

Hurstbourne Baptist Church, February 7, 2021
Sermon Notes and Quotes: Revelation 11
“Suffering, But Sealed”

1. God Protects His People.

- “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’ (Revelation 11:1).
- “All three descriptions refer to the people of God, so that the temple and the altar refer to those who worship God. Believers are called a ‘temple’ because they are the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:6; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16), and indeed in Revelation 21:1-22:5 (cf. also Rev. 7:15) the whole universe is portrayed as God’s dwelling place. The worshipers are individuals of God’s people—they are God’s temple. They are also designated in terms of the altar, for their lives are devoted to and surrendered to God. To say that the temple, altar and worshipers are measured is to say that God protects and watches over his people—they are under his care, his lordship, and his sovereign oversight” (Schreiner, Revelation, 647).
- “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).
- It is so important for God’s children to receive these promises. Christ has purchased benefits for us by His blood: 1) Assurance of God’s Love, 2) Joy in the Holy Spirit, 3) Peace of Conscience, 4) Preservation by His Grace. Christians must make diligent use of these benefits.

2. Faithful Christians often experience suffering.

- This is not a contradiction of the first point. The first point only strengthens our resolve for days of suffering.
- “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 forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth” (Revelation 11:2).
- Some of you who have studied these passages will recognize and hear a reference to Daniel 7:25. According to Daniel, the people of God will be “worn out” for 3.5 years by unbelievers who “change the times and change the law, and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” In Revelation 11, John refers to “forty-two months” and to “1,260 days.” These figures equal 3.5 years. Some people read this and think that it still refers only to future events. I think this period of suffering refers to the present day sufferings of Christ’s church.
- This is a tough message for American Christians to hear. Because we prize religious liberty as Americans, and we have enjoyed many years of peace and comfort. But those days are changing. I know this is a heartbreaking message for many to hear, especially some of our senior saints. But pastorally, I feel a sense of urgency to prepare Christians to suffer well.
- How do Christians prepare for difficult days? Build a bunker? Stockpile money and toilet paper and guns? No. The way that Christians prepare for difficult days is by being deeply rooted and grounded in God’s Truth. It’s called doctrine. Pastorally, I don’t want to serve you fluffy little comforts, when you can have weighty doctrinal comforts rooted in the Gospel.

3. Christians are called to be witnesses of God’s Truth/God’s Gospel.

- And this leads us to that controversial question of, “Who are the ‘two witnesses’ of Revelation 11:3-14?”
 - Some say Moses and Elijah.
 - Some say Enoch and Elijah.

- I believe that the two witnesses represent the church of Jesus Christ. They represent the people of God who faithfully proclaim the truth of God by the power of the Spirit of God.
- “The two witnesses, i.e., the church of Jesus Christ, are also described as two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth. John here picks up on Zechariah 4, where Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel are identified as two olive trees (Zech. 4:3, 11, 12). The parallel to Zechariah 4:14 is also evident, for Joshua and Zerubbabel are identified as the ‘two anointed one who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.’ Zerubbabel and Joshua were king and priest, and so by speaking of the two anointed ones and the two olive trees, John refers to the church as a kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). As priests and kings, they mediate the God’s blessing and gracious rule over the world. Kings and priests were anointed by the Spirit (Ex. 28:41; 29:7; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:12-13), and the anointed here suggests the church, as a kingdom of priests, is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Significantly, the oil of the olives fills the lampstand so that it can yield its light (Zech. 4:11-12, suggesting the oil is the power of the Spirit enabling the two witnesses to prophesy by speaking forth the Word of the Lord (Zech. 4:6). The church is God’s lampstand, shining forth to the world in both word and deed (Matt. 5:16)” (Schreiner, *Revelation*, 651).
- Application: Church family, when is the last time you pondered how important it is to share the Gospel? I’m not sitting around waiting for Zerubbabel and Joshua to come do this for us. That ministry of the prophets belongs to us as faithful witnesses to Christ. I think the part that hangs people up is the fact that these two witnesses seem to possess so much power and so much authority when they speak. And the imagery of Revelation 11 certainly conveys this. So often we think, “Well surely that’s not us, right?” I mean, “Who am I to judge anybody? I’m not the Christ. I’m not Paul.” We don’t have that kind of authority, do we? No, we do not have the authority in ourselves. **But there is power and authority in the Word of The Gospel. The Spirit is active in our witness. We share the Gospel, and we tell people the truth about God’s judgment on this world and against sin. We speak to people about grace in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And when we do, that Word is authoritative because it is God’s Word and God’s Truth and God’s Gospel.**
- The world may hate our message. They may (and will) hate the Gospel. Consider Revelation 11:10. How does the world feel when the two witnesses die? They don’t mourn! Quite the contrary. They “rejoice; they make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets” are dead (Revelation 11:10). Jesus told his disciples that this would happen: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:18-20).
- I know this is a hard message for America Christians to hear, because we are used to being honored. But I hope you can see that that is quickly changing. The culture is withdrawing from Christianity. And Christians will soon be the oppressed ones.
- Let me pause right here and share with you three specific encouragements.
 - First, when I think about the young folks that are part of our church family, they’re not here because it gives them a political platform or a leg up in the job market. That aspect of cultural Christianity is nearly dead. When you have someone in their 20s and 30s show up at a church, it is most likely because the Lord is working in their hearts. I’m sharing this encouragement especially with our senior saints, because I know it can be discouraging to you when I start talking about the rise of secularism and Christian suffering. But I hope you are encouraged in Christ when you see the young folks that the Lord has gathered here! They’re not coming to church simply because it is the “right thing to do on Sunday.” They’re here because they WANT to be here, worshipping the Lord, fellowshiping with

other Christians who love Jesus, and sitting under His Word. They're not afraid of the hard conversation. And they love you.

- Second, to our young folks, I just want you to know that you are such a special part of what God is doing at HBC. I hear so many horror stories in churches where the senior saints are annoyed by the younger folks and the younger folks just want to separate from the senior saints. Not here. Our senior saints love our young folks, and our young folks love our senior saints. If that resonates with you, then I want you to take the opportunity to write a note this week and share that encouragement with one another.
- Third encouragement for you: we are committed to outreach. We will bold and unafraid during these days of fear and persecution. I am so thankful for the reports that the pastors gave last Sunday night: the vision for outreach in 2021, the prayer walking, the camps and VBS, the support for our overseas missionaries, "The Gospel to Every Home initiative," Trevor's vision to tie all of that together with our Advent devotionals and our Christmas programs. And don't lose sight of this, we have the promises of God. We possess the promises of God as our inheritance: Matthew 28:19-20, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**"

4. Christians will be persecuted, but they will also be triumphant.

- Revelation 11:12, "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."
- This is resurrection and triumph. It is vindication for those who have suffered in the name of Jesus Christ. Right now, the church does not live in final glory and final triumph. Right now, we live under the cross. And the cross is our message.
- But the longing of all Christians is this final hope: "We give thanks to you Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign" (Rev. 11:17).

Closing Illustration: John Paton, Missionary to New Hebrides (i.e., Vanuatu)

- As Paton prepared to leave Britain as a missionary, several well-meaning people tried to dissuade him from the mission fear. One Christian gentleman named Mr. Dickson said to Paton: "The Cannibals, You will be eaten by Cannibals!"
- Paton writes, "At last I replied, 'Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms. In the Great Day of the Lord, my resurrection body will arise as fair as your in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.'"
- Church family, this is the source of our hope and confidence: the tomb is empty; the resurrection is real; Jesus is alive. Let us speak His name boldly.