

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE VICTOR

### A Mighty Angel and a Little Scroll

#### Revelation 10

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*Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever 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, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings" (Rev 10).*

We are getting close to the halfway mark in our study of Revelation. I wonder how your perspective of this book has changed since we started our journey. Think back with me and consider the emotions you felt when you learned about this series or when someone told you about it. Here's a few that I might expect:

- Curiosity: Maybe you've never studied Revelation before, and you wondered about its content.
- Apprehension: Maybe you were worried about the many views on Revelation and how I would navigate them.
- Fear: Maybe you were nervous that the tone of our study would take a dark and foreboding turn.
- Anticipation: Maybe you were excited to dive into this book and learn about its timely message.

I'm sure there are more. But as we've made our way through this book—one that I've never preached before—there's one emotion that I've found a bit surprising. As we are looking at this glorious book, I'm finding myself feeling conflicted.

What do I mean by that? To be conflicted means that you have an internal struggle between things that seem to be incompatible or in opposition to one another. And I think that the more we really understand the message of Revelation, the more this confliction becomes clear and real.

Take last week for example. We covered two chapters that highlighted overwhelming judgment. Remember that the earth, sea, and sky were radically affected, and all kinds of people were killed. This is the stuff of nightmares. And yet it's part of the return of our King. So, we rejoice and tremble.

Revelation shows us the marvelous nature of the glory of God, but it also shows us the devastating side of that glory that results in judgment. Worship turns to judgment—in an instant. Remember the censer being thrown toward the earth? A worship object turned into a missile. We should feel some level of confliction about that.

Chapter 10 is another “interlude” chapter. After John recounts the judgments connected to the seven trumpets, we receive a rather personal account of what John sees, hears, and eats—and what it does to him. This chapter speaks to what is happening to John, and it addresses what should be happening to us as we read this book. Here it is: **Live with hopeful confliction**. By this I mean that the posture Christians should take with this book and how they live in light of this book is holding things with a grace-filled tension.

### **1. Deliverance (vv. 1-3)**

We see, yet again, the theme of deliverance emerge in Revelation. This theme is woven throughout the book, and it emerges in the context of judgment. God promises to deliver his people through the defeat of sin, death, and the devil. The suffering believers ask, “How long, O Lord?” (8:3-5), and the enacting of divine judgment is a direct answer to their plea.

In chapter 10 this repeated message is received through the emergence of another angel. According to 10:1, John records seeing another mighty angel. In chapter 7 there was an angel who rose from the east with the seal of God with which he protected God's people—the 144,000 (see 7:2-4). Remember that chapter 7 was also an interlude as chapter 10 is as well.

Notice the description of this angel:

*...a mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire (Rev. 10:2).*

The image here is designed to connect this moment to both divine power and historical deliverance. Some commentators believe that this is a manifestation of Jesus. Others take it to be simply a powerful angelic messenger. Regardless, it's important to note that this angel is coming from heaven. Previous visions were located in the heavenly realm, but this one involves a messenger coming to earth from

heaven. Take note of the symbolism that we saw before: the angel has a rainbow over his head like in chapter 4, and his face was like the sun—similar to the picture of Jesus in 1:16. This is an authoritative messenger with otherworldly glory.

Don't miss two additional symbols with historical significance. The angel is "wrapped in a cloud" and his legs are "like pillars of fire" (v. 2). Where else do we find God being represented by a cloud and fire?

The deliverance from Egypt featured this. After God's people were freed from slavery, Exodus 13 describes God's presence this way:

*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light...The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people (Exod. 13:21-22).*

Clouds and fire were loaded with meaning and comfort. They symbolize both the presence and protection of God in the context of the most significant moment of deliverance for God's people.

Greg Beale notes: "The point of the reference to God's presence with Israel in the wilderness is that the same divine presence is to protect and guide the faithful witnesses of the new Israel in the wilderness of the world, as the following chapters reveal" (so 11:3–12; 12:6, 13–17).

Verse 2 tells us something new and important. The angel had a little scroll in his hand, and it is open. This must be the same scroll as before, which the Lamb took and opened in chapter 5. It's probably described as little because of its comparison to the size of this angel.

Do you remember the purpose of the scroll? It contained the plan of God for the world, and its seals were the judgments of God that bring about the completion of God's plan. Don't take this for granted. It's part of what creates the conflict. Divine deliverance and judgment are linked together.

This divine messenger has authority. The planting of his feet on the sea and the land connects this messenger with the power and rule of God. He has both realms of the earthly created order under his feet.

John is recording what he sees. Now he turns to what he hears (another pattern in Revelation). In verse 3, the angel called out with a loud voice, like the roaring of a lion. Here's another image connected to deliverance in the Old Testament:

*The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. (Joel 3:16).*

*And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem." (Amos 1:2).*

This roaring image is announcing a coming judgment. It's similar to the trumpets that we looked at last week. It's a powerful metaphor for the judgment that Christ will bring. But, again, this judgment is announced with a terrifying sound—the roar of a lion.

Notice what happens next. According to verse 3, when the lion roared seven thunders sounded. This was more than just a sound, as we'll see in verse 4. There are seven spoken responses to the lion's roar that sound like thunder. It's similar to what we find happening in John 12.

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die (John 12:23-33).*

Take note how connected the deliverance is to conflicted realities. God has delivered his people in ways that don't make a lot of sense and are mysterious.

## **2. Hope (vv. 4-7)**

What follows in verses 4-7 is a hopeful statement, but not without mystery. When John hears the sound of the seven thunders, he's inclined to write it down. Apparently, what he heard was important. But John is prevented from writing these thunder judgments down.

Why is he prohibited from recording them? Frankly, we're not sure. A few possible reasons:

Some commentators suggest that God intends to communicate that not everything about the Apocalypse is being revealed. God must be trusted because there's much we still do not know about. Others suggest that God holds off these judgments in mercy toward those who are unrepentant. Still others believe that these are not recorded because they are repetition of the previous trumpet judgments. Like so much of the book of Revelation, there is mystery here. And it's by design.

Hope doesn't come from knowing all the details or every specific event. Hope comes from knowing the King of kings and Lord of lords. Hope comes from knowing the King behind the roar of the lion.

What happens next is fascinating. According to verse 5, the mighty angel raised his right hand and swore "to him who lives forever and ever, who created the heaven and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it that there would be no more delay" (v. 6). The angel links his announcement and his oath to the character of God.

In other words, the future is assured by the predictions of Revelation, however true they are. The promises in this book are linked to the essence of the One who sits on the throne. Listen! This is not a new concept if you've been following along in this series. Resting in who God is and who is in control isn't a new idea in Revelation. But it is one that we need to keep hearing over and over again.

We live in a world filled with brokenness, and we need regular reminders of who's in charge. Do you know why? Because the dynamics in which we are called to persevere continue to change and evolve. What's more, it seems that the longer you live, the more hardship you'll face. And yet that doesn't mean there's no hope. No way! Instead, we need regular encouragement from Revelation about the hopeful plan of God.

Verse 7 states it explicitly, "that...the mystery of God would be fulfilled just as he announced to his servants the prophets." This pronouncement is connecting the vision that John sees with everything that had been previously prophesized by the Old Testament prophets. In other words, John's vision stands on the hope and authority of the prophets of old. John's vision is prophetic.

The same God who could be trusted in the Old Testament to care for his people can be trusted by his people today.

### **3. Confliction (vv. 8-11)**

We come to the final section of this interlude, and we find something interesting happens. John is given personal instructions that relate to his posture in receiving and declaring this revelation. The result is that John joins a long list of biblical prophets who declared God's Word in a particular manner.

We see John's prophetic confliction take shape here, and it's instructive for us.

In verses 8-9 we find that John hears the same voice as in verse 4. He's given specific instruction to take the scroll from the mighty angel. When John approaches the angel, he's told something that probably sounds unusual to you and me. But it would have been familiar to those who knew the Old Testament.

*So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey" (Rev. 10:9).*

This is important because it's repeated for emphasis. In verse 10, John confirms what the angel had said:

*And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter (Rev. 10:10).*

The command to eat the scroll is connected to the prophet Ezekiel:

*"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them" (Ezek. 2:8-3:4).*

John stands in this prophetic tradition, and he's affirmed as such in the closing verses of chapter 10:

*And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings" (Rev. 10:11).*

John's mission is to share this revelation about the future to "many people, nations, languages, and kings," but it will be conflicting. John's ministry will be bittersweet. This message will be something that he'll love, but it will also make him incredibly sad.

This posture of living with hopeful confliction is not only central to John's ministry and the book of Revelation. It's also central to Christianity. Here's what the apostle Paul said in Romans 8.

*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom. 8:22-25).*

Living with hopeful confliction means that Christians know the revelation of God. They love it as they tearfully live in a world under the curse of sin. Let me suggest to you that this posture is really important for the Christian life. Consider how we might live this out.

- **Expect confliction** – Do not be surprised when following Jesus in a broken world is bittersweet.
- **Pray in confliction** – In faith talk to God about your sorrows. Let lament lead you to trust.
- **Read with confliction** – Read the Bible with a yearning to grow, knowing how much you have to learn.
- **Build relationships with confliction** – Love one another deeply while remembering that we are all broken.
- **Work with confliction** – Live in the world but don't love the world. 2 Peter 3 tells us to be godly in light of the coming destruction of the world.
- **Share the gospel in confliction** – The message of the book of Revelation needs to be shared. People need to be warned and cautioned, but this needs to be done with a broken heart.

Reading Revelation is supposed to do something to you, Christian. This book isn't meant to merely satisfy your curiosity. It's designed to help us understand the future so that we can live right now. And how are we to live as we receive this revelation?

Live with hopeful confliction.

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