

"God's Witnesses"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. You know, when I moved to Connecticut back in 2003, one of the selling points of moving to Connecticut was, I thought, there are no natural disasters here.

I moved from Ithaca, New York, where we had blizzards, and I thought, we're moving to Connecticut, it's going to be great. And then, since then, there's been a tornado, a blizzard, a couple hurricanes, and anyway, so I was sold a bill of goods.

But having said that, I do remember distinctly when we had, in the early 2011, 12, 13, we had a series of hurricanes that came close.

We didn't really get the full brunt of it, but we certainly had days where the wind blew and the rain fell and the power went out, and when you face a storm, what do you do?

You hunker down, right? You put away your porch furniture. You make sure the windows are all locked. You clean your gutters. You hunker down and try to get through the storm.

[1 : 09] And when I moved to Connecticut, I thought, well, maybe I don't have to do that. But I found out I did. And so here we are. As we continue in our series in the book of Revelation this morning, I wonder if the church has a similar impulse to what we have when a storm comes.

In Revelation, we've been looking at stories, and last week, Pastor Nick preached on Revelation 8 and 9 about the coming storm of God's judgment against evil in the world, warning the world that this was coming.

And what is the church going to do in this storm? Maybe some of you think, well, if I become a Christian, if I become a part of God's church, then God's going to protect me through the storm, and I don't have to go through it.

Maybe I want to be like Noah, and I want to just get locked up in the ark and float through the storm and come out the other side and to somehow just hunker down in my holy huddle and get through it.

But as we come to chapters 10 and 11 of Revelation this morning, I think we see a different picture, a different picture, a different path for God's people and God's church in the world.

[2 : 36] And so that's what we're going to be looking at this morning. If you want to turn to our text in the Pew Bibles, it's page 970, Revelation. We'll be reading it in sections because we're looking at a big chunk of Scripture this morning.

But the big idea that I want you to see is that God has called His church to costly witness to the risen Christ. This is what we're supposed to be doing in the middle of the storm, so to speak, of God's judgment.

This is our calling in this age. And we're going to see how this all fits together in these chapters. We're going to look at three. For those of you who are taking notes, here's our outline for today.

God's going to call the witnessing church to a prophetic role. That's chapter 10. God calls the witnessing church to follow Christ's pattern. That's going to be chapters 11, 1 through 14.

And then God calls the witnessing church into reigning with the risen Christ. And that's chapter 11, verses 15 through 19. So that's what we're doing this morning.

[3 : 50] And just so you can remember a little bit, because Revelation is an apocalyptic book. The structure is challenging. It's a little hard. So remember, what we're seeing is this series of visions about what God is doing now, leading into the future, right?

And so we had in chapters 6 and 7, we had seven seals that were broken, that were symbolic of God's judging action, leading towards His final judgment.

And in chapters 8 and 9, we saw seven trumpets being blown. But in fact, we only saw six of them, right? And what we have in chapters 10 and 11 is an interlude, kind of like chapter 7 was an interlude between the six seals and then the last seal.

So we also have a second interlude where John gets a different vision, right? If chapters 8 and 9 is a vision of the judgment of God on the earth, that's happening now, that's ongoing and building towards a final judgment.

So then this interlude gives us a picture of what is the church meant to do during this time. So that's where we're going. That's where we are. We're gonna begin by looking at chapter 10 and seeing that God calls the witnessing church to a prophetic role.

[5 : 09] So with that, let me pray for God's help because this is a big passage and there's lots going on. And then we're gonna dive in together. Lord, thank you for this morning and a chance to look at your word.

And Lord, we thank you for the richness of your word and how you express yourself and your truth and reveal yourself through many different ways. Thank you for the book of Revelation and its visions that help us to understand you and your purposes in this world more clearly.

Help us, Lord, to understand with our head, to receive with our heart, Lord, the truth of your word this morning. And I pray for your help that you would help me to speak as I ought.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, Revelation chapter 10. Here we go. Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven wrapped in a cloud with a rainbow over his head and his face was like the sun and his legs like pillars of fire.

He had a little scroll open in his hand and he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land and called out with a loud voice like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.

[6 : 23] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write. But I heard a voice from heaven saying, seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write them down.

And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and earth, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should, would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

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 little scroll. And he said to me, take and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.

And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

[7 : 44] And I was told, you must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings. Okay. So in the midst of all these visions about God's judgment and what God is doing on the earth, suddenly it gets personal again.

John is the center. He sees a vision of an angel with a scroll and he's speaking with a loud voice. And all of the imagery around it, the rainbow and the loud voice like thunder, is reminiscent actually of what we've seen in other places of images that refer to God.

And some have suggested that this might be a manifestation of God, but I think it's actually more that this angel is speaking for God. And so the imagery connected to him gives him a kind of authority that he's speaking on behalf of God as he speaks these things.

He straddles the sea. He is speaking with a worldwide authority. And he speaks about the seven thunders. And friends, I'm just going to tell you, I'm punting on these.

Verses three through seven are not very clear. And the commentators are all over the place in terms of what does it mean that he spoke something and then he told John, don't write it down and don't let anyone know what it said.

[9 : 04] I don't know why that is in there. So you can come talk to me afterwards if you have a better idea. But what we do see near the end is a little bit of clarity, right? Because whatever those seven thunders were, whatever they were speaking, at the end, the angel says, here's what I'm going to swear.

To heaven and to earth, the mystery of God will be completed and you must prophesy. What God, the mystery, not something that nobody could know that you're trying to figure out, but what had been unknown in the past, but now is being revealed, it is going to be fulfilled on the last day.

God's plans for the world will be accomplished. And we know that that's the arc or that's the end of what this first section is about, right?

God told the prophets what was going to happen. It will come about. And this is where we see then the prophetic role become really clear because what the angel is announcing is what the prophets have announced and now what John is supposed to then pick up.

Because in verses 8 through 11, there's this scroll, and again, there's lots of conversation. Is this the same scroll as chapter 5? I don't actually think so, but lots of wise people do.

[10 : 27] But it seems like it's still about God's revealing his plan for the world. And John receives his scroll and he's meant to eat it.

Now, if you're a Bible student, if you've been reading the Bible for a long time, then you know that this is reminiscent of Ezekiel 2 and 3. For the rest of us who haven't read Ezekiel recently, let me remind you and commend to you.

Ezekiel 2 and 3 is about the calling of the prophet Ezekiel to proclaim God's word to unrepentant and hardened people of God during his time.

He preached at the end of, right before and during the exile, and he knew, and God told him, you're going to preach my word and people are not going to listen to you and they're going to reject you because they're rejecting me.

But Ezekiel similarly was told, eat the scroll and it will be sweet in your mouth but bitter in your stomach because the message is from God. that's a good God that has a redemptive purpose and yet it will make you sick to your stomach because you will also know that the people will reject it and refuse it.

[11 : 45] And John is, in this image, being brought into a similar role of being the prophet prophet, to speak God's words to the nations, right?

And it's important to recognize too, some of you may think when we're talking about prophets, what do prophets do? Well, they say, what's going to happen in the future? Okay, that's sort of true to a certain extent in some ways, but what a prophet actually does is rather than foretell, they foretell.

That is, they speak clearly and make known God's words and God's ideas. And so this is what John's role is. He's continuing, he is called, like the prophets of old, to be one who speaks forth God's word to the world.

So this is what we see in chapter 10 is that John's role is being reinforced. We saw this in chapter 1, he's coming back to it in chapter 10 and this reminds us that the book of Revelation is cyclical, not linear.

This doesn't happen, I don't believe this vision necessarily happened after other things, but could be contemporaneous with the very beginning of the book in the sense that this is another vision affirming, John, this is your role in the world, to prophesy, to speak God's word to the world.

[13 : 14] So what does this mean for us? Before we go on to chapter 11, what does this mean for us as God's people? First thing I want to say is we serve a God who is revealing himself, who is committed to making himself known in the world, right?

He spoke through the prophets to the people and to the world throughout all of the Old Testament history. He spoke through Jesus as Jesus came.

He spoke in Jesus in a particular way when he came to earth to make himself known. What an incredible joy it is that we have a God who wants us to know him and that our knowledge of him is not numinous.

It's not like the force in Star Wars, but it's particular. It has content. It actually has words. You can just stop for a minute and think, why do we have language and words?

Because God wanted to be able to communicate to us. It's how he made us so that we can know him. And these words of revelation, right, through Moses and the law, through the great prophets from Elijah and Elisha to Nathan to Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.

[14 : 33] Our God is a speaking God. And secondly, we need to recognize that the final revelation, we see this in Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1.

In the times past, he spoke through various prophets, but in the last days, he spoke through his son, Jesus, who John called the Word of God, made flesh, and we have beheld his glory so that we might know God.

This is the pinnacle of God wanting us to know him is sending his son, Jesus, so that we could see who he is. And finally, friends, we now have this because the translation of this speaking God and revealing God through the person of Jesus is now this book, which is God's words to us recorded, written down, the account of the final Word of God in his life and the implications of it in the church throughout the rest of the New Testament.

So as we think about this, let us recognize that God is still speaking through his Word, in his Word, to his people, and through his people to one another.

So friends, let's treasure the Word of God. Let us rejoice in the God who has made himself known, and let us be those who not only receive God's Word, but then who turn and share it with others so that this would be part of our understanding of what God wants us to do.

[16 : 12] This then brings us to chapter 11, the first 13 verses where we see that God calls us to be a witnessing church in the pattern of Christ. Let's look at Revelation 11, verses 1 through, actually we'll read through 1 through 14, so let's read this together.

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, for it was given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for 42 months, and I will grant authority to my witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.

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 up the skies so 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.

And when they 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 dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt where their Lord was crucified.

[17 : 49] For three and a half days, some from the people and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

But after three and a half days, a breath of life entered, a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying, come up here.

And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour, there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell, seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

And the second woe had passed. Behold, the third woe is soon to come. Okay. We just dove into the deep end of the apocalyptic pool.

This is a vision, right? And at the center of the vision is two witnesses. And the main idea of this passage is that the church represented by the two witnesses is called to bear witness to Christ in the pattern of Christ, which will include suffering, death, and resurrection.

[19 : 23] Okay? That's the big picture of this vision and of this section. And what we see is there's a continuity with the idea of prophesy because you see in verse 3, 4 that they will prophesy.

Where is it? I can't find it. You can look for it and read it again. They will prophesy again and recognize that there are echoes of these Old Testament prophets.

Again, if you've read your whole Old Testament recently, you might pick up some of these. Do you remember the prophet who called fire down from heaven and who spoke and the sky was shut up with rain?

Elijah in Kings. So go read the stories of Elijah to be reminded of this. And then remember the plagues? Do you remember who the prophet was during the plagues?

It was Moses. Moses who led the people of God, who was God's representative speaking God's words to the world, who through, God brought these plagues on Egypt.

[20 : 28] And God is saying, these two witnesses are going to continue in the line of these prophets in the same role that the Old Testament prophets had of speaking God's words to the world.

Right? And God's words are always going to be a message of redemption, that there is redemption in Christ and a calling to Him and an exalting of the character of God which will always have also the message of judgment because those who reject Him those who stand against Him in all of His goodness will find themselves under judgment eventually.

So this is the two witnesses. And I believe it's the church partly because we see in verse 4 that it's the two lamps, it's two lampstands. Remember back in chapter 1, the lampstands, there were seven of them that represented the churches of God or the church of God as a whole.

Why two instead of seven here? Well, because in the Old Testament and Deuteronomy and the law, if you had to establish something to be true, you had to do so with two witnesses in a courtroom.

And so God calls His church as the two witnesses. So our communal witness to the person and work of Christ and the purposes of God in the world as the church are establishing the truth of it for all who have ears to hear.

[21 : 57] So this is the big picture of what God is doing. Now what does this testimony look like? Well, for one thing, it has a limited time.

You might have noticed we got some funky numbers in this passage, right? Suddenly there were 42 months and, oh no, 42, yeah, 42 months and then we had 1,260 days, which is actually the same length of time if you're doing math.

42 times 30 is 1,260. And then you had, and then we'll see as we keep going that this is a number that comes up in the next couple of chapters.

What does this mean? Well, the summary of it is this number represents three and a half years. We see it here in verse 2 and verse 3.

In chapter 12, it will also, verse 6, it'll also talk about 1260 days. In chapter 12, verse 14, it will use a phrase time, times, and half a time.

[22 : 59] And you just think, really? But yeah, time plus two times, that's three and then a half, three and a half years. It's the same symbolic number that we see. And this is drawing on Daniel and I'm just gonna say if you wanna go read Daniel 7, 9, 12 and put it together, you'll see there's some resonances from there.

But the overall picture in all of the ways this is used is that there will be time of tribulation, there will be times of trial, there will be times where the church is undergoing persecution, hardship, suffering, and at times experiencing as well God's provision through this, but not ultimate vindication or freedom from it.

And the reason why I think God uses the word the three and a half is because three and a half is half of seven. And seven is the picture of completeness that we've seen.

The fullness, the ultimate fulfillment are always done in sevens. So three and a half means this is truncated, it's cut short, it's limited rather than expansive.

So, that's how we read these numbers. We get this sense as well in verse 7 of chapter 11. You can look with me there where it says when the testimony is finished.

[24 : 18] Because here's the thing, friends, the testimony of the church to a world that is in rebellion against Him and God calling people to Himself, that's not going to last forever.

One day, the witness that the church will have will be transformed from witnessing to people that don't know God to simply worshiping with God with those who do forever.

Right? So we know that there's a time that it will come, a time will come when our witness will end. That might give us a sense of urgency, but it also gives us a sense of hope because we know that this witness will not merely happen in easy times, but in fact, it will happen through persecution, through trial, through opposition.

And in fact, the word witness, many of you probably know this, but in Greek, the original language that this was written, it's the word martyr. Right?

And martyr originally meant witnesses, but it's taken up this role because of the biblical witness, this meaning of someone who dies for their profession of faith.

[25 : 36] And this is exactly what we see, that God has called his church to bear witness even unto death to the work of Jesus. Right?

A beast will rise. We'll get to the beast next week. But a beast will rise from the depths of hell and attack and seemingly to kill the church.

And it will happen in a city of darkness like Sodom or like Egypt or like Jerusalem that's rejected Jesus and was the place where he was killed. And they will have a party.

Friends, it's Super Bowl Sunday. Somebody, either in San Francisco or in Kansas City, is going to throw a huge party next week to celebrate a victory. This is what the world will do when they see the defeat of, what the seeming defeat of the church.

When they see it eradicated, when it feels like it's completely overcome and disappears, there will be a rejoicing in the church because the church's witness, as it says in 2 Corinthians 2, is an aroma to the whole world.

[26 : 45] It is a scent. But to some, it is the aroma of life to those who receive it and respond to it and take it in and become followers of Christ and know the life that's in him.

But to some, it is the aroma of death because in our stubborn human hearts when we reject Jesus and when we refuse to submit to God, we find ourselves facing his judgment on our sin on our own.

And so we recognize that the world will hate, this is why it says that they were tormented by the preaching of the gospel because it pricked their conscience and they hated it. And this is the world that we live in.

And friends, we need to be careful that the things that people hate about the church is the gospel and not other things. But let us recognize that we will never be accepted in the world at large.

We will never be praised as the great things that we want to be in the world. We will be hated and persecuted because this is what happened to Jesus.

[28 : 00] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. And this is the pattern of our witness then, that we witness in the face of a world that ultimately will want to kill us.

And not all of us are going to die for our faith, though some are today in this world. So what do you think about this, friends?

Church, are you ready to live your life as a martyr? Are you ready to see how great the redeeming work of Christ is and to identify yourself with it publicly, even if it costs you?

It might cost you the acceptance of your friends in high school who want you to live a life that's contrary to God's plans.

And you say, no, I want to live for Christ. That means I'm going to do it differently. Maybe it's going to mean talking about your faith in Christ on the playground with the other parents on a Saturday morning.

[29 : 17] Maybe in your workplace. Recognizing there's appropriate wisdom in how you do it, but to recognize people should know in your workplace that you follow Christ.

How can you share that with them? How can you create, how can you pray and look for God to give you opportunities? And look, I understand it's hard. We're in a world today where the word Christian is confused with national and political and social movements and ideologies that don't have to do with the gospel.

And we need to somehow clear the wood and get through all that so that people can see that what we really want people to know is that Jesus loved the world such that he came and died for their sins so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

This is the message of the gospel. Not be more like us or do the right thing but repent. Repent and believe in the good news that in Christ alone there is forgiveness for our sin and true living spiritual life.

This is what God has called us to. And friends, if you're wondering, I don't know how to do that, go read Pastor Nick's little blurb in our weekly email.

[30 : 37] It was really good. I'm actually going to read part of it to you. Ready? Here we go. What sorts of things do we naturally share with our friends and colleagues? The things we love, the things that bring us joy, whether it's a favorite new recipe, engaging in an engaging podcast, we easily talk about and share the things that we love.

And it's the same with the gospel. Evangelism, rightly considered, is a form of praise. Praise because we have found Christ to be so unbelievably good.

When we experience the gospel in our own hearts and as good news, we'll naturally want to share it with others. Friends, if you're struggling with sharing this with others, the first step may be go deeper into the gospel.

Recognize what great things God has done for you. Let that captivate your heart. And when you do that, then you will see God will open doors because you will want to talk about the things that are changing your life.

So friends, God has called us to be a witnessing church in the pattern of Christ. It may cost us great things to be witnesses for Christ.

[31 : 55] And yet it's exactly what He's called us to because we know that the end is not the death, the end is not the trampling, the bodies lying in Sodom and Egypt, but that God came in this vision and breathed new life like a recreation, like Genesis 2 all over again.

God breathes new life in them and they are raised, not just raised back to life, but then raised up into the throne room of God to be with heaven forever, to rule over this world.

And this is what the end of this, this is what the seventh trumpet shows us. This is the picture that we see at the end of our passage in Revelation 11, 15 through 19, is that the witnessing church that's called to be a, have a prophetic role in the world, the witnessing church that's meant to follow in the pattern of Christ through suffering and death to resurrection is the same witnessing church that God calls to reign with him, Christ the risen King.

This is the final trumpet. Let's read this last section together as we close, as we, we're almost done, I promise. The seventh trumpet, Revelation 15, or 11, verse 15.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

[33 : 30] And the 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, we give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who was and is, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun your, begun to reign.

The nations raged, but your wrath came. And the time for the dead to be judged and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both great, small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

And then God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and earthquake and heavy hail.

friends, this is the end of the witnessing church is that Christ will come and he will judge the world and he will destroy the destroyers and the nations who rise up against God will be no more and the believers, both great and small, will get their reward.

The prophets and the saints will receive because they will be seated with him and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

[34 : 54] And friends, the temple will be opened. The imagery here would be a whole other sermon but the temple will be opened. We'll see to the very inner place, the holy of holies where the presence of God dwelt, where the ark was.

We can walk right into there because of Jesus and have this unfettered, uncomplicated fellowship with the risen and reigning God forever and we will be a part of his kingdom.

The final sacrifice for Christ has opened the door now to the temple and when Christ returns and defeats all of his enemies and we will see this building, this vision of that victory through the rest of Revelation, right, we will reign with him forever.

Friends, can you imagine what good news this was to the church in Rome in the first century suffering persecution? that those who suffered under Diocletian and Domitian will reign with Christ.

That those who suffered in France under the Huguenot persecution during the Protestant Reformation, they will be there.

[36 : 21] That believers who died at the hands of Chairman Mao's Red Guard because they claimed the name of Christ and witnessed to him. They will be there.

And those today who are dying for the name of Christ, whether it be in Central Asia or Myanmar or Saudi Arabia or Sudan, friends, they will be reigning with Christ forever and eternity.

and they will have the joy. And this is why God calls us to be the witnessing church now unto death because Christ is worth it and because God is still at work calling people out of darkness into light.

God is still calling us not to hunker down and just try to get through to heaven but to stand up and to go out and to proclaim that Christ has come to save the world and to testify and bear witness to his work so that we might together sing for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. The kingdoms of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and I'm about to break out into song because you know this shall reign forever and ever King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever.

[38 : 01] Hallelujah. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this great vision and this great call and Lord we ask for your forgiveness for we so often love comfort and the love and praise of our fellow man more than we love to bear witness to how great you are.

Oh Lord, may you be our joy so that we might overflow with the good news of the gospel. Help us, Lord, to be this kind of church we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.