

# The Defeat of the Saints

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Father, for some of us this is a difficult text. For some of us this is a very political text. For some of us it's just really confusing and seems really odd as to why something like this text would be in the Bible.

Father, we trust that you are the ultimate author of Scripture and that this is your word. Father, we're Jesus' people and it talks about Jesus.

We ask that, Father, that you just pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and help us to learn from your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

So, for some people this is a highly, highly, highly, highly charged political passage. Probably, since Israel became a nation that's become increasingly common, when people talk about the book of Revelation, we come to this text, that there will be talk that what this text is talking about is the destruction of the Dome, the Dome and the Rock, which is one of the holiest sites for Muslims in Jerusalem, where the old temple, the Jewish temple used to be, that there's talk of different ways and scenarios that that mosque will be destroyed, where a new temple, a Jewish temple will be rebuilt, and that sacrifices will be returned and then there will be prophets and then there's all sorts of other stuff mixed in.

And you could well imagine that talking about the destruction of one of the holiest sites of Islam in Jerusalem and putting a Jewish temple there is not a politically irrelevant or that obviously is highly politically charged.

[ 1 : 49 ]     So, the question is, is that what I'm going to talk about today? Am I going to give you a list of different conspiracy theories and other things in terms of how this all fits in with the Revelation or how are we to read it?

And so, it would be a great help to me if you got your Bibles out. We're going to be looking at the Bible today. That's what we do here at Church of the Messiah. We read the Bible together. If you've forgotten your Bibles, there's always some extra Bibles here at the front that you can take and you can keep it afterwards as a gift.

And what I'm going to do is I'm going to actually start by reading, I'm going to ask you to turn to the beginning of the book of Revelation before we look at Revelation 11. Let's turn to Revelation chapter 1.

Revelation chapter 1. And the book of Revelation, if you're new to the Bible, is the very last book in the Bible. So, it's easy to find. And notice how, just this is sort of as a way of reminder, remember how it is that the book of Revelation began.

Remember, one of the things about we preach through books of the Bible is that books are sort of meant to be read from the beginning to the end. And so, things that happen throughout the book all should be connected to each other in different ways.

[ 2 : 57 ]     And here's how the book of Revelation begins. It goes like this. The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Remember, the book of Revelation is going to be primarily about Jesus. What he's done, what he's doing, what he will do.

Next week, we're going to have a very, very odd retelling of the birth of Jesus in sort of very mystical terms. It's imagining Jesus being born and a dragon there ready to eat Jesus as soon as he comes out of the womb.

Not normally something you'd see at a Christmas pageant with kids. But there's going to be a retelling of that. That's next week in Revelation chapter 12. But it's a book about Jesus. So, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants, the things that must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Now, here's the thing I want you to really notice.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. Notice that it says, blessed not only are those who read it, like we're blessed in some way because we just read part of that, Revelation 11, and we're going to read through it again.

[ 4 : 14 ] But it says that we have to be, we're blessed if we keep the words of Revelation. And now go back to the very end of the book. Revelation chapter 22, very last chapter, and turn to verses 7 and 9.

And these are close to the very end of the book. And notice again what the book says. Verse 7, and behold, I am coming soon.

Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Verse 8, I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me.

But the angel said to me, you must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.

Now, here, Andrew, if you could put it up. Here's the first thing when we're going to go now and look at Revelation 11. It's sort of a fundamental question. As I read the book of Revelation, the primary question is not, what will happen in the future?

[ 5 : 22 ] The primary question is, as a follower of Jesus, how shall I then live? Say that again. As I read the book of Revelation, the primary question is not, what will happen in the future?

The primary question is, as a follower of Jesus, how shall I then live? Now, if I slip today, I don't have any intention of making fun of people who read the book of Revelation, primarily to try to understand what's going to happen in the future.

It's very, very clear from the book of Revelation that the book of Revelation talks about the future. But it always talks, as we sort of heard by reading the beginning and the end of the book, it always talks in the sense about two things at the same time.

Sometimes it will be talking about the past, like next week when we look at the sort of a retelling of the birth of Jesus, because it's a book about Jesus and what he's done, what he's doing, and what he will do.

And I have no doubts that, I mean, the book of Revelation is very clear that Jesus will return, that he'll bring in the new heaven and the new earth, there'll be a judgment of living and the dead, that that's going to happen.

[ 6 : 32 ] And obviously there's going to be some type of a scenario, a variety of scenarios, and obviously I have no doubt that Revelation 11 in some way, when that end finally comes, whether it's in three weeks or 300 years or 3,000 years, that when that end comes, parts of Revelation 11 will look at and will say, oh yeah, that's obviously what was intended or what's meant.

But my focus all the way through the book of Revelation is to really take the beginning and the ending of Revelation very seriously and ask every Sunday, not what's going to happen in the future, but as a follower of Jesus, how shall I then live?

Now, some of you might say, okay, George, that's your question? Okay, come on, listen. Like, why on earth would God have written in such a weird way?

Like, why didn't he just sort of tell it to us straight? Well, as I've said different times throughout the week, some of us, you know, really, really, some of us like little simple statements that we can sort of memorize, and that really helps us.

Some of us like things to be written in like a more philosophical manner. Some of us like things that are more like poetry. Some of us like things that are more like law. And some of us love fantasy and have wild imaginations.

[ 7 : 54 ] And we might have the hardest time in the world remembering like a concise little philosophical statement, but images of temples being measured and of somebody standing in fire and conflict and enemies, and you can just sort of, they can picture the fire coming out of a person's thing and the ability to, like a wizard, to call down plagues in the presence of enemies, and then something like a beast rising from the abyss and attacking, and boy, that gets some people's blood stirring.

They remember that. They might not remember some simple statement of philosophy or theology or systematics, but they remember that, and the Bible is for everybody.

And it just means for some of us, we're going to be slower learners with the book of Revelation than others who just love the idea that, like next chapter, whoa, there's going to be a dragon ready to eat a baby?

Like that's exciting for some people. It will help them to understand the Christmas story in a way that the story never really spoke to them. And so, okay, so even then you say, okay, well, okay, maybe that's the case, but how on earth could anything in Revelation 11 actually be practical or something that I could actually live?

Like how on earth could I actually read Revelation 11 and then say, now this is what I'm going to do? Like, it seems like it's the most impractical text imaginable.

[ 9 : 22 ] Well, let's look at the text because actually it talks about one of the, it has, in a very, very powerful series of images, talks very insightfully about why it is that some of us drift away from the Christian faith and why it is that for some people outside the Christian faith, they find the Christian faith, they find it very daunting and they wouldn't want to become Christians.

And in an odd way, this text talks about both types of experiences at the same time. Why some drift away and why some are in a sense so hesitant to even consider the claims of Jesus.

And this text talks in powerful language about both experiences at the same time. Maybe some of us are beginning to drift away from the Christian faith. We might not think of it in those terms, but, you know, all the time, but maybe, maybe our friends think that about us.

And this will help us to understand what's going on in our lives. So, turn back to Revelation 11. And let's look at the, let's look at the first three verses.

Then I was given a measuring rod, like a staff, and I was told, rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there. But do not measure the court outside the temple, leave that out.

[ 10 : 46 ] For it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for 42 months. Just sort of pause there for a second. All the way, I haven't mentioned it that much, but all the way through the book of the Revelation, you're going to see sometimes it'll say three and a half years, sometimes it'll say 42 months, sometimes it'll say 1260 days.

And in the, there's sort of the old way at the time of the writing, the way months and all were calculated, all three of the things are, there's three different ways of talking about the same thing, three and a half years. So, you know, it says 42 months, 1260 days, three, three and a half years.

It's all talking about the exact same thing, just using different language. So, back to verse two, but do not measure the court outside the temple, leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for 42 months.

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. Now, here's, I've talked about this a little bit in other weeks, because generally speaking in the book of Revelation, there's a very, very odd sense of the meaning of God giving something.

And I've used the imagery before, the imagery is if you're on a, you're on a river, and there's a dock, and you have a canoe tied up to the dock, and the river, of course, has a current, and, but because the boat's tied up to the dock, the boat stays there, and, and the word often used in the book of Revelation about given, could really be better translated as allowed.

[ 12 : 20 ] And the underlying image of the original language is as, it's as if God allows the rope that's tying the boat to the dock, to become unraveled, or partially unraveled, so that the current, which wants to take the boat away, that's allowed to happen.

And, and so regularly in the book of Revelation, it's talked about that what, sort of, there's this, it's almost as if there's all these currents that are going on in human life, both our own individual lives, and in corporate life, there's these currents, and God, as his common grace, regularly restrains it, but sometimes what he does, is he, in a sense, allows the restraints to be loosened, so that what desires to happen, happens.

And so, in the first part of this text, where it's talking about the nations, God gives over the outer courts of the temple, I'll talk about that more in a moment, to the nations to be trampled, that's that type of giving.

It's as if there's forces in the world, in the nations, at the nation-state level, and community level, and family level, in the level of peoples, that there's this part of, there's a tendency there to not like God, and to rage against God.

And God's going to allow that to happen, and when that is allowed to happen, then there's a type of trampling, that happens, of his people. And then, the other thing though, is it's a very unusual use of giving, and they use a different word here, in the English translation, that I read from, about granting.

[ 13 : 49 ] But then it talks about these, how does it go again in verse 3? And I will grant authority, to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy, for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. In the original language, it's a word similar to the word we translate as given, but there, it's a different tense.

And there the idea, it's not that God allows something to happen, but it's as if, he's looking around the room, and he sees the person, and he says, okay, you two over there, come here, and then as they come here, he walks to them, and he says, I'm giving you this, this is yours, do something with it.

This is what I want you to do. So it's a very, very different sense. It's like a commissioning, pulling people out of the crowd, and saying, this is what you're going to do, and this is what I'm giving you to do.

Okay, I'm giving you something, and this is what you're supposed to do with it. And so, the very, very heart of, it's the only command, that actually happens in all of Revelation 11. And it's the command to prophesy.

It's portraying this idea, that in the face, of being trampled, in the face of being trampled, and desires to be, of others to trample you, there's a commission that's given, to prophesy.

[ 15 : 05 ] Now, sorry, this will be the last time we jump around, in the book of Revelation, but this is really important, to the whole book, because this idea of prophesying, happened, it comes up time, and time, and time, and time again, in the book of Revelation.

And it actually, it explained what is meant by, at the end of the book. So, if you turn to Revelation 19, close to the end of the book, turn to Revelation chapter 19, and let's look at verses 9 and 10.

And towards the end of the book, the author, explains what prophesying means. Does it mean, that we, like in modern language, that we speak out against, a whole pile of political, and economic things?

Does it mean, the way it's often interpreted, in Christian circles, that it's primarily about, knowing the future, or knowing secrets? There's tiny little elements of this, but it has one primary meaning, in verses 9 and 10.

And the angel said to me, write this, write this, blessed are those, who are invited, to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And the angel said to me, these are the true words of God.

[ 16 : 11 ] Here's the key part. Then I fell down, at his feet, to worship him. But he, the angel, said to me, you must not do that. I am a fellow servant, with you and your brothers, and sisters, who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Worship God. Here it is. For the testimony of Jesus, is the spirit of prophecy. Excuse me. The testimony of Jesus, is the spirit of prophecy.

Remember I said, the whole book of Revelation, is about Jesus. It's about who he is, what he's done, what he's doing, what he will do. And at the heart of prophecy, is testifying to Jesus, who he is, what he's done, what he's doing, and what he will do.

And so now, if we go back to Revelation chapter 11, sorry, this is a little bit of jumping around. So what is it? I will grant, verse 3, I will grant authority to my witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth.

Now, here's the relevant thing. There's a question. Andrew, if you could put it up. Is the gospel tiny, or is the gospel immense? Is the gospel tiny, or is the gospel immense?

[ 17 : 30 ] Excuse me for a moment. Have a, almost like I need to have a drink, or something like that, but I'm fine. So, is the gospel tiny, or is the gospel immense? The gospel is the good news about Jesus.

And it's about the fact that Jesus set aside his glory, and splendor, and divine prerogatives, that he came, and took unto himself, while remaining God, he became fully human. He walked amongst us, lived a fully human life, but he was never tempted.

I mean, he was tempted to sin, but he never succumbed to sin. He performed miracles, he taught mighty things, but primarily he came, so that he would die upon the cross. And when he died upon the cross, he died not for his own sin, because he was sinless.

He died for you and me. He died for the things that keep you and I, alienated, and estranged from God, and that really God should properly judge us for it.

And he bears that in himself. In a sense, he takes my doom upon himself, and he offers me his destiny in exchange. And then God vindicates him, shows that all of the things that he said about himself are true, when he raises Jesus from the dead on the third day.

[ 18 : 35 ] And that's why when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we believe that he is the one that God has sent to reconcile us to God, and that he is the one that gives us a proper hope for heaven.

But the question is, is the testimony to Jesus just a tiny thing, or is it a big thing? Is it something that just really helps us with our personal soul, our tiny little soul, our tiny little spiritual life?

Is it just a... Oh, thank you so much, Andrew. You don't have to edit your name out later on when you put this online. Thank you. Sorry, I don't usually go dry, but for some reason I've gone...

Maybe it's the cold air outside or something like that. So the question is, is the gospel a tiny thing, or is the gospel immense? And here's the thing.

On one level, Jesus and the gospel seems like a tiny, tiny little thing. I'll give you... It's a little bit like... How many years ago is it now?

[ 19 : 34 ] I sort of lose track of it. It was 1975, and in the fall of 1975, I went to the second floor of the library at the university in the philosophy and the religion section, and I sat down in my normal seat, and I glanced over, and I saw what I thought, still think, is the most beautiful person I'd ever seen in my entire life.

I was instantly drawn to her. And later on, she came and sat at the other end of the table, and she glanced at me, and I'd been looking at her, and as soon as she glanced at me, I glanced away because I was very, very shy.

But I was so shy, it took me two years to finally work up the courage to speak to her. Don't come to me for romantic advice. If you're wanting to try to develop a relationship with somebody.

And on one level, that glance, and my shy response, was a very, very tiny thing. That was 1975. Almost 40 years later, 32 of those years, 33 years married, nine kids, six sons and daughters in light, grandchildren, and who knows, eventually counting.

That small beginning was something immense. And for many of us, if we share the story with each other about how it is that we came to faith in Jesus, or how it is that we came to renewed faith in Jesus, for many of us, it is just something that maybe there was a sense that there had to be something more.

[ 21 : 03 ] Maybe it was something that there's a sense of emptiness in our lives. Maybe for some of us, there was a sense of guilt that we just couldn't get rid of. Maybe for some of us, there was a sense of brokenness and a sense of life.

There'd be a variety of different stories. Maybe some of us can remember the very, very first time that the story of Jesus began to make a tiny little bit of sense for us. I can remember the beginning moment, in a sense, when all of a sudden, going from just thinking that Christianity was boring and irrelevant, whether it was true or not, I didn't really care, but I found it boring and irrelevant, and just not something I wanted to do.

And I can remember the first moment that all of a sudden, I was intrigued. I was intrigued. And I can remember that moment. And yet, it starts small, but for those of us who are in Jesus, it doesn't stay small.

It becomes immense. It becomes immense. It's a little bit, as I said, like with my marriage to Louise, and eventually involves, well, I mean, that glance, it eventually becomes marriage, it becomes children.

In our case, God blessed us with this large number of children, and every one of them has been a blessing. It has been, still is. And the gospel is the exact same way.

[ 22 : 23 ] It starts as something tiny, but it becomes completely and utterly immense. And when we're gripped by the gospel, as we're gripped by the gospel, God starts to do all sorts of different works in our lives.

And it's as if, as the gospel grips us, we start to realize that maybe we're going to have to change the way we handled our sexuality. Maybe we're going to have to change the way we've handled our money.

Maybe the way we're going to have to change the way we relate to the other sex. Maybe we're going to have to change the way we relate to our parents. Maybe we're going to have to change the way we view the poor. Maybe we're going to have to change the way we view power.

Maybe we're going to have to change the way we view different cultural issues. And as we're gripped by the gospel, that which begins on one level seemingly so small and so deeply personal grows and becomes immense.

It grows and it becomes immense as we're gripped by the gospel. But you see, the same thing can happen. And that, you see, for some people outside of the Christian faith, that's what terrifies them about the gospel.

[ 23 : 35 ] They'll listen with great interest about maybe the way that we first became intrigued or how we came to Jesus out of a sense of emptiness or a desire for a longing or a desire for something more.

They'll listen to us. But outside, for people outside the Christian faith today, they often hang back because they realize there's something immense about it. That it might end up meaning that it'll change our view on political things like abortion or maybe on same-sex marriage or, you know, if we're with a whole pile of very, very hardcore capitalist types in terms of how we have to view the poor and having compassion on ordinary people and simple people if we're very, very elitist and hoity-toity.

That whatever it is, there's a range of things that it keeps us away from the Christian faith because we realize on the outside looking in that there's something immense. And the process of drifting away from the Christian faith is when we want to start to have pushed Jesus into a tinier and tinier corner of our lives because we don't want to talk about some of these things that are an immensity to outsiders looking at the Christian faith.

And it all comes from the fact that Jesus is on one level the easiest person in the world to make fun of and to deride and to write ridiculous books about.

Yet on the other hand, as we read the scriptures and as we realize that prophesying is about talking about Jesus, we know there's something immense about taking that step with him.

[ 25 : 12 ] Here's the consequence for this text. You could put it up, Andrew. I'm going to put a variety of prayers that we can pray. And it's this one.

Dear God, I desire to be so gripped by the gospel that it propels and pulls and shapes and grounds my whole life. Remember, the gospel is a story of Jesus, who he is, what he's done.

Dear God, I desire to be so gripped by the gospel that it propels and pulls and shapes and grounds my whole life. For those of you who like to take notes, if you can't get all of these down, it'll be on the web page within a couple of days.

And you can check your notes there if that's what you like to do. But now some of you might say, George, that's very interesting. You focus on prophecy. But, you know, you miss the dualism. You know, George, you miss the dualism.

You jumped over it. Like, isn't that very interesting, George, that the text, I'm listening to the text. I'm not afraid of dragons and beasts and fire-breathing prophets. And I was listening and the text begins with a safe sanctuary.

[ 26 : 19 ] And then it has the outer temple. And isn't that teaching a type of dualism? Isn't that, in fact, teaching that Jesus is just some private little part within you? And then there's that outer stuff that just sort of goes on that's all messy and chaos and it's screaming and anger and death and, you know, all of that.

And woe and all that type of stuff. George, isn't the text teaching that? Like, you just sort of jumped over that very quickly. But look at it again. Verse 1 to 3. Notice he's told to measure three things.

The temple, the altar, and those who worship there. But do not measure the court outside the temple. Leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, the peoples, and they will trample the holy city for 42 months.

That's three and a half years. That sort of implies that God will, even if God allows it to happen, he still has a limit to it. It's not something that's going to go on forever. He controls it.

He says, so much, no more. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1260 days clothed in sackcloth.

[ 27 : 35 ] Now, this is talking about another important thing about our Christian life. And it's talking about our twofold identity, but us having one task.

It's saying something, actually, in picture language, very powerful about what our identity is in Jesus. And, but before I, sorry, where's my place?

Here's what it's, and it's posing our identity in such a way that it'll answer this question, if you put it up, Andrew. Will I be ashamed of the gospel or will I suffer for the gospel?

Will I be ashamed of the gospel or will I suffer for the gospel? The way the text is using the temple imagery is it's very, very clever imagery.

And the, on one hand, the idea of a temple, and it's actually not just the temple, it's the sanctuary, the inner part. Even now when we use the word sanctuary, we hear of a place of respite, of rest, of safety.

[ 28 : 44 ] And that's actually the language, it's that part of the temple where the sanctuary is. And the language of measuring is the language of possession and ownership and care. And it shows, on one hand, that in its corporate language, all the way through the New Testament, a very regular image of the Christian, the Christian is, the Bible talks about the Christian as being the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Often the body of Christ, all Christians are described as God's temple. And there's this imagery then of, it's as if the people of God, people who have given their lives to Jesus, that God, in a sense, measures them.

He measures them as individuals. He measures their worship. He measures their corporate life. He's claiming it as his own. He owns it. He protects it. And he's giving us this identity which is solid and secure in him.

That, on one hand, I am going to live in the world. And in the world, I might sometimes be trampled. In the world, I might sometimes have to deal with people who want to trample all over me.

Who just don't like me. And they maybe didn't like me before, but then they hear that I'm a follower of Jesus. And now they have 15 new reasons not to like me. And they express it.

[ 30 : 03 ] And it's trying to communicate that even though I am going to live most of my life in an area where I might be trampled by people, that I am to understand that, on one hand, while that might be happening to me, I don't...

You see, shame isn't where... Shame is where I don't say about myself that I've done something wrong. Shame is where I say, I am something wrong.

Right? That's the big difference between just maybe feeling guilt and feeling shame. That many of us, we do something... I don't know, you know, we meant to turn... We're going to turn right while we're driving, and we forgot to put on our turn signal.

And you can see the person who's waiting to turn into the road. He's mad at us because we didn't put on our turn signal. And we just walk away, oh, well, I made a mistake that time. I just did something wrong.

But shame is when trampling and other types of things happen to us, and we start to think that I'm wrong, that there's something wrong about me.

[ 31 : 14 ] There's something wrong in my fundamental identity. There's something wrong about me. And so this language of the temple and the court, it's trying to talk about this sort of dual life, but not to create dualism.



It's trying to help us to understand that even though I might be trampled, and as we'll see at the end in a few verses, there's even a time of trampling that appears to be successful, and I get trampled to death, that in the midst of that, in the midst of the call that I have to bear witness to Jesus, even in the face of trampling, that my identity is fixed and secured, that it's been measured by God, that God owns my identity, that God owns my destiny, and that I am His, I am His precious, I am in His, I am in the sanctuary with God, and that I do not have to feel, by bearing witness to Jesus, that there's something wrong about me.

I do not have to be ashamed. And because I do not have to be ashamed, I can suffer. You see, the very, very powerful social pressure, and you know, and you can take all sorts of it, you know, you know, just, you know, you have 13 or 14 year old, 15 year old kids, and they may start to go to parties, and you hope as you're, as a parent, that they're not, they're not going to get drunk, that they're not going to do drugs, that they're not going to, they're not going to get drunk, and then get in a car with a 16 year old, or 17 year old, who's driving, and that's what we don't, we hope, what do we hope as parents?

We hope, that our 14 or 15 year old, if they find themselves in such a party, that they are willing to look like a loser, and not, and not do it, and even to walk away, to the derisive laughter, of their friends.

Isn't that what we hope? That the child, might have to walk away, with people laughing at them, but when we find out about, we want to say, oh boy, I'm so proud of you, I'm so proud of you, and that which happens to 14 year olds, happens to us throughout all of our life.

[ 33 : 21 ] What, you don't have this, you don't have the same view as me on this, you don't have the same view on me as this, like, oh you give somebody, what, you give 10% of your money to the church, are you nuts? Like, you don't have this view on this, you don't have this view on this, you don't have this view on this, like, you waste your time doing this, and scorn, I mean, I'm not talking about, what people have to face necessarily, in northern Nigeria, and other places, in terms of, of actual, real, physical, but we have to sometimes, just in Canada, still just deal with scorn, and it might have to be, it might be greater than that, it might mean that we end up, not getting a job, because of something that comes up, in the job interview, that they, maybe they see in our, in our CV, that we've connected to a church, and it means they just pass this over, they look for somebody, who's more suitable, who's going to be a better fit, with the corporate culture, or with the bureaucratic culture, there might be, big things that we have to, to deal with, and it's so easy, in the face of, of having people feel badly about us, to avoid suffering, that we say, well, no, no, I don't really think those things, but no, no, no,

Jesus didn't really say that, no, no, no, I don't, I don't have to deal with that, you see, the text is telling us this, because it's all about prophesying about Jesus, it's saying that, John is hoping that we'll be so gripped by the gospel, that we'll be so gripped by what it is that Jesus did on the cross, for us to reconcile us to God, be so gripped by the truth, that there's good reasons to believe that he really did rise from the dead, and that death has been defeated, death has been defeated, death itself, that I can experience the defeat of death, not because there's something special in me, not at all, but because I can be in the hands of the one who has defeated death, not that my hand is so strong, but that when I put my hand up to Jesus, and he grabs my hand, his hand is really strong, he will never let me go, and the hope of this text is it will be so gripped with the gospel, and the story of Jesus, that when it comes time to choose between denying things in the Christian faith, which is really being ashamed, or being willing to take a humble stand and suffer, that we will know that there's no need to be ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes, the great and the mighty, and the most broken.

So here's the prayer, which the scriptures are inviting us to pray, if you could put it up, Andrew. Dear God, please help me to be so gripped by the gospel, that I will choose to suffer for Jesus, rather than be ashamed of him.

Dear God, please help me to be so gripped by the gospel, that I will choose to suffer for Jesus, rather than be ashamed of him. Just sort of in closing, some people might say, okay, George, you've given a variety of right-wing examples.

I always knew you were just a closet right-wing guy, and you're next going to be telling us we should all vote for Stephen Harper, or something political like that, that you're just part of the religious right.

[ 36 : 33 ] And maybe some of my examples have been a little bit, you know, it's purely and utterly a coincidence right now, that Christians in Canada are often considered right-wing.

I mean, it was Christians who started the New Democratic Party, right? Christians that were at the forefront of starting unions. William Wilberforce, who fought the abolition of slavery, he was not viewed as right-wing capitalist.

He was viewed as the enemy of commerce. And so on one level, we have to be very, very careful. Political things come and go over time. Political allegiances and all that, I'm not despising anybody here.

I know people in our parish work for government, and we should pray for those who work for government. Our regular prayer meetings that we have, we pray for those who, the MPs who meet regularly to pray and to read the Bible, and for those on the hill that read, gather to read and pray and support each other.

We pray for them. They cross party lines. It's the exact right thing to do. But, you know, maybe it has sounded like a little bit, I've talked about homosexuality and abortion and some things.

[ 37 : 36 ] Maybe it has sounded like I'm a little bit right, but some of you might be saying, George, surely there's other, there's ways that people approach the Christian faith that are, that just, aren't there other examples?

Well, there are very, very powerful ones. Here's the thing. I'll tell you the question, then we'll read the text. Here's the question. Do I dream of towering over life, or do I dream of being a servant of Jesus?

Do I dream of towering over life, or do I dream of being a servant of Jesus? The fact of the matter is, is that many Christians have Christian versions of power of positive thinking.

That there are, in many spiritualities, many, many types of Christian teachers who will teach a charismatic, or an evangelical, or an Anglo-Catholic, or, you know, an Anglican version of, of, of just the same type of thing of being able to tower over people, and tower over situations, and always be successful, and they'll teach you lessons of success, and name it, and claim it, and pray it, and believe it, and do it, and, and all sorts of things.

And it's all the same type of success literature, often connected to a more right-wing view, but there's a Christian version of it. And, and this text challenges that.

[ 38 : 56 ] It, it, it forces us to ask the question, and, and I, I'm not saying that people who talk about all this tower, I'm not saying that they're not my brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm just saying that they, they talk in a way which doesn't really fit with the scriptures, because it, I don't think the scriptures tell us secrets about how to always be successful, and tower over every situation, how to get the girl, or get the guy, or get the promotion, or get the perfect kids, or get the house, or get the perfect retirement, or get this, and get that.

It doesn't go with the Bible. Look at verses four to ten. Listen to them. These are the two, the prophets, right, who are prophesying. These are the two olive trees, and the two lampstands, that stand before the Lord of the earth.

And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth, and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall, during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters, to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth, with every kind of plague, as often as they desire, it definitely sounds like it's all towering, doesn't it?

It's in fact, combining the story of Elijah, with the story of Moses. A series of images of Elijah, and Moses. But verse seven, and when they have finished, their testimony, and we miss the fact, that they're having to do these things, because people are so enraged at them.

Because people are enraged at them, that God gives them the ability, to protect themselves, for a season, in the face of rage. Right?

[ 40 : 37 ] A lot of times, that success literature, tries to tell us, that there's a way of doing everything, so that people don't get mad at us. But this isn't saying, that these people are engaged, in success literature stuff, that they've been, you know, so whatever, that people don't get mad.

People are so enraged at them, that God gives them the power, to protect them. But then look at verse seven, and when they have finished, have finished their testimony, the beast that rises, from the bottomless pit, will make war on them, and conquer them, and kill them.

And their corpse, will lie in the street, of that great city, that is spiritually called, Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. The divine assignment, that God gives these two people, that in some ways, represent all Christians, is a divine assignment, that's connected with protection, dramatic protection, for a season.

But as they, finish their course, and complete the divine assignment, that God gives them, and they complete it, in the power, and the grace, that God gives them, it ends, with the beast, killing them.

You see, here's where the question, comes before us. Is our dream, is my dream, at night, different ways, to tower over everything?

[ 42 : 04 ] And I can, all I want to do, is think of different ways, of being successful, of having the cutting remark, of having the witty remark, of getting that promotion, and I'm not saying, we shouldn't want to get promotions, I'm not saying anything like that.

I'm just saying, is that always our dream? And so that when reality, comes the other way, and we don't, we're not always successful, that we start to feel ashamed, or we start to feel disheartened.

Do we, as we start to only think of success, always want to tailor ourselves, and do things, and avoid conflict, in such a way, so that we can, we can achieve those promotions, maybe at the cost of our soul, at the cost of justice, at the cost of righteousness, of the cost of trampling, over other people?

Or is our dream, to hear the divine assignments, that God gives us, and my dream, isn't necessarily for my success, but to be a servant of Jesus?

Even if that means, that as I receive the assignments, that he gives, that it might bring me, into conflict, it might bring me, into suffering, it might bring me, to my death.

[ 43 : 10 ] Which is the, what dream, do you have, when you dream? And there's nothing wrong, with wanting to do a job well, and get rewarded for it, nothing at all, but what dream do we have?

And the text, is inviting us, to dream, of being, the doulos, the servant, of Jesus. And it is so wonderful, because it even puts, the context of this dream, with the reminder, that the greatness, that we want to try to emulate, in a Christian way, the greatness of, of, of, of Jerusalem, of, of, of Babylon, of Rome, of Sodom, and of Egypt, is, are all images, of humanity, organized, in rebellion, against God.

God. And that it was, the world, and its greatness, the great Roman civilization, and the great religious civilization, that combined together, to crucify God.

And that my model, isn't to be, Rome, and Babylon, and Jerusalem, but my, my model, is to be, Jesus, who's crucified.

You see, that's why, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's trying to, have us to understand, to be so gripped, by the gospel, of who Jesus is, and what he, and what he did, and to remember, that even though, Jesus died, to the, the mocking of soldiers, and the mocking, of the most religious people, on the planet, but even though he died, bearing, and hearing their mark, their mocking, he died for you, and he died for me, and God vindicates him, in his resurrection.

[ 44 : 46 ] And he vindicates you, and I, who put our faith, and trust, in him. In Jesus, we share, in the vindication, we, we share in God's vindication, of Jesus, when we put our faith, and trust in him.

In Jesus, we are to understand, that in the gospel, in the gospel, no matter how successful, or how broken we are, that when we put our faith, and trust in Jesus, in Jesus, we hear God's final words, spoken about us.

And the final words, spoken about me, is not spoken by Washington, it's not spoken by Ottawa, it's not spoken, by the head of Apple, or the head of Microsoft, it's not spoken, by a human rights commission, it's not spoken, by any human being, that the final word, about the lowliest person, who puts their faith, and trust in Jesus, is spoken by God.

And in Jesus, I am vindicated. And so, I should seek, the divine assignments, that God sends me. And that should be my dream, rather than the tower.

Andrew, if you could just put it up, in closing, the final prayer, it says, see, dear God, please help me, to be so gripped, by the gospel, that I not dream, of towering over life, but I dream, instead of living daily, as your faithful servant.

[ 46 : 06 ] That's the challenge, for us to pray. Could you please stand? Andrew, if you want to leave it up, there. Now, I invite you to, I'm going to pray it out loud, you don't have to pray it out loud, with me, you can pray it silently, if you want.

But I invite you, to take the challenge, and to make this your prayer. To pray to God, that this will be the prayer, of our church. Not that we want the tower, but that we want to be gripped, by the gospel.

Dear God, please help me, to be so gripped, by the gospel, that I do not dream, of towering over life, but I dream, instead of living daily, as your faithful servant.

Father, we ask that you would, pour out your Holy Spirit, upon us. Make us disciples, gripped by the gospel, bringing you glory. And we ask this, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.