

Revelation 8:1-11:18  
January 20, 2013  
First Baptist Church, Vancouver  
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**TURN AROUND – THE CALL OF GRACE**  
(Series: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ)

Our text this morning is the eleventh chapter of the last book of the Bible; the eleventh chapter of the drama that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Through a brilliant, subtle “interweaving” (Metzger) of images and symbolism, we are taken more deeply into grace; into the “unbounded grace” about which the choir just sang.

Although it may not feel like grace on the first reading of the text! In fact, on first reading it may feel like anything but grace! As I read the text out loud in a moment, you might even say to yourself, “Why are we bothering to give attention to this?” You will very likely at least say to yourself, “Like ... what is all this about?” Maybe after every sentence! “Whoa... what is **that** about?”

Many times this week I have said to the One Who gave us the text, to the Lord Jesus, “Are You sure You want me to read and preach this? Here in Vancouver?” And each time I have had to do what I invite you to do this morning: trust that Jesus has a good reason for putting on this part of His apocalyptic drama!

Grace. It turns out that the brilliant, subtle interweaving of images and symbolism leads us more deeply into grace; into the grace that calls us to turn around. Grace always calls us to turn around... and come home.

And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. <sup>2</sup>And leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. <sup>3</sup>And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” <sup>4</sup>These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup>And if any one desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. <sup>6</sup>These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. <sup>7</sup>And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. <sup>8</sup>And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup>And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three days and a half, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. <sup>10</sup>And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup>And after the three days and a half, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. <sup>12</sup>And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up

into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them. <sup>13</sup>And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

<sup>14</sup>The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

<sup>15</sup>And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." <sup>16</sup>And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup>saying,

"We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. <sup>18</sup>And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Your bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

(Revelation 11.1-18, NASV, altered)

Why is the Hallelujah Chorus experienced as a woe? Did you notice that? In verse 15, John says that loud voices in heaven sing: "The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." Words that George Frederick Handel has immortalized in the music of his "Messiah." But in the eleventh chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the good news of the Hallelujah Chorus is experienced by many people in the world as a "woe." Why?

Here is the plan this morning. I will first remind us of the context of this text. It is very important that we remember where we are in the overall flow of the great drama. I will then go back, and slowly walk through the text key phrase after key phrase. It will be a demanding exercise, but well worth the effort! And then I will suggest the implications for us as disciples of Jesus in this part of the world He claims as His own. Context, walk through, implications. Okay... here we go!

The context. Revelation chapter 11 is the concluding scene of the second act of the five act drama that Jesus put on for the apostle John on the prison island of Patmos. The second act begins at chapter 4, verse 1, and like the other acts, it begins with the verb "open." "Look!" says John, "a door standing open in heaven." Through the open door he sees a throne, with Someone sitting on it. "Who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8).

John sees in the right hand of the One Who sits on the throne a scroll, sealed with seven seals. It is the scroll of history. John hears the question, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?" sounded through the universe. "Look!" one of the elders says: "The Lion has overcome ... He can open the scroll." John turns expecting to see a lion, but instead sees a lamb – slain, crucified. The lion has overcome by becoming a lamb, a sacrificial lamb. The lamb – Jesus Christ – is worthy to take the scroll of history and open it because He has given Himself in sacrificial love for the life of the world.

Then John sees the lamb open the seals (Revelation chapter 6). As we emphasized last Sunday, in each seal, someone prays. When the lamb breaks the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1), there is silence in heaven. Why? In order that all the prayers of God's people can be gathered up before the throne. Why? Because the breaking of the seven seals reveals one of the secrets of history: in the words of Thomas Torrance, "History moves at the impulse of prayer."

And then out of the breaking of the seventh seal, John sees seven angels step forward (Revelation 8:2). The seven angels are given seven trumpets. The angels blow their trumpets, the first four in rapid succession, the fifth and sixth taking longer. The fifth trumpet introduces three “woes,” so that trumpet five is the first woe, trumpet six is the second woe, and trumpet 7, the Hallelujah Chorus, is the third woe. Why? Why would the Hallelujah Chorus be experienced as a woe?

The seven trumpets are formatted in the drama the same way the seven seals are. Seals 1,2,3,4 in rapid succession; then 5, 6, 7 with the sense that we have reached the climax of the drama. Trumpets 1,2,3,4 in rapid succession; then 5, 6, 7 with the sense that we have reached the climax of the drama. Revelation 11:17 – “Who is and who was.” But no “is to come.” Up to this point in the drama, the Almighty is referred to as “Who was and is and is to come.” In the seventh trumpet, there is no “is to come,” because we seem to have reached the end.

But we have not reached the end. Because John will see more, including seven peals of thunder, which he is told not to relay to the churches of Asia Minor and to us. And seven bowls.

Now, remember the question to ask when reading The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ is not “what happens next?” The question is “What did John see next?” because what John sees next may not happen next.

So as we read the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls, we are not reading historical events happening in sequence, as though history first goes through the seven seals, and then through the seven trumpets, and then through the seven bowls. John is not giving us a sequence of twenty-one historical events.

Rather, John – actually Jesus through John – is going around the same historical dynamics three times, from three different perspectives. The seven seals are from the perspective of the church experiencing opposition and persecution. The seven trumpets are from the perspective of the world experiencing God’s actions in history as judgment. The seven bowls are from the perspective of heaven working out justice when the call of the trumpets is not being heeded. All of it going on all the time throughout history. All taking place, in one way or another, since the first coming of the Lamb ... and will continue until He comes with His new heaven and new earth.

Now, in both the opening of the seals, and the sounding of the trumpets, there is an interlude ... and interlude between the sixth and seventh part of the sequence.

Seals:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- Interlude
- 7

Trumpets:

1

2

3

4

5

6

Interlude

7

Why bother with this detail? Each interlude answers a question raised by the six seals or trumpets. The seal interlude is answering the question, "Who can stand?" As the kinds of things depicted in the six seals takes place, "Who can stand?" Answer? Those whom the Lamb seals as His own. Revelation, chapter 7. 144,000, clearly a symbolic number, as are all the numbers in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Symbols, not statistics.

144,000.

144 = 12 x 12. A perfect symbol for the whole people of God.

144 x 10. A big number.

144 x 10 x 10. A really big number.

144 x 10 x 10 x 10. A really, really, big, big number!

So, Revelation 7, verse 9: "I looked, and look! A great multitude, that no one could count ...." Sealed. The Lamb has a lot of people, a lot of followers. Over two billion in the world today, mostly in the global south, and many in places where it is very costly to follow Him.

The trumpet interlude answers the question, "What is the church supposed to do?" As all of this ... all that is depicted in the seals and trumpets takes place ... "What is the church, sealed by the Lamb, supposed to do?"

The sixth trumpet ends ... Revelation 9:21 – "They did not repent." All that is depicted in trumpets one through six has the goal of bringing people to repentance. Repent – it simply means "turn around." God's actions in the world have the goal of bringing people to the place where we will turn around and embrace the Lamb as Saviour and King. And what is the church supposed to be doing in the midst of it all? As the church continues to pray? As some people are turning around and others are not? What is the church supposed to be doing?

Trumpet interlude. Revelation 11. Witness. Witness to grace. Witness to grace in such a way that more and more people turn around. The eleventh chapter of the drama is all about the church bearing witness to grace in the world.

Richard Bauckham, one of the leading Revelation scholars of our time, suggests that what we have in Revelation 11 is a parable about the church. Here is how he puts it:

“The people of God have been redeemed *from* all the nations (5:9) in order to bear prophetic witness *to* all the nations (11:3-13). ... This is what the story of the two witnesses (11:3-13) symbolically dramatizes. Two individuals here represent the church in its faithful witness to the world. Their story must be taken neither literally nor even as an allegory, as though the sequence of events in this story were supposed to correspond to a sequence of events in the church’s history. The story is more like a parable, which dramatizes the nature and the result of the church’s witness.” (84)

How do we know Revelation 11 is about the church? Verse 4: Lampstands. The two witnesses are called the two lampstands. Where have we met this imagery before? In chapters 1-3, where Jesus depicts the seven churches of Asia Minor as lampstands. In chapter 11, we have a parable of two witnesses, two lampstands, representing the whole church of Jesus Christ bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the world. A witness of grace, calling people to turn around. “We are heading the wrong way ... we have to turn around.”

So let us now walk through the parable. If you have not already done so, please take the printed text in hand and follow me through the text one phrase at a time. I am going to be working with material I develop more fully in my book on the last book of the Bible. We are going to make some startling discoveries about being disciples of the Lamb in the city! Do not worry about getting it all... receive what you can.

Verse 1. For the first time in the drama, John is asked to take a part. He is told to measure “the temple, and the altar, and those in it.” The word “temple” here cannot refer to a literal brick-and-mortar building in Jerusalem. Why not? Because it was not there anymore; it was not anywhere anymore. When Jesus put on his Apocalypse, the Jerusalem temple did not exist anymore. It had been, tragically, leveled to the ground in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome, just as Jesus had said would happen in His temple sermon in Matthew 24 – “Not one stone shall be left” (24:2).

When John was on the island of Patmos, the temple no longer existed. And John knew it would never again exist... just as Jesus said. Which is why in the vision of the New Jerusalem, the true Holy City, recorded in Revelation 21-22, John says “I saw no temple” (21:22), for “the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple” (21:22). And it turns out, the whole city is the temple (21:16), where God and the Lamb dwell in all their glory (21:23).

So John is not being told to measure a literal building. It did not exist anymore ... and never will again. He is being told to measure the new temple of God... which is the people of God, a major theme of the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” 1 Corinthians 6:19: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” 2 Corinthians 6:16: “For we are the temple of the Living God; just as God has said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’” 1 Peter 2:5: “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood.” (See also Ephesians 2:21.) The temple of God is now the people of God.

Verse 1: “Measure.” The idea being measure in order to protect. Here John is working with a scene from the prophet Zechariah (as he does in other places in the Revelation). In Zechariah 2, a man appears with a measuring line in his hand (2:1). He says he has come to measure Jerusalem, to see how wide and long it is (2:2). Why? The Lord answers: “For I will be a wall of fire to her, and I will be the glory in her midst”

(2:5). John is told to measure the temple, the people of God, because God wants to dwell in our midst, as a wall of fire!

Verse 2: “Leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; they will tread it underfoot for forty-two months.” The outer court of the literal temple was the place where Gentiles were allowed to go. The “temple” was the inner sanctuary, where only the priests could go. John is being told that the people of God will find themselves in conflict for 42 months. God will protect the inner court where His people, His new priesthood, bought by the blood of the Lamb, now lives. But the outer court, where people live who are not yet part of the new priesthood, is not protected. It cannot be protected – it can only be converted.

Verse 2: “Forty-two months.” What is this about? Statistic or symbol? Symbol – all the numbers in the Revelation of Jesus Christ are symbols. 42 months is 1260 days, based on a month of 30 days. 42 months, 1260 days, is the length of time that Jesus says the nations trample on the temple of God while the witnesses witness about him. 42 months, 1260 days, is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  is one-half of 7, the number of perfection.

This set of numbers is found all over the place in the Bible! For instance, 42 is the number of stages in Israel’s journey across the desert, the number of stages from Egypt to the Promised Land (Numbers 33). And 42 months,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years is the length of time it did not rain as the prophet Elijah was calling the nation to repentance (Luke 4:25; James 5:17). And Matthew says, in his genealogy of Jesus that there were 42 generations from Abraham to Jesus. He lists the 42 in 3 sets of 14. Matthew says, “All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to Messiah, fourteen generations.” (Matthew 1:17). 42 months = 1260 days =  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years is found twice in the book of Daniel, 7:25 and 12:7. There it is in the form “time, times, and half-a-time.” One, two, and a half... one year, two years, and a half a year ...  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years.

42 is clearly a symbol, not a statistic. And it appears that the symbol stands for the whole time the new temple, that is, the people of God, bear witness in the world under pressure from the nations to compromise their allegiance to Jesus Christ. 42 months = 1260 days =  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years is the period of time from the day Jesus Christ constituted the new temple by His blood, until the day where the New City without a temple, the new city which is a temple, comes down out of heaven.

In Revelation 12, John uses this number for the length of time that the dragon, Satan, goes after the woman who gave birth to the Messiah: “a time, times, and half a time” (12:14). The symbol therefore refers to the time between Jesus’ first and last coming. The symbol refers to the whole time the church is in the world, caught in the crunch of clashing Kingdoms.

Verse 2: “Two witnesses” who prophesy for the 1260 days – who speak forth the word of God, which is what prophesying means. John says they are clothed in sackcloth. Sackcloth is the sign of a prophet, and it is, more importantly, the sign of repentance. The two witnesses wear the sign of repentance, because they are speaking a word that calls for repentance, and because the witnesses themselves are living in repentance – they themselves are turning round.

Verse 4: John refers to these two witnesses as “the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” Here John is working with another text from the prophet Zechariah. In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees a lampstand with seven lamps on it (4:2), and he sees two olive trees on

either side of the lampstand (4:3). It turns out that the two olive trees are two “anointed ones” (4:14); and they most likely refer to King Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua. They are the two who are given the word, “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.” (Zechariah 4:6).

Verse 4: “Lampstands.” As we already noted, in chapters 1-3 of the Revelation, Jesus uses the image of lampstands to refer to his church (1:20). In John’s mind, shaped by the Scriptures, the two lampstands refer to the church as the bearer of light in the world.

Why the number two? In the Zechariah scene there is only one lampstand, with seven candles on it. Why the number two? Possibly because of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 1-3, only two, Smyrna and Philadelphia were faithful witnesses (Leon Morris, *Revelation*, p. 144). The other five failed in their lampstand/witness role. Ephesus lost its first love; Pergamum and Thyatira tolerated the spirit of compromise; Sardis was wealthy and famous, but self-absorbed and dead; Laodicea was lukewarm. Only two of seven churches had the oil of the two olive trees burning in their lamps.

More to the point, the number two is used because of the Biblical principle that “the testimony of two is true” (see Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; John 8:17; Matthew 18:16). Every legal matter must be settled by a minimum of two witnesses. Which is why Paul exhorts Timothy “do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19).

The image of the two lampstands, two olive trees, two witnesses, is a picture of the church, full of the olive oil of the Holy Spirit, burning brightly with the Fire of God.

Verse 5: “If anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies.” Yikes! This recalls the experience of the prophet Elijah, recorded in 2 Kings 1, when he was confronted twice with fifty soldiers, and twice called down fire which consumed them.

Verse 6: “These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall.” This recalls the experience of the prophet Elijah, recorded in 1 Kings 17, when after praying, it did not rain for three and a half years (James 5:17).

Verse 6: “And they have power over the waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with every plague.” Yikes again! This recalls the experience of Moses, recorded in Exodus 4-11, who by holding up Aaron’s rod, caused the Nile River to flow with blood; and who by a word caused plagues to come against the idols of Egypt.

Do you see where the parable is going? John is saying that God will do through the witnesses/lampstands what God did through Moses, Elijah, Zerubbabel and Joshua. God will vindicate His message and overcome opposition.

Verse 7: The beast. “And when they have finished their testing, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.” John will tell us more about this beast in Revelation 13. Here he is doing what he does throughout the book ... introducing a character in preparation for further revelation. He introduces the beast here to tell us that the real enemies of the witnesses is not human, but the anti-Christ forces behind the scenes. As the apostle Paul tells the Ephesians, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12).

The beast overcomes and kills the witnesses. Why? Because the beast does not like the One to Whom the witnesses are bearing witness, as we will see in Revelation chapter 12.

The witnesses and persecution take place, says John verse 8: “the great city which is mystically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” What is this about? In the Bible, Sodom is human cities at their most immoral and corrupt, and Egypt is human cities at their most oppressive and resistant. Is John saying that Jerusalem has become Sodom and Egypt? In the rest of the Revelation, the phrase “the great city” will refer to Babylon, the picture of Rome ... and of many cities after it.

Again, remember that when John writes Jerusalem is no more. It has been leveled. So John is not saying that the two witnesses, the church, bears its witness in a literal Jerusalem. “The great city” is any and every city that resists the in-breaking Kingdom and persecutes Jesus’ followers. New Testament scholar Gerhard Krodel puts it this way: “the great city ... is every city that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence on the Creator, achievement in place of repentance, oppression in place of faith, the beast in place of the Lamb, and murder in place of witness to God” (*Revelation*, 226). We know all about “the great city”!

Verse 11: For 3½ days the bodies of the witnesses lay in the streets of the great city, a horrible affront in any middle-eastern country. 3½ days, not 3½ years. Symbols, not statistics. The period of time when it appears the anti-Christ has defeated the church is very brief.

Verse 11: “And after three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet.” The words come directly from the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 37, the vision of the dry bones. God took Ezekiel out into a valley full of bones and told Ezekiel to prophesy to speak the word of God over them. When he did, the bones come to life and the Spirit of God entered them, standing them up as a great army.

John is saying that although the beast overcomes the witnesses, the Spirit of God breathes them back to life. The point is that the church of Jesus Christ cannot be destroyed. “Wherever the church appears to be wiped out, it rises again” (David H. van Daalen, *A Guide to the Revelation*, p. 104). Think China! Think Vietnam. The specific individuals within the church may not come back to life on this planet ... but the church does, again and again.

Verse 13: “And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” It is easy to read this and miss the wonderful point. Wonderful? What is wonderful about one-tenth of a city falling, 7,000 people dying?

1/10. 7,000. Statistics or symbols? Symbols – all the numbers in the Revelation of Jesus Christ are symbols. 1/10 and 7,000. Symbols of what? Grace. Grace? One-tenth, seven thousand, sounds awful – and it is. But John is doing Gospel math. The prophet Isaiah (6:13) spoke of God saving one-tenth ... but nine-tenths fall. The prophet Amos (5:3) spoke of a city of 1,000 having 100 left, a city of 100, having 10 left. One-tenth saved ... nine-tenths fall. John says nine-tenths are saved, only one-tenth falls. Revelation 11:13 – 7000 die. Awful. But in 1 Kings (19:18), Elijah bemoans the fact that only 7,000 are left. John says 7,000 die, but 63,000 are left.



Again, we are not dealing with statistics, we are dealing with symbols, symbols of gospel math – of grace. Not one-tenth saved, nine-tenths lost, but nine-tenths saved! Not 7000 saved and the rest lost, but 63,000 saved!

The mathematical reversal is due to the witness of the witnesses! The witnesses get killed, but because of the way they die – still trusting the Lamb – nine-tenths of the great city is redeemed. They “gave glory to the God of heaven,” says John. This is a way of saying they turned around and embraced God’s Lamb. The faithful witnesses “bring about the conversion of all but the seven thousand” (Bauckham, 87).

Okay, what then are the implications of this parable for us as disciples of Jesus in the city at this moment in history? Again, this interlude in the sounding of the seven trumpets is answering the question “what are those sealed by the Lamb to be and do in the world?” Witness.

“Witness” is the language of the courtroom. “Witness” implies someone is on trial. Who is on trial? Not the church, not us. If we were on trial the text would call us “defendants.” Witnesses are called to give testimony on behalf of another, to provide evidence for another’s claims. So who is on trial in “the great city”? Jesus Christ, who was crucified in the great city – Jesus is on trial.

Why? For claiming to bring into the world another Kingdom, which transforms and displaces all other kingdoms. Jesus Christ is on trial for claiming to be able to repair broken lives; for claiming to be able to set humanity free from the powers of evil and sin and death; for claiming to be the Centre of all things. He is on trial for subverting the status quo. And in His trial in “the great city” He calls the temple, His people, to be His witnesses, the evidence that He is right. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:5). The issue is Jesus, not the church, not me, not you. We are not the ones on trial – Jesus is. We did not make the claims, He did. He is the issue in the world. He Himself makes Himself the issue.

And it is our great privilege to serve Him as His witnesses in the city. And John tells us that the key to our witness is what we wear! Sackcloth; clothed in sackcloth (11:3). Not literally so! Sackcloth is a prophetic sign, and the church’s witness is a prophetic witness. A “thus says the Lord” kind of witness. A declaring the truth in the midst of confusion and deceit kind of witness.

And sackcloth is a sign of repentance – a sign of turning around. Jesus is saying we bear witness to Him in the world clothed in repentance. Why? Because truth and grace always call us to turn around. How can I follow a new Master and still follow the old? How can I live by the value system of His new Kingdom and still follow the old? I have to turn around ... over and over again ... at ever deeper levels. We wear repentance because we ourselves are a repenting people – always turning.

We bear witness to Jesus by constantly turning into His counter-cultural ways, by constantly turning away from the idolatry of our age. We bear witness as people who are seeking to turn around, which means the witness is not judgmental. Oh, judgment may be the result for those who do not join in the turning around. But the spirit of prophetic witness is not a judgmental spirit, it is a broken spirit. We bear witness to the Lamb from a place of brokenness over our own idolatry.

And, says John, we do so clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the point of the references to the experiences of Moses and Elijah. Not that the church, like they, calls down fire and causes rivers to flow with blood – although that would get attention! But that we, like they, will be “clothed with power

from on high” as Jesus promises (Luke 24:49). In Revelation 11, Jesus, through John, is telling us that as we bear witness in the city we will do so in the same Spirit and power given to Moses, Elijah, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and John the Baptist. Power that validates the message, and power that overcomes resistance and enables the city to join us in turning around.

And, according to the text, we find ourselves in trouble. How can it be otherwise? We’re following a King Whose gospel subverts the status quo. Some will joyfully accept such news – others do not. John says, verse 10, that the great city killed the two witnesses “because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on earth” (see also 9:5, 9:10; 11:10). Why would prophetic witness torment anyone? Why would good news about Jesus torment anyone? Because the good news confronts idols. If Jesus is Lord, then you and I are not. When Jesus enters the picture, He begins to heal and restore ... and exposes the idols, false gods. And we either turn around, or we begin to feel tormented in conscience. The torment itself is a sign of grace.

Somewhere along the line we have to accept the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a great scandal. The gospel is wonderfully good news, but it is a scandal, calling into question the status quo in our lives, and in our cities. I am learning from Soren Kierkegaard, that great Danish philosopher-theologian, that true faith really cannot happen until we accept the scandal that Jesus is.

This is why the Hallelujah Chorus is experienced in Revelation 11 as a woe. The chorus sings the great scandal. I love to attend public presentations of Handel’s Messiah – the gospel is proclaimed so powerfully! At the end, as the orchestration begins the introduction to the Hallelujah Chorus, and the choir starts to sing, people stand. It is moving to witness people standing to revolutionary words: “The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”

Do they hear the words? Do they – do we – realize how revolutionary those words are? “The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.” If people really hear the words, they (and we) cannot just stand there. They (and we) will do everything possible to turn around, leave our idols behind and follow Jesus with reckless abandon into His Kingdom. Amen.

“The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever.”