

Testimony Time: Part 2
The Testimony of the Twenty-four Elders
Revelation 11:14-19

With the Lord's help over the past several months I have endeavored to preach through the book of Revelation in a clear, accurate, and understandable way. Nevertheless, I wouldn't be at all surprised if, during the course of our study, some of you have occasionally felt a little bit like that famous American Daniel Boone. Someone once asked the great explorer and frontiersman if in all of his many adventures if he had ever been lost. He thought for a moment and replied, "No, I can't say that I have ever been lost. But I must confess that I have been mighty bewildered a few times." I realize how easy it can be to get confused and bewildered by this blessed book. Don't feel discouraged if you don't understand it all. Listen, nobody really understands it all. If you can't name everyone of the seven churches or remember whether the seal judgments come before the trumpet judgments or the trumpet judgments come before the seal judgments, don't worry about it. If you can just see Jesus, if you can just get a picture of the glory and greatness and majesty and might of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have grasped the purpose of this book. That is what this book is all about. It is the Revelation, the unveiling, of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1).

Today we are going to consider the testimony of the twenty-four elders in heaven. Please take your Bibles and turn to Revelation chapter 11. Beginning in verse 14 we see...

1. An Announcement of Victory (Rev. 11:14-15)

First of all, there is an announcement that **God's final judgment is about to begin**. Verse 14 says *"The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly."*

The last trump of the seven trumpet judgments is about to sound, and this will precipitate the outpouring of the last seven judgments of God upon the earth, known as the seven bowls of God's wrath.

Second, there is an announcement that **Satan's kingdom is coming to an end**. Look at verse 15. *"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.'"*

Now the KJV and the NKJV read *"the kingdoms of this world,"* (plural) but in the original Greek the word is "kingdom" (singular). From earth's viewpoint there are many kingdoms. From heaven's viewpoint there is only one kingdom, a kingdom that is presently ruled by Satan.

The Bible tells us that during Jesus time of temptation in the wilderness the devil carried Him to a high place and said, "If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all the kingdoms of this world." Satan had the authority to offer Jesus the kingdoms of this world because he is currently the ruler of this world. That doesn't mean he is in charge of things. God is in charge. God is sovereign over the whole earth but He has allowed Satan to be prince of this world for a set time. Old Lucifer's time to rule is limited, and he knows it.

Jesus said in John 12:31 *"now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."* Jesus called Satan the "ruler" of this world, literally "the prince of this world."

Beloved, we must never make the mistake of underestimating the power of our adversary. As prince of this world Satan is very powerful, but he is still subject to the king. There is only one true king, and his name is Jesus Christ.

Notice, verse 15 says *"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."* Now you might have expected this verse to read that the kingdoms of this world "will become" the kingdom of our Lord. But this is written as if it has already happened. As if it's a "done deal." Well, as far as God is concerned it is. The kingdoms of this world have already become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me explain what I mean by that.

You see, there is a sense in which the kingdom of Christ is both now and not yet. Jesus is king now. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords right now. And He has a kingdom right now. Christ's kingdom exists in the hearts of all those who have trusted Him as Lord and Savior. If you are a Christian then Christ reigns in your heart. If Jesus isn't your Sovereign, your Lord and King, then He isn't your Savior. Christ is King right now, but He has not yet officially ushered in his kingdom. When Jesus returns to this world at the end of the Great Tribulation He will establish His earthly kingdom and what a glorious kingdom it will be.

Third, there is an announcement that **Christ's reign will never end.** Verse 15 goes on to say, *"And He shall reign forever and ever."* Around Christmas we always read Isaiah 9:6. *"His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Isn't that great? Now, we usually stop right there, but listen to what the next verse says. Verse 7 reads *"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this"* (Isaiah 9:7).

When Jesus returns He will bind the devil for a thousand years and after the thousand years He will cast the devil into the lake of fire. Satan's kingdom will end. The Savior's kingdom will never end. Jesus will reign as King forever and ever. Now here is the exciting thing. If you are a child of God then you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom. That means you are going to live and reign with the Lord Jesus in His kingdom forever and ever.

We have seen an announcement of victory, next we see...

2. An Acclamation of Praise (Rev. 11:16-18)

The twenty-four elders praise the Lord because **He reigns supremely.** Look at verse 16. *"And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: 'We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come'"* (Rev. 11:16-17a).

This isn't the first time we have read about the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation. Who are they and what do they represent? The twenty-four elders represent all the saints of the Old Testament, represented by the twelve tribes of Israel, and all the saints of the New Testament, represented by the twelve apostles. In other words, the *"twenty-four elders"* are symbolic all those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Verse 16 says that the twenty-four elders *"fell on their faces and worshiped God."* At the very thought of Jesus, at the very mention of his name, every saint in heaven is moved to worship and praise and glorify and magnify and his blessed name.

Dear folks that is how we ought to respond every time we think about the Lord. As Gloria Gaither wrote, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; There's just something about that name." Just the mention of His wonderful name should stir our hearts. When we think about what great sinners we are and what a gracious Savior He is it ought to humble us. When we stop to consider who He is and all that He has done for us it ought to move us to worship and praise Him.

John goes on to say in verse 16 says that the twenty-four elders fell upon their faces before God saying, *"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned"* (Rev. 11:16-17).

In just a few weeks we will be celebrating Thanksgiving in our homes. This verse tells us there is going to be thanksgiving in heaven. Do you want something to be thankful for today? Think about Jesus! Do you want something to be joyful about this morning? Think about Jesus!

Think about Who He is? He is the Lord God Almighty. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the eternal God who took on human flesh. He is the Lamb of God who shed His own blood for our sins on the cross. He is the gracious Savior whose love is everlasting. He is the gentle Shepherd whose mercy and grace is inexhaustible. He is the glorious King whose kingdom shall never end. Praise God. Somebody ought to say amen!

We see another reason here why the twenty-four elders praise the Lord. They praise Him because **He judges righteously**. Verse 18 says that *"The nations were angry."* Why are the nations, the peoples of the earth, angry at God? Simply because they don't want God in their life. They don't want Christ to rule over them. The Bible says in Psalm 2 *"Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.'" (Psalm 2:1-3)*

You would think that the terrible judgments of the Tribulation would cause men to turn from their sins and submit to God. Sadly, like Pharaoh in the days of Moses, the vast majority of people in the world will refuse to repent and will instead harden their hearts even more. This hostility and anger toward God will grow and grow throughout the Tribulation until it reaches a climax in the battle of Armageddon when the armies of this world will turn their weapons against the Prince of Peace himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John goes on to say in verse 18 *"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come."* What is the wrath of God? The Greek language has two words for wrath. One word is thumos, which means a sudden boiling-up of wrath. Like a volcano erupting. The other word for wrath that is used here in verse 18 is orgē which means "righteous indignation."

God's wrath is simply the expression of His abiding, universal, holy hatred for sin. When the seventh trumpet sounds God isn't going to throw a holy temper tantrum. He is going pour out His just and righteous anger against mankind's sin and rebellion that has been building up since the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Did you ever wonder why God doesn't do something about all the evil in the world? Well beloved, He is going to. Some day God's wrath will come. Until that day the Lord in His mercy is giving people more time to repent and be saved.

Robert Ingersoll was a well known atheist who lived in the nineteenth century. He liked to go around the country giving lectures on the topic "There is no God." He was a very captivating speaker who often drew large crowds who paid handsomely to hear his eloquent blasphemies. One day while giving one of his lectures, he said, "If there be a God, let Him strike me dead in sixty seconds." The stunned crowd waited silently to see what would happen. After sixty seconds had passed the renowned atheist shouted to the crowd, "See, I told you: there is no God." Immediately a Christian man in the crowd stood up and said, "Sir, do you really think you can exhaust the patience of God in sixty seconds?"

There is a verse in the Bible that I have quoted frequently in the last few weeks that says, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* God is patient and merciful. However, the day is coming when His mercy will be withdrawn and His wrath will be poured out on this wicked, rebellious world. Isaiah wrote *"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it"* (Isaiah 13:9).

Not only will there be a day of wrath, there will also be a time of judgment. Look again at verse 18. *"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged"* (Rev. 11:18).

Many people believe that there are only three stages to a man's existence: there is birth, then life, and then death. You are born, you live, and then you die. That's it! But that's not it. The bible says there are four stages to man's existence: there is birth, then life, then death, and then judgment. Hebrews 9:27 says *"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."*

Every Christian will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of His or her life. Paul wrote *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10). At the judgment the judgment seat of Christ the Lord will reward His servants.

Look again at verse 18. *"And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great."* We are saved by God's grace alone though faith in Christ alone. Our faith in Christ is the only thing that is going to get us into heaven, but the Bible teaches that it is our good works for Christ that will determine our rewards. At the judgment the Lord Jesus is going to reward those saints who have faithfully served Him.

Notice, John says that rewards are going to be given to the *"small and great."* I like that. That ought to be a real encouragement to every Christian here today. Rewards are going to be given to the great servants of the Lord, to the great heroes of the faith. But rewards also going to be given to the small, to the multitude of unknown saints who do nothing more than give a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus now and then. Beloved, nothing you do for Jesus goes unnoticed in heaven. Every good work will be rewarded.

There is another judgment for those who don't know the Lord. All those who die in their sins are going to stand before God in the Great White Throne judgment. The Bible tells us in Revelation 20 *"And the dead were judged according to their works...and anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

Not only will this be a time of wrath and judgment, it will also be a time of destruction. Verse 18 goes on to say that at the judgment God is going *"to destroy those who destroy the earth"* (Rev. 11:18). Listen, it's a wonderful thing to rest in the arms of a loving God. But it's also "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). One day the devil, the destroyer himself, his legions of demons, and all those who have willfully rebelled against God and rejected His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ will be destroyed. To quote R. G. Lee, there is going to be a "payday someday."

3. An Affirmation of God's Faithfulness (Rev. 11:19)

John closes chapter 11 with three observations. First of all he saw that **the Temple of God was opened**. Verse 19 says, *"Then the temple of God was opened in heaven."*

It is interesting to note that this chapter begins with a temple on earth, and ends with a temple in heaven. Now we are told that the temple of God in heaven was open. In Revelation chapter 4 heaven's door is opened. Revelation chapter 5 a scroll is opened. In Revelation chapters 6-8 seven seals are opened. In Revelation chapter 9 the pit of the abyss is opened. In Revelation chapter 15 the tabernacle of testimony is opened. In Revelation chapter 19 heaven is opened. In Revelation chapter 20 the books of judgment are opened. And here in Revelation chapter 11 the temple is opened.

The temple on earth was the place where God met with His people. The temple in heaven represents God's presence among His people. Within the temple in Jerusalem were two rooms separated by a great thick veil. The first room was called the holy place. Behind the veil in the inner most sanctum of the temple was the holy of holies, and within the holy of holies was the dwelling place of God.

The veil in the Temple was a symbol of the great spiritual barrier between Holy God and sinful man. Only one person was permitted to go behind the veil and that was the High Priest on Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. The Bible tells us that at the very moment Jesus died on the cross of Calvary the temple veil was torn into from top to bottom. The tearing of that great thick curtain dramatically symbolized that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to make atonement for mans sin and open the way for all men to live eternally in the presence of God.

When John saw the temple of God was opened in heaven it was a powerful reminder that the door to salvation is open to all those who repent and receive Jesus as their Savior. Jesus said, *"I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine (fellowship) with him, and he with Me"* (Rev. 3:20). Dear friend, if you will turn from your sins and trust Christ as your Savior, not only will your soul be set free and your sins all forgiven, you will experience the joy of living in sweet fellowship with Jesus everyday of your life.

Second, John tells us that **the Ark of God was seen**. Look again at verse 19. *“Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple”* (Rev. 11:19).

The Ark of the Covenant was very important to the people of Israel. The priests always carried it where the people could see it. It always preceded them in battle. It always led them through the wilderness. Wherever the Tabernacle was set-up the Ark was always in the center of it. And when the holy temple was constructed in Jerusalem the Ark was enshrined in the most holy part of it.

The Bible tells us the Ark contained three items. There were the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written, Aaron’s rod that budded, and a golden pot of manna. On top of the Ark was the mercy seat on which the blood of the lamb was sprinkled in atonement for sin. Above the mercy were two winged cherubim. It was there, above the mercy seat and between the cherubim that God dwelt among His people. The tablets of stone were a symbol of God’s promise. Aaron’s rod was a symbol of God’s power. The pot of manna was a symbol of God’s provision. The mercy seat was a symbol of God’s propitiation. And the cherubim were a symbol of God’s presence.

When John saw the Ark of the Covenant in the temple in heaven it was an affirmation of God’s faithfulness to His children. I’m certain this heavenly vision was a great encouragement to those first century Christians to whom John sent this book. But there is a message here for 21st century believers as well. God is saying to every Christian here this morning, “Dear child, this world may not always be fair but I will always be faithful. Troubles, tears, trials and tribulations may come but you can be sure of this. I will keep all of my promises to you. I will protect you and provide for you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Don’t give up! Don’t lose hope! Place your trust in me and I will see you through.”

Finally, as the seventh trumpet sounds John observes that **the Judgment of God was unleashed**. Verse 19 says *“And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.”*

All these things, the lightning, noises, thunder, earthquake, and great hail, are symbols of the terrible storm of judgment that is about to come. When the seventh trumpet sounds seven bowls of God’s wrath are going to be poured out upon the earth. If you think the judgments we have already seen were bad, well, you haven’t seen anything yet.

Notice where the final judgment of the Great Tribulation is going to come from. John saw the *“lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail”* coming from the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of God. Think about that for a moment. The very symbol of God’s mercy is also the source of His judgment.

Let me tell you what that means. That means if you reject God’s mercy you will receive His wrath. If you say “no” to Jesus you are saying “yes” to judgment.