

Chapter 12 – God’s Two Witnesses

Read Revelation 11:1-13

The opening of the seals and the blowing of the trumpets of judgment, though written over 1900 years ago, in so many ways accurately portrays our C21st society. But if you believe Christ you are comforted that you are immune from the scorpion sting of the locusts and even though other aspects of the judgments may physically touch believers, they can not hurt them spiritually. Christ controls all things in implementing the remainder of the seven-sealed book, and what remains is that referred to in Revelation 10:7 as that which the seventh angel must sound concerning the end of this space-time creation. The end is coming, the end of this world and the kingdom of Satan; it is all ripe for judgment. The only escape, the only salvation, is in the blood of the Lamb. As Noah preached righteousness before the flood, God’s prophets (preachers) must unrelentingly preach the gospel and warn of impending judgment right up to the end. This was the command at the end of chapter 10. Throughout what remains of this world, God’s people will know the sweetness of gospel salvation and the bitterness of enmity with the unbelieving world.

Who Must Preach and Witness?

As if in answer to the question that might be asked as to who, in addition to John, might be included in the “Thou” of Rev 10:11 who are called to preach God’s truth, Revelation 11 opens with a picture of John being given a measuring rod with which to measure or mark out the Temple. Strange as this may seem, I think this helps to clear up some confusion which might have been arising in previous messages, especially concerning the sixth trumpet or second woe. In that vision the four angels bound in the great river Euphrates were to be loosed and that opened the way for a 200 million strong army of fearsome horsemen to bring the death of a third of mankind. We interpreted that as the countries of the world that had a Judeo-Christian heritage to whatever extent being overrun by the kingdoms of Gog and Magog, i.e. the peoples that had never had any cultural influence from the gospel.

Basically, I interpreted that as being what some would call Christendom being overrun with non-Christendom. But knowing what we believe concerning the true gospel and its narrow distinctiveness, you might have been left puzzled as to why I was giving any significance to that which is merely ‘Christendom’. After all, fast-forwarding to Revelation 17 and 18, we will see most of what is called Christendom marked out as spiritual Babylon. In those chapters, what at first looks like the church of Christ (a woman) is revealed as a ‘whore’ denying gospel truth to its core. Nevertheless, there are swathes of what we identify as ‘western culture’ (e.g. Europe and the Americas) and as nominally ‘Christian’. Whether they be Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Protestant and even Reformed, they can all be traced back to the opening of the first seal, the sending forth of the White Horse of the gospel into the world. The effect of that, in frustrating Satan’s purposes, has not only been the calling out of God’s true elect from every tribe and kindred but a huge amount of nominal Christianity that will ultimately be revealed as Babylon.

Many claim to be God’s true witnesses in this world. My wife and I recently visited Rome and marvelled at the magnificence of over 2,000 years of history, of ancient architecture and of stunning works of art, but on every side we were confronted with the claims of the Roman Catholic Church to be the true witness of God on earth. This raises the question of whether it is possible to mark out the true church of Christ from that which is Babylon waiting to be revealed. The significance of Revelation 11:1-2 is, I think, that we can mark out that which is Christ’s true witness from that which is merely nominal, merely Christendom and ultimately Babylon.

John is told only to measure, to mark out, the core of the Temple but not to measure the court nor the rest of the city of Jerusalem. Remember that this is symbolical; it is

not speaking of literal Jerusalem. Effectively here, 'Jerusalem' pictures Christendom but only the core of the Temple signifies the true people of God. The court is given over to the Gentiles, i.e. not those who are the Israel of God (Gal6:16). These spiritual Gentiles 'tread the holy city underfoot for 42 months'. They are in the vicinity of the true people of God, but they are not themselves his people. They are men whose spiritual number is six (short of God's perfect seven) striving to achieve divinity (seven) and so it is for $6 \times 7 = 42$ months. I do not claim to understand anything approaching the true depths of this but I can not help noticing it. God's Spirit has obviously put the words there for us to read, hear and keep (Rev1:3).

Let us consider the nature of the 'marking out' between wider Christendom and the true church of Christ. The numbers comprising Christendom must run into billions¹, but 144,000 symbolises² the true people of God on earth at any time in history. But the clearest line of all between the true and the counterfeit is that all but Christ's true people deny the efficacy of Christ's blood as the sole means of salvation. They all deny that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1John4:1) which means they deny that everything the Old Testament said of the Messiah and the salvation of his particular people is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. The media regard them as Christian but in reality they epitomise the treading of the holy city underfoot by those who deny the gospel. Apply the test as John instructs us in his first epistle; yes they may say a man walked this earth called Jesus of Nazareth but they deny what God has revealed of his saving work and its extent.

Beyond that which is obviously false, look at those who profess to be true gospel believers. In saying this I am not calling for a negative judgmental spirit, on the contrary. But true believers do need to be discerning. Many churches professing to uphold the true gospel in reality deny it, they compromise primary doctrine, they tolerate false teaching and association with the doctrines and practices of heresy. Even churches which only a few years ago stood solidly for the truth are now totally compromised with liberal practices and the old waymarks have been removed. They actually deny the gospel truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They adopt Arminian methods on the one hand and add the bondage of law works on the other. Whatever they might claim to be they are not within the Temple which John is directed to measure.

A further mark of distinction is that the true church is distinguished from the false by the ministry gifts that God has given to it and God's ministry gifts cause his true believing people to experience the sweetness of the gospel (rejoicing in it! Phil3:3) and the bitterness of its clash with the world and false religion. God's ministry gifts do not place his people under bondage to law in any respect.

The True Church Pictured By The Temple

The New Testament makes explicit that which is implicit in the Old. 1Cor3:16-17 and 2Cor6:16-17 describe the church, believers, as the temple of God. Eph2:21 pictures individual believers as building stones forming the temple of God. 1Pet2:5-9 continues the theme of Ephesians in describing believers as living stones built into a 'spiritual house' and also as the priests within the temple. Whatever the rest of the religious world thinks of itself, this is the true spiritual temple of God. Phil3:3 reinforces the identification of the true people of God, in contrast to the merely religious, as those who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

¹ The Roman Catholic Church alone claims to have about 1.2 billion adherents

² It would not surprise me, if it is so revealed in heaven, to discover that 144,000 was the *actual number* of true believers in the world on 5th November 2016, today's date.

In the Old Testament, the rebuilding of the temple following the Babylonian exile in the face of extreme worldly opposition, pictures the true New Testament church as it is today. The details are given in Haggai, Zechariah and Ezra; Zerubbabel and Joshua are prince and priest in the venture giving light to God's people, sustained by Holy Spirit oil with the assurance that "*not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts*" (Zech4:6). They stand as 'two witnesses' in those days. What could be taken as 'two witnesses' in these New Testament days? It seems to me that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are (1) the members of the true church of Christ and (2) the church's true ministers? I am aware that many identify the Revelation 11 witnesses as literally Moses and Elijah from verse 6 because of the physical manifestations of God's power that they called forth (Moses with plagues in Egypt and Elijah with a 3½ year drought) but I am confident they are simply cited as types of all of God's true witnesses in this world.

What Must They Testify?

Verse 4 speaks of the oil of God's grace; this is that to which they must be witnesses, the light of gospel righteousness, redemption accomplished in Christ's blood, sinners justified and the just wrath of judgment turned away. This is the focus of the witnesses' testimony, the true gospel of redeeming love. I challenge any church that 'has a name that it is alive' (Rev3:1) in these days, as to whether the overwhelming core of their message is the gospel of sovereign grace and particular redemption accomplished in Christ, for without that everything else they might say is but empty words.

But, complementary to the central gospel message, there must be warning of impending judgment, as surely Noah warned his generation. Verse 3 speaks of sackcloth which symbolises repentance throughout the scriptures, repentance in the hope of escaping judgement. Sackcloth also indicates the need to deliver the testimony without any of the trappings, allurements or gimmicks of the world. How sad to see once-faithful churches increasingly adopting these methods to make the message more appealing to flesh.

Verse 5 says that fire proceeds from the witnesses' mouths in response to worldly attack; this echoes God's promise through Jeremiah (Jer5:14) that he would make the prophet's words as fire in his mouth if delivered faithfully to the truth of God. The 'fire' is judgment declared as the certain end of gospel rejection. The two witnesses, Christ's church and his anointed preachers, will proclaim these things in the face of opposition, scorn and unbelief using only spiritual weapons, 2Cor10:4, which are '*mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds*'. And with these words they will 'kill' (v5), they will silence the power of those who oppose the message, and they will bring down God's judgments on this kingdom of Satan as did Noah, Moses, Elijah, Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest.

For How Long?

Revelation 11 is a high-level summary of how the end comes and much more detail will be revealed in later chapters.

Verse 3 states that the prophesying of the two witnesses shall be for 1,260 days, until (v7) they have finished their testimony. They will prophesy until the end is imminent, until God by his two witnesses has said everything he must say to call his elect to himself and warn of impending judgment. But how are we to understand 1,260 days?

Please bear with some more Biblical numerics. 1,260 days is 42 months (if a month is 30 days). 42 months is 3½ years of 12 months (if a year is 360 days as in the number of degrees in a circle) and this can be read as 'a time, times and half a time'. Twice 3½ is seven, God's number of perfection. Six is the number of the beast and of

man, i.e. one less than the seven of God's perfection. Six multiplying seven gives 42 (see v2), the number of months that the spiritual Gentiles shall tread under foot the holy city. That is fallen man's best attempt to make perfection in Satan's kingdom and it results in failure. So the 1,260 days of the witnesses' prophesying is the same as the 42 months or 3½ years of Satan's kingdom striving but failing to achieve perfection without the justice of God. It is the time from Christ's ascension to his return at the end of all things; it is symbolically half of the perfect duration of God's creation which must be seven. I have already said that I do not understand by any means fully the depths of meaning in these numbers, but there is surely great significance in them. The last thing I want to do is to sound as if I am advocating the sort of nonsense peddled in many books on Revelation. So how do we bring it back to some sort of tangible reality?

A 'time' is a long time, 'times' is twice as long; those living through it must think it is never going to end it seems so long, but then the next 'time' is cut short half way through just when most people think it is going to continue as the preceding 'times' have done. This is the symbolical 3½ years, the 1,260 days, the time we are now living in from Christ's ascension to his return. It is a long time but a limited time. What are God's believing people called to do? They are called to *witness*, to be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in them to anyone who asks them (1Pet3:15), and the church's preachers are called to *preach* the gospel, calling sinners to Christ and warning of the certainty of judgment. They are to strive to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, to bear opposition with patience and to increase in their hope for eternal glory in Christ.

What To Expect

In the light of these things, having a measure of understanding of what God has revealed via John concerning his true church and wider Christendom in these days, what can we expect to happen next?

Above all we can be confident that God will keep his people; Christ prayed for this (John17:11,15) and it will surely be granted. Living in the world but not of the world, Christ's church will be kept in wilderness separation from the principles of the world and will be fed by God (Rev12:6) until they are all taken to glory (Rev11:12). But that will not happen before their testimony is to all intents and purposes silenced (v7).

The beast of v7 is Satan's Antichrist which we shall see in greater clarity in later chapters, but for now suffice to say that Antichrist is manifested in all false religion and all self-righteous attempts to reach heaven without the Christ of God. This beast ascends from the bottomless pit (v7), makes war on God's two witnesses, overcomes them and kills them. The witnesses' dead bodies lie unburied in the street of the world's 'city', the metropolis of peoples that reject the true God. Symbolically, spiritually, this city is Sodom, it is Egypt, it is even Jerusalem where our Lord was crucified, it is the God-rejecting, gospel-rejecting, world we see all around us in these days. And seeing the witnesses' bodies lying openly in the street, the world's people refuse to let them be buried out of sight. They go so far (v10) as celebrating the death of the witnesses because the message of grace and warning that tormented them has been silenced, seemingly for ever. Their sin can now progress, so they think, unrestrained.

This speaks of a time when the true church and its ministers are effectively silenced, disrupted and made to be non-functioning as living, visible, churches bearing God's testimony. In the UK in 2016 the church which stands solidly for the true gospel is as good as 'lying dead in the street'. Even 30 years ago, you could find churches ministering to the gospel of free sovereign grace widely distributed; today you struggle to find a handful remaining true; even where the witness is upheld, it is often the case that they are unable to function as a living church with building, structure, a good number of members and a visible life as a church. That is the case

with us; we meet in a home on Sunday morning only with barely ten adults meeting together. To the world and false religion we are 'lying dead in the street'. Even when recently we had a regular meeting place, Satan's beast contrived to make it practically impossible for us to hold public meetings there throughout the 9-month rugby football season. Even in the USA where there is a thriving association (small A) of free grace churches and pastors, those whose messages are available at www.freegraceradio.com, even there the numbers involved are miniscule compared to the population of the USA and the populous swathes of Arminian, Catholic, Episcopalian, Reformed and Presbyterian 'Christianity'. I believe we are living in the days described here in Revelation 11:7-10.

But these are exciting days! The signs of Christ's return are increasing. Who would have thought even 30 years ago that Revelation 11:7-10 would be happening as I have described here? That which God signified via John over 1,900 years ago is unfolding unmistakably as prophesied then. And not only that; the death of the witnesses is only as it appears to the world and false religion. The true church of Christ will never really die; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! Look at verse 11; after just 3½ days lying apparently dead the witnesses stand up and great fear falls on all.

Where the world and false religion is rejoicing over the demise of what it recognises as functioning witnesses for God, the gospel has never been more clearly preached than it is in these days. Is it not remarkable that coincident with the demise of what was the visible witness of God in the world (in the UK, evangelical churches preaching sovereign grace in most towns throughout the country), the internet has blossomed, especially in the last 15 years, and with it the ability of 'scattered sheep' to join others for worship and hear the gospel faithfully and powerfully preached. Even our own little group of 10 or so is now joined by possibly hundreds of others around the world using the internet. As verse 11 says, there is cause for the world and false religion to fear. You see, the witnesses are not dead; they are brimming with the life of Christ and they shortly hear that blessed voice of v12, "Come up hither!". The day of the Lord (1Thess5:2) is surely close. Are *you* living on the 'tiptoe of faith' looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Great God our Saviour, Jesus Christ?