. 11:10). Then the last time, verse 18, *"The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great ..."* (Rev. 11:18).

Now this emphasis on "prophets" and "prophesying" highlights the role of God's people in the middle of all these judgments. In the middle of these judgments in the world, what do God's people do? They speak God's Word to the world. Now remember that to prophesy is not just to make pronouncements about the future. To prophecy is to proclaim truth in the present in light of what is coming in the future. Revelation 10:6 refers to *"no more delay,"* highlighting the fact that God's judgment and kingdom is indeed coming in the near future, signified by the seventh trumpet, and that has huge implications for the immediate present.

So first we see John depicted as a prophet. Chapter 10 recounts, in a sense, God's commission of John to write these revelations, or visions, down. Interestingly, there's one vision he's not supposed to write down—the voice of the seven thunders—which is a good

reminder to us that Revelation is not intended to be an exhaustive account of every single thing that will happen in the coming of God's kingdom.

But in imagery that's very similar to Old Testament prophecy, God tells John to digest this message—this message that is both bitter and sweet at the same time. It's bitter because it's a message of judgment and condemnation, and it brings suffering to all who proclaim it. But it's sweet because it is a message of salvation for all who believe and stake their lives on it. Verse 7 is actually the only time in the entire book of Revelation where we see the world *euangelion*, which means to announce the gospel, and the picture is God announcing to and through his prophets the good news of God's grace in the midst of God's judgment.

And then, when you get to Chapter 11, John describes the ministry of "two witnesses" and there has been a variety of debate about who these "two witnesses" are. Are they literally two specific people that God will raise up in the last days as His witnesses to be His prophets like Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist? Or are these "two witnesses" a figurative representation of the entire church? My inclination is to lean toward the latter—that these two witnesses are a figurative representation of the entire church.

The picture we've seen throughout Revelation, and all of Scripture for that matter, is of every follower of Christ in the church testifying to the word of God and the gospel. This is why the Spirit of God is in Christians. No longer, like we had in the Old Testament, is the Spirit in a few prophets, but according to Joel 2 and Acts 2, the Spirit is upon all God's people for the purpose of prophesying, proclaiming God's Word.

This is the primary function of the church—to be a witness in the world. It's the primary thrust of the book of Revelation—to compel all Christians to proclaim Christ, even when it costs them their lives. Every follower of Christ (without exception!) has been given the Spirit of Christ to testify to the gospel of Christ in the world. Even the imagery in Revelation 11:4 of two lampstands, which we've already seen as imagery for the church, seems to indicate this. And much like two witnesses in the first century world would be used to establish a particular matter, this symbolism would certainly make sense here.

So the picture that Chapter 11 gives us is of God's people, His church, witnesses in a world full of God's judgment upon sin, testifying to the gospel of God's grace in the gospel. This is not just first century Christians. This is you and me. We are witnesses in a world that is under the judgment of God, and we fearlessly proclaim God's gospel to all.

### **Our lives are secure.**

And as we do this, as we witness, Revelation 11 tells us ... This is so wonderful! Listen to this in your life, and then listen to this from the perspective of fearful brothers and sisters in parts of the Middle East right now who are facing fierce persecution for their faith in Christ. The book of Revelation says to us and to them, first and foremost, that our lives are secure.

The first part of Chapter 11 can be really confusing, and like various parts of Revelation, there's some disagreement over exactly what is meant by the temple or the 42 months and the 1,260 days.

You may or may not remember that God called Ezekiel to do a similar thing to this—to measure out the temple—and this action in Ezekiel was a symbolic depiction of God's protection of His people. Ezekiel prophesied that in the rebuilding of the temple, God would restore His presence to the people of Israel, and God would once again show Himself as their provider and protector.

So in the picture here, John is not measuring off a physical temple, but a spiritual temple, His church, and God is promising to be with His witnessing people, to protect and provide for them. He will never leave them or forsake them, and they will always and ultimately be safe and secure in Him. God's people have no reason to fear.

### **Our suffering is expected.**

Yet at the same time, you'll notice in Revelation 11:2 that the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles, is left vulnerable and open to be trampled for a particular period of time (42 months), and the message seems to be that yes, while our lives are ultimately secure, our suffering is expected for a time.

This 42 months, which is also referred to as 1,260 days or three-and-a-half years, was prophesied way back in Daniel and is now signified here in Revelation as a time of tribulation in which God's people experience suffering and persecution as His witnesses in this world. Again, some people view this as a literal three-and-a-half-year time of tribulation. But in light of understanding these witnesses as the church and in light of the context we've seen already here in Revelation, this seems to be a symbolic portrayal of a time of suffering that the church will endure before the final judgment. Not only does this seem to fit Daniel's prophecies, but not coincidentally, this also reflects symbolically the approximate length of Jesus' ministry on earth.

So the witnesses reflect the True and Faithful Witness, who for a time suffered in His testimony to the Word of God. And just like Christ, on one hand, these Christians are absolutely and eternally secure in the presence of God, yet on the other hand, they are vulnerable to attack, suffering, and persecution in this world as they witness. This is us. These are our brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East.

### **Our task is prophetic.**

Our lives are secure, our suffering is expected, and our task is prophetic. We "*prophesy ... clothed in sackcloth*" (Rev. 11:3). Brothers and sisters, this is what we are here to do in this world. This is why God has not immediately brought you and me up to heaven from this world. He has saved us from our sins, filled us with His Spirit, and commissioned us by His Son to be His witnesses in this world. We are here to fearlessly proclaim the truth of Christ.

This is what a prophet does: he speaks. You and I know how things are going to end in the future. You and I know that has huge implications for our lives and the lives of every single person around us in the present. So we don't stay silent.

You know that the people you live with, the people you go to school with, the people you work with, the people on your ball teams and in your supper clubs or whatever else you do, they will all face the judgment of God one day soon. And God has put you in their lives to proclaim his truth—His good news of mercy and grace to all who will receive it and repent of their sin and run to him. Our task is to tell them. Our task is prophetic.

### **Our message is clear.**

Our message is clear. This picture of witnesses clothed in sackcloth represents the message we proclaim, and just like we saw with John, it is bittersweet. It is bitter because it speaks of the coming judgment of God upon sin, and that is cause for mourning and weeping. At the same time, it is sweet because it speaks of the mercy of God to save from sin, and that is cause for rejoicing and celebrating.

So students in your classrooms and on your campuses, families in your neighborhoods, among friends and co-workers, make this message clear from your mouth. God is the

coming King, righteous Judge, and merciful Lord, and He will save all who turn from their sin and trust in him. When was the last time you told someone that? Would you pray even now that God would use you to tell someone that this week? Our task is prophetic and our message is clear.

### **Our light is unquenchable.**

Our light is unquenchable. Verse 4, we are "lampstands," brothers and sisters, with light and fire that cannot be quenched.

### **Our souls are untouchable.**

Our light is unquenchable. Our souls are untouchable. Verse 5 says, *"If anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed"* (Rev. 11:5). Talk about divine protection against demonic forces. We dwell with God, God dwells in us, and nothing can touch us.

### **Our power is invincible.**

Verse 6, *"They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying"* (Rev. 11:6). This is an allusion to Elijah, and it reminds us that when we speak the Word of God, nothing can stop that Word of God from going forth and carrying out its intended effect.

But then, things take a turn in verse 7 as John describes how our days of prophesying in this world will come to an end. He writes,

*"And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified"* (Rev. 11:7-8).

John describes how God's witnesses will eventually be struck down in this world. This could be a specific reference to literal martyrdom for proclaiming the gospel, or it could be a more general reference to every Christian who proclaims the gospel amid a world of sin and suffering. For until Jesus returns, every one of them will die in this world of sin and suffering. It will likely look like their lives, whether as martyrs or simply Christians who proclaimed Christ, were wasted from the perspective of this world.

*"For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth"* (Rev. 11:9-10).

The picture is of worldly people who will laugh at how professing Christians lived and died, and those who have rejected God's mercy will think for a minute that they have been vindicated in their rejection. "Look at those Christians," they'll say, "who proclaimed judgment coming for us. Look what happened to them."

### **Our death will be temporary.**

But Revelation 11:11 says our death will be temporary. *"But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them"* (Rev. 11:11). Ironically, after a time that seems to symbolically represent Jesus' days in a tomb, we will rise as His witnesses, and God will vindicate our testimony.

### **Our resurrection will be sure.**

Our death will be temporary, and our resurrection will be sure. *"Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them"* (Rev. 11:12). We will rise to meet our Lord as He reigns down ultimate and final judgment on the earth, which leads right into verses 14 and 15, where the third woe is pronounced and the seventh trumpet is blown. Read it with me. Revelation 11:15-19, what some might say is the central passage of the entire book of Revelation:

*"Then 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 shall reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.'*

*"Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail"* (Rev. 11:15-19).

### **Our mission will be complete.**

Brothers and sisters, one day our mission will be complete. The task of witnessing in the world will be done. Just as Jesus said in Matthew 24, *"this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"* (Rev. 24:14). There is coming a day when witnessing will be no more; on that day, it will only be worship.

### **Our God will be glorified.**

Our mission will be complete, and our God will be glorified. The best part of this closing passage comes in verse 17 as the 24 elders begin to sing. Listen to how they start and see if you can notice what's so significant here. Verse 17, *"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign"* (Rev. 11:17). Do you see it?

Over and over again up to this point in Revelation, we have seen God glorified as the One who is, and who was, and who is—what?—who is to come. But now, in this scene, He is not glorified anymore as the One who is to come. He is glorified as the One who has come, fully and finally, to assert His reign and His rule over His kingdom forever. Today, we worship God as the One who was, and is, and is to come. But on that day, never again will those words come out of our mouths, for He will have come.

And we will behold His majesty. Notice how worship and judgment are intertwined together here, and all throughout the book of Revelation for that matter. God will one day be glorified in majesty for His judgments, as a result of His judgments. His justice and mercy and holiness and grace will altogether be put on display for all to see.

For on that day His judgments will be final. Verse 18, *"The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged"* (Rev. 11:18). God will be glorified for His just judgments, and His judgments will last forever.

His judgments will be final, and His servants will be rewarded. "*The time for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great...*" (Rev. 11:18). All who have trusted in God through Christ will receive the reward of our cosmic King and the inheritance of our heavenly Father.

God's judgments will be final, God's servants will be rewarded, and His enemies will be destroyed. He will be worshiped "*for destroying the destroyers of the earth*" (Rev. 11:18). I can't wait until next week as we see this unpacked more in depth, but let me pause at this point and just give you a summary of the entire book of Revelation in three words. Are you ready? These words are not in your notes, but if you are going to sum up the message of Revelation in three words, here it is: OUR GOD WINS. "*The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*" (Matt. 24:14).

And look at how John closes—with the image of heaven opened, and the ark of his covenant with his people, symbolizing the mercy seat where God's people can rest in his presence by the blood of Jesus, where He will welcome His people in. One day we will behold His majesty, and on that day we will be welcomed by His mercy.

So, Church at Brook Hills, let's fervently pray for God's kingdom to come, and let's fearlessly proclaim God's gospel to all. Remember, don't miss the point. The purpose of the book of Revelation is not to promote speculation about the future. The purpose of the book of Revelation is to compel action in the present.

\* NOTE: A list of additional resources to assist you in further study of the book of Revelation and eschatology are available as a PDF download at [Radical.net/Revelation](http://Radical.net/Revelation). Click on the "Materials" button under any message in the series for this and other weekly resources.

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