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REVELATION 10

IN THE LAST DAYS THE GOSPEL PROCLAMATION CONTINUES

What have we seen so far of John's vision? In Rev. 4 the apostle John was invited to enter the heavenly throne-hall. Here the Almighty God rules in majesty and glory. Then he saw the glorified Christ, the Lamb that was slain, who takes a scroll, sealed with seven seals. Christ alone is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals, to activate God's plan of salvation (Rev. 5).

Then we witnessed what happened when the Lamb opened the seals. But you will remember that in Rev. 7 the pace of events slowed down after the sixth seal had been opened. There was an interlude, a pause, between the sixth and the seventh seal. In the midst of frightening judgments, the Lord comforts us with the vision of the 144,000, God's sealed and protected children, the great multitude no one can count.

After that the seventh seal brings in seven trumpets. And then the speed picks up again with a new series of dramatic and terrible judgments, the one after the other. That is in Rev. 8 and 9. And what was the result after the sixth trumpet? We read at the end of Rev. 9 that *the rest of mankind did not repent of the work of their hands, their idolatry, murders, and sexual immorality.* And then what?

Well, in Rev. 10 we find that the frantic pace slows down again. There is another interlude, a pause in the events, this time between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Again, the Holy and Almighty God takes the time to encourage his church not to give up, not to be discouraged, but to keep doing what the church is called to do, proclaim the gospel. The world needs to know that God's plan will be completed.

A TRUSTWORTHY MESSAGE

Just when the end seems to be around the corner, just when we get ready for the seventh trumpet to sound, bracing ourselves for something worse than the locust-scorpions and the other terrible creatures we came across in Rev. 9, just then, John's vision pauses. The exalted Christ takes a moment to empower and re-assure John, and us today, for the future in this dark, desperate, and broken world of the last days.

For that purpose, John sees *another mighty angel coming down from heaven*. We see lots of angels in Revelation. But here we see the second one, of only three, that are called "mighty angels". At crucial moments in the story these angels represent the decisive power of God.

We see and hear the first one in Rev. 5:2, posing with a loud voice the most decisive question: *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll*. The third one appears in Rev. 18:21 with a powerful demonstration of the destruction of the great city of Babylon, which represents the evil antichristian world and culture.

About the second, the one here in this passage, it says that he is *coming from heaven*. That means that this mighty angel comes straight from God. The Holy God himself sends him directly with his message, a message that will be confirmed by an oath. That is how important, how trustworthy, and how urgent it is what God has to say to John and to us. The mission and message of this angel comes with direct divine authority.

You can also see this when you look at the angel. You can see it in his brilliant outward appearance. He is *wrapped in a cloud* and *his legs are like pillars of fire*. I take these two together, because they allude to Exodus 13:21. There we

find that the Lord protects Israel when they leave Egypt, by leading them to the Promised Land with a *pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night*.

With a *rainbow over his head and a face like the sun* this angel resembles not only the exalted Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:15,16) but also the Almighty God who rules from his heavenly throne (Rev. 4:3). This is not Jesus Christ himself, but in this angel John sees an awesome reflection of the intense glory, majesty, and faithfulness of the Holy and Almighty God and the glorified Son of God. He is ready to protect and lead his new Israel out of this hostile world into the new Promised Land.

All this makes for an incredibly encouraging picture. Whatever is happening when God's devastating judgments unfold in these last days, our glorious God remains in control. And his encouraging message is a trustworthy message.

When the seventh trumpet will sound, we can expect things to happen that will be more frightening than ever. But before we are going to find out, the majestic and glorious appearance of this angel underlines that his message is God's own message. It is a message that comes with God's authority, a message full of comfort for people who love Jesus. It is a message we can trust.

But how do we know that this angel has a message for us? Well, it says that *he had a little scroll open in his hand*. The picture reminds us of what we read about the prophet Ezekiel (2: 9,10). He is given a scroll, which comes with the instruction to speak God's word to the rebellious Israelites.

When we hear about a scroll here in Rev. 10, we remember the other scroll, from Rev. 5. And then the natural question arises: could there perhaps be a connection between these scrolls? Would the content be similar, or even the same?

When you compare the two, you will find some obvious differences. To begin with, in v.2 John uses the diminutive. He talks about a 'little scroll'. But we should not make too much of this, because later on (in v.8) when he talks about the same thing, he uses the regular word for 'scroll'. Apparently these words are interchangeable here.

A more visible difference is that, in Rev. 5 the scroll was sealed in God's hand, and then given to Jesus Christ, the Lamb, because he was worthy to open the seals. Whereas in this chapter the scroll is open in the hand of an angel, to be given to John, who will be called to proclaim its message.

However, those differences have nothing to do with what is written in this scroll. And so, it makes sense to see here the same scroll with the same content. It is about God's purpose for our world, as it unfolds in our history. It his plan of salvation for his people and the judgments of his wrath for those who resist and hate him, his enemies.

The difference is this: in Rev. 5 we learn how this purpose of God is to be activated, carried out and fulfilled by our Saviour Jesus Christ. Here, we are told how this message is to be proclaimed by John first of all, and then by the church as God's trustworthy message. After all, we are talking about God's purpose for the world, for his whole creation.

This is underlined again by a remarkable detail in this picture. Look at the posture of this mighty angel. He is huge. He is an immense giant.

It says that *he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land*. Now, you and I could stand on a rocky beach, with one foot on a rock and the other in the water, and say the same thing: 'my right foot is in the sea and my left on the land'. That is nothing spectacular. But this is different. Think of the angel planting his left foot on the Canadian prairie and his right foot in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

This is unbelievable. As an enormous skyscraper, this mighty angel is towering high above everything, above the whole globe. He is literally dominating all of God's creation. The highest mountains in the world dwarf to nothing in comparison with this mighty angel. That is pretty intimidating. Imagine how John must have felt.

All this is to emphasize the universal significance of the appearance of this angel. And it makes abundantly clear how important his message is for all of creation and everything in it. It is for everyone in this world.

When you think of the gigantic size of this angel, you can also imagine what it sounds like when he opens his mouth to give a loud shout like a roaring lion. A frightening sound, which with supernatural strength, reverberates

all around the world. Everyone in heaven and on earth must hear him and his powerful message.

Then something unexpected happens. At least, unexpected for us, the unsuspecting listeners! The angel's roaring shout triggers a loud response. *When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.* "Thunder" is in these verses another aspect that reminds us of the Holy God appearing in great glory and majesty.

Actually, when you think of it, this whole passage is so cram-full of God's power, glory, and majesty. It is everywhere. It is in every detail. It is just amazing! Our God is such an awesome and marvellous God, forever worthy of all honour, praise, and worship. And that is on purpose. For this is how we need to remember the Lord and hold on to him when the world gets dark.

It reminds us of Psalm 29. In this thunderous song thunderclaps are qualified seven times as *the voice of the LORD*. In other words, in these seven thunders of Revelation 10:3 the Holy God himself speaks. Indeed, seven times we hear the majestic voice of God Almighty in all its awe-inspiring power.

There is only one problem. We would love to know what God is saying in his seven-fold message, but we do not get to. Do we have here another seven judgments, like we have them in the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and later, in the seven bowls (Rev.15 and 16)? Perhaps. We just do not know. No one knows.

Well, that's not entirely true. John knows! But he is not supposed to tell us. When he hears God's seven thunders speaking he wants to write it down. That makes sense. After all, in Rev. 1:11 and 19 he had been instructed to write down carefully what he was going to see and hear. And so far he has faithfully done so. But now he is told: "Don't do it! Keep it secret!"

It says that *he hears a voice from heaven*. Could it be the voice of the exalted Christ, or of God himself? In any case, the voice has enough authority to make him stop. *Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down*, is the command. John knows more than we do. But he is not allowed

to report the message and pass it on to us. On the contrary, he must “seal it all up” so that it will not be accessible.

We do not hear ‘why’, but the result is that we will never know.

Perhaps it makes you wonder why we still need to hear this. If God does not want to tell us what the seven thunders said, what can we do with the information that these thunders ‘just said something’? How helpful is that?

The point is that our God wants to keep us humble. We need to depend on him and trust him. He reminds us that it is okay that we do not know everything. When God works out his plans in the history of our world, there is more going on than we know and understand or comprehend. We will never know all the factors, all the powers, and everything about the principles that are operating in this world.

In God’s gospel message to be proclaimed in these last days we hear about seals, trumpets, and bowls and what these things do to establish his kingdom. But as our history moves toward completion, God has also other forces at work we do not know about. And he does not provide detailed predictions of all future events. That does not mean, however, that his message is not trustworthy.

On the contrary, you and I, we can all trust God’s Word. That Word does not answer all your questions. God’s message does not give you all the details of his plan of salvation. Many aspects of God’s strategy to get you safely to the end, he did not disclose. But that is ok. You can trust him who rules creation, also your life, from his throne in heaven. This makes the message of his angel a trustworthy message.

Trust in the Lord. Be confident that he knows everything, and as the journey towards the New Jerusalem continues, he governs everything for your benefit.

AN URGENT MESSAGE

Having said all this, what is it that makes this mighty angel come down from heaven to present this message to John and to us? What is the urge to

ensure that the proclamation of the gospel continues in the last days? Well, we will find out.

As John looks on, this gigantic and glorious angel, still standing on the sea and on the land, raises his right hand to swear an oath by the Almighty God. It is a pretty elaborate formula that he uses in v.6:

He swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it.

It pictures the Lord abundantly as the eternal and powerful Creator of everything. It stresses that indeed everything, literally all things in heaven, on earth, and in the sea, without any exception, are all made by God.

This implies that he is also the God who controls all of creation and everything in it. And this in turn, shows us that God is also fully aware how his whole creation is suffering because of its bondage to sin and decay. And how his people are suffering and struggling in the increasing darkness of the last days. In Romans 8 Paul talks about “a groaning creation, eagerly waiting for its liberation”.

In this swearing of the oath, the angel draws all our attention to the powerful and urgent character of his message. He announces and declares with great emphasis for everyone to hear: *There will be no more delay!* The end is coming soon.

When the prophet Daniel had his vision of the End Times, he asked in Daniel 12: 6, *How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?* Then a man who shows remarkable similarities to the mighty angel in Revelation 10 (see Daniel 10:5,6), gives him the answer, in the form of an oath, that he will have to wait for a while.

You may also remember how in Revelation 6:10 the souls of the martyrs cry out: *O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*

They were also told that they had to wait a little longer.

Well then, the waiting time for all who are looking forward to the end of suffering and injustice is almost over. Here is God’s announcement, presented

under oath by his mighty angel: “There will be no more delay”. Yes, we have come to the end of the time that was indicated to Daniel in Daniel 12:7. It will soon be over!

In Daniel 12:4 and 9 the prophet was told to close up and seal the words of what he had seen and heard *until the time of the end*. Well, in Revelation 22:10, when the apostle John has seen and heard everything, he is told to *not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near*. God’s final judgment is about to come. This is the time of the end. The God of heaven and earth is coming to avenge the blood of those who have been killed because of their faith.

That does not mean that God’s disastrous judgment is going to be the end of his work. Our God maintains his plan for a new world. That is what he has promised. He will usher in our full salvation, our glorious inheritance. But this also means that God’s enemies will feel his wrath. The seventh trumpet will announce the next seven-fold series of God’s final judgments, the seven bowls of God’s terrible wrath.

So, what is going to happen? *In the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God will be fulfilled*. It will usher in God’s final judgment. The seventh trumpet will lead directly to Jesus’ second coming. God’s purpose for all of us and each one of us will be accomplished.

Do you feel the excitement? This is our time! The suspense is mounting. God’s angel swears an oath that the course of our history is approaching the end. The hour of completion is near. Are you looking forward to that?

The expression “the mystery of God” does not indicate something we know nothing about. But it acknowledges that we can never figure out God’s plans on our own. We can only know God’s will and plan for us, if and insofar God reveals it to us.

And then we also realize that there is indeed much of God’s plan that we do not know. In that way it still remains a ‘mystery’.

But we do know what the completion of this ‘mystery’ is going to look like. This is comforting and encouraging today. But it is also a warning. God will win the victory over all evil. And he will liberate his persecuted and

suffering children. *Just as he announced to his servants the prophets*, adds the angel.

In other words, these are things God reveals to us. We know them from his Word, from the Bible. And through these prophetic promises and warnings in the Bible, God keeps calling us to repent and believe his Word. We know the gospel. We know the good news of Jesus Christ. The truth and urgency of this message was again confirmed by this solemn oath of God's mighty angel.

The mystery of God is going to be fulfilled without delay. The clock is ticking. Our time to repent is almost up. This makes John's message for the church, our message here today, and the church's message for the world an urgent message. There is no time to lose. Do not delay. Repent and believe.

God puts the world, the church, you and me personally, on high alert. He is about to wrap up his plan for our history. The powerful oath of the angel heightens our anticipation of what is coming. It sure fills all those who read the book of Revelation and listen to it, with growing suspense; at least it most certainly should.

And yet, we still have several chapters to go till the end. More things must happen, before the New Jerusalem will appear and all the tears will be wiped away. This is the re-occurring pattern in Revelation, to keep us on the edge of our seat: "Soon, but not yet". The end seems near. We are told that it is near, and yet postponed until all God's purposes can be accomplished.

And for this, God wants to use his church. This makes the message of the church an urgent message. We see how God's judgments ruin this world. Recognize the thunder of God's voice in what is happening all around us, and in our own lives.

But do not give up. Through the faithful testimony of his church in this world the Almighty God will complete his work and accomplish his goal to the glory of his Name. A new creation is being prepared. You will be surprised when you see it!

A BITTER-SWEET MESSAGE

And yet, the end is not right there. The seventh trumpet does not follow immediately after the sixth. The third ‘woe’ is still to come (mentioned in Rev. 8:13 and 9:12). But in John’s vision God creates space to reassure his children with comfort and hope.

Even when God’s judgments inflict large-scale sufferings on the wicked, we should not forget that in the midst of frightening darkness the perspective remains the victory of Jesus Christ and the survival of his church.

That’s why the proclamation of this trustworthy and urgent gospel-message must continue in the last days, despite resistance and opposition. In the last part of this chapter we see John himself getting actively involved in this.

The heavenly voice he had heard before, in v.4, telling him not to communicate the words of the seven thunders, this same voice now orders him to go and take from the angel the open scroll with the gospel of God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

‘What I have revealed, I want you to communicate in this world,’ the Lord says to John. That’s why the angel will hand over God’s message to John. And in turn John will have to pass it on to God’s servants, God’s church, to be proclaimed in this world.

Then, when John does so, God’s angel instructs him to *take it and eat it*. Here is again a remarkable parallel with what we read in Ezekiel 2 and 3, where the prophet is also instructed to eat a scroll. Now eating a book sounds kind of weird. You can, of course, say ‘it’s a vision,’ and in visions strange things happen.

That is true, but to understand the symbolism, think of the expression that describes an avid reader. We can say that someone like that “devours books”. You get so deeply into it, that the content of the story, the message, affects you personally and becomes part of who you are, so to speak.

John has to digest and internalize completely the message he has to bring on behalf of God. This will empower him to proclaim God’s gospel with passion and great urgency. There is much at stake. The Holy God calls him

and us to proclaim salvation for all who turn to Jesus Christ while also proclaiming God's wrath to an unrepentant world.

That is why the angel warns him. Proclaiming God's message for this world will turn out to be a bitter-sweet experience. *Eating this scroll will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey*, he says. And this is exactly what John experiences when he does what the angel tells him to do (v.10).

The message of the Bible is delightful. The author of Psalm 119 says that the words of God are sweeter than honey. It is always exciting to proclaim God's grace and forgiveness for lost sinners. Nothing is sweeter and lovelier for any preacher than bringing the glorious message of the Father's deep love in Jesus Christ. Especially, because you can say that the fullness of all this is coming soon.

But the same message also gives you much pain when you think of those who reject Jesus Christ and refuse to repent. Then the result of the words of God about his deep love, grace and mercy becomes bitter. For then it becomes a message of condemnation. God's word also speaks about his destructive judgments and wrath.

Indeed, the gospel message is a good message to the glory of the Almighty God. But for John, for you and me in this dark and broken world it is at the same time a bitter-sweet message. God is love. But God is also holy. And so his Word does not only bring joy, it also causes suffering.

That is why the proclamation of the gospel must continue. *You must again prophesy*, we hear. Whether grace or wrath, forgiveness or judgment, it must go on. As long as the last days continue – no matter how dark or bad it is going to be – the church must carry on. She must proclaim to a world lost in sin and heading for destruction that there is hope in Jesus alone. Do not become discouraged by resistance. This is how God's mystery will be accomplished.

Are we ready to take this message to wherever it needs to be heard in this world? Are we ready to explain to people the implications of what they do with this message, how they respond to it?

Let us not give up. Because God does not give up!

There will be no more delay.

prayers of the saints. What kind of connection could there be between the voice coming from this altar and the frightening and violent destruction that is unleashed by this voice here in Revelation 9? Can Christians pray for God's judgment over evil and wickedness?

3. How does God's love for the world and the joyful message of the Gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ – how does that fit with the picture of a God who inflicts the horrible terror of ruthless warfare on this world. What does this imply for the message of the church today?
4. Can we recognize what we read in the verses 20 and 21, as something that is happening in our society today? Should this stop us from reaching out in our society with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

Chapter 16 – Revelation 10

1. What is the purpose of the interlude in Revelation 10 and 11, between the blowing of the 6th and the 7th trumpet?
2. What is the meaning of the oath of the angel (see the verses 6-7) for us? Think of expressions like: *there will be no more delay*, and: *at the 7th trumpet call the mystery of God will be fulfilled*.
3. What does the symbolism of eating the scroll, as John is told to do in verse 9, mean for us? Read also Ezekiel 2:1 – 3:11.
4. Eating the scroll (verses 9 and 10) comes with the message that it will taste as sweet as honey, but that it will make John's stomach bitter. What does that tell us about the sweet and bitter things we will experience when the church will faithfully reach out into this world with the message of salvation by grace alone, the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Chapter 17 – Revelation 11:1-14

1. Read Zechariah 4. Why was this an encouraging vision for Israel after the exile? And how does it help us to see the encouragement for the church today in the vision of the two witnesses in Revelation 11?
2. In what way do the two witnesses resemble Moses and Elijah (see the verses 5 and 6)? Where else in the New Testament are these