

Revelation 10 The Bitter-Sweet Gospel

Here in ch 10 we get another interlude, or we might say, intermission. We may feel like we need a break from the list of judgements. Perhaps the Lord thought John needed a break or the original audience needed to get recentered on the divine control of those events being discussed.

One of the greatest challenges to our faith is the question of evil and bad things that happen in the world. That question is often raised by those outside the church AND by those inside the church. It is a legitimate question. God doesn't run from it. In fact, scripture raises that issue over and over.

That is the theme of most of the book of Job. We heard echoes of it in our series on Ecclesiastes. The Psalms are the cry of the heart, and we often hear the cry, "God why are you silent? Why don't you do something?"

The Psalm, attributed to and quoted by Jesus on the cross begins, "My God My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Perhaps you've felt that way. Many believers throughout church history have felt that way. The interludes provide a chance to remember the big picture of the plan and purpose of God. This reminder bears repeating: God uses the tribulations as a call to repentance, as judgement on those who rebel, and to purify the saints.

Even Jesus was tried and tested, so we're in good company when it happens to us. That does not mean it is pleasant, but the fruit of our trials is worth it. Consider James 1:

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The interlude of chapter 10 extends the 13th verse of chapter 11. Remember the chapter and verse divisions come long after. John did not write his Revelation with chapters and verses. Once again, the story is not carried forward in the interlude, but the pause allows for the addition of some explanation and perspective. In chapter 10 we are introduced to the angel with the little scroll and in chapter 11 to the two witnesses. We take chapter 10 this morning, which is an introduction to the main part of the interlude taken up in 11:1-13.

REVELATION 10 INTERLUDE BETWEEN 6th and 7th Trumpets (from 7th Seal) 10:1-11:13

The Angel and the Little Book

1 I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; 2 and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; 3 and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. 4 When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."

5 Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he *said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your

stomach bitter, but in your mouth, it will be sweet as honey.” 10 I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11 And they *said to me, “You must prophesy again (against) concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

We have another interlude to be reminded of the HEAVENLY throne and the One who rules from it. The word of God comes as TRUE TRUTH, which is the opposite of the chaos of chapter 9. As believers, we gather for worship to get a taste of heavenly truth each week.

God delivers his message by a mighty angel to recommission John as his prophet. This message deals with the ongoing witness of faithful believers and the destiny of those who oppose the faithful and their message. At the conclusion of the interlude in 11:13 John goes back to final TRUMPET VISION.

As with previous interludes, this is not a chronological interruption per se, but rather it offers a further divine perspective of the same period of time covered by the first six trumpets.

This section 10:1-11:13 shows the basis for the judgements seen thus far and those to come. Those who persecute the believers will be held accountable before God. That brings comfort to the believers whose prayers are for God to display His justice.

In general, we may not like the idea of being accountable before God, but please remember that accountability validates value and dignity. If you are not accountable, then what you do doesn’t count. It’s of no or of little importance.

We may balk at the idea of God’s justice, but deep down we all want it, for others if not for ourselves.

There are those who proclaim a naturalist philosophy i.e., the view of someone who believes that there is no God and that the only thing that exists is matter, that everything is just stuff, nothing more. Steven Pinker, an evolutionary materialist, is a good example. In his book How the Mind Works, he gives an argument like this...

Our brains are nothing but physical organs, complex computers. Our thoughts, our ideas, our feelings are all nothing but neurons firing in the brain. ... Truth, love, right and wrong are not *real* things; they are simply what human beings *feel* because the meat in their heads produces such feelings. There is no truth and falsehood in objective reality; just the feelings produced by the brain. Love, right and wrong; all of this is simply a mindless chemical, biological process, nothing more.

Such a “God- less” approach is not new, but its predominance is new. While it makes a catchy soundbite for a certain type of documentary, it IS NOT an approach to life that one can live with consistently. Such ideas fall apart while living in the real world. The most ardent naturalist has a hard time avoiding non-naturalistic ideas.

The realities and relationships of life force us to affirm certain things – like love, moral freedom, justice, sympathy – even if we claim that such things don’t exist in a purely material world. Those who consistently hold such views must deny the things that matter the most in life, the things that make us enjoy life. They can’t account for the things that make life significant.

“Truth, love, right and wrong are not *real* things; they are simply what human beings *feel* because the meat in their heads produces such feelings” doesn’t make a great Hallmark card.

Try that on Valentines Day or your anniversary.

“ I would say I love you but it’s just the meat between my ears that produces such feelings. Happy Anniversary anyway”. (That would confirm to your wife that you are a meathead)

V. 2 echoes the angel of Daniel ch 10-12 as other portions allude to other OT Prophets.

WHO IS THE ANGEL??

Not the same 'mighty angel' of Ch 5 who asked, "Is anyone able to open the scroll?"

This description in ch 10 has many echoes of OT images and some commentators take this mighty angel to be Christ, but the text isn't clear. This is 'another' mighty angel. The first was not Christ, and there will be a third in Ch 13, so it would seem to fit that this one is not Christ either. There is no indication that John gives worship to this angel, which would make sense if he were Christ, or even perceived to be Christ.

In verse 6 this angel makes an oath "by Him who lives forever and ever." He could swear by Himself, but the language is more indicative of a created being.

The echoes of OT images do indicate that this is a heavenly being who is a divine representative or messenger i.e. angel = messenger.

Ultimately, the exact identification of the angel is not as important as the MESSAGE itself. This angel is carrying the message of the savior – his sovereignty and his trustworthiness.

This angel is holding a little scroll. Again, there are different views on whether or not it is the same scroll or book from Ch 5. It is the content that is important, not the identity of the scroll.

V 4-6 Here John is told NOT to write down what he sees or hears. We might expect another parallel account of the 7 seals, trumpets, and bowls. We are not given the details, so we don't need to know. God does not reveal everything. We walk by faith, not by sight. If God doesn't tell us, then we don't need to know.

v. 5-7 The angel raises his hand and makes an oath. In doing so he invokes the land, the sea, and the sky – all the realms of creation.

He announces "no delay" i.e. once the 7th trumpet has sounded there will be no delay, not once he finishes speaking.

There is a mystery that is finished, as was preached to the prophets. Most commentators connect this with Daniel 11-12. There is a mystery that was hidden, but now to be revealed. The use of the word mystery is a clue since that word is used numerous times in the NT describe the GOSPEL.

What Daniel did not understand is now explained in these 'latter days' as Christ has been revealed. His life, death, and resurrection are the mystery that was predicted from of old, but the details and nature of the mystery were unexpected, i.e. The incarnate deity would come and walk among us and bear our sin.

Here are two examples of scripture that talk about the "mystery" of the Gospel.

Rom 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

1For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

This gospel is mysterious in that no one would expect a savior who would die like a criminal on a cross. Also, the mystery is unexpected because the victory of Christ comes by way of an apparent defeat – the cross. God defeats the kingdom of evil by what seemed to be a defeat of the His son.

It was Friday. All looked lost and the disciples were defeated and scattered, but Sunday was coming.

On Friday a thief, On Sunday a King
Laid down in grief, But awoke with keys
Of Hell on that day, The first born of the slain
The Man Jesus Christ Laid death in his grave

v. 8-11 Instead of writing down what he saw and heard, John is given instructions to eat the little scroll. This resonates with the prophet Ezek who was also given a scroll to eat 3:1-3. It was also sweet in his mouth but also bitter.

John has been commissioned since Ch 1 to serve as a prophet of the apocalypse, i.e. 'revelation'. 10:11. Here he eats the scroll as a confirmation of his obedience and identification with Christ, His message, and His sovereign reign. Rev 5 and 7 speak of those of every nation, tongue, and tribe who will have the mark of the Lamb, but as John goes forth at this particular time he will see peoples and nations and languages resisting Christ and his witnesses (11:9; 13:7; 17:15). Kings in particular will ally themselves with evil (6:15; 16:12-14; 17:2, 18; 19:18-19).

The scroll is bittersweet because some will hear and repent and trust Christ while others will hear and rebel. There is the GOOD NEWS of salvation but there is the bitter reality of our sin. If we accept the bitter news of sin and turn to Christ in repentance, we then know the sweetness of the gospel.

Psalm 19 The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.
10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Ps 34 – O Taste and see that the Lord is good.

1 Pet 2 1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

The Christian life is not simply a set of propositions. It is a relationship that is tasted and experienced in the soul. It is that relationship that will strengthen the heart and enable believers to stand firm.

The “taste and see” part is not less important than the ‘doctrinal’ part. They go together to make up biblical faith.

The scroll is bitter because of suffering that goes with it – suffering for those judged and the suffering of the Saints (ch 6:10). Jesus warned that those who follow Him will suffer and be persecuted. Most Christians around the world over the past 2000 years have been exposed to that in ways that we have not. The original audience certainly experienced it, so the message of Christ' victory was an encouragement to them. It should be for us as well.

We can learn much from Joni Erickson Tada (podcast Let Pain Take Wing). She knows more about suffering and trials than most of us will ever know. In that devotional she points out that God does not promise to take away our suffering, but He can and will bless them, if we trust Him in the midst of them. – James 1:12;
12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

God uses the trials to build our faith. Without trials our faith would be weak. Trials are like the cross-fit gym of our spiritual life.

The Rosemary Tree, by Elizabeth Gouge, describes Harriet, an elderly woman crippled by arthritis: “Pain accepted is just pain, weighty and heavy, but pain gladly accepted took wings and went somewhere and did something.”

Throughout Revelation pain is productive – it was for the Lion-Lamb and it is for the believer who walks by faith. Perseverance in trial blesses others, it matures us, it adorns the gospel, and it brings about the grace of endurance and the crown of life.

We learn things in trials that we would never learn otherwise. There are things we will never understand until we embrace Christ in our trials.

That is the counter-intuitive bitter-sweet reality of the GOSPEL.

COME TO THE TABLE

Just as John eats the scroll, we are given the bread and cup to eat. This too is bitter-sweet as it displays the suffering of Christ and the anticipation of the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

AMEN

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