

The Church's Victory Comes through Suffering

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[0 : 00] We're going to spend a few minutes in prayer, and so will you join me as we pray together? We're going to pray for ourselves and for our city. Let's come before our Father. Heavenly Father, loving Lord, sovereign God, merciful Christ, we come before you this morning, God, because we are so in need of you.

Lord, we sang that song earlier, but how long, God? And there's a part of our hearts that longs for that day, Christ, when sin and evil will be removed from our world.

We will be fully reconciled with you, God. God, our hearts cry out, come soon, Lord Jesus. Lord, this world is not a home, and we long for our home to be with you, Christ, again.

God, but thank you that while you've called us for the season, for this to be a home, for while we live in this world, God, you're so gracious. You're so merciful. God, thank you that while we go through trials and struggles, you, God, do not abandon us.

You're with us in the midst of it. You're such a faithful God. God, when we consider your many attributes, your holiness and your sovereignty, but also your mercy and your tenderness, your righteousness, Lord, but also your grace, God, your faithfulness to us, God.

[1 : 19] We are brought to our knees, and we cannot help but worship your great and glorious name. God, we come to lift our sights off of our circumstances around us and to worship you and to declare that you are God and there is no other.

And so we've come to do that this morning. God, we worship you not only for who you are, but also for what you've done in the gospel. Thank you, Christ, that we are saved by the blood of Jesus, not by silver or gold.

We're not saved by our own efforts, but simply through grace alone, God. We revel in your death on the cross, and we take great confidence in it. Thank you, Jesus, so much for your grace.

Thank you, Jesus, for going to the cross for us. We so love you, Lord. Christ, this morning we want to pray for the preaching of your word as we come to Revelation 11.

We pray, God, that you'll speak to us, God. We pray your word will come alive, God. As a church, we don't need to hear my opinions. We need to hear you speaking to us from your word. And so, God, as we come to your word, I pray it'll open up in our hearts, and you'll speak truth and confidence, God.

[2 : 27] You'll reassure us of the gospel, but also of your sovereignty. God, I pray let your word speak to us this morning, God. Comfort us and challenge us with your word. Father, this morning we want to pray for Amelia again.

And just hearing from her is so wonderful. Lord, we bring her work to the Hakka community in Taiwan before you. And, Father, this morning we want to ask that you will continue to pour out your amazing grace on her.

God, won't you strengthen her and encourage her, Father God, when at times it is lonely, at times she may feel isolated. I pray your spirit will draw near to her and she will know your presence and your love, God.

I pray, God, for increased friends and friendships, God, and deeper friendships. I pray for real sisters there that she can pour her heart to and share her life with, God. And, Father, as she goes into this internship in this local church in Taichung, God, we pray that you'll bless her work.

I pray she'll feel your smile upon her, God. We pray for Amelia and we ask for your blessing to rest upon her. God, we pray for Joanne in Japan who's just gone back this week.

[3 : 35] We pray that you strengthen her and her work in Japan amongst the Japanese people. God, thank you for these faithful women of God that have answered your call to the mission field.

And we pray that you strengthen them, Lord. Father, finally, we want to pray for our city. We want to pray for particularly the march that's planned for this afternoon. We thank you, God, for a relatively peaceful weekend.

And, Father, we pray for peace to reign this afternoon, God. God, we pray that there won't be violence. Pray that people will stay safe. Pray there won't be bloodshed, God.

We pray for peace this afternoon, God, in our city, Lord. Father, we pray for healing and wholeness to come to our city, God. We pray that we will hear your voice and see what you are doing and what you want to say to us.

Thank you, God, that how Hebrews says you are shaking the kingdoms of this world to show that your kingdom is unshakable. But, God, we do pray for our city. We pray for the police.

[4 : 36] We pray for our political leaders. We pray for protesters. And we pray for peace to be restored to our city, God. We pray these things in your wonderful and your powerful name.

Amen. Amen. Great. We're going to listen to Revelation chapter 11 being read to us by Betty and Jonas. So, come on up. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. The scripture reading comes from Revelation chapter 10 to 11. Please follow along in your bulletin or on the screen.

Then the voice that I 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 I told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, Take and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter.

[5 : 35] But in your mouth it will be sweet as honey. And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel, and I ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth.

But when I had eaten it, my stomach was made better. And I was told, You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff. And I was told, Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there. But do not measure the court outside the temple.

Leave that out. For it is given over to the nations. And they will trample the holy city for 42 months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses.

And they will prophesy for 1,260 days cloth and sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

[6 : 39] And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.

They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying. And they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they desire.

And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom in Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

For three and a half days, some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb.

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents. Because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

[7 : 47] But after the three and a half days, a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here.

And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to God of heaven.

The second woe has passed. Behold, the third woe is soon to come. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

And the twenty-four elders who sat on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants. The prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

[9 : 06] Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

This is the word of God. Amen. Okay. Great. Thank you so much, Betty and Jonas. If you are new to Watermark, we are working our way through the book of Revelation, and we are about halfway through.

We are in chapter 11 today of 21, 22 chapters. And you'll see, if you've got your Bible in front of you, the next chapter is called The Woman and the Dragon, which sounds very ominous.

We'll look at that in two weeks' time. Next Sunday, we have a visiting preacher, Ryuta, from Japan, from Tokyo. We'll be preaching, and we're looking forward to that. But we are working our way through Revelation, and the last two weeks have been quite challenging.

I have found it quite hard work as we've gone through chapters 6 to 10. And last week, we ended off at the end of chapter 10. And the way it ends off, Betty read it to us this morning, is that John, in his vision, in his revelation, God says to him, Go to the angel that you saw, and ask the angel for the scroll that's in his hand.

[10 : 26] And so John goes, and the angel gives him the scroll. The scroll contains God's words. And the angel says, I want you to eat the scroll. And as you eat it, it's going to be sweet at first, but then it's going to become bitter.

And so John goes, and exactly as the angel says, this is what happens. He, in his vision, eats the scroll. And it's sweet at first, and it soon becomes bitter in his mouth. And the angel tells him, this is because though God's gospel is sweet, as you speak out his words, you're going to get a bitter reaction.

And this is a reference to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, chapter 3, where the same thing happens. Ezekiel has a vision to eat the scroll. And in his vision, God tells him, Ezekiel, you are to speak my words out.

And some people will receive the message that you are bringing, and the reaction will be sweet. But some people will reject it, and the reaction will be bitter. But don't mind about people's reaction.

That's not your responsibility. Your job is to speak God's word out, whether they receive it or not.

And so the point that God gives to Ezekiel, and that God gives to John, and to the seven churches of Revelation, and the point that he gives to us, is that even though at times there's a bitter reaction to the proclaiming of the gospel, our job is to witness and evangelize, and we must do it nevertheless.

[11 : 51] Okay, so that's how chapter 10 ended. Now chapter 11, which we're going to look at today, picks up on this idea. And in it, Jesus is going to show John that despite opposition to the message of the gospel, Jesus is showing John how it is that the gospel is going to go forward in the earth, how it is that God's kingdom is going to come to the world, and how it is that God accomplishes his purposes in the earth.

Okay, so that's where we're going today in chapter 11. And so let's look at how it starts off. And the first thing is, God says this, His kingdom comes in the midst of great suffering and opposition to his kingdom.

Look at verse 1 to 3 with me. It says this, Then I was given a measuring rod, like a staff, and I was told, rise and measure the temple of God and those who worship there.

But do not measure the outside, the court outside the temple. Leave that out, for that is given over to the nations. They will trample the holy city for 42 months.

Okay? Now, there is so much in chapter 11 which is referencing two books in the Old Testament, the book of Ezekiel and the book of Zechariah. It's going to keep on coming up. In the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel also has this vision.

[13 : 10] And in his vision, he has a temple, and he sees a man measuring out this temple. And what happened is that just before Ezekiel's day, the Babylonians come, 605 BC, they overthrow Jerusalem, and they destroy the temple.

And Ezekiel has this vision of this new, grand, and glorious temple. This majestic temple in which God's presence is filled, and it fills the whole earth. Except Ezekiel's temple was never, ever built.

It was never accomplished. And the reason is because Ezekiel's vision was a prophetic picture that God was saying of this is one day what the church is going to look like.

This is the temple that my Christ is going to build. Not a temple made with bricks and concrete and stones. It's a temple made with people. The church is the new temple.

But just outside the temple, there is this court. And John describes this outer court. And in it, he says there is chaos. The nations, that's those that oppose Christ, they are trampling this temple.

[14:13] They are destroying it. They're trying to overthrow it. There's absolute chaos happening outside as they try and destroy the church, God's people. And John says that this is allowed to happen for 42 months.

Now, what on earth is 42 months? 42 months makes up three and a half years. Now, remember in the book of Revelation, there's this number that keeps on appearing.

The number? Seven, right? And the number seven in the book of, or in the Bible, but especially in the book of Revelation, is the number of completeness, of fullness. In other words, when something happens seven times, God is telling us that this action is completed.

Three and a half years is half of seven, which means that it's a limited period of time. God is saying for a shortened period of time, not for the whole of history, for a limited period of time, that I'm allowing, I will allow the nations, those that oppose me and my kingdom, to trample on my kingdom and to oppose my church and my purposes and the gospel going out in the nations.

For a period of time, those that oppose me will be allowed to inflict difficulty on the kingdom of God on earth. And so, that's what God's saying.

[15:29] Now, the key question for those of us that are believers, and if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian, we're so glad you're here. You're so welcome. It's great to have you with us.

But the question this passage asks for those of us that are Christians is this. When opposition and persecution comes our way, when following Jesus costs you dearly and you're reviled or rejected for it, what should you do?

How should we respond? You see, for the Christians in the first century, being a follower of Jesus meant, at the very least, that they would be ostracized and kicked out from community.

You'd go to the marketplace and you wouldn't worship the emperor, and so you'd be cut off from business deals. You'd be on the outskirts of society. You wouldn't be in the in crowd. As people are making business deals and arrangements and inviting people to social gatherings, you would kind of be at the bottom of the list, at the very least.

But at worst case scenario, being a Christian in the first century meant being thrown to the lions or maybe being left to rot in some jail cell at the bottom of some building.

[16:35] And so how should these Christians in first century Roman Empire respond? Friends, how should you and I respond? Well, look at verse 3 with me.

Look at what happens here. God says that during this time, for 1,260 days, which is the equivalent to 42 months, which is the equivalent to three and a half years, for this same time period, this limited period that God is allowing this to happen, rather than retreating into self-preservation, rather than thinking how to avoid suffering, Jesus sends his witnesses out to bear witness to the fact that Jesus is Lord.

Look at what verse 3 says. I will grant authority to my two witnesses, says Christ, and they will prophesy, that means they will speak my word, for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.

And so the first thing is, how does God accomplish his purposes? How does the gospel go forward in the world? It goes forward in the midst of suffering and opposition and persecution. But that leads us to the second thing, which is this.

God's kingdom comes through Christian witness. You see, these two witnesses, why are they clothed in sackcloth? The answer is not because they're poor and they couldn't afford any other clothes.

[17:55] The reason is because in the Old Testament, when someone wore sackcloth, it was a symbol of calling people to repentance. It was a way of saying, Christ is Lord, and come back from rejecting him.

And so while the church is being opposed because of their faithfulness to Jesus, God, at that very same time, he says, this is the time for his witnesses to speak out and to let the world know that Caesar is not Lord, Rome is not Lord, the systems of this world are not Lord, Christ is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. Let the hope and the peace and the freedom that people are looking for and longing for is not found in the systems of this world. It's found in the person of Jesus. That was their message.

And friends, that's still the message of the church today. See, again, if you're new to church here this morning, you may be surprised to hear that the message of the church is not primarily how to make your life more comfortable or convenient or better.

That's not why Jesus came to earth. Now, following Jesus will sometimes make your life better. Sometimes it'll make it more inconvenient. But that's not the primary message of the gospel.

[19 : 08] The message of the church is not simply how to be a good citizen in society, although Christians should be good citizens in society. We should pursue peace and well-being. Friends, if you're new to church, you may be surprised to hear the goal of the church is not to make people feel better about themselves or improve themselves.

Though if you believe the gospel, it does help you in the way that you think about yourself. Though, friends, the message of the church and the message of the gospel is that all people, Asians, Westerners, black, white, rich, poor, all people everywhere are under the consequences of our sin and that salvation and peace are found in no other source, no other solution other than coming to Christ and surrendering our lives to Him.

This is the message of the church. And this is the message that the witnesses in verse 3 are given. Now, here's the question. Who are these two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11?

Well, on the one hand, they are a picture John has at the back of his mind. He has these two great witnesses in the Old Testament that spoke up for the glory of God and the cause of Christ. He's thinking of Moses and he's thinking of Elijah. Remember, both Elijah and Moses stood firm in their testimony that God is God rather than the powers of their day, even in the face of great opposition.

[20 : 32] Remember, Moses stood up to Pharaoh, that pagan king of Egypt, and he demonstrated God's power through various plagues. Elijah stood up to Ahab, that wicked king of Israel, and he demonstrated God's power through amazing prayer.

But at the same time, both Elijah and Moses face incredible opposition and persecution for their stand. Both of them at one point decide to run away and save themselves because the opposition is so fierce that they are convinced they're going to be killed by those that they are witnessing to. And yet both of them find that in the face of opposition, God is with them and empowering them for the task that he's called them to. And in this way, they are models for what all Christians should be. But then on the other hand, John here is writing, and he's thinking not just of these two, he's actually picturing all Christians everywhere throughout the ages. You see, we may think these two witnesses refer to Tim Keller and Billy Graham, right?

The two great heroes of our age. Or John Piper, Ravi Zacharias. They're going to come and save the church. Or maybe we think they refer to the two missionaries, Joanne and Amelia.

[21 : 46] They're going to go out and take the gospel to Asia. Or maybe you think they refer to the pastors and the preachers. But look at verse 4. Look at what he says here.

He calls them to lampstands. Now in the book of Revelation, what do lampstands always refer to? They refer to churches. That's right. They're like the church in Smyrna, or the church in Ephesus, or the church in Laodicea, or Philadelphia, or that church in Ebenezer.

You see, the lampstands, which are the witnesses, are local congregations of God's people gathered that declare the wonder of God. In other words, friends, the kingdom of God advances or goes forward through the witnesses, not of celebrity preachers and pastors, but through everyday witness of ordinary Christians like you and I in our places of work, in our schools, in our universities, in our neighborhoods, as we seek to follow Jesus and advance His cause.

J.D. Greer, who leads the church in the U.S., he asks a challenging question. He says this, what if we made our primary consideration when pursuing a career, where we can most effectively be used in the mission of God?

Lots of factors go into where we choose to pursue our career, where the money's good, where our families live, where we want to live. These are all valid. They're not bad things. But why wouldn't the advance of God's kingdom be the largest factor?

[23 : 12] You see what he's saying? The gospel goes forward, not just through celebrity leaders and pastors and mega Christians, it's actually through the faithful witness of ordinary Christians in their ordinary places in the cities in which God calls them.

But then we see a twist. We see a surprising twist. And that's not that not only the kingdom of God comes out through our witness, not only does the kingdom of God go in the midst of suffering and opposition, but actually the kingdom of God advances, God establishes his kingdom, and the gospel goes forward, not just despite our suffering, but because of our suffering.

In other words, the gospel advances not just in spite of opposition, but through opposition that the church encounters. Look at verse 7 with me.

Look at what he says here. When they, that's these two witnesses, when the churches, God's people, had finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit, okay, that means satanic forces.

We're going to talk about that in the next few weeks. The beast will make war on them, and will conquer them, and will kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the streets of that great city.

[24 : 26] For three and a half days, that's that limited time period again, some of the peoples and the tribes and the languages and the nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb.

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them. They will clink glasses and say cheers and raise a toast to one another, exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

I don't know if you remember, in Luke's gospel, Jesus is betrayed by Judas. He's arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, and he's put on trial, this mock trial throughout the night.

And in the morning, the religious leaders want Jesus to be crucified, but they don't have the authority to put anyone to death in the Roman Empire. And so they take Jesus to Pilate, and they say, Pilate, this man is causing an uproar, we better get rid of him before he causes you any more problems.

And so Pilate questions Jesus, and Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent. But he doesn't want to let Jesus go, because that's going to ruin his political career. And so Pilate's kind of like, not sure what to do.

[25 : 37] Pilate hears that Herod is in town. And so he sends Jesus to Herod, and says, Herod, here's this man, I don't know what to do, what do you think we should do? So Herod interviews him, and Herod comes back and says, no, I think we should kill him.

And so Pilate says, okay, fine, sentence him to death, and Jesus is sent off to be crucified. And at the end of Luke 23, there's this amazing line, and it says, that day, Herod and Pilate became friends, because up until this point, they were enemies.

See what's happened there? Here are two people that previously had nothing in common. They actually didn't get on at all. But they find some kind of commonality. They find that they are unified. What brings them together is their mutual dislike for their opposition, and for Jesus, who's causing an uproar. That's exactly what John is saying is happening here. Here in the streets, those that oppose the gospel and the cause of Christ, they persecute Christians, and they're celebrating, and they're exchanging presents, and they're toasting, and high-fiving one another.

Yeah, we got rid of those that have tormented us and caused us such problems. And the reason for this, because the church, those who hold that life and salvation are found in nothing except Jesus and His sacrifice, not Caesar, not Rome, not politics or wealth, those that hold that Christ alone is worthy of worship are considered a threat.

[27 : 03] They're viewed as some kind of plague that must be exterminated for the well-being of society. And yet, this is all part of God's sovereign plan to bring His kingdom to earth, to establish His kingdom and His glory.

And we see this because throughout the book of Revelation, the word witness and the word martyr are almost used interchangeably. Wherever there's a witness for Jesus, they end up being martyred, and whenever there's a martyr, it's because they were witnesses for Jesus.

Tim Chester says it like this, the church is persecuted, Christians are martyred, and at times the cause of Christ seems defeated, but the church survives and comes back with renewed strength, and the cause of Christ continues in history.

Again and again, throughout history, regimes have risen, and it's looked as if they would wipe out the church, but those regimes have gone, and the church has come through persecution strong.

It has been victorious through suffering. And so the point that John is making is that the God-given, God-protected calling of the people of God is to bear witness to Jesus, but that does not mean we'll be spared from suffering or death, but rather that the suffering itself, just like the Jesus that we

follow, will be the ultimate prophetic sign to the world that God's kingdom has come, that He's establishing His kingdom, and ultimately, the nations will glorify Him.

[28 : 33] 150 years after the book of Revelation is written, this early church father called Tertullian famously said this. He said, the blood of the martyrs is the seedbed for the gospel to go forward.

It's the blood of the martyrs that's the seedbed for the gospel to go forward. In other words, he's saying it's as Christians suffer opposition that the gospel flourishes, doesn't retreat.

I shared the story a few weeks ago prematurely, so I'll share it again properly. 1555, okay, so almost 500 years ago, in the city of Oxford in London, these two bishops are being arrested and killed, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley.

And the reason is because they are telling the Queen of England, Queen Mary, that she needs to repent and come to faith in Jesus. And she doesn't like being told that. So she has them arrested and thrown in jail and eventually she decides that they're going to be burnt at the stake.

And so, one October day in Oxford, these two bishops are taken to Town Square and they are tied to the stake and there is hay put around their feet.

[29 : 43] There's a bag of gunpowder put around their necks and hanging there so that as the flames come up, it's going to catch the gunpowder and explode in their faces. And while this is happening, the younger of these two called Nicholas Ridley is a little bit nervous.

You can see he's a bit fearful. And so Hugh Latimer, who's this older, wiser saint, he turns to Nicholas Ridley and he says this, Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, for we shall this day light such a candle in England as I pray by God's grace will never be put out.

You see what he's saying there? He's saying, they think that they've got us because they're killing us but they don't know that we've got them. They don't know that actually by killing us they think they're going to quieten the gospel.

This is going to propagate the gospel. They think they're going to quieten the church. This is going to send the message of the gospel out even further. Be of good cheer, Master Ridley. This day we shall light a candle by God's grace that shall never be put out.

And so this week I heard the story on Friday night of the Korean revival. I'm sure some of you will know this. May you know it better than me. 1865, this young Welsh man, Robert Thomas, is that right?

[31 : 03] He's a missionary to China but he's got a heart for Korea. He goes down to Korea and he walks amongst North Korea, Pongyang, for two months learning everything he can. He then goes back to China but he's desperate to go to Korea.

And so he joins this French naval trading ship that's going to go to Korea. But halfway along the trip the French vessel decides not to go to Korea to go to Vietnam. So he abandons that ship and joins another American trading ship that's on its way to Korea.

But this trading ship is causing a few problems as it gets to Korea. This Robert Thomas decides to join as he wants to get to Korea to be a missionary but he goes as a translator on the ship.

And as the ship comes towards Pongyang it's sailing up the river there's a whole lot of opposition and they are eventually attacked. But Robert Thomas takes his Bibles and he throws them onto the banks of the river to try and at least get these Bibles out there.

But before he can even get onto the banks there's this fight and this war and they are all killed on the ship. And so Robert Thomas never goes back to Korea. He went previously the year before for two months but on this trip he never even sets foot on the banks of Korea.

[32 : 17] All he does is he throws his Bibles ashore. But there's a general that takes these Bibles because he wants to put wallpaper on the house where he lives.

And so he takes these Bibles and he tears the pages out and he casts them as wallpaper on his house. And the people start to read the words in the Bible and they start to realize that Jesus is Christ.

And this revival breaks out and within 15 years there are 100 churches planted in Pongyang. It's this Christian center in North Korea. But Robert Thomas paid with his life.

Friends, it's the blood of the martyrs that is the seed bed for the gospel to go forward. And that brings us to the fourth and the final point that is God's kingdom comes with spiritual life.

Because the kingdom of God doesn't only come despite suffering. It doesn't only come through suffering. It comes when God by his sovereign will implants spiritual life into his people and into a society.

[33 : 20] Look at verse 11 with me here. It says this in verse 11. These witnesses, God's people, they've been fought against, they've been killed because of their testimony, they've been left for dead like trash on the street.

Those that have killed them have celebrated their great victory because they killed them and they've destroyed the church. But then verse 11 says this, after three and a half days, that's that limited time period again, a breath of life from God entered them and they stood up on their feet and great fear fell on all those who saw them.

Though they are killed for their witness, they do not stay dead but rather their death leads to life. And the point that Jesus is making here is not simply that you may suffer but don't worry it all ends alright in the end.

The point that Jesus is making is though things may be difficult, it's okay, there's a happy ending at the end of the day. The point is that the life of the Christian follows the life of Jesus which is that the road to glory, the road to life passes through Mount Calvary.

You see that? Remember Jesus went through Calvary to get to resurrection life. Friends, the pattern of the Christian is the pattern of Jesus that it's death that leads to life.

[34 : 40] You see a Christian is not just someone who believes that Jesus is God that's good you do need to believe that but even the devil knows that Jesus is God and the devil is not a Christian in case you thought he might be.

No, a Christian is someone who follows Jesus who has come to trust in him and obey him and love him and follow him and imitate him and that means the pattern of Jesus' life is the pattern of our life as well.

Remember Jesus said if anyone wants to follow me let him pick up his cross daily. Friends, a Christian is someone who is daily learning what it means to follow Jesus by forfeiting our own life for the sake of his glory but the irony is in that place as we lay down our lives actually we find life and that's the great promise of the gospel and we see it here in Revelation that ultimately both spiritually speaking and from the perspective of heaven in God's economy it's through dying that actually we find life.

It's through dying that the church comes alive. It's through suffering persecution opposition that the church flourishes. Again, Tim Chester says it like this Jesus is showing his church that God's people die and yet live.

In fact, life comes through death because we are united to Christ our lives are shaped by his death and resurrection. His death and resurrection are not just the means of our salvation they are also the pattern of the Christian life.

[36 : 05] Whenever you see people receiving spiritual life whenever you see a living healthy vibrant church you can be sure that behind the scenes someone is dying dying to self or suffering some kind of hardship.

And friends, that's the great paradox of the Christian life that the more you try and hold on to your life and preserve your life the more you try and maintain your status and your honor and your comfort and your name the more you end up losing it.

But paradoxically the more you're willing to give up those things for the sake of Christ actually you find that you gain life and you find you gain Christ as well. And that's true for the individual and it's true for the church as well.

Be of good cheer Master Ridley we shall this day light a candle that I pray by God's grace will never ever be put out. And you see friends this is because this life this vitality that's given to the churches is not a result of human ingenuity or human leadership.

Look at what it says in verse 11. After this limited time period it says a breath of life from God entered them. Well I mentioned this earlier how chapter 11 is full of these references to Ezekiel and Zechariah.

[37 : 20] The first century church as they read that line they immediately would have remembered a very similar line. You see in Ezekiel 36 Ezekiel has this vision and in this vision he sees this valley full of dead dry bones.

This valley that's just full of these dry bones there's no life in there. And in this vision God comes to him and says Ezekiel can these bones live? And Ezekiel says I don't know God you alone know. Humanly speaking no but with you who knows right? And so God says Ezekiel speak my words to these dry bones. And so Ezekiel does he speaks God's word and as he does the bones start to

rattle flesh and muscle and sinew start to form and these bones start to become human bodies. And then God says Ezekiel speak again. And he speaks God's word and it says the breath of God entered these bones these bodies and they stood up on their feet like a great army. Well that's exactly what Revelation said. As the breath of life came into them they stood up on their feet like a great army. Except in the Hebrew Bible the word for breath pneuma from where we get the word I've forgotten where we get that word.

[38 : 37] Pneumatic what's that sickness when you pneumonia there we go thank you doctor all the doctors in the back left corner there where we get the word pneumonia the word for breath in Hebrew pneuma is the same as the word for God's spirit.

And so as the breath of God comes into these bones God's spirit comes into these bones and they come alive. In other words what God is saying is that revival happens by a sovereign move of his Holy Spirit.

it's not the work of human ingenuity. You can't you can't grow church or establish God's kingdom on earth just by doing things well and putting on a good show. It's the spirit of God that breathes into dead souls and gives them life again.

But that's also a reference to Zechariah chapter 4 because in Zechariah chapter 4 Zechariah has a vision and in this vision he sees two olive trees that are like two lampstands and they are guarding the temple.

And Zechariah says God how are they going to do it? How are they going to guard your temple? And God says this is how they are going to do it. Not by might not by power but by my spirit says the Lord by my breath by my pneuma.

[39 : 52] And so friends the point that Jesus is making is that the church is victorious. The kingdom of God will advance. The gospel will go out. It doesn't merely survive. It doesn't merely just make it through.

The kingdom of God will survive and will advance and will thrive because though it once was dead God breathes his spirit and life into it because the church is fundamentally a spiritual organism. It's not just a group of people that are trying to do life together. And that's why the church is so precious because it's his temple and it's his presence that's in here. But it's also why the church will stand.

Friends the future of the church doesn't depend on me. That's good news. It doesn't depend on you. It depends on Christ who is the head of his church and he will stand. Friends the church will stand and will never become overcome.

Individual Christians will mess up and make mistakes. Churches will make mistakes. Pastors and preachers do dumb things. We lose our way for sure. But the church God's witness on earth will stand throughout the ages no matter what the opposition if if we maintain our witness.

[41 : 01] If we speak his word. Friends the great irony of the church is that the more we try and save ourselves from persecution the more we end up dying away. And yet the more we embrace opposition and suffering for the cause of Christ the more the church flourishes.

And so look finally as we come to a close and what is the consequence of this? How does this all end? Well look at verse 13 with me. It says there are these dramatic events at the end of that hour a bunch of people some people reject God 7,000 are killed in this earthquake.

It's a small number but then it says the rest were terrified that means they were humbled and they gave glory to the God of heaven. See at the end of chapter 9 there's all these dramatic events. Remember in chapter 9 there's earthquakes and there's calamity and there's disaster and there's chaos and there's all these strange things that are happening and it says but the people did not repent. They don't turn from their idols.

But yeah they do repent. So what's the difference between chapter 9 and chapter 11? The difference is that God's church is a faithful witness. Friends how is revival going to come to Hong Kong?

[42 : 16] It's not just through doom and disaster and calamity. It's through the witness of his people through his church. It's through faithful followers of Jesus witnessing to the point of death that will bring the nations to repentance.

And so what does that mean? It means three things for us. Firstly it means this that Hong Kong needs hundreds and hundreds of more churches faithfully proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Friends it means we need more leaders. We need more elders and pastors. We need more worship leaders. We need more CG leaders. We need more university ministry leaders. We need kids ministry leaders.

We need men and women that will take someone under their wing and read the Bible with them and disciple them. Friends our city is desperate for hope and the hope of the city is in the witnesses of God God's church standing and proclaiming that Christ is Lord.

Secondly it means this it means that if you're not a Christian Jesus is calling you to follow him today. Friends if you're here this morning and you're not yet a follower of Jesus today is the day that he's calling you to come and follow him.

[43 : 24] Friends Jesus is not inviting you to himself so that he can simply improve your life or make your life more comfortable and convenient. Jesus says that if you follow him it will be inconvenient. He may even ask you to die for your faith.

Jesus may even send you as a missionary to some foreign land where it will cost you your life.

Friends following Jesus will cost you daily and dearly. Jesus is not asking you to add a little bit of Jesus to your life to your already busy life.

Jesus is calling you to lay down your life to follow him to the cross to make him your first priority in your life. Jesus is calling you today to pick up your cross and to follow him.

Friends if you don't know him today is the day to change that. Come to Jesus. And then thirdly it means this it means if you are a follower of Jesus he's calling you to be a faithful witness in the city at this time.

Friends chances are that will mean opposition and persecution. Chances are you'll be misunderstood. Chances are you'll be accused of being bigoted and hypocritical. Chances are it will cost you dearly if not financially then probably your reputation certainly your pride and your ego.

[44 : 33] But he's also promising you this that in that place while it feels like you're dying a thousand deaths that death will lead to life. He promises you that though you die you will be raised he will give you life both in this lifetime and in the life to come.

Friends Jesus calling us to follow him with everything we have. Will we do it? Let's come to him in prayer now. Let's do that together. Lord Jesus we come before you and we thank you God that you are such a magnificent and faithful God.

Christ in our day and age we don't like the idea or let me put it this way Father in our day and age we feel entitled to a comfortable and a convenient life.

And God when things don't go our way we so easily feel sorry for ourselves we feel victims of some agenda against us. God you cut against the grain and you promise us that in this life we will have trouble that following Jesus following you God means that we are inviting difficulty into our lives.

But God you promise that that death will lead to life. Father pray for those of us God that maybe feel spiritually stagnant we feel spiritually dry.

[46 : 01] Father won't you in your grace and your mercy won't you bring us to the end of ourselves that we may find true life again. God God I pray Father where we've tried to hold on to our lives and I pray God that you will intervene and intercede that God you will cause us to die to ourselves that we may find true life in you Lord.

And God I pray for Watermark and I pray for every church in Hong Kong I pray for the English churches and the Chinese churches I pray God that we will be faithful witnesses to our city I pray God that the kingdom of God will come to Hong Kong I pray that the gospel will advance God I pray Lord that your kingdom will come God because your church does not shrink back in the face of opposition but that will stand Lord make us a faithful witness we pray we pray these things in your wonderful and your powerful name Amen