

Defeating Myths About Christian Witnessing

Rich Nathan

June 11-12, 2005

**Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series
Revelation 10 and 11**

I've been doing a series from the book of Revelation, which has to hold the title of the most misunderstood book of the Bible. It has no near competitors for that title.

As I mentioned in the first talk, one of the great tragedies of the way Revelation has been handled and interpreted over the centuries is that this wonderful book has been taken out of the hands of ordinary people. Revelation is not a secret code book requiring some super decryption machine to decode it. Revelation is not a book only for folks interested in the esoterica of prophecy. It is not meant to be a form of alarmist entertainment like *The War of the Worlds*, or the Friday the 13th movies. The book of Revelation, contrary to popular belief, is not a book about night vision goggles, or Apache attack helicopters, or laser guided missiles, or Mikael Gorbachev or Saddam Hussein, or George Bush.

As I mentioned in my first talk, the great English writer GK Chesterton once said: "Saint John saw many strange monsters [in his revelation], but he saw no creature so wild as one of his commentators."

Rather than being written for prophecy buffs, or code breakers, we found in Revelation 1 that John wrote this book for ordinary Christians, Rev. 1:1,

SLIDE

Rev 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him **to show his servants** what must soon take place.

Revelation is like the rest of the Bible. We read in 2 Tim. 3:16-17,

SLIDE

2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,
2Ti 3:17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 is as applicable to the book of Revelation as it is to the book of Romans, or the Gospel of John. We must continually remind ourselves that this is not a secret code book, and stop buying all of the nonsense and the fantastic interpretations communicated on TV, the radio, and through the sale of millions of books.

We learned that Revelation is a book with seven different introductions that forms chapter 2 and 3. John wrote this book to different churches in the Roman province of Asia, which is today in Western Turkey. Some of the churches were rich and successful. Some of the churches were persecuted and some church members were even being martyred.

But this book is written to every church everywhere wherever the church is coming from, whether you are a 21st century suburban American church that is dealing with issues like consumerism, hedonism, and apathy, or you are a church in Pakistan dealing with militant Islam and government corruption, or you are a church in 1st century dealing with Roman persecution and martyrdom. John communicates to us through this book that every church everywhere at all times is called to engaged in the great cosmic struggle against the Beast in whatever form the beast manifests itself. And every church everywhere at all times is also called to participate in the gathering in of the nations under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

So, how do we defeat the beast and gather in the nations? That is the message of the book of Revelation.

John gives us the secret in chapters 4 and 5. He is given a vision of heaven where he sees God seated on the throne and the Lamb of God, Messiah Jesus, standing in the center of the throne sharing sovereignty, sharing rule and authority with God. Rev. 4 does not suddenly launch us forward 20 centuries, as some interpreters suggest. Rev. 4 is not a chapter about the church being taken away out of tribulation through a secret rapture. There is not a word in Rev. 4 from Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* Series.

Some people have asked me if I believe in a rapture. Of course, I believe in a rapture. I am a biblical Christian. I take literally the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Thess. 4:15-17, where he says:

SLIDE

^{1Th 4:15} According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

^{1Th 4:16} For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

^{1Th 4:17} After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

But I read nothing in these words about the church being snatched away seven years before the end. Rev. 4 does not teach that.

The book of Rev. is designed to teach us how to endure difficulty, not escape it. It is designed to teach us how to combat the beast as the beast manifests itself in our time and in our day. This is not a virtual reality story. Revelation is not some futurist entertainment designed to tickle our ears about what some people at some time might have to deal with, but not us.

And we learn the secret of dealing with the beast in Rev. 4 and 5 and the secret is this: We live in a God-centered, God-ruled, God-controlled universe and Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has triumphed through his death and resurrection. It is

because of God's sovereignty and Christ's triumph that we can defeat the beast and harvest in the nations.

John's vision of heaven is needed by the church in every year, in every place, whatever state, whether we are big and successful, or tiny and struggling. We have to see our life right now from the perspective of heaven. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is in control of all things.

In Rev. 6 and 7 we read the opening of the seals of a secret scroll telling of the destruction released on the earth. And yet, on the front end of the opening of these seals, we encounter a rider on a white horse. I believe that the rider on the white horse is nothing other than the triumph of the gospel in the face of great opposition.

We also read in Rev. 7 about 144,000 who are sealed by God. These are not Jehovah Witnesses. These are not 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams that go out in the world. The 144,000 is an army of martyrs. In ancient Israel a census was taken to measure the strength of the military. This is an army, an army that is going into battle, many of whom will be martyred, all of whom need to be willing to be martyred. This 144,000 is not the super-elite, radically devoted person who prays 24 hours a day. The 144,000 is not a few chosen individuals. It represents all of Christ's people.

The sealing of this 144,000 suggests to us that God's people are preserved from the God-separating impact of the plagues and persecution. The sealing of God's people is reminiscent of what the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8 where he says in vv. 35-39,

SLIDE

Ro 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Ro 8:36 As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Ro 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Ro 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Ro 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The sealing has to do with spiritual preservation. It may also suggest some measure of physical protection for God's people. Rev. 9:4 suggests this.

SLIDE

Rev 9:4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

There are times, there are moments, where God not only spiritually preserves his children, but physically protects his children. How many of you have at one time or another in your life been physically protected from something that could have

been life-threatening or life-altering. This is the testimony of many persecuted people. They found themselves miraculously preserved and protected.

But it is clear that the sealing doesn't preserve us from all physical threats. We'll talk more about this in a couple of weeks.

So, Revelation is book about defeating the beast and gathering in the nations. How will the nations be gathered in? Rev. 8 and 9 tell us that the nations will not be brought under the Lordship of Christ through warnings and judgments from God. We read in Rev. 8 and 9 about the blowing of six trumpets, partial judgments, that call the world to repentance. Despite the warnings from God, through famines, and terror, and natural disasters, people stubbornly refuse to repent and turn to Christ.

There is likely something of a future element in Rev. 8 and 9. I believe there is going to be an intensification of God's warnings and God's judgments on this earth. The Bible does speak about the earth convulsing like a woman in labor. The labor pains will get more and more severe until the Lord comes. But Rev. 8 and 9, God's warnings, are always a now-word for the church. We are to learn from disasters. We are to learn from terror. We are to learn from affliction. God's warnings calling us to repentance are a word for now, not just the very end.

Well, if warnings and judgments will not draw people under the Lordship of Christ, what will? That is the subject of Rev. 10 and 11. What will draw people in is the faithful witness of Christians. Here is the secret of the book of Revelation. As Christians, faithfully follow in the footsteps of Christ, and bear witness to Christ, the gospel will be extended, the nations will be saved, the beast will be defeated, and the Lord will return.

But we Christians hugely struggle with the whole notion of bearing witness to Christ. I've called today's talk very simply, "Defeating the Myths about Witness." Let's pray.

Revelation 10 and 11 is all about bearing witness to Christ. Now most Christians will nod their heads in assent if you ask do you think it is important to bear witness to Christ. Most Christians going to Bible-believing churches will say yes, of course witnessing is important. Then, if you ask a second question: do you bear witness to Christ, most of us would hang our heads and say: Well, not really. Or, I used to. Or, I'm not very good at that.

In Christianity there is the dreaded "E" word – evangelism. It brings to mind someone standing on a street corner screaming at passers-by or knocking on the door of some stranger, or calling folks through church campaigns. Witnessing is something for especially gifted people, for Billy Graham, for pastors, for loud, obnoxious types – but not you!

As we begin to unpack some of the myths regarding bearing witness, let me begin by sharing with you what I mean by witness. The word for witness, either used as a noun or verb, is found 18 times in the book of Revelation. What a witness does is make the fact that Jesus Christ is alive today tangible, real, visible, effective. Jesus is invisible right now. The witness, through their words and actions, makes Christ visible. Jesus is intangible. A witness, through their words and actions, makes Christ tangible. For many people, Jesus seems unreal. A witness, through their words and actions, makes Christ real. Witnesses through their words, works, and wounds point to the fact that Jesus Christ is alive, that he can be known. Witnesses point to the fact that at the cross Christ defeated every power that enslaves men and women, and through simple trust in Christ a man or woman can be set free to enjoy life as meant to be lived. Witnesses announce to the world that if you have failed God, he will forgive you. If you are enslaved, he will free you. If you turn to him, he will not forsake you. You can have fellowship with God that will endure beyond the grave.

So, why don't we allow others to know that Christ is alive, that Christ can bring comfort to people in times of tragedy that Christ can heal and comfort, liberate and rescue? Why don't we bear witness to Christ? Rev. 10:1-4 and 8,

SLIDE

Rev 10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.

Rev 10:2 He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land,

Rev 10:3 and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.

Rev 10:4 And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

Rev 10:8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

We read in Rev. 10 about a scroll. We have already read about this mysterious scroll in ch. 5. It was the scroll sealed with seven seals. We read in ch. 5:2-5,

SLIDE

Rev 5:2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

Rev 5:3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

Rev 5:4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Rev 5:5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

The content of the scroll is communicated here in chapters 10 and 11 during the interlude between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets. The content of the scroll is very simple. The way the beast will be defeated and the world saved is through the witness and suffering of Jesus' people. Let me say it again. The

way the beast will be defeated and the world saved is through the witness and suffering of Jesus' people.

So what do we learn about bearing witness to Christ? Rev. 10:8-10

SLIDE

Rev 10:8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

Rev 10:9 So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."

Rev 10:10 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

John is reaching back into the book of Ezekiel for his images. The prophet Ezekiel was also given a book and was commanded to eat it. We read in Ezekiel 3:3,

SLIDE

Eze 3:3 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.

These words are written in symbolic language. Do not picture a man chewing reams of paper, or swallowing the leather cover, binding and glue that holds the Bible together. The prophets are saying that the common experience of all of God's children is to savor and enjoy God's words. God's children love the message they receive from scripture. It is sweeter to them than honey. As the psalmist says in Ps. 34:8:

SLIDE

O, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Is that your experience, by the way, of God's Word? As you meditate on the Word of God and take it in, do you savor it, are you are thrilled by it, do you enjoy it? Friend, one way you can tell whether or not you are a child of God is your response to the scriptures. If reading the Bible is always an exercise for you in eating shredded wheat, if it comes to you as dry and boring, something you feel like spitting out, a grim duty, it is possible that the Holy Spirit who inspired this book does not live in your heart. He is not opening up God's Word for you.

One of the most common testimonies for people who go through the born-again experience is that the Word of God suddenly comes alive. Folks enjoy reading it. People will say: For the first time in my life, as a result of my conversion, I am getting something from the Bible. I sat in church for years. I didn't understand the preaching. When I heard the Bible taught in church, it was a bunch of irrelevant abstractions. But now since I've gone through the born-again experience, I love hearing Bible teaching.

Is that where you are at Friend? Does the Holy Spirit make the Word of God sweeter than honey in your mouth as you take it in or is the Bible still hard for you

to read – boring – like reading the phone book? If so, turn fully into Christ, he will make his Word come alive for you.

There is something strange about this scroll in both Ezekiel and in Revelation.

We read in Rev. 10:10 these words:

SLIDE

Rev 10:10 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

Here is the first myth about witness. Witness is not a matter of unbroken success or certain acceptance.

God's Word is sweet to his children. And yet, it is often not received, but it is rejected. When we bear witness to the reality of Christ's life and love, it often results as an experience of the bitterness of rejection in the pit of our stomach. Every biblical witness – Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, Barnabas, Jesus himself – every biblical witness knows the bitterness of having God's Word thrown back in their faces.

Anyone who bears witness to Christ is going to have this two-fold experience. We thoroughly enjoy God's love. Why would someone not want to know the God who created them? Why would someone not want to be set free from addictions? Why would someone not want to have meaning and purpose? Why not meet the One who died for you and who rose again? Why not find fulfillment

and purpose in life rather than live with emptiness? Why continue to live a Jerry Springer existence – broken, insane disordered soap opera? Instead, turn to Christ.

It seems so obvious to the child of God. And yet, bearing witness is not all sweetness. There is bitterness when our witness is rejected. Unfortunately, so many books and teachings on bearing witness suggest that if you just become more skillful in your presentation, if you are just a little more loving, a little more winsome, if you learn how to listen better, if you take this seminar, you will meet with unbroken success and acceptance. That is just not true.

When we open the community center, I guarantee you that we will experience problems. There will be takers and manipulators, and people who throw God's Word back in our faces and reject every offer of help that we make.

This is an important lesson. You do not bear witness because you mentally calculate your chances of success and acceptance and only when your chances of success and acceptance are strong enough – in your case, it might be 99% probability; in someone else's case, 70% probability of success; or 50% probability of success – whatever your threshold is, that is not the reason why we bear witness. We bear witness because Jesus Christ is true. Because he is alive. Because whether this person realizes it or not, accepts it or not, receives it

or not, Jesus Christ is still the only one who can save, set free, and make alive. We bear witness because that is what we are called to do.

I had to face this lesson again just a week ago when I was out in California talking to my Jewish Dad and a Jewish friend of his. Internally, everything inside of me was screaming: No, no, no, don't talk about your Christian faith. They won't receive it. They won't accept it. You've gone down this road before. But the Holy Spirit said, "It is not acceptance or success that determines whether you point to Christ. This is your calling, child of God."

Of course, we bear witness in the most winsome, warm, generous way we can. I am not suggesting that you become obnoxious or pushy. But I am saying that we do what we are called to do. Witness is not a matter of unbroken success or certain acceptance.

And witness is not only something for the young. Rev. 10:11,

SLIDE

Rev 10:11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

I want you to underline the word "again." John was told: You must prophesy again. This little word "again" is one of those words we quickly read by, but it absolutely ought to arrest our attention, particularly with respect to bearing witness. John prophesied again. John bore witness again, and again. It is so

easy for older Christians to pass off their responsibility to bear witness to the young, particularly if you have been a follower of Christ for some years. You may have succumbed to the false idea that:

- Witnessing is something I used to do in High School or college.
- Witnessing is something for young people who go on a missions trip to Mexico or who do beach evangelism over spring break down in Ft. Lauderdale.

So many Christians hit what I call a middle-age malaise where they rest on their laurels. Because you were successful in the past, that is sufficient for the present.

- I used to be really excited about God.
- I used to burn white-hot.
- I used to pray for the opportunity to share my faith.
- I used to have a prayer list.
- I used to pray for the salvation of my roommates, my professors, my parents, my brother, my sister, my teammates, but I no longer pray for many people's salvation.

The apostle John says: Do it again. The word "again" is so significant for older Christians. Maybe you got burned through a profoundly rejecting experience. You put yourself on the line with someone. You tried to share your faith. You prayed and prayed and did not see an answer to your prayers. Older Christian, it

may be necessary for you to go before God and confess the hurt and disappointment of rejection or former failure. Jesus does say: Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest. As a Christian, you may need to go before God and be cleansed of past failure and rejection.

But the word for you, Old Christian, is do it again.

- You used to pray for the sick. Do it again.
- You used to be excited about the possibility of seeing God's Kingdom come in power – do it again!
- You used to give words of prophecy, but you haven't in a great long while – do it again!
- You used to go to prisons or work with the homeless.

The Holy Spirit wants to speak with some of you today and say: Do it again!

In Rev. 11:1-6, we read this:

SLIDE

Rev 11:1 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.

Rev 11:2 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.

Rev 11:3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

Rev 11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Rev 11:5 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.

Rev 11:6 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.

This passage has certain interpretative challenges. What is the meaning of the measuring rod that John was given? John, as a prophet, was called to measure the temple. Measuring is a prophetic symbolic action. It is designed to communicate protection for those who are within the temple. It is like the sealing we read about in ch. 7. Measuring in the prophets meant protection. It was like the sealing that John referred to in ch. 7. The temple is also a symbol of protection and refuge.

So what we read here is that God's people are going to be protected. On the other hand, those outside the temple are not measured, they are not protected from pagan attack. Instead, we read in v. 2,

SLIDE

Rev 11:2 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.

Now there has been a very extravagant theology that has grown up around this 42 months, or 3½ year time frame. There are repeated references to this period of time in Rev. chapters 11-13. We are told in v. 2 that the Gentiles are going to trample the outer court and the holy city for 42 months. In v. 3 we read that it is the duration of the testimony of the two witnesses.

SLIDE

Rev 11:3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

The woman, spoken about in ch. 12, is said to be preserved for this timeframe.

Rev. 12:6,

SLIDE

Rev 12:6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

And the beast is said to blaspheme for this timeframe. Rev. 13:5,

SLIDE

Rev 13:5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months.

Now, the most common way to interpret this time is to suggest that there are really two periods of 3½ years spoken about totaling seven years. The first half is the Tribulation; the second half is the Great Tribulation. That is why folks talk about a seven year Tribulation period before which the church is raptured.

I don't think these timeframes are meant to be read literally. John keeps reaching back into the Old Testament for his images. This period of 3½ years is borrowed from the book of Daniel, from which John draws many of his images. The 3½ years is derived from ch. 7:25 in Daniel:

SLIDE

Da 7:25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

Daniel 7:25 was specifically fulfilled in 169 AD when the Jewish Temple was captured and defiled by the Greeks for 3½ years by the Greek king named Antiochus. Antiochus, this defiler of the Jewish Temple, became the proto-type of the enemy of God, or the Anti-Christ, in the same way we use Hitler as a proto-type today of the quintessentially wicked human being. Antiochus was that back in 1st century Judaism. The 3½ year period became the reigning symbol of the enemies of God attacking God's people.

It is sort of like the Holocaust today. When folks speak of the Holocaust, they may be referring to the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis during the 1940's, but often folks will use the Holocaust as a general paradigm for the destruction of any ethnicity. So we might speak about the Holocaust that took place in Rwanda, or the Cambodian Holocaust.

3½ years was not simply a timeframe for 1st century Jews. I think we err by looking for some future period of 3½ or 7 years and arguing about the length of time of the tribulation. That is not the way a 1st century Jew would have heard these words. They would have heard these words as the oppression of God's people by God's enemies, whenever and however long that oppression lasted.

Now, who are the two witnesses? We read in Rev. 11:3,

SLIDE

Rev 11:3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

John goes on to speak about them as two olive trees and two lampstands, borrowing from images in the book of Zechariah in Rev. 11:4.

SLIDE

Rev 11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

They apparently have the power of Moses and the prophets Elijah and Elisha in Rev. 11:5-6,

SLIDE

Rev 11:5 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.

Rev 11:6 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.

The issue that arises is whether these two witnesses are two individuals, or again, whether this is to be taken symbolically as the witness of the church.

A lot of ink has been spilled trying to guess the identity of the two witnesses. A dear friend of mine wrote a book in which he suggested that the two witnesses were almost certainly Pope John Paul II and Billy Graham. He even wrote in the book that if they were to die before the return of the Lord, he would be shocked. Well, Pope John Paul II did die and the Lord has not returned.

These two individuals, I think, represent the church in its faithful witness to the world. The story should be read as a parable that dramatizes the nature and result of the church's witness. The story of these two tell us what is going to happen all the time when Christians bear faithful witness to the world.

They are called lampstands in v. 4,

SLIDE

Rev 11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

This is the symbol of the churches in chapter 1 where the seven churches are represented as seven lampstands. But these two represent the whole church, not just two individuals.

This leads to the third myth. Witness is not only for a certain kind of person.

It is very easy in reading about these two witnesses, who are able to call fire down from heaven and shut up the sky so that it cannot rain, and turn water into blood, and say: Well, I can't do that. I am not operating in the power of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha. Therefore, I cannot be an effective witness.

Let me drop this down and say that it is extremely common for us as followers of Christ to believe that because we have the temperament that we do, or the gift mix that we do, that we are not the kind of person who can be an effective witness. You know, effective witnesses need to be pushy, loud, and insensitive. They need to be willing to stand on street corners, or cold-call people at their homes and you are simply not like that.

One of my very favorite books on witnessing is a book by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleberg called *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. I would encourage many of you to pick up this book. It is very readable and it makes sharing the Christian faith accessible to every single Christian. One of the messages in *Becoming a Contagious Christian* is that "you can be yourself and bear witness to Christ." God deliberately built diversity in his body. Each of us has a different style and God can use your individual style, your temperament, and your gifts in pointing people to Christ. When you begin to believe that you can be yourself and bear witness, you will be liberated to assist people to find Jesus according to your own unique style.

As Hybels and Mittleberg pointed out in *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, we find different styles of witness in the New Testament. The apostle Paul often used an intellectual approach in sharing the Christian faith. He persuades. He reasons. He uses logic and proof. Some of you are drawn to that and there are people in your circle who don't want easy answers and platitudes like: "You just have to take it on faith." To them it sounds like there is no evidence. Just leap and maybe you will get lucky and land on something. Some of you love to dig into Christian apologetics and you love reading about faith and science, or the Christian faith and philosophy. You can be you, and be a witness.

Some of you have a testimonial style. You are not as much drawn to reading volumes of proofs regarding the Christian faith, but you know what Christ has done for you and you feel very comfortable in telling your story. There are lots of people who are not interested in all the proofs and evidence. They want to see a real living human example of a transformed life. Tell me what Jesus has done for you, they are asking. What difference has your Christian faith made for you? You can be yourself and be a witness.

Some people bear witness through a servant-style. Recently, down at our free dental clinic, a woman from England brought her 8-year old daughter to the clinic. One of the dentists who works there for free attends another church. When he saw the little girl's mouth, he determined that she needed more help than he

could provide that morning. He set up a special appointment in the evening to see her for free. When the little girl was sitting in the chair, the dentist reached into her mouth and said: "Look what I found in there." He showed her a quarter. He said, "Did you know that was in your mouth?"

She replied, "no," and began to laugh.

The dentist said, "This is your quarter. And it is your job in life is to hold this quarter in your hand and be sure you don't drop it."

She was really happy. As he was drilling in her mouth, she held onto that quarter. And then the dentist very gently said to the girl's mother, "Do you know who Jesus is?"

Mom said, "Yes. I think so."

The dentist very graciously asked the little girl the same question. Then while he worked on her teeth, he told this little girl the story of Jesus and what Jesus had done for her. He asked the little girl if she had ever pulled a wagon over a bumpy road. She said, "yes."

He said, “Well, that is what it is going to sound like as I work on your teeth.” All the while, he moved back and forth very skillfully between assisting her to get through the dental procedure and sharing the love of Jesus.

When she left, she asked: “Can I come back next week?”

This man bore witness not through proof or testimony, but through service. Each one of you has a certain temperament. You have a certain style and gift mix. The secret to bearing witness is in using whatever God has given you in an outward focused way. It is taking who you are and stretching out your hand just a little farther.

- If your gift is hospitality, then don’t only use your gift of hospitality for your friends. But stretch your hand out a little farther and welcome someone into your home who doesn’t know Christ.
- If your gift is service, don’t only serve your family or your children. Cut the grass of a neighbor. Assist someone who doesn’t know Christ with a project.
- If your gift is prophecy, don’t only prophesy to the saints, but ask God to give you a word for someone who doesn’t know him.
- If your gift is healing, don’t only pray for people in the church. When someone at your job or someone who you meet complains of an illness, ask if you can pray for that person.

You are witnesses. You don't have to be a certain kind of person to be effective.

Witness is not a solo affair. It involves the whole church. There is a reason why there are two witnesses. As some of you know, in the Old Testament, testimony could only be confirmed on the basis of two witnesses. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. I think there is a general principle in bearing witness that we miss because most of the books and most of the training tell us to be individual witnesses and not part of a whole. But friend, I tell you that if each of us could find our place on the team and function together, we would be so much more effective in this community.

The administrator sets up an event. The one with gifts of hospitality is welcoming people. The servant is assisting folks with their needs. The comforters are comforting. The people with the gift of gab are gabbing. That's what I am envisioning regarding our community center. The church together with all of our various parts and gifts being a light to the community.

Here is a prayer for you. Solo witnesses, in your work places, in your departments, in your schools, pray for a partner. Say your witness is in your neighborhood, pray for another Christian family to move in. That is the witness of the whole church.

Pick up one of our business cards at the info counter and stick it in your wallet or purse. As you have opportunities at work, with you barber or beautician, with a server in a restaurant, extend an invitation to church. Allow the whole church assembled together in worship, preaching and prayer be a witness.

Pastor Dan Franz, who leads our ministry called Fruit of the Vine, which incorporates our medical clinic, our food pantry, the ministry to the homeless, and our prison ministry, told a story. They were doing a church service at our food pantry the other night. There was a wide range of people at the service. Some suburban folks, some urban people who live around the food pantry, some homeless folks, African Americans, and whites. A man came in and said to Dan after the service, "You know, it is really obvious that there is a difference in this group between the have's and the have-not's, but for some reason, no one seems to notice it. I can't figure you people out." In other words: I am seeing something, but I don't understand it.

What he was seeing was the witness of a reconciled church, a church that transcends race. He saw a church that transcended economics. Witness is not a solo affair. It involves the whole church.

Finally, witness is not and cannot be defeated. Our witness will triumph. Rev. 11:7-19,

SLIDE

Rev 11:7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

Rev 11:8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

Rev 11:9 For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

Rev 11:10 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.

Rev 11:11 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.

Rev 11:12 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.

Rev 11:13 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.

Rev 11:14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

The Seventh Trumpet

Rev 11:15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Rev 11:16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,

Rev 11:17 saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

Rev 11:18 The nations were angry; and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

Rev 11:19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The beast comes up and attacks and kills the witnesses. It looks like their witness is dead. Their bodies were left lying in the street of the city, which has been given a symbolic name – Babylon the Great City, Sodom, which is the symbol of immorality, Egypt, which is the symbol of oppression and Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified. Where are these witnesses going to be attacked and killed? John is saying that witnesses will be attacked everywhere in every place that has ever opposed Christ – Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem, Columbus, Ohio State, your office, your family.

For a short time, unbelieving people refuse these witnesses burial. They are showing the ultimate disrespect. Unbelievers gloat over the death of the witnesses and they celebrate their murder. Why is that? It is because the two witnesses have caused them torment in mind and conscience. We read in Rev. 11:10 these words:

SLIDE

Rev 11:10 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.

There is joy because their witness is silenced. Have you ever had anyone scream at you, attack you for your faith, tell you to shut up, “I hate your Christianity,” and maybe you are barely saying anything. You might be attacked in your own home and you are hardly saying anything about Christianity. You might be attacked in your work or school and you say: What is going on here?

Why am I coming under such brutal attack? Your life, friend, is a living indictment, it is a continuing rebuke, a reminder to this other person of their alienation from God, their Creator.

The Holy Spirit in you bears witness to this other person. Just the fact that you don't join in with their lewd jokes, or their gossip, or their racism is an indictment. The fact that you don't laugh at a racist joke is an indictment.

I remember years ago a colleague at a faculty meeting at OSU where I was teaching began screaming at me in the middle of this small meeting. She was telling me that the reason why I didn't agree with a faculty appointment was because of my Christianity and she was sick of it. She just exploded. I sat there dumbfounded. The other people in the room were embarrassed. I sought this person out after the meeting and I inquired, "Have I done something to offend you? I didn't know what you were referring to." There was nothing there. It was simply my Christianity.

Well, we read in Rev. 11 that after a short period of time, the martyred, silenced church is going to be resurrected. The witnesses will be revived. I don't believe that folks have to literally be resurrected from the dead for Christian witness to be triumphant. It is seeing the power of Christ's resurrection in the life of Christians, seeing confidence and courage that makes the gospel triumphant.

In the early church there was a great persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Julian, who was called the Apostate. Julian was hostile to everything Christian. He rounded up thousands of Christians and murdered them. He killed hundreds and hundreds of church leaders. He burned churches to the ground. Yet, instead of the church shrinking, the church spread and grew. Julian the Apostate watched Christians – women and children going to their death, praising Jesus Christ. At the end of his life, Julian the Apostate said: “You have beaten me, oh Galileean,” referring to Jesus Christ.

Let me finish with a story. Witness cannot be defeated. Witness will triumph.

There was an Ethiopian man named Wandaro, who was the son of a witch doctor in Ethiopia. In the 1930's a medical missionary was working in his village and this young man, Wandaro, was converted to Christ. His son became very ill. Wandaro's father told him to renounce Christ and worship the demons that they had always served in their village but Wandaro refused. His little boy died. Wandaro's wife left him. But he said that he could not turn his back on Jesus Christ, who had embraced him and loved him and had embraced his little boy, who he believed was safe in the arms of Jesus.

Well, in 1936 Italy, under Mussolini, attacked Ethiopia. All of the missionaries from the Sudan Interior Mission were kicked out of the country. In 1936 when they were kicked out, there were only 48 known evangelical Christians in the

whole of Ethiopia. The local governor decided to burn the few churches that were there. He began imprisoning people and he took the leader, this man named Wandaro, and tried to get him to renounce his faith in Christ. When Wandaro wouldn't, he was dragged out to the marketplace, tied to a post, and five men took turns beating him for three hours.

Wandaro lingered on the edge of death for days. Finally, he recovered. His courageous witness in the marketplace led to the conversion of many folks who saw him being beaten. When the missionaries were able to return in the 1940's, just six years later, they found not 48 believers, but 10,000 believers and a hundred new churches planted.

Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to have faith in the power of bearing witness. If Christian witness was able to triumph in the Roman Empire, under the great persecution, and if the Christian witness was able to triumph in Ethiopia in the 1930's and 1940's, simple, faithful Christian witness can triumph in your family, with your kids, with your parents, with your spouse, with your siblings, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, in your class, in your apartment complex, on your team. Christian witness cannot be defeated. Witness will triumph. Let's pray.

Defeating Myths About Christian Witnessing

Rich Nathan

June 11-12, 2005

**Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series
Revelation 10 and 11**

- I. A Review of the Book (Rev. 1-9)

- II. A Revelation of the Meaning of Witness and the Scroll's Content (Rev. 10:1-4, 8; 5:2-5)

- III. A Response to the Myths
 - A. Witness is not a Matter of Unbroken Success or Certain Acceptance (Rev. 10:10)

 - B. Witness is not Only Something for the Young(Rev. 10:11)

 - C. Witness is not Only for a Certain Kind of Person (Rev. 11:1-6)
 - 1. The Temple
 - 2. The 42 Months
 - 3. The Two Witnesses

 - D. Witness is not a Solo Affair; Witness Involves the Whole Church (Rev. 11:1-6)

 - E. Witness is not Defeated; Witness Will Triumph (Rev. 11:7-19)