

Eat, Speak, and Die

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[0 : 00] So we are in Revelation. We're at the halfway point. And we find ourselves again in fairly baffling territory. So I want to remind you of a couple of principles which have guided us so far for interpreting Revelation.

And the first one is this. Think Picasso, not Pentax. Think Picasso, not Pentax. And what I mean is the descriptions we read and we just heard read out, these are not photographs of what has happened or what is happening.

It's highly symbolic language. And they're images that are meant to interrupt us. Pictures that are meant to sort of shock us.

Somebody told me last week that they've been thinking about these pictures all week from last week's passage. And I think that's exactly what it's supposed to do. It's supposed to engage our imagination, revitalizing truths that have maybe gone cold.

I'll give you an example. So it is true that God is sovereign. And I could say to you, folks, God is sovereign. Just the other day, I got a really great car park when I was late for an appointment.

[1 : 07] God is sovereign. That's a fairly good example, right? And I was grateful for the car park, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. However, here's how revelation reminds us of that truth. It says, See, that's how God reminds us in Revelation that he is sovereign.

It's very, very memorable stuff. Second principle, revelation is not chronological, okay? So John goes back and forth and revisits ideas. So chapter 11, for example, today ends with the end of the world.

But we still have 10 chapters in Revelation to go. And John will come back to what's happened before the end of the world, obviously. And he's going to look at it from a whole lot of different perspective.

So it's not chronological. We basically, we're reading it and we're trying to understand it and hear about it in the order that John heard it, which is not chronological. Okay, third principle.

Revelation is hard to get your head around. Not everything is very clear, but it's as clear as God wants it to be. So a good principle is this, and this is an important one. Interpret what is unclear by what is clear.

[2 : 32] Interpret what is unclear by what is clear. So some people love to spend time on the unclear stuff. Seeing unusual, you know, reading the sort of the little minutiae, the images, and looking at each individual thing.

And so going, ah, well, that's predictive of something modern, or that represents, you know, Mussolini or whatever. And as a result, you come up with things like this. The locusts, remember from, I think it was that last week, the locusts that had sort of stuff at the front and stuff at the back and wings and flew and destroyed and stuff.

It's a fairly popular interpretation to say, well, those represent Apache attack helicopters. Right. And I'm not saying this to make fun of these people.

These are wonderful Christian people who love Jesus. I just think they have a wrong interpretive model. So they're focusing on the unclear stuff, and they're trying to interpret everything else around it based on the unclear stuff.

So Revelation 9 becomes, in their situation, well, this must be a prediction of some future war involving these specific military helicopters.

[3 : 39] And it involves something in the east, because there's this thing last week about some enemies coming from the east. So it's a modern war. This is what it's predicting. I just don't think that's how we're supposed to interpret Revelation.

We interpret what's unclear through what's clear. And last week, what was clear was this. There's very scary stuff going on. There's chaos in the world. And it's throwing people off. It's making people feel completely overwhelmed. Now, for some people, that's going to be helicopters, probably, in parts of the world. But for other people, it's going to be something else. It's going to be horrible inequality or whatever it is. But whatever it is, the big situation is this. It's this chaos. So this is last week's sermon. There's this, in the midst of all this chaos that God has brought. It's still not enough to bring people to repentance. People don't come to Jesus just because there's a whole lot of chaos. No one's thinking, oh, something's wrong. We must do something different. No. So that passage is relevant in any time in history. [4 : 43] So the focus is on the clear stuff and interpret the unclear stuff through that. So those are a couple of principles. We'll come back to a few more later on. All right. Tonight, we're in chapters 10 and 11.

Let's do a quick flyover to remind you what was read out because it is, you know, goodness, there's a lot of stuff to take in. So you've heard from last week the sixth trumpet has been blown. So we're still waiting for the seventh trumpet. Do you remember a few weeks ago there was the six seals and then there was an interlude and then the seventh seal? It's like that. Six trumpets have blown. John, we now have an interlude before the seventh trumpet is blown. So let me remind you. Let me tell you what that interlude was about. This is just a quick flyover at 10,000 feet. So we hear about this angel. It's a pretty special sort of angel, it sounds like. There are seven thunders and John starts writing it down and the angel's like, pens down, time's up. No, you've learned enough about that. Don't write this stuff down. And then the angel has a scroll though, which is somehow related to the big scroll. It's called a little scroll. So John takes the scroll and he's told to eat it, which is so interesting, right?

[5 : 51] And then it says it's like it tastes sweet, but it's kind of bitter as well. And then John's told to prophesy and preach to people. And then he's told to measure a temple, but not the outer court. And then there's this kind of story within the vision that feels like it's sort of jarring because all of a sudden we're talking about these two witnesses who are also called two olive trees, who are also called two lampstands.

And they're preaching and it's really powerful, but then the beast comes and the beast kills the witnesses and humiliates them. But the church rises and people come to Jesus and then the seventh trumpet is blown.

And God punishes evil and he rewards his people. So there you have it. That's chapters 10 and 11 summary. So does that need to be explained or are we good?

Or do you feel like you've got a handle on it? Picasso, not Pentax. So let's focus on what is quite clear in the passage and interpret everything else around that. Now you may ask, okay, so what exactly is clear here?

Good question. Okay. If I've already said this, I'll remind you of it. The judgments that came last week are from chapter 9.

[7 : 01] People experiencing brokenness in the world didn't bring them to repentance. It says right at the end of chapter 7, chapter 9, it says, But no one came to Jesus just because the world was chaotic. Something else was needed.

And what was needed is what's talked about in today's passage. And what is needed is the witness of the church. Because God doesn't just judge and say, try and work it out yourself.

He judges and then he gives the world the church. He gives the world us. So here's what's clear in the passage. Definitely John is commissioned to preach and prophesy.

And we also have these two witnesses who are sort of preaching and prophesying. And they represent the church. And they represent all that stuff about the beast and all that.

That's sort of saying, here's what it's going to be like for us. Here's our experience. Here's the experience of the church in the world preaching the gospel.

[8 : 03] And it explains that very symbolic language. So let's break that down. So we've gone 10,000 feet. We've gone 5,000. Let's go right into the passage now. Okay, first.

I think maybe the best way to try to unpack it is by asking a few questions. So here's the first question. If this is about witnessing and preaching and evangelism, etc., what's the source of their message?

What's the angel of God in the passage? And it's a fairly special sort of angel, it seems. One with great authority. You see he sort of strides the sea and the land. His voice is like thunder. He's wrapped in a cloud and his feet are like pillars of fire, which both represent, in the Old Testament, both represent the presence of God. He's covered in this kind of rainbow, which you remember from the throne room right at the start of Revelation.

This is, you know, kind of rainbow made out of emeralds somehow. Basically, it's like the authority of God is stamped all over this angel.

[9 : 01] And he gives John the message. And John passes that message on. So the source of the message that we have to speak about, it's from God.

The source of this message is God himself. It's not something we sort of made up. Now, what are the implications for us, if that's the case? Well, when I preach, when you speak about Jesus, when you try and explain it to people, what are we doing?

We're not chirping moral advice. We're not saying, well, be nice. Don't download music illegally. Do your homework.

Be nice to your parents or your children. No, it's... We're speaking about the deepest realities of life. And it's very powerful stuff because it's from God.

It's God's words. Which is why when we preach at St. John's, we have a commitment to preaching the Bible. If it was up to me, you know, like if I just wanted to say stuff that would make me feel good and you feel good, I'd do 10 hot tips on friendship, you know, or something like that, right?

[10 : 07] But no, we talk about the... We talk about God's words, not our ideas. Okay, next question. What do we do with this message? Verse 9 says, So I went to the angel, that's John, and told him to give me the scroll.

So we take the scroll. We take God's message. We grab a hold of it. So this life-changing, powerful gospel message, it's entrusted to us.

God has given it to you. God has given it to me. But we don't just take it. Verse 9, And the angel said, Take and eat.

Goodness, it's so bizarre, isn't it? Eat it. Eat the scroll. What does this mean? The angel gives the scroll. It's God's. Eat it, you know. It feels... This is what it means.

It means that the message we have been given and entrusted with, these words of God, before we pass them on to other people, we've got to internalize them ourselves.

[11 : 08] It's got to be part of our life. It's got to be assimilated into our life. You've got to apply it to yourself. It's got to be real to you. That's what it means to eat it. And I know that some of you are picky eaters.

It doesn't fly with God's word. It doesn't work like that, folks. This is, again, this is one of the reasons why when we preach here, we preach the whole... We preach whole books of the Bible so that we don't avoid the tough stuff.

Because, again, if it was up to me, I'd totally skip the horseman, you know. I'd, like, do the start, which is like a throne room. It's really cool. Jump straight to 21 and talk about heaven. Okay, another question.

What was it like for John to eat the words of God? What was it like for John to internalize these gospel truths? Well, it says it tastes sweet and it tastes bitter.

It's sweet because it's God's precious word of forgiveness. It's the good news of Jesus who died for us so that we can be wrapped in the goodness of God when we face God.

[12 : 18] This is fantastic stuff. But it's bitter because when we do internalize it, we're convicted by it. And we tell others about it, they'll be convicted by it. This is one of the reasons why people who are not people of faith sometimes feel very uncomfortable when you sort of drop the J-bomb in a conversation, when you start to bring up Jesus.

You can sometimes see people bringing up these psychic walls, right? They're just not happy about this. Because essentially what you're telling people is you're saying this.

You're saying what you've built your life on is about this thin. And you need Jesus because you're lost. I mean, who wants to hear that? It's a hard word.

It's a bitter word for some people. You're kind of like this walking announcement of judgment on them by saying that how they're living and the basic foundations of their life are not right.

So the words are bitter and they're sweet. So John takes the words. He eats it. He internalizes it.

And then in verse 11, he's told to prophesy, to take it to the nations, to take it to the kings, to take it

to every language.

[13 : 27] So God's given us his precious message. This message, we internalize it, and now we preach it. This is our call, folks. We take this wonderful word into, well, everywhere.

We take it to playgrounds. We take it to our schools. We take it to our offices. We take it into our homes. We take it to our children. We take it to our parents. We take it to our family. We take it to our friends. We take this worldview, this idea, this beautiful truth, and we take it everywhere.

That's what John has been called to do, and it's a mandate for us. Now, some of you are sitting there thinking, that is just terrifying. Telling people about Jesus, that's just the hardest thing you can ask me to do.

Try and think of it like this. Let me give a framework for thinking about it. This word from God, which is in you, which you've eaten, which is shaping you, which is guiding you, which you attempt to verbalize to others, think about it like this.

What you're doing is you are, you're not like, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah. Okay? Don't think of it like that. Think of it like this. You're basically just interpreting your life for people.

[14 : 31] Okay? I'll say it again. You are interpreting your life for other people, and that's very important to do, because otherwise they will interpret it for you. They might look at you and go, goodness, Derek is so nice.

I should be nice too. That's not the gospel. That's Derek presenting his Christian faith in his sort of his persona, right? But the gospel's got to be explained to people.

You actually have to interpret why it is you live like this. What difference Jesus makes in your life.

That's evangelism. Interpret your life. Okay, summary so far.

God speaks through this angel. He entrusts these words to us. We eat them. We pass them on.

And now chapter 11, we get this interesting sort of, there's this shift, right?

It's, it's, it's, we're going to skip the measuring stuff, but because we've talked about that before, basically it's about God protecting his people and his church. So we get this vision of these two witnesses.

[15 : 33] What is that all about? As I said at the start, very symbolic. It's a picture of the church. It's fulfilling. What does it look like for the church to fulfill John's mandate of taking, eating, preaching the message of God?

Let's look at it closely here. So we have these witnesses. That's us. But they should only preach for 1260 days. Come on. Like, what does this stuff mean?

I'm coming up to three and a half years in this pulpit. It's a reference to, to Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, we have this apocalyptic scene and there's this very bad thing going on and the world is terrible and the people of God are being horribly oppressed.

And Daniel in this book says, this time frame of this oppression and terribleness is going to last for, he says this, a time, a times and a half.

Okay? Time, times and a half. Which is, Old Testament way, Daniel way of saying three and a half years. Right. 1260 days?

[16 : 38] What's that? It's three and a half years. So the witnessing church is not literally just going to witness for three and a half years or 1260 days. The numbers are there to describe the character of the time that we will be witnessing.

The character of the time that the church will be proclaiming Jesus. And the character of that time is that it's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult.

There will be opposition. People will think you're stupid. And narrow-minded and anti-science and homophobic and all of those things. It's going to be difficult.

And this point is emphasized in, it talks about, you know, it talks about rain, like, and you'll pray and there'll be no rain and there's fire.

And you're like, goodness, what is this stuff about? Well, it's trying to emphasize that point there. So the original readers would have got it quicker than we get it. this fire and no rain business, that's referencing Moses and Elijah.

[17 : 40] I'll just talk about Elijah though. So, they're both men that brought a message from God to quite oppressive regimes. And it was tough for them, but God provided for them.

Now, how does it make that connection? I'll tell you a great story. So this is in 1 Kings, 1 Kings, and 1 Kings in there. I can't quite remember. So in Elijah's time, right, so God's people were worshiping Baal, who's bad, bad God, a non-existent bad God.

And one of the things about Baal is the Israelites believe that Baal controlled the rain. So Elijah thought, right, I'll sort this out. I'll pray for a drought. He prayed for a drought.

There was no rain for like actually three and a half years, interestingly. And so there's no rain. And so King Ahab, who was a terrible king of God's people, totally corrupt and committed to worshipping Baal as well.

He tracked Elijah down and Elijah said, right, I worship the true king. You worship Baal. Let's have a competition. And so Elijah said, you get all your Baal priests, pull them all in.

[18:49] So there's hundreds of them. And so what they did is they set up this massive, you guys know the story. It's a great story. It's a big bonfire of wood, right? So just dry wood, dry wood. And Elijah says, you guys go first. You pray to Baal and see how you go and pray that God would light that fire.

Just see how you go. See how you go. See how this is working for you. And so they pray and they pray and they pray and it's terrible. The story's like, they're cutting themselves and they're screaming and nothing's happening.

And Elijah, if you actually read the passage, it's great. Elijah says, so what's happened to Baal? Where's he gone? It literally says, has he gone to the toilet perhaps? It literally says, is he relieving himself?

Is that where he's gone? Where does he go? I don't know. Let me try my God. Shall I? Shall I pray and we'll see what happens? And he pours these, he pours three buckets of water on the wood first, soaks the wood and he prays and fire comes down and the water explodes.

It's fantastic and people come, people recommit themselves to the true God. So that's the fire and the rain reference in the passage. It's the people of God prevailing even though it's very, very difficult.

[19:59] Back to chapter 9. So you have this witnessing church who preach the word of God within a difficult context like Elijah, like Moses and then verse 7, the beast. Wow, the beast.

Goodness. This is an answer to the question, what are the results of the church's witness? It's a good question. So the church witnesses gets the word, passes it on.

What's the result of all this? Well, death, it seems. I've said this before, all the witnesses die in Revelation. Everybody dies. In chapter 11, a great example of this, the beast comes up and he kills the witnesses and he humiliates their bodies.

He lets the bodies rot out in the sun. And then the beast and all his buddies celebrate. They start exchanging presents like it's Christmas. They just think this is the most wonderful thing in the world. They're absolutely delighted. Now, we live in a country where we are very, very unlikely to die for our faith, but some people obviously are. What we all faith is things like exclusion or misunderstanding.

[20:57] We all face the small deaths that Christians face in the West. And in the West, you know, like when Christians fail in the eyes of the world, when Christianity fails in the eyes of the world, people do celebrate that.

It becomes big news. You know, some priest turns out to be a crook or an abuser. Some minister's kind of stealing money from his church. You know, people love to talk about this stuff.

Revelation tells us don't be surprised by these responses. Don't be surprised when people think we're ridiculous.

Don't sort of, you know, what's the, is an American phrase clutch your pearls or something? You know, clutch your pearls I think is a phrase in America.

Clutch your pearls. Like over the Trinity Western University, you know, huge lawsuits saying that Trinity Western shouldn't have a law school because they're bigoted, et cetera.

[21:59] You know, don't clutch your pearls and go, oh, I can't believe this is happening. Of course it's happening. Of course. Of course it's going to happen. Being an active and public Christian or whether you're an individual or an organization is going to be tough in the West.

But this symbolic death, that's not the only result of the church witness here. There's also salvation. We see this in 12 and 13. We have this earthquake, this chaos, and the witnesses come back to life. In the midst of all that, people come to Jesus.

It says nine-tenths of the people come to Jesus. This is a great encouragement to us. People are coming to Jesus. You might hear the sort of narrative that Christianity is dying.

Folks, it's just not true. It's just exploding in places that you're unaware of. I met the bishop of Nigeria, the archbishop of Nigeria, technically the primate of Nigeria about two years ago at someone's house.

I was visiting Vancouver. And I greeted him. He was a very serious man. And I said, it was a stupid question, but I said, how many Anglicans are you in charge of? Because, you know, I'm in charge of about 200.

[23 : 04] Like, what about you? Tough guy. You know. He said, 20 million. I checked it at, true story. He wasn't joking. He wasn't lying to me.

There are 20 million just Anglicans in Nigeria. You take the case of China. You know, in the 1950s, sort of the Cultural Revolution, all of the missionaries were kicked out of China and you could sort of go, well, that's the end of Christianity over there.

There are an estimated 70 million Christians in China. And a large percentage of that are in underground churches and the non-authorized churches of China.

And they face real persecution. Just in April this year, there was a church going to be bulldozed because the state is cracking down on churches. They were going to bulldoze his church and the husband and wife pastor team stood in front of the church.

Bulldozer went over them. Husband survived. The wife was killed. They face real persecution but Christianity is exploding there. And Revelation reminds us that the witness of the church is we're throwing out seeds and they're not going just to dry ground.

[24 : 18] They're going to fertile ground. And people are coming to Christ. And it's wonderful. Christianity is thriving in the very difficult places in the world. So we take the word of God. We internalize it. We preach it.

Even when death is at stake. But there is life and there is wonderful hope. Let's finish this off. Chapters 10 and 11 has mostly been an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpet. trumpet. And it says this that God as well as giving judgment is giving us giving the world the witnessing church.

And our chapter explains what this is going to be like for us. It's going to be tough. It's going to be wonderful. And right at the end we're given this fantastic hope at the end of chapter 11 that seventh trumpet sounds and it's a high point in Revelation.

It describes this future event when God gathers us, gathers all his people together and destroys evil so we can live eternally with him in peace. So folks, what's my hope in this?

[25 : 18] My hope is that you would be strengthened in your evangelism and encouraged in your witness. And this last bit reminds us of the end goal. The end goal is God reclaiming the world for himself.

It's an incredible picture. Revelation has a lot more to say about this particular topic we just finished with here. But before it does that it has a lot to say about the beast.

Which we have just been introduced to in this chapter. And we're going to hear about that over the next few weeks. Amen. Amen.