**Revelation 11:1-14**

Introduction

I. Revelation’s Images

Revelation’s power is not in giving us brand new information but in giving us old information in a new way: through powerful and evocative images. Its purpose is both to inform our intellectual and also to inspire our imaginations for living out the faith in this world until Christ returns.

II. Context

A. Ch. 10-11 is an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet that shows us what God’s people are doing during the time of the trumpets = bearing faithful witness to Christ

 B. Interpretive issues

 1. Some see this as a description of two men who will one day appear.

2. Others see these two witnesses as a representation of the church’s faithful witness to Christ. The story functions much like one of Jesus’ parables

3. Either way, the chapter is about faithful witness to Christ, and so either way we can learn a lot from the example of these two witnesses

 C. The role of a faithful witness

 1. See Acts 1:8 and 24:12-14

2. Jesus is on trial with the world, and his people are brought in as witnesses to testify (through word and deed) to the fact that he really is who he says he is.

The Passage

I. The posture and purpose of the witnesses (v. 3)

 A. They are “prophesying” (v. 3)

1. prophesy = speaking God’s truth

2. Speaking God’s truth is often met with opposition and antagonism as is clearly the case in this passage (consider also the OT prophets, the ministry of Jesus, and the early church as examples of opposition to faithful witness)

 B. They are clothed in sackcloth (v. 3)

1. People wear sackcloth as a sign of repentance and mourning

2. Their posture is not one of arrogance or anger, but they are humbly calling the world to repent with the hope that people will make peace with their creator

II. Their ministry is modeled after 4 key Biblical figures

A. Zerubbabel and Joshua in the book of Zechariah (v. 4)

1. See Zechariah 4:1-6

2. In a time of conflict and challenge, God encouraged his two servants (Zerubbabel and Joshua that they would succeed, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”

3. Likewise, these two witnesses are sent out in the power of the Spirit and will succeed only by God’s Spirit

B. Elijah (v. 5-6a)

1. See 1 Kings 17:1 and 2 Kings 1:10-12

2. Just as God worked powerfully through Elijah, so also he would work powerfully through these two witnesses

C. Moses (v. 6b)

1. See Exodus

2. Just as God worked powerfully through Moses, so also he would work through these two witnesses

 D. Jesus (v. 7-13)

 1. Notice how their ministry parallels Jesus’ ministry in many ways

-They witness with signs and wonders, they are killed in a humiliating way, dead for 3 ½ days, their enemies rejoice over their death, they are raised up to heaven in a cloud

 2. The main idea here is that their ministry parallels Jesus’ ministry.

It is a ministry of power, but also suffering, humiliation, death, but ultimate vindication by God

E. All of these references communicate the idea that these two witnesses will witness in the power of the Spirit, with God’s power behind them, but will also experience suffering, humiliation, and even death, yet with God’s final vindication

III. Notice the impact they have on the world

 A. For the most part the world is antagonistic to them

 B. But when all is seen in its entirety many “give glory to the God of heaven” (v. 13)

 1. This is the most positive response the world has to God in all of Revelation

2. What the judgments of God did not bring about alone, the faithful witness of the church does bring about: people glorifying God

 See 1 Peter 2:11-12

IV. This is the story of the church we see throughout the ages

A. The church in Acts witnessed in the context of the Jewish authorities, and they suffered and died as a result, but the testimony of their lives brought about many people coming to faith in Christ

B. The church in the early centuries witnessed in the context of the Roman empier, and they suffered and died as a result, but the testimony of their lives brought about many people coming to faith in Christ

“Crucify us, torture us, condemn us, destroy us! Your iniquity is the proof of our innocence. For this reason God permits us to suffer these things. Yet, your tortures accomplish nothing, though each is more refined than the last; rather, they are an enticement to our religion. We become more numerous every time we are cut down by you: the blood of Christians is seed.” --Tertullian

C. Today we continue in this tradition of faithful witnesses who face opposition and also great opportunity

1. What are the gods of this age that Christianity confronts? What does it look like to be witnesses to Jesus in our particular context?

2. Examples: sexuality, materialism, relativism, image, success, keeping up, etc.

**Discussion Questions**

1. On Sunday, we talked about Acts 1:8 where Jesus says, “you are my witnesses.” He uses a courtroom metaphor in which he is on trial with the world (is he who he claims to be?) and we are brought in as witnesses to testify to the truth of his claims through word and deed. What are the implications of that metaphor, and how does that strike you in the context of your own life?

2. Consider the two details of v. 3 that the witnesses are 1) prophesying (= speaking God’s truth) while 2) wearing sackcloth. What are the implications of both of those details for our lives today?

3. On Sunday, we talked about the fact that the 2 witnesses’ ministry is modeled after 4 other Biblical characters, with Jesus himself being the final character (see especially v. 7-13). In what sense is the witness of the church modeled on the witness of Jesus himself? How does that inform how we witness and what we can expect from our witness?

4. Every age is marked by its own set of gods/idols that the gospel confronts and offers alternatives to. In your opinion, what is one key idol of our current culture, and what would it look like practically for our church community to speak and live in such a way that we offer the culture a radical gospel alternative to that idol?