

Throne Room Snapshots 3/3: Trumpet Judgments, Witness Keeping

Preface:

Let me lower our expectations right now. I was once told that Revelation 11 is the hardest-to-understand chapter in the New Testament. I don't think it's totally true, but it's not totally wrong, for sure.

Today's passage is difficult for us to talk about well. But we can, and I hope to. I hope by the end of this moment we can understand what John wanted his first readers to know, and how we can make sense of this passage in our own situation.

First, let's pray.

Prayer:

Locating Ourselves:

Last week we looked at the "Seal Judgments" of Revelation 6, 7 and the first few verses of Chapter 8.

These judgments promised that God would act against the evil that Christians were already experiencing a little, but would definitely experience a lot if they resisted the Emperor worship that John called them to.

And we talked also about the way this set of judgments is presented three times in three different

ways. This rhetorical strategy is called “Recapitulation,” and it's so, so important for properly understanding Revelation. Revelation is a letter, with a set of seven judgments against evil, that we see repeated three different times from different perspectives.

Last week the set of seven judgments were presented as “Seal Judgments,” then, starting in Chapter 8 as “Trumpet Judgments,” soon as “Bowl Judgments.” Each time this vision is replayed there's less and less room to repent and turn away from evil, and so this dramatic tension builds in the book as we become more and more certain that evil is going to be judged, and judged harshly, and soon. We do not want to be on evil's side when it's judged.

Chapter Eight talks about what we'll call the “Trumpet Judgments.” It's a second take on the judgment that is coming upon evil in the world. And by comparison, the “Seal Judgments” could called “light.” “Diet judgments.” The “Trumpet Judgments” are harsh.

And guess what? We're not talking about them at all this morning. Not really. When this message is posted online, I'll tack a pile of stuff on to the end of the message that looks at the “Trumpet Judgments.” They go through Chapter 8 all the way through Chapter 11. And just like there was an interruption between seal six and seal seven in the last judgment vision John

had, there's one in between the sixth and seventh trumpet (Keener, *Revelation*, 279). And we should expect one, because this is the same set of judgments, right? Just presented differently.

That pause, in the “Seal Judgments,” was a vision of God's faithful people. In the “Trumpet Judgments” we see a commissioning scene, a commissioning scene, in which John is told to eat a message, internalize it, and share it.

He does. It initially tastes sweet. But this word of God he receives, this message he's supposed to share: It's not sweet. We've seen it. Death, famine, hardship. It's a bitter message. “Lament and mourning and woe,” in the words of Ezekiel, who this scene is modeled after. It's a bitter message. And with that bitter message of judgment sitting in John's gut we enter the chapter that was read to us today.

Let's walk through it.

11: 1-2

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (1-2)

The passage starts with John, envisioning the throne room of God, and the heavenly temple of God, being told, basically, to get some numbers. Measure it out, and count whose in it. And what John measures, God protects.

So God is protecting his worshippers, and God, of course, is protecting his place. We basically saw this promise in the “Seal Judgments,” framed around those who stayed faithful despite suffering. But by this point in this second judgment vision, we’re not looking at neutral people, those who have simply chosen to “not worship” God. We’re talking instead about those who are working against God, worshipping other, lesser, demonic things. John calls them “Gentiles.” This is purposeful.

11:1-2 Gentiles:

In the Temple in Jerusalem, which was considered a copy of the “real,” heavenly Temple, there was an outer court. Gentiles were allowed there, but no further--only Jews, God’s People could go further in. And if we remember that John’s use of the phrases “synagogue of satan,” and “those who say they are Jews, but are not,” we know that for John, God’s People are those who gather around the Lamb, who worship Jesus as the Messiah and as God. As far as John is concerned, it’s these ones who are “jewish” and those who don’t worship the lamb are the

“gentiles.” John is using these ethnic categories to talk about whether one has faith in Jesus or not. He's saying that those who are ethnically Jewish, but not Christians, are actually “Gentiles.” Honestly, I wouldn't recommend we do this today for a bunch of reasons, but it's what John is doing, here.

11:3-12

And we keep reading. As I read this, I want us to think of what I'm reading as an apocalyptic parable. An apocalyptic parable.

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom

and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. (vv3-12, tniv)

So we know how these two witnesses are, right? They are the lampstands and olive trees that stand before God! Bam!

Kidding. What do we know, though? We know that in Jewish culture, in the Old & New Testament, that it takes two witnesses to establish the truth of someone's testimony.

We know--or could learn, right?--that the early church sent Christians out in pairs for witnessing.

And we know a ton of biblical things, too, mostly drawn from Zechariah. Or we could know these things.

Let me connect a bunch of things together for us, here. And as usual, this will all be posted online for us if we want to check into it again.

We've already seen mention of "lampstands" and "olive trees" in Revelation 2 and 3. We noted there that this language comes directly from the Old Testament book of Zechariah, Chapter 4.

Zechariah was asked, about the lampstands and olive trees, "Do you not know what these are?" And the answer was "'Not by my might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

The Zechariah passage suggests there are two people who are especially anointed with God's Spirit to do what he wants. Most scholars would say that Zechariah is talking about the king & the high priest at the time, who were Joshua & Zerubbabel. (Keener, 291-292).

And we know, too, that we, the Church who worship the Lamb--we're a kingdom of priests, right? Rulers & Priests at the same time.

We know that Elijah, acting with God's power against the enemies of God's people called down fire; we know that Moses, acting with God's power against the enemies of God's people, called down plagues.

Now: Jewish expectations around this time suggested that Elijah and other faithful Old Testament heroes would show up before God finally judged evil. But it seems to me that we should take these two, in this vision, as representative, symbolic, rather than as two actual people. This is just what John does in Revelation, you know? As one author asks, “Is it not...likely, given John’s consistent reinterpretation of traditional Jewish symbols elsewhere [and we could add, people], that he transforms this traditional expectation of returning prophets, reapplying it symbolically?” (Keener, 291; see previous & ff for the discussion).

11:3-12: Witnesses:

These two individuals, if they are symbolic, are layered with imagery from all throughout the Bible. It’s likely the case, likely, that these two represent the Spirit-filled witnessing Church.

The Church, taken together, are those who are antagonistic against evil.

The Church, taken together, are the ones who have the promise of Resurrection given to us; Jesus was the firstborn of the dead, the faithful witness; and his people follow in his footsteps.

The Church, taken together, are the ones who are pursued by God’s enemy, the beast from the abyss,

the devil; we'll talk more about this beast soon; not today. But as one author puts it when talking about this chapter, "The story is more like a parable, which dramatizes the nature and the result of the churches witness," which describes "what will be happening all the time while Christians bear faithful witness to the world" (Bauckham, 84-85). Again, when it comes to this crazy scene, "The story is more like a parable, which dramatizes the nature and the result of the churches witness," which describes "what will be happening all the time while Christians bear faithful witness to the world" (Bauckham, 84-85).

Kind of Time, Quality of Time:

And this "all the time" piece is tricky, because there are specific times mentioned in today's little scene, right?

John describes the witness of these two, which I believe is symbolic of the Church's witness, will last 1,260 days which is equal to both three and half years *and* 42 months (if you roll with a 30 day month).

In the book of Daniel, the most famous Old Testament apocalyptic work, Daniel mentions these same numbers. Scholars believe Daniel is using the numbers he uses to describe the "kind of time" or "quality of time" that his readers will have, not how long they'll experience whatever he is talking about. We talked about how numbers can communicate qualities as

much as actual quantities in apocalyptic writing.

And the “kind of time” that Daniel is talking about in his ancient vision is a time of terrible, terrible suffering. If John is following Daniel in this regard, then John’s telling us that these two witnesses will witness; but they’ll do it while they suffer, at the hands of persecutors, and the devil.

We shouldn’t read this number as “length of time,” but as “quality of time.” The take away for those of us in John's churches who want to understand him? As long as the church is witnessing, it will be persecuted for its witness. As long as the church is witnessing, it will be persecuted for its witness.

One Place? Many Places? Or All Places?

And we’re told that these witnesses at some point finish their witnessing, and are killed. They’re martyred just like the Lamb was.

And these witnesses, in this vision, lie unburied. This was deeply shameful. The point here is that the witnesses are shamed even in their death. They lie unburied for “three and a half days.”

This is a direct reference to the three-and-a-half years the witnesses were testifying. But it’s much smaller, right? In the context of this apocalyptic parable, the church’s witnessing ministry is much

longer--exponentially longer--than the period of time in which it is killed for it.

And their bodies lie in a place that is described with all sorts of place names: John just piles them on: Egypt, which reminds us of Exodus, and was a great persecutor of God's people; the "great city," which is likely Rome; Sodom, which was the classic example of a place judged--by fire, no less--for its sinful choices; and of course, a reference to Jerusalem, where Jesus was killed. (Keener, 294ff.)

Look, bodies can't be in multiple places at once, right? But the Church always is. John is highlighting places that we as people of faith have history with; but he may as well be talking about the whole world. These are representative cities, and so in some way stand in as all cities, all places. We can say that the everywhere the church witnesses and is persecuted, that place will be judged. The take away is this: Everywhere the church witnesses and is persecuted, that place will be judged.

And after this short time, God will prove his faithfulness to his witnesses, and shock all those that have gloated over them in ways that directly echo Jesus, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, just like these witnesses will.

11: 13-14

“At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.” (vv13-14)

And then in this vision an earthquake happens--we're supposed to assume that this is a judgment on those partying over the death of the witnesses, but an earthquake also happened when Jesus rose from the dead as well, increasing this sense that what's true of Jesus is true of his followers--and a tenth of the city is destroyed, 7,000 people are killed: and *man*, people worship God (ibid., 643).

Finally, right? This is what all the Judgments on sin we've seen were supposed to result in: repentance, turning away from sin and the evil one, the beast, and to the Lord—which is part and parcel of worship.

And most people are saved! In the Old Testament book 1 Kings, God keeps a remnant for himself. We're told in chapter 19 there that only 7,000 people haven't worshipped the false god baal. But in this vision John has; it's only 7,000 who die. The majority “gave glory to the God of heaven,” and it's the remnant who are the ones who died as a result of their partnership with evil against God's people.

This breaks all our expectations! But it points to the effectiveness of the Church's witness.

What the Sam? vv15-19

The vision ends as the seventh trumpet is blown; and worship breaks out, because God has triumphed, and we enter into a new thing, a new time.

“The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small--and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Just like the first Seal-centered view of these judgments ended with a statement about “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake,” so this Trumpet-centered ends with “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.”

And the vision ends as we glimpse the opening of God’s Heavenly Temple, with the Ark inside it. This is important, because it was Jewish expectation that at the end of time, the ark of the covenant God made with Israel, which was lost, would show up again.

So we know that whatever happens next is final and it’s different and new: because we’re looking at the Ark, when before it was hidden in the Holy of Holies,

the part of the Temple only the High Priest entered, and then only once a year (Keener, 306).

Bridging the Gap:

So what do we do with this mess of information?

First of all: we need to remember that chapter 11 of Revelation is a vision, and it's a vision that is a part of the Trumpet Judgments, and like all of John's visions it was written to Christians in a particular situation.

And like all these scenes of judgment, it was written to both encourage Christians to keep their faith and share the need for their persecutors to repent.

So what would John's readers have taken from this? They could have taken in all the encouraging reminders of Revelation 11: that they would triumph, that even in their suffering and persecution, God would not fail them, that their witnessing for the Lord would be accompanied by real power, and that if they were killed by Rome, by any of God's enemies, they could look forward to their own resurrection, following the pattern Jesus set before them.

This vision would have allowed them to enter into their call with eyes wide open; they were going to witness during a time of suffering; and this was part of the bitterness John's message left with him; but it was true. They couldn't get away from it.

Reading this vision, they can know that things are not going to get shinier and happier for them, but worse. And knowing that, they can set their expectations appropriately, which is no small thing.

But what hope, right? Because they could know that in the end, God wins. And not only does God win, but God wins big; a remnant isn't saved—only a remnant is lost. Their witnessing and God's judgments achieve what God wants to see them achieve.

People are going to listen and give glory to God, and John's first readers can know that they will be vindicated.

Bridging: Our Futurist Bent

But we still ask: How did this or how is this going to play out in real life? Because our default mode is futurist, right? We forget this passage has context, and read it as though it's an isolated scene in the end of the world.

If we want to see this as something that is not about John's readers, but about what will happen before Jesus comes back, then I think we should at least be very cautious about looking for 1:1 realizations about the things we see in this chapter. We should be very cautious about looking for two witnesses wearing burlap, breathing fire. We should be cautious about looking for one particular city to be home to these

events.

Instead we really should look for principles: that the church must continue to witness, that it will seem as if we are failing, losing, ineffective. That the church needs to persist in its faithfulness, because God will win, even as things seem to get worse and worse for us.

But if we go this route, we also need to be cautious about looking at world events from only our perspective. There are Christians right now who are being persecuted, who read this and think “This is my life!” Not “Will this be my life in a decade?” For some Christians in China or Morocco or Iran or North Korea, this can’t function as a vision of “end of time” events, because it looks far more like their July 12, 2020.

Bridging: Principles & First Meanings

If we want to instead read this vision as primarily a vision for John’s readers, which we need to discover how to best apply in our lives right now, we could consider all sorts of things.

We could consider the hope that they can take from this letter, and the promise of suffering that they can take from this letter, and the vision that most will turn to the Lord.

Maintain Your Witness

Because, you know, we don't have it that bad. We don't have it that bad at all. We aren't suffering in a way that would impress Antipas' family. Now, here's the rub: we're not called to impress Antipas' family. We're called to be faithful where we find ourselves.

So what is your situation and what do you need to do to maintain your witness in that place? Most of us are staying at home right now. What does it mean to maintain our witness to our neighbors or family? If we're working or going out and about, what does it mean to maintain our witness there?

Smoky Row, as a congregation, is maintaining our witness, which is a gift. We each protect that through our generosity in prayer, service, and giving.

The limelight is never on one of us, but on the Lamb, whom we emulate. We are stronger together than we are apart; our message is "our" message, Smoky Rows, the church's--not just mine or just yours.

Expect Hardship

And as far as John is concerned, our witness shouldn't result in us having great, happy times. In fact, it is a concerning anomaly if that's the case. We should be cautious of any version of the gospel that says that we'll have nothing but prosperity and ease in this life.

While we witness for the Lord, we witness in an

environment that is hostile to our message. This is just the way of things. It doesn't mean we need to invite hostility or help people despise us by being jerks, but in the Light of the Lamb, you can see a lot more ugliness and sin--in people, institutions, systems. And no one likes their ugliness to be seen.

Our witness to what the Lord has done shines light on ugliness, sin, and evil, and it will fight back against us. If we as individuals or as a congregation aren't experiencing this, as far as John is concerned, it means something is off.

Consider the Majority

And importantly, there's this. I think we remember that God will be faithful to us, you know; we'll rest in God's hands, we'll be resurrected, we'll experience a life where we can see the Ark of the Covenant, and look in the Holy of Holies: but I certainly don't walk around thinking to myself that the majority of people will.

This vision of John's, that turns the remnant upside down, is a powerful vision. How would you act differently if you considered that the majority of people you worked with, talked with, played with, watched, listened to--if the majority of people would be someday "giving glory to God in Heaven." How would you act differently toward them? How would you speak toward them? Knowing that they might be your

persecutors, but they'll someday come around? How would you pray for them, and witness to them?

Conclusion:

So have we forsaken our witness because we are so tired of being trampled? Do we expect ease when we should expect something else? How would we act differently toward those around us if we saw them in our minds' as praising God alongside us? How is living in the light of the Lamb revealing the ugliness and sin in the world?

Look: this is a hard passage. It is. We so much want to figure out when and where this will happen. But wherever the church finds itself this is already what's happening: Antagonists are **against us**, and will be, and yet we must keep sharing about what God has done for us, and for the world, no matter what it costs us. Can we? And if that's not our experience at all, it is an anomaly we ought to deeply consider.

Extras, Unpreached:

By comparison, the Seal Judgments could be called “light.” Like diet judgments. Because the Trumpet Judgments amp up the pressure on John’s Christians and whoever hears them talking for a number of reasons.

First Four Trumpets:

First of all, the first four trumpets cause things to happen that directly echo what happens in Exodus to the Egyptians who wouldn’t stop persecuting God’s people, Israel. And the stuff in Exodus; it was in a lot of ways the big thing that God did for Israel, right? It was remembered annually in the Passover--still is. It set in motion the giving of the Law, God’s biggest Covenant with humanity until Jesus came along. It starred Moses; we’ve heard of the guy. Everyone has heard of the guy. Half of us have been walking through his life story for weeks in Adult Ed..

And so this vision that echoes Exodus--it carries with it not only our own power, but the power that Exodus has in our memories, right? And if we are Jewish Christians, who are just now being forced from our synagogues, then Exodus and God’s faithful events there are something we have been steeped in since birth. What God did for Israel (and we’d say, by extension, the human race) is something that has shaped us and formed us and colored our perception of the world. We personally are invested in the Exodus story, right? As Christians in Smyrna or Laodicea or

anywhere else.

Think of any movie or story you've seen or read or heard where the plot echoes New Testament/Jesus things, right? *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or *The Lord of the Rings*, or just about every English-language epic that there is. These stories are powerful on their own, right? Is there a crazier rush of a movie than the 9 hours of *Lord of the Rings*? But every echo of New Testament/Jesus stuff makes these narratives even more powerful.

And so this vision has its own power to persuade us, but also has Exodus coming along behind it. These are the first four trumpets; after them an eagle cries woe three times, and the fifth trumpet sounds at the start of Chapter 9.

Fifth Trumpet:

And at this fifth trumpet, we continue to hear echoes of Exodus, with the introduction of Locusts that act as scorpions; locusts, if we remember, being one of the plagues of Egypt. But this trumpet introduces a lot of apocalyptic language, which echoes the Old Testament book of Joel, which described an invading army, that would come upon Jerusalem, and devour them; but, God says, over and over in various ways, if his people would turn to him, they could avoid being destroyed by this evil army. They've gotten themselves into a mess, but God will get them out if

they trust him and turn to him.

Revelation isn't Joel, right? This vision isn't against God's people who have turned from him, but against those who have turned on God's people. In fact, over and over we see God's protection on his people in this fifth trumpet, protection from the judgment that Rome is bringing upon themselves.

But there is a passage that we should discuss, just so that we can be prepared to talk about it if someone really wants to:

“The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).” (9:7-11 tniv)

What you will hear, and some promote, but I simply don't, is that we should be waiting to see a 1:1

embodiment of these visions of John in the world. We should look for giant locusts, and a demonic army, like this fifth trumpet tells us about. Or, that John was describing an eyewitness account of some great future war, but that he didn't have the language to describe it--because, you know, he's a simple man--and so used imagery that we need to decode. And we need to identify who this Apollyon is, because he's out there right now, just waiting to gain power, and send the army John tried to describe to us.

If this were the case, the application would be something like, you know if we know who this guy is, and who his army might be, then we can get away from them before things get so bad, right? And we can avoid being on this army's side. That's not a bad idea, really? And it's a basic principle of these judgments: don't be on the bad guy's side.

But who's the bad guy? Not us, right? But Palestinian Christians or Afghani Christians or Iranian Christians might think the bad guy, Apollyon, is someone we'd never pick out of a lineup. So interpretation can be difficult if we're intent on identifying someone in our times as this or any other bad guy we'll read about in this book.

But we do know that "apollymi," in Greek, means "destroyer;" and it also sounds an awful lot like the name of Apollo, right? One of the Greek gods.

Domitian sometimes suggested that he was the God Apollo incarnate; Apollo was his “patron deity.” We do know that Apollo was depicted as an archer; that he had a sting. We know that one of the animals that was associated as an Apollo logo, his brand, was a locust. So John may be simply saying that Rome is going to implode; that it’s so evil, it’s going to destroy itself, and its emperor who claims to be its protector, will really be its downfall (Keener, 268ff.)

But Rome doesn’t only have to worry about inward implosion of their empire, and their protector destroying them; they also have to worry about enemies outside them.

Sixth Trumpet:

And the sixth trumpet sounds out, and what John describes there is something many, many interpreters have taken to be a veiled reference to Rome’s biggest enemy, the Parthians from their country on the other side of the Euphrates river, with their archers who were famous for shooting a volley of arrows as they swarmed in, and then shooting another behind them as they rode past and through their enemies. Rome hated these guys, and feared them. And a lot of Jewish speculation before John’s time emphasized that God would likely take out Rome by using the Parthians to do it.

But still; the vision we see of Judgment in these

trumpets is scary, and freaky, and is not something we want be on the receiving end of. It's not effective to explain the imagery we see in these passages, even if it's important. Because the judgment John sees and hears in these visions is frightening stuff. God will judge you has different impact than you will be pierced through the chest by a giant locust, or stung by a lion-headed, snake-tailed monster.

A chimera, actually; which was a stock-greek beast from greek mythology with a lion-head, dragon-tale, and goat-body. (Keener, 271-272).

Locating Ourselves: 10

So again: we're just talking now about what's going on before this chapter 11 stuff that was read to us. And we've talked a little about these six trumpets.

And just like there was an interruption between seal six and seal seven in the last vision John shared with us; this time there's an interruption between the sixth trumpet and seventh trumpet (thanks keener! 279).

There we saw a vision of God's faithful people; here we see something else.

John sees this vision of a giant angel, a giant messenger of God, who's described in ways more powerfully than many greek gods were described, but who is simply a servant of that God who sits on the

throne with the Lamb. And this angelic being holds a scroll and delivers a message: ***“There will be no more delay. But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”***

And John is told by a voice from heaven to eat the scroll that the angel is holding; a message that tastes sweet, but turns his stomach. He’s told, with his stomach upset, that “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.”

Remember that when we had read the first take on the judgment that was going to befall the world, we saw all those who had been killed for their faith asking, “How long?” How long will it be until God judges those who have killed them.

The answer was “A little longer.” But this time we look, and judgment, final judgment; it’s just around the corner. God’s not going to delay; John knows, and those who are listening to John know, that they’re running out of time. If you’re under the alter, this is great news: if you’re sending people under there, this is your eviction notice.

And what this little scroll is, exactly, is a difficult thing to say. It might be what one person calls “the substance of the book of Revelation” itself. John’s

message, period. And John has been informed by the prophet Ezekiel, shaped by Ezekiel, when he has this vision in which he receives his message.

In chapter 2 of that book, God has just arrived by way of royal chariot--we talked about this a couple of weeks ago--and God starts speaking to Ezekiel, saying:

“But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe....Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” Ezek. 2:6ff.

But God tells Ezekiel--and this is a hard calling--that no one in Israel is going to listen to him. His message is going to get no results. He will be an ineffective guy. Nice, right? And Ezekiel tells us, after he's told how ineffective he'll be, that:

“The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me (Ezekiel 3:14)”

Now: John is not talking about what's going to happen to just the Israelites, but about "many peoples, nations, languages, and kings." Ultimately, this happens by way of the church, right? But this word of God he receives, this message he's supposed to share: I mean, we've seen what's in it: death and famine and hardship and sword. In the words of Ezekiel, "lament and mourning and woe." It's a bitter message.

And with that bitter message, the message of Judgment, we enter the chapter that was read to us today, Chapter 11.