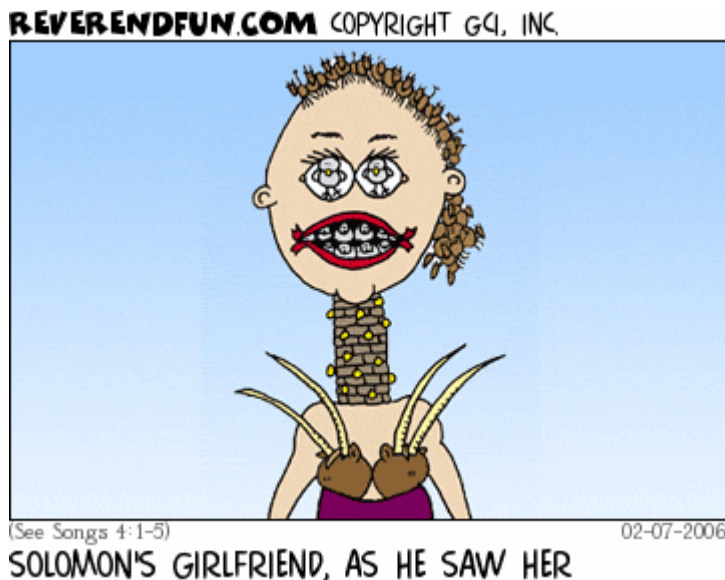


Revelation 10:1-11

Last week we talked about the opening of the fifth and six trumpets. The fifth trumpet introduced us to some locusts that were described in some unusual ways. They were told not to eat any vegetation; but instead to torture the inhabitants of the earth for five months, with their tails, without killing them. They were described as having what appeared to be like crowns on their head, they had like human faces. They had hair like a woman's. They had what appeared to be protection like armor. The common denominator in all of these descriptions is the word like, which is a simile. A simile compares two things that are different, using the words, like or as. Similes are never meant to be taken literally; instead they are meant to describe something by using metaphor.

For example, the Song of Songs describes Solomon's future wife as having a neck like the Tower of Lebanon. She had hair like a flock of goats, teeth like baby ewes, and her breasts were like fawns. These similes are saying his wife has a long prominent, sensuous neck, she has thick curly hair, having twin ewes that were not lost meant that all her teeth matched and were not missing, and the fact that she has breasts like that of fawns meant they were firm and youthful in appearance. So, the similes are not meant to be taken literally. Otherwise Solomon's wife would look something like this.



In the same way, the symbolism in Revelation is not meant to be taken literally; instead it is trying to describe something using apocalyptic language. No one denies John actually saw these creatures he describes, the debate is whether they should be taken literally or if they were meant to convey something using highly esoteric imagery. In Apocalyptic literature, the question that drives the reader is simply, "What is the meaning behind the symbolism?"

There is no denying that Revelation is filled with symbolism! For example, we discover in chapter one that the seven lamp stands are of the seven churches. Likewise, the seven stars refer to the seven angels that are assigned to each church. The great dragon, the ancient serpent of old, is a reference to Satan, the white garments of the saints represent God's people being cleansed. More importantly, the lamb that has been slain, of course, represents Jesus, who alone is worthy enough to break the seals of the scroll.....which represent God's plan for the unfolding of redemptive history. Symbolism! Symbolism! Symbolism! In some cases, we are told what the imagery represents; in others we are not!

So when John describes these unusual locusts that have human faces, woman's hair, teeth like lions, tails like scorpions—he is describing something that is demonic in nature, but whether he is referring to literal supernatural locusts is highly doubtful. Instead it is best to understand their description as an invincible force, possibly a great army, which will reap utter and complete havoc on those who are not sealed as God's children by means of torture.

In trumpet 6, John describes an incredible army where the horses have heads like that of a lion and their number is around two hundred million. Unlike the locusts, these forces will kill those that are not sealed of God. The best way to understand this is to think of an army of considerable proportion that will change the course of history forever. It is quite possible this army will represent all the different nations at war with one another, with the demonic realm influencing them. The text says a third of the inhabitants of the earth will be killed. If you add these casualties with those already killed by the seven seals;

you have quiet a number of casualties, over half of the population. What's even more amazing is that at the end of chapter eight we read..... that despite the disasters and the casualties.....no one repents. Amazing!

Now before John reveals the seventh seal, which will be Christ establishing his kingdom on earth, there is an interlude. Interludes in essence allow the reader to catch his or her breath and contemplate what has just been revealed. There was an interlude before the sixth and seven seals....and likewise here.....between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Now I want to suggest that this interlude represents another opportunity for the inhabitants of the earth to accept Christ. Because as we have mentioned in previous messages, the theme of God throughout Scripture is that He is a loving God, slow to anger, abounding in mercy, and able to relent from sending calamity if one repents. There will always be an opportunity, even during this period which is referred to as the Great Tribulation. Before us again, is what life will be like during the great tribulation on earth. In the context, John has moved from being transported to heaven to being back to earth again. We are reading what he saw happen on the earth from an earthly viewpoint.

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, 3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.

There has been some debate as to whether this angel mentioned is Jesus. The description of him seems to be similar to that found in the book of Daniel 10:5-6. But it seems to me that this is not Jesus Himself mainly because I don't think the allusion to Daniel 9 is Jesus Himself. In Daniel, this heavenly being is described as someone who was prevented from answering Daniel's prayer because he was delayed by the demonic Prince of Persia and needed the assistance of Michael the archangel to come to Daniel. Satan and his demonic real cannot prevent Jesus from ministering to his people and he certainly does not need Michael to help him win a battle.

Instead, this figure with a face of lightening and legs of bronze seems to be an angel from heaven. The description is meant to magnify a heavenly being vs. an earthly one. There is majesty and glory from those who come from heaven. God's kingdom produces creatures that are greater in appearance and stature than the representatives of the earthly kingdoms.

4 And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

The seven thunders seem to represent another series of judgments. The point seems to be that God relents from sending more calamities. God the Father tells John not to record these judgments in the same way he wrote about the seven seals and the seven trumpets. It is as if God says, "Okay, okay already, let me show them some mercy. Let's take a break from all the destruction!"

5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven 6 and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, 7 but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

The positioning of the one leg on the land; the other on the sea, and the right hand raised to heaven represent that God is in control of all facets of creation. John specifically mentions that God is the creator of the heaven and what is in it; the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it! Secondly, the judgments we have read about have occurred in the land, the sea, and the spiritual battle in heaven. The symbolism represents God's complete and utter dominance of His domain!

We tend to think of this planet as our planet and the seas as our sea. But the reality is that we are just stewards of God's creation. I think this is an area where the "green" line of thought is right on. We must respect and be good stewards of our environment.

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10 And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.

Internalizing God's Word

The eating of the scroll, in essence, is symbolic of John internalizing the message. God did this same thing with Old Testament Prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The sweetness / bitter wordplay is the reality that God's Word is sweet to those who are believers. Think about this: Before us is the very words of the living God who as we just read created the heavens and the earth, and the sea! The Mighty God of the universe has given us the absolute privilege of knowing His will. The reality of the matter is that we have the sweet word of God within our midst. If we want God's blessing in our lives we have to make sure we internalize it. That is the very reason why Christians all over the world are encouraged to read their Bibles daily.

On the flipside, the Word of God is also bitter to the stomach because the reality of it is that most of the inhabitants of the world do not feel the same about God's revelation. What this means is that Christians will have to watch God judge those who ignore, minimize, or reject God's teachings overtly or subvertly. Many of us know either Christians who have fallen away from God's will for our lives, or unbelievers, whose lives have just bottomed out because they have decided to create their own path in life. Watching their slow demise is just bitter to the stomach! So God is communicating to John there is a blessing and a curse in knowing God's will.

The Wisdom of the World

Paul once told the Corinthians that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. If you have ever tried to share your faith perhaps you can relate to your message seeming like foolish talk to the ear of an unreceptive person. I've had people say, "Is it really that simple?" This is usually followed by the "supposed concern" of those who follow a different religion. Have you ever tried to work your way through this objection? Many times you feel like a simple thinking, disrespecting of other beliefs, narrow and unyielding person who has simply been brainwashed by the cultic organization you are apart of. Such people listen to your message and think to themselves.....foolishness! Absolute and utter foolishness! Sometimes if we dare to admit....our message seems like foolishness to even ourselves!

The reality is that our culture.....increasingly..... does not subscribe to absolute truth! In the academic community there is this division known as fact, belief, and values. The only fact according to a majority is that all we know for certain is that matter and the cosmos always existed. Beliefs are thought to be personal and subjective....but not provable.....and values are cultural norms, which change with the times, the prime example being the growing acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle.

The sad reality is this thinking has even permeated into the Christian realm where people may accept God being the creator of matter and the cosmos....but have minimized their stance on the exclusiveness of Christianity and compromise in the area when it comes to Christian values. Many times our lives simply don't look any different from the prevailing understanding of life from the unbelieving world. We live in a tough period when it comes to being a Christian and sharing our faith. We live in a tough period when it comes to finding other Christians who share the values of Christian living as found in the Bible.

But that does not mean we should stop sharing our faith and living for Christ. Instead we should recognize as Paul once told the Corinthians that though our message is foolishness to those who are perishing.....but for us that believe it is power that saves (1 Corinthians 1:18-19). This power does not just manifest itself by the presentation....it also shows itself powerfully by the way we live our lives. The power of the gospel is found in the belief and the values! What we say and how we live! In a nutshell, we aren't going to win someone to Christ by out debating them—our message comes across as utterly naïve and foolish. We will win them through the power of God which will reflect our dedication to God's Word!

That is why John ate the little scroll and was told in the last verse this command....

11 And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

This is precisely what John is doing throughout the book of Revelation. He is prophesying to many peoples, nations, languages, and royalty....the events that will take place as redemptive history unfolds like a scroll. He is encouraging Christians who are being persecuted and warning those who have not been sealed about what is to come. For the majority, the locusts with the crowns, heads of humans, and the tails of scorpions will seem utterly foolish. But for those who take heed...they will be rescued by the power of God. May we eat this scroll and internalize this message. May we live for the Lamb who stands before the throne of God and was slain on our behalf. May we like the angels bow down in sheer awe and proclaim in a loud voice..."You are Worthy!"