

Revelation 10

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[0 : 00] Imagine you're on holiday and are invited to try out one of the local delicacies.

The unknown fair is offered to you with these words of invitation. Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.

And then you're handed whatever it is. What do you do? I think I'd steer clear. The honey part seems okay, but a sour stomach is best avoided while on holiday, or indeed at any other time for that matter.

As you'll have recognized, these are the words that the angel, or that the voice rather from heaven, directs to John in his vision.

Well, indeed the angel himself directs those words to John. There in verse 9. So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, the angel said to me, take it and eat it.

[1 : 06] It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey. What are we to make of this invitation that is made to John?

Perhaps more than an invitation, an instruction that is given to John. And what are we to make of the scene within which this invitation is found? Before we try and answer that question, we need to step back and work out where we are within the unveiling of the broader vision contained within the whole book of Revelation.

Do you remember back in chapter 5 we encountered another scroll? Here in chapter 10 we read of a little scroll. In chapter 5 we've already encountered a scroll.

The scroll with seven seals. And in the vision six of the seven seals were opened. We have that recorded in chapters 5 and 6.

And the opening of those six seals in their totality revealed something of the judgments on God's enemies and the trials for God's people that characterize the last days.

[2 : 19] An expression that we are understanding to encompass the period between the first and second coming of Jesus. Then between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, who were still back with the scroll and the seven seals, there was an interlude.

So in chapters 5 and 6 we have all that is described about the opening of the first six seals. And then there's an interlude before the seventh seal is opened. And that's recorded in chapter 7.

And in chapter 7 you have an answer given to a question that was posed at the end of chapter 6.

We can just turn back to the end of chapter 6 and we have this question, who can stand?

Speaking about God's judgment and in the face of judgment, who can stand? Who can stand? And in that chapter 7, that interlude before the seventh seal is opened, you have an answer given to that question, who can stand?

We discover that those who can stand are God's people, those who have washed their robes and made them clean in the blood of the Lamb. Now I mention all that because we now see a similar pattern repeated with the seven trumpets.

[3 : 37] In chapters 8 and 9, which we were considering three Sundays ago, the first six of the seven trumpets are sounded. And then there is another interlude before the seventh trumpet will be sounded as recorded in verse 15 of chapter 11.

Notice there in chapter 11, the section is entitled the seventh trumpet. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet. And then there follows what occurred accompanying the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

But before that, you have chapter 10 and most of chapter 11, this, let's call it an interlude. And during this interlude, there is also an answer given to another question.

Previously, chapter 7 had given an answer to the question, who can stand? Well, now chapters 10 and 11 answer another question, a question that isn't stated explicitly in the text, but that it is

nevertheless a very important question that requires an answer.

And the question is this, what are we to do? And that's a very broad and general question. So a little more specifically, what are we to do as believers during this time of temporal judgment and trial before the final trumpet is sounded and Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead and to wonderfully usher in the new heavens and the new earth?

[5 : 04] What are we to do? What are we to do now? How are we to occupy ourselves as we await the sounding of the seventh trumpet and all the events that will accompany the sounding of the seventh trumpet?

Now, before we try and answer the question, it's important to make one point about the chronology or order of events. The interlude between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets is not to be understood as describing a period of time subsequent to the sixth and prior to the seventh trumpet.

Now, for literary purposes, the interlude is located in the unveiling of the vision between the sounding of the sixth and the seventh trumpet, but it deals with the message that we find that we're given in the interlude, it deals with the mission of the church, of God's people throughout the period, covered by the sounding of the six trumpets, and prior to the sounding of the seventh trumpet that will announce the coming of Jesus, the period that the New Testament calls the last days, that we sometimes speak of as the gospel age, the age in which we live.

Well, are you still with me? I hope so. Back to the sweet and sour scroll, and the manner in which this vision answers the question, what are we to do?

What are we to do? God tells His people what we are to do by means of a message that He delivers to John. In some senses, in chapter 10, it's very clear that this message is for John, and in the first instance, it is for John, and we acknowledge that, but it is also by extension a message for us.

[6 : 59] The little scroll is or contains that message, but there's also, as we'll see in a moment, a spoken message delivered by the angel. Let me set out how I intend to help us hear and respond to the message that answers the question, what are we to do?

So perhaps if you just have that question very much to the forefront of your mind, what are we to do? And what I want is that at the close of the sermon, we be better informed as to what we are to do.

We may not understand all the details of chapter 10, but hopefully we will have an answer to that question, what are we to do? What are you to do tomorrow? You go to work or whatever it is you have in store for you tomorrow.

What are you to do? Well, consider the following matters that relate to the message from God. The message for John, by extension for us. The following matters that relate to that message.

We're going to think about, first of all, the identity of the messenger. The chapter begins by describing the messenger who brings the message, who holds the little scroll. So we want to think a little bit about the identity of the messenger, but then we want to think a little bit about the content of the message.

[8 : 13] And what we'll discover is that it's actually, or we might speak of a threefold message within this chapter. And then finally, we'll think very briefly, but it will be hopefully significant because it really provides then the final answer to the question, what are we to do?

We'll think about the purpose of the message. So the identity of the messenger, the content of the message, and the purpose of the message. That's the structure. The identity of the messenger. Now, the messenger in verses 1 to 3 is described. It's described very vividly, but he is not explicitly identified or named.

We can read again the verses there at the beginning of chapter 10. Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud with a rainbow above his head. His face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.

He was holding a little scroll, and we could go on. So he's described in very vivid and visual terms, but he's not identified explicitly.

[9 : 18] So the question is, who is he? Now, whoever he is, he is a colossal figure. You know, I would encourage you to try and just picture what is described in the second half of verse 2 and verse 3, where we read, he planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.

And he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. I think the picture being painted is of this colossal figure who towers over the planet, towers over the earth, you know, one foot on land, one foot on

sea, with authority over the totality of our little planet where we live.

So he's a colossal figure. Whoever he is, he is a colossal figure. And the description of this colossus is very God-like.

Let me use that language. Or Jesus-like. To the extent that some conclude that it is, in fact, Jesus who is being described here at the beginning of the chapter. Jesus is the messenger, some would argue.

Now, it's certainly the case that the description of this messenger echoes the language employed to describe the risen Jesus in Revelation itself. And we can see some of the parallels.

[10:33] We note, we just read again, that he was robed in a cloud. Well, in chapter 1 of Revelation, the very beginning of the book, we read of how Jesus will come with the cloud.

So we see a kind of connection there. We're told that there was a rainbow above his head. Well, in chapter 4, we read of how the throne at the center of heaven was arched over by this rainbow.

So again, we see kind of connections. His face like the sun reminds us of the vision of the risen Jesus, John's vision of Christ in chapter 1. His face like the sun.

His legs are like fiery pillars. And again, there are echoes of the language that we find in chapter 1 describing the ascended Jesus. And then we're told that his loud shout is like the roar of a lion.

It reminds us of the one who was found worthy to open the scroll, a lion from the tribe of Judah. And so there's all these connections and maybe we could identify more. And of course, some of these pictures are also pictures that are associated with the presence of God in the Old Testament when he came at Sinai and on other occasions.

[11:42] So the language is, we recognize and acknowledge, God-like or Jesus-like. And yet for all that, he is introduced at the beginning of the chapter in this way.

Then I saw another mighty angel. It's difficult to get around that introduction. Another mighty angel. Language that hardly seems fitting to introduce the eternal Son of God.

Another mighty angel. It's also the case that on no other occasion in Revelation is Jesus identified as an angel. In the event that he were being so identified here, it's true that an angel is after all a messenger.

So it's not inconceivable that Jesus could be described as a messenger for he is indeed a messenger. But it is significant, surely, that throughout the book of Revelation he is not so described.

So why would he be so described on this occasion? On what side of the argument are we to fall? Is this Jesus or is this a mighty angel who is unnamed for us?

[12:54] Now, this may sound surprising, but I don't think it matters a great deal as there is another, more important question that we can answer with no difficulty. I think when it comes to Revelation, indeed, to the Bible generally, it's always good to try and answer the questions that are easy to answer and where the answer is clear.

And there is another question that we can answer without difficulty, and it's simply this. Where does the messenger come from? Without being too concerned about definitively identifying the messenger, where does the messenger come from?

Well, we're told, then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. And that is what is perhaps most significant. Whoever he is, he is sent by God and very evidently enjoys the authority of God.

Perhaps the reason why he is described in such God-like or Jesus-like vocabulary is to reinforce his authority. He is sent by God and so enjoys the authority of God in the delivering of the message that he is to deliver.

Even as we think of the picture that is painted, there is, at least to my mind, as I picture the scene, there's a striking and telling incongruity or seeming incongruity in the image that is painted.

[14:20] This colossal figure who towers over the earth and yet in his hand he holds a little scroll. In the original Greek, it's actually a double diminutive that is used.

A little, little scroll. So there's a great emphasis for whatever reason on describing the scroll as just a very little scroll. A colossal figure and yet holding this little scroll.

I think we can draw something from that, perhaps for our encouragement. That the message from God that John received, the message from God that we have in our hands, the Bible, the Word of God, may appear and may be described and may be considered and may be dismissed by many as small and insignificant and easily ignored.

But the source of the message is Almighty God and so we would do well to listen up. So the identity of the messenger, we don't know.

We have him described but we don't know for sure. But we do know that he comes from and is sent from heaven and hence the authority to deliver the message he delivers.

[15:30] But let's move on to the content of the message. Now I think we're drawn understandably to the little sweet and sour scroll. But I think we can identify as I hinted at a moment ago, three messages from God in this vision.

Maybe not three distinct messages but three almost modes of communication within chapter 10 that I'm going to describe in this way. A hidden message, a spoken message, and an edible message. As I say, we tend to focus in on the edible message perhaps because it's so striking. But I think there are these three. A hidden message, a spoken message, and an edible message. First of all, a hidden message.

In verses 3 and 4, the second half of verse 3 and verse 4, something really rather peculiar or intriguing is described for us.

So you have this messenger. He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. And then we read, when he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write.

[16:32] So John says, I was about to write what I was hearing. But I heard a voice from heaven say, seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down. So we're calling it a hidden message.

Now, I should say that the message is hidden to us. It was not hidden to John. John heard it. John was perfectly able, and indeed it was his intention, his stated intention, to write it down.

He heard the message, but he was directed not to write it down. Why so? Why is this message of the three that were identifying, why was this a message that the voice from heaven said to John, no, don't do that.

Don't write it down. I don't want that to form part of what others will read. Why so? Well, I think the honest answer to that is I don't know. Although I even, that answer is perhaps significant and revealing in the light of what we're going to go on to say.

You can imagine that the content of this hidden or unrecorded message generates much speculation. But the simple point is this. This is a message that God has chosen not to share with us.

[17:44] And that, very simply, is his prerogative. We don't know everything. I would hope that we all recognize that. It's not a particularly startling revelation.

We don't know everything. We're not intended to know everything. We don't need to know everything. We'll never know everything. Eternity itself will not allow us to discover everything that is to be known.

God wisely and graciously reveals to us everything that we need to know in order to know Him, in order to love Him, in order to serve Him, in order to tell others about Him.

And in His grace, perhaps He reveals even a little more than would be necessary for all of these fundamental things. That's what God makes known to us.

And so, that He chooses on this occasion not to make known this message, that is His prerogative and we humbly accept and submit to it. But let's move on to the second message, what I'm calling the spoken message.

[18:51] And really there, I'm simply identifying or drawing your attention to the words that are spoken by the angel. In verses 5, you have this angel and then he begins to speak.

First of all, he swears by the one who lives forever and ever and then he speaks. He has a message, a spoken message that begins at the end of verse 6. There will be no more delay, but in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished just as He announced to His servants, the prophets.

So there you have a message, a spoken message, spoken by this mighty angel. What can we say or what can we draw from that message? Well, let's just see what he says.

He begins by saying there will be no more delay. I think what the messenger is telling John and what he's telling us is that as the events announced by the sounding of the six trumpets take place, the end game is approaching.

Everything purposed to take place by God before the return of Jesus either has taken place or is in the process of taking place. hence there is no reason to imagine or foresee any delay in His coming.

[20 : 06] There will be no more delay. No doubt the intention of revealing this to John and to us is to inculcate a sense of urgency that we would be conscious and aware that Jesus is coming soon.

And we don't say that ourselves. Jesus said that at the end of Revelation in His own words. He declares to us I am coming soon. Any delay to use the word can be explained or any delay as we perhaps perceive delay can be explained only in terms of God's patience and forbearance as He calls all to repentance and faith before it is too late.

And again we're familiar with how in the second letter of Peter in chapter 3 and verse 9 that point is explicitly made. No doubt in the context of believers imagining that there was this great delay and that the seeming delay is explained in those terms of God's patience and God's desire to see men and women come to repentance.

There will be no more delay. That's how the spoken message begins. But then the angel goes on and says the mystery of God will be accomplished. The mystery of God will be accomplished.

Now in the New Testament the word mystery is used largely to speak of that which was unknown but has been or is being made known.

[21 : 34] So really it speaks of something that was a mystery but has become known. A mystery that has been revealed or explained. Now we see that very clearly that use of that word very clearly in Romans chapter 16 in reference to the gospel itself.

And though there are other occasions where the word is employed I think we can just limit ourselves to that one occasion. In Romans chapter 16 verses 25 and 26 we read, Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ.

Amen. The mystery that was hidden but has now been revealed concerning Jesus concerning God's plan of redemption concerning the gospel the good news God's purposes at the center of which is the gospel his redemptive plan for his people in the world are being accomplished.

That's what the angel is declaring. Those purposes are being accomplished. The verb translated accomplished is the verbal form of the noun teleos that we sometimes encounter in the New Testament that points to the perfection and completeness of God's plans.

And so when the angel says that the mystery is being accomplished he's speaking about a perfect accomplishment. Everything that is purposed is coming together just as God intended.

[23 : 21] Now we sometimes imagine by and understandably perhaps by observation as we look around perhaps our own chaotic lives and certainly the chaotic world in which we live we sometimes imagine that God's purposes are being frustrated or even messed up by his enemies or even by his friends.

But that is not so. The mystery or the plans and purposes of God are being and will be accomplished to the letter. The mystery of God will be accomplished. And then he goes on just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

And there the word translated announce is the word from which we have the word evangel or evangelize. A verb of course associated principally though not exclusively with announcing the good news about Jesus.

And I think there even in the use of the word further confirmation that the heart of the mystery or purposes of God is Jesus and his saving work. A spoken message.

But then finally an edible message. The little scroll the sweet and sour scroll of which we read in verses 8 to 10. But what is the message? There's the means of communication a scroll.

[24 : 34] We know that a scroll communicates. But what's written in the scroll? You see to know that there's a book is all very well but you need to know what's written on the pages of the book.

And here all we're told is that there is a little scroll. And so we're left somewhat unsure as to what the message is. Now we're not told. But it does seem reasonable to assume that the message has to do with the mystery of God that the angels already spoken of verbally.

But beyond that, beyond that general presumption, we simply don't know what is written in the little scroll. The key it seems to me is not to try and identify with precision the content of the little scroll which I think would be a thankless task because we can't do that.

So let's not try to identify with precision the content of the little scroll but to recognize that it is a word from God for John. That's the character of the message.

It's a word from God for John. And once we recognize that, we can then draw lessons for ourselves from the manner in which John is to receive the message from God as to how we are to receive our message from God, the Bible, the Word of God.

[25 : 56] So what is John urged to do with his word from God, the little scroll? Well, let's look and see what he's told to do.

And really, there's two very specific things he's told to do and then subsequently another thing that he's told to do. We're told there and the language is simple enough, the angel directs these instructions to him.

He's already been told by the voice from heaven to approach the angel for the scroll, but then the angel himself speaks to him and tells him. He says, take it and eat it. Take it and eat it.

So the first thing he needs to do, he needs to take it. And there's two points just to make there. First of all, that it is accessible to him. Indeed, the scroll is open.

Remember the scroll in chapter 5, it was closed, it was sealed, and Jesus was required as the only one with authority to open the scroll. Well, this scroll is open. It's accessible.

[26 : 58] It's there to be read. It's not hidden. It's not distant. He can take this accessible word from God to him, to John.

That in itself is a great truth and a great privilege that God's word is available and accessible to us as we draw the implications for ourselves. But he does need, accessible though it is, it is still the prerogative or the onus is on John to take the little scroll.

He needs to approach the angel. He needs to take the scroll for himself. And again, we won't take time to reflect on the implications of that or the applications of that, which I think are fairly evident to ourselves.

this need for us to proactively and deliberately take God's word for ourselves. But not only take it, he's told to then eat it.

He needs to eat it. And the verb employed has the sense, so we are told by those who know about these things, it has the sense of devouring. It's the sense of consuming in its totality this little scroll that he has been instructed to eat.

[28 : 17] It's a call to consume the scroll in its entirety and to take it into his inmost being. So the picture here being painted is not of a tray of appetizers where you might just select one or two that take your fancy.

No, the picture here is of this meal being set before a famished man or woman who devours what is being given to them with a sense of urgency and desire to be satisfied by what is before them.

Take it and eat it. And of course, again, the application that we can draw for ourselves I think is very clear as to how we take and eat God's Word given to us.

We don't know what's in the little scroll, but we do have an open Bible accessible to us that we can read and consume and devour for our profit. What will the experience of eating the scroll be like?

Well, again, here you have this unusual warning, I suppose, that John is given and that extends to us in a measure. It is a sweet and sour scroll.

[29 : 29] It is God's Word and as such it is sweet to God's servant. We sung in Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 of how the Word of God is compared to honey and equally the same picture is used here and so it is sweet and we understand that, we get that.

But John is warned that once consumed it has a sour edge to it and that is John's own testimony when he actually does take the scroll and eat it.

And when I had eaten it my stomach turned sour. What does that mean? What does that teach us? It's sometimes suggested and examples are given of Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah for whom this was their lived experience.

It's often suggested that what is being said is that while the Word of God is sweet to the believer it is sour in the sense that the proclamation of it is often met with painful hostility and bitter rejection.

So God's servant receives His Word with delight and with joy it is sweet to His mouth but then when He wants to tell people about it all He is met with is hostility and hatred and rejection and apathy

and so you have the sweet and you have the sour.

[30 : 43] Now I don't deny that in our lived experience that may well indeed be true but I'm not persuaded that that's what is being said here. It seems to me that what is being said to John and to us is our experience of devouring God's Word is bittersweet.

It's sweet and sour. We've already dealt with the sweet part of it. In what sense is it for us in the consuming of it bitter or sour? I think the bitterness is rather and given the context of Revelation where judgment looms large as one of the great themes I think the bitterness is rather than a reference to the woes and judgments that the Word of God does contain.

That we are maybe sometimes uncomfortable with that we sometimes wish were toned down a little or perhaps were absent altogether but there they are inescapably within the fabric of God's Word woes and judgments against God's enemies and we acknowledge the justice of God in exercising judgment against His enemies but we take no delight in their fate hence the bitterness.

We're not questioning God we're not bitter with God and saying we wish you wouldn't do this but we take no delight in recognizing God's justice in exercising judgment there is a bitterness to that reality.

It is for example for us a bitter pill to swallow that those who reject Jesus are hell bound. That is not a pleasant thing for us to ponder on it's not sweet for us to contemplate it is bitter it is sour but it is true it is the bitter truth that we need to grapple with and recognize.

[32 : 28] So you have this this edible message John has to take it he has to eat it and that will be the impact that it has on him sweet and sour but then finally and briefly the purpose of the message in verse 10 I think you have it captured or verse 11 rather than I was told you must prophesy again about many peoples nations languages and kings.

the eating of the scroll is I think a vivid portrayal of John being commissioned or recommissioned to announce to the world the word of God that he is being given and this is a task for John in the present in his present I think perhaps that that's why the mighty angel comes down from heaven to earth to deliver the scroll even in his location on earth delivering the message he's emphasizing that this is John's day job in the here and now and it's our day job in the here and now as John eats the word he is informed by what he reads and consumes he's instructed by God's word he's also nourished by God's word as the picture certainly illustrates he's also empowered by God's word but having eaten having received he is duty bound to share that word to give that word to others to many peoples nations languages and kings he is to warn them about God's judgment but he is also to extend the word of life and salvation he is to tell them about the judge and about the savior who as we know are not two characters but one and the same are risen and reigning

Jesus and this same duty is laid upon us so returning to the question that we suggested is answered by these chapters 10 and we'll discover chapter 11 also what are we to do what are we to do in these last days before the final trumpet sounds and Jesus returns what is to occupy us what are we to do what are we to do in the midst of trials and suffering as we await and long for the coming of Jesus very simply and it's not rocket science we are to take God's word we are to eat God's word and we are to declare or testify God's word to others may we be faithful in so doing and let us pray Heavenly Father we do thank you for your word we thank you that you are a God who is there and who is not silent we thank you that you are a God who speaks and who speaks clearly we thank you for your word for us this morning we pray that we would take it that we would eat it that we would be nourished by it and empowered by it and that we would leave this place with a clear sense of commissioning and calling to communicate and to share with others a word from God concerning eternity concerning their eternal destiny concerning Jesus and the offer that is made for sins to be forgiven to be welcomed into the family of God and we pray that you would help us do these things and we pray in Jesus name

Amen that's for you that you're using they call their to but their will eat food so there's this love this■■■ and we pray that you would be übrig to finish their to la to and they are to be