

The Church Victorious in the Midst of Strife

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, for thousands of years, the story of humanity is that though we think we know better than you, though we kick and resist your ways, the story of the world reminds us again and again that you are God and we are not.

That you are great and just, that your ways are perfect and right, and that in trusting you we find life. Father, we find freedom and wholeness, and our hearts find the rest and the peace which they long for.

Oh sovereign God, we confess that Lord, you are right and your word is always right. Father, help us to trust you. Father, we believe you, but oh help our unbelief.

We trust you, but forgive us and help us in our lack of trust. Father, we desire to love you more, but oh forgive us for how cold and stingy our love towards you can often be.

Father, help us, we pray. Father, as we come to your word now, we ask that you speak to us from your word. We confess that revelation is confusing, it's difficult, it's difficult to understand, it's difficult to receive.

[1 : 11] Father, we ask that you open up your word to us, even as it's read to us this morning, may it make sense to us. May we see and understand what you want us to see and you want us to understand.

God, as we study it together, we pray that we will be truly blessed by your word and find life in your word, even as we are blessed in you and find life in you.

Lord, let your word lead us to you this morning. As we look at our role as a church in the midst of a broken and difficult world, I pray God this morning speak to us.

That we will know with conviction and certainty what it looks like to be faithful men and women following Jesus in the city of Hong Kong in this day and age. Speak to us today we pray.

Father, today we want to pray for our brothers and sisters across Asia. For those who are following you in the midst of very difficult circumstances. Father, we pray for followers of Jesus who are currently in North Korea, in South Korea, in Japan.

[2 : 13] We pray for our brothers and sisters in Myanmar, in Laos, in Malaysia, in Thailand, in Singapore. Father, right now we bring before you Christians in Bangladesh, in Nepal, in India, those in Pakistan, in Mongolia, in Japan, in Uzbekistan, in Kazakhstan.

God, we pray for Christians in Indonesia and Philippines. We pray for our brothers and sisters in mainland China. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong.

God, we pray that your gospel will go forward in our great continent. That all across Asia in the years and the decades to come, that hundreds of thousands and millions of people will come to know you.

That you are the one true God and they will find life and freedom in you, we pray, God. God, we pray that we will be salt to our city and light to the cities, we pray. We look forward to that day when we stand shoulder to shoulder with followers of Jesus from every culture and language and ethnicity worshipping you together.

Father, we want to see a lot of Asia represented there on that day in heaven. We ask for the gospel to go forward and we pray, God, that you send many, many workers into the harvest.

[3 : 25] We see that the fields are ready. We see there are billions and billions of people in our continent who do not know you. And we ask God, send out missionaries, send out businessmen and businesswomen, families and students and teachers and social workers all across Asia to take the gospel out.

Father, we hear you say, who will go for us? And humbly, aware of our shortcomings, aware that you do not have much to give, with fear and trembling, we join with our Zion and say, here we are.

Send us, God. Send us, Lord. God, may your gospel not die with us. We're so grateful for the missionaries that you sent to Asia all those years ago, who brought the good news of the gospel to us in Hong Kong.

May it not end with us. Send us, we pray. Empower us with your presence. Give us your joy. Cause your face to shine upon the nations that they may know you.

God, if you do not go with us, then do not send us out. But if you go, send us in your name, we pray. For the praise of your great and glorious name. Amen.

[4 : 35] Amen. Let's listen to Janet and Victoria reading God's word to us. Just as they come up, today we've got a long reading. You might have thought last week was long.

Today is a little bit longer. We're reading three chapters from Revelation chapter 8 to 10. But in chapter 1, John says, blessed are those who hear this book read to them.

And so, let's listen to God's word. And I pray that we will be blessed and encouraged as we do so.

So, thank you, Janet and Victoria. The scripture reading comes from Revelation chapter 8 to 10.

Please follow along in your bulletin or on the screen. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne.

[5 : 37] And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints arose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth.

And there were pearls of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now, the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire mixed with blood. And there were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.

A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.

[7 : 02] The name of the star is warm wood. A third of the waters became warm wood, and many people died from the water because it had been bitter.

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so the third of their lights might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead. Woo! Woo! Woo to those who dwell on the earth!

At the blast of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow. And the third angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star falling from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit.

He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like a smoke of a great furnace. The sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

[8 : 15] Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like a power of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green plants, or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them. And their torment was like a torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.

And in those days, people will seek death and will not find it. It will long to die, but death will flee from them. In appearance, the locusts were like horses prepared for battle.

On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold. Their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lion's teeth.

They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.

[9 : 37] They have as king over them the angel of the bottleness pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

The first rule has passed. Behold, two rules are still to come. The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Then I saw an other mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in the 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 rolling.

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.

[11 : 02] 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 will 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.

[12 : 09] And I was told, You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings. This is the word of God. Okay.

Great. Thank you, Janet and Victoria. We skipped a little section in the middle. If you were following on your phone or something and you got lost, we skipped a little section.

But primarily, there were three long chapters there in the book of Revelation. And we are working our way through this book of Revelation. And if you are new to church, or I guess even if you are not that new to church, we are in the middle stages of this book.

And Revelation is full of imagery and symbolism. And we are working our way through it. And as we do so, we are hopefully seeing that the gospel is far richer and deeper than maybe we first experienced.

But also, we are learning there is more to God and who He is and the way that He is leading and ruling the world than we first experienced. And so in chapter 1, John writes and he says, blessed are those who read this book and those who hear this book.

[13 : 18] And so our hope is as we work through this stuff, as challenging as it is, we will be blessed. We won't just understand with our minds the imagery and the symbolism. We pray that our hearts will be encouraged and strengthened as we work through this.

Now, last week we looked at chapter 6 and 7. And in those chapters, there was this picture of this scroll that is rolled up and there are these seven seals, wax seals, on the scroll.

And each time a wax seal is broken off, some event in the story of the world is portrayed or spoken of. And then we saw in between the sixth and the seventh seal, there's this interlude.

And in the interlude, Jesus speaks to John and He wants to give him a message. And the message we saw last week was, though there is chaos and calamity in the world, though the world is full of all these strange things and disaster, God promises that His people will be kept safe, will be sealed, will be guaranteed to be kept in His hands until they reach glory on the other side.

And so God says, yes, there is challenges, and Christians aren't immune from experiencing those challenges, but God promises His people will make it through to the other side to get to glory.

[14 : 37] Okay? And so what that meant for us is that the Christian gets to live with this unbelievable hope and confidence because our security and our assurance and our confidence aren't found in the circumstances around us.

They're not found in ourselves. They're found in Him who is seated on the throne. And so that's what we looked at last week. Now in today's passage, we get to the seven of the second, sorry, of

these series of the seven events.

Last week was the seven wax seals that are broken off this parchment. Today we get to these seven trumpets that are blown. And as we said before, this isn't meant to be a chronological account.

It's not like this happened and now we get to stage B and then stage C. Rather, this is a multi-layered, multi-angled, multi-perspectival approach on the story of the world.

Okay? I don't know how you translate multi-perspectival into Cantonese, but I'm sure there's a way of doing that. Okay, so let's dive in and see what's happening here.

[15:44] In chapter six, we saw last week, John's vision of the story of the world. Every time a seal is broken, something happens and the same thing happens here. Look at chapter eight, verses seven to 11 with me.

It says, the first angel blew his trumpet and there followed hail and fire mixed with blood and these were thrown upon the earth. A third of the earth was burnt up and a third of the trees were burnt up and all the green grass was burnt up.

Verse eight, the second seal blew his trumpet and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became like blood. A third of the living creatures died and the ships were destroyed.

The third angel blew his trumpet and a great star fell from heaven blazing like a torch, et cetera, et cetera. And on it goes on, the fourth trumpet is blown, the fifth trumpet, the sixth trumpet is blown. And each time, some kind of disaster is brought upon the earth. Now as we read these, a couple of things should stand out to us straight away. The first one, same as last week, is who is it that's bringing this about?

[16:50] It's God, right? Remember last week, it was Jesus that was breaking off the seals and unleashing this disaster on the earth. In chapter eight, it's God, it's his angels who are blowing the trumpets.

And what's happening here is that as a trumpet is blown, these events signify God's judgment on sin in the world. Now it's not God's final judgment on the world, that's still to come later, but these events signal God's disciplinary judgment on the world, and it's his warning to alert people of the danger of sin and of ultimate judgment that's going to come.

So think of it this way, when I discipline my kids, there's a good way to do it and there's a bad way to do it. Now when I discipline my kids well, which I don't always do, when I do it well, it's not out of a fit of anger or rage, it's not because they've pushed my buttons so much and now I just fly off the handle and do something, that's a really bad way to discipline my kids.

When I'm feeling frustrated or angry, the best thing for me to do is to not try and discipline my kids, right? But the way as a loving father that I should discipline my kids, and like I say, I don't always get this right, is to, when they've done something which I know is not good for them or for the family, is to calmly take them to the bathroom, to sit down with them, and to explain to them that because I love them and because I'm for them and because I want to help them grow up to become the kinds of people that God is calling them to be, I'm going to inflict a little bit of pain on them to help them get off the path that is currently leading towards destruction and pain and heartache and to help them get on the path that is going to lead to life and joy and freedom and peace.

Does that make sense? I would rather they experience a little bit of pain from me now than one day they get fired from their jobs because they don't know how to show respect to people or they one day their spouse walks out on them because they don't know how to love someone else or they one day get thrown in jail because they've never been taught something, right?

[19:09] And so as a loving father my job is to bring a little bit of discipline in the moment to help them get on the path that's going to lead to life and freedom and joy and flourishing.

Now, that's what's going on here. God brings His judgment upon the earth and in this instance it's a form of disaster or world events and its job is to make us to sit up and to think about our actions and to come to Him in repentance.

But notice something else here and that's that there's this growing intensity in the judgments of God. I don't know if you remember from last week we read in chapter 6 remember last week every time a wax seal is broken an angel calls forth and there's this picture of a rider that comes and there's some kind of disaster on the earth.

Well, in chapter 8 in verse 8 it says this the fourth rider comes he brings destruction and chaos and a quarter of the earth experienced this destruction.

Okay? That was last week. In this week how many times did it say a third of the earth experiences this heartache? Did you notice that when we read? I think it's something like 15 times.

[20 : 18] It talks about a third of let me find it here a third of the sea becomes blood a third of the living creatures a third of the ships are destroyed. And later on when we get to chapter 15 and 16 and there's this next set of seven events in the world it says not just a quarter of the earth not just a third of the earth not just a half of the earth but everyone is affected by the things that come.

So what's happening here? There's this growing intensity of the judgments of God. In other words what John is showing us is that as things that things ramp up as it were towards the end of the age which tells us that rather than the popular belief that the modern world is going to get better and better and safer and safer and more secure and more prosperous and that as society we are heading for some kind of social utopia where everything is just glorious in the world Revelation is actually telling us that things are going to get more difficult as we experience greater consequences for our rejection of God and our rebellion against God.

John is showing us that the more humanity believes and acts on the belief that we are the center of the world the greater the calamity that comes as a consequence of it and so the progressive narrative of our secular culture that assumes that the more we unshackle ourselves from the tentacles of religion and the more we unshackle ourselves from the chains of belief in God the more we will experience freedom and joy in life that belief John tells us and the history of the world shows us is simply not true that actually as a society the further we drift away from honoring God and who he is the more we drift into the dangerous waters of God's judgment does that make sense now here's the question why does God do this why does God allow these difficult things to come upon the world as a form of his judgment well look at what we read in chapter 9 verse 20 Victoria read this for us the rest of mankind those who are not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver which cannot see and hear and walk nor did they repent of their murder their sorceries their immorality and their thefts why does God allow these disastrous things to come upon the earth the reason as we said earlier is because he is urging us to wake up from the trance that we are in to wake up from our self-centeredness and to turn to him and repentance repentance is one of those things that sounds like such drudgery you might have imagery in your mind of maybe as a child if you went to catholic school or catholic church you got to go to the confession booth and say father I've sinned this is what I've done you might think of repentance as a form of self-flagellation where you beat yourself and tell yourself how terrible you are but actually the bible says that confession repentance it can sometimes feel like death but actually it always leads to life

I don't know if you remember in Isaiah chapter 30 God comes to his people and this is what he says in repentance and in rest you will be saved you will find life in quietness in other words in submission and in trusting to me you will find strength God calls us to repentance because in coming to God we find rest we find peace we find the freedom and the peace that our hearts are looking for we found that it's not found in asserting ourselves and in claiming our rights but actually surrendering to the one who knows us and who loves us repentance feels like death but it always leads to life except in Isaiah 30 tragically the people don't listen to God and so look at what he says he says you were unwilling you said no we will flee on our own horses and so I will cause you to flee you said we will ride upon swift stallions and therefore we will be safe therefore I will cause your enemies to be swifter than stallions repentance always leads to life

I experienced this in my household last week last weekend I was a terrible dad and husband on Saturday I was just feeling incredibly stressed out about everything that was going on in Hong Kong and the protests and the fact that live rounds had been shot during protests the MTR station everything was going on and in addition to that I was preaching last Sunday and I didn't feel ready for preaching and so on Saturday morning I'm still trying to get my head around where we're going and all that meant that I was just a terrible man in the house and my kids asked me something and I would snap back at them and Claire was trying to give me space and I just wasn't great and so on Saturday night we go to some friends house some new friends that we met this lady on the bus and we've become friends with her we go to their house for dinner and our kids I'm like stressed out and our kids are standing on things and knocking things over and I just lost it right and so I said some things

[25 : 48] I shouldn't have said and I responded the way I shouldn't have responded and I could see I just crushed my daughter and so that night they go to bed Claire goes to bed and I'm feeling like

an idiot and so I wake up on Sunday morning trying to get my head around preaching and on the way to church I'm walking and I'm holding Sierra's hand and I say Sierra I've got to tell you something I've got to say I'm so sorry I haven't been a great dad will you please forgive me and I could see my seven year old's heart and her smile just like the ice just evaporated and she holds my hand and she says it's okay dad I understand sometimes these things happen isn't that amazing but the point is this the point is acknowledging our shortfall acknowledging our sin confession and repentance always always always leads to life remember how Jesus began his ministry he doesn't start off telling people how he can improve their lives and give them jobs and happy marriages and bless them with kids

Jesus starts off and he says there's a problem in the world and the problem is sin and I want to help you deal with it come and follow me Jesus' words here in Revelation are the same thing he's calling us to turn from the idols that we look to but which cannot save us they cannot solve the deep longings of our heart because as verse 20 says they are mute they are deaf they are lifeless they cannot walk or hear they cannot hear our prayers and the freedom and the life that we long for are found in him but tragically as Revelation 9 will show us many people do not heed his call and do not humble themselves and admit their need for God and so God says there are these plagues coming upon the world and my judgment is coming and this would have made sense to John's first century audience because they would have picked up straight away that so much of the language in chapter 8 and 9 resembles the language that God spoke to the people of Egypt back in the Exodus in Exodus chapter 3 4 and 5 listen to look and notice how in verse 7 he talks about hail and fire coming upon the earth in verse 8 and 9 he talks about the sea being turned red so that the creatures die in them in verse 12 he talks about how darkness has come upon the earth and in chapter 9 he calls these things plagues and so John's audience straight away would have realized as they heard these words God is referencing the plagues of Egypt and what happened in the plagues of Egypt God brought these disasters on the earth because he was saying to Pharaoh Pharaoh these are my warning judgments to you sit up and take notice if you do not listen to my voice finally my full judgment will come these were God's warnings to Pharaoh to listen and to turn and to trust him but Pharaoh would not listen and so finally God's judgment came not just the plagues but finally the death of the firstborn son and friends this is history's pattern that all human empires all kingdoms all movements and causes no matter how well meaning they begin no matter how well intentioned they are in the beginning all human kingdoms ultimately become Egypt become Babylon become Rome and ultimately are brought to their knees by him who is seated on the throne whose kingdom is an eternal one

I guess it's worth noticing that at the end of chapter 9 Jesus says they would not repent maybe a question for us to ask in this time is in the midst of the difficulty and the trauma that our city is going through at the moment what could it be that God might be asking us to repent for as a city could it possibly be that where we as a city have rejected God's ways and hoped and trusted in false gods and idols idols of gold and silver bronze and wood and stone idols that cannot hear or walk or see could it be Hong Kong that with all our success that we've gained and the prosperity we've enjoyed that maybe we haven't loved the poor and the marginalized we haven't looked after those that are underprivileged like Jesus would want us to could it be that God is allowing challenges to come to our city to allow us to wake up and to turn to love our city like he does something to worth consider and so the question

I want to ask I want us to ask is how do we respond last week we saw between the sixth and the seventh event there's this interlude and God speaks to his people and saying despite the challenges I will save you in chapter 10 and chapter 11 we come across another interlude between the sixth and the seventh of these trumpets and in this interlude Jesus wants to show us something he wants to show us what does it mean to be a Christian to be a follower of Jesus in the midst of the challenges of the world in which we live how does this passage call us to respond and there are three ways that it calls us to respond the first is in chapter 10 verse 1 to 7 look at it with me John sees this angel and this angel is standing one foot in the sea one foot on the earth and this angel speaks to John and it says that as he speaks his voice was like seven thunders okay and John is about to write down what the angel says but he hears another voice from heaven saying don't write down what you heard seal it up and don't tell anyone what you heard okay look at what it says here seal up what the seven thunders have said do not write it down the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land swore by him who lives forever and ever that there would be no more delay

but that the days of the trumpet to be sounded by the seventh angel the mystery of God would be fulfilled now commentators and theologians

[32 : 02] I read a lot of them this week don't know what's going on here in other words why does God speak to John and then say don't write it down don't tell anyone it could refer to any number of things but I think at the very least one of the things we can say it does mean at the very least it signifies that there are many things in God's plan which he has chosen not to reveal to us but instead to keep a mystery and that as a Christian our walk is a walk of faith you see sometimes as Christians we can think if we obey the rules we obey the ten commandments we go to church we tithe and we go to CG therefore we should be blessed you follow the recipe you do as God says and life works out perfectly and God says actually there's a lot of mysteries you see a Christian is not just somebody who follows the rules or follows the recipe a Christian is someone who's growing to love God and trust him and obey him even in the midst of the mysteries and the challenges of life a Christian is somebody isn't just somebody who does what God says and suddenly receives blessing in their life a Christian is someone who understands that God's ways are not our ways and we follow him and one of the dangers of the book of Revelation is to read too much into it you can read this symbol and say okay that's Donald Trump this thing here that's Boris Johnson this is the Apache helicopters therefore

Jesus is coming this week and John would say no no no there's a lot of mystery involved still there's things that God wants us not to know but to simply trust him by the way I wasn't going to say this but in chapter 9 you know there's all that stuff about the locusts and they've got teeth like lions and hair and all this strange stuff one commentator seriously said John is prophesying the Apache helicopter that is flying like locusts to swarm upon the earth that's not what John is saying John is talking about something else so the first thing is this how do we live in the midst of challenging times to realize that we live by faith not by recipes there's some things we don't understand the second thing is this and that leads to the second thing the way that Christians are called to live out our faith in the midst of the chaos and the calamity of the world is found actually in the beginning of chapter 8 in the beginning of chapter 8 we read it right in the beginning

John sees this angel in verses 3 and 4 and this angel is holding this golden bowl and in this golden bowl is incense that's burning and mixed up with the incense are the prayers of God's people in other words I don't know if you've ever walked into a room where there's incense burning and you can smell it straight away right what's he saying here as the incense rises to our nostrils and we can smell it straight away John is telling us that the prayers of God's people come before God's throne they come before God's throne but what's clear is that from scripture is that for some reason God's sovereign purposes in history are shaped by our prayers even when we can't see what's happening or how God is responding so what do we do in the midst of this time between the already and the not yet where Jesus has come but he's coming again in the midst of the challenges and we don't know how this world is going when there's mystery and we're unsure about what God's doing in the world what do we do we come before him in prayer

John writes us and he says our prayers come before God and just like incense is burnt and in the beginning you can see it but soon it disappears sometimes we can feel like our prayers disappear sometimes we pray these prayers before God and we say God are you even hearing where are you what's happened to our prayers do they just vanish into thin air and John is telling us that though we do not know what happens to our prayers you can rest assured that for some reason God in his sovereign plan has purposed that history is shaped by our prayers even when we can't see what's happening and so you know what that means for us Watermark it means we have to become a church that gets better at praying we have to pray because if we're going to make it through the challenges and the calamity and if we're going to make it through our faith being rocked if we're going to make it through the difficulties that we change we have to be a church that prays friends if Hong Kong if it's going to be in Hong Kong like it is in heaven it's not going to be through Watermark organizing these amazing programs and plans it's not going to be through some slick preacher or some amazing church service it's going to happen through the prayers of his people getting on their knees and crying out to God for the well-being of our city friends you know what Hong Kong's secret weapon is it's men and women all over the city getting on their knees and praying and praying and praying friends when we pray for the suffering church and we don't see direct immediate results when we pray for imprisoned Christians it'll be advance of the gospel and nations like we did this morning and we don't know how effective those prayers in this passage

John takes us through the door of heaven and he shows us it may just be that our prayers are somewhere in one of those bowls just waiting for the right time for God to tip it out and to say now is the day for me to answer your prayers Watermark we must become a church that gets better at praying but then there's one last third thing so the first thing is this we understand that life is a mystery we don't know how it all works second thing is we must get better at praying third thing how do we live in the midst of the challenges and the complexity of life what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus even as God allows these the chaos and the calamity to come we'll look at the end of chapter 10 with me this is the third and final thing here we see the most important thing that Jesus wants to say to us in this interlude what does it mean to be a Christian in this age what does it look like to follow Jesus between the cross and the throne of heaven chapter 10 and chapter 11 give us the clearest picture look at what John says here verse 8 then the voice that I'd heard from heaven spoke to me again saying go and 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 I told him to give me the scroll and he said to me take it and eat it will make your stomach bitter but your mouth will be as sweet as honey in your mouth so I took the scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it it was as sweet as honey in my mouth but when I'd eaten it my stomach was made bitter and I was told you must again prophesy about many peoples and nations languages and kings friends what it means to be a follower of Jesus even in the midst of challenging times is that we don't only receive [39 : 15] God's word and enjoy it ourselves but that we'll become agents and ambassadors of God's word into our city and the nations of the world look at what happens here John is given the scroll and the scroll contains the words of God and as he eats it it's beautiful he tastes it and it tastes like honey it's just the most incredibly good news but as he internalizes as he swallows it ah it becomes difficult it becomes challenging friends at first the gospel is the most wonderfully incredible news God loves us and he died on the cross for us Jesus covered our sins by his blood said you and I don't need to stand before him with our own sin where once we were outcasts now we are welcomed as his family where once we were enemies now we are sons and daughters of God no shame no guilt for those who are in Christ Jesus washes us by his blood and now we stand as white as snow the gospel is just incredible but as we believe it we soon come to see that the gospel doesn't only save us it also changes us and the gospel starts to confront us and it starts to challenge some of the idols in our heart and it starts to challenge some of our behavior and our character and the gospel not only saves us it starts to reform us and to make us more like Jesus as the gospel gets into us it challenges us to see the idols in our lives and it calls us to live a life of faith and repentance but then not only that as we grow in Christ and we become more like him we realize we are his ambassadors and he calls us to share the gospel to take it out to the nations of the world to take it out into the city and as we do that as we speak his word what happens we face persecution we are rejected and oppressed look at verse 11 he says when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter

I was told you must still speak God's word to many nations and peoples and languages and kings friends this is the reason watermark was planted nine years ago this is the reason watermark exists this is the reason we must plant more churches into Hong Kong and into other cities because the good news of Jesus cannot stay with us it must go out into our city and so John is telling us here that as chaos and calamity and difficulty comes to our city the worst thing that we can do is to bunker down and to sit back and to think let's just hope the chaos passes over so we can get back to our lives in the midst of the challenges that our city faces God says send the message out go and tell everyone wherever you can about the astoundingly wonderful good news of Jesus that he died on the cross for you and for me that in this life you will face challenges but take courage Christ has overcome that friends one day we will all face the final judgment of God but Jesus has died so that we can be washed of our sin friends this is why we exist friends this is why as you sit on the bus and you sit next to the same person day in and day out and you get to know them Christ has put you in that place to tell them about the wonder of Jesus friends as you go to work and you face challenges and your colleagues face challenges you've been put there to tell them about the wonder of Jesus that he loves them and he died on the cross for them friends as your kids go to school and they're overwhelmed by the pressure of grades and will they get into university we tell them that their life does not consist of their grades and how well they do but their life consists that they are in Christ and that he loves them and he died for them and he saved them and that his kingdom is coming John Jesus says to John

John you're going to proclaim his word you're going to speak the gospel and that's going to be hard and next week we're going to see in chapter 11 for some of us that may mean death friends for some of us here if you're obedient to Jesus and he calls you to speak his word he may send you into the nations of the world and that may mean a premature death for some of us it may feel like death as we face persecution and opposition for all of us it will mean our ego and our pride will have to die as we call people everywhere to faith in Christ and repentance from sin Tim Chester says it like this like the prophets of old the church proclaims the sweet words that are met with bitter hostility the message of the scroll is bittersweet for it is a message of victory through suffering all Christians know something of John's experience the message of Christ is so sweet to us but this sweetness is matched by pain when family and friends reject the message leaving a bitterness in our stomach you see in chapter 6 and 7 there are these seven scrolls and we saw how the church is an invisible kingdom

God's visible kingdom on earth it overcomes the challenge and the chaos of life it's protected but the message of chapter 10 and 11 is that the church doesn't only survive the church thrives and is victorious and overcomes the challenges of this world how not by hunkering down trying to preserve ourselves and save ourselves but by going out and proclaiming the message of the gospel friends our city faces the greatest challenge it has witnessed for many many years maybe even a couple of generations how are we going to respond are we going to sit back and hope that it passes over quickly so we can get back to our lives are we going to sharpen our arguments and get ready to fight and demonize those that disagree with us and tell them that they're bad and wrong friends this passage calls us to respond very differently to a more difficult way a more challenging way it calls us to examine our own lives and to see whether we've been walking in step with the gospel and to repent where we haven't where we haven't loved people particularly the poor where we haven't pursued mercy and justice like we should have friends this passage calls us to pray to pray to pray and to pray it calls us to be radical in our prayers and persistent in our prayers trusting God in our prayers even as we don't see the desired outcomes knowing that our prayers are not wasted but they come like incense before our

[46 : 12] God and in his perfect timing he will pour our prayers back upon the earth to bring healing and renewal of all things but finally this passage calls us not to shrink back from declaring the hope of the gospel that though we deserve to face God's judgment God in his mercy has come to us in the person of Jesus friends revelation calls us not only to take heed of the warnings but to go out with this message of salvation to all people to tell them about the wonder of Jesus that's the invitation to feast on this gospel message to internalize it and to go out with it friends on the night that before Jesus died on the cross he too was praying and he is praying in the garden of Gethsemane he's pouring out his prayers before his father and this is what he prays he says father if there is any way for this cup of suffering to be taken from me let it be so friends Jesus on that night that he prayed there was no mystery involved he knew exactly the outcome of his prayers and he knew that his prayer in that moment was not going to be answered

Jesus had and the father had the torment before the world was made how salvation was going to come it was going to come through him dying on the cross and as Jesus in the garden remember his sweat turns to blood through extreme anxiety and stress why does Jesus sweat turn to blood it's not because of his impending death Jesus wasn't scared of dying if that was the case then many martyrs handled death Jesus wasn't afraid of dying the reason is because he knew that the sins of the world were going to be put on his shoulders Jesus knew that not just the warning judgments the full and the final judgment of God for the sins of God's people was going to be put on his shoulders and he was going to bear it and Jesus in extreme anxiety his sweat turns to blood as he faces the prospect of the judgment of God friends Jesus did that so that you and I don't have to Jesus went to the cross that we don't have to bear the guilt of our sin and now Jesus does bring judgment upon the world but it's his calling us to come to him it's his calling it's his waking us up so that we turn from sin and we come to find hope and rest in him friends Jesus Christ out of his profound love for us went to the cross that you and I don't have to friends will you come to him will you make him central to all that you are and everything that you do will you accept his sacrifice and his sufferings but also his right to be Lord in your life let's do that now let's come to him in prayer let's pray Lord Jesus we do come before you Father we want to be followers of you followers of Jesus in the midst of the challenges and the calamities of life Father we don't only want to serve you and follow you when all is going well we want to be those that are faithful to you between the

cross and the throne in the already and the not yet

God as you are bringing your kingdom to earth God we want to follow you faithfully and we want to be those that are not only followers but agents of you in this world God I pray for watermark church and I pray for myself and I pray for all of us that Christ you will make us and fashion us and form us to the kind of church that you long for us to be that we will be a people of prayer that we will trust you even as we don't understand what's going on that we won't take our lives and matters into our own hands but God we will come before you trusting you Lord even in the mysteries of this world Father we pray that more than anything else we will be pray in your wonderful and powerful name Amen