

Saint Paul's Sunday Morning Bible Class

Book of Revelation, Chapter 10 Notes and Questions

Introduction

• As we saw with the first vision of events on earth throughout the NT era (the seven seal judgments), we have an interlude between the sixth and seventh judgments in 10:1-11:14. This interlude consists of two scenes: 1) The Mighty Angel and 2) The Two Witnesses. As we will see, this interlude focuses on the mission of the Church throughout the NT era and God's protection of her in that mission. Thus, we take a break from the series of judgments leading to the End here and focus in on the Church's mission.

Rev. 10:1-4

- “Mighty Angel” – While some interpret this to be an actual angel from the presence of God, this is none other than Christ Himself. Once again, Christ appears as an angel guiding the vision of events. It is Christ who accomplishes the mission of the Church – He works through us to accomplish His will. It is His mission, not ours. Thus, it is only proper to have Him appear to lead the way here in the vision. He is “Mighty,” for He has defeated sin, death, and the devil and now rules over all things.
- “Robed in a cloud” – In the OT, God's presence among His people is often associated with a cloud (“pillar of cloud”; “cloud of Glory” – cf. Ex. 13:21; 14:19-20; Num. 9:17-21; Ex. 24:15-18; Deut. 31:15-16; Ex. 16:10; Ex. 40:34-35, et. al.). As the God-Man, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, comes “down out of heaven,” it is only natural that He be “robed in a cloud,” for Christ comes in glory.
- “With a rainbow above His head” – The rainbow is the sign of God's pledge never to destroy the earth by a flood again (Gen. 9:8-17). Here, the rainbow indicates that not only does Christ come in glory, but with His promise not to destroy, but to save. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world, that sinners would be brought to saving faith in Him. The Church does not proclaim this message to destroy, but to give life – true life, life in the full, eternal life.
- “His face was like the sun, and His legs were like fiery pillars” – Cf. Rev. 1:15-16, where the “appearance” of Christ as the Son of Man shines like the sun, and His feet “were like bronze glowing in a furnace.” The Holiness of God is often depicted in terms of fire – “burning bush,” “pillar of fire,” “the sacrificial system,” etc. This language also calls to mind the face of Moses when he descended from Mt. Sinai after being in God's presence – His face shone and his hair turned to white. It also calls to mind the Transfiguration of Christ, where Jesus' face “shone like the sun.” This Mighty Angel is the Holy One of God, Jesus the Christ.
- “He was holding a little scroll which lay open in His hand” – This hearkens us back to chapter 5 where Christ is the only One worthy to break the seal and open the scroll. The “little scroll” here is one and the same scroll. It contains what must take place during the entire NT era.
- “He planted His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land and He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion” – The “sea and land” taken together indicate all of creation. Christ rules over all. In the judgments we have already witnessed and those to come, their focus is both on the sea and the land (and the heavens), indicating that what takes place will affect all of creation. Christ strides over the sea and the land, indicating His great size (figuratively) and His omnipresence (He is everywhere). His size here also indicates the importance of the mission for which He comes to fulfill. He dominates everything on earth – no one and no power can resist Him and the mission He comes to fulfill – the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:18). When He speaks, it is “like the roar of a lion,” indicating that His is the voice of God Himself. Christ is the “Lion of Judah” and His voice is authoritative over all things.

- “The voices of the seven thunders spoke” – God’s voice is often depicted as “the roar of thunder” (cf. Ex. 19:16) – it is majestic and holy and powerful, so much so that sinners cannot bear to hear it. So it is that, as Christ speaks, the Father’s perfect voice accompanies His, for He and the Father are One, and share the same mission (“seven thunders” = Father’s perfect voice).

- “I was about to write . . . Seal up . . . do not write” – Some interpreters have a lot of fun with this, claiming that the “seven thunders” spoke something very secret that is not to be revealed to the world. You can imagine the many different ideas about what that “secret” entails. But, this is not what’s happening here. John is not told to seal up and not write what the “seven thunders” spoke because there is something to hide, but rather because this is the unveiled perfect voice of the Father, which no one can bear to hear. What the Father (the seven thunders) utters are holy things of His heavenly glory that are too sacred and beautiful for anyone to hear and understand while still on earth. Only those who enter His eternal kingdom can hear such things. This is also a warning for us not to delve into the mysteries of God which He Himself has not revealed to us. There are simply some things He hasn’t told us and we must not try to decipher those things using our own sinful human reason (e.g. Where did God come from? How can God predestine the saved, but is not, at the same time, responsible for predestining the damned? How can God be Human and Divine at the same time? How can a tiny infant have faith? How can Christ give us His very Body and Blood in the Holy Supper?, etc.).

Rev. 10:5-8

- “Christ swears an oath” – This oath is that “there will be no more delay *when* the seventh angel blows His trumpet, for then the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets.” In short, this oath is that all things will be accomplished according to the Divine Plan and everyone will know it in the End. There is coming a Day when “at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow” (Phil. 2:10. The NIV is not the best translation here, for it tends to give the impression that there is something between the fact that “there will be no more delay” and the sounding of the seventh angel’s trumpet. But, the two go hand in hand. Christ is vowing that He will return on the Last Day as He promised and that all will be revealed as His Word proclaimed and as His prophets announced).

- But, before that Day, His prophets will continue to prophesy in His Name (preach His Word), which is what the rest of this interlude teaches. Christ tells John to “take the scroll” from His hand, for he (and all those men who are called into the Office of the Holy Ministry) is to proclaim His Word, namely preaching repentance and faith, thus fulfilling the Church’s mission.

Rev. 10:9-11

- “Take it and eat it” – The eating of the small scroll has its referent in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, the Glory of the Lord (pre-incarnate Christ) gives the scroll; here it is also Christ (the Mighty Angel) who gives John the scroll. John is to fully digest the Word of God, so that he may boldly proclaim it to the world. This is the Church’s mission throughout the NT era – to proclaim the message of God (His Law and Gospel) among all peoples on earth. The Church accomplishes this message through its prophets (those men who have been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry, which she calls to exercise that Ministry in her midst). The pastoral office is a prophetic office. Many people often like to distinguish between prophets, apostles, evangelists, teachers, elders, deacons, etc. But, those whom God has chosen to speak on His behalf are united in that endeavor. Just as the OT prophets and John here is to speak on God’s behalf, so pastors today are to speak on God’s behalf to the people before us. To be sure, all Christians, clergy and laity alike, are united in the mission of the Church. All Christians are called to share the Gospel of Christ with the world. However, not all Christians are called to the prophetic (pastoral) office. We must always distinguish between the “priesthood of all believers” and the “Office of the Holy Ministry,” a distinction that has, sadly, been blurred more and more in our day and age.

- “Turn your stomach sour . . . sweet as honey” – God’s prophets (pastors), who have “eaten the scroll” (fully

digested the Word of God) will suffer much for the ministry they are called to accomplish by Christ's command and in His stead. The message they must proclaim will not always make them popular among those to whom it is proclaimed. If they remain steadfast in the Word (if they truly "eat the scroll"), they will undergo persecution and hatred at times, even from those they are committed to serve. Thus, "eating the scroll" will "turn their stomach's sour." But, at the same time, proclaiming the Word of God can be the most joyous of experiences ("sweet as honey"); to see the results of the Gospel working in the hearts of people is awesome. Thus, "eating the scroll" will not always bring suffering, but also great joy. Of course, the greatest joy for the suffering servant (pastor) will come on the Last Day, when he receives his reward for remaining steadfast in the Word he was called to proclaim – then, and only then, will he experience the honey-sweet taste of the Word.

- "You must prophesy" – In the Greek, there is a little word, *dei*, which often refers to "Divine necessity," as it does here. "It is necessary that John prophesy . . ." Why? Because it is only through the Word of God that sinners are brought to faith and saved (cf. Rom. 10:17). The mission of the Church (Christ's mission) is accomplished solely through the Word of God. If the Word is not proclaimed, sinners are not saved. Thus, John (and all pastors) must "prophesy," that is, preach the Word (the Word they have fully digested and are called to proclaim). This is the mission of the Church that must be done throughout the whole NT era. The Word must be proclaimed!

Conclusion

- The whole purpose of the appearance of the Mighty Angel and His scroll rings out loud and clear: John (and all pastors) must proclaim the message of God among all peoples on earth. That is the mission of the Church throughout the NT era. We turn our attention now to the second scene of this interlude, namely the Two Witnesses described in chapter 11, which shows us how God will keep His Church, and her mission, safe during Satan's "little season" before the return of Christ.

Excursus: The Mission of the Church

There is a lot of confusion today in defining the mission of the Church and how the Church carries out her mission. Too often, even now in Lutheran circles, people reduce the mission of the Church to simple witnessing, as if telling someone that Jesus loves them is the mission being fulfilled. But, the mission involves much more than simple witnessing. The Church's mission is to "make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them all that Christ commands" (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). The goal of this mission is not to fill our pews or enlarge our synod, but to "make disciples" of Christ, our Lord. When we focus on increasing our numbers instead of making disciples, we run the danger of watering down our doctrine and practice in order to make it more appealing to people. When this approach meets with "success" (outward growth and enthusiasm), people are deceived into believing that God's work is being done and He is blessing their efforts. But, God never blesses falsehood. He never permits His Word to be compromised with the world, as the entire testimony of Scripture clearly shows, and as we have learned in our study of Revelation. He "spits the lukewarm from His mouth" (Rev. 3:16). What looks like success is actually failure – grave failure. People come to believe that they are Christians on their way to heaven because they have "joined a Church they like and in which they feel comfortable." The sad reality is that many of them will find on the Last Day that they were Christians in name only and that the Lord never knew them. For this reason, it is vital that the Church truly understand her mission; that she be committed to "making disciples," not "filling her pews." She must be committed not only to bringing people into the Church, but to seeing to it that those people are properly catechized into the faith. She must realize that "watering down her doctrine and practice" will only result in "watered-down," nominal Christians. She must remain firm and steadfast in the Word she is given to proclaim to the world. Then, and only then, is she about her Lord's business, fulfilling the mission He has given her to fulfill!

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation Chapter 10

1. The book of Revelation contains powerful images of the overwhelming presence of God. Yet much of our world denies the truth, stressed again in 10:6, that God, who lives forever, is the Creator of all. What are some of the results of the denial of this truth that we see in the world today?
2. Why is the image of an awesome, all-powerful God, upon whose direct presence we dare not even look, not inconsistent with the teaching that he is gracious?
3. The Greek word (*euangelion*) in verse 7 is translated as “announce” or “proclaim,” is the word from which we get the word "**Gospel.**" Can you think of any other words which come from this word?

What does each mean?

4. Based on Colossians 1:24-27, do the saints know the mystery of God (10:7)? If so, what is the mystery of God and what are we to do with our knowledge of that mystery?