

Rev 26-02-18b

We continue our study now. We're in Revelation chapter 11. We're looking at the two witnesses and noticing that as the Lord Jesus charged those in Smyrna, be faithful unto death.

And these individuals are, and it is amazing that they are invulnerable. They are absolutely nine feet tall and bulletproof throughout the time of their ministry. When their ministry is fulfilled, God provides an even greater ministry in their seeming defeat.

And what a picture of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, to drink his cup and to undergo his baptism as these two witnesses do. There is the appearance of loss. There is the appearance of failure.

There is the appearance of complete discrediting and dismissing and celebration on the part of the enemies. Can you imagine as an alternate, as a mirror image of the joy and rejoicing in heaven when a sinner comes to repentance that Jesus described the joy and rejoicing amongst the fallen angels and Satan himself when they believed that the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ had been taken out and was unable to implement his kingdom only to discover through the resurrection that instead of being the greatest victory they had ever achieved, this was actually their undoing and the Lord Jesus will lead captivity captive. He has triumphed over death and the grave.

Oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Nothing this life can throw at us will overcome the overcomers. We overcome in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And these witnesses looking to the future, just as we look to the past in scripture and draw comfort and assurance and learning and wisdom from the promises and principles and doctrines, the narratives, the exhortations, the teaching portions of the word of God that help us to understand God's purpose, God's will, God's character through the historic aspects of scripture. We see it here in the anticipation of what is to come. You don't have to wait for the days of tribulation and the time of Jacob's trouble to benefit from the lessons that it reflects.

And so the example here of the two witnesses, whoever they may be, I personally think there is a persuasive amount of evidence that this is James and John. You remember, as I pointed out last time, that in Luke chapter nine, when Jesus is traveling through Samaria and he's heading to Jerusalem and the Samaritans say, stop here, stop here, we want you to come here. You would think, wow, look at there's a response to the Lord Jesus in Samaria.

It's probably greater than in Judea. Why wouldn't he stay here? And when he does not consent to remain, the Samaritans get mad at him and start yelling at him. And so in Luke 9, 54, James and John specifically ask the Lord if they can call down fire from heaven on Samaria.

It's their idea. And I'm a little bit amused. I could easily imagine the Lord Jesus saying, just bite

your time.

You want to call down fire from heaven? It's coming. But the time is not right. This is the age of the lamb, not the lion.

This is the lamb who has yet to be slain, not the lamb as it had been slain. And Jesus does not bring death on anyone in his first coming that is reserved for the second coming. And James and John are jumping the gun.

Let us call down fire on these blasphemers, these horrifically insensitive and abusive and unrepentant people. They have a zeal for God. They have a zeal for the Lord Jesus.

They are indignant that the Lord Jesus is being rejected and repudiated and insulted. And they want to bring judgment upon them. And Jesus says, no, you don't know what spirit you're of.

The spirit of this time is of appeal, of the offer of repentance. The spirit of judgment is future. Remember when the Lord Jesus was reading from the Isaiah scroll and said, the spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good tidings to the poor, to heal the broken and so on.

And he stops in the middle of a sentence in Isaiah before it says, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He doesn't read that part. He stops.

But I think that this, and that is the spirit of the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Preach good tidings to the poor, to bind up the broken, to minister to the broken hearted. This is the testimony to take back to John the Baptist in prison, the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Go tell John, because there is the suffering servant, Mashiach Ben Yosef, Messiah, son of Joseph. But the coming one is going to have an entirely different aspect. So you remember in Mark chapter 10, verses 38 and 39, and we had a beautiful rendition of a hymn that commemorates this passage.

Jesus says to James and John specifically, whoever requested to sit at his right and left hand, can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? Mark chapter 10, verse 38, 39. Jesus says, you will uniquely to those two disciples. And I can't think of a more graphic fulfillment of that prediction, that promise from the Lord Jesus than the chapter that is before us.

James was martyred early, it's in Acts chapter 12. John is the opposite end of the bracket. James is the first to go, John is the last.

They are the first and the last. They bracket the apostolic age. But the cup is more than just martyrdom, it is reflecting and performing Christ's witness against the powers of the world.

And this goes back to these plagues that they can call down. This is the proof, this is the demonstration that the God that is preached, the salvation in Christ that is offered, the

opportunity for repentance is unlike anything the world has to offer. It has greater power.

It can stop, it can put away, it can rebuke and even destroy the powers of this world that try to come against it. Remember when Jesus told Peter, you are Petras and on this Petra, your confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Doesn't mean that there will not be a time when there will be a seeming defeat, a seeming setback.

The promises of God seem to be in abeyance during the destruction of the Northern kingdom by Assyria in 721 or the carrying away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar with his three waves of invasion ultimately resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple in 586 BC seem to be over. Israel is no longer in the land, but God through his prophets promised to regather his people and they will gather in unbelief. We've covered this in our Kings and Prophets and our post-exilic prophet studies in the past.

Prophetic scripture witnesses that Israel will return to the land in unbelief, which they have done. Don't let anyone tell you that 1948 and following is meaningless. This is the beginning of signs.

This is the beginning of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Israel has been largely regathered in its historic land, but the end is not yet. So fire called down from heaven, fire from heaven.

This is God's judgment coming down. And we've seen it in these preceding chapters in the revelation. The witnesses drink the cup of the Lord Jesus.

They are hated by those who hear their testimony as the religious structure, the authorities, both civil and religious are threatened by the message of the Lord Jesus. So they are hated by the system. They are publicly killed and they are then ultimately vindicated in their resurrection.

And the baptism, the Lord Jesus was baptized with, Paul talks about this. We are baptized into his death and we are raised with Christ. That's the ultimate baptism.

Water baptism is a mere shadow. We are baptized with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit baptizes us into his death. You can look those passages up.

We've seen them many times. So this is in the pattern of, and there are many who believe these witnesses are Moses and Elijah. I sympathize with them greatly, but looking at prophecy as pattern, they are coming as John the Baptist did in the spirit and power of Elijah for Jesus' first advent, his first coming.

And for the second coming, instead of one witness, Elijah, you have two witnesses. First coming, one witness, John the Baptist. Second coming, two witnesses.

Moses and Elijah pattern. Moses, the law giver confronting the empire who would change the

times and the laws and come up with its own system of righteousness instead of that which Moses represented to God's people. And remember, this is age of Israel.

This is the 70th week. So the witnesses are Old Testament figures. They are olive trees, but they are also lampstands because the additional information is salvation through Christ.

Previously hidden, now revealed. The Gentiles can enter in. The mystery that was entrusted to Paul.

The mystery of the kingdom of God. The mystery of God. Chapter 10, verse seven, now revealed.

So Moses, the law giver confronting the civil and economic and governmental structures that man seeks to build like a tower of Babel to raise himself up. And Elijah confronting apostate religion, false worship, false gods, symbolized in his day and summed up with the prophets of Baal under Jezebel. You have the unholy alliance of Jezebel with the Baal cult.

Moses and Elijah, the side of law and structure, which includes economy. And then you have apostate religion and its unholy alliance. We're going to see that upcoming in Revelation with the woman riding the beast.

The woman, mystery Babylon, mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints and so on, is the woman of religion, the Jezebel, the scarlet harlot, in an unholy alliance attempting to control government. And all you have to do is look at the history of the last 2,000 years to see this and its abject failure and the death and heinous evil and destruction that it has wrought. So you see that there is a Moses-Elijah echo.

Water turned to blood, Moses. Fire from heaven, Elijah. Shut up the heavens, Elijah.

Frogs, Moses. There is this thread of relationship, but these individuals are two olive trees and two lampstands. And the only way you can turn Moses and Elijah into lampstands is if someone comes in the spirit and after the likeness of the way John the Baptist did of Elijah with his garb and his diet and his message.

So these are the witnesses. Now, I have skipped over for the purpose of completing our witness survey, the first part of chapter 11, where John, before the ministry of the two witnesses, is handed a rod. I was given a reed like a measuring rod.

He wasn't just given a reed and he wasn't just given a rod. He was given a reed like a measuring rod. Now, this is fascinating to me for the same reason that the word again was fascinating to me.

So if you look at the words here for reed and rod, this is Revelation 11, verse one in the Greek. We have two words. The first one is a reed, a reed.

And if you check this out, it is the word kalamos, not kamala, kalamos, K-A-L-A-M-O-S. When you

consult the lexicon, it's number 2,563 in your Strong's, this is a reed, the plant or its stem or a similar plant. And it comes to mean a pen.

They would take these and cut them short, sharpen it to a point and use it to deliver ink to a surface. But we find it in the New Testament when the Lord Jesus talks about John the Baptist and he says, what did you come out in the wilderness to see in Matthew 11, verse seven? A reed shaken by the wind, a kalamos, a kalamon here since it's accusive, shaken by the wind. In Matthew 12, verse 20, Old Testament prophecy rendered into Greek, a battered reed he will not break.

This is, both of these are a stalk growing from sort of swampy soil, a swampy area. When you come to the end of Jesus' ministry, Matthew 27, verse 29, and the soldiers are mocking him. They give him the crown of thorns on his head and they put a reed in his right hand because this is mocking the idea that he has a scepter or a rod of authority.

He's got the reed in his right hand. Then they take that reed away from him in the next verse and they began to smack him with it and beat him on the head with it. This is kalamos.

You find this in Matthew 27, 29, and 30. This is the same word when he is on the cross and he says, I thirst. And they put a sponge of vinegar on a reed and lift it to his lips.

But when he tastes what it is, he doesn't consume it. This was also something of an anesthetic was used to dull pain, which would prolong the crucifixion process. But that's Matthew 27, 48.

You wonder if it's the same reed all three times. It's in his hand as a mocking symbol of kingship. Then it is used to beat him.

And then it is used to try to extend his agony on the cross by giving him a sponge of vinegar. You find parallels to some of these in Luke chapter seven. What did you come out to see? A reed shaken by the wind in Luke 7, 24.

But in third John, our author uses this same word to take up ink and pen to write unto you. And it's translated there as pen. Pen.

And then we have it in our passage here in Revelation 11, verse one. It is going to occur again one more time in the Revelation in chapter 21, verse 15 and 16. Then it is going to be a golden rod.

Not the flower, not the weed, but it is a golden measuring rod. And an angel is going to measure the new Jerusalem and the temple with it. So measuring rod is what we have here.

Now, why is that important? First of all, think of the connection. This is not a real common word in the New Testament. And when you see the reed, if you're familiar at all with New Testament scripture, you think of the words of the Lord Jesus and you think of His trials and His mocking and scourging where a reed is used to abuse Him, to deride Him.

That is this reed. Why are we told that it is a reed like a rod? Like a staff. The second word here is rabdo, R-H-A.

It's actually H-R, but we just switch them around to speak it in English. R-H-A-B-D-O, rabdo, rabdo. And when you check this in the lexicon, this is a stick or wand.

It is a rod. It is translated scepter in many contexts. So this is a reed like a scepter.

Again, you can't help but think of one of the worst periods in the life of the Lord Jesus, when He is scourged and mocked with the crown of thorns and the reed for a scepter, a reed like a rod. It is a calamouse like a rabdo. So this is a rod, a scepter, or a staff.

This, interestingly, is the word that is used when the Lord Jesus is commissioning the 12 to go forth and do not take two tunics, do not take a bag, do not take money in your belt. And in two of the three witnesses in Matthew and Luke, He says, take no rod, take no rabdo with you. In Mark, He says, don't take anything with you except a rod.

No extra sandals, no staff, or no bag, no bread, no money in your belt, and so on. So in Mark chapter six, verse eight, take nothing except a rabdo. In Luke chapter nine, verse three, and in Matthew 10, 10, He says, do not take it.

This is an apparent contradiction. Did He say take a staff or did He not? And the answer is yes. These disciple teams are going throughout the land and the walking staff, the rabdo, is necessary.

Why would young men need to use a cane as it were? If it were just an assistance for walking, you would think these guys are young and healthy. They're going to travel. They travel by foot all the time.

They've traveled with the Lord Jesus hither and yon. Why do they need a staff? Are they leaning on it like an old man? No, but there are times when there is difficult terrain and you need it for safety. There is also places where thieves and vandals hang out and you need it for personal defense.

And some of the disciples, some of these pairs are going to be going into rough or dangerous territory. They will take a staff. Most of them will not.

So two of your three witnesses say you don't need a staff. Mark gives Peter's testimony. And I suspect that Peter and Andrew as a team probably had to go to some rough quarters and they probably did take a staff.

So we can look around at one another and say, well, God seems to have provided extra for you that he didn't give to me. What's the mission? If the mission requires it, God will provide it. God will mandate it.

If your mission doesn't need it, don't look across the fence at others and say, well, they've got

this. Why do I not have that? Why do I not have it? Different targets, different opportunities, different kinds of ministry. So I don't see it as a contradiction.

I see it as a provision. You two, you four, yeah, take a staff. The rest of you, you don't need one.

But it is this word, rabdo. So it is an item of defense. It is a scepter.

This that is handed to John is used to measure the temple. And this is right before the testimony of the witnesses. The sequence is so important here.

The angel stands there and has the open book. This is before John is told that he's going to prophesy again. It is in order for him to eat the little scroll.

Then you have the two witnesses, but before the witnesses, you have the measuring. And this, in a nutshell, if you want to put something in the margin of your Bible at the beginning of chapter 11, read the room. John is going to take the measure of those who worship.

What kind of temple exists? There is no temple right now. If there's going to be a temple in the time of tribulation, who built it? What does it look like? Were they obedient to the word of the Lord? And spiritually speaking, we are the temple. Does our temple measure up? If John comes in a spiritual sense to measure us as a temple, are we sanctified? Are we cleansed? Are we anointed? Are we holy? Are we a place that qualifies for the presence of God as the tabernacle and later the temple were supposed to do? Build it according to the pattern, God tells Moses, that you saw on the mount.

It is a reflection of what is in heaven. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Jesus tells the disciples to pray. So the question in chapter 11, the first couple of verses, does our temple measure up? Before the two witnesses undertake their ministry, John is going to take this staff that is like a rod.

It is a measuring device and it's not blowing in the wind. What did you come out to see? A shaking reed? A bruised reed that might break? Remember when it says a bruised reed he will not break? The Lord Jesus came to bind up and to heal, not to break what's already halfway broken. So significant, this reed, like a rod, like a staff of both defense and authority.

Why did Jesus tell his disciples don't take a staff when you go for this witness? Because they are not coming as lording it over those to whom they speak. We're not coming here with a symbol of authority. We're not coming here with a stick like Moses' rod or Aaron's rod that budded, representing we're authorities from God.

We are appealing to you on the basis of the gospel itself, the content of God's invitation to relationship and redemption and cleansing and function, restoration as God's covenant people. We are coming with the message. It's not the messenger, it's the message.

The messenger is coming with nothing. If you like the message, then give some bread to the

messenger, but he's not coming with a cudgel to beat you over the head. He's not gonna try to fend off your arguments.

If you're unwilling, they're just gonna shake the dust off their feet and go to another town. But they are not coming trying to impress you. Paul says, we did not come to you with great swelling words of wisdom.

We came to you in the power of the spirit to preach Christ and him crucified. So important. Isn't it amazing? There's just not a wasted word.

There is not an unimportant detail anywhere in this. John is handed a reed like a rod to measure. And this measuring has spiritual importance.

What is he doing here? Taking the measure of those who dwell at that time on the earth and purport to be worshipers of God. Don't measure the court of the nations, the Gentiles. There's no hope for them.

This is why the two witnesses are going to witness in Jerusalem. If there are any people of faith, they will be in or near Jerusalem, just as in the Old Testament, people of faith were in or near Israel. That's the place of witness.

If anyone is going to respond, it's gonna be someone who is already looking, already near the place of worship. And this is in spiritual terms. Geographically, they might be anywhere.

But in terms of the message that we are receiving here, you have to be looking like the Ethiopian eunuch who traveled from Ethiopia to Israel to get a copy of the scriptures so that he can see for himself the truth of the word of God. And God sends Philip miraculously, snatched up by the hair of his head, as it were, and dropped by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to meet that eunuch. And they don't meet in Jerusalem, but that's where the Ethiopian came and got himself an expensive copy of the book of Isaiah, not a small scroll.

And he's attempting to read it and understand it, and God brings Philip to give him understanding. And he believes, and he's baptized, symbolic of the fulsome ministry of the Spirit. So, arise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.

Now, you can't really measure people who worship with this kind of rod. What's the idea? It tells you that this is non-literal. What kind of worship structure is in place? And who has come to worship there? What is their motivation? Jesus came on the day of the parade into Jerusalem on the back of the colt of a donkey and looked around and left.

He took the measure, and what he saw was a disappointment. He will stand on the brow of the hill and weep over Jerusalem because they did not know the day of their visitation. John is gonna take the same kind of measure just before the consummation of his prophetic ministry as one of the two witnesses, in my view.

And he's gonna take the measure the way the Lord Jesus did, just before he drinks the cup and experiences the baptism. The sequence, the order, the content here is so important. The Lord Jesus, having taken the measure, is beaten with the instrument of measure, the reed.

And he does not take up the rod of authority. He doesn't call 10,000 angels, as the song says, to destroy the world and set him free. My two witnesses, by God's power and grace, they will fend off any attack.

They are not attackers, but they have a perfect defense. No one can harm them until their ministry is complete. There is a set time of ministry, and when it ends, God could have taken them straight to glory the same way he could have taken the Lord Jesus straight to glory.

Instead, he allows them to be slain. And for people to out themselves with their attitude of celebration and vindication and belief that they are victorious. They identify themselves.

They can't explain it away. They can't say, well, I know what I said, but what I really thought. It's out.

They will be judged according to their works when you get to Revelation 20. The books will be opened. Is this what you did when the two witnesses lay slain in the streets and you wouldn't allow them to be buried? Are these the gifts that you sent and exchanged? Don't tell me that in your heart of hearts you felt differently.

Look at your actions. You will be judged by your works. The world judges us by our works.

Does our light so shine before men that they see our good works and are motivated to glorify God in heaven? So when they finished their testimony, verse seven, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit. Where have we seen this? Have we seen a beast ascend out of the bottomless pit yet? This is going to take a little bit of investigation.

Is John anticipating things that he hasn't yet described in detail? Have we seen anything come out of the pit yet? We may have to revisit what has come out of the bottomless pit. There was a star that fell from heaven with a key to the bottomless pit and opened it and Abaddon and Apollyon, or slash Apollyon, if you will, lets the demon locusts out. Did we see a beast? We'll have to investigate.

What is our conclusion for tonight? This is given to us for our instruction, just like all of the other scriptures. It's fascinating to be given a visionary view of what is to come, but these forces, these kinds of people and kinds of activities are already present. The spirit of Antichrist, according to this same John, is already at work in the world.

What should our response be? We should be inspired by the example of the two witnesses who rely on God for their defense, who call upon God for the confusion and confounding of those who would thwart their mission. They, like John, keep on keeping on. You must prophesy again,

John.

You're not done when you get finished writing this revelation vision. You've got a further ministry. If we are alive and breathing air, God has a continuing purpose for our lives.

And like John, in order to perform it, we need to consume the little scroll. We need to enjoy the taste and be willing to endure whatever bitterness may come. John was warned in advance, not every part of this is going to be tasty.

There's going to be some pain, some internal sorrow, perhaps, in the application, in the digesting, in the understanding of what this means. Are you able? Are we able? And it is a good question to ask. I encourage you to go to our music stream that is linked on the homepage of the website and listen and read again, Are Ye Able? The lyrics to that hymn are a beautiful distillation and summary of what we are called to do in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah, after the anticipated pattern of these two witnesses, in consonance with the church in Smyrna.

Can we be faithful until we die? Even if it becomes the instrumentality of our death. We don't live in the age of martyrs where we are. You look at what's happening in Africa, you look at what's happening in other places in the world, and there are Christians who are daily being murdered because they are Christians and for no other reason.

We are generally not party to that. I don't want to undergo that physical calamity. I want to be a spiritual warrior that refuses to be silenced, refuses to be led astray, neutralized, deflected from the reason God put me on this earth.

And each one of us should be looking for opportunities to exercise our spiritual gift. As my old pastor said, if you are still here, God still has a plan for your life. Whatever the circumstance, we don't even have to know what it is.

Be faithful unto death, I will give you the crown of life. We want that crown. We want that life.

We want to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and vindicate His work on our behalf in saving us and making us presentable before His Father in heaven. So when you think about Revelation 11 and the two witnesses, faithfulness. God will provide defense for as long as is necessary.

And if we do experience a defeat and we are faithful, it is going to result in an even greater expression of victory, resurrection from death, ascension into the very presence of God to receive a well-done, thou good and faithful servant. That's our opportunity. It doesn't seem like it in the mundane circumstances of our life.

And that's why we have this scripture, this message from the Lord Jesus through the Apostle John to remind us that this is what's on the line. Don't be fooled and think that it is a day of small things. Your daily spiritual battle to be faithful and obedient has consequences undreamed of, unless and until we take these scriptures to the bank.

Your life is important. Your decisions, your attitudes, your words, and your actions of faithfulness and obedience, regardless of the consequences. Your prayers going up in the golden altar mixed with the perfume matter.

Don't take it lightly. What a privilege and opportunity it is to live in this age. Father, we thank you for that privilege and we pray that God, the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts.

Help us to be faithful witnesses now and in the ages to come in function and service and in appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray, amen.