

Date: March 22, 2020

Text: Revelation 11:1-14

Title: A Fiery Sermon

Theme: Mercy and Judgment

Proposition: God will always have a gospel witness till the end of the world.

Introduction: We focus our attention back to Revelation this morning. Our theme in this study has been *The Beginning of the End*. I would think with everything that is going on today with this coronavirus that we should be listening for the trumpet of God. I don't know of a better time to be looking prophetically in the book of Revelation than now. There is a new interest in this last book of the Bible, not just in the United States but all across the world. So, what a great joy and privilege it has been for us to be studying this revelation of Jesus Christ and His second coming. If you're just joining us this morning in our study let me just quickly catch you up.

Jesus appeared to John in chapter 1, dictated the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3. Six of these seven churches had things they were commended for, and five of the seven had charges against them from the Lord. We saw in chapter 4 that John is invited into Heaven to see the worship of God. In both chapters 4-5 we noticed that God is the central subject. Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father and Creation, and chapter 5 focuses on God the Son and redemption. In chapter 5, Jesus takes the scroll from the Father, and in chapters 6-8 He begins to open the seals on the scroll. The seals were judgments of God upon the earth and man. In chapters 8 and 9 God gives seven trumpets to seven angels, and the first six angels blow their trumpets of judgment. Each one becomes more intense and Jesus describes them as birth pangs (Matthew 24:8).

Listen, after the first six seals and the first six trumpets of God's judgment have been unleashed, half of the world has died either by plague, famine, pestilence, murder, great cosmic disturbances, or by two incredible, hellish, demonic armies that come from the abyss. The first army of locusts with scorpion-like stingers which inflict pain on mankind. The second army of some 200 million demons from hell,

riding horses with tails as serpents' head, bite and kill a third of mankind.

There is a break in between the sixth and seventh seal. We refer to it as an interlude and the first one appears in chapter 7 where we are introduced to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists. During this time Jews and Gentiles alike come to Christ for salvation and the number is so great that John can't even count them. He merely says, **“a great multitude. . .that no one could number” (7:9)**. Before the seventh trumpet is blown at the end of chapter 11, chapter 10 shows us a strong angel bringing a little book or scroll for John and he is commanded to eat it and told it will be sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. In other words, God's Word is like honey but the message of judgment from God is bitter. The second interlude takes place between the sixth and seventh trumpets beginning in chapter 10 and continuing on until verse 14 in chapter 11. That pause is to assure all that God will be gracious. In spite of the unrelenting judgment, in spite of all the disaster, the demon activity, the satanic effort, in spite of the coming terror, the fury and the vengeance of the wrath of God, God will still be merciful and gracious. In chapter 10 truth will be preached and in verse 11, John was instructed to prophesy again about many peoples, tongues, and nations. The message being that saving truth only through Christ will be preached. The purpose of the tribulation period is to punish an unbelieving world that since the flood and the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), mankind has rejected God and His message. God's punishment has been put on hold for some 20 centuries and now prophetically we see payday is coming. The tribulation is also referred to as the *Time of Jacob's Trouble* indicating that the tribulation is primarily for the nation of Israel. Israel wandered spiritually; rejected Moses; the Law; the prophets; the Savior, Jesus; rejected the apostles; and so much preaching of the Gospel has gone on by the Gentiles. Israel's time of Great Tribulation is coming. Now we arrive at chapter 11, verses 1-14 this morning. If you have a Bible, please turn with me to Revelation 11, beginning at verse 1. **“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. (2) But leave out the court which is outside the**

temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. (3) And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.’ (4) These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands standing before the God of the earth. (5) And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. (6) These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. (7) When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. (8) And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. (9) Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. (10) And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. (11) Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. (12) And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. (13) In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. (14) The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.” Pretty remarkable guys, I would say. The main point of this passage is: God will always have a gospel witness until the end of the world.

Prayer:

Daniel said that there would be another temple (9:27; 12:11) as did Christ in His Sermon on the Mount of Olives—that the temple will be

rebuilt and in operation during the Tribulation period. (Matthew 24) and Paul wrote about the same thing in II Thessalonians 2. Now the apostle John sees it in operation. The two witnesses that are introduced are possibly the agents that lead to Christ the 144,000 Jews in the first three and half years. The two points of emphasis this morning concern, The Measuring of the Tribulation Temple and the Ministry of the Two Witnesses. But before these unusual witnesses are introduced, John is asked to actually take part in the unfolding drama with the temple. Now let me just clarify by saying this drama that John is participating in takes place in Jerusalem. I believe all that we're studying this morning occurs in the first half of the Tribulation, not in the second half. This tribulation temple is built under the protection of the Antichrist, whose true character has not been revealed yet. To spiritualize Revelation 11:1-2 and make the temple refer to the church creates a number of serious problems. For one thing how could John measure an invisible body of people, even if the church were still on the earth? If the temple is the church, then who are the worshippers and what is the altar? And since the church unites Jews and Gentiles in one body (Eph 2) why are the Gentiles segregated in this temple? It seems the wisest to interpret this temple as an actual building in the Holy City of Jerusalem. This was prophesied by Daniel which Pastor John read for us earlier.

1. The Tribulation Temple - vv. 1-2

- John's participation - v. 1 **“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod.”** John was given a *kalamos* — a tall hollow cane that grew in the swampy Mediterranean regions, sometimes as high as 15 feet. It could be whittled down to make writing pens, or canes, or used as John does here, as a surveyor's ruler (yardstick) or measuring rod. God tells John to take the yardstick, or reed and measure the temple. The Greek word for “temple” is *naos* which would refer to the inner temple, made up of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies—not the entire temple complex. Let me show you a picture of the temple in Jesus' day.



Now this might seem like a strange thing to do in the midst of these intense, earth shattering judgments. But what we tend to miss, as we read this, is the elephant in the room—and that's what John has just been asked to measure. A temple, but remember there is no temple standing in Jerusalem when John writes the book of Revelation. It had been destroyed 25 years earlier. The history of the temple is a sad history, which illustrates the cycles of faithfulness and unfaithfulness by the people of God. Temples have been built and temples destroyed.

- The first temple was built by Solomon and was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- The second temple was reconstructed by Zerubbabel after the exile.
- The third temple was actually the magnificently enlarged second temple by Herod the Great. Many refer to this as the third temple and it was present in the time of Christ, but then,

just as Christ predicted in Matthew 24:2, **“not one stone of the temple shall be left upon another.”** This prediction of judgment came true in A.D. 70 when Titus, the Roman general, overran the rebellion in Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground. The only thing left standing in Jerusalem from this temple was a portion of the Western Wall. It is often referred to as the Wailing Wall, for to this day Orthodox Jews come there day after day, and pray, “May it be Thy will that the temple be speedily rebuilt in our own time.”

- The fourth temple will be the Tribulation Temple that we’re studying in Revelation 11.
- The fifth temple will be built in the Millennium when Christ reigns on this earth. (Ezekiel 40-46; Zechariah 2:1-3) The millennial temple built by Jesus will be a memorial to God’s faithfulness to His people and to Israel. Ezekiel 40-46 is such tedious reading that it cannot be some allegorical symbol but is a very real literal temple.
- John’s observation - v. 1 **“And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of god, the altar, and those who worship there.’** John was to measure this Tribulation Temple—literally the Holy Place; the *naos* which included the Holy of Holies. This measurement was not meant to be an effort to determine its physical dimensions, since none are given, but the act proves ownership. The Lord was saying through John, “I own this city and this temple, and I claim both for Myself.” Furthermore, the worshipers were to be measured as well as the temple. But how does one measure a worshiper? Evidently this type of measurement has to do with spiritual standards rather than physical. The temple and its altar and its worshipers are to be evaluated in terms of their conformity to God’s spiritual criteria, and John is to be the one who measures (judges) them. Peter tells us **“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God” (I Peter 4:17)**. Friends, this has been the order. God judges His own people first to cleanse and purify them. Then

He judges His enemies to punish and banish them. The Judgment Seat of Christ for believers comes first and then the Great White Throne Judgment a thousand years later where unbelievers are separated from God forever in the lake of fire.

- John's omission - v. 2 **“But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”** This is so significant because the Gentiles had taken over Jerusalem. Traditionally, Gentiles were allowed to enter the outer courtyard surrounding the temple itself. This area of the Gentiles was not included in the measurement. Why? Because this is the judgment of Israel, not of the Gentiles, which John was to be concerned with at this point. Jerusalem will face God's judgment first and then Babylon would experience the wrath of God. One other note, the rebuilt temple during the tribulation will be fulfilled with the help of the Antichrist.

Transition: The Guardian News agency reported on July 9, 2018 the story that took place on June 23, 2018, twelve boys ranging in age from eleven to sixteen—all members of a Thailand soccer team—took an after-practice excursion with their coach into the Tham Luang cave in northern Thailand. They had passed through two of the cavern's six miles when monsoon rains flooded the caves, trapping the team on an underground ledge.

When families reported the boys missing, a search party found their bicycles and packs near the cave entrance. Authorities immediately instigated operations to search the caves. Thai Navy Seals entered the caverns feeling their way through murky water, an experience they described as “swimming through coffee.”

After nine days, divers finally located the boys and delivered survival supplies while they devised a complex rescue system. Over the next week, they strung underwater guide wires from the team's location to the entrance. Then they equipped the boys with scuba gear and brought them out one by one, each escorted between two experienced divers. All the boys were finally brought out safely within three days as the

watching world applauded the heroic efforts of the divers and support teams.

If you think about the complexity of the caves, the underwater distance to be crossed, the darkness, and the danger of further monsoon rains, it would have been easy for the authorities to write off the rescue attempts as too dangerous—even impossible.

But using that rationale, God could just have easily written off the people who will be caught up in the dangerous dark time known as the Tribulation. The rapture happens when Christians will be caught up to the clouds with our Lord to dwell with Him in heaven, while only unbelievers will be left to deal with the gloom and doom that follows. But God will not write off the millions who are flooded and trapped in spiritual darkness. No, God will send witnesses—people to proclaim the good news of the gospel—offering salvation to those who are near imminent doom.

God has always in every generation had His witnesses, from Moses to the prophets; from Jesus Himself to the apostles and even here during the tribulation period God has biblical witnesses prepared for the world. Let me ask you this question, who are His witnesses right now to the world? That's right, you and me! (Acts 1:8).

2. The Two Witnesses - vv. 3-14 (David Jeremiah in his book *The Book of Signs* gives us a wonderful outline of these two witnesses.
 - The personality of the witnesses - v. 4 **“These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands standing before the God of the earth.”** The most consistent interpretation of Scripture here is that these will be two actual people who will speak with human voices and perform miracles by the power of God. John affirms their humanity with two significant metaphors: Two olive trees and two lamp stands. John's readers would have recognized these metaphors from a vision the prophet Zechariah had, who, described a golden candlestick bearing seven lamps flanked by two olive trees, which produce golden oil for the lamps. Zechariah identifies the olive trees as actual people—**“The two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth”**

(Zechariah 4:14). These two “anointed ones” in Zechariah’s prophecy were prominent men of faith in his time: the high priest Joshua and Jerusalem’s governor Zerubbabel, who restored the Jewish temple. In Zechariah’s day, Joshua and Zerubbabel were two witnesses of the fact that God does His work through the power of His Spirit (vv. 6-10). It’s often quoted, “**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,**” says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).” The zeal of these two men provided fuel for God’s work, like the olive. Their zeal also gave light for God’s work, like a lamp. Given this background, it’s easy to see why John identified the two witnesses in Revelation as olive trees and lamp stands. Like the godly Zerubbabel and Joshua, they will be men controlled and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit to shine like lights into the darkness of the Tribulation period. So who are they? Their exact identity is debated today even though God did not name them. So, we don’t need to spend hours guessing, right? There is no need to guess. I found a verse that clearly marks it out. It is in Hezekiah chapter 2. If you would like to turn there—it’s right next to Zephaniah. Okay, if you know your Bibles, you know there is no book of Hezekiah. So, you can stop looking.

- The prophecies of the witnesses - v. 3 John gives us two details indicating the duration and character of the witnesses’ prophecies: “**And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**” The time is clearly stated. It will last 1,260 days, which is equivalent to forty-two months or three-and-a-half years. The nature of their prophecy is indicated in their clothing. They will wear sackcloth, a fabric that throughout Scripture has expressed mourning, distress, or repentance. The people of Nineveh we’re told repented in sackcloth and ashes. (Jonah 3) The content of their message will be judgment. They will preach that payday is coming. It will not be a message of *Happy days are here again*. Why are they mourning? Because the nation has gone back to the Law. What should the nation be doing?

Repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus. This message will also be preached by the 144,000. Think of the many New Testament books that have been written about not going back to the Law? (Hebrews, Galatians).

- The power of the witnesses - v. 3 **“And I will give power”**
 - In their preaching - We can only imagine how much they will be hated by the Antichrist and the unbelieving world. Their message will be a fiery sermon, for they will fearlessly and supernaturally testify to the truth of God’s Word and the coming Messiah. By the way, all of this focus on Israel and Jerusalem and the temple is further evidence that the church is already gone. Author and pastor, Willian R. Newell wrote, “They will testify unsparingly of human wickedness to men’s very faces. You have probably never heard a preacher that told you to your face just how bad you were. . . .These witnesses will tell to the teeth of a horrid godlessness which is ready to worship the Devil, just what they are before God.” Don’t we see this today? Unbelievers do not merely reject the truth; they go all out to silence it. People do not want to hear truth that inflicts a sense of guilt. (Rom. 1:18-21)
 - **In the plague of death** - v. 5 **“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.”** Who does this sound like? Elijah, right? In II Kings, chapter 1, King Ahaziah fell through a lattice and was severely injured. He sent messengers to go inquire of Baal- Zebub, the god of Ekron concerning his recovery. Elijah intercepted them as directed by the Lord and he said go back and tell Ahaziah that because he wanted to consult a false god instead of the Lord, he will never get out bed. Ahaziah sent his captain of 50 men to go get Elijah. The captain said to Elijah, “The king wants to see you.” Elijah has fire come down and it consumes the whole lot of them. A second captain comes with fifty men

and says, “The king wants to see you.” Again fire comes down and consumes them. He sends a third group but this time the head guy was a little more cautious than the other two. He made an appeal instead of a demand and Elijah went with him. Take note, appeals go much farther than just demands.

- **In the plague of drought** - v. 6 **“These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy;”** Who does this sound like? Elijah in the days of King Ahab with a great drought. (I Kings 17)
- **In the plague of disease** - v. 6 **“And they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”** Who does this sound like? Charleston Hesston?, No Moses. Just like Pharaoh of old hated Moses, and Ahab and Ahaziah hated Elijah, the tribulation world will want to see these two witnesses killed. Because of their miracles of judgment, these two witnesses remind us of both Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophet. Will Israel repent? Answer. No!
- The persecution of the witnesses - Although God has protected these men thus far, look what takes place in verse 7 when they have finished their testimony. **“When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.”** The word **“finish”** is the Greek word *tetelestai* which is the same word Jesus used on the cross, when He cried out, **“It is finished!”** Did you notice the beast will come out of the abyss? You know what a beast is? In the Old Testament a beast was a nation, an empire, that had power with no conscience. You ever been attacked by a forty-pound dog? It’s terrifying because that dog has no conscience. All it wants is your leg or ankle. The beast here is the Antichrist who is satanically inspired. His true colors are eventually going to come out, and we will deal with him in a future study.

The death of the witnesses will expose the extreme depravity of the Antichrist and the earth dwellers of the tribulation period.

- In their death in Jerusalem - v. 8 **“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”** In other words, Jerusalem will be called spiritual nicknames like Sodom for its immorality and Egypt because of the idolatry and oppression of God’s people.
- In the display of their bodies - **“Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.”** The greatest insult to the deceased is to withhold burial, to leave them to decay. This text says that the world will see them lying out in the open. In fact, the present active participle **“will see them”** indicates continued action. They will keep looking at them. Years ago, skeptics said this could never happen, that the world will never have the capability to all see them at once. Times have changed, have they not?
- In the delight of their enemies - Here we have the only report of joy and happiness that occurs in the tribulation period. Verse 10 states, **“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”** Some authors I read declared this *Happy Dead Witness Day!* This will be a holiday that rivals Christmas. This just reveals the heart of man.
- The preservation of the witnesses
 - In their resurrection - Three days later the world witnesses their resurrection.
 - In their rapture - The world witnesses their ascension in the cloud and fear invades them. Henry Morris stated, “The sight will be enough to strike terror into the hearts of the most

arrogantly rebellious of their enemies. A moment before, such men were rejoicing in supreme confidence that Christ was finally defeated and Satan's man was on the victor's throne. But now Christ had triumphed again. The ascent of the prophets into heaven was a dire prediction that even greater judgments were about to descend from heaven. The three-and-a-half day festivities were about to be followed by another three-and-a-half years of judgments more severe than ever."

- In their revenge - Earthquake and 7,000 die in Jerusalem.

Conclusion: There are some core principles from the temple and the testimony of these witnesses that can be applied to our own lives today.

1. Life is precious
2. Death is inevitable
3. Judgment is certain
4. Salvation is only through Jesus Christ
5. Truth must be shared
6. Worship will always be the result

As we conclude our worship service, let me assure you that we are praying for you and our entire church family, for protection and for peace through this crisis. What a day we live in when and people are looking for answers! God use us for Your Kingdom.

Prayer: