

**A Hope and a Calling**  
**Revelation 10-11**  
**1/25/98**  
**Dr. Jerry Nelson**

Yesterday's Denver Post carried an interesting story.

“U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced Friday she is creating a high-level post in the State Department to ensure that concerns about religious liberty around the world are addressed in all aspects of foreign policy.”

From now on countries that perpetuate religious persecution may face economic sanctions and those that improve their religious tolerance will be rewarded with closer U.S. ties including economic preferences.

For Mr. To Dinh Trung of Vietnam that news might come as hope for some much needed relief.

He has been beaten, bound hand and foot, left to lie in the hot Vietnam sun without water until he became delirious. (Shea p70-71)

Mr. Trung has been in prison in that country since April of 1995 because he has led Bible study groups.

Because Vietnam is seeking to normalize relations with the U.S. and because maybe now, after years of lobbying, our government is beginning to recognize the amount of religious persecution taking place around the world - Mr Trung, his wife and 3 preschool children might get some help.

Imagine living in a place where being a true Christian was illegal and punishable by death.

The evidence is overwhelming - there are such places today - as I have reported to you in recent months.

But imagine living at a time when in the whole world it was illegal to be a Christian - when there were no agencies lobbying for freedoms, when there were no U.S. or other governments putting pressure on religious persecutors.

Imagine living in some of the cities John tells us about at the beginning of the book of Revelation - cities where just being Christian was a crime against the government.

How hopeless must that feel?

I wonder what Mr Dinh Trung feels as he lays in his wretched cell tonight 2 ½ years after being incarcerated.

When I listen and watch what is happening in our culture, it is not difficult for me to imagine a day when it would be considered illegal to be a Christ-following Christian.

There are increasing signs that the day is coming when the only thing that will not be tolerated are religious convictions.

When believing and teaching that Jesus is the only way to God will be considered so dangerous that it will be outlawed.

Even now, in this age when every belief is equally legitimate, the exclusive claims of Christianity are subject to ridicule and characterized as dangerous.

The apostle John was writing to people who knew what it was like to live in the midst of that kind of deadly discrimination.

And the Apostle John was writing to generations to come who would likewise live under those conditions.

And he was writing to those who, one day, would live in a world that had gone mad in its hatred of Christianity - a period of time called the great tribulation. John thought they would live in it.

What does God say to encourage his people who are living in such times?

The whole book of Revelation is written for that purpose.

But what do chapters 10 and 11 contribute to this goal?

Since most of you don't spend time between Sundays pouring over your notes about Revelation, it will probably be helpful once again to give you a quick overview of the book to see where these chapters fit in.

We can outline the book very simply:

Revelation

1-7 Prelude to Tribulation (Seals) - This present age from John's day to our own and we don't know how much longer.

8-18 Tribulation (Trumpets/Bowls)

19ff 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming and End

If we look at just a piece of that center section - the Tribulation we have this outline:

Chapters 8 - 11

7 TRUMPETS of Judgment

1. Firestorm on earth

2. Chaos in the oceans

3. Fresh waters poisoned

4. Darkness on the earth

Woe 1:

5. Demons inflict torture on unbelievers

Woe 2:

6. Demons inflict death on unbelievers

(Rev. 10 -11:14 Explanation)

Woe 3:

7. 11:14-15 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet introduced

While the chaos and panic described by the first 6 trumpets is happening in the world during the first part of the tribulation - what are believers doing?

What is happening to those who are Christ-followers - Christians?

Chapters 10 & 11 answer that, at least in part and remember, the intent is obviously meant to encourage God's people.

But you will find the encouragement to be "bitter-sweet"

There is good news and there is bad news in what we will see.

But the good news far outweighs the bad.

I want to start with the bad news.

I describe the life of a Christian, especially during the tribulation, as a “hard calling” - a calling to die.

Look with me please at 11:1

John is looking at the time of the tribulation and he says this:

“I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days (42 months), clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and half days men from every people, tribe, language, and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.”

In obviously symbolic language John is describing what the people of God will be doing during this time of tribulation.

When John is told to measure the temple, the only way we can understand what that is about is to remember the OT usage of measuring the temple.

And we discover in Zechariah, for example, that the measuring indicated God’s intention to protect his people.

A couple of times already in Revelation we have heard John emphasize this point - When God symbolically put a mark on those who belonged to him in Chapter 7 we knew it was God’s way of saying I will take care of you.

When, last week in chapter 9, the locusts in the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet judgment were not given power over any who had God's mark on them - we knew it was God's protection.

Now here again we see God's symbolic way of saying - you belong to me and I will protect you.

But what we read next in this chapter doesn't sound like protection to some of us until we understand protection differently.

The Temple, the altar, the worshippers, and the holy city of verses 1 and 2 represent God's people.

And the Gentiles represent those opposed to God and his church.

Here John tells us that the godless forces of this world are going to be given unprecedented power to control this world and persecute God's people - but for a limited amount of time (represented by 42 months or 3 ½ years).

There is no reason for us to define this as precisely 3 ½ years but we ought to see the number as referring to a very limited period of time.

During the time that this world is dominated by such evil forces, Christians will be witnessing to the person and power of Jesus.

There is much debate about who the "Two witnesses" are but I believe, after studying it, that the "two witnesses" represent the witnessing church.

For a period of time during the tribulation the church will have uncommon power to declare the truth of God to this world.

Just as during the days of the apostles so maybe John has in mind during, at least a part of, the tribulation the church will have power to heal, do miracles, even the power to shut down their enemies as Peter did Annanias and Saphira.

But their calling to testify of Jesus will be met with great resistance and eventually many will be killed and the world will gloat over the apparent destruction of God's people.

It says in V7 that a “beast... will attack, overpower and kill them.”

When we get to chapter 12 we will see that “beast” again.

There it says of him “he was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.”

What we have in chapter 11 is a description of the “hard calling” to be Christ-followers - to be witnesses for Jesus.

I say “hard” because it will be met with resistance and even death.

That shouldn't surprise us.

Jesus had already said to the churches in chapters 2 and 3:

“I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days (again, a limited time). Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

When Jesus was describing the end of the age he said this:

Luke 21 “...they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to...prisons...and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in you being witnesses to them...You will be betrayed even by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.”

If those words are true in this present age, how much more true will they be during the tribulation.

Testifying to the person and power of Jesus - telling people about God's grace will be a “hard calling” in those days - resulting in the death of some, maybe many.

BUT, John quickly points out - while the calling is hard, the conclusion of the matter is so, so good.

Revelation 11:11-12

“But after three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them (the witnesses), and they stood on their feet, and terror struck 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, while their enemies looked on.”

Do you remember that the earlier text said that the witnessing of God’s people and the persecution of God’s people would go on for 3 ½ years - a limited period of time?

Notice here that after a very short period of time - 3 ½ DAYS - the world will see something that strike terror in their hearts.

God’s people who were killed for their faith will be resurrected and they will be drawn into the presence of God.

The whole world will see that what those believers had been saying is true.

The calling, the vocation, to follow Jesus can be a very hard calling and during the tribulation it will be hard for a greater number of God’s people BUT they are guaranteed an outcome of vindication, resurrection and life with God.

Some of you might be somewhat confused.

You thought that when it says God’s people are “protected” it meant they couldn’t be harmed in any way.

You thought that when God’s people were “sealed” in chapter 7, it meant they couldn’t be hurt at all.

If that was true, how could Jesus possibly have said:

“they will put some of you to death... But not a hair of your head will perish.”

What Jesus meant and what is taught throughout the Scripture is that even death in this life is not the last word.

God has the last word and he says those who belong to him will be resurrected and gain a life that cannot be destroyed.

The Apostles Peter and Paul both responded to our tendency to fear suffering and death in this life:

Peter wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

Paul wrote, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" when Jesus comes again.

The Apostle John in this passage is very clear that God's people will suffer, and many will die during this period of intense turmoil on the earth but that is not the end.

Jesus said it this way: "I tell you dear friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more." Luke 12:4

In Chapter 10, John had seen a mighty angel and had been told to go and take a little scroll, a little open book from his hand,

Revelation 10:9-10

"So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour."

Earlier I said that the encouragement of chapters 10 and 11 would be bitter-sweet. This passage is why I used those words.

John was told that the message the little book contained was bitter/sweet.

The bitter part was the news of the persecution that God's people would face - but the sweet part was the news that the persecution would be short-lived compared to the eternity of the reward they would receive.

And John's first vision in these chapters is what makes that believable:



Look with me at chapter 10:1-7

“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, which lay open in his hand. 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. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "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."

The description of the angel is significant.

Whose authority does he have? He was “coming down out of heaven” - He has God’s authority, having been in the very presence of God.

How extensive is his authority? He plants one foot on the sea and the other on the land - he straddles the whole world. He has authority over it all.

And the description of him lends even added emphasis to his authority - robed in a cloud, crowned with a rainbow, face like the sun and legs like fiery pillars - what a sight of magnificent power!

And he gives a shout like the roar of a lion. This shout is associated with the great declaration of God that it is all over - the time has come to bring all history to a close.

When the Lord descends at his second coming he will give a victory shout. In Joel 3:16 it says “the Lord also shall roar out of Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth will shake...”

So here the angel's announcement is powerful, authoritative and final.

And as if his authority wasn't enough just in his appearance and his deportment - this mighty angel lifts his hand and takes an oath that what he is saying is true.

And he swears by no less a name than the name of the God who created the heavens, the earth and the sea - just in case you missed it he wants you to know the God on whose name he is making his declaration is none other than the sovereign God of everything.

And with all that lead in - all that display of light, sound, power and authority - what does he have to say.  
This must be something worth hearing!

"There will be no more delay!!"

Let those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ,  
let those who are suffering because they testify to Jesus' name and grace,  
let those who are dying for their commitment to Jesus,  
KNOW that when the seventh trumpet sounds - it's all over!

Let them know that there is no further 2000 year wait.  
Let them know there are not many years yet until the end.  
Let them know they don't need to be patient any longer.

The final battle will now be fought.  
It will now move swiftly - the mystery of God will be accomplished.

We have a calling - a hard calling - a calling to testify to the saving person and power of Jesus in a world that increasingly will resist that message.

But we have a hope - a confidence - that God is in control of the end and he has promised us vindication, resurrection and life that will never end.

That's how To Dinh Trung faces imprisonment tonight.  
That's how God's people have always faced persecution.  
That's how God's people will have victory even in the Tribulation.