

Text: Revelation 11:2-14

Title: "The day of the very big thing"

Time: 11/12/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro: We saw last week in the first verse of our chapter that John is commanded to use a God-given measuring rod to measure the temple, including God's dwelling place, the altar of incense, and the worshippers that are there. We made the point that in measuring these things this way, John would be obtaining a deeper appreciation for them. We spent some time trying to deepen our appreciation for God's dwelling places, prayer, and worship in our day.

As we come to verse 2, we find that John is told specifically not to measure the outer-court of the temple of heaven, which is later identified as the earthly Jerusalem of Palestine, the holy city where our Lord was crucified (v. 8). The angel explains that Jerusalem cannot be appreciated with the measuring rod now because it is being trampled underfoot by the nations of the earth (v. 2). Rather than having John measure Jerusalem, the king-angel of chapter 10 sends his two witnesses to it in order to prophesy to it (v. 3). When they are finished doing that one-tenth of Jerusalem is destroyed in an earthquake, and 7000 Jews lose their lives. But those who survive that calamity, perhaps the other 90% of the city, give glory to the God of heaven (v. 13).

So this is what happens in this chapter. As we endeavor to understand what this means and how to apply it to our lives, we are helped by the fact that we can hear two important echoes of Old Testament passages in this chapter.

The first is an echo of Daniel's 70th week prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27). That last week of this prophecy (v. 27) is the seven

years of the Great Tribulation. In the middle of that week, or after 3.5 years, the passage tells us that the ultimate trampling of Israel happens. Antichrist breaks covenant with Israel, sets up an image of himself in the Most holy place, and demands to be worshipped. This is called Daniel's "abomination of desolation."

Our passage this morning tells us that the two witnesses prophesy for 42 months, 1260 days, or 3.5 years (Rev. 11:2-3). When we read about this period of time, we immediately think on that second half of Daniel's week, after the antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and demands worship of his image in their temple. That second-half period of the Great Tribulation is the timeframe of the ministry of these two prophet-witnesses.

The second echo from the Old Testament is one that we hear in v. 4. This truth originates in Zechariah 4, where Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the priest, are described as two olive trees, whom God has anointed to give oil to a lampstand that would help rebuild a temple that has been trodden under foot by the Gentiles.

That day was a day of small things, but not a day to be despised. It was a prophetic type that looked ahead in Zechariah's prophecy to what these two witnesses do in this passage. We might say that in Zechariah we read about the day of small things; here we read about the day of the very big thing. In Zechariah we read about rebuilding a temple that would be destroyed again by the trampling of Gentiles, and here we read about the rebuilding project that is going to put an end to the trampling of the Gentiles in Jerusalem.

It is what Paul described in Rom. 11:25, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye

should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." That fullness is about to come in here in Revelation 11, and the blindness of Israel is coming to an end. God uses these two witnesses to help remove Israel's blindness just before the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.

For our hearts this morning, I want us to see four things about their witnessing that can also be true of ours today.

I. Their witness will be empowered by the Holy Spirit (vv. 2-4).

Illustration: One of the great blessings we enjoy as members of a local church is seeing how the Lord provides for our needs. Sometimes we know who gives a gift, and we rejoice as a brother or sister is letting his light shine that we may see his good works and glorify his Father who is in heaven. But often gifts are given completely anonymously. When we know where the gift comes from, we can be tempted to think about the glory of the man who gives, but when the gift is entirely anonymous, we can only wonder at the generosity and goodness of the Lord.

Appl: A lot of ink and paper has been used to try to identify who these two witnesses may be. We are not going to spend any time doing that this morning because it seems as though the text would have us focus on other things about them. They are anonymous for a reason—it is not them but the one who sent them who really matters. Note some indications of this with me:

1. The two witnesses belong to the king-angel of chapter 10, a representation of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 3, "*my* two witnesses"). Jesus has said the same thing about you and I:

“And ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses *unto Me*” (Acts 1:8). When He called a disciple, He said, “Follow *Me* and *I will make you a fisher of men*” (Matt. 4:19). When He commanded us to make disciples, He promised, “And lo, *I am with you* always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

We are not just witnesses; we are Jesus’s witnesses. We are sent by Him, have His work to do, do that work under His authority, and do that work with the power of His Spirit. The job is a difficult one (note the sackcloth of v. 3, which indicates a very negative message), but it can be done because we are His witnesses.

2. The two witnesses possess the oil that gives the light (v. 4). The olive tree does not burn to give the light; nor does the lampstand. It is the oil that these possess that burns and gives the light. So too in our witness, it is not we who cause people to see God’s truth. It is not even our ministry as a local church. The eye-opening power of that light is the Spirit of truth we possess and share. He alone can do the miracle of giving spiritual light. How did we come to possess that oil? It comes from our relationship with Christ – the two witnesses stand before the Lord, and so must we if we are to be Spirit-anointed possessors of light-giving truth.

These two witnesses shall be empowered mightily by the Holy Spirit in their witness. Jesus told His disciples, “Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” Will our witness for Christ be empowered by God’s Spirit as it should be, or will it be true of our lives that something has caused Him to become quenched or grieved? A good way to answer that question is to honestly assess what kind of witness we have been. Has God’s Spirit used us as His lampstand? Do we possess the oil that burns brightly for Him, or has something grieved His Spirit?

II. Their witness will be vindicated by God's judgment (vv. 5-6).

Illustration: Our witness to people is not always welcomed kindly by them. I can remember a Mr. Wilson who shouted at my visitation partner and I that he was a good Methodist and then slammed the door in our faces. I turned to my friend and said, "Boy, I sure am glad he was not a bad Methodist." Humiliated, we had to put our tail between our legs and meekly try to share the gospel at our next stop.

Appl: If these two witnesses show up at Mr. Wilson's door during the Great Tribulation, he will be in grave danger if he tries to act like a "good Methodist" with them. The witness of these two will be vindicated by God's judgment in real time. This is a period of judgment, not of grace. There will be no waiting for the vindication of their witness.

But I want us to see this morning that although in our age of grace there is a great delay in the vindication of our witness through the judgment of God, that vindication will come. What should concern us today, however, is failing to be the witness that will someday be vindicated by that judgment of sinners. That is the failure God warned Ezekiel's about as His watchman: "But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me" (Ezek. 33:6).

Will God's judgment of sinners vindicate our witness someday? Or will we be found instead with blood on our hands because of our failure to warn them now?

III. Their witness will be victorious over God's enemies (vv. 7-12).

Application: One thing every witness has in common with these two witnesses of Revelation 11 and every other faithful witness or prophet who has ever been sent by the Lord to a sinful world is that Satan is the enemy of their witness. He hates witnesses, and he will do everything in his power to tarnish, corrupt, silence, intimidate, and ultimately kill, if he has to, God's witness.

But look what happens in the face of this enemy in our passage:

1. The witnesses are stopped only when they are finished (v. 7).
2. The witnesses proclaim the death of Christ even in their own death (v. 8).
3. The witnesses are resurrected and raptured (vv. 11-12).

Jesus said not to fear the one who can destroy the body, but to fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Whom do we fear? What does it take to stop our witness? Has the enemy succeeded with us before we finished our witness? Have we exchanged our witness for a bowl of potage, comfort, and ease in Egypt and Sodom? What will be said of our witness when we are resurrected and raptured and stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Will our witness be victorious over God's enemies, or succumb?

IV. Their witness will bear fruit to the glory of God (vv. 13-14).

Application: 7000 more people die in this earthquake. We have seen from these chapters of Revelation that many will

die during the Great Tribulation. Significantly, this verse is a bit different from the others in two respects.

1. First, the word translated *men* in verse 13 is actually the word *names*. I think that word is used to remind us two things about all these people who die during the Great Tribulation -

- (1) they have names - "John, Daryl, Frank, Linda, Doris, Stacy" - we need the reminder that these 7000 have names;
- (2) their names need to be written in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5, 13:8, 20:15).

2. Second, a remnant is mentioned after this judgment, who give glory to the God of heaven (v. 13). After the witness of these two prophets, there is a great harvest in the 90% of Jerusalem that was not destroyed by the earthquake. I believe that we begin to see here the fulfillment of Zech. 12:10, "Then I will pour out a Spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and they will look at Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for Him as one weeps for a firstborn." And so Paul promised, "All Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). The work of these two witnesses is a glorious part of that outcome. Will our witness bear fruit to the glory of God? Do we believe Jesus's prophecy about our day: "I will build my church!"

Conclusion: The day of the two witnesses is the day of the really big thing. "Who has despised the day of small things?" is a question for our day as it was for the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua. They had a lampstand that was lesser in scale than the salvation of all Israel in the Great Tribulation. We too have a lampstand that is lesser than

scale – our local church ministry (Rev. 1:12, etc.). Will we despise our day of small things or be faithful witnesses – empowered by the Holy Spirit, vindicated by God’s judgment, victorious over God’s enemies, and fruitful to the glory of God as He has promised to build His church through the salvation of precious names yet found in the Lamb’s Book of Life?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*