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Revelation

Chapter 11 - Revealing Religion's Hatred for the Light Separating Power from Rhetoric (vs. 3-6)

Revelation 11:3-6: “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not 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 plague, as often as they desire.

The beginning of this book declares that this is the testimony of Jesus. It also declares that this is to be proclaimed to the churches in Asia Minor.

The declaration of Revelation 1:11 is,

“Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

What we know is that this is not only revelatory in the sense of God is revealing things, but He is specifically revealing things to the Church. He wants the Church to know today the things that the Church is against and the things that would easily infiltrate the Church, things that are hidden in the world, and oftentimes misinterpreted because the Church has not really had the discernment of the Spirit in the decisions and the things that it does. So that as you go through the Book of Revelation, you begin to see what is most important, obviously, what is the power of the Church.

We're going to be talking about the two witnesses in this particular text, and it's going to be talking about authority

that's been given to them. Well, if you think about it, that's the same thing that Christ said to the church. In fact, if you look at the very end of Matthew 28, it says, Jesus says to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth." Now, we understand that authority was given to Christ, but what about the church? Well, in Acts 1, He then turns to the church, and He says, "Look, you wait here until the Spirit of God comes upon you, and He'll give you authority." The point is that we've been given the same authority as Christ. What is that authority? It is the power to save; to rescue men. And it is the testimony of Jesus that gives us this power.

Unfortunately, the Church has not only not been proclaiming the great power, as Paul will say in Romans 1:16, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I believe it to be the power of God, for every man's salvation. The Jew first and then to the Greek." His point is that which gives power is the Gospel, and it is the message of Jesus Christ that we proclaim unashamedly, without fear, boldly.

By the time you come to Acts 4, it tells us that those that were filled with the Spirit of God spoke out boldly about the message of Jesus Christ. So, the evidence that you're filled with the Spirit of God, of course, obviously, is always conveyed in a boldness for Jesus Christ. Not an obnoxious spirit, but a boldness with a great love for Him that really supersedes a love for anything else or anyone else. But it is that love for Him that causes us to love the world. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. So, the moving in the church is that the church should be that light. And as in the Gospels, it says, now you don't take a lamp and hide it under a bushel. You want to take the lamp, as Matthew 5 would say, you want to let your light so shine before men that they would see your good works and glorify God in heaven. So, the purpose of a light is to shine. That's pretty obvious. Therefore, He gives that interesting picture of the church in Revelation 1 as candlesticks. The seven candlesticks, the seven churches in Asia Minor, and you're to be light. What He has been proving throughout is that you're allowing the world to cover you up. Or as Paul will say to the church at Corinth, the god of this world has blinded

the minds of those that are unbelieving, so that the church has held hands with the world. And by virtue of doing that, the messages become unclear. We've allowed the world to sneak in and try to make the church a kind of organization rather than an organism. God meant it to be a body of Christ, not to be an organization. And oftentimes it comes across harsh or unconcerned or detached, and much like the church at Ephesus. And he begins to warn them, "You've become too mechanical in this, and you've become too legalistic in this. This is not about legalism; it's about the love of God." But we also know that there are so many other things. For instance, fear can easily creep into the church, and Smyrna was having to deal with that particular issue. But can you imagine how strong and how powerful the testimony of the church could be if, in fact, we were fearless, we were not afraid of things? Much like when you read in Jeremiah 10, he says, "Don't be like the other nations, for they're afraid of the things in the sky or in the air. But we are not." We are not. If the church would just proclaim that, if we would display what Christ continued to tell His disciples, "Fear not, I am with you." If we would just walk

that way, what a testimony that would be. That would be light, wouldn't it?

So, he talks to the church of Smyrna. He says, "You don't have to be afraid of death. I mean, the time is coming where you're all going to be martyred, but that's okay. You're ready. You're ready." He comes to the church at Pergamum, and he goes, "Don't let them infiltrate your mindset with the whole concept of 'you can make money doing this.'" And of course, he uses the example of Balaam in the Old Testament, who was a prophet for hire, and he says, "You've allowed them to come into your church. People are doing what they're doing because of money. They're not doing it because they love Jesus." He says, "Don't let that come into the church." That just covers the light of the love of Christ, who, if you think about it, I mean, the very difference of Christ to the world, God so loved, He gave. God didn't come to take. So, it's a very unique situation. And when he goes beyond Pergamum, into Thyatira, you begin to see a church that is compromising by virtue of holding hands with the world so that somehow, they can get contacts. And I've

oftentimes encouraged people to never do business at church. We're not trying to make contacts. We're trying to proclaim the gospel of Christ. And you blur the message when it becomes all about that, and before long you begin to compromise the integrity of the gospel by doing it. Paul will say to the Corinthians, "We're not like many peddling the word of God." We're not trying to make money off of this. This is because the love of Christ constrains us, and we're moved by that wonderful, wonderful Spirit.

So, all the way through, he's showing how the churches, of course Sardis, makes mention of the fact that they would like to be popular. Of course, popularity seems to be a pretty big deal nowadays. And Philadelphia is concerned that maybe they're going to be shut out of being the in crowd. And he says, "Don't worry about that kind of stuff." And of course, Laodicea then begins to embrace the things of the world, so much so that their perception is, "If we have a lot of money, we don't even need God." But all these things have come into the

church, and it's caused them to be meek about who God is and lack boldness. So, the light's not shining.

As Paul will say to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, that "The days are coming when nobody's going to want to hear what you're having to say." He said, "Now, here's the deal. They're going to accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and try to find somebody to tell them what they want to hear. But you don't do that. You keep proclaiming the word of God, be unapologetic about it, preach the word, be ready in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, in sound doctrine." Well, this is one of the reasons why in this particular chapter we are given this picture at the middle of the tribulation, and we understand that this is going to be a real event that's actually going to take place. But the church needs to see this, because the church needs to see the boldness of these two witnesses. The church needs to see that this is what a light looks like. And actually within the text, they're going to be called lampstands. So, not unlike Revelation 1, where the church is identified as such, that's what a witness is. In the Gospel of John, John

the Baptist was referred to as a lamp that shined brightly, as it says within the text. And of course, when you go back to Psalm 119, he talks about, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, light unto my path,” right? So, the word of God is what we proclaim as a church and we are witnesses of what God has done for us. What causes that light to shine brightly is the evidence of the Spirit of God within us. He fuels the flame, so to speak. Let's put it another way. When you and I speak from the heart in genuineness and sincerity, that makes light shine. Up to that point, it's just a lampstand. But it takes on light when the Spirit begins to move, and we now are genuine about it. So, you talk to somebody that actually loves Jesus, they look a whole lot different than an institution that calls itself a church. They look a whole lot different. And you're going, “Okay, I'm seeing light here. Over here, I'm seeing oppression, and I'm seeing rules and regulations. There's nothing light about that.” So, what we're going to see is the power of light that is being displayed within this particular setting in Revelation 11, in which He has the two witnesses that He proclaims.

Now, we're not going to try to speculate who these two witnesses are. I just thought I'd let you know right off the bat. The reason why? It doesn't say. Now, we know that there are a couple of people that can fit in here real, real well, and we go, okay, that fits. That's fine. If that makes you happy and you feel better about it, that's good. But the point isn't the identification of the witnesses. The point is that they are witnesses. And the point specifically to the church is that they are doing what they're doing with great boldness, and at the cost of not only being ostracized from religion, but at the cost of people wanting them dead. And as we know, for 3 1/2 years, they'll be in the middle of religion, i.e. Jerusalem. They'll be in the middle of Jerusalem, and they'll be proclaiming for 3 1/2 years the testimony of Christ. That's what they'll be proclaiming. Now, what we know is that they're not going to be received well at all. And of course, that was the chapter right before this, that there's this message; it's sweet to the lips, but it's going to be bitter because of the way that it's received. So, we're going to see these that are proclaiming this message. You would think naturally, you know, what a wonderful message we have, that Jesus

Christ came to save sinners. But once you use the word “sinner,” then everybody turns you off. “I'm not a sinner. You're the sinner.” Well, what they're saying is they don't want to change. That's all they're saying. I mean, because I have no problem saying, “Yeah, you're right, I'm a sinner. But I don't want to be. Do you?” That's a big difference, isn't it? So, it's not that I'm better than you, it's that I just don't want to do it anymore. And you come to Christ, and He says, “I can make you a new creation. And you don't have to do this anymore.” And, you know, we as believers go, “I was looking for that door because I couldn't do it. But Christ changed me.” So, it is a great message that we see.

Now, just by way of review, at the beginning of Revelation 11, there is a measuring, if you remember within the text. And the measuring is the measuring of the inner court of the temple and then the external court. The external court was the part that was embellished and so grand and glorious, and it was basically an edifice unto human wisdom and his great deeds. It was never something that

God really declared that He wanted. The focus was always on the altar.

And if you look specifically, he says,

(Revelation 11:1) “Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar...”

“Temple” being the holy place proper.

“... and those who worship in it.”

Now, once again, the emphasis of “altar” is a place of sacrifice. The point is that the place where we meet God is at the place of sacrifice. We meet God at the cross.

That's where we first saw the light. That's when all of our burdens rolled away. So, it was at the cross, we met Him there. And it's at the place of sacrifice that we continue to have a relationship with Him. Paul says in Philippians 3 that “It's the fellowship of His sufferings that draw me close to Him.” And Peter will say in 1 Peter 2, “For this reason you were called, to suffer for doing what is right like He did. Because that's the place where the glory of God will rest on you. If you'll do what's right and be

willing to suffer for it, you become comrades with Christ in the things that you do.” So, it's at the place of the altar, and Jesus will even tell His disciples, “Take up your cross, follow Me. This is where we meet. This is where we unite. This is where we become one.” And it is in that you and I draw near to Him; that willingness to give of our life. It begins with the sacrifice of our life in the sense that we're surrendering everything to Him. When you first come to Him and ask Christ to come into your life, you're telling Him, “I'm giving You my life.” Well, that's where it begins. It continues as you begin to walk and say, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” And as you do this, you would think that you would be living a life of deprivation. Nothing could be further from the truth. He not only supplies all your needs according to His riches and glory, but He gives abundance above what you could ask or think. So, God is taking us to this place of great joy that we never thought could be possible. It's a wonderful walk and a fulfillment of our lives so that we're not living this empty life of going, “Why am I even here?” We know exactly why we're here. So, the great boldness that you begin to see in this passage.

So, the passage is saying that God is declaring, "We need to measure things off." In other words, God's making a distinction. And the distinction that He's making is distinguishing worship from ritual.

In other words, the external part of the temple, and if you look with me in verse 2,

(Revelation 11:2) "Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."

3 1/2 years. So, the point is that if in fact you're not meeting Him at the place of sacrifice, then you're not in. I know that people think that they can be nominal Christians, that is to say, in name. "Well, I'm a Christian." Okay, good. You've given us your title. But that doesn't mean that you're saved. And God makes distinctions. You think that He doesn't. You think that He doesn't look at the heart. God sees the heart. Man looks at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart. So, God is making decisions, and He's measuring that which is true and that which is false. And one of the ways that you see the

difference between the relationship that somebody has with Christ and religion is that relationship is built around the altar. Religion is built around a ritual. And when you think about the fact that oftentimes religious institutions have liturgical memorizing of stuff, so you need to memorize all this stuff. I mean, look, once again, I have to clarify myself. I'm not against you memorizing. If that's what you want to do, go ahead. But I really suggest people not to memorize Scripture. I suggest fall in love with Scripture and you'll never forget it. And to me, in some way, memorizing is putting the cart before the horse. It's saying, "I'm going to memorize it." And look, it kind of works with some people and they fall in love with it. That's good. But I still believe if you fall in love with something, you'll always remember it. And take the passage, fall in love with the passage, go through the passage, fall in love with God all over again. And when He tells you something, you'll go, "Yeah, I know what He said." You'll go, "How do you remember all these things?" Because I love every word that He said, everything that He said to me. So, as we see the difference literally being marked out within the passage, He is removing the

liturgical memorization, pomp and circumstance, the parading, the show stomping shows that man has a way of doing.

What's interesting, we've oftentimes read in Isaiah 1:12, in which God literally asked him, He says, “Who requires of you this trampling in My courts?” That's an interesting way of putting it. God says, “I'm not going to hear your prayers. You don't want to be here anymore than I want you to be here” because there's not really a desire for relationships.

So, what verses 1 and 2 is saying is that God makes distinctions between what is worship and what is ritual. And God begins to reveal the difference.

Just to take you on a short journey on this, if you just take a moment with me and turn with me to Isaiah 28, and we won't spend a lot of time in this. God declared to His people, “You know, I wish I could talk to you, but apparently I'm going to have to go to another people because you're not listening to Me and you seem to be scoffing at everything that I say.”

His statement in verse 16 is this,

(Isaiah 28:16) “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone...”

Which means tested by fire, right?

“... A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.

(Isaiah 28:17) I will make justice the measuring line
And righteousness the level...”

Do you hear Him making distinctions? The point is that when you've come in contact with something genuine and real, it changes things. And your standards change, so that no longer are you doing things because you have to and thus in your heart not really doing them, but a transformation takes place and a righteousness, and a level of justice begins to be a part of your zeal. And God says, “I can see the genuineness of his heart.”

So that if you look in Isaiah 29, verse 13, of course, is an interesting contrast.

(Isaiah 29:13) “Then the Lord said,
“Because this people draw near with their words
And honor Me with their lip service,

But they remove their hearts far from Me,
And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned
by rote,

(Isaiah 29:14) Therefore behold, I will once again deal
marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous...

“And I'm going to begin to reveal, because quite frankly,
you think I don't see what's going on, but I see everything
that's going on.”

His statement is in verse 15,

(Isaiah 29:15) “Woe to those who deeply hide their plans
from the LORD,

And whose deeds are done in a dark place,
And they say, “Who sees us?” or “Who knows us?””

Oh, He sees. He knows what you're doing and why you're
doing it, in fact.

So, if you drop on down a little bit further into Isaiah 30, a
strange place that we end up meeting God.

If you look with me in verse 15,

(Isaiah 30:15) “For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of
Israel, has said,

“In repentance and rest you will be saved,
In quietness and trust is your strength.”

But you were not willing,

(Isaiah 30:16) And you said, “No...”

“We're going to go to all the resources that are available to us. We're not going to believe in Him. We're not going to trust in Him.” Well, that's the difference between that which is just ritualistic, which is based upon basic humanism and what man can do, and that which is of a heart that says, “I'm just going to trust in God.” I mean, man gets himself in all kinds of frenzy of all kinds of things that are happening. Watch the person over there that's just sleeping while it's all happening. That's the person that's resting in God. God will take care of it. I trust Him. Walk by faith, not by sight. We're not trying to figure this thing out. And it's in this quietness that we actually find rest, and it's in getting my heart right with God and repentance that I had this close relationship with Him. So, it begins to reveal those wonderful things.

If you look at verse 18,

(Isaiah 30:18) “Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you...”

What He is waiting for is for you, if you look at the end of verse 18, to long for Him. That's all He's waiting for you to do. So, it's not a complicated thing.

We'll jump back into Revelation after this, but if you look at Malachi, which is right before Matthew, which is the beginning of the New Testament, or Malachi being at the end of the Old Testament. Much of Malachi is basically God saying, “You know, you really don't respect Me. You don't value Me.” But it says at the end of Chapter 3 that there's going to be a day when God's going to reveal the difference between the real and the fake.

I just love the way that it's put. If you read it with me, it reads this way,

(Malachi 3:16) “Then those who feared the LORD spoke...”

I long to hear people that fear the Lord speak. I haven't been hearing them lately.

“... spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name.

(Malachi 3:17) “They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts...”

God's making a distinction here.

“... “on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

(Malachi 3:18) So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”

How am I distinguishing? Well, the one who's given his devotion to Him and is at the altar.

So, a distinction is being made at the beginning of Revelation 11 in the first two verses, and that is that God is distinguishing worship from ritual. What we're going to see in verses 3 through 6 is God separating power from rhetoric. That much of what we see today is just a

substitution of what I would perceive to be bombastic rhetoric in which social change as people gather together trying to in some way declare themselves and declare their methods and declare their money and declare their politics, declare their man-made solutions in some way as the answer. And people gather around and they go, "Wow, that's great!" You're just like a politician making all the promises. But you end up going the next year, and the next year, and the next year, and you just wonder, "When are they going to do something about it?" It's just rhetoric. Because the fact of the matter is that man doesn't change things. He can't change things.

I get a kick out of sometimes watching the weather, and the Weather Channel, and I told Connie, "Watch them. Every now and then, they'll act like they control it." And they'll say something, just a little something off the side, all of a sudden, and you go, "Okay, you have nothing to do with the weather. You're just telling us what it's doing." But there's something in man that just can't seem to help but say, "By virtue of me saying something, that I'm actually going to make it so." And that's one of the

great disappointments, I think, of man. Well, the fact of the matter is that everybody sees this and everybody knows it. I mean, look, we've all bought into the commercials and sent off for the item and found out that it didn't work quite as well as they said it was going to work. And tried to get our money back and they said we could return it for free, but the shipment was more than the item. And we know how all this stuff works. I'm not bitter. But the fact is that man doesn't change things. Ecclesiastes tells us that there's nothing new under the sun. And you know, we've shined it up, we've made it more mechanical, we've even made it technological, but it's still the same stuff. And I found oftentimes that, and I told Connie, I said, "Man, I just wish I could get a radio with knobs. Because I could actually change the channel faster." But that's technology for you. But man promises all these things. It's still moving the station from one place to the next. It's still music. It's still something. So, nothing's really changed. Man cannot change things. The point is, he can't change hearts. Now, this is why religion, and I just want to emphasize this very strongly, because

what we're talking about are two prophets, and where are they? In Jerusalem. This is religion's capital.

Unfortunately, if you look in Revelation 11:8, God describes Jerusalem, even though it's His city,

“And their dead bodies...”

They will ultimately die because the Beast will come up and kill them.

And it says,

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”

Where are we talking about? That's Jerusalem. It's a place that is the most religious place on the planet, that out of their 900,000 citizens, that only about 9,000 will say that they don't believe in God. So, you won't see those statistics anywhere else in the world, a city being so religious. Nevertheless, what we're going to see is their tremendous hatred towards these two witnesses who are sent by God, which is telling you something. Religion hates Jesus. Can I emphasize that again? Because Christ

will repeat over and over again that “The day is coming when people are going to kill you in My name. And they're going to use religion to do it.” And whether you think of the Crusades or whether you think of, I mean, even today there's a lot of hostility towards people that are wanting to meet in churches, and there are churches that are feeling hostile towards them. And I'm saying, what planet are you from? I can't completely understand why people would be so hateful against God's people, especially since they're calling themselves God's people. But you're going to find that the greatest attacks are not going to come as much from the world but are going to come from religious people. That's where you're going to get most of your attacks. Christ was not attacked most by the general populace. It wasn't the Roman soldiers. It wasn't the Greeks. Who was it? Pharisees and Sadducees. Scribes. Priests. That's who He was attacked by. And those are the ones that hated Him most.

So, you come into this passage, understand we're in Jerusalem. These men are going to be prophesying for 3 1/2 years. And at the end of 3 1/2 years, they're going to

be killed. They're going to lie on the street for three days, dead. Nobody's going to want to bury them because they hate them so much. Now, this is in a religious place. And they're going to give presents to each other and celebrate the day that they died. And this is in a religious place. So, the point is that there's a tremendous hatred for the message of Christ. Why? I'm going to give you the answer. I'm just going to cut to the chase. The reason why religion hates those who proclaim Jesus is because Jesus works, and they don't like anything that shows them not working. In other words, when you proclaim Christ and you lead somebody to the Lord, it goes beyond their methods, it goes beyond their religions, and they're going, "How come this person changed here, but they couldn't change with us?" And I mean, you could even go to religion and go, "I've changed," and they'd go, "Yeah, maybe." They're not going to celebrate with you. Why? They hate the fact that you change. They hate the fact that something efficacious actually worked. They hate the power of the Gospel. And so, what we're going to see within the passage is the power and the authority of the message being graphically displayed to such an extent

that it's unarguable. I mean, you're seeing these two witnesses, and they've got power to stop up the heavens. "I'm going to stop rain. I'm not going to let it rain today." They're going to say something like that. It's not going to rain. It's not going to rain for as long as they say it's not going to rain. And if you think something against them, they're going to breathe out fire and you're going to be toast. That's pretty graphic, isn't it? What it's talking about is a great power and the power's in the message. And the power of the message is what the world hates. If you think about it, if in fact you and I would proclaim the message of God in the Spirit of Christ, unapologetically, boldly, you know what would happen? People around us would begin to be convicted. And inside, they would have turmoil. They would begin to wrestle. Why? Because the Spirit of God is moving. A fire is breathing in their soul. The power of the message can change the heart. And the way that Paul put it in Hebrews is, it's like a sharp two-edged sword. It cuts into the bone and the marrow. The word of God is powerful.

So, if you look in the passage, we'll pick up in verse 3, it says,

(Revelation 11:3) “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses...”

Once again, “witnesses” is where we actually get the word “martyr”. “*Martys*” is the word for witnesses, which means that you're so bent on telling the truth that you're willing to die for it. That's what a witness is.

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”

Now, the reason why they're clothed in sackcloth is that there's a grieving over the fact that the world is in a state of rebellion against God. So, they're proclaiming their grief. Scripture says, don't grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you've been sealed to the day. You can actually grieve God. That's always been a bizarre thought to me. How could I be that important that I could grieve Him? But we actually can grieve God by what we do. So, the great sorrow that there is in the rejection of God's message, and this is part of the bitterness that is coming out of it.

What a wonderful, sweet message that God has come to save you from your sins, and you're rejecting it.

These witnesses are proclaiming, and just to clarify this, in Revelation 19, the spirit of prophecy is always the testimony of Jesus. So, we know what the testimony is.

We know what the witness is. But if you look at the passage, it says, now for 3 1/2 years, they're going to be doing this, and they're going to be proclaiming this. We're going to get in the detail of the 3 1/2 years, 1,260 days, why it's a little bit different than the 42 months in verse 2, but basically the same period of time that He's emphasizing. I think the emphasis of the days is showing that God is making detailed effort in every single day of their life, that it's not just 42 months to Him. It's every single day they're rejecting that message, and God is taking focus on that.

If you look in verse 4,

(Revelation 11:4) “These are the two olive trees...”

Now, why would He call them olive trees? Well, according to Exodus 25 and other passages, Leviticus as well, Deuteronomy, we know that in those particular passages,

it talks about the menorah that was to be given and to be placed in the place of the holy place. The menorah, interestingly enough, was described more like a tree than it was a lamp. And so, when it talked about the different lighting places, they called them branches. And it was not unusual for them, even today if you wanted to buy a menorah, if you want to Google it, you can Google in “menorah olive tree,” and you'll get a menorah that's kind of shaped like an olive tree. Because the picture is that the oil, and if you read in the Old Testament, that it was the olive oil that was beaten and thus purified, that it might flame the light. And of course, we know our Christ was beaten at the Mount of Olives. And there was a purification that He would shine in His sacrifice for you and me. So, the imagery is constantly there. And the olive tree, of course, is that tree that is often used, Romans 11, is often used to describe God's people. So, the point is that God had called them to be a nation that would have light come out of them so that the oil, i.e. the anointing from the olive, would be that which fueled the flame. And the anointing of God would bring forth that wonderful light. So, it's an interesting picture.

There's a parallel to this in Zechariah 4 and will also in some ways be consummated in Zechariah 14. We'll talk about that in just a minute.

But if you look with me in verse 4,

(Revelation 11:4) “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands...”

Now, once again, who is he identifying them with? Well, clearly the fact that they're witnesses, clearly the fact that they have a source in which they are being fed, oil or the anointing or in the Spirit. And then they are lampstands, which are going to identify them directly with the churches. So, the message is the same. The proclamation is the same.

And it says,

“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

(Revelation 11:5) And if anyone wants...”

Now, I want you to underline that word in verse 5, “if anyone wants”. In the Greek, that's in what is called the subjunctive tense, which means that it's an action not yet

happening, but is intended to. So, when it's stating a desire, it's an intention that somebody has inside. Have they done anything? Have they tried to strangle the witnesses? No, they haven't done anything yet. They just desired it.

Now, watch the passage, very interesting.

“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies...”

We're talking before they even do anything. I can just see a guy, “What...” And then he's gone. And they don't even know what's happened. What do you mean they don't even know it? All they did was think it. Now, this is a very, very key point. Because Scripture reminds us that God will judge the motives and intent of your heart. “Well, I didn't do it. I didn't kill him.” Did you think it? Remember Jesus, “Did you think it?” Because that's what we're judging. We're not judging what you did. This is pretty interesting. So, what it's demonstrating is that the Word is being revealed as so powerful, it is immediately judging the intent of your heart. Now, when I proclaim and preach from the pulpit, what I trust the word of God is doing is

burning in you what the truth is. And though you may not have done certain things, the Spirit of God is not letting you get away with thinking about doing it; that the word of God is powerful enough to begin to move on you instantly. And it's His grace that we're not consumed instantly now. That's His grace. But God in His wonderful conviction is now even burning within our hearts about things that we've been thinking. So, how wonderful is His message. And this is one of the things that's being conveyed.

It says,

“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed...”

Why? Because he must be killed by the declaration of the mouth, by the message. It must be the message that condemns him. Scripture tells us in John 3, this is the Light, that the Light came into darkness, and this is what judges men.

In fact, if you read it with me, John 3. Once again, one of those great familiar passages, but sometimes you look over them and you go, “Wow, I didn't see that.”

(John 3:19) “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

(John 3:20) For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

(John 3:21) But he who practices the truth comes to the Light...”

So, what is he saying? Well, the judgment is the Light. The Light is revealing what you love and what you don't, and it's judging the intent and the motives of your heart. So, the word of God is powerful. And look, if you and I would believe that, what would we be telling people? We'd be proclaiming the word of God. If you and I believe that was the power, once again, go back to Romans 1:16, “I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I believe it to be the power of God,” Paul says. Do we? Do we believe that this gospel is that which moves the heart of men and shows their

motives and intent of their heart, convicts their heart? It's a wonderful thing. I don't have to go through a list of things that you've done wrong. I don't have to spy out in your house. I don't have to bug your phones. I don't have to know anything about what you do. God does. And all He has to do is proclaim the gospel and the gospel begins to move in your heart and you go, "I'm a sinner." And God goes, "Done. Done. We're done here. You're healed. Things are okay." And how wonderful it is that He takes us from that. I mean, can you imagine all the things that go before your eyes at that moment, and you go, "All are given to Him. He's freed me from all these things." But the necessity of the word of God to go forth and the light to be clear is that which brings about that conviction.

And that's why the text says,

"... he must be killed in this way."

Because the evidence must be seen.

Revelation 11:6) "These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not 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 plague, as often as they desire.”

Now, the point obviously is that they have the power to shut up grace, which by the way, the word of God has the power to withhold grace. If you deny the word of God, if you will not receive the love of God, the grace of God is withheld from you. The very things like the river flowing through you to give you benefit, things that exist as a benefit to you, can be stopped as well, can be actually turned into bad things. And difficult times can come, and oppression can come, as you begin to reject the words of God. So, all these things are really demonstrating that God is using all these things in people's life to bring them to the message. The ultimate point of the text is that these witnesses are here in the middle of the worst times of the earth to proclaim a message, and the consequences have to be very clear to those that are listening. And so, they're proclaiming that.

If you go all the way back into Zechariah 4, and we'll probably end in this and hopefully do a little tying together in this particular passage. But in Zechariah 4, you

have a similar scenario in some respects. And that scenario is that it's a time in which the people of God have become not only complacent, but the sources around them have become intimidating. And so, God has called two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to come and proclaim a message. Now, I'm going to tell you right off the bat that my understanding of this text is different than a lot of theologians, so I'm just telling on myself. And you have every right to believe that I'm not as intelligent as they are. But the passage itself seems not to be focusing on Zerubbabel and Joshua. The passage itself seems to be focusing specifically, I believe, on Haggai, who is the prophet, and Zechariah, who is the prophet of this book. And there are a number of reasons why I say that, and I'm going to try to explain it to you.

But if you look with me in Zechariah 4:3, he begins to explain two olive trees that he sees, and it sounds pretty familiar to Revelation, doesn't it? And so, the question of Zechariah is, "I'd like to know what this is all about?" And some of you may be asking the same thing about the two guys in Revelation.

(Zechariah 4:4) “Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, “What are these, my lord?”

(Zechariah 4:5) So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” ...”

Now, I don't know if the angel was a psychologist, but it sounds like he might have had some practice going on. But the text is emphasizing that Zechariah should have known. Now, the question is, why should he have known? And here's my answer. Because he was one of them. This is why the angel says, “What, don't you know? You're who we're talking about.” I don't believe he's talking about Zerubbabel and Joshua, who are going to be used to do these things. I believe he's talking about the prophets. I'm going to show you why.

Because if you go on, it says,

(Zechariah 4:6) “Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD...”

Now, he's talking about the lampstands and the light.

And he says,

“... “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel...””

Now, it's the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, but it's not Zerubbabel. What is the light? The word of the Lord, which has always been true. It's the word of the Lord that is the light, right?

“... saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.””

Now, Zerubbabel is a governor, so, you know, he might could work some things out. But what Zerubbabel needs to hear from the prophet is, “It's not going to be you that makes it happen. It's going to be the power of the word of God that's going to make it happen.” God's going to make it happen by His Spirit, by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts who orchestrates everything, every molecule, every star in the heavens. I'm the one that controls it.”

So, he says in verse 7,

(Zechariah 4:7) ““What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel...””

“I declare grace and the favor of God. It's going to happen.”

(Zechariah 4:8) “Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

(Zechariah 4:9) “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

(Zechariah 4:10) For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line...”

There's an interesting measurement going on.

“... in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.”

(Zechariah 4:11) Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?”

(Zechariah 4:12) And I answered the second time and said to him, “What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?”

(Zechariah 4:13) So he answered me, saying, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.”

(Zechariah 4:14) Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

Now, that's almost the exact same description that we see of the two witnesses in the passage. What's the point? Well, the point is, though Zerubbabel is a governor and he's going to be working with his hands, and though Joshua is the high priest and he's going to be doing what he needs to do, things will not change because of them. The things are going to change because of these two prophets that are declaring the word of God. If you remember, the whole system was held up because everybody was afraid to start building again. But when these two prophets came in, well, just look with me in Ezra 5.

If you go all the way back to Ezra 5, it'll give a clue to this.

If you look at the end of Chapter 4,

(Ezra 4:24) "Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped...."

Now the fact of the matter is, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua were very much a part of this.

But now you go to Chapter 5, and it says this,

Ezra 5:1) “When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them,

(Ezra 5:2) then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God...”

What caused them to rebuild? When the word of God was proclaimed. And the whole point of the passage is that the power of the Spirit is far more powerful than anything that you and I can do. If we would actually believe that, then things would be accomplished. If we don't believe that, then nothing will be accomplished. And it's not by might, it's not by power, but by God's Spirit, says the Lord. And it's by the message, and it's by the testimony, and it's by the words of God where conviction begins to change the hearts of men. And this is the focus of the whole text, that there's great power in this. And

the church has been denying the power of the message. And it's the reason why they've become impotent in really doing anything. They're going around and making the same promises that politicians do. And they're involving themselves in things which maybe they can accomplish, but certainly nothing that is of any eternal value. So, Scripture is bringing us to this wonderful place of saying, "Okay, here's a power that's far greater." And what a graphic way, what a graphic picture that it gives.

I've got to end with this. Matthew 23. And once again, I'm probably going to be debating with some theologians in this. But God is saying in Matthew 23 that the Pharisees, religion, they're just hypocrites. He refers to them as whitewashed tombs in verse 25.

He says in verse 28,

(Matthew 23:28) "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy..."

Matthew 23:29) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ..."

But what's interesting to me is that He says in verse 34, (Matthew 23:34) “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, (Matthew 23:35) so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah...”

Now, some people say this is the Zechariah in Chronicles, which is another Zechariah. But if you look at the text, he is the son of Berechiah, right? Well, that's the Zechariah where we just read. Now, what's interesting is that little prophetic book, Zechariah, we were just reading in, we have no record of that Zechariah being killed by anybody.

But the text reads,

“... the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”

Which seems to convey that they got the temple built and the religious leaders then later on killed him. The point is that Jesus is proving, “You never have liked truth. Even

when you got things in order, and finally when you got things in order, it seemed like you were doing the right thing, but of course, then you go and kill.” So, from Abel all the way to Zechariah until Christ comes on scene, He says, “You've been killing the guys that have been...” So, is it strange that these two witnesses are going to be slaughtered in the streets of religion? Is it strange? Don't be surprised when men say things against you and when oftentimes it's religion that is against you. Don't be shocked. That's what religion does, because religion hates efficacy. It hates true power. Because once you say that Jesus is enough, then they're no longer needed. And all of their oppression and all of their rules and regulations, you don't have to abide by anymore. You're not trying to please them anymore. You don't look up to them as the grand person who changes your life. You're just looking up to the Savior. And they hate the fact that our gospel has power.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for the wonderful words of life that are efficacious, that change things, that change us. They convict us of things. They move our hearts. Lord, You tell Your disciples, "All power has been given, heaven and earth, and I give you that power, that you might bind on earth, and it will be bound in heaven, that you will loose on earth, and it will be loosed in heaven." That this Gospel, this message, binds evil and sets free the prisoners. This message of the Gospel is so powerful that it changes things, and religion just cannot handle that. Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. I'm asking you to step out of the realm of religion and into the realm of reality, of something that actually works. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not the method of Gary. It is not the work of Family Bible Church. It is the message of Jesus Christ, and it is the power that changes the hearts. If you will but embrace this message, if you will proclaim the truth of this without apology, things will change. People will change. God will bring even to you people that you might see change, for it's powerful. Rest assured, you will not be liked by religion, for it seeks only to blind the eyes

of the truth. But for those that are searching, it is the power of God to eternal life. With your heads bowed, I'm asking you to pray with me that you and I would be used greatly, as strongly and as powerfully as these men are, these two witnesses that God calls to do this great work. May we boldly proclaim this message.