

We are continuing our accidental series on the book of Revelation. Today we're back in chapter 10. As is common in this vision John sees it's hard to always know what's real, what's metaphor, what's literal, and what's poetry. You read something and then think – now, wait, what? I mean look at Verse 1 of chapter 10, and tell me what's literal and what's figurative.

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.

Revelation 10:1

He saw an angel – that seems to be literal

Robed in a cloud – might be hyperbole – I mean can you actually wear a cloud? The angel in verse 3 is going to be further described as rather large so maybe he could but it seems like it's figurative.

Rainbow above his head – could be literal – could be just color shining right around the angel and not a full rainbow – it could again just be that John is describing the angel as full of mercy - but we'll go with literal.

Face was like the sun – that's figurative because that's a classic simile – it uses like or as.

Plus it can't be literal because if you look directly into the sun you'd burn your eyes out.

Legs like fiery pillars – again it seems like simile – uses like – and I know God once had a burning bush that didn't burn but it doesn't seem like this angel is actually on fire because John is about to approach him.

What's the point in this English lesson? Revelation can be both super mysterious and understandable if we'll take a minute to think about it. Reading the Bible is easy and hard, quick to read and extremely time consuming, divinely inspired and also written in a certain style in certain genres. It's important to know what you're reading when you're reading the Bible. Are you reading a letter – like Ephesians? Are you reading a historical record like 1 Chronicles? Are you reading poetry like Song of Solomon? It helps to know what you're reading before you start reading it. In the same way - are you reading a novel or fictionalized account of a famous person or that person's actual autobiography? It makes a difference. Ok, so knowing what you're reading matters. We got that.

So the literal mighty angel in Revelation 10 is holding a little scroll which lay open in his hand. We pick up the story in verse 5: **Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted it as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."**

Revelation 10:5-11

A few things to note here.

1. The scroll is open. As always in Revelation if you get confused find the Lamb. Always reorient yourself in the book with where the Lamb is and what He's doing. Because the book is first and foremost about Jesus. The Lamb hasn't been mentioned in a few chapters but don't think He's not still at the center of the story. Chapter 5 makes it clear that Jesus is the Lamb and it's Jesus that opened the scroll. The revelation is no longer hidden it's open and ready to be revealed because the Lamb made it so.
2. The voice from heaven that tells John to take the scroll appears to be the same voice he'd heard in chapter 1 and that voice identified Himself as Jesus. It appears here that Jesus is telling John to go take the scroll from the angel – which some scholars think the angel is actually Jesus given the figurative language used to describe the angel is the same as when John has described Jesus. But, last week my pastor said he thought it was an angel so we're going with it's an angel. To clarify though – angels are messengers and it appears given the similar likeness but being referred to as an angel by John that this mighty angel is sent as a representative of Jesus. He's there on official business from the throne room bearing in His hand the now opened scroll. So, again, where is Jesus – He's present and telling John to take up the scroll.
3. The announcement the angel makes is there would be no more delay. However, there does seem to be a bit of a delay before the seventh trumpet. Leon Morris says, "When the necessary conditions have been fulfilled there will be no delay. The End will come." But until the conditions have been fulfilled the church still has a task to complete and a mission to fulfill. That mission was what was covered last week – the need for a constant witness. In

the delay between when John is living and what he is seeing in his vision there is time for another prophetic word to go forth – this time from John. Here’s where something interesting happens. There had been Old Testament prophets who had heard a similar command regarding a scroll – Jeremiah ate God’s words and they were a joy and a delight to him but were followed by a stern word to be delivered to God’s people who were being taken away into exile. Ezekiel **“I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel” ... So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. Ezekiel 2:9-3:1, 3**

It appears John is experiencing some sort of prophetic initiation. Oh, we’ve all had to do it, John. Prophet hazing. Actually, it’s more of a commissioning. The mystery of God that’s being accomplished was announced by those former prophets to Israel, but in the delay there is still a message to be announced by this newly commissioned voice to many peoples, nations, languages and kings. There’s a delay because the mystery of God has not yet made its way to every nation and tribe. The conditions have not yet been met. Think of it this way – more than any other sign people are looking for to indicate the Lord’s return – and there are many – but one of the biggest is what Jesus said in Matthew 24 – the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. When that has been accomplished then all systems are a go and there will be no more delay. But, right now – in the delay – there’s a mission that we’re all to fulfill.

4. John eats the scroll. Here we return to the original lesson. Did he literally eat a scroll or is it a metaphor for how John took in the message of the scroll? Think about your answer.

There's not a right or wrong – you just need to defend your answer! Eugene Peterson wrote, **“He eats the book – not just reads it – he got it into his nerve endings, his reflexes, his imagination. The book he ate was Holy Scripture. Assimilated into his worship and prayer, his imagining and writing, the book he ate was metabolized into the book he wrote.” Eugene Peterson**

The Greek verb is actually translated as devour not eat. In fact, the definition of the form of devour that's used here says – to consume by eating, to devour, of a prophet, eating up a book, suggestive of spiritually eating and digesting its contents. In other words what John did here was to take the scroll and get its contents into every fiber of his being. Before he could move forward with the task he was to be given he had to digest the Word. God's words will become the words John will speak – that's what prophecy is – but God's words became his because he devoured them into his very being. Did he actually eat it? I doubt it – personally, I feel it's figurative – but did he devour, consume, and assimilate every part of it? Yes.

5. Then, having taken the scroll and devoured it he's left with the command – now take what you've eaten and speak of it to the nations. G. K. Beale, a leading scholar on the book of Revelation said, **“Having digested the contents of the scroll, he must now make its contents known to others.” G. K. Beale** You cannot share what you have not experienced, but once you've experienced it you cannot keep it to yourself. John had let the book get into every fiber of his being – but not so that he could be satisfied but so that he could prophecy to the nations.

Here's where I want to hang out for a minute. Peter said The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to

perish, but everyone to come to repentance. We're living in the delay. We're living in anticipation that Jesus could return at any time yet knowing there's still a condition to be met – there are still over 3 Billion people who live within an unreached people group – a distinct language/ethnic group with little to no access to a gospel witness. We live in the delay when there's still time for the message of Jesus to be taken to the nations. There's still opportunity for the gospel to spread and many more people to repent. God is still calling missionaries to go into all the world and sending His Holy Spirit to empower people to say yes to that call.

But, when Ezekiel and Jeremiah ate the scrolls and prepared to give a harsh word it was to God's people. And, when John sends this vision with its warnings about judgment it was sent to the church. Furthermore, when John eats the scroll and is told to speak again to the nations – it's just after he's witnessed in a vision 1/3 of mankind die in a plague and the others refuse to repent. So my question is: who is John warning if not the church? In this time of delay while spreading the gospel to those who have not heard, the danger is there that those who have already heard will grow complacent, bored, and restless. The delay is not the time for the church to compromise or lose sight of the Lamb, this is not the time for the church to change her allegiance or pledge loyalty to anyone or anything other than Jesus, this is not the time for the church to lose sight of her mission, to fail in taking the gospel, to drop the ball on proclaiming good news to the poor, to stop preaching freedom for the captives, to quit releasing the prisoners who are waiting in darkness, or to take a break in rescuing those who are perishing without Christ. This is not the moment for us to live in fear of our neighbor instead of loving them, or for us to sit down and refuse to care

about our children, our communities, our cities. Because any minute now the conditions will be met and a trumpet could sound and this time it won't be a warning.

Here's how the church remains vigilant against compromise in the delay. Here's how the church does not grow complacent, sidetracked, or comfortable. Here's how each of us knows what discipleship looks like and what it means to take up our cross and what it means to follow Jesus, act like Jesus, love like Jesus, serve like Jesus. Here's how we will know how to live full of the Spirit and see the fruit of Him at work in our lives. Here's how:

WE EAT THE BOOK.

We devour it until we know it, we chew on it until we understand how to live it, we meditate on it day and night, we let its words penetrate every part of us, we eat it until people around us start sniffing – you living in a library? You smell like a book.

Think of it like garlic and onions. When you eat garlic it seeps into your pores, the smell of it cooking invades every room in your home, you can taste it for days, you smell it in your hair – others smell it on your breath. If you were the one chopping onions its on your fingers even after 35 hand washings, it's still burning your eyes for hours. You cannot eat garlic and onions and not have it impact every part of your home, your person and those around you – but the aroma as it cooks and the taste of it in a sauce of your lips – possibly better than honey. This is what it means to feast on the word of God, to devour it, to eat it. It's not enough to just know what the Bible says. In fact, Eugene Peterson says that can almost be dangerous to the church – “if we know what the Bible teaches, we don't have to read it anymore, don't have to enter the story and immerse ourselves in it.” We say – well I know what the Bible says – but what else does it say? If you only the parts that taste like honey and skip over the parts that make your stomach hurt then you've not eaten the book.

If you spit out the convicting bits before they have a chance to sour – you’ve not eaten the book. Earlier this week I was reading from 2 Timothy and in the same chapter I read a line that tasted like honey and I was saying Amen and a paragraph later it had soured in my stomach as God’s word convicted me. We have to devour the whole book.

Again quoting Eugene Peterson – **“Words spoken or written to us under the metaphor of eating, words to be freely taken in, tasted, chewed, savored, swallowed, and digested, have a very different effect on us from those that come at us from the outside, whether in the form of propaganda or information.”** – Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book*

I don’t want you to just have information about the Bible, know about the Bible, recite the Bible, or reference the Bible. I’m not just suggesting you read the Bible. What I’m trying to say is that you devour the Bible until you embody its message and begin to live it out. We’ll become what we read. I hope you’ve been reading the Bible with us this year but more than that I hope you’ve been savoring it like honey on your lips, applying it, letting it convict you and turning your stomach sour on occasion, and allowing it to change the way you talk and think and act. For some of us the daily act of Bible reading this year has instilled a new habit but for some it’s meant reading without properly digesting. We were talking about this as a staff this week and realized perhaps we’d done a disservice if we accidentally overemphasized reading without making sure you were having time to chew, swallow, digest, and allow the word to get into your organs and build muscles and strengthen your bones and give life to your body. This is what God’s word has the power to do if we’ll eat this book. Pastor Jeff had a student essentially ask him if he was reading the Bible wrong if he just read the same story over and over. He didn’t know it but there’s a name for that –

Inductive Bible Study. There's no wrong way to read the Bible except to not read it all. Eat the book, devour the book.

But, how? How do we eat the book?

Choose to Sit Down for Dinner

One of the biggest concerns people have about prayer and about reading is how to stay focused and pay attention. You do not want me to teach anyone how to stay focused.

Focusing is not as hard as math but focusing is hard. I was reminded this week of a story Brennan Manning shares in his book, Ragamuffin Gospel. He relates our capacity to stay focused to a small child playing with her toys who then runs to her father and climbs up in his lap for a moment. While in his lap she's still looking around, not focusing on any one thing in particular, still squirming and in a minute she'll want back down to play again. But in that moment when she lays her head on his shoulder she is "confident of the love, the care, the security that is hers in those arms." And, ultimately the father was delighted that she chose to be in his presence even with her attention darting here and there.

If you're like me your mind has thought of 50 specific things – while I've been preaching – that you need to not forget to do or say and put away. But, you still chose to come and be in God's house today and hopefully something – a line in a song, the presence of God during worship, a sentence in this sermon – something has made it past your lips and into your spirit for you to chew on. When you eat a meal you aren't focused the whole time on the food but enough so that you can tell someone later – yes, we had tortellini with pesto cream sauce for dinner it was delicious. Did you remember all that you read from God's word today? Word for word? That's remarkable recall. But do I remember that I stopped and

chose to read and for a moment I was in the lap of my Father God and it felt good and there was this one line that I'll chew on today? Yes, that's oftentimes the case.

Set the Table with the Right Utensils

Ask questions of the text. What are we having for dinner? Like I said at the beginning –

What's the literary genre? are we eating a letter, a history text, a poem? If we're having soup I'll need a spoon, if we're having steak I'll need a knife. We prepare the utensils – we set the table based on what we're about to eat. We ask questions based on what we're about to read. If you're reading something in the New Testament ask **Where have I heard this before?** What is being referenced? Paul keeps talking about a second Adam or a new Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15? Who is this Adam? Where can I find the first Adam so I understand the importance of the second Adam? I'll answer this one for you – Genesis 1-5. Look up what's being referenced. Find out what's being referenced.

Who was this being written to originally? Was it a person, a place, a people group? If it's a letter in the New Testament it should tell you in the opening verses. A quick google search will give you some quick info on those places at that time. I wonder **How did they hear this message?** Did it taste like honey on their lips – was it comforting? Did it bring peace or joy or hope? Did it sour in their stomach? Was it a hard word for them too? If you're reading the Old Testament – how did they respond? Over and over the prophets gave hard words about repent or major punishment is headed your way. Write down your questions and answer them as you keep reading over weeks or months. Remember, the Bible is a story. A true one. But it's telling a story of a people. There should be an element of what's going to happen as you're reading.

What does this mean? If you don't know what something means read the passage that came before or after. Or, if you have a Bible with commentary look and see if that gives more information. See if Wikipedia helps to answer your question. Consult a good Bible commentary. Call and ask your Sunday School teacher or one of the pastors. If I could spend my day answering Bible questions I would be so happy. As pastors we take all the wrong classes in school. We prepare for Bible questions that no one asks and we never took a class on how to estimate how many people will eat a spaghetti dinner at an event where you invited all your neighbors.

But, of all the questions you could ask of the text and there are so many and I could go on and on and give you books filled with questions to ask for study. More important than figuring out what's literal and what's figurative in Revelation. More important than sorting out timelines and reading to crack the code. Even more important than what does this mean. Here's the most important question you need to ask in order to devour the book:

What can I obey? What can I immediately apply and put into practice? What do I need to hear from this verse or section or story? What do I need to live out in my own life. If we're going to eat the book it means we have to ask this question. Having read it and let it fill in every fiber of my being how do I now live it out?

After You Eat, Give your Compliments to the Chef

Brennan Manning said, "**The Word we study has to be the Word we pray.**" – Brennan Manning A conversation with the writer of the book about the book is how we will take what we've read and obey it. Pray as you read. The Psalms are prayers. Read them aloud and change the wording so that it's your prayer. Psalm 46 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear." Oh, God I thank you

that you are my refuge, thank you for strength, thank you for your help. Or, I might pray – God, I need refuge, I need a safe place to run. Could you hide me and strengthen me today? Be my ever present help in the midst of my troubles. Help me Lord not to fear.

Pray the word you're reading. And, then meditate on it. If I asked you what's the best chocolate cake you've ever eaten? Your pastor will immediately say – King David hotel in Israel. What's the best dessert you've ever had? If you're a dessert person you're recalling it right now. Eat the book. Recall the parts that have ministered to you, challenged you, or that you are needing to apply. The Bible calls this meditating on the Word. Go home today and look up how many times the Bible says to meditate on His word – to keep it in mind. Chew on it, savor it, feast on it. Once you become a grown up no one is ever going to encourage you to memorize Scripture. You'll never get a candy bar for memorizing a Bible verse again. But, can I encourage you – still memorize the word? It'll help you recall the best book you've ever eaten.

Eugene Peterson summarizes what I've been trying to say - Read page 19

Eat the book and let it taste like honey as the story becomes alive and you let it begin to change you, let the book bring you comfort and joy, let its words settle inside of you like peace and spring up inside of you like hope. Let its words make your stomach hurt until you've put it into practice. Let it trouble you a bit. Eat the book and let it get inside you. Eat the book and then obey what it says.

Let's pray.