



This morning we're picking up once again in our study of the book of Revelation. A few weeks ago we left off at the end of chapter 9. We learned of the blowing of the six trumpets, unleashing a whole series of terrible judgments upon the earth. God sent these judgments at least in part to warn the people who survive and to bring them to a place of repentance. But it doesn't work. At the end of chapter 9 it says not once but twice that *"they did not repent"* of their idolatry, murders, thefts, etc.

So were left at the end of chapter 9 waiting for the blowing of the seventh trumpet. It would seem this would bring us to the very end of history. But before that last trumpet blows there is another interlude or pause in the story. We saw the same thing between the opening of the sixth and seventh seal. These interludes are important; they give us a broader perspective. While all hell is breaking loose on earth they show us what's happening behind the scenes. They show us God is still in control and he has a purpose for his people during these terrible times.

I think the start of a New Year is a good time to pause. It's a perfect time for an interlude; a time for us to step back from the relentless pace of our lives in order to gain some perspective. I've never been entirely successful at keeping New Year's resolutions, but sometimes we need a fresh start; we need to make some changes; perhaps some personal housecleaning is in order. Sometimes we look at the year past and it seems we went backward; we slipped a bit. We were doing fine in January and February but by the time summer rolled around we lost our focus.

The interlude in chapter 10 is a perfect template to help us pause and evaluate where we've been and where we're going in this new year. It can help us know where to focus and how to reorder our lives.

**"I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book which was open He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.' Then the angel whom I saw standing**

**on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets. Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, 'Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.' So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.' I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings'" (Revelation 10:1–11).**

### **A strong angel, a little book and a bittersweet meal**

A passage like this makes me realize how strange the Bible can be at times. If we're honest we'll admit we have all kinds of things going on here we're not sure what to do with. I wish John were here because I'd have a list of questions I'd want to ask him.

#### **Who is this angel?**

First of all, I'd ask John, who is this angel? Revelation is full of angels, but this is one serious angel. He's called "a strong angel" or a "mighty angel." Does that mean there are weak angels? I don't know. We saw another strong angel back in chapter 5 who asked, *"Who is worthy to open the scroll?"* Now a second strong angel comes down from heaven. He's described in such a way you almost wonder if he's more than an angel. He's so impressive, you might even mistake him for Jesus Christ. He has a rainbow around his head. God had a rainbow around his throne in chapter 4. His face is like the sun just like Jesus in chapter 1. He roars like a lion. Isn't Jesus called the lion from the tribe of Judah? The Bible says Jesus will one day put all things under his feet, just like this angel; a giant with one foot on the sea and one on the land.

But I believe John would tell us this is an angel, not Jesus. In John's writing angels are angels and Jesus is Jesus. He might add that this is an important angel who has been very close to God's

presence and in many ways reflects the power and glory of God. This angel has a special role to play. Angels are messengers. God sent this angel to John with a special message, and it's wrapped up in that scroll. The first strong angel asked, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" while this strong angel carries a small open scroll in his own hand.

### **What is the little book in his hand?**

This leads to another question: "John, what is this little book (scroll) in the angel's hand?" We saw a scroll with seven seals back in chapter 5. That book contained the future dealings of God in history. It was a record of God's plan for the future establishment of his kingdom, including both the judgment of all who oppose him and the salvation of all who worship him. That book was the word of God, specifically about the future.

But is this the same scroll? If it is, call it "a little scroll"? I think John would say they are the same. The scroll which once lay closed in God's hands now lies open in the angel's hand. Perhaps it only appears little compared to this massive angel! Perhaps it's called a little scroll because it contains only a segment of what was in the larger scroll of chapter 5. Or perhaps it's called a little scroll because later on John has to eat it and it makes more sense for him to eat a little scroll than a big one. I would much rather eat a little scroll than a big one, wouldn't you?

### **Why did he command John not to write?**

Then in v.3 John says this angel cried out with a loud voice, much like the roar of a lion. And when he cried out there were seven peals of thunder. This is a scary scene. But somehow John discerned a message, like a sermon, in the peals of thunder. It was clear enough for him to begin to write it down. Back in chapter 1 John was commanded to write what he saw, so here he's just doing what he was told to do. It's like how some of you take notes during a sermon. John's thinking "I need to take notes." If I was 100 feet tall with one foot on land and the other on the sea you would **all** be taking notes!

But then he hears a voice from heaven telling him to stop writing and to seal up whatever the peals of thunder said. This is another strange thing. I want to ask John why was he told not to write? Many times in Scripture thunder is used as a metaphor for the voice of God. It's also a mark of judgment. Perhaps these seven loud peals of thunder communicate more about the judgment of God at the very end of time. But why, John, were you told not to write it down? Perhaps the judgment is too terrifying. Perhaps there is something else God wants the people to focus on at this point. We don't know for sure. I guess there are just some things we aren't supposed to know.

God said to Moses, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law"* (Dt 29:29). In other words, God has told you all you need to know to obey

him. There are some things that you aren't supposed to know and shouldn't even try to know. Proverbs says, *"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter"* (Prov. 25:2). This is especially true when it comes to things pertaining to the end times. Jesus even said he didn't know the day and time he would return. It was enough for him that his Father knew; he didn't have to have it all figured out. So it is with the message of the thunder. If God wanted you to know he would have told you.

### **What was the oath he took?**

The next thing you know, this mighty angel raises his right hand and takes an oath. John, what's this oath all about? Clearly, it's an important oath because he swears by him who lives forever and ever and who created all things. This is a big thing. The content of the oath is clear: *"there will be delay no longer."* Back in chapter 5 the martyrs cried out to God, "How long until you avenge our blood?" Well, here is the answer. The waiting is over. Then he adds that he's talking about *"the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets."* He's pointing to the seventh trumpet. There will be no more delay before it sounds, which will usher in the very end of history. He says *"the mystery of God is finished;"* That's the completion of God's plan in bringing his glorious kingdom to fulfillment in Christ. It's the plan God set in motion before the foundation of the world.

All through history God has been working behind the scenes to bring this plan to fulfillment. It was a plan preached to *"his servants the prophets."* It's a mystery but it's a mystery that's been revealed. Paul wrote about this mystery in Eph.1:9-10, *"God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ... And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth."* The angel says that now is the time for that to happen. There will be no more delay. For believers living in the midst of the tribulation of that time, this would be a tremendous comfort. Your wait is just about over!

### **Why did he tell John to eat the book?**

The next thing that happens takes the cake as far as strangeness is concerned. The voice from heaven tells John to go and take the open scroll out of the angel's hand. John obeys and the angel says to him, "Take it and eat it. It will taste good but give you a good dose of indigestion when you're done. It will be sweet in your mouth but bitter in your stomach." Have you ever been told to eat something you knew would make you sick? But John obeys again. He doesn't even stock up on Alka Seltzer first; he just pops that little scroll in his mouth and starts chewing. Sure enough, it tasted great but he paid for it later! And when he's done, upset stomach and all, the angel commands him to go and prophesy or preach to many people, nations, tongues and kings.

What's going on here, John? Why were you told to eat the book? Why was it both sweet and bitter? How does this coincide with your call to preach to all the different peoples of the world? John would remind us this wasn't the first time someone in the Bible ate a book. Ezekiel was a prophet. When God called him to prophecy, he said to Ezekiel, "*Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.*" Then God handed him a scroll that was spread out before him; it was written on the front and back, and written on it were "*lamentations, mourning and woe.*" God said to him, "*Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.*" So he ate the scroll and it was like honey in his mouth (Ez. 2:8-3:3). Eating the scroll was a part of his call. Before he could preach the contents of the scroll, he had to eat it; he had to digest it. He had to taste for himself both its sweetness and its bitterness. Why was it sweet? It was sweet because it spoke of the victory of God over all evil. It said God's people would be vindicated. It spoke of the salvation and blessing of all those who followed Christ. Why then was it bitter? It was bitter because of the terrible doom awaiting those who refused to surrender to Christ. Paul would have understood. He said "*I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart*" for my fellow Jews who don't know Christ (Rom. 9:2). This was the message that, once digested, would be John's bittersweet message to the world.

### **Before we can proclaim God's word, we must digest it**

It's our message as well. It's a bittersweet message. We hear the word of the angel that there will be no more delay. The time is coming soon when God will intervene in history as judge. The mystery of God will be finished! And the litmus test for how people fare in that day will be what we did with Jesus Christ. For some of us and some of our loved ones, that's very good news. It's a sweet message; a message of forgiveness and salvation and hope. This message is sweet because we know we did nothing to deserve it; like the man at the intersection holding a sign that says, "Need help. Hungry." God pulled up and unrolled his window and handed us a wad of money so big it would last us through eternity. That's sweet. But when we think about some of our loved ones who have yet to accept the gift of God in Christ, it's not so sweet. It's bitter because they've refused to admit they needed anything at all.

Like John we're being asked to go and prophesy. We're being asked to proclaim to this world both the sweetness and bitterness of his word. In chapter 11 we'll be introduced to two witnesses who do exactly that at a very steep price. But before we can do that effectively and meaningfully we have to come and take the open book out of the strong angel's hand and eat it. We have to get this book into our gut. We have to get the words of this book flowing through our bloodstream. We have to chew on these words and swallow them so they can become muscle and bone. This is the focus we need for a new year: the call to eat

the book. The call to get the word of God into our life; not just to listen to it; not just to take it in, but to digest it and to live it. But what does that mean and look like for us?

### **We must ask for the book**

It means first of all we have to want it enough to ask for it. That's what John did. He walked up to this massive angel and like a dwarf looking up at the Jolly Green Giant said rather boldly, "Give me the little book." Do you want the word of God enough to ask for it? Peter says, "*Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word*" (1 Pt. 2:2). Do you long for it enough that you'll stop what you're doing and inconvenience yourself to go and get it? It may be scary and intimidating; as scary as walking up to a strong angel, but God is telling you to do it. Maybe this means you sign up for a small group Bible study. That's a stretch for some of you. You're comfortable in the anonymity that the Sunday morning crowd affords. But you know God is saying, "Go, take the book which is open."

### **We must put the book into our mouth**

That's a good start but that's not enough. Once we have it in our hands we have to put it into our mouth. We have to eat it. We have to chew it. We have to get it into us. It takes time to do that. It takes effort. It takes discipline. We'll have to set aside time each day just to chew on God's word. We'll have to make time to listen to it and read it. Do you read the Bible? Do you listen to it being read? Do you get it into your mouth and mind? Not just the easy parts. Not just the sweet parts. We all know where those are. You need a little advice — turn to Proverbs. You need a little comfort — turn to the Psalms. You need a little inspiration — turn to the gospels. Nothing wrong with that, but what about those parts of the Bible that either put you to sleep or keep you awake at night? We have access to the entire canon of God's word, but too many of us want just the cliff notes. Jesus said some very troubling things, have you noticed? He ruffled feathers. He said, "*No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions*" (Lk 14:23). He said, "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:26). He said, "*If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell*" (Mk 9:47). Some of that may be a bitter pill to swallow, but we must put the whole thing into our mouth.

### **We must digest the book**

But even that's not enough. We also have to digest it. I have a new granddaughter. Her name is Peyton. I haven't met her yet in person but her pictures pretty much have me whipped. But if my own kids are any indication, soon she will be eating books. Babies love to chew on stuff and books are no exception. They start life out trying to get the book inside of them, not through

their ears but through their mouth! But soon she'll know better. She'll go to school and learn that's not the way to do it. You use a book to find answers and pass tests. And when you've done that you put the book on its shelf and buy another. But the reading we're called to isn't the kind that helps you to pass a test. You are what you eat! When you eat the book it becomes part of the very tissues of your life.

So is memorizing the Word. When was the last time you memorized an entire passage of Scripture? The process of memorizing forces us to go over and over the text, chewing on it until it can be swallowed. Meditate on the Word. Take a verse or a passage or a story from the Bible and don't just read it but mull it over. Think about it from different angles. Read it in different translations. Take it with you into prayer. Use it as you pray for yourself and others. For years I've meditated on the prayers of Paul, which he recorded in many of his letters. I don't always know how to pray for others so I use those prayers to guide me.

Ultimately, the best way to digest the word is to live it; to be an active participant in it. The more we live it the more it will mean to us; the more we will want of it. This past week I've been shopping for a car. I'm not one of those guys who knows a whole lot about cars. I've never read a car magazine in my life. But with the need to buy a car came a lot of interest in learning about what's out there. So I've been on websites reading reviews of this car and that car. Do I want a used car or a new one? 4 cylinder or a 6 cylinder? Four doors or two? A sedan or an SUV? A Ford or a Honda? And how will I buy it? Lease or buy? Cash or finance? Normally these things mean nothing to me, but because I need

to buy a car I digested it all with much interest. But when I'm done with this and finally buy a car, believe me, my interest will be over.

In the same way, in order to digest the Bible, we have to read it as a participant, not an observer. We have to sense our need for it. We can't digest the Bible if we read it from the bleachers, or even from expensive box seats. We have to be on the field. We have to be a player. We have to be a buyer. We have to be involved with living this truth out in our own lives.

## **Conclusion**

If you're an average American, you've spent 70% of your waking hours in 2009 consuming information. During these 11.8 hours per day of reading or viewing information you consumed 33.8 gigabytes of data and 100,564 words. Your information consumption has tripled since 1980. William Falk says, "Consuming information doesn't necessarily lead to wisdom, which is the art of knowing how to spend our allotted minutes amid the prevailing stupidity and chaos, so that one's life has meaning. May the new year bring us all more wisdom, and not quite so many zettabytes."

May I encourage you, even admonish you, to start this new year with a commitment to eat this book. Maybe you're just starting out — ask for it, get it into your hands and then into your mouth. Maybe you've read it all and heard it all, but it's become as dry as an old chemistry textbook. Will you chew on it and digest it like your life depends on it, and then go out and share it with others?