

Can I Get A Witness?

Turn to Revelation 10-11 as we continue our look into this amazing book. I know most of us are used to a more sensationalized version of Revelation and that approach has its merit, but it is not the only way to understand this book. This little nugget of wisdom from Father John Behr has helped me as I've studied Revelation. He said to think less in terms of "this will happen and then this and then this" and more in terms of orientation when considering Revelation. An orientation to see all things in Christ, through Christ, the slain Lamb; an orientation that sees all that has happened, is happening, will happen as resting in God's plan, purpose and timing. We see an end and then an orientation that says, "this is how we live in Christ, moving toward that end, dying to ourselves, finding ourselves in Christ, made complete in him. It is an orientation so I won't become earthbound, tied to the temporal rather than the eternal. I won't hold desperately to life because I've already laid down my life in Christ." I think that's a helpful orientation in studying Revelation. Look at chapter 10:

"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.'" Revelation 10:1-4

An interesting thing about reading Revelation is we encounter visions and images that alternate between judgment, or the threat of judgment, and images of assurance and victory. We've just gone through the sounding of six of the seven trumpets and we've seen judgment coming upon a third of the earth. A third of the earth's population dies. The hope is that people will repent of their sins and call upon the Lord but the end of chapter 9 tells us people still did not repent. Then the judgement of Revelation 9 is interrupted in chapter 10 by the appearance of a mighty angel and a voice from heaven. The description of the angel is reminiscent of John's description of the glorified Christ in chapter 1. Some believe this is Jesus or an angelic representative of Jesus, an emissary. He is definitely representing Jesus with a rainbow above his head which represents the throne of God and his face like the sun.

The images of chapters 8 and 9 have been of judgment on the wicked. They suffered because of their sin and rejection of God and his word, but in chapter 11 it isn't the wicked that are suffering, it's the righteous, the faithful witnesses who are persecuted and killed. Chapter 10 prepares us for chapter 11. How? If you are facing persecution, if you are likely to be martyred for the faith, seeing a giant angel would be a real boost to your morale. The posture of this angel is that of a conqueror taking possession of a territory. He isn't timid or hesitant. He roars like a lion as he claims the whole world, planting his right foot on the sea and his left on land. The empire and the devil, enemies of Christ and his church, are set on destruction and world domination. They are set on defeating the church, defeating you, pulling us all down into sin. They are set on the destruction of Israel as well, but God through this angelic representative puts his foot down and says, "not gonna happen." Regardless of everything going on and all the schemes of the enemy, Revelation 10 declares **God still has claim to this world and He will prevail!** Be encouraged because you belong to Him. We belong to him. The church belongs to him. This planet still belongs to him. In the midst of persecution, in the midst of the world in distress and under judgment, God is still in control. Trust him.

Notice in verse 4 John was about to write down what he heard in the seven thunders and a voice from heaven told him to seal up their words and don't write them down. Not everything is to be shared. Sometimes it's about timing and sometimes it's because the secret things belong to the Lord. I don't know what you hear in this verse, but for some of us worrying constantly I hear the Lord saying, "See the giant angel with one foot on land and one on the sea? Hear him roaring like a lion? He is trying to let you know I've got this, I'm in control, I'll conquer every foe, I'm Sovereign and so you don't need to know all the details, you don't have to have all the reasons and know all the whys and wherefores, you just need to trust me! Seal up the words John. Don't write, just let them trust me." Facing persecution, trouble, just don't have any idea how you can handle this next thing, too much drama and trauma, think of that mighty angel in chapter 10 and remember: **God's got this. Trust him!**

Next Sunday Sarah is going to cover some other important pieces of this chapter, but look with me now at Revelation 11 and let me share a couple of things I believe the Lord is showing us. The chapter opens with John being told to go and measure the temple of God and the altar and count the worshipers there. He is told to exclude the outer court because it has been given to the Gentiles. Most evangelicals like us believe a Jewish temple will be rebuilt on the temple

mount in Jerusalem and this is the temple John is being told to measure, but some see this as a spiritual metaphor for the church. John is being called to draw lines of demarcation to separate what is holy from what is profane, to separate who belongs and who doesn't. The prophet Ezekiel was instructed to do a similar thing. **“Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins.” Ezekiel 43:10** In other words, look at God's purpose and plan, consider his design and then feel remorse if you've not lived according to his plans. Be ashamed of your sin. I believe this is a word for the church in 2022. John is told to measure the temple of God and the bible tells us we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Israel may rebuild the physical temple but what if we are the temple that is being measured? What if lines are being drawn to separate the holy and the profane in the church, among God's people, in our own lives? Where do we land? Are we living a holy life? The hope is that once again God's people will examine themselves, recognize where they are and repent. “Lord as you measure us, as the lines are drawn, let us be ashamed of our sin and commit our lives to you, to walk in holiness before you.”

Revelation 11:3 speaks of two witnesses. **“I will give power to my witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days.” Revelation 11:3** God doesn't tell us who they are or if they are to be taken literally as two individuals or are they representative of the church. People have speculated it is Enoch and Elijah, two men who were caught up into heaven without dying. Some suggest it is Moses and Elijah because they were seen with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Again, some suggest they represent the faithful witness of the church, even in times of hardship and persecution. Here is the point we mustn't overlook: **God will always have a witness!** In good times and bad, times of persecution or times of peace, God will always have a witness. John is told, **“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” Revelation 11:4**

We've already been told in Revelation 1:20 that the lampstands are the churches. The two olive trees can represent a continual source and supply of oil to keep the lamps lit and burning. We used to sing, “Give me oil in my lamp keep me burning.” The point is whoever you decide these two witnesses are, they speak to us of God's plan to have an anointed, Spirit empowered witness in the earth, shining the light of Jesus into the darkest places, not dependent upon human might or power, but depending upon the Spirit of the Lord. He's counting on us to be a witness.

Centuries before the prophet Zechariah was shown a lampstand and two olive trees. The Lord told him, “These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.” It was in this context that the Lord said **“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty.” Zechariah 4:6** God intends to have a Spirit empowered witness in this earth. He intends to have a church like the lampstand with two olive trees, a church that has a continual anointing of the Holy Spirit, a church with lamps held high, not ashamed to preach the gospel, not ashamed to speak truth to power, not ashamed to live holy lives in a culture that celebrates the profane and the unholy. As I said, a measuring rod has been laid down and God is drawing lines of demarcation, separating the profane from the holy and he is calling the church to bear witness to Jesus and the gospel. Can I get a witness? Are you willing to be a witness? Will you keep your lamp burning, your light shining? Will you stay full of the oil of the Holy Spirit, relying upon Him? It’s not by our might or power but it is by the help and power of the Holy Spirit that we can shine in the darkness of this world. That’s who he is counting on!

The Lord is asking today, **“Can I get a witness?”** At your school, on your job, in your family, before your neighbors. God needs a witness, empowered by the Holy Spirit. A witness willing to go into the darkest places. A witness that won’t quit. I think John thought maybe his work was done. But then John is told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” The work isn’t done for any of us. There are too many waiting to hear! Be a witness!

Verse 7 tells us the two witnesses finish their testimony, complete their assignment and then the beast that comes up from the Abyss attacks them, overpowers them and kills them. We need to remember there is a battle going on and there will be casualties. Just as God always has a witness, there will always be opposition and there will always be martyrs for the faith. Satan is looking to devour us, to destroy us if he can, but the Lord protects his witnesses until their time and assignment is complete. The two witnesses are killed and it looks like the enemy is in control. The witnesses were hated because they spoke and lived God’s truth when the world chose Satan’s lies and deception. The wicked gloat over their death. Like a perverse Christmas, they send gifts to each other to celebrate the death of God’s faithful witnesses, but that’s not the end of the story. **“But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them and they stood on their feet, and terror struck 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**

while their enemies looked on. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” Revelation 11:11-13

In the battle remember: There is a resurrection! Even in death God doesn't abandon or forsake his people. The witnesses die, but they are resurrected. You may be on the verge of giving up, you may be weary of the battle but the Lord will breathe the breath of life back into you. For everyone who has been persecuted, beaten down, abused, rejected, abandoned, there is a resurrection for you. Jesus is going to stand you on your feet again and it will bring terror to your enemies. Never count out a follower of Jesus. Paraphrasing Yoggi Berra, “It ain't over til it's over and with Jesus, it ain't ever over.” Let the breath of God refresh and restore you!

There wasn't only a resurrection of the two witnesses but the survivors of the earthquake get saved. The beast thought he had won by killing the witnesses but instead, they are resurrected and taken to heaven and many more come to Jesus and are saved. God is still at work, working all things for his glory and the devil can't win for losing.

John then moves from this scene on earth to a scene in heaven where the 24 elders fall on their faces and worship God saying, **“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign...The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great.”**

Revelation 11:16-18 In the midst of trouble, persecution, devastating judgments on the earth, the elders give thanks for three things. We should too.

Give thanks because we know our God reigns! There is victory in Jesus and ultimately every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. There are still battles to be fought, there will still be casualties and martyrs, but don't give up, our God reigns!

Give thanks because we know God will judge rightly! A day is coming when God will condemn sin and wickedness and He will right every wrong and every injustice will be made right. A day is coming when every enemy of God and his people, every cause of pain, every cause of sorrow and death, all disease and war and famine, child abuse and neglect, when every scheme and design of hell will be judged, condemned and destroyed and God will wipe the tears from our eyes. He will make all things new. He is going to make it right in your life.

Give thanks because we know God will reward his saints! All who have repented and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord, all who have revered his name and obeyed his word, both small and great will be rewarded in his presence. No one is overlooked in his kingdom.

We have reason to be thankful. I know this sermon has been like a shotgun blast, just shooting all over the place, but this is what I felt the Lord wanted me to share today. Remember what I said at the beginning from Father John Behr, about looking at Revelation as an orientation to see all things in Christ, through Christ, the slain Lamb; an orientation that sees all that has happened, is happening, will happen as resting in God's plan, purpose and timing. We see an end and then an orientation that says, "this is how we live in Christ, moving toward that end, dying to ourselves, finding ourselves in Christ, made complete in him. It is an orientation so I won't become earthbound, tied to the temporal rather than the eternal. I won't hold desperately to life because I've already laid down my life in Christ."

We don't have to be afraid of anything that may come upon this world. We've already laid down our life in Christ. We belong to him. We can face it all resting in God's plan, purpose and timing, living for Jesus with joy even in troubled times. I don't know what the future holds, but I know the Lord calls us to be faithful witnesses in spite of what happens. I know he still lays claim to this world, he's still in control, he's got this and we can trust him. I know even in death there is a resurrection. I know even when it seems like we are dying, he will breathe life into us and raise us up. I know we can give thanks always because our God reigns, he will make things right and he will reward us with his presence forever. Think of that, someday forever we will be safe at home with Jesus! It's good news and good news should be shared. Can I get a witness? Are you willing to be his witness and share this good news? Let's commit ourselves to the Lord and his plans today.