



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 10:1-11

“The Bittersweet Book”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Revelation chapter 10, beginning with verse 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;

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;

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.

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.’

Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven,

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,

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.

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.’

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.’ 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.

And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this time together, and the opportunity we have to open the Scriptures and read them and consider their meaning. It’s a great privilege. And as we read these things and study your Word, we find that some are bitter, some of the things we study are disturbing. And yet your Word is sweet to us; it is a comfort to us. And I pray that as we study these things this morning – a difficult text of Scripture.

But as we study it, you would give us an understanding of these things, and give us a sense of the sweetness of what you have in store for your people, because it is great. It is marvelous. We have an eternal destiny that someday will come, that someday we will be a part of, which will be a time of great joy in which every tear is wiped from our eyes. There’ll be no more sorrow, no more difficulty.

There will be glory beyond our imagination, and all of that is due to the person and work of your Son. We give you the praise. We thank you for him and for the life that you’ve given us in him, which is eternal, and which is glorious to come. But it is not something that’s simply future; it’s for the present as well. We enter into new life through your grace and through faith, and have new abilities, new power to live.

We have access to the great mysteries of life that you unfold for us in your Word. You’ve blessed us abundantly in this present life, in the vale of tears that we pass through in this world. In the midst of all of that, there is joy, and there’s comfort and reassurance. And so I pray, Father, that we’d have that, we’d experience that as we study this text this morning.

Build us up in the faith. Teach us your truth. Guide us into these things, that we might be built up in the faith and made more like your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for him and for all that we have in him, and we

thank you that it’s not only the spiritual blessings of life that you give us, but the material things as well. You care for us at every moment of our life.

Oftentimes we don’t understand that, and your care and your shepherding doesn’t seem to be that because life can be difficult, full of hardship. And yet you’re guiding us through that and you’re watching over us. You’re holding us in your hand. You’re keeping us and protecting us. Through the storms of life you teach us, and protect us and bring us through them safely.

We pray for those that are going through difficulty. We pray for those who are without employment. We pray that you give them opportunities of work. We pray that you’d open doors of opportunity, and you give them diligence in seeking that employment, and you’d bless them. We pray for those that are sick. So many others, Lord, that have great needs – physical needs, emotional needs.

Individuals that are weighed down with the cares and concerns of life, and all of us, to some extent, experience that. We become anxious because of uncertainty, and yet we’re told not to be anxious. You’re in control. The day will take care of itself. We’re simply to look to you and trust you. I pray that you’d enable those who are particularly anxious today to do that.

May all of us have our sight on Christ and be thinking of him, and may the things we study this morning encourage us about life in this present world, and give us great hope because of the life that is to come in the world to come. We commit our time to you and pray you bless it. Prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together. And we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] One of Winston Churchill’s famous statements is the description he gave of the Soviet Union in the late 1930s, when he called it “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” That description could be given of our text, Revelation 10, in which a great angel gives John a small book and tells him to eat it up. As you read the passage, it’s all a bit mysterious.

In fact, according to verse 7, it is about “the mystery.” This chapter and the next one in fact have been called by some “by far the most difficult part of the whole book,” so if you’re visiting and you’ve come into a difficult book to begin with, you’ve come into a difficult passage in a difficult book. In fact, for many the whole book is something of a mystery; something tucked away in an enigma.

But as we’ve said before, and I think it’s good to remind ourselves of this, this book is an apocalypse. *Apokalupsis* is the Greek word, and it means “unveiling, unfolding, a revelation.” And so we shouldn’t be mystified by it. We shouldn’t be deterred by it – not at all. This book is about opening things up. It’s about unveiling things. And as we look at it carefully, well, I think the riddle is unwrapped, and the mystery revealed.

What the mystery is about that is so central to this chapter is very simply God’s purpose for history; his kingdom on the earth, which he will bring through judgment that he will pour out on this world. Those judgments are what are contained in the little book that John is given to eat. It is sweet to his mouth, but bitter to his stomach. Bitter because it’s about divine wrath, but sweet because it is about the glory that will come.

Well, that will happen when the seventh trumpet is sounded, and when it is, the voices in heaven will shout, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of Christ.” That statement is made in chapter 11. Before that, before that cry of victory is given, there is a pause in the action. A second interlude or intermission occurs. That’s what chapter 10 is – it is an intermission in the flow of this book. It’s a pause in this book.

Very similar to that which we saw back in chapter 7; you remember after the Lamb on the throne, the Lord Jesus, takes the book of destiny in chapter 5, he begins breaking the seven seals. And in chapter 6 plagues are unleashed on earth. Six of the seals are broken, but before the seventh seal, there’s a pause in the action, a pause in chapter 7, where John sees a vision of two great multitudes.

And in that vision, he learns the other side of things; that God is not only pouring out judgment on the earth, but is also going to be giving grace and multitudes will be saved during the great tribulation. That answers the question that’s raised at the end of chapter 6 of “Who can stand in God’s judgment?” You remember that’s what the people of the earth are saying.

They’re terrified of the wrath of the Lamb, and they wonder who can stand in the midst of this? And the implication of their statement is absolutely no one can stand against this wrath; we’re all going to be swept away. But that’s a question that’s asked that ends the chapter, and the answer that’s given is found in the next chapter, in chapter 7, where we have a great multitude standing, standing before the throne of God.

And so the answer to that question, “Who can stand?” well, very simply, only those in Christ; those who have believed in him. And as we see in chapter 7, multitudes will.

But that is the purpose of these intermissions in the book of Revelation – to give us some background on what is happening, and answer questions that are raised. Chapter 10 is the next intermission, the next interlude. It answers the perennial question, “How long?”

It was the question that was asked by the souls of the slain under the altar of God in heaven in chapter 6. “How long, O God?” they ask, and it is a question that, while asked in that chapter of the souls in heaven, is a question that’s asked all through the ages. How long before trials end? How long before the glory comes? Well, the answer is given in chapter 10: “There will be delay no longer.”

The end of trials and beginning of glory is about to come. That’s the great assurance that’s given here, and that’s what chapter 10 is. It is an assurance. It is a reassurance. It is a chapter of consolation for those on the earth. It is a pause in the action for the purpose of encouraging those who are suffering, and it prepares us for the seventh and last trumpet judgment.

So just as the first intermission or interlude occurred before the seventh seal was broken, the second intermission happens before the seventh trumpet is sounded. Six trumpets have been blown, and chapters 8 and 9 describe the things that follow as a result – stars falling from the sky, stinging locusts coming out of the pit, and fire-breathing horses charging over the earth. And just when we would expect the next calamity to come, John sees something very different.

Not a demon coming up from the pit, but an angel coming down from heaven; that means that John is now viewing things from the earth. Since chapter 4, he had a panoramic view of events from the heights of heaven, but now he is down in the center of things; he’s on the earth in the scene of action. And from there, he sees this angel; calls it “strong.” It has a glorious appearance.

The angel is clothed in a cloud. He wears on his head a rainbow. His face shines like the sun, and his feet are glowing like pillars of fire. So his appearance is glorious, and it is very similar to the description of Christ, if you’ll remember, from 1:15-16. In fact, some commentators have identified this angel as Christ, but it can’t be Christ. It can’t be him for two reasons.

First of all, Christ is never called an angel in the book of Revelation, and second, John describes this as “another angel,” and that word “another” means “another of the same kind.” So this is not a unique angel, and Christ is unique. There’s no one like Christ. So

this isn’t Christ, this is an angel, but obviously, not just any angel. This is a gigantic angel, who according to verse 2, stands with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.

Well, we’re all familiar with the speculations of those medieval theologians, and how they used to wonder how many angels could stand on the head of a pin. I don’t think they had this angel in mind. It is colossal. It is glorious in appearance, and that appearance of the angel – which I think we’re to understand as a ambassador of our Lord, one who represents him – that appearance of this angel is very informative.

It tells us something about God’s intentions for the world, and for us individually. First of all, there’s that rainbow on his head, and the rainbow recalls, if you’ll remember from our earlier studies, the emerald rainbow around the throne of God back in chapter 4, when John is taken up into heaven and sees the glories of that place. And there is an emerald rainbow around the throne of God, and it evokes a sense of majesty.

It’s glorious in its appearance, so it evokes that majesty, but it communicates something as well. It says something very important to us, and that is peace. That’s what the rainbow represents. You remember the bow in the sky is the sign of God’s covenant with Noah after the flood, after he had washed away the ancient world, the antediluvian race that had been so wicked. He promised never again to destroy the world with water.

And so that rainbow that he put in the sky, that bow in the sky was to remind us of that, and the covenant that he made with Noah, and the promise that he had given to the world. It represents peace. And so the angel, wearing the rainbow, and straddling earth and sea, as he does, signals that God’s plan for this world is one of peace. Now, if his plan for the world is peace, what’s his plan for his children – for you and for me?

Well, it’s peace amidst difficulty, and life’s full of that. God’s purpose for you is peace; in fact, peace in the midst of trials and afflictions. Well, that’s an aside, as it were, an implication of this. This is about his purpose for the world, and that’s what it is, and he’s making that declaration.

This mission of the angel, planting his feet on earth and sea, reminds me of the American Marines on Iwo Jima when they planted the flag on top of Mount Suribachi, and how in doing that, they made a claim of that island for our government. And that’s really what this angel is doing here. He’s standing on land and sea. His actions say that it all belongs to God. In the midst of this great rebellion that’s going on in the world at this time, it belongs to him.

And because it is his, he will carry out his plan for the world, and he will bring eternal peace to this world. The voice of the angel is described in verse 3. It is equal to his gigantic size. “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.” What all this means is difficult to say.

The angel’s voice certainly resonates with authority; maybe the authority of Christ, because it sounds like a lion, and of course, Christ is identified as the lion of the tribe of Judah. And this angel is his ambassador, his representative, so he speaks in the authority of Christ. Perhaps that’s the significance of the description of his voice. But who the seven thunders are who respond to him, we’re not told.

And we really don’t know what they said. They said something, and something significant, because John tells us in verse 4 that he was about to write it down. Evidently he had been writing down everything that he was seeing and hearing, so he hears this voice of the seven thunders, and is about to write down what they had spoken, when a voice from heaven stops him and says, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.”

And you can’t help but wonder what it was that John heard. It’s pointless to speculate, because it’s obvious that we are not intended to know, and so we don’t know. But then you wonder why John would have been given this particular revelation and told not to reveal it, and why he would then tell us that God had given him a revelation that he couldn’t give to us.

There must be some reason for that. There’s meaning in this, and so we can ask the question why that would happen, and what the significance of it is. And perhaps it’s to remind us that there are some things that we, in our present condition, are not yet able to understand. That they are beyond us, and it wouldn’t be helpful at all for us to have them revealed to us.

Couldn’t understand them, couldn’t fit them into things, as great as they may be. It’s very much like the revelation that was given to Paul when he was caught up into the third heaven. He speaks of that in 2 Corinthians 12 and informs us that he heard and saw things that it’s not lawful or he’s not able to reveal to us, so he doesn’t. But we do know that they’re great things and glorious things.

And that awaits us in the world to come and in heaven, when we arrive there. So perhaps there’s something of that here; it’s to remind us that there are things that

we cannot comprehend, that are yet to be revealed to us. Or maybe simply to tell us that God has not made everything known to us; that we don’t have all of the information. So there are some things that we cannot know with certainty.

There are some things that just must be held with some uncertainty. Things like the date of our Lord’s return – we know he’s coming, but we don’t know when. We’re limited in our knowledge. We don’t have all of the pieces to the puzzle, and I think that is important for us to understand; that we, as God’s people, we have much, but we don’t have all of the pieces to the puzzle. We can’t figure it all out.

And that should cause us to be humble, and that should cause us to be careful, and I think particularly as we study this book in particular, and this subject. We need to stay within the lines, so to speak. We need to be aware of speculating too much about the future and the events as they will unfold, and let this book teach us, and be restricted in some of the things we might think.

So we don’t know everything, and much is held back from us because we’re not able to comprehend it. We don’t have all of the pieces; and yet, having said that, there is much that has been revealed. In fact, more than enough has been revealed for us to understand God’s plan for this world, God’s plan for us individually, and enough that has been revealed that we should be greatly encouraged by what we do know.

In the next verses, more of that revelation is given. Back in verse 2, the strong angel was described as having a little book in his hand. That book is opened, meaning its contents are not concealed, but revealed. The contents are now about to be made known. It’s a solemn moment, and the angel who holds the book indicates that in verses 5 and 6 by raising his right hand to heaven.

“And he swore by him” – verse 6 – “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.” From that point on, when that happens, when that angel takes his stand and raises his hand, nothing will stand in the way of God carrying out his plan.

And it will certainly occur, and it will occur quickly. That’s the message of the angel, and he swears to it by heaven, raises his hand. That’s what Moses did in the book of Deuteronomy, in one of the latter chapters; he raises his hand to heaven to

swear that the things that he’s saying are true. And here that angel does as well, in a solemn oath.

And in making that oath and confirming the truth of what he’s saying, that these things are going to unfold, and these things will happen, the angel singles out God’s eternity and his activity as Creator. That’s the basis of our assurance, that God is sovereign. A God who is not sovereign cannot carry out his plan and purpose. His promises are not guaranteed to us.

But this is a sovereign God. The Bible makes that very clear, and it’s clear here. God is sovereign over both time and creation. He governs history, and he rules the world. Nothing surprises him. And the reason nothing surprises him is because ultimately everything fits within his plan for history. He sees it all because he’s planned it all. That’s the guarantee we have, and that the suffering saints in that future day will have.

When the seventh trumpet is blown, the end will come quickly and certainly. Now, it won’t come immediately upon the sounding of the trumpet. In verse 7, John writes that it will be “in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he’s about to sound.” Now, he didn’t write, “When the trumpet sounds,” but “In the days of the voice,” or the days of the sounding of the trumpet.

So the sounding of the seventh trumpet is not a single event, it’s not a simple act; it is a prolonged event. The picture John gives us is of the angel playing his trumpet for days. How many we don’t know, but it will be a prolonged event, in which the seven bowls of chapter 16 will be poured out. So you remember, there are three series of judgments: the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, the bowl judgments.

And as we move to each of these, they become more intense and more widespread. So just as the contents of the seventh seal of the seventh trumpet are the seven trumpet judgments, the seventh trumpet will sound, and that will be the seven bowl judgments that follow. And so with each of these judgments comes an intensity of judgment.

And as the seventh trumpet sounds and the bowl judgments are poured out, judgment intensifies all the more right toward the very end or climax of the events of history. The six trumpets that had already sounded gave men every opportunity to

repent, and that was their purpose, in part at least, was to give men a sense of their need, their desperate need of a Savior.

To disrupt them from their contentment in life, and to make them realize that they’re not in control of things; that the sovereign God against whom they shake their fist and rebel, he is in control. And they cannot stop these judgments, and they cannot escape them, and it’s to drive them to despair and drive them to him. But men did not turn from their sin; they did not turn from their idolatry.

That’s how chapter 9 ended. In that day, men will have hardened themselves beyond repentance, and God’s patience will then be exhausted, so there’ll be nothing left for him to do but sound the seventh trumpet. That will be a decisive moment for the world. It marks the beginning of the end, and that means condemnation for the world –condemnation for the world, but consolation for God’s people.

The trumpet brings good news, because then John says the mystery of God will be revealed. As he puts it, “They mystery of God is finished, as he preached to his servants the prophets.” Now, this word “mystery” is an important word. It’s found throughout the New Testament. It doesn’t mean “mysterious” or “mystical” or “something secret.”

It is truth that is previously unknown, but is now revealed. In other words, it’s truth that can only be known by revelation. In Ephesians 3:4, we have this word; Paul speaks of the “mystery of Christ,” which he goes on to explain is that believing Gentiles are now fellow heirs and fellow members of the body of Christ with Jews. In other words, believing Gentiles, male and female, are spiritually equal to believing Jews in every way.

That the church is made up of those who are equal – all kinds of people, but all equal in Christ; now, that was not known in the Old Testament. Gentile salvation was, and Gentile salvation happened all through the Old Testament. But when a Gentile was saved, he became a Jew. But equality of this kind that’s spoken of in Ephesians 3 is Gentiles don’t need to become Jews.

Gentiles are saved in the same way as Jews, and they are equal with Jews in the body of Christ, and that’s the mystery in Ephesians 3. It was not known in the Old Testament. It became known through the apostles. It’s something that is revealed. And here in Revelation 10, the mystery is something different from that, but it’s the same in the sense that it is a truth that must be revealed in order to be known.

And here it refers to what is to follow in the book, and what follows in this book of Revelation is the consummation of human history, which will end in the millennial kingdom, and ultimately in the new heavens and the new earth. That meaning, I think, of this word “mystery” is proved by the declaration that’s given in the next chapter, in 11:15, at the seventh trumpet.

It sounds, and there’s the declaration “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.” That’s God’s purpose for the universe. Now, that’s a mystery, because that cannot be known by looking at the world, or studying human nature, or studying history. People study history for different reasons.

Some people study it because it’s just interesting. But I suppose that a serious historian studies history so that he can, in some way, predict the future, and know what’s coming by looking at what has unfolded. And if he sees patterns that unfold, then he may be able to understand somewhat of what’s coming in the future. And men are desperate to know what the future holds.

But the reality is we can study history all we want and we’ll never know what twists and turns the future’s going to take. We can never know the future by studying the past. We can see patterns, and we can make educated guesses, but we cannot know what the future holds by studying the past. That is only known by divine revelation. What a blessing we have in that we know what’s coming.

We know what God has in store for those who love him, and it’s glorious things. That’s how we know it is not by our own intuition or our study of the past – it’s through our study of God’s Word. It’s through revelation. It’s through his unfolding of things, and John says it was revealed in the prophets. God spoke to the prophets of old. It’s what God, as he says, “Preached to his servants, the prophets.”

And literally that word “preached” to the prophets – God preached this kingdom to the prophets – is literally “evangelized.” So God evangelized his Old Testament prophets. It’s a very interesting way of putting it. That doesn’t mean that he preached the gospel to them in the sense that we think of the gospel, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:1 and 3 about the crucifixion and the resurrection.

He means that he announced to them the good news, and that’s what evangelize means. The evangel is the good news. That’s what the Greek word simply means. And he announced to them the good news of the kingdom to come,

the Messianic kingdom. They knew the gospel that we preach. It was their gospel as well. They had the hope of a redeemer to come, who would die and be raised from the dead.

You read the book of Acts, and from the earliest chapters, from chapter 2 on, Peter and then later Paul prove the resurrection as well as the crucifixion from the Old Testament. So it was there, and they had this hope. They didn’t see it then, in the Old Testament, as clearly as we see it now, after the events, but their gospel is our gospel. It’s the same gospel. They had the hope of a redeemer to come.

But the kingdom and the cross cannot be separated. It’s all part of the gospel. God’s eternal plan for the world was secured and made possible by Christ’s sacrifice. That is where, at the cross, where he bought a kingdom of priests. So the gospel is not just about the past. It’s not just about the cross and the empty tomb, and I don’t mean to diminish that, because that is essentially what it is.

That’s at the heart of the gospel is the crucified Savior, who is living today. But it’s not just about that; it’s about the future as well. We tell people about the hope of forgiveness for all who believe in Christ, who came as the servant to die, and of the future hope for the forgiven, when Christ comes again to reign as king. The gospel promises the believer in Jesus Christ the abundant life.

It promises you peace in this world, in this time. It promises you power and life that you don’t have naturally, that is of God. Those are great blessings, and we never fully enter into the greatness of them. But what the gospel also is, is the promise that the best is not yet come. It’s still coming. There is a world to come, and that’s what this mystery is about. This is what he’s proclaiming. That’s the good news.

And when the seventh trumpet sounds, the long wait for it will be at an end. Events will move quickly and certainly toward the Lord’s return. Now, at this point, in verse 8, the voice from heaven that told John not to write what the seven peals of thunder had spoken – that voice speaks to him again. Presumably, this is the voice of Christ.

It tells him, “Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.” And so having forbidden him to make known the message of the thunder, he gives him a new message, the contents that are found in

that little book that the angel is holding. So John went to the angel. He asked for the book. When he did, the angel told him, “Take it and eat it.”

Now, what a strange command that is. A strange command, and yet it’s not unprecedented; it’s not unheard of among the prophets. You read the Old Testament, you know that. If you read the book of Ezekiel, and you read the book of Jeremiah, books that most of us are not altogether familiar with, but if you read those books, you find the very same thing.

Ezekiel was given a scroll at the beginning of his ministry. It was full of judgments, front and back. And then he was told to eat it. Jeremiah said, “Your words were found and I ate them.” It may be that these men literally ate the scrolls they were given, and I say it may be, because if you study the prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel – these are the major prophets of the Old Testament – they did strange things.

And they were commanded to act out things that would seem a bit bizarre to us, and so it’s possible that scrolls were literally consumed. But the significance of the symbolic action, or the command, or the description of eating a scroll, is that of assimilating its contents; in other words, making the contents of those scrolls, making the content of God’s Word, a part of the person.

So when Jesus told the crowd in John 6:53 that unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood, they would not have life, they should’ve known what that meant. They had a precedent for that from the prophets, and they would’ve been very familiar with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and they would’ve known the significance of eating something. Jesus had previously called himself “the bread of life.”

They knew that he was speaking figuratively – they should have. And before that, he told them in John 6:29 that they must believe in him. Well, that’s the meaning of eating and drinking him; it’s believing in him, believing the truth, taking it into the mind and the heart, assimilating it. And John was being told, in effect, to believe the message about the kingdom to come; make it a part of himself.

Believe it so firmly, understand it so completely that it is a part of his mind and his thinking, so that he could proclaim it as a prophet. By implication or by application that’s what we’re to do with God’s Word. We have the great privilege of

having the full revelation of God; 66 books of the Bible that unfold for us the mysteries of life that can only be known by revelation, which this book gives.

The wisdom of God, the mind of God, it is all there for us to have, to know, and it must be known. But to know it, we must assimilate it; we must feed upon it, as it were. Not simply read it casually. Hopefully, you read through your Bible once a year, or you’re consistently reading it, whether you read through it all in a year or not. It’s important to read it.

But it’s important not only to read it, but to think deeply upon it. To reflect upon the Word of God and to know it – to take it in as one would take in food, because it is food for our soul, and without it we wither, and we become very ineffective. So this is what John was to do – he was to eat the little book. For Jeremiah, the words he ate were a joy for him, he says. For Ezekiel, the scroll that he ate was sweet as honey.

And the book would be sweet for John – the angel tells him that – but it would also be bitter, he says. “It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” To the believer, it is sweet because it’s God’s Word, and it has the promise of God’s kingdom, which is soon coming. The question, “How long, O Lord?” has been given; the answer there will be “delay no longer.”

Well, that’s sweet. The glorious conclusion of things, the beginning of the unfolding of the ages of glory is about to come. But the kingdom will come, that glory will come, through judgment, and that’s bitter. The hope is sweet, but the judgment that will bring it to fulfillment is bitter. That’s what John was now to proclaim. This is the message he’s given in this little book the angel holds, and that he has eaten.

It’s a hard message. It’s a message of judgment. And yet, every believer must give it, whether it’s proclaimed from the pulpit as preachers must do – temptation for the minister is to say the sweet things and not the bitter things. But we’re instructed through the example of the apostles and through the instruction they give us to proclaim the whole counsel of God, the bitter along with the sweet.

And you, as God’s people, and even those who are not God’s people, all are required to listen and believe, the sweet as well as the bitter. So this is what John is to proclaim; it’s to be proclaimed from the pulpit, judgment as well as grace, and it’s true for those of you who are not in the pulpit, where you are. And all of us are witnesses to some extent; we all bear the truth of God, if we’re God’s people.

And we must proclaim it to people, if not from a pulpit then in our conversation with those we meet. We must speak the truth, and we must speak the whole truth of God. We must be true to God’s Word, and that means giving the hopeful message of the coming kingdom, and that Christ will come, and may come very soon. But then there’s the other side of that message: that he’s coming in judgment. That’s bitter.

And we cannot help but feel the bitterness if we truly understand it. No one can speak of judgment, no one can speak of hell with joy. In fact, throughout the book of Ezekiel, the Lord says that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and if we have the mind of God, and are filled with his love and his understanding, then we will have no delight in the death of the wicked, either.

The woes of judgment that we see in this book will be bitter to us. This is the bittersweet message John was given; one of grace and justice; of the coming kingdom, and the inevitable judgment. The scope of this prophecy is wide; we see that in the last verse, in verse 11. “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

The entire civilized world will come under this judgment, and it will fall. The world as we know it is going to be swept away. The judgment will be complete, and there will be no exceptions; all nations and even kings will meet God’s wrath. It’s a reminder that no one, not even kings, not even the greatest of men, are above the Word of God. Its authority is over all, so all must repent while they have opportunity.

But primarily this chapter is one of encouragement to God’s people, particularly for those who will be in this world in the last days, the suffering saints of the tribulation. They are assured that the end will come without delay, and it’s an encouragement to us today as well, because the question of the souls beneath the altar of God in chapter 6 – “How long, O Lord?” – is one that saints ask in every age.

It’s the question that David asked in his prayer in Psalm 6:3. “O Lord, how long?” He was suffering much; mainly a trial of humiliation due to his sin. He’d brought the affliction upon himself. But the trial was about to break him. He couldn’t endure it much longer, so he asked the Lord how much longer this trial, this discipline, this difficulty would go on; when would it come to a conclusion.

It’s the question suffering saints ask. Calvin made those words of David’s Psalm his constant prayer, because he suffered much physically. I think I’ve referred

to those sufferings many times, but he was chronically ill with all kinds of things. He had a physically debilitating life, but his suffering was not only that; he suffered emotionally and spiritually.

He experienced betrayal from trusted friends, moral failures in his own family, under his own roof, that grieved him greatly and gave cause for his enemies to ridicule him, and he had many enemies throughout the city of Geneva and throughout Europe. They were continually attacking him. So he would often pray in Latin the words of Psalm 6:3, “O Lord, how long?”

That’s the prayer of so many suffering saints; sometimes that’s all a person can get out, and sometimes they can’t even get the words out. They can just sigh, because burdens are so great, difficulties are so strong. So it’s been, down through the ages from David to Calvin to many of you here; how long, O Lord? Well, the Lord brings an end to such trials in this life.

He gives us resolution to the difficulties of life in our own experience. He gives comfort now, and he does it in his time and in his way. In fact, not only that, but he promises to use the trials of our life for our own good, and for our own growth; and we can’t see that at the time. But very often, that is the case.

But the ultimate comfort for all who ask “How long, O Lord?” is found here in Revelation 10, which promises that eternal glory and comfort are coming. That’s the future for us. This is a chapter for those who long to see God’s will done on this earth; who long for the coming of his kingdom. But this passage also reminds us that there is an end to God’s patience.

There will come a time when all opportunities of repentance will run out, and the end must come. That will be true for the world in the future, but it’s also true today for individuals. Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, the author quotes Psalm 95 and the warning, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” The day will pass, and opportunities will end, and that may be today for some.

So today, if you hear God’s voice in his Word, in the good news of salvation in Christ, don’t harden your heart; come to him. Trust in him. Flee the wrath to come, and find refuge in Jesus Christ. May God help you to do that. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. We praise you for your sovereignty. You are over this world. Your angel, your ambassador illustrates that by planting his foot on the land and on the sea, and raising his hand toward heaven, and

swearing by the one who’s eternal and in control of all things; the one who is forever and ever, and who created everything, time and things, that these things will happen.

So we take great comfort in knowing that our future in Christ is certain – glorious to come – and in the midst of all the trials of life today, there is blessing that only you can give. We thank you for that. Thank you that we possess all of that in Christ. We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, and the life that’s eternal through him. It’s in his name we pray. Amen.