

The Bittersweet Scroll
(Sermon 17 – Rev. 10)
2.5.17

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation ch. 10.

As you know, this Book is a series of visions Jesus gives to the Apostle John, to write down, and to originally distribute to 7 churches in Asia Minor. One of the reasons was to encourage these churches, who were undergoing much persecution and suffering, that Jesus has not forgotten about them, that He still reigns, He still has a plan, and that plan will come to pass: Those who follow Christ will be preserved, and those who do not will be judged.

This middle section of Revelation deals with that judgment of God – not only the present consequences of a sinful world, but also a future judgment to come, that is worse than anything mankind has ever experienced.

And in these chapters, John is shown God's judgment from 3 different perspectives: 7 seals on a scroll, 7 trumpets being blown, and 7 bowls being poured out. Three different ways of describing God's final judgment.

The 7 seals showed God's judgment from the perspective of earth, looking up to heaven. Then we came to the 7 trumpets, which showed us God's judgment from the perspective of heaven, looking down on earth. We have come through the first 6 trumpets, each one increasing in intensity.

And now in our text today, we come to a pause, an intermission from the action. Now, if you'll remember, we saw the same thing between the 6th and 7th seal. There was a pause, a break in the action. The same is true here, with a pause between the 6th and 7th trumpets.

These intermissions are not simply a time for the reader to catch his breath. God uses these pauses to remind His people of certain truths and encouragements. In these intermissions, God reminds His Church that He is sovereign over all things. He reminds us that while we will suffer, those who trust in Christ will never face God's wrath - Jesus took that for us. And God is using these pauses as a sign of His mercy - to give more time for sinners to repent.

So, with that in mind, let's read Rev. 10, this intermission between the 6th and 7th trumpet blast, and then we'll pray and ask for God's help...

Revelation 10

[1] Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. [2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.

[4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." [5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven...

[6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

[8] Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." [9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."

[10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. [11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

(PRAY)

PROP: The most effective witness for Christ is the one most affected by His grace.

God doesn't reveal everything to us. But what He does reveal is everything we need to know about how to be saved, how to live holy, and how to share the good news of salvation with others until He returns. And the more we are moved by the forgiveness and mercy and love Jesus has shown us, the more powerful our evangelism will be.

The most effective witness for Christ is the one most affected by His grace.

Today, we're going to see this illustrated in two sections in our text:

- 1. God's mystery concealed**
- 2. God's word consumed & conveyed**

I. GOD'S MYSTERY CONCEALED

[1] Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.

This description shows us that this angel is very important. He's different. We usually don't see angels described in such grand ways: "wrapped in a cloud", "rainbow over his head", face shining "like the sun".

If these sound familiar, it's because a similar description was given to Jesus Himself back in chapter 1. We also see in later verses that this angel has a voice like a lion, showing authority and power. And he is huge in size – standing with one foot in the sea and the other on land, showing authority over the earth.

Now, even though these descriptions are similar to the ones given for Jesus, this is not Jesus. This is an angel - a very powerful and important angel. But as important as the angel is, he is not the focus here. It's what he's holding that's important.

[2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land...

We know from previous visions, scrolls represent God's will and His word. But is this:

- God's word of judgment (like the scroll in ch.5)?
- Is this all of God's written word, the Bible?
- Or, since it's identified as a "little" scroll, is this only the Book of Revelation John is meant to write down?

We are not sure. What we do know is the scroll is from God, it is God's Word, and the scroll is open or unrolled.

This tells us that this scroll represents God's final plan of judgment and redemption that will soon be revealed.

[3] and [the angel] called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded...

John hears what he calls 7 thunders that "sounded". Another translation says the angel called out and the thunder "answered", they responded to the mighty angel's call. So, John heard the thunder say something – in words he could understand.

Something like this has happened before in the Bible, when God's voice was heard as thunder: In the Gospel of John, Jesus was praying publicly that the Father would glorify His name. In response, the Father answers Jesus and says, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." John 12 says...

The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out." (John 12:29-31)

So, not only do we see an example of God's voice being described as thunder, but we also see Jesus connecting it to judgment, that His death on the cross would be a sign of judgment upon the world.

So, back in our text in Revelation, John sees the angel holding a small, opened scroll. The angel roars like a lion and in response, thunder talks back. But what did the thunder say?

[4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

We don't know the exact message the thunder claps relayed, but we know that John understood them (because he was about to write it down like the rest of these visions). But "a voice" from heaven, either an angel or Jesus, stopped John and told him not to write it down.

Now that's surprising. After all, John is commanded repeatedly in Revelation to write down what he sees and hears. But here, he's told not to write it down. Put down your quill, John. What you just heard is not meant for human consumption, at least not yet.

We've seen this in the Bible as well. In the Book of Daniel (which is one of the OT companions to the Book of Revelation), God shows Daniel a vision, but tells him not to write it down.

[God] said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:9)

Even the Apostle Paul had this experience. God gave Him a vision of heavenly things. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and told them that I...

"...was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." (2 Corinthians 12:3-4)

There are some things that God has shown apostles and prophets that were not meant to be revealed. We don't know why God does that, and we don't have to know why, because God knows best. Some things are not meant for us to know right now, and we have to be ok with that. If nothing else, this causes us to be less dependent on our understanding and more dependent on God.

But, God does not leave us in the dark.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

God doesn't reveal all we want to know, but He does reveal all that we need to know. And He has revealed to us the greatest mystery of all – the mystery of the gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Whatever we know to be true of God Himself, of salvation in Christ, of living holy lives – all of this is revealed by God. Man did not figure this out. We don't come to a saving knowledge of Christ on our own. We can't. It is revealed by God. God thought up salvation. God enacted salvation. God revealed the plan of salvation to us. And God did the saving. So it's God alone who gets the glory.

That should remind us, especially here in Revelation, don't let yourself get preoccupied with guessing the timing of the end, or obsessing about current events and end-time prophecies. God has hidden some things for a reason. Like when Jesus will return. No man knows the day or the hour.

A preacher was once asked when did he think Jesus was coming back. He said, "I'm not on the planning committee. I'm on the welcome committee."

God hasn't told us when Jesus will return. But He has told us to be ready. Because here's the real truth: Even if you knew the world was going to end tomorrow, that really shouldn't change how you live right now. If our hearts have truly been transformed by Jesus, we will be living lives of gospel obedience every day.

(Transition): So, John hears things he can't write down, things God does not yet want revealed. That brings us to the second section of the text...

II. GOD'S WORD CONSUMED & CONVEYED

Look in your Bibles at verses 5-7...

[5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

The mighty angel raises His hand and swears by God and heaven that the full judgment of God will not delay.

And it is revealed that the judgment the angel is talking about will take place at the sounding of the 7th trumpet. That's the time "the mystery of God will be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

-So, while in a temporary pause here in ch. 10, the angel's oath is that God's judgment would not be delayed forever. This intermission is about to end, and God's full redemptive plan would be fulfilled. That would include:

- all of history coming to a climax, to its intended end
- all of God's promises in His word being fulfilled
- all of the wicked to be judged
- all of God's people, redeemed in Christ, rewarded with God's eternal presence and God's eternal kingdom

-all of creation being redeemed, the old heavens and old earth destroyed, replaced by a new heavens and new earth
-the full enactment of Christ's eternal, perfect reign

No more delay means God will wait no longer. There is nothing else left to happen before the end. The final judgment revealed at the 7th and final trumpet will soon come.

Maybe that's what John heard in the thunder and was forbidden to write down - a full description of the terrible judgment to come. Either way, that judgment is coming. God has been warning us all along, from the OT prophets until now. In his commentary on Revelation, Derek Thomas writes this:

*"What Daniel and the other prophets had not been able to show, given their place in the history of redemption, John is now disclosing to us: that the first coming of Jesus has actually set in motion the process that leads to the final consummation...
...In the end, whatever may be the case now, Jesus will be seen as victorious over all the forces of evil. That which has been veiled will then be fully disclosed for all to appreciate."* ~ **Derek Thomas**

Church, think about this: you know more of God's plan of redemption today than any prophet of the OT. You understand more about the fulfillment of all things than the vast majority of Christians in the NT. Not because we're smarter, but because God has revealed it to us!

Now that's a humbling thing. But it could also be dangerous. One of the worst conditions a man can be in is to have a head full of the Bible, but a heart void of the gospel. That is a fast track to false assurance and self-deception.

Let that sober us today – that we will resolve to be a people who are not simply full of the knowledge of God, or full of pride that we have had the mystery of the gospel revealed to us - but that we will be a people who are transformed by the power of the gospel, that we will be people full of the power of the Holy Spirit, people who are passionate worshipers, and faithful evangelists...with an insatiable hunger for God and His Word.

May we never be a people who have just enough Jesus to be inoculated, to be immune. But may we be a people who are overflowing with life and grace and joy and praise and love for our Savior and love for one another.

(Transition): This idea of knowing the gospel but not being affected by the gospel could be what's in view, illustrated in our remaining verses.

"Eat and Proclaim God's Word" (10:8-11)

[8] Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." [9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll.

And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." [10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.

This is a strange thing that John is commanded to do – to walk over to this giant angel, and take this little scroll he's holding, and eat it. If I heard those words, I might think I heard wrong. "Lord, did you say take and *read* it?" No, I said take and *eat* it.

What does this mean? We get some clarity by looking back in the OT, when God gave the same command to the prophet Ezekiel...

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat...

And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. (Ezekiel 3:1-3)

Now, as you read on in Ezekiel, you find this scroll symbolized God's judgment upon Israel. God rebuked Israel for not listening to Him, for having hard heads and stubborn hearts toward God and His law.

Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. (Ezekiel 3:10)

So this idea of God commanding a prophet to eat a scroll seems to indicate that whatever it is that God is speaking, He doesn't just want the prophet to deliver the message. He wants that prophet to first be affected by that message.

I was talking to a pastor the other day, and we were marveling at how, when we preach God's word, God is faithful to feed the one preaching as much as the one listening.

When I'm preparing a sermon, before I get up to preach it, I want to be affected by it. Before I attempt to feed others, I must have my own heart fed. Before I try to help others apply God's word to their lives, I must apply it to my life first. So, I pray often, "Lord, don't let me move to sermon prep before this text affects my heart first."

And that temptation is not just for pastors. We can all be tempted with reading the Bible with the main goal of wanting to have something to give to others, without letting it minister to us first. Instead we are to feed on God's word for our own nourishment, and then we can give it to others.

The psalmist declares, "*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" (Psalm 119:103)

God's word is not something simply for us to read and repeat. It's something for us to savor and celebrate. God has not called us to be scribes who simply relay gospel truth. He's called us to be disciples who relish Christ, and who worship Him with our lives.

To meditate on God's word and spend time with God in His word, not just so that we have something to share at our discipleship group. God's word is meant to be our treasure, the power in us, along with the Holy Spirit, that causes us to be transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

That's likely what's in view here in John's vision. God stops John from writing, and instead commands him to eat the scroll, to eat the word of God. "Eating" implies nourishing, digesting, taking it in before you give it out. And John echoes the psalmist and tells us that when he did eat the scroll, it was indeed sweet like honey.

But just as God told him, while it was sweet to the taste, it would be bitter to the stomach. That's a description of God's judgments. These promises are sweet and encouraging to God's people, knowing that God's justice will be done and Jesus is coming soon. But it is bitter to the world, knowing that God's judgment is at hand and they will not escape.

And that bitterness can also be connected to how the Christian feels in sharing the gospel. No one likes being the bearer of bad news. But we have to tell the bad news in order for the good news to truly be good. The

need for a Savior only makes sense if I know I'm a sinner. And that can be difficult to tell. That can be painful. Especially when we share the gospel with people we love, and they reject Christ. Sweet to the taste. Bitter to the stomach.

So John eats the scroll, then v. 11 says...

[11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

This has been described as the "re-commissioning of John" – he is being affirmed and reminded by God of the purpose of these visions, and the task John has – to proclaim the words of these visions, of this Revelation, to all the nations. John is to be affected by God's word, and then he is to proclaim God's word.

Notice John is not commanded to understand it all. John is not told to interpret all the symbols he sees. John is called to be faithful – to record and proclaim what Jesus shows Him, what John sees and hears, in a faithful, accurate way, to the nations.

While this was a unique and specific calling for the Apostle John, you and I are given a similar call. Every Christian is called to receive God's Word, let it affect our lives, and then share God's Word with others.

We may not be able to explain everything or answer every question, but we are called to draw our own nourishment from the gospel, and then go and proclaim the gospel to all we can.

Conclusion

And that's what I think we should leave here with today. We may not fully understand all the symbols of this text, or of this Book. But what we need to know has been made clear:

- We know Jesus saves.
- We know He saves those who turn from their sin and trust in Him.
- We know those He saves, He keeps.
- And we know Jesus is coming again, to be Judge and Ruler over all.

But until that time, we are to be encouraged by this good news. Eat it. Digest it. Let it nourish and encourage your soul. And then, take the good news of the gospel, and tell others.

The most effective witness for Christ is the one who is most affected by His grace.

Take what you have been given, and give it.

Take what you understand and teach it.

Take what has been proclaimed to you and proclaim it.

And do it in the love you've been shown,

In the grace you've been given,

With the hope and the joy that only Jesus can give.

(Let's Pray)