

Vision of Cosmic Reality

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Date: 14 November 2020

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[0 : 0 0] This Wednesday, just gone, we celebrated and remembered Remembrance Day. We spent time remembering that there was thousands of young men who saw the evil carried out in the name of conquest and signed up.

Signed up to go to war and to give their bodies and lives to see people and nations saved. In 2017, a young man by the name of Emmanuel Mensah repeatedly ran into a burning building to save people's lives before ultimately losing his own life.

In 1665, when the bubonic plague was spreading across the world, one town chose suffering to see lives saved.

The town is called Iam, I think that's how you pronounce it, E-Y-A-M in England, a town of about 800 people. They chose to quarantine themselves off from the important trade routes around them when the plague came.

And so over 14 months, they lost 260 of 800 of their residents. But their self-sacrifice resulted in victory. Nobody outside the village contracted the disease.

[1 : 1 8] They doomed themselves to pestilential death to save the surrounding country. Victory came through suffering.

And there is a pattern here that extends throughout life and life beyond death. Victory comes when I put to death my own pride and arrogance.

When I choose to love other people. I win as a friend when I'm really busy. But I choose to give up my time to help someone else. I win as a dad when I put to death my annoyance with my kids.

And choose to sit and engage with them. Today, as we continue to look through the book of Revelation, John sees a vision of the future of the church.

A future of victory through suffering. The same victory that Jesus won in his sacrificial death and resurrection, the church would also be part of.

[2 : 1 9] And a challenge for us today would be to see that that is the ultimate victory. Victory through suffering. And then continue to put to death the things that hold us back.

Our personal preferences, our pride and our sin. And to have life in Christ. Because that is the victorious Christian life. We're looking at a really strange and detailed part of Revelation.

All of it's fairly detailed and, you know, it's got some strange things going on. But today we're going to work our way slowly through Revelation 11, looking at the various images to understand what this meant in its context and what it means for us as well.

We're going to see three things as we go through this this morning. We're going to see that God has protected his church. He's protected his church because the church is also persecuted.

But God will ultimately vindicate them. I couldn't think of a third P. So it's God protects his church because it's persecuted. And then finally the church is vindicated. So let me pray for us as we get into Revelation 11.

[3 : 2 8] Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word to us today. I thank you that we can read your word without fear of persecution in this country. But Lord, as we look through the detail, help it not bog us down, but to see the amazing victory that you have for us through the suffering of Christ and how we too can have life because of Jesus.

Amen. Please have your Bibles open. It's wonderful to see some people with their Bibles open on their laps, on your phone. Make sure it's the app and the Bible. If you get distracted, you know, turn your notifications off.

We're in Revelation chapter 11 and we'll start in verse 1 where we see John is shown a vision of the temple. Have a look with me. I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, go and measure the temple of God and the altar with its worshippers.

But exclude the outer court. Do not measure it because it is being given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. In the Old Testament, the temple is the place where God met with his people.

It was where sacrifices were made. It was where the high priest went once a year to make sacrifice and it was built to the exact measurements that God said.

[4 : 48] But the image here is not of the Old Testament temple. Rather, it is of the church. 1 Corinthians chapter 3 tells us that now, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the church is the temple.

It is not the building. We are the people of God. This building is wonderful that it allows us to meet, but God has made us his temple.

We are the place where God meets. He sends his spirit and he dwells in us. The outer court is left to be trampled by the Gentiles.

Now, again, with this language of Gentiles, we know that God has broken down the wall of hostility between God's people, the Jews, and has now brought the Gentiles in.

We are united together as a church. That is the amazing news of the gospel, that those, the Gentiles, me, those who are far away from God, his enemy, have now been brought into his family.

[5 : 49] But the outer court here is a picture of those who are God's enemies now. Those kingdoms, those armies arrayed against God, those who are against God.

And they will attack God's people for 42 months. This points back to a prophecy from Daniel. Without getting too much into the specifics, 42 months is three and a half years.

And in the book of Daniel, there's a prophecy that at the end of a time, times, and half a time, the end would come. So a time is a reference to a year.

And so a year and two years and another half a year is 42 months. Now, this is pointing to the fact that there will be persecution come against the church from those who are against God, but it is for a season.

It doesn't go on forever. This season is controlled by God. And whatever people do against God's people, God will protect them. Even though there is persecution, God will protect his people.

[6 : 58] And John sees God appoint two particular people to be witnesses. They're referred to also as lampstands. So John is describing the church who are going to be persecuted, and they have a job to witness to the world what God has done.

He's described as two witnesses because in Deuteronomy, we see that in court, you need to have two witnesses to be reliable. So these two witnesses are a reliable witness to what God has done, and the church are lampstands to shine God's light into a chaotic and dark world.

We are to witness to what God has done in history, through Jesus, and in our lives. And we've been seeing over the last five weeks what God has been doing in people's lives.

It's been wonderful to see, even today, what God has been doing in people's lives, and to witness to what God has done. The church is to witness, to preach, to share what God has been doing for 1,260 days.

That's the same reference as the 42 months. Clothed in sackcloth, as a sign of grieving, to call people to repent. This time will be over.

[8 : 17] Your time for repentance will be over. Repent now. Follow the Lord now. But this church also has been given great power to protect itself.

There's this wonderful imagery. Verse 5. Have a look with me. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

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, to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Power to cause plagues. Power to shut up the sky. These are pictures of Moses and Elijah, the two great heroes of the Old Testament.

We are now engaged in a very different kind of ministry. I've never seen anybody have fire come from their mouth. But what this point is, it's saying that the work we are now involved in, being part of God's mission, is every part as powerful as the great heroes of old.

[9 : 28] They brought plagues. They brought locusts. They brought fire. They stopped rain. They turned rivers into blood. But with the preaching of the good news of Jesus, we bring either eternal

life or eternal death.

That's what I'm doing standing right here now, proclaiming the gospel, preaching the good news. That's what you do when you read the Bible with a friend. When you read it with your children, you are preaching and witnessing to what God has done to bring eternal life or eternal death. Seeing God's mighty power work through his word. God has sent us to be on about his mission with the very words of life.

God is working to protect us now so that we can continue to be his witnesses. The vision given to John summarizes the glory of following God, that mighty and wonderful things happen, that people's lives are saved, but it also paints a picture of the pain of existence in this present evil world.

For we are in this 42 months. We are still in this time between Jesus' resurrection and his return, the time that we have to witness, to continue to proclaim the good news.

[10:47] And this time we are protected by God because nothing can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus. And yet those who are in the family of God are protected because we need protected.

Very much like a soldier goes into war wearing armor because of the need to be defended from attack, we need to be protected from attack too.

Life in this tension is not easy, and yet God is with us, guarding us, guiding us, nourishing and strengthening us until the very end. We need protection because John is going to paint a picture of persecution coming for the church.

Second point today, persecution. Have a look with me in verse 7. Now, when they had finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. The witnesses who were protected are now killed by a satanic power.

[11:59] It takes place in Sodom and Egypt and also where the Lord was crucified. And it says it's figuratively. So we get this picture that the church is suffering against those who have arrayed themselves against God.

Historically, Sodom was against God. Egypt was against God's people and the place where Jesus was crucified was against God and his people.

The world who is opposed to God wants to shame Christians. It was a picture of these two witnesses killed and then their bodies are left in the public square.

They are left for days and they're not buried, which in the ancient world would have brought great shame to their families and those associated with them.

The church is attacked, maligned, scorned, dishonored by those who oppose God. The very ones that we are called to witness to.

[13:01] Verse 9. For three and a half days, some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. That phrase, every people, tribe, language and nation, we saw that in Revelation 7 last week when we saw that there would be a multitude of people from every tribe, nation and tongue praising God and now those people that Christians are called to witness to, to the whole world, some of those people are gazing on the bodies of those two who have died and refusing burial.

They're giving themselves presents. They are just so ecstatic that these Christians have been killed. The church had been tormented because they had been tormenting others.

This is what happens when you preach the good news to those who don't want to hear it. People don't find it easy to just say, oh, I'm not interested.

The Christian gospel can actually also torment people. John the Baptist called Herod to not marry his brother's wife and he was beheaded. Jesus himself called the Jews not to have a legalistic, half-hearted devotion to God and they crucified him.

He had the words of life. He was God and they did not like to hear those things. It tormented them and so they killed him. The world cannot bear to have its evil condemned.

[14:34] Have you ever seen a loved one making bad choices that won't end well? Do you risk criticizing what they're doing out of care and love? Even when that person doesn't want to hear it, it's much more comfortable not to say anything.

But it is not comfortable losing that person's life. It is very comfortable to not share the gospel. To not share the gospel on the front lines with our friends, with our family.

I see you making these choices and chasing after these things. You think these things will satisfy you but they won't. but I don't want to say anything.

I see you chasing these things but only Jesus will satisfy and if I bring that up it will make for an awkward family dinner at Christmas. It is much more comfortable to not face the shame from sharing the gospel and being persecuted.

Can you imagine being a Christian and seeing people do what happens in verse 10? The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate by sending gifts to each other because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

[15:47] It looks like a painful future to be a Christian. But God doesn't leave his people on the ground beaten and defeated. He vindicates them.

Our third point today, vindication. Verse 11 But after the three and a half days but after three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them and they stood up 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. Those who had been struck down beaten, mocked, killed, shamed in front of everybody are brought to life and lifted up in front of everybody. God's spirit has brought them back to life. They have been vindicated in the public square shown to have been in the right to follow God and to proclaim his good news. Now, this is one of the passages in Revelation that has a lot of detail including specific time references that people can often see this as a literal linear timeline.

There are going to be two witnesses who come and then it's going to go for 42 months and then people are going to be lifted up to heaven. Now, I don't believe that this is a literal timeline.

[17:10] It's a symbolic way for John to show that God has vindicated his people. God protects those who are persecuted and vindicates. He will vindicate. God has shown his people to be innocent.

His people in public in plain view of those who rejoiced over his deaths. And the amazing thing is that in verse 13 it says that the people who saw this gave glory to God.

God sent an earthquake a sign of judgment. People died but people also gave glory to God. He saves people too. I believe that this is more of a pattern of history rather than an exact timeline for what will happen.

The church is called to witness to the gospel. The church is persecuted, martyred, scorned, mocked and at times it seems like the church is done.

The cause of Christ is defeated. God is dead they cry. Those who follow him, those Christians, well they're dying out. but God's spirit breathes life into them.

[18:20] Picking up imagery from Ezekiel 37 where dry bones are revived and God makes an army. God is reviving his church to make us his victorious army.

It happened to Jesus himself. He was persecuted, killed and yet raised from the dead. Stephen in Acts 7 he is persecuted and killed but God also uses that moment to send his missionaries out into the world to witness to what God is doing.

Soviet communism set out to crush the church but the church outlived it. In Ethiopia between 1975 and 78 President Mengistu implemented the Red Terror where 1.5 million died and churches were closed.

When Mengistu fell no one was sure what had happened to the Christians. Were they still there? They didn't know. But Christians had been meeting in homes and not only survived but had grown. In 1900 the Boxer Rebellion in China saw over 200 missionaries killed and over 30,000 Chinese people killed and yet God breathed life to what seemed dead.

[19:35] The same thing happened again in China after the Cultural Revolution. In the face of hostile powers the story of Jesus repeats itself in the church.

The church witnesses to God. There is persecution death and what looks like defeat but God breathes life and the church grows.

Victory comes through suffering. Victory comes through suffering. It is God's chosen weapon against the forces of evil.

Faithful people are sustained by the power of the Spirit of God. Victory came through suffering. Life comes through death. Last week my family watched the 1999 classic Disney movie Hercules and I think the church is like a mythical beast that I saw in that movie.

not the phoenix that rises from the ashes although that might be apt but I think the church is really like the ancient hydra. The hydra is a dragon like beast and what would happen is a head would be cut off and two more heads would grow back.

[20 : 51] You should go and watch this scene in the movie Hercules but I think this is an apt picture of the church. There is suffering and persecution but victory comes through suffering.

The church grows because suffering and persecution is God's weapon against the world his tool to see the church grow. Our victory comes through Jesus' suffering his death and his resurrection and I think it also works in the church broadly as we've seen the church grows but also in our death and resurrection with Christ each day.

For us as a church and individuals preaching Christ in Chatswood and on our front lines with our family and friends we are not yet at the point of shedding blood not yet at the point of shedding blood here but death and resurrection is the way that we are saved and it is also the pattern of our lives and the weapon to see our lives shaped for Christ and to see people saved Jesus said that whoever wishes to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it the pattern of a Christian follows this same pattern of victory through suffering we die we die to ourself and we live to Christ Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 that he's hard pressed his body is being given over to death so that life might be revealed the call of Jesus to us to his disciples is to die die to yourself surrender your career and future prospects surrender your status and reputation surrender your desires to have everything that society tells you you must have the newest and the best you see those sins of pride and lust and arrogance put them to death so that

Jesus is the priority and he sets the direction for your life he gives life because the idols we chase won't embrace the death of chasing career put to death the chasing after self worth on your own live to the worth of Christ who died for you and valued you above his own life whenever we we give money to the church for the sake of the gospel whenever we give of our time our talents our treasures you are dying to yourself and you are dying to building your own kingdom and God gives life and he and we get to be satisfied in him whenever we choose to witness to a friend we are dying to ourself and our own comfort to see a loved one saved and God gives life whenever you pick up your bible and read it choose trying to do to read your bible four or more times to see growth in your life in Christ whenever you pick up your bible and read it you are putting to death your own control of your life and saying

God you are the one who gives me life you are the one who leads me I will obey you and you give me life whenever you are faced with sin and choose to obey God you put to death the idea that you know what's best you worship Jesus as the king every moment of dying to self and choosing God is a moment of life by the spirit this is God's weapon to build his kingdom this is God's weapon to build himself in us and across the world let me pray heavenly father we thank you for this reminder from revelation 11 that you do protect us because we will be persecuted but we thank you that you will indeed vindicate us help us not chase that in our own time but wait patiently for your son to return heavenly father we ask that each day we live we would live for you and we would die to ourselves fill us with your spirit help us to do that so that we would have more of you so that we would love you more that we would treasure you more and so that we would see many come to know and love you we ask this in your son's name and all for your glory amen