

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Revelation 10:1-11:19

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Introduction

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. ... We had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.¹

So begins Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens pictures the age preceding the French Revolution as one where a few enjoyed great wealth and comfort and many others struggled and starved. While Britain enjoyed internal peace and security, France stood on the precipice of social upheaval and chaos. And so for some it was an era to look back upon with fondness; for others it was an era to forget. Two worlds overlapping and one's sense of peace and prosperity depended entirely upon in which one you lived.

We've been watching for weeks now this existence of two simultaneous worlds, one in heaven and one on earth. We've seen though that despite their differences they're connected. The citizens of heaven remain physically present in this world for a time, though their true citizenship doesn't reside here. We've seen God's wrath and judgment toward the sinfulness of humanity in this world, the hardship and oppression of the saints in it. And yet, we've also seen God's desire to not destroy but to redeem. Just as He had revealed Himself to the Egyptians through various plagues and signs, so, too, in human history God manifests Himself and His righteousness to a lost and dying world that they would recognize their sin and their need and repent.

And yet, no such repentance has come. We're still waiting for the contents of the scroll which the Lamb alone is worthy to receive, reveal, and implement. He has broken the seven seals; visions of judgment and the sounds of trumpets have resounded. We finally arrive in

¹ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, I.1.

Revelation 10 and 11 at how God plans to rescue His creation and redeem rebellious sinners to Himself.

But there is a twist, we'll see. God's redemptive purposes will not yet feature Him riding in on a white horse and destroying all who stand against Him. No, just as the Lamb's blood was shed to bring many sons and daughters to glory, it will be the faithful witness of the church to the point of death which will finally bring about faith and repentance in the nations. Revelation 10 & 11 is meant, therefore, to prepare us, that we would begin to be spiritually fortified in the Lamb today for whatever God may call us to. We see that **From Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom in His first coming to His consummation of the Kingdom at His second coming, the call of the church is to faithfully endure the world's persecution by remaining steadfast in its witness to Jesus.**

1. Must be prepared to live out a faithful witness to the Lord 10:1-11

Just as we saw with the seven seals, so we find in chapter 10 an interlude in the sounding of the seven trumpets, and the purpose of this interlude is the same as before, to encourage and assure believers of God's sovereignty to demonstrate the purpose of their faithful witness. Craig Koester summarizes it like this, **"Now, in the series of seven trumpets, the interlude interrupts the specter of judgment to show how the testimony of the faithful who suffer on earth helps move others to give glory to God (10:1-11:13)," (Craig R. Koester).²**

In other words, before the scroll is revealed we're shown in chapter 10 that **As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Church must be *prepared* to live out a faithful witness to the Lord.** You see, again, the purposes of God will not be destructive but redemptive, to bring about the salvation of many. Right, that's the mystery of which the angel speaks to John, verse 7, **"but in**

² Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 94.

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,” (Revelation 10:7). In other words, the element of mystery, we find, is not so much the goal of God’s saving purposes as much as the means by which He will attain it. The mystery that God now discloses is how the suffering of His servants helps to bring about the conversion of the ungodly (Rom. 16:25-26).

That’s what makes the scroll both sweet and bitter. It is that God will be faithful and just but the saints will suffer at the hands of the ungodly in this lifetime. Right, God will accomplish His promise to rescue creation and restore it, but the suffering of the church will be one of the central components of that accomplishment. The demonstration of judgment upon the world didn’t lead to faith and repentance, rather, this will come through how the church follows the Lamb to the point of death, if necessary.

2. Is to offer a counter-message to the world to lead to faith and repentance v. 1-6

Chapter 11, thus, brings us to the central message of John’s whole prophecy.³ We see here how the church’s witness to the nations intervenes before the final judgment, the seventh trumpet, with which God’s kingdom finally comes. We see a variety of different images, which will not be elaborated upon here, such as the beast, the great city, and the time period of 1,260 days. Instead, the chapters to follow will return to each and elaborate upon them there. In other words, we’re getting the whole big picture here, with greater detail to follow.

The main idea of chapter 11, therefore, is how **The church’s faithful witness and death is to be instrumental in the conversion of the nations of the world.** The church does not escape tribulation and persecution; instead the suffering we endure is a vital component of our very

³ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 83.

purpose and mission.⁴ We're shown this truth through a parable of two witnesses. Now, I use that word parable, which in the Bible is simply a story used to teach a deeper spiritual truth. Jesus often taught in parables, using these memorable stories and pictures to capture an important message He wanted to convey.

Most of the parables in Scripture are obviously such, meaning we know that Jesus is speaking in a parable and doesn't mean that the story He's about to tell is a real account. Other parables are not so obvious, such as the one we have in Revelation 11. Some Christians believe that these two witnesses and the events around them are literal prophecies about the future and need to be read literally.

But understand, please, what I am saying and what I am not when I, and other scholars, call this a parable. What I am not saying is that these words are not true. They are true. They are spoken to us by God, just as all the parables which Jesus told were true in the sense that they conveyed real spiritual truths. What I am saying, therefore, is that as we read through this chapter we aren't meant to get caught up in trying to dissect and analyze every single detail. Instead, Jesus shows us this picture in order that we may fully grasp the bigger reality He wants us to understand.

Thus, in verses 1-6 we see, first, that **As Citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Church, is to offer a counter-message to the world to lead to faith and repentance.** Immediately we read of the Temple of God, which is a rich image throughout the Bible where God could dwell among His people and creation. The Garden of Eden was the first temple. The tabernacle was its

⁴ New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham writes, "God's kingdom is to come not simply by saving an elect people who acknowledge his rule from a rebellious world over which his kingdom prevails merely by extinguishing the rebels. It is to come as the sacrificial witness of the elect people who already acknowledge God's rule bring the rebellious nations also to acknowledge his rule. The people of God have been redeemed *from all the nations* (5:9) in order to bear prophetic witness *to all the nations* (11:3-13)," (Ibid., 84).

replacement, which itself was eventually replaced by the Temple which King Solomon built. Fast-forward to the New Testament as we see though that Jesus, Himself, is the perfect Temple of God (John 1:51, 2:13-22), for as fully God and fully Man, Jesus is the quintessence of God with Us, Immanuel. Of course, once Jesus makes a way for our salvation and comes to dwell with His People through the Holy Spirit, the New Testament then calls the people of God, the Church, God's Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). In other words, in Jesus, you and I are the Temple of God.

Thus, in verse 1, when the Temple is mentioned, we are to understand, first and foremost, that we are talking about the Church. Thus, these two witnesses of verse 3 also represent the church, specifically the church in its role as witnesses to the world of the Gospel. This is reinforced by the image of two olive trees and two lampstands. We already saw back in chapter 1 that the lampstands represent the church. Zechariah 4 tells us that the olive trees also are representations of the people of God.⁵

And so, just observe with me what all these symbols teach us. You and I are the true temple of God, as through the Holy Spirit, we are the place in the world today where God uniquely dwells and moves. Now just meditate on that a moment. I know that if we stop and meditate on each image we'll be here until next week, but just relax, we'll pick up the pace in a moment, but we've got to pause here because everything else hinges upon us recognizing who we are. The Church is not a social club; it is not first a place for you to get fed; it is not first a place for you to find community. I mean those are nice byproducts of the Church and you should enjoy those privileges, but they are not the primary purpose of the Church. **The Church is, by its**

⁵ That there are two is a reference that evidence is acceptable only on the basis of two witnesses (Deut. 19:15). The Church are Prophets of the mold of Moses and Elijah, meaning those who confront the world of pagan idolatry in the church's witness to the world.

very nature, the place where God dwells among creation. It is the place where His Kingdom begins to reside *and* from which His Kingdom will grow.

Right? That's what we see here in the opening verses of chapter 11. The Church is the Temple of God *in* the world called to be God's witnesses *to* the world. The Church is to be the place where the righteousness of God confronts the idolatries and injustices of the world.⁶ That's why FBC exists! Now, this doesn't mean that we go old-school fundamentalist and just stand on our soapboxes and spew venomous attacks on all these disgusting sinners around us. No, absolutely not! Revelation 11 shows us that we are to confront the idolatries and the injustices of the world around us not just to point out what's wrong, but to point the world to what is right: King Jesus!

Two promises are made, therefore, about this witness. First, (1) We will be protected by Jesus in this mission. The 1,260 days are noteworthy namely because we will see in chapter 13 that this is the length of time in which the church will be persecuted, but also in chapter 12 it is the length of time in which the church is protected. Right, put those three things together. The church is persecuted, but completely protected and, thus, during that time is to be offering faithful witness to the world. As Dennis Johnson puts it, "The two witnesses cannot be destroyed as long as their prophetic mission remains incomplete," (Dennis E. Johnson).⁷

Now does protection mean that the Church will avoid suffering? No, not at all. Just in the next chapter we'll see that the church is said to be "in the wilderness" during this time, meaning a time of persecution. We'll elaborate on this in a moment in verses 7-13. But the Church will be nourished by God, meaning their faith will be strengthened and they will not abandon the calling of God.

⁶ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 114.

⁷ Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 172.

Which leads to, second, (2) God promises to accomplish His mission through us. In other words, we will be successful. Back in chapter 9 you saw God pronounce judgment and yet it did not produce repentance. Here now a second element is added, which is simply of witness to the Kingdom of God.⁸ The nations are called to repentance through the church's witness to the one true God and warning of His coming judgment.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that this is what true saving faith is; it is what we are called to and what we are to call others to, "[F]aith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," (Hebrews 11:1). Faith means *both* believing in the Word and promises of God, in other words that what He says is true, but *also* believing that there is judgment for rebellion against Him. We see here in verses 1-6 an illustration of this. The Church calls the world to faith in the Word of God while also announcing the wrath of God against sin.

This is our purpose, Church. This is our mission and why we exist. We are called to be a people who have surrendered their identities to God and found new identities solely in Jesus. In that new identity, we are called to announce this truth to the whole world, lovingly and graciously inviting the world to faith and repentance in Jesus.

3. Will endure persecution but find vindication in Christ **v. 7-13**

But, we're warned, the world will not eagerly want to receive this message from us. In fact, they will hate it and, thus, hate us. They will try to quench the message by destroying those who bear witness to it. We read in verse 7 that, "... 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," (Revelation 11:7). Now the text doesn't mean that the whole church will be martyred at this

⁸ Greg Beale writes, "The church's prophetic declaration of God's truth concerning the gospel, including the message of final judgment, unleashes torments toward those who remain ultimately impenitent," (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC, 584).

point, but that the finished mission of the church will end with sizeable persecution in which many Christians will suffer and/or die. Throughout church history and even into day we've seen countless Christians martyred for their faith as the beast wages war against the church, but as we near the very end of this age, there will be intense persecution and martyrdom for many. In other words, at God's appointed time it will seem as if the beast has won.

This period will be brief, though, as we're told in verse 11, because God will use the martyrdom and suffering of the church as the final piece in leading to the redemption of many. God will use the attacks of the beast to actually destroy the works of the beast. We read in verses 11 & 12, "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," (Revelation 11:11-12).

Once again we're given an image or a picture to represent a spiritual truth. It is not as if suddenly all Christians who have been martyred will rise from the dead out of their graves. Instead, this image of resurrection, ascension to God, three days, it ought to make us think of Jesus' own resurrection. John is saying that the ultimate victory of those Christians who are killed for their faith is found in their salvation. Right? That the body they may kill but the soul they cannot destroy (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4)! The point, again, is that **It is the willingness of the church to suffer and die, knowing that their eternal life rests with God in Jesus, that proves to be the most potent evidence to the world of the truth of the Gospel.** It is this final witness in death that leads to the last great repentance among the nations.

And think about that. The great powerful witness of the church to the world that leads to the great conversion of the nations comes through the church's suffering. My point, guys, is that

we're told very clearly what our mindset is supposed to be in this world. I mean, yes, this truth is meant to be an encouragement to us, to know that when persecution and suffering comes that God is still in control and will win the victory. That's vital for us to know, absolutely. But in 2021 America, I don't think that's the most pressing message the church needs to hear today. Instead, we really need to hear and need to take in this calling we have to gladly endure the hatred and scorn of the world.

If I may be so frank this morning, the American church is often not taking this position. Instead, how we've seen so many "Christian" leaders and pastors and churches just completely sell out this kind of Gospel witness for the sake of being in good with the guy in control. Regardless of which political party is in power, regardless of who occupies the White House, there always seem to be 'Christian leaders' who will do and say whatever is needed to get close to those in power. I mean there's a lot that could be said here, but my point is that **The American church has a proven track-record of at times forfeiting our gospel witness for the sake of our connection to power and money.** And this goes back through history all the way to Emperor Constantine in the fourth century.

But that's not what the church of the book of Revelation looks like. The Church doesn't whore herself out to the powers-to-be, but instead she gladly suffers persecution for the sake of the clear witness of the Gospel. Now, that doesn't mean that we are called to seek out persecution or anything like that. This isn't a calling to having a martyr's syndrome, but it is instruction on the posture we are supposed to have. Just looking to the example of Jesus we're told, **"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth," (Isaiah 53:7).**

While we need to, yes, be pursuing religious freedom, that does not entail forsaking Gospel witness just to garner favor with those in power.

The simple point is this: Be faithful to the Gospel, church, and trust the rest to God! Be engaged in politics, work in the various institutions of society which are in place, but forget not your mission. Stop taking its success into your own hands and instead trust the success of the mission to the God whose mission it is in the first place!

4. Will enjoy the fullness of God's presence when He consummates the Kingdom v. 14-19

Ok, because here's the spoiler alert: God wins! Jesus comes back! The Kingdom will be consummated! Thus, as citizens of the kingdom of God, the Church will enjoy the fullness of God's presence when He consummates the Kingdom. We're running out of time here but what verses 14-19 show us is simply, then, the end. As the mission of the church, to preach the Gospel to people from every tribe and every tongue concludes, as the kingdom of this world mounts its last-ditch effort to destroy the church, King Jesus returns.

The trumpet is sounded again, meaning the coming of God in glory and splendor. We're shown the consummation of human history as the third and final woe comes with the seventh trumpet. This then is that third woe, that the judgment of God comes upon those who have rejected Him. Another way that we could translate and phrase verse 15 might be to say,

“Dominion over the world, without challenge or rival, has come into the possession of our Lord and His anointed King.”⁹ In other words, the Kingdom now finally comes on earth as it is in

heaven. The Son finally makes the nations a footstool under his feet. Jesus' kingship is consummated!

⁹ Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 153.

In the context of the book as a whole, these verses open the picture of the final judgment which will not be explained until chapter 19. In other words, just as verses 1-13 set the stage for chapters 12-18, verses 14-19 set the stage for chapters 19-22. Dennis Johnson writes, “The vision of the opened temple in heaven also prepares us for a new cycle of visions that pierce to the heart of the cosmic conflict of the ages, the battle between Christ, the woman’s seed, and Satan, the ancient serpent-dragon,” (Dennis E. Johnson).¹⁰

But in the context of this immediate chapter the point is that after the church’s mission and witness, after the persecution and suffering of the church, is then finally the church’s glorification. This age ends with our full reconciliation to God! And, again, this is vital for us for two reasons.

First, this is our hope, our confidence, our security, our fortress and our refuge! Think about it, no matter how bad things may get, or how difficult they are, no matter how much hatred and vitriol and suffering comes our way, we have the promise that God wins! That is our ultimate prize. It is God Himself. It is unimaginable peace and joy that comes with knowing in full your God and being known and loved in full by Him. There really is no way to describe it. No word does justice to it. Perhaps the closest we could come is that rich Old Testament Hebrew term, *shalom*, which means more than just peace. *Shalom* is the total well-being of a person; it is completeness beyond our wildest imagination or understanding. That is the guaranteed promise to you.

Therefore, second, this is our power and endurance through the trials that will come our way. This is the message that we must constantly be preaching to ourselves. Whatever befalls us, whatever God sends our way, whatever we face and come up against, we can and will overcome.

¹⁰ Ibid., 154.

Moreover, this is why we can be confident in our mission; this is why we witness to a lost and dying world with boldness. Because we know God will do it! You don't have to be fearful when sharing the gospel with your neighbor or co-worker. Neither do you have to stress about 'doing a good job.' It's not up to you! It is not you or your persuasiveness or rhetoric that 'wins' people to the Lord. The Father Himself does so by drawing lost sinners to Himself. Your simple responsibility is simply to proclaim the message.

So, in close, friends, proclaim the Gospel! That is the calling of the church. That is our role as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven while we live in the midst of the kingdom of this world. You see, I'll just close with the question that some, if not many, of us are asking ourselves right now. 'Does all of this mean I'm supposed to be killed for my faith? Or is there something wrong if I'm not suffering for my faith?' Or, perhaps, the best question we could ask in self-reflection this morning is, 'Am I suffering or encountering hardship as a result of following Christ? And if not, then maybe why?'

You see, please understand this morning, the lesson is not that in order to follow Jesus well and be a faithful witness to Him you need to be persecuted. No, that kind of conclusion suggests that our goal is persecution, that this is what we should be seeking out. No, the lesson is that if you are simply pursuing Jesus, then you will likely find yourself in situations of conflict with a lost and dying world. Thus, you need to be prepared to encounter that hardship, be willing to suffer and be persecuted, even to the point of death, if need be. **Count the cost of discipleship.** Revelation 11 tells us this morning. Because, frankly, if following Jesus doesn't bring you into uncomfortable, if not hard situations, then you and I likely aren't following Jesus as witnesses for Him like we should be.

And so, then, Christian, proclaim the Gospel. Be a witness to Jesus! But even in knowing that it may be hard at times, and that it may bring persecution, whether verbal, social, or physical, you can still do so in hope; do so in confidence! Why? Because,

The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever, (Revelation 11:15).