

The Scroll and the Measuring Tape

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to the passage we read earlier in Revelation chapter 10. I'd like us to read two verses, one from chapter 10 and verse 8, and the next one from chapter 11 and verse 1.

So the first one is in chapter 10 and verse 8. Then the voice that I 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.

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the scroll, and he said to me, Take it and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.

And then on to the next chapter in verse 1, chapter 11 and the beginning of the chapter. 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.

Now it may be a disappointment to some of you that I am not going to discuss some of the various views that there are about the book of Revelation. Revelation, I am sure many of you have lived long enough in the world now to know that we can go to some terrible extremes.

[1 : 2 6] Either you become so overwhelmed with the complexity of Revelation, it is so complicated that you ignore it and don't bother reading it because you will say, Well, I never understand it anyway, so there is no point in reading it.

Well, that is a wrong extreme. All of God's word is God's word from Genesis to Revelation. And even when we come across passages that we don't understand, we should still read them and become acquainted with them.

And it will amaze you from the questions that you naturally ask as you read the Bible, how things come to us through the Spirit and through the ministry of the word and through the teaching of other people and through the teaching of the church.

The other extreme, of course, is to become so obsessed with Revelation, as I am aware of some parts of the church, where they become so obsessed, it is all they ever think about, because they see it as a key to understanding when the world is going to end.

And they try to equate all the events and episodes in Revelation, and they try to say, Well, this is what is happening in the world today politically, and here is where the wars are and where the earthquakes are and where this decision is being taken in this parliament, and it all fits together.

[2 : 4 3] And they try to make it fit the chapters and the events and the processes that there are in Revelation. Now, that is equally a bad extreme, because what we're doing then is we're importing our own understanding, we're forcing our own understanding on the book of Revelation, and that is ill-advised.

What I'm going to do tonight, because I'm involved now in preparing students for ministry, is to reflect again on these two verses that describe the work of ministry, albeit in symbolic form.

Because John, for whom initially and immediately Revelation was given, was involved in ministry, or he had been involved in the work of ministry, ministry in the church, the preaching of the word.

And this Revelation, this vision was given, or rather this series of visions was given to the Apostle John in order to encourage him and to remind him again that irrespective of how isolated he felt, remember he was in prison in Patmos, he was isolated from the church that he loved and would have preferred to have been amongst.

Probably couldn't understand why God and his providence had allowed him to be on this island when the church that he loved and he had been involved in for years was suffering at the hands of the Roman Empire and all those who hated the church and hated the gospel.

[4 : 24] And God gave him this vision because it looked for all the world as if the church was on the decline. The forces of Satan and the forces of hell were arrayed against the church and it appeared as if the church was diminishing and that all that God, Jesus, had promised the disciples was going to come to nothing.

Well, that, of course, wasn't the case. But that's the way it looked to someone like John. He had watched his compatriots, his other disciples, being put to death. And it looked as if all the world, as if the kings of the world, in all their anger against the gospel, they were, they had the upper hand.

And this vision was then given to John in order to remind him afresh that God was on the throne and that if there was one thing that was absolutely sure, that God's purposes would come to pass and that his labor, even his isolation on Patmos, was not in vain.

So he was to take encouragement from that fact. That God, as the great weaver, was able to weave every episode, every event, even his own suffering, even John's own suffering, into God's eternal purpose in expanding his kingdom all over the world in the fulfillment of the prophecy that Jesus made.

I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Now, we are in the process, I'm here to represent our college in Edinburgh.

[6 : 11] We believe, as a church, in the importance of training our own students and giving them as adequate a preparation as we possibly can in order to equip them for ministry.

And by ministry, I mean various kinds of ministry. Not only pulpit ministry, some of them are going to be missionaries, some of them are going to be church workers in our own church, in the free church, and in other churches.

We have students from all over, from different backgrounds and it's a great privilege to have fellowship and to hear their testimonies and how God has worked in their lives bringing them into his church and into faith in Jesus.

It's wonderful, it's a great privilege, a really humbling experience to be amongst them as God is preparing them for their future wherever they go. Some of them will go abroad.

God is doing, I'm not sure what, but he's doing something and one of the things he's doing is preparing men and women to be missionaries and to be workers and to go out in his name and to make Jesus known.

[7 : 20] Who knows how God is going to work in time to come. Which means that in preparing students for mission work and for works of ministry, it's important to focus on passages like this which present to us what the work of ministry is.

And here in this chapter in a rather intriguing way, you have it presented in two different symbolic forms. One is where John is commanded to eat the scroll, verse 8, chapter 10, eat the scroll and when he ate it, it was to have two effects.

One effect was to be sweet to his taste and the other effect was that it would become bitter in his stomach. How does that help us to understand the work of the church, the work of the gospel and the work of ministry?

How does it help John in the first instance and how 2,000 years does it help ourselves? But the second of these symbols was when John was commanded to rise and measure the temple of God.

Once again, he was given a command by God, a command which would help him to understand what God was doing in the world in his day and what God continues to do in our day as we continue in the work of ministry.

[8 : 49] And by the way, remember that that word ministry, it simply means service. In a way, we're all ministers if we're followers of Jesus, all of us.

He said that himself to his disciples the night that he washed the feet of his disciples. He told them that as I have done to you, so you must do to others. We're all servants here to, first of all, do service to God in obedience to him, but we are to do service to one another.

A minister is a servant. There are different kinds of ministry. If you teach Sunday school, you are a minister. If you make the tea for God's people after the service, you're a minister.

If you take part in a fellowship, you're a minister. If you go and visit somebody who can't get to church, somebody who's elderly, you're a minister. You're ministering, you're doing an act of service to that person and that service glorifies God because of what he's done through you.

A cup of cold water, said Jesus. Matthew chapter 10. A cup of cold water is sometimes all it takes. So let's think of ourselves as servants for the sake of Jesus.

[10 : 12] And no act of service and obedience goes unnoticed by the Lord. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Everything we do as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a result of God's grace having operated in our souls. But we're all ministers. But some of us are given to pulpit ministry, specifically pulpit ministry.

John was a disciple. He was told by Jesus to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Well now, here in Revelation, the first command he's given is to take the scroll. To take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing.

Let's get the context. Remember that this is the blowing of the seven trumpets. The seven trumpets in which God is announcing his judgment on the earth. And there's a series of seven trumpets and every time one of them blows, a different event takes place in the world.

[11 : 20] Now this is number six has been blown. All that there remains is for the seventh to be blown. But there's a pause. Chapter 10 is an interlude between trumpet number six and trumpet number seven in which God as it were puts his process of judgment on delay.

He puts it on hold. Why does he do that? Because God is patient.

He is not willing for sinners to perish but for all to come to a knowledge of eternal life.

That's what he tells us. God's desire this evening is for sinners to be saved. For the gospel to go out into all the world.

And for Jesus to be made known in places and in cultures and among peoples that have never heard the gospel before. God's purpose will that and not until the very last person accepts the lordship of Jesus will that final trumpet be blown.

[12 : 48] God's purpose is for his word to reach all over the world this evening and that includes this community it includes this congregation it includes Scotland and Europe and Asia and Africa and Australia and the Far East and the Americas and all of these places all over the world where there are human beings whose greatest need is to be right with God.

so is our prayer not that during this time of mercy that's what we call mercy's ground while there is still an opportunity surely we want more than anything else for men and women to take hold upon Jesus by faith including you if you're not a Christian this evening take hold of him while there is still that opportunity God is patient this may be one more opportunity that you have and there may not be another one we don't know what God is going to do in his own providence now so there's this interlude isn't there there's this pause between trumpet number 6 and trumpet number 7 and it's during this time that John hears this command that he must take the scroll now notice that he has to take it the scroll is in the hand of an angel and did you notice how we read there the angel is absolutely enormous one foot in the sea and the other foot on land he is absolutely enormous which means that this angel has been sent with a worldwide mission but it's not the angel who is told to eat the scroll

John has to eat it you notice also that for the first time in this book this is John participating in the vision so far he's been a spectator he's watched the heavenly processes and the heavenly events taking place like in chapter 5 and in chapter 4 he's watched amazed sometimes it's taken the very breath from him sometimes it's reduced him to rubble it's brought him to his knees but this is now the first time where he now has to take he's got something to do he is given the scroll he has to eat it not the angel no matter how powerful the angel is he has to eat it so what's the scroll well there's actually an easy answer to that because if you're acquainted with the book of revelation and particularly chapter 5 you'll know that the scroll represents the word the message the gospel the purpose of God you remember in chapter 5 how the scroll was in the hand of the one who sat on the throne none other than God himself this is God's word in God's hand it cannot mean anything else but the perfect plan and purpose of God and it was that plan and purpose that John was commanded to take and eat he had to consume all of it he had to make it part of his being that's what happens when we eat something isn't it it becomes part of us through the digestive system we are what we eat literally we take it in and it becomes part of our bodies giving us nourishment and that's what happened here the gospel became had to become part of him he could no longer stand as a spectator he was not only in the business of the gospel this the gospel was his very life and that's the way it is for the

Christian isn't it the gospel is our very life to whom else shall we go said Peter to Jesus you have the words of everlasting life we cannot live without you without me he said Jesus said you can do nothing everything we are and everything that we will be abides in the Lord Jesus Christ he is everything to us and of course John knew this ever since he met Jesus and began to follow him on the shores of the lake of Galilee Jesus had become his he had become united with the son of God he could no longer think of himself as being separate from Jesus he was in Christ as Paul would say so are we we are in Christ the gospel is who we are it is our identity it is what God has made us and when he ate but when he ate the scroll two things happened the first thing that happened was as he tasted it it was sweet as honey but then the second thing that happened was that when it reached his stomach it made his stomach literally turn in bitterness and suffering and probably pain what do you make of that well

John knew all too well the bittersweet experience that the gospel had given him he could look back on that time when for example he had gone up with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration as one of the three disciples who Jesus took with him and he had literally witnessed the glory of God for himself he saw Elijah and he saw Moses appearing and speaking to Jesus about Jesus exodus which meant of course his death on the cross and that experience had been so glorious so blessed so blissful so absolutely wonderful that you remember how Peter said we don't want to go anywhere else let's build three tents one for you one for Moses one for Elijah we don't want to go back down we want to stay here John too had experienced the joy of that moment the joy of standing on the sea of Galilee and listening to Jesus and watching him as he fed five thousand people from five loaves and two fish he had experienced the joy of his life being changed as he followed

[19 : 45] Jesus along the way there is no joy like following Jesus you'll never find it anywhere else he experienced the joy after Jesus was raised from the dead again of watching three thousand people coming to faith on the day of Pentecost there were all kinds of days and experiences and events in which John and others would stand aback amazed as they discovered time again the majesty of this Jesus and the joy of having and knowing that their sin was forgiven by his death on the cross there is no joy like it it's a joy unspeakable indescribable and full of glory but John also knew the bitterness that there was in the gospel he knew that as he he had experienced the disappointments that there often was associated with being part of the church times when he watched for example when he watched his fellow disciples being put to death because of their faith in Jesus that cannot have been an easy time for John he was the only disciple that was left and there and he was left on the

Isle of Patmos on his own probably wondering why God had left him wondering at the providence of God we often wonder don't we at the providence of God that we cannot explain and often that providence is so perplexing it's inexplicable there were times when his stomach was turned as he suffered for the gospel and yet he wouldn't have anything else he wouldn't have it any other way and this is God's way of reminding John that the gospel is a bittersweet life that the same salvation that brings peace with

God through our Lord Jesus Christ is also the salvation that brings suffering of all kinds various kinds some that we can explain and some that we can't and yet we go back to the Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us because it is in him that our hope and our confidence lies so that's the scroll then the scroll that taught that was a reminder to John of what his ministry of what his life in Jesus was like was to be and what John experienced there in the Isle of Patmos has been the experience of many many Christians all down the ages the second command that John was given is in chapter 11 and it's a different command altogether completely different context different scene a different vision but the two things are related this time he is given a measuring rod like a staff and he was told rise and measure the temple of

God and the altar and those who worship there so right now we're looking at a different scene altogether in which John is confronted with the temple now the temple features very heavily in the Bible goes all the way back to Solomon in actual fact it goes beyond Solomon if you look at what the temple stood for which is God's presence amongst his people then the temple goes all the way back to the garden of Eden the first temple actually existed in the garden of Eden because God dwelt with Adam and Eve the glory of the Lord dwelt in the garden in all its perfection and in all his holiness when there was perfect communion between God and humankind before the fall so the idea of the temple goes all the way back to the very beginning but I'm not going to spend time talking about the garden of Eden

I'm going to start with the temple as it was when Solomon built it you remember how long it took for Solomon to build the temple seven years and it became the single most expensive building anywhere in all the world to this day if you look at all the gold that was placed in the temple you look at the weight of the gold and if you measure it at today's prices it far exceeds in cost any building that you'll ever find even by today's standards the greatest buildings in Dubai or New York or any of these places the worth of the temple was far greater than any of these places quite interesting it's quite a fascinating exercise to do the temple though was the glory of Jerusalem not because it was so ornate or magnificent in its appearance but because this was the place where God chose to dwell this was the place where God's glory descended from heaven remember when

[25 : 48] Solomon completed the temple remember that moment when the fire of God which was the glory of God it descended from heaven and filled the most holy place to the point where the priests could no longer be there and that was what the temple was all about it represented how special how unique the people of God were because it was amongst them that God chose to locate his glory but you remember of course that things took a turn for the worse over the years and after Solomon's day the kings of Judah and Israel they became corrupt they replaced God with idols and the temple fell into ruin it was destroyed in 586 I think by Nebuchadnezzar and then it was rebuilt again by Zerubbabel when the children of Israel were allowed back into Jerusalem once again and you remember of course that under

Zerubbabel there was a great sound of lamentation among the people because the second temple was nothing like the first one but of course the second temple still was the symbol of God's glory the relationship the covenant relationship that there was between Israel and the living and the true God and you remember as time went on that temple fell into ruin by the Romans shortly before Jesus came and then it was there was an attempt to rebuild the temple by Herod but people saw through that as a political attempt to try and win the favour of the Jewish people and you remember in 70 AD finally that second temple was destroyed now did you hear what I said that temple was destroyed in 70

AD flattened raised to the ground you notice what's happening here God is telling John and this is the point of what John is being told John is being told to measure a temple that doesn't actually exist it's not there anymore it's been destroyed by the Romans and yet God is telling John go and measure the temple this is obviously a vision he's seeing something but he's measuring something that has fallen into rack and ruin it is now derelict now why do you measure a derelict building why would anyone measure a building that is uninhabited and that's been raised to the ground you often see buildings in this community you're driving along a road and you see houses that were once occupied some of them beautiful houses in beautiful locations and you think what a shame that nobody lives there that nobody's there to enjoy the tremendous location maybe beside a loch or beside the sea or whatever else and you think

I wish somebody would buy that old ruin and do it up and if somebody I'm thinking of one particular house not that far away from here and I just wish somebody would I wish I could drive past it and if I saw someone if I saw a van outside of that house and there were tradesmen around the house and they were measuring it do you know what that would mean it would mean that someone has taken possession of that house and they had plans for it they are going to rebuild it there's a future there's a purpose there is no longer going to be left derelict for nobody to occupy but there's going to be rebuilt once again and that someone is going to live there and that's exactly what God is saying to John you look at that temple look how pathetic it is it's now a symbol of decay and destruction the weakness of my people and having rejected the

Lord Jesus Christ their temple which was their pride and their glory at one time is now nothing it's destroyed the story is not finished I have a plan except this time God's plan is not for a physical building an actual edifice four walls and a roof and chambers and rooms the way that the Old Testament temple had there was no longer any need for the holy place and the most holy place and the tabernacle and all of these things because all of that had been fulfilled in the death of the son of God and yet God was going to rebuild his house not this time as a temple but is the church the people of God would supersede the building that was the temple in the

[31 : 13] Old Testament and the church would be a place where the glory of God would dwell and that is what the church is a place where the glory of God is located so it was in Acts chapter 2 when the disciples were all joined together in the one place and all of a sudden the Holy Spirit came down upon them and filled them they spoke in other tongues and Peter preached as he never preached before with the power of the Holy Spirit they were filled what did that mean that meant that God was coming to dwell among his people and God has not abandoned his people he still dwells in his people despite all our weaknesses and sinfulness and our disobedience and our laziness God loves his church and has a glorious future for that church

I know that we're all scattered and divided and in disarray and yet somehow God loves his church and has a plan and a purpose for that church to spread his word and to make Jesus known and to grow and to develop John is asked to measure three specific things and with these things I close he's asked to measure the temple itself the structure of the temple which was of course really important in Solomon's day every inch was important it was designed and planned from the very beginning there was order and structure there was a sacredness about how how tidy the whole church was why because God is a God of order and he expects his church to reflect that order in the way that we do things John is also told to measure the altar now that could have meant one of two things there were two altars at the temple there was the altar of burnt offering and there was the altar of incense but there was a connection between the two of them the altar of burnt offering was the place where sacrifice was to be made but on the basis of that sacrifice the flame was to be taken from the altar and it was to light the altar of incense which sent up a unique fragrance which was accepted by God what does that tell us it tells us plainly this that at the center of everything we do as a church is the cross where the sacrifice was made for us in the death of

Jesus but as a result of that sacrifice we have access to God in which we can call him Abba Father and approach him as children to a loving living God who loves to receive the worship of his people the third measurement was the people themselves because the church is the people people like you and I who have been saved by grace who were lost but are now found who were dead and are now made alive again and we are God's people we have God's mark we are a new creation created in Christ Jesus if any man be in Christ he is a new creation the old has gone and behold all things have become new we have been given abundant life life and we have been given eternal life the ministry of God's word is about ministry to people for their encouragement because we need encouragement and here

God wants to God the whole purpose of the book of revelation like I said at the very beginning was to encourage John and by encouraging John we also have every entitlement to rediscover that we belong to a movement that can never fail because God dwells among us are we conscious of that day by day week after week as we come together to worship are we conscious that we are coming to meet with God who wants to personally meet with us and to nourish us and to instruct us because he loves his people with an everlasting love let's relish that privilege afresh this evening as we thank God for his indescribable gift and for the privilege that is ours in belonging to his covenant and to his kingdom let's pray