

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Two Witnesses **Revelation 11:3-14**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: None

Sermon Audio Blurb: In this interlude John describes both a temple in Jerusalem during the Tribulation and two mysterious “witnesses” who both declare a true testimony to a rebellious world, suffer martyrdom and are raised from the dead. In this sermon we consider the two witnesses raised up by God to speak judgment to a world in wholesale rebellion. We see what appears to be defeat that is actually victory and in this are reminded that God works in ways we don’t expect.

I. Introduction.

- A. One of the challenges in preaching is the apparent futility of it all.
 1. I recently read this from a friend of mine who went through seminary together.
 - a. He is referencing 2 Timothy 4:2, “. . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”
 - b. “When I began ministry it was the clause "with complete patience" that gave me the greatest challenge here. I have since learned preaching and teaching is not an event, but a process. Each week chipping away a little more than the week before. Like Christian growth, it is a gradual process which requires humble patience and faithfulness on the part of the preacher.”
 2. These words are true for every Christian for we are all preachers in some way.
 - a. We often look for the “home run.” That moment where we really get the message of Jesus Christ through to a person.
 - b. We want power. We want results. We want to be seen as wise people who are sought after for counsel.
 - c. If we are honest, we desire for the very praise that Jesus decries in Matthew 6. The yearning to be noticed now for what we do, not realizing in pursuing that we actually forfeit eternal reward.

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3. But the reality is often very different. Words and actions that seem to go unnoticed and unheeded. For parents and teachers the question, “Are they even getting anything?” often comes to mind.
 4. The work of a pastor is a work of faith. It is a work that can only be judged over time.
 - a. I taught in my series on parenting that it is a work of faith.
 - b. This would apply to friendships and marriage as well. Any work worth doing is usually done in faith for the fruit will be seen often years later.
 5. The reality is that we usually are not called to achieve much. But we are called to be found faithful.
 6. But it also is very true that God works through weakness more than strength and in then when He triumphs it is often done in a surprising manner which humiliates the mockers.
- B. The passage before us is one where we see promise, strength, weakness and victory.
- C. Read chapter 11:1-14.
- D. There are two main sections to this passage. The Temple and the Two Witnesses.
1. This is still a parenthetical portion of Revelation that started in chapter 10.
 2. In our section today we are going to see a portion of time during what the bible calls the Tribulation. 42 months to be specific. This would be the second half of the Tribulation.
- E. We considered the first part last week regarding the idea of a temple.
1. If it is not to be taken as a physical reality then there are many choices as to what is meant by these two verses.
 - a. Usually it is seen not to be a physical temple but rather the Church.
 - b. The measuring of only the inner part of the Temple references that God will protect His Church but not those outside the Church.
 - c. The 42 months is actually a reference to the time period between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus Christ.
 - d. The justification for all of this is n`ot found in the text in anyway but it is driven by a theological conviction.

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2. But if we take this to simply be a reference to an actual earthly temple then we are left with a different set of decisions and conclusions to make.
 - a. For some, this is a reference to Herod's temple that was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. However, nothing in the context supports this either.
 - b. Therefore, the only other option is that there will be a rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem sometime in the future.
 - c. This is not something that is far-fetched but is fully attested to in the bible, most definitely in the Old Testament.
 - d. Last week I spent our time showing the reality of a time yet future where the nations (Gentiles) stream to Jerusalem to worship the Messiah and that the temple is present.
 - e. I also sought to show that this time we live in is known as the "time of the Gentiles" where God's saving grace is upon the nations. But that it is designed by God to then move Israel to jealousy and ultimately where God draws that nation to Himself. The time period in which this happens is at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

II. The Two Witnesses.

- A. Their identity and commission (3-4).
 1. Tightly connected to the measuring of the Temple and trampling of Jerusalem is the commissioning of these two witnesses.
 - a. Two reasons:
 - (1) *Kai*, "and" is a simple conjunction that is connecting vss 3-13 with 1-2.
 - (2) 42 months = 1260 days. So the same time period.
 - (3) Again this becomes an issue when dealing with numbers in Revelation.
 - (a) Fascinating how these days or months simply means something else without any internal or external evidences.
 - (b) 42 months in the minds of many simply mean the "Church age." But without a shred of biblical/textual basis.

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- b. The one commissioning is God.
 - (1) “My” two witnesses.
 - (2) These two persons never decide to be in this role. This is a role/task given to them by God.
 - (3) These are prophets raised up and sent out by God to a world facing judgment.
 - (4) This is an act of grace for it is again an opportunity to repent. Never shall anyone be able to say that there was not a witness given to come, see and believe.
- 2. Who are the ones receiving this commissioning?
 - a. Again if you approach this in a symbolic manner then this whole section is symbolic.
 - (1) Therefore these are not “two” witnesses, but rather it is merely a restatement of Matthew 28:18-20. The church is sent to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) The use of “two” merely is due to the Old Testament idea of two witnesses necessary for confirmation of facts and conviction in trials.
 - (3) So the clothing refers only to the manner in which we share the gospel. With sobriety and seriousness.
 - (4) The fire that devours the enemies is speaking to the future judgment due to rejecting the gospel.
 - (5) In other words, though much detail is given in these verses they really are only broadly applicatory.
 - b. If you are going to approach this more literally, allowing for the symbolism but not making all things symbolic then there is a much different meaning.
 - (1) I take it to simply mean two witnesses. Simple as that.
 - (2) The time frame shall be exactly what it says, 1260 days or 42 months.

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- (3) It is worth noting the future orientation that is given as well. If this was the church then a future tense for these two would not be a good fit.

c. Their identity.

- (1) In the ancient church key leaders such as Tertullian and Irenaeus both believed it would be Enoch and Elijah. Why? Because neither of these men died. Interesting that they took this passage in a literal manner.
- (2) Others believe it is Moses and Elijah for they both did very similar miracles with fire.
 - (a) They were also present with Jesus in Mark 9:4.
 - (b) There is the mystery surrounding the death of Moses and the taking up of Elijah into heaven.
 - (c) Finally, the time frame is the same as the drought brought on through Elijah for 42 months.
 - (d) By far the most popular view but with problems.
 - i) Moses did die so this would be a second death.
 - ii) Elijah was fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist.
- (3) My position is much simpler, we don't know because it doesn't tell us specifically. Therefore to try to spend too much time with identity simply becomes guesswork.
- (4) The clothes of sackcloth speak of the great sorrow and grief that they have as they preach against these people. This is not a time of joy but of grief.
 - (a) it is a reminder again that the ministry of the preaching of the Word is seldom pleasant.
 - (b) Grief, persecution and hardship will follow those who seek to be faithful even in their relatively small calling as a believer.

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- (5) They are described as the two olive trees and the two lampstands in vs 4.
 - (a) Here it is fairly common to go back to the imagery in chapters 2-3 regarding lampstands and see that this means churches. Legitimate to do as this is how it is used in chapters 2-3.
 - (b) However they are also described as the two olive trees. There is the assumption we should know what is being described.
 - i) An allusion that comes from Zechariah 4:1-14.
 - ii) In this vision the two olive trees bring oil to the lampstand.
 - iii) Though there is only one lampstand in the vision notice it goes on to describe in vs 14 the two golden pipes that bring the oil to the lamp.
 - iv) This is likely the image John has in mind.
 - v) The key to it all is that this image is one of the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit going forth.
 - vi) it is worth noting that Zech 4 is a vision designed to encourage Zerubbabel in the task of rebuilding the temple so that it might serve as a testimony to the world.
3. Their preaching is concurrent with two events that are helpful to keep in mind:
 - a. The trampling of the holy city of Jerusalem in 11:2.
 - b. And the false preaching/teaching/prophesying of the Anti-Christ in 13:3-7.
 - (1) Since the message he gives is exactly what the world wants you can see how much hatred will be against these two witnesses.

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- (2) And it also helps give a sense of the content of their prophesying. They will be standing firm against those lies and proclaiming both truth and judgment upon the false teacher and the false message.
- B. Their power (5-6).
1. Here we see the uniqueness of these two witnesses. They have incredible power granted.
 2. Again, if this is taken merely symbolically as the power of the gospel going forth then you are left with little here that means much in itself. You are forced to go elsewhere to find meaning.
 - a. There are countless events where the church is afflicted and attacked and no harm came to those who sought to harm the church and those who suffered and died.
 - b. Notice how specific this passage is. They have the power and that power is very specific in its effects.
 - c. And before we take it fully symbolically we ought to remember that these occurred before in a literal manner. Unless you deny the works of Moses and Elijah.
 - d. If it is easy to believe in the past then why not in the future when the fullness of times are gathered up?
 - e. Note though that their power exceeds Moses' for they can call upon these plagues as often as they wish.
 3. There is a power that this world and its thinking values. And far too often the Church falls into similar thinking.
 - a. Notice here the great works of power they exhibited. Yet they did not convert anyone apparently.
 - b. They preached and gave faithful testimony. But they could not stand against the power of the beast and they are killed.
 - c. But this is ever and always the issue for each believer listening to grasp.
 - (1) We are not to judge by results. We are not to judge by short-term gains.

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- (2) We are to ever and always judge whether the message proclaimed is faithful to the Word of God.
- (3) At the end of the day let each of us have a clean conscience before God that we were found faithful in the place and things given by God to us.

C. Their end (7-12).

1. Vs 7 when they finished. . . The word speaks of bringing things to completion. Until their message and work was done, they could not be touched.
2. Remember Rev 3:7-8.
3. The beast is identified as coming from the abyss.
 - a. This again is the holding place, a prison, for demonic beings who shall be released in the time of tribulation.
 - (1) We have see these hordes in Revelation 9 attacking and tormenting mankind.
 - (2) Here is a specific being called the “beast.” We will learn about him in chapters 13 and 17, but he is who is called the Anti-Christ. This is his unveiling.
 - (3) He is powerful. Incredibly powerful. His way is war and he is filled with a hatred for mankind but specifically God’s people.
 - (a) In Daniel 7:21 he makes war against not merely these two but also the rest of the saints.
 - (b) We see this also in Revelation 12:17 and 13:7.
4. The preaching of the Word of God is powerful but it does not mean that it will appear so if we define power in terms this age understands.
 - a. These men are killed and they are left untouched so as to bring them much dishonor.
 - b. Note where they are killed in vs 8.
 - (1) The specificity is important for it again speaks against a symbolic understanding of these two witnesses.

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- (2) They have bodies and they lie open to the elements and to the view of the nations.
- (3) But where? Jerusalem. But here we are told where it is through overt symbolism.
- c. To many, they failed and they were fools.
- d. This idea of being seen by the whole world is something that was beyond comprehension in the time of the writing.
 - (1) But frankly it is rather simple today to imagine how this could happen. Though much mockery comes from those who do not believe this is a literal event.
 - (2) However, it doesn't actually say everyone will look upon it, but rather, representatives of the nations.
- e. I think we must remember that the enemies of mankind are greater than all of us.
 - (1) Romans 7 makes this clear regarding sin. Nothing is more powerful than it. It takes the law of God which is good and right and uses it to produce more sin.
 - (2) And the point of all of this is that the only thing greater is Jesus Christ.
- 5. But this was not their final end, for God, who is over all then raises them from the dead (11-12).
 - a. Imagine the terror seeing these two powerful witnesses stand back up!
 - b. How much more will it be when they ascend into the presence of God.
- D. The earthquake (13).
 - 1. Like the death of Christ, there is a great earthquake yet again in Jerusalem.
 - 2. 7,000 die, unless you hold to a symbolic meaning. Then all sorts of guesses are given with nothing certain and anything goes.
 - 3. Yet there is a glimmer of hope as well, for the rest grasped that God was at work.

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- a. Were they converted? Perhaps some, it is simply not clear enough to know.
 - b. But it is enough for them to grasp that as powerful as the Anti-Christ is there is One who is greater and that they could not deny that. Either to their salvation or their damnation.
- E. The impending doom (14).
- 1. This is telling us that the final trumpet is about to sound.
 - 2. And in the way it is written it is designed to generate fear. If the first two woes/trumpets were this bad, what does the final one bring?

III. Conclusion.

- A. At the beginning I talked about a tendency by us to want that big event that wins the day.
- 1. In this passage we saw the very opposite. Two prophets, raised up with obvious and apparent power.
 - 2. Yet, when it came to the point of confronting the great enemy behind the many other enemies they lost. They literally died.
 - 3. The world mocked and the world rejoiced.
 - 4. But this was part of the plan of God. What appeared to be defeat was really victory.
 - a. With the simplest of events, the spoken word by God, they rose and ascended into eternity.
 - b. And as the passages states it so wonderfully, “. . . their enemies beheld them.”
 - 5. And we are told in Colossians that when Christ is revealed in His glory at His return, we too shall be revealed in glory. And it will be then, and only then, that our enemies shall truly see us for what God has made us.
- B. Lessons:
- 1. God is holy and is truly an all-consuming fire. To trifle with Him now is only to your eternal harm.
 - 2. God ultimately protects His children but also wills that they endure suffering in whatever manner He ordains.

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3. Before desiring to be used much of God you should remember what God demands of those used much by Him.
 4. The level of evil in the hearts of all who are unredeemed is beyond your comprehension. Grasp that now.
 5. There is no real ability to have peace in this world, it is just as Christ said, it hates you because it hated Him. So stop thinking you can have true peace here.
 6. I think we need also to consider the cost of being uniquely called by God to do very special works on His behalf. It is not sexy and it is not fulfilling. It is ugly and hard.
 7. Do not fear the one who can destroy the body; rather fear the One who can destroy both the body and the soul.
- C. Failure to grasp these lessons will only lead to hurt and dishonor.
1. In a temporary manner.
 2. In an eternal manner.

IV. Benediction/Doxology.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- **Over the summer what has been most challenging or helpful in our study of Revelation?**
- **Without becoming argumentative, what are you learning about how Revelation is approached by way of interpretation?**
- **What, if at all, has changed regarding your view of God as we have progressed through Revelation?**