

What to Do While We Wait

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 October 2024

Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0 : 00] Good morning. Please turn your Bibles back to Revelation 10 as we continue our series through the book of Revelation.

We're going to look at chapter 10 and chapter 11 today. So again, it's going to be a long passage, so we won't be able to look at every single detail. We'll look at the general overview.

I have a younger brother, and when we were kids, we were very different from each other. And our differences were made even more obvious when we had to wait.

So I was more of a passive waiter. So when I had to wait, I was happy to just sit and wait while watching people and look at things.

My brother was more of an active waiter. In fact, he was very, very active. So he had to walk around, talk to strangers, touch things that he wasn't supposed to touch.

[1 : 09] In fact, he got lost multiple times. I'm surprised that he's still with us. I wonder which one you are. And I wonder which one we should be as Christians as we are waiting for the coming of Jesus.

Well, we certainly see either or types of Christians. There are some Christians who spend this waiting period being very still, firmly confident that Jesus finished everything on the cross.

It is finished, he said, and firmly confident that God is sovereign over all. And so they don't do anything and just wait passively.

Other Christians spend this waiting period being very active, being very anxious, restlessly working to grow in their holiness, being worried about not progressing enough, going around talking to people and evangelizing, anxious to finish their work.

Which one should we be? Our passage today shows that our waiting attitude should not be an either-or, but a both-and attitude.

[2 : 33] Our passage today is an interlude. It stands between the first six trumpets and the last one. And we will see here that God is indeed sovereign, and so we can trust him and be spiritually still.

That command is repeated over and over again in the whole Bible. Be still. But we will also see that because God is sovereign, there is a mission that he has given us.

Gospel, a gospel to proclaim. Before Jesus returns, we must go and work. We will see both of these things.

So first, God is sovereign. In chapter 10, verse 1 to 4, we read about a mighty angel that reflects all the glories of God, all the details there in that passage reflect the glory of God.

God is a representative of God. And as a representative of God, this angel shows God's sovereignty.

[3 : 43] So first, he stands with one foot on the sea and another foot on land. So here is a picture of a very, very big angel.

But not only that, it's a picture of dominion. God rules over both the sea and the land. He is sovereign.

And this angel holds a little scroll in verse 2 there. He was holding a little scroll. Now, this is very likely the same scroll that Jesus was holding in chapter 5.

And again, this shows God's sovereignty. Because God is sovereign over what will happen in the world, and his plans are laid out in that scroll.

And so that scroll is a picture of God's sovereignty. And when the angel speaks, when the angel speaks, seven thunders also speak.

[4 : 44] But strangely, the message of the seven thunders is sealed up, not revealed. Which is ironic, right? This is called the book of Revelation. But something is not revealed.

Now, there are many different interpretations of this. But I think the point is still the same. It reveals that God is sovereign. That even though he has chosen to reveal a lot about his plans, in this book, some things are still a mystery to us.

Only he knows everything and is sovereign over everything. We don't need to know everything. We need to trust him.

Nonetheless, he has revealed a few things, and therefore a few things are sure. God will sovereignly accomplish all that he has planned.

In verse 5 to 7, the angel swears by God's eternity and sovereignty, that even though there is mystery in God's plan, it will be accomplished.

[5 : 52] There is no more, there will be no more delay, he says. God is sovereign. Everything happens when it should, at exactly the right time that God has ordained.

Not one second earlier, not one second later. God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God is sovereign.

This serves as an additional assurance to both Christians and non-Christians that judgment is coming. And when it does, there will be no more delay.

Both Christians and non-Christians might read the previous chapters about the trumpets and say, all right, we keep seeing disasters and bad things happening, you know, from the previous chapters, disasters and wars.

And if there are warnings about the coming great judgment, where is it? Where is the real thing? It's been 2,000 years and all we see is just warning after warning after warning, but not the event itself.

[7 : 03] Surely it's not coming. This passage says, it will come at the appropriate time, and when it does, there will be no more delay.

But the time is a mystery. Only God knows when, and He is patiently, patiently waiting for the world to turn back to Him before He judges.

And so first, we see God's sovereignty. And so we can wait quietly and be still because He will accomplish His plans.

But second, we also see that this sovereign God gives His servants a mandate, a mission, and so we don't just wait passively because we have a task that is unfinished, a mission.

In verse 8 to 10, John is commissioned to prophesy. What's the message of this prophecy?

[8 : 11] Well, the context of this passage is within an interlude in the midst of the trumpets of judgment. John is called to prophesy about many people, nations, languages, and kings that they will be judged.

In other words, John is commissioned to participate in God's act to warn the world, to warn the people of the coming judgment. And that's why the message of this prophecy is sweet and bitter at the same time.

it's sweet because it's God's word and God's word is as sweet as honey, but it's bitter because it's a message of judgment. John is told to warn the world.

But John is not the only one who is commissioned to do this. In the next chapter, we read about God's two witnesses who are likewise commissioned to prophesy.

In chapter 11, verse 3 to 4, we read, And I will, God says this, I will appoint my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1260 days clothed in sackcloth.

[9 : 26] They are the two olive trees and the two lampstands and they stand before the Lord of the earth. Now, just like all numbers in the book of Revelation that 1260 is not literal.

It's roughly three and a half years and that we will see that number three and a half repeated over and over again and that is to point to three and a half is half of seven and seven is perfection, eternity.

In other words, in other words, it's not eternal. We are, we are, these two witnesses are called to prophesy not for very, very, very long time but only for a short while and half of eternity.

Basically, that's what it says. But who are these two witnesses? These two witnesses represent the church as a whole which is a community of witnesses to Jesus.

How do we know? Well, these two witnesses are called two olive trees. in verse 4. They are the two olive trees and olive tree is an Old Testament image for God's people.

[10 : 38] They're also called two lampstands and we've seen that in the book of Revelation lampstands symbolize the church. The seven lampstands are the seven churches and they also stand before the Lord which is a description of the saints in chapter 7.

If you remember in chapter 7 the wicked are hiding from the Lord and the saints are standing before the Lord. These two witnesses represent the church and there are two of them because that's the minimum requirement for witnessing in the Old Testament.

So, again, two is a symbolic number not literally two people but it's a symbol of a community of witnesses. And so, these two witnesses represent the witnessing community of the church as a whole.

That's us! And so, everything that goes there applies to us and we are given the power to prophesy in verse 5 to 6.

If anyone tries to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who want to harm them must die.

[11 : 59] 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.

Now, these are not literal. We don't have the power to breathe fire but it's a picture. Fire, it's a picture of prophesying power. Fire comes out of our mouths means we are given great power in our words when we speak from God's word.

We could lead people to life with our words or if they keep rejecting the message of the gospel then they are heading towards destruction.

The power to stop rain refers to the prophesying power of Elijah in the Old Testament who did stop rain and the power to turn waters into blood refers to Moses with the plagues in Egypt.

In other words, these are pictures of prophesying power which are given to us. We are given great prophesying powers when we speak from God's word.

[13 : 11] Do you believe that? We are called and equipped to prophesy as in to warn the world like John in the previous chapter.

And that's the mission that we must do as a community as we wait for the coming of Jesus. We wait quietly, yes, because God is sovereign and He will accomplish what He has planned but we must also work and do this mission that is given to us.

We have been given the power to do so. So, how do we prophesy? How do we warn people of the coming judgment?

Well, as a community, this is what we do every single Sunday, right? We preach the gospel, the good news, because there is the bad news, judgment.

as individuals, we can evangelize and which is what we've been focusing on this year. In our evangelism, we can present both the warning that God has shown in the world.

[14 : 23] Look, there are wars, there are conflicts, there are disasters, there are nasty things. You don't want to rely on this world and then we offer the salvation in Jesus.

A few years ago, before I joined this church, I was leading a Bible study in my previous church and I knew that during that time at least two people in that group did not know Jesus.

And so, I shared about my past before I knew Jesus, my past addiction to pornography, how it led me to unhappiness, my past reliance on my wealth.

I came from a quite wealthy family and I just relied on my wealth, which disappointed me greatly.

My past pursuit of people's acceptance, which led me to not enjoying life, just constantly looking for people's acceptance.

Now, these are warnings, aren't they? that this world cannot satisfy. What we have cannot satisfy. And then I shared about what Jesus offers, the freedom, the community, the love, and the life, the life that He has given us when He died on the cross.

[15 : 54] So, both warning that this world cannot satisfy and the gospel that Jesus has offered us way more than we think.

That's how we prophesy. The warning message, however, can be confronting and offensive. And therefore, the devil hates us for warning people and people can, may, hate us for warning them. So, in verse 7, now, when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them.

Now, we haven't met this beast before in the book of Revelation, but in Daniel 7 and later in Revelation 13, there are beasts that represent Satan's influence in political powers.

Basically, Satan using political powers to hate Christians, to destroy Christians. Now, the early Christians have seen such a beast, the Roman Empire, who constantly persecuted and killed them.

[17 : 09] Or, we have seen from two weeks ago, the Emperor Nero, who burned Christians alive and used them as torches. But this beast can manifest in any political power that hates Christians in the past, present, or future.

When a political power becomes anti-Christian and tries to destroy the church or kills Christians, governments can hate Christians.

And people can hate the church as well in verse 8 to 10. When they die, their bodies, the witnesses' bodies, will lie in the public square of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, that is, enemies of God's people, where also their Lord was crucified.

For three and a half days, again, that is that, three and a half, half of seven, 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.

[18 : 24] What are we reading here? The mockery, the celebration of the church's failures, because at the end of verse 10, our message of warnings can torment them.

The mockery when I was working for City Bible Forum, an organization, a Christian organization, people constantly commented on our social media, mocking us, mocking Christians, and wishing that our entire work would fail.

That's what someone said, actually. There was a guy who got offended by a video that we posted online of a talk about what the Bible says about the human race, about the humanity, and what Jesus offers to humanity.

He didn't like that. He didn't like what we said about humanity. And so, he kept name-calling us online. He just kept calling us dumb and irrational.

And he kept asking for evidence that God exists. I kept giving arguments and evidence for the existence of God, but he did not want to hear because the message was offensive.

[19 : 44] the mockery, the celebration of the church's failures, and the active attempt at destroying Christians have been happening over and over again throughout history.

When we read the book of Revelation, we don't need to know when it's going to be. It's been happening over and over again. Now. And yet, even after being mocked, rejected, even killed, even after the church seems to be defeated, it rises up again in verse 11 to 13.

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.

7,000 people were killed in an earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. God is keeping us with the power of Jesus.

[21 : 04] Here, the church is pictured in the pattern of Jesus dying, rising back to life, and then called up to God. Every single time the church seems to be close to dying, we are rising back to life.

And that has been happening over and over again throughout history, and throughout the world, in a lot of places in the world where the church seems to be dying, and they rise back to life.

We are like cockroaches, we can't die. And at the end of history, we will be vindicated, as God calls us home, in victory.

And those who mock and hate and persecute and kill Christians will be judged, unless they repent, like those people in verse 13.

Oh, sorry, unless they get terrified and give glory to the God of heaven. Just a few weeks ago, I met a Christian uni student, and he said he had friends from another religion who constantly mocked his God, our God.

[22 : 19] And he some friends, right? And apparently these friends always said, brother, look at those Christians in such and such countries. They are losing.

They are being killed. Where is your God? Why are they losing? Why is he losing? And so this uni student never knew what to say and what to think about that.

And so he asked me, if God is sovereign, why is he not acting? Why? Now here in our passage, and from the previous chapters, in the context of the trumpets, we see God waiting out of both love and justice.

His love warns people to repent and to return to him. And so he sends warnings through disasters, through wars, so that people can see that this world cannot satisfy them.

He sends Christians to go and warn them. He doesn't want to judge them yet. He wants them to return. But his justice means when people keep rejecting him and hardening their hearts, he justly gives them over and allows them to ridicule him and to ridicule his people and reject them, which makes them worse off in their condition.

[23 : 56] And that is scary. But there's also a promise of final judgment. And this leads to the final trumpet in verse 14 to 15.

It says, I was given the second war has passed, the third war is coming soon. 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 his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever.

That's the seventh trumpet. Compared to the first six trumpets, there's nothing bad here. this is a celebration. Now if the trumpets are warnings, as we've said two weeks ago, how is this a warning? It's a warning for those who still refuse to repent because where are they here? They are nowhere to be found.

All their mockery, their celebration over the church's failures disappear. There's no trace of them or anything that they've done.

[25 : 17] It's like they've been forgotten, completely replaced by the celebration of heaven. The contrast is stark. We just went from the persecution of God's people and the mockery straight to the celebration of heaven.

Victory is achieved just like that. God. It's like there is an instant seizing of power. Suddenly, the kingdom of the world now belongs to God.

And straight away, after that, there is doxology in verse 16 to 18. Christians praising God. This is like the final song at a worship service.

That's it. The curtain rolls down. There's no fighting. There's no chance for the unrepentant to win. They can mock.

They can persecute. They can kill. But then suddenly, silence. The silence of the unrepentant is deafening.

[26 : 27] So, whether the seventh trumpet will be a trumpet of doom or a trumpet of victory depends on how you respond to Jesus now. return to God.

And so, before that, this is another chance to do so. Return. Return to the God who loves you and has given his life for you. He's patiently waiting.

Come home. Come home to Jesus. Jesus. Now, if you have been following Jesus, which I know most of you here are doing, following Jesus, let's do our mission out of love.

Let's warn the world. Let's warn the people around us that if they continue in their path, following their sins, following their idols, rejecting Jesus, they will end up in destruction.

and offer them the path of life in Jesus. Now, we have to do this with love, with gentleness, with a lot of wisdom, knowing what to say and how to say and when to say, but we have to do it.

[27 : 44] They might not want to hear us, but we still have to give them the message. it's scary. And the Bible says it's scary. It's both sweet and sour.

But we have to bear it. And because it's scary, we have to trust God. It's appropriate that our passage starts with a view of God's sovereignty.

The one who is eternal, who rules over heaven and earth, who knows everything, who can accomplish his purpose just like that. We need that view of God as we wait in this world.

So we can wait both being still, trusting in God, and being active, doing our mission, so that the people that we love, love Jesus.

So let's sing this next hymn as our prayer together. let's rise and sing.