

The Mission of the Church

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[0 : 00] Tonight's first reading is from Revelation chapter 10, beginning at verse 1.

That can be found on page 1240 of the church Bibles. That's page 1240, Revelation chapter 10, beginning at verse 1.

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.

[1 : 10] 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 forever 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 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 chapter 11, beginning at verse 1.

[2 : 28] Again, that's on page 1240 of the church Bibles. That's page 1240, Revelation chapter 11, beginning at verse 1.

I was given a reed like a measuring rod, and was told, Go and measure the temple of God and the altar with its worshippers, but exclude the outer court, do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles.

They will trample on the holy city for 42 months, and I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.

They are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, and they stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.

This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying, and they have power to turn the waters into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

[3 : 39] Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

For three and a half days, some from every people, tribe, language, and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them, and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

But after the three and a half days, the 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. The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming soon.

[5 : 02] The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven which said, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

And the twenty-four elders who were seated on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped 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 nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets, and your people who revere your name, both great and small, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant, and there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a severe hailstorm.

Thanks be to God. Thanks, Jack, very much for reading. If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here.

[6 : 21] It's great to have you with us, and it'd be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at page 1240, Revelation 10 and 11, as we continue our series in Revelation. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful as we look at this together.

Good to be reminded about the clocks by Jamie. This morning, my daughter Hannah came running in, and sang, the clocks, the clocks, they've gone forward. We've missed everything. And then we realized it was next week, so that was a relief.

So remember it next week. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Father God, we know we need help, and we thank you that you provide for us.

We ask that you will open your word to our hearts, and open our hearts to your word. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we've been in this series in Revelation, and we've seen how it's a special kind of writing.

And it's great to hear it, because John throws up vivid image after vivid image. And often he'll start with an image, and then he'll move to another image that describes the same thing from a different angle.

[7 : 27] And you can't really piece them together, but you're not meant to. It's meant to leave us with a deep impression of what's going on. It's more like looking at a sort of a painting by Picasso, some sort of abstract work of art, than it is looking at a sort of smartphone photograph.

And it's a highly symbolized style of writing, where lots of things, including the numbers, have special meanings. So for example, the number seven is a Bible number for completeness.

And so when we see seven years, it can mean the complete time. When we see three and a half years, that can mean a limited time, because it's kind of half of the completeness.

Three and a half days would be a very short, but limited time. And lots of the images, including lots of the ones we'll encounter tonight in this passage, are from the Old Testament.

The better we know our Old Testament scriptures, the more that helps us with a key to sort of unlock this vision in Revelation. And so we'll explore some of that shortly as we look at it together.

[8 : 35] We've also seen that in this main body of Revelation, this section we're in, it's a bit like watching action replays of a great goal. So you know, sometimes if you see a goal, you can then watch different replays of it from different angles, and then there might be sort of the commentary box camera as well that shows the reaction there, or a camera showing the crowd.

But it's all showing the same event in different ways. And that's happening in this main body of Revelation, as we had seven seals, and now we're in seven trumpets, and then we're going to get to seven balls, each describing the same period of time.

Now just to remember where we got to, in chapter four, the apostle John, eyewitness to Jesus, was given this vision where he was taken through a doorway into heaven itself, and in heaven he saw a throne.

On the throne was the living God with a scroll in his right hand that has in it his plans for the future. And then Jesus, the slain lamb, standing in the throne room, alive again, is worthy to take the scroll from the hand of God.

And it's got seven seals, sealing up the scroll at different points, and he's unlocked seal after seal, breaking them, to reveal for us, through John's testimony, what our times are going to be like, and what the future holds.

[9 : 54] But then just as he was about to break the final seal, the seventh seal, and we were going to hear about the end, what's going to happen at the end of time, he rewound the tape. He went back in time.

Everything jumped back. Now we're looking at the same things from a new angle with seven angels, with seven trumpets. And six of them, six of the trumpets were sounded in chapters eight and nine of Revelation, and we've had those last time.

And now, tonight, we're in a gap before we hear trumpet seven get sounded, which will be the end of history. And the reason we need this gap, this interlude, is because what we heard last time from chapters eight and nine of Revelation, was that our times that we live in now will be marked by distress.

The world we are in is a broken world, profoundly broken. We see natural disasters, wars, famines, plagues, pandemics, and it is not meant to be this way, our world.

These are the marks of a world that is under the judgment of God. So a very big question for us, as we're hearing that revealed for us, as we read Revelation eight and nine, is, well, how then do we live in our times, if they're going to be times of distress?

[11 : 09] More than that, how do we thrive here? What is the meaning of life in these times? What is our goal? And to answer that tonight, we're going to hear that John sees a little scroll, and then two witnesses, and then the seventh trumpet.

So first, the little scroll, where we hear that God's word is dependable truth. This is in chapter 10. John sees a mighty angel in verse one, and then if you just look at verse two, it says he was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand, tantalizing.

And John gets told to go and take hold of the scroll in verse eight, and the angel, in verse nine, tells him, take it and eat it.

And you can imagine it on the menu of your local Chinese takeaway in verse 10. I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I'd eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

So it's a sweet and sour scroll, and this is what God's gospel news tastes like. This is what the word of God tastes like, because the gospel, the news about who Jesus is, is that he is God's saving king, appointed by God, to rule the world righteously forever.

[12 : 32] And so that message is a message to put down your arms. It's a message of coming judgment for anyone who has not received Jesus as their savior and king. And so there is a bitterness to that message, a sourness to knowing that God's word brings, it proclaims judgment on the world.

And yet these are also the words that can save everyone who believes them, because the invitation is take refuge in the son now before he appears in glory, and he will be a merciful savior to you.

And so there is a sweetness to all who will receive that message and receive Jesus as savior. Words from a good God that tastes as sweet as honey, they are like the best chocolate in your mouth.

So John is a model for us in this chapter of what he does with the word of God, the scroll that he gets. He eats the word and then he shares the word. Just as we are to be hungry for God's word, obviously not to eat it, but to kind of devour it, to inwardly digest it as we build our lives on it, and to share it with others, to be eager to pass on God's word to one another and to others.

And John is told to do that in verse 11. Then I was told, you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings. These are the words that our world needs and that we need.

[13 : 56] And we were told that this would happen in chapter one of Revelation. At the very beginning, we were told this revelation, this book, originated with God who gave it to Jesus. It's the revelation of Jesus, given to Jesus, who gave it to his angel, who gave it to John to give to the churches.

And we're seeing that enacted in chapter 10 here, that the angel is passing it on to John to give it to the world. It doesn't tell us everything about what's going to happen in our world.

In fact, in verse three, there's quite a tantalizing verse where John hears things and gets told, don't write that down, to remind us that this isn't exhaustive truth.

And we're not to kind of get preoccupied and fixated with all the details and predictions of the future, as people want to do, because we know that some things we just don't know, but God has given us everything we need to know in the gospel.

It's truth that we need. And it's truth that we can depend on whatever happens in our world, because God's plan for the future will not be stopped by anyone.

[15 : 03] And that's why John describes for us the might, the majesty, of the angel who hands him the scroll. He's this representative of Jesus Christ. And if you look at verse two, well, verse one even, verse one, he was robed in a cloud with a rainbow above his head, his face like the sun, his legs like fiery pillars.

That's a kind of picture of the presence of God leading his people. Then in verse two, he plants, it's like this power pose, he plants his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.

In other words, God's authority is over the whole world. And the times to remember that in the Christian life are when people around us get destabilized by what happens.

If there is another pandemic in the next few years, a worse pandemic, or if Putin starts launching missiles at Finland, or China invades Taiwan, or America starts a third world war, whatever it might be, when things happen that shake our whole sense of stability, we're to remember as Christians, whatever happens, whatever happens, revelation will still be true.

And God's plan will not be thwarted. Nothing will stop it. But the six trumpets that we heard about in chapters eight and nine, they left us with a big problem. They described how the world in our times between Jesus' resurrection and his return are going to be marked by distress.

[16 : 33] That is like a trumpet call warning the world that all is not well between us and God. This is a world under judgment, experiencing the foretastes of that judgment so that we will wake up and realize and repent and turn back to God.

So when people around us who don't know God see natural disasters or evil or suffering going on around them, what are we meant to think?

Here is evidence that things are not well between us and God. I need to repent or I'll perish. But what do they think? What do people think when they see evil and suffering?

There's no God. That's what people think. There can't be a God. The God of the Bible can't be there or this bad stuff would not happen. That's what people think.

So they don't repent. You hear that reaction all over the place to bad things happening in our world. And it was summed up for us at the end of chapter 9. If you just look back across the page, chapter 9 verse 20, after really awful stuff happening, chapter 9 verse 20, the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands.

[17 : 50] They did not stop worshiping idols. So we were left thinking, well, what is God's plan then? If God has promised there will be a great multitude from every nation in glory with him forever, dressed in white, washed clean by Jesus.

And people won't repent when the signs of God's judgment are all around us. What is the plan? And the answer is in our second point tonight. It's the two witnesses. God's people have a vital mission.

So the big idea comes in verse 3 of chapter 11. If you just look down, the Lord says, and I will appoint my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.

So 1,260 days, three and a half years, a long, limited time. These two witnesses are called two lampstands. If you saw that in verse, if you look down at verse 4, they are two lampstands.

And we know from Revelation chapter 1 that lampstands mean churches. So this is the church. This is the people of God appointed by God to be witnesses to his truth by prophesying.

[19 : 00] And a prophet is just a mouthpiece for God, someone who proclaims, who speaks God's word. We are to be a proclaiming people. Prophecy doesn't just mean preaching, what I'm doing right now, what people do on a Sunday in church.

And it doesn't here mean something that only a few people among the church can do. In Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit was given by God to his people, every Christian was given the Holy Spirit.

And that's been the same ever since till Jesus returns. Every Christian is able to prayerfully speak God's word to other people. And that is prophecy. As we speak God's word about Jesus to one another and to the world.

And here then is the great mission to line up your life behind. People look at the world and they won't repent. They need God's word about Jesus. And we as Christians are commissioned by God to be his prophets, to speak the gospel message of who Jesus is and why he came, and that he calls and invites everyone to repent and believe in him.

And the images through the rest of the chapter move us to be up for that, for that mission, to line up our lives confidently and joyfully behind that mission.

[20 : 19] So in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 11, we find that we're a protected people. This is this picture of a temple in verse 1. John says, I was given a reed like a measuring rod.

And then he measures the temple of God and the altar with its worshippers. And that is a picture of him measuring out the people of God. Because today, we are the temple.

The spirit is in us. And being measured is a mark of being protected. That we are known by God, thought of by God, marked out, and kept safe.

And we need to be kept safe because of what he then says in verse 2. That in this kind of picture language of there being the temple and then outer courts, that the Gentiles, which in this picture are people who don't follow Jesus, he says they will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

So I take it that's a picture of the world. And that's three and a half years, which is the same amount of time that we had in verse 3 that the church will prophesy. So a long but limited time.

[21 : 23] While the church is bringing God's word to the world, people are harming the world, they're harming each other, they're harming the church. And the people of God are speaking the gospel urgently, calling people back to God.

God, we're a protected people. And in verses 4 to 6, we see that we are an empowered people or an equipped people. This section is rich in Old Testament echoes.

So in verse 4, he says of Christians, they are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, and they stand before the Lord of the earth. And that's from the prophet Zechariah, where the olive trees were a picture of the Holy Spirit equipping God's people for what he was calling them to do.

So we are equipped by the Spirit for what we're to do, to prophesy. And then we get three pictures of glorious ages of prophecy from Israel's history.

Two from Elijah's time and one further back from Moses' time. And together they show us that when we share the gospel today, God is powerfully at work by the words that we speak, bringing both judgment and salvation.

[22 : 29] So in verse 5, the first picture from Elijah is about the judgment that it can bring. Verse 5, if anyone tries to harm them, that is God's people as they prophesy, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.

Now that's a reference to what happens in the prophet Elijah's time in 2 Kings chapter 1, where some men came to capture him from the king and they were devoured by fire from heaven.

But here, John says, now that equivalent fire comes from the mouth of the prophets because now it's the words. As people reject the words that Christians bring about Jesus, if they reject them, then they are words that bring judgment upon them ultimately.

We speak about Jesus and how people around us respond is decisive. It either moves them further from him as they harden themselves to the message and under judgment or it moves them towards him and towards salvation.

That that salvation comes next. So in Elijah's time, God used Elijah to turn the hearts of the people back to him and he did that partly by showing that Elijah could control the rain because Elijah's God, the God of the Bible, can control the rain.

[23 : 51] So that's verse 6a if you have a look. He says they, again the church, they have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying.

So God provided a sign alongside his prophets' words and through that sign he showed that he was there and not silent and he drew his people back to him in repentance.

And God does the same work today, the same kind of work, as his people speak about Jesus. to others. We speak about him with the sign that God raised him to life after he died so that people can trust the words and turn back to God.

And then the third image moves to Moses and the time of the Exodus. And this one has judgment and salvation in the same picture because God sent plagues on Egypt where his people were in slavery to save his people through judgment.

So if you look at the second part of verse 6 it says they have power to turn the waters into blood that was one of the plagues and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

[25 : 01] So it's God bringing salvation and judgment as his people bring his word to the world. God is at work when his church proclaim the gospel.

Judgment is confirmed on those who resist the message about Jesus but God uses those words to turn the hearts of people back to him and when they do that they are freed from slavery.

So I wonder have you thought about yourself like this before if you're a Christian tonight? Our lives are so full of different things that we're striving for and we have all kinds of things we're aiming for and daydreaming about but when you share with a friend some good news about Jesus when you just in a very ordinary way pluck up the courage to say well as a Christian this is how it is for me or this is what I think as a Christian or you have the opportunity just to open the Bible in a coffee shop with a friend these things are being fulfilled in our times you are protected by the Father you are empowered and equipped by the Spirit and you are setting out words that might well be God's means of turning their heart back to him of rescuing them from the judgment that's coming as they see Jesus and they are moved by his grace to repent signs of God's judgment all around us in the world they don't move people to repent they should do but our hearts are turned against God and when we open the Bible about Jesus and people see who he is by the Spirit's work in their lives he moves them to repent as they experience

God's love and salvation so this is wonderful isn't it because someone said to me when we looked at Revelation 8 and 9 this is so troubling for us with people around us who don't know Jesus what is God's strategy for those people who don't know about Jesus they're under judgment and here's the answer in tonight's passage he calls his people and he equips his people to speak about Jesus to them but the world doesn't want to hear that they are answerable to Jesus so in verses 7 to 10 they fight back very sobering words because we find out that we're going to be a persecuted people in verse 7 when they have finished their testimony the beast that comes up from the abyss take it that's the devil will attack them and overpower and kill them they get shamed like Jesus was but it's only for a very short time in verse 9 for three and a half days some from every people tribe, language and nation will gaze on their body and refuse them burial and it's as good as Christmas for the world who rejects God in verse 10 the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth we're bringing words of life words of salvation people feel tormented by them because they don't want to change now this could be describing here an especially intense time of persecution that will fall on the church shortly before Jesus returns that may well be what's going on here but it's also describing a form of treatment of the church that goes on around the world today and has done every day since Jesus ascended to heaven two weeks ago in northeast Nigeria

Boko Haram the Islamic extremists broke into a refugee camp of internally displaced Christians in Nigeria and they kidnapped dozens of women and children we've been praying as a church for their release in Burkina Faso four Sundays ago Islamic militants opened fire on a church meeting and people were killed for meeting in Jesus name and just two weeks ago Susanna Koh was in Glasgow with the organization Open Doors she is the wife of a pastor a Malaysian guy Raymond Koh who he got involved in sharing his faith with Muslims in Malaysia and on the 13th of February 2017 he was abducted and no one knows where he is two years later the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia concluded that Raymond most probably has been taken by the state and nobody has heard from him since so his wife travels around to raise awareness to ask people to pray for Raymond and to raise awareness that this is going on in Malaysia this suffering comes from people's attitude towards Jesus taken out on his people and it is an attitude that could come to Scotland there are people around us who when they hear what the Bible says in the current moral mess around us they think that is tormenting society and it's not hard to imagine people around us hearing the news that Jesus is Lord and thinking to themselves you know if we could just get rid of the church that would be better than Christmas for me that would be worth celebrating so this is the pattern of life for the follower of Jesus we follow a saviour who laid down his life for us and that is a pattern that Christians are called to follow but God promises that he will have the last say and he will raise his people so in verse 11 we see that they are to be a victorious people verse 11 but after the three and a half days that kind of short time the 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 and just as there could be an especially intense time of persecution coming for the church just before the day of Christ there also seems to be in verse 13 hope of a large group of people turning back to God around that time just before the end so in this chapter

[31 : 32] Jesus lines up reasons to urge us to stick with him and to keep witnessing to him we can expect it will be hard at times that we follow the pattern of a saviour the world crucified and people will want to shame the church and people will want to gloat over the church when it looks weak I don't know if you've ever experienced anything like that just in sharing that you're a Christian with people around you or if you fear that kind of reaction from people well Revelation 11 encourages us know that you are known by God that spiritually you are protected by him you are equipped by him to speak for him and he has given you a mission which is the people around us it's their only hope because it's God's power to move people to turn back to him as they meet Jesus in his word and find freedom and salvation and our future is astonishingly bright that's our third point the seventh trumpet

God's kingdom has a glorious future so after the interlude at last the seventh trumpet sounds in verse 15 and it's the end the seventh angel sounded his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven which said the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign forever forever and ever and that is such good language for us forever and ever it's not like in sport you know like in sport you have a final and a team wins and the crowd celebrate but it's not really the final is it because next year they have the same competition again or four years later they start the whole thing again for a new winner so if you're a fan you enjoy your team winning but then next time you might be kind of full of sadness and war that the gold medal went to someone else or someone else lifted the trophy this is not going to be like that God is going to win and his victory will last forever and ever there will be no fear anymore and then there's worship in heaven in verse 17 look at what they say we give thanks to you

Lord God Almighty the one who is and who was so notice earlier in Revelation God was the one who was and is and is to come but this is the cry in the future that we'll be able to sing with joy that he is the one who was and who is because he's with us forever and it's a decisive day so for the for those who were angry in verse 18 they meet God's anger you see that the nations were angry and your wrath has come for those who have been destructive they will be destroyed you see that end of verse 18 destroying those who destroy the earth as God's judgment falls but for anyone who was turned back to God through Jesus a day of great honor and reward in verse 18 a time for rewarding you see that halfway through verse 18 a time for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name both great and small great promise isn't it we might think that we're very small and insignificant in the world today even in the church today if we are serving God if we're revering his name if we're part of his people he will reward us beyond any measure of what we deserve and he'll reward us with his presence forever so in verse 19 at the end of the chapter the temple of God in heaven is opened and tantalizingly the ark of the covenant is seen you see that within his temple was seen the ark of the covenant and there's lightning and there's thunder and you just want to be there as you hear this promise that one day

God will come to us to overwhelm us with the goodness of his presence and his delight in you and his love for you that's our future when our daily cries of your kingdom come will finally be answered and day by day in the present we can see that kingdom growing whenever we speak of Jesus and someone receives Jesus as their king let's pray together we praise you heavenly father for the gift of your word help us to consume it and to build our lives on it we praise you for the gift of the gospel may we proclaim Jesus bravely as we remember that you know us you protect us your spirit equips us and you have given us the words that are the only hope for people around us because when they hear of Jesus you can bring them to repent and be saved and as we follow

Jesus' pattern of sacrifice in our lives that others might find life keep us firm in the hope you've set before us of the wonderful glorious future that awaits a future in your presence when you reign in love forever as you come to be with us we thank you for that hope in Jesus' name Amen to God to Job that same in Jesus' name that is the word in Jesus' name says word in Jesus' name God thank you and thank you thank you to God thank you to God thank you God God thank you brothers and thank you