

The Witness of the Witnesses

Revelation 11:1-19

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Have you heard they don't make yardsticks any longer? Fortunately, they're not making them any shorter either. Sorry (not sorry) about the "bad dad joke."

One of the ways we use yardsticks is to measure furniture or equipment to make sure everything will fit in a room (begin measuring drum enclosure, keyboard, and the podium). We also take measurements to see how tall we are. According to this yardstick, I'm 7'5", which means Victor "Wemby" from the San Antonio Spurs can't dunk on me.

We measure all kinds of things. We measure our homes, our bank accounts, our grades, how much rain we got this past week (a lot), our success, how the 'Hammond Bears' are going to do this year (not well), and even how many Bibles we own. Last Sunday, during the first service, I visited each of our EdgeKids and student classes, and all the adult Growth Groups. The kindergartners were very excited to get brand new Bibles. I heard one boy say he already had six Bibles. Not to be out done, another boy replied, "*Oh, yeah, well I have seven!*" We live in a world obsessed with measurements, don't we?

As we return to our verse-by-verse study of the last book of the Bible, we're going to discover that God measures things very differently than we do. Before we jump in, I trust you've been putting into practice Pastor Kyle's gripping message on forgiveness from last weekend. Here's a reminder of his main point: *Forgiveness is supernatural because it begins with the heart of God, who then empowers us to forgive.* If there's anyone you need to forgive, or if you need to seek forgiveness from someone else, don't put it off. Do it today.

Revelation 11 is one of the most challenging chapters to understand in the entire book (I think I've said that about every chapter so far). Here's a one-sentence summary of the sermon: *God measures what matters to Him, He mobilizes His messengers, and He manifests His majesty.*

1. God measures what matters to Him. Listen to verses 1-2: "*Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, 'Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample*

the holy city for forty-two months.” Once again, we see that John is invited to be an active participant in the communication of God’s message, not just as an observer. Because they didn’t have yardsticks back then, people used stalks or reeds to measure things. These reeds could grow to a height of 15 feet. We see this in Ezekiel 40:3 when a man had: “...*a measuring reed in his hand*” to take the measurements of the millennial temple.

In Scripture, measuring is never just about dimensions, but about possession and protection because God protects what He possesses. Someone said it like this: “*What God measures, He marks out as belonging to Him. What He excludes from measurement is shown to be outside the sphere of His immediate safeguarding.*” Don’t miss that God measures “*those who worship there.*” If you know Jesus through the new birth, you belong to Him.

The “*court outside the temple*” refers to the “court of the Gentiles.” John is told to not measure this outside court because the nations will trample it for three and a half years. The word “*trample*” means, “*to beat violently or tread like a winepress.*” Isaiah 63:18 uses similar language, “...*our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.*” Jesus used this same word in Luke 21:24: “...*and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*”

It’s good to pause here to acknowledge that faithful Bible-believing Christians interpret this passage differently. Some understand these verses as primarily fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Others, including myself, understand this text to be pointing to a future temple and events that will occur during the Tribulation period. To say it another way, preterists typically see Revelation 11 as fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of the temple, while many futurists see this chapter as still awaiting fulfillment.

Whether you’re a preterist or a futurist, here’s what we can agree on:

- God measures what belongs to Him.
- God is sovereign over history.
- God sets limits on evil.
- God keeps His promises.
- God will hold everyone accountable.
- God will preserve and ultimately vindicate His people.

- God works His way and His will for His glory, for our good, and for the sake of the gospel.
- Jesus is the center of everything.

God measures what matters to Him, He mobilizes His messengers, and He manifests His majesty.

2. God mobilizes His messengers. God doesn't just measure His property; He sends out His messengers to proclaim His message. God often raised up faithful witnesses in times of great darkness. I think of Noah preaching before the flood, Moses courageously confronting Pharaoh, Elijah standing against Baal worship, and John the Baptist who called people to repentance as he prepared the way for Christ. In Revelation 11, God sends two extraordinary witnesses to call the world to Christ during the darkest days of human history.

I believe these two witnesses will come on the scene at the midpoint of the 7-year Tribulation period. We see this in verse 3: ***“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”*** The word **“witness”** has the same root word as **“martyr”** and refers to one who gives testimony about what he knows to be true. The word **“prophecy”** means, **“to foretell, to speak forth by preaching.”** The 1,260 days correspond to the same forty-two-month period mentioned in verse 2 and points to the final three-and-a-half years of Tribulation before Christ returns.

The Bible reminds us that God will never leave the world without a witness. This shows that He is a gracious and merciful God. In Elijah's day, there were 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal. Today, God still has a remnant of faithful followers who speak forth His truth like missionary pilot Kevin Rideout who was kidnapped from his home in Niger this past October. Sadly, there still has been no word from him or his captors. One Edgewood member told me he has been praying for his release every day. Let's pray right now.

These witnesses are **“clothed in sackcloth,”** which was a rough garment associated with mourning, repentance, and humility. Their message will not be one of wealth and health, but rather a call for sinners to turn to Christ before judgment falls.

Speaking of being a witness, on Tuesday I watched how Shane Davis lives on mission amid his wife Caralee's cancer journey. I listened as he thanked the surgical team and several medical students who came into her hospital room in Iowa City. He then asked if he could pray for them. Without waiting to see if they

were OK with that, Shane bowed his head and humbly prayed that God would give wisdom to all the doctors and nurses and bring healing to Caralee. He also prayed for the over 800 patients in the hospital, as well as the nearly 200 children in the Stead Family Children's hospital. He thanked God for the incredible care provided there and asked Him to guide the hands and hearts of those who serve others every day.

It was a very tender moment, and I could tell each member of the medical team was very moved. I also saw Ray Pritchard's new devotional on Proverbs on a table which Shane reads to Caralee every day. What a good reminder for all of us to live on mission wherever we are!

Verse 4 indicates these two messengers will fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah 4:2-3: ***“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”*** David Jeremiah says this verse signifies *“their ministry of light in the power of the Holy Spirit.”* Olive trees provide oil, and oil in Scripture represents the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will provide continuous fuel for their light to shine in a very dark world. To say it another way, the ***“olive trees”*** speak of their *unction* and the ***“lampstands”*** represent their *function*.

I appreciate this insight: *“Their ministry reminds us of an important truth: God never leaves Himself without a witness. Even during the Tribulation, when rebellion reaches unprecedented levels, God graciously sends messengers to proclaim His truth and call people to repentance.”*

These two witnesses not only have the power of the Holy Spirit; they also experience supernatural protection according to verse 5: ***“And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.”*** That's quite a picture, isn't it? I'm reminded of what is said about God in Psalms 18:8: ***“Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed from his mouth.”*** I'm glad we don't have the ability to throw flames from our mouths when someone crosses us because we'd likely end up incinerating our enemies.

Verse 6 tells us they also had control over the weather and the ability to unleash plagues on the earth: ***“They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.”***

Let's pause here to consider who these two witnesses might be. In my tour of the Sunday Growth Groups last weekend, I barely made it out of the Women's Connect Class because they cornered me on who I thought the two witnesses might be (I told them they had to wait for this sermon). While the Bible never explicitly identifies them, and we should avoid being dogmatic where the Bible is silent, here are three good reasons to suggest they may be Moses and Elijah.

- The miracles described in verse 6 closely parallel the ministries of Moses and Elijah. Elijah prayed and the rain stopped for three-and-a-half years (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17), while Moses turned water into blood and called down plagues upon Egypt (Exodus 7-12). Interestingly, the period of drought in Elijah's day was the same time frame we read about in Revelation 11:3.
- Moses and Elijah appeared together with Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), giving us a glimpse of these two great Old Testament servants standing with Christ in glory.
- Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets. Together they exemplify the entire Old Testament which points to Christ (Luke 24:27).

Let's keep in mind that the emphasis of the passage is not ultimately on who they are but on *whose* they are. God empowers them, protects them, and uses them to proclaim His truth to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

Revelation 11:7-10 describes the persecution which will be directed at the two witnesses by the Beast when he unleashes his deadly fury. This is the first of 36 references in Revelation to the Beast: ***“And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.”***

Don't miss that the Beast couldn't touch them until they ***“finished their testimony.”*** The word ***“finished”*** means, *“to accomplish and complete.”* God gave them 42 months to preach. This reminds us that God is in charge of our birth and the day of our death, and every day in between. As Psalm 139:16 says, ***“In***

your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

As someone has said, *“Satan is powerful, but he is not sovereign. He remains on a short leash and can only do what God permits.”* The Puritans often put it like this: *“The devil is a chained dog; he can bark, but he cannot bite unless you draw near to him. He goes only as far as the length of his chain allows.”*

After the two witnesses are killed, in the ultimate act of dishonor and desecration, their decomposing bodies will lie in the street for three and a half days while people gawk and gaze at them. Their deaths will be broadcast worldwide, which is easy to do with the Internet. The people will be so happy the witnesses are dead that they will turn their deaths into a joyful celebration in which they will give each other gifts. One commentator refers to this holiday as *“Satan’s Christmas.”* The only prophets people love are dead ones. This makes me think of John 3:19: ***“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”***

Brothers and sisters, this also applies to our cultural situation. Someone said it well: *“Why did the world throw a party when these men died? Because truth torments those who love their sin.”* When the church speaks up for the sanctity of life, for biblical marriage, or for the exclusivity of Jesus, the world doesn’t care what the Word says. If they can’t silence the message, they’ll try to cancel the messengers.

In a demonstration of God’s power over death, which is reminiscent of the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, these two witnesses are raised to life in full view of a watching world in verse 11: ***“But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.”*** This makes me think of Ezekiel 37:5: ***“Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.’”***

The people went from having fun to being filled with great fear. The unbelievers will think they won because the pesky preachers of holiness were gone for good. However, the text says ***“great fear”*** fell on them when the breath of life entered the witnesses. The words in Greek are *megas phobos*; it’s where we get our word phobia from and refers to a paralyzing, breathless terror. Their arrogant celebration instantly morphed into the horrifying realization that judgment was

about to fall. This shows us the world's rebellion against God is temporary because ultimate vindication belongs to the Lord.

After being raised from the dead, the witnesses ascend into heaven according to verse 12: ***“Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here!’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.”*** I think of how Jesus ascended in a cloud in Acts 1:9, of how believers will be raptured in a cloud according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and how John was told in Revelation 4:1: ***“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”***

The partiers are petrified according to verse 13: ***“And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”*** This is a fulfillment of Philippians 2:11 which says that every tongue will ***“confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** Verse 14 signals the end of this intermission of mercy: ***“The second woe has passed; behold the third woe is soon to come.”***

God measures what matters to Him, He sends His messengers, and He reveals His majesty.

3. God manifests His majesty. We finally hear the seventh trumpet blow in verse 15: ***“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’”*** Trumpets were often sounded at the coronation of a king to announce that a new kingdom had been inaugurated. This is the answer to the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:10: ***“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”***

The remaining chapters of Revelation will flesh out what that reign looks like in stunning detail.

To get a sense of the redemptive storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, the annual Bible Reading Marathon will be held in front of the Scott County Courthouse on Saturday, June 20 at 7:00 a.m. In 2016, then Iowa Governor Terry Branstad issued a proclamation declaring the Bible as the Word of God and that it should be read aloud in its entirety in all 99 counties. Governor Kim Reynolds has

continued this practice every year. I've taken part in this before but can't make it this time. I wonder if some of you will be able to participate during the day.

We see the response to God's resplendent glory in verses 16-18: ***“And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’”***

It's common throughout Revelation to see elders, creatures, angels, and redeemed people fall on their faces in worship. Every created being that encounters the full glory of God, hits the ground in worship. Verse 17 extols Him as the ***“Lord God Almighty.”*** The title ***“Almighty”*** means, *“the one who has His hand on everything.”* Verse 18 gives us a condensed outline of the rest of the Book of Revelation.

Verse 19 solves one of history's great mysteries: where is the location of the Ark of the Covenant? Someone should probably tell Indiana Jones that we know where it is: ***“Then God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.”*** The Ark represents the Lord's presence and His power and serves as a reminder that He is always with His people.

Action Steps

1. **Let God measure what matters.** Instead of measuring your success by income, achievements, popularity, or possessions, read Psalm 139:23-24 and ask yourself: *“What does God value most about me and how can I use this for His glory?”*
2. **Live as God's witness.** Identify one person who needs Christ in your family as well as a neighbor and intentionally reach out to them this week. In addition, send an email to a missionary.
3. **Worship God's majesty.** Begin each day this week by thanking God for one aspect of His character and one promise of His coming kingdom. Let worship replace your worry and faith replace your fears.

There is another measurement [pick up yardstick] that no one can meet. Romans 3:23 says, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** None of us

measure up to God's standards of holiness. We've trampled on His goodness and dishonored His glory. No amount of religion, self-improvement, or good works can make up the difference. Whether we're on the performance track or we've settled into endless acts of penance, we cannot add one inch to what we lack.

As God said to Belshazzar in Daniel 5:27, ***"You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting."*** That night, Belshazzar's kingdom was taken from him. He could make no appeal and was given no second chance. He had been measured and had fallen short. But what Belshazzar never knew is that Someone else was willing to step onto those scales in our place.

There has been only one person who measures up to God's standard and hasn't fallen short of the full glory of God. His name is Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He has never missed the mark of God's measurement.

The staggering truth of the gospel is that Jesus absorbed every inch of our rebellion and our trampling of God's holiness by exchanging His righteousness for our rottenness. *The One who measured up was treated as though He didn't, so that those who don't measure up could be treated as though they do.*

And on the third day, like the witnesses in Revelation 11, Jesus stood on His feet and walked out of the grave to show He has conquered our depravity, the devil, and death itself. And Heaven erupted in verse 15: ***"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."***

Friend, when you trust in Jesus Christ, God no longer measures you by your unrighteous record. Because He treasures you, He measures you by His Son's righteous record. You don't have to earn your way into His family. You don't have to clean up your outer court before coming to Him. When you are born again, you will be welcomed, forgiven, and forever His. Once you put your faith in Him, He'll clean you up on the inside, so you fit in His family. Come to the one who already measured up for you.

When Jesus stretched out His arms horizontally on that rough wood, He was tracing the dimensions of divine love that comes down vertically (from two yardsticks into a cross). It's His way of saying, *"This is the measure of what I am willing to pay to forgive you, own you, protect you, and keep you as Mine forever."*

The same God who marks out the boundaries of the temple in Revelation is the God who has marked your value. You don't ever have to wonder if you measure up, because Jesus has already stood in your place and fulfilled the entire span of God's righteous measurement.

A child asked Jesus, "*How much do You love me?*" And Jesus answered, "*This much,*" as He stretched out His arms and died.

Will you trust Him today?

Invitation