**The Little Scroll**

Revelation 10

After two years at the church in Kentucky, ***we wanted to leave***. The church was divided and unhealthy, and people were leaving constantly. Hardly any visitors came and the few that did, did not come back, because you could tell people were mad at each other. The church lobby looked like this, with little clusters of 3 or 4 people in closed circles, arms crossed, scowls on faces.

We wanted to leave. But God made it very clear that **we were supposed to stay**. Would the church turn around? Would the people listen to me as a preacher and a leader? Probably not. But that didn’t matter. God gave me words to speak. He gave me a process to help the church rediscover its purpose and identity. I made lots of mistakes and was my usual impatient, impulsive, ricochet rabbit style leader. But we stayed three more years and helped the church start to turn the corner from bitterness to healing; from division to unity; from inward focus to awareness of the outside world.

***We didn’t understand*** those extra three years in Kentucky until God called us here to Tampa. The situations were quite similar in what the two churches had been through. I made a lot of the same mistakes here that I had in Kentucky, but on these two points I stayed firm: the Word of God and the Gospel. We knew that God’s Word would not return empty but will always accomplish the purpose for which God sent it. We knew the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And we knew God had sent us here.

I’m sure you’ve had **a season of life like that**: where you struggled and wrestled and suffered and waited and just could not make sense of what God was doing. You were trying to stay faithful; you were trying to trust God and obey His direction, but you didn’t understand WHY. What was any of it for?

It’s like the old ***Karate Kid movie*** where Mr. Miagi makes Daniel-son wax all of his cars and paint his whole, big fence. Daniel feels like it’s all a huge waste of time. He wants to learn karate - not do a bunch of chores in a junk yard. But after weeks and weeks of this drudgery, this hard manual labor, Mr. Miagi shows Daniel what his repetitive training has been doing. It was creating a deeply embedded muscle memory that would serve as the foundation for his whole approach to karate. Wax on, wax off. Paint fence.

That’s what God was doing in us for those years in Kentucky. ***Wax on, wax off***. Paint fence. One year I literally painted our fence with a sprayer, and I have never been more sore in my life than the day after doing 1,000 deep knee bends… And that was a metaphor for that whole period of time for us: building strength, forming muscle memory, learning what NOT to do as a pastor and leader.

***What is YOUR TEST right now?*** Some of you are in that kind of season. Waiting. Struggling. Wax on, wax off. Painting one fence post after another. Another deep squat.

Revelation 10 brings us into ***a time of great trial for the apostle John***. Exiled on a distant island. Separated from friends and loved ones. His sufferings and visions became a gift to the church back then and ever since. Imagine what it must have been like to receive these visions in the first place. We struggle now to make sense of them and not be terrified. Think what it must have been like for John!

And for the early Christians with an emperor like Domitian threatening their lives and their freedom. Wax on. Wax off. Listen up, people. ***We have a sensei far more wise than Mr. Miagi***. Our Master knows exactly what we need and when. He is always working. Always preparing us. Look at verse 10.

“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.’” Revelation 10:9

There are some prominent echoes here. “Take and eat.” ***Sounds like communion, right?*** Here is bread to eat. Here is wine to drink. It is bittersweet. Bitter for Jesus. Sweet for us. “Take and eat.” ***Sounds like the Garden of Eden.*** Here are all these trees, take their fruit and eat it! Just this one tree; don’t take and eat from that. Oh, if only human beings followed orders.

But the main hyperlink here, the main Old Testament reference we are supposed to think of is **Ezekiel**. John has already pointed us to Ezekiel 1 with his description of 4 heavenly angel-creatures around God’s throne. Remember that the throne room scene of Ezekiel 1 sets up the commissioning of the prophet in Ezekiel 2. And that’s when God tells the about to be prophet to eat a little scroll.

“‘But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.’ And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.” Ezekiel 2:8-9

***God was preparing Ezekiel for a long and difficult assignment.*** Similar to that of Isaiah, being sent to Israel to speak God’s Word to them which they would not listen to.

“And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.” Ezekiel 2:10

A scroll covered in words… but they are ***words of lamentation and mourning and woe***.

These are not lighthearted short stories or knock-knock jokes. Ezekiel’s job was going to be to testify against Israel, to bring prophetic warning after warning to them of coming judgment.

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey… ‘But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me…’”

Ezekiel 3:3, 7

God told Ezekiel, “I could have given you a cush job like Jonah, going to a foreign nation - that would listen to a Jewish prophet. But no. I’m giving you a hard assignment. Your job is to testify to a stubborn and obstinate people with stick necks and foreheads like stone.”

But ***God was strengthening Ezekiel for his task by means of God’s Word.*** Eat the scroll. Fill your belly with it. This is the strength you need to do the work ahead of you. Wax on, wax off. Paint the fence. Eat the scroll.

“Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ whether they hear or refuse to hear.” Ezekiel 3:11

***How people respond is not our responsibility.*** Our job is to receive God’s word into our heads and hearts and to share what God gives us. Their response is THEIR responsibility.

So let’s turn back to Revelation 10, with these echoes from Ezekiel in our minds. This is a commissioning. **This is preparation of a prophet**. Revelation 11 describes two witnesses God empowers in a special way to speak His Word during the Great Tribulation, to the point that they are killed. So chapter 10 is the preparation. ***We RECEIVE God’s Word in order to proclaim it.***

We will see the four steps in how God commissions a prophet. John’s experience here follows Ezekiel’s process exactly. First.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* See God’s Infinite **Glory**

“Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head.” Revelation 10:1

John sees a heavenly being he calls an angel, which means ***MESSENGER***. There have been lots of angels in this book, but this one is mighty and the description makes him seem like more than an angel. These descriptions sound a lot like the ones used in the Bible with reference to GOD.

Coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud. ***Sounds like the Son of Man in Daniel 7***. God is the One who rides the cloud chariot. God is the one with the rainbow over and around him.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* See God’s Infinite **Glory**

“And his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.” Revelation 10:1

This sounds like chapter one and the description of Jesus: a face radiant with glory, legs blazing with power and righteous fire. He is holding a little scroll, which reminds us of the Lamb who was the only One in the universe found worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll in God’s right hand.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* See God’s Infinite **Glory**
	+ The Creator of all things is **Sovereign** over all things

“And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land.” Revelation 10:2

Who can walk on the raging waters? Who can calm the sea? Who is the bridge connecting heaven and earth? Who speaks with a voice like thunder and is like a lion roaring?

Scholars are a little divided over whether this angel is Jesus or not. On the balance I think it *does* sound like Jesus. But even if this is Michael the archangel or Gabriel or some other high-powered angel and not Jesus, the lesson is the same: God is sovereign. **He is in control** of this whole sequence of events and therefore all of history and all of creation.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* See God’s Infinite **Glory**
	+ The Creator of all things is **Sovereign** over all things

“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.” Revelation 10:6

Even as God introduces a delay before the last trumpet is blown, He announces the end of all delay. The mystery of God will now be revealed, and all prophecies will be completed.

This is step one in the preparation and commissioning of a prophet: to see God.

***Have you seen Him?*** That’s what this whole book of Revelation is for: to reveal the glory of King Jesus. Every one of us will be called to testify to what we have seen and heard. Have you seen Jesus? Have you experienced His life changing love and mercy? Have you seen His sovereign power and goodness? Have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good?

Step two:

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* Hear God’s Irrevocable **Promise**

“And swore… that there would be no more delay… the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” Revelation 10:6-7

***God is the ultimate promise keeper.*** Throughout Scripture God made hundreds and hundreds of promises. Jesus alone, in his birth, life, death and resurrection fulfilled over 300 prophecies. But some remain to be fulfilled in the future. Many of Jesus’ own words remain to be fulfilled, like His promise to come back.

***What is the MYSTERY to be fulfilled?*** In the New Testament, the mystery is the gospel: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The mystery is the one church: no longer just Jewish but now Jew and Gentile united forever in Christ. The mystery is God’s plan for salvation history: to unite all things in Christ and complete the revelation of His glory.

This mighty angel, probably Jesus Himself, raised His hand and swore by God the Creator that **the time had come**.

* This is how Jesus’ birth was described: “When the time had fully come, Jesus was born of a woman, born under the Law.”
* This was Jesus announcement when he started preaching: “The time has been fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near.”
* Jesus opened the scroll of Isaiah, read from chapter 61 and announced, “TODAY this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
* And on the cross Jesus declared, “It is finished.” The price was paid. The sacrifice accomplished.

In Jesus’ first coming ***the Kingdom of God was inaugurated on earth.*** One day soon it will be consummated. In Jesus’ first coming he opened up the day of the Lord’s favor. One day soon he will come back for the day of God’s vengeance. In His first coming he gave up His life in payment for your sin and mine. When He returns every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

Have you seen God’s glory? Have you heard His promises?

From the beginning God has spoken both ***the promise of blessing and the warning for judgment.*** Both are PROMISED. Blessing for those who believe God’s Word and follow it. Judgment for those who reject God’s Word and do not follow it.

* Moses set before Israel blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.
* Jesus set before the world the promise of everlasting life for those who believe in Him and the promise of everlasting destruction for those who do not believe in Him.

Don’t miss this critical point. **BOTH are promised.** Both are guaranteed. Wonderful promises of life and blessing for all who know and love Jesus. Terrifying promises of judgment and suffering for all who do not know and believe in Jesus.

The prophet being prepared first sees the glory of God, then hears His promises, both the warm fuzzy ones and the cold prickly ones. Third.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* **Receive** God’s All-Satisfying Word

“Go, take the scroll that is in open in the hand of the angel… And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it.’” Revelation 10:8-9

Normally you wouldn’t think to eat a scroll. Our golden doodle does like mail time and will eat envelopes with the sweet part. Gobbles them right up. But normal people and dogs don’t eat paper. But this reminds us of what Jesus told the devil, quoting Deuteronomy: “Man shall not live by bread alone but ***by every WORD that comes from the mouth of God***.” Later when his disciples asked if someone had given him food Jesus told them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.”

Jesus was sustained by His relationship with God the Father.

This is **how God strengthens us to serve Him**: with His Word. He speaks to us and says, “Take and eat it.” The phrasing reminds us that Jesus is the ultimate Word of God who spoke those words to us, “This is my body, which is for you, take and eat it.”

And Jesus gave us His teachings to show us how to live and sustain us as we walk with Him.

***Do you FEED on God’s Word?*** Many of us READ Scripture. But do we FEED ON IT? What is your attitude toward this book? Is it LIFE to you? Is it sustenance? An old mentor of ours used to say, “No Bible, no breakfast. No prayer, no pillow.” Is the Bible your breakfast? Is prayer your time of rest?

What has your menu been like this past week? Were you well fed on Scripture, or did you just eat some scraps here and there? What is your usual diet like?

It’s so helpful to find a good Bible reading plan and stick with it. ***Our family has been reading through the whole Bible together for over ten years now***. It’s helpful for you as an individual, it’s great for a married couple to share the same plan. And it’s wonderful for a whole family, once the kids are confident readers, to go through the whole Bible together year after year. We told the boys when they were younger that it was ok to skip the Old Testament parts sometimes. We use the Bible in one year with Nicky Gumbel because we like his British accent and daily devotional. But we also like how that plan mixes in a Psalm or Proverb every day along with the NT and OT.

Those are like **well prepared meals**. The “lucky dip” approach to the Bible is usually not as fruitful. Just flipping and hoping for “a word from the Lord,” isn’t going to work very often.

Sometimes you want to ***drill deep in one passage for a long time***. I’ve been working deeply through the sermon on the mount. I’m hoping, by the time we go through it in the fall as a church family, to have most of it memorized. Some passages in Scripture are just so rich and valuable they are worth memorizing in whole chunks: John chapter 1; Romans 8; Isaiah 40; Psalm 103 – really a bunch of the Psalms - Ephesians 3… maybe Revelation 21 and 22 - the New Heaven and new earth.

The point is to Take it and eat it. Receive the Word of God. ***Consume it as if your life depends on it, because it does.*** This is food for your soul. It is nourishment for your mind. This is how you “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.” This is how you think about “whatever is noble and true and excellent and praiseworthy.” This is how you learn to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* **Receive** God’s All-Satisfying Word

“Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” Revelation 10:9

God’s Word is like honey. ***Read Psalm 119.*** It’s an acrostic using every word in the Hebrew alphabet. Each letter gets 8 stanzas. The whole thing is a song of praise about God’s Word. It is light to our path. It is worth more than gold or jewels. It is food for our souls. It is like honey on the lips.

God’s Word is always sweet when we receive it, because it is a gift from Him. But it can become bitter or sour inside of us because of what we have to do with it. That was the case for both Ezekiel and John. ***Their stomach turned*** as they realized what their visions meant; where they had to go.

Do you see the progression? A prophet first sees the glory of God. Then the prophet hears God’s great and precious promises. Third, you receive God’s Word. This is the preparation. This is the commissioning. And it comes to this gut check. You realize: you cannot keep this word to yourself. This is a Word that must be shared. If you keep it inside, you’ll get sick. The Word must come back out of you. Which is the fourth step in our commissioning.

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* **Proclaim** God’s Message to the Nations

“And I was told, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’” Revelation 10:11

***John’s work wasn’t yet done.*** The seventh trumpet has not yet been sounded; and that will simply activate the 7 bowls of God’s final judgments. He still had to share about the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. He still had to pronounce the judgment on Babylon and the great prostitute. And, thankfully, he still had to get to the return of Christ, the final judgment and the renewal of all things.

Aren’t you glad John didn’t give up halfway? Aren’t you glad we have this whole book?

***John was faithful.*** To the very end, like the other 11 apostles, John remained faithful to the Lord Jesus and his testimony that Jesus rose from the dead.

Consider ***which is the harder calling***: the apostle, like Peter, who was killed in Rome in AD 65, or the apostle John who lived into his 90s? Would you rather be among the first to die in your friend group or among the last? Would you rather go to all of those funerals, or be the first to go home to the Lord? Peter’s assignment was no picnic. But John continued on much longer and had to endure, on top of the persecution, the sadness of losing his brother and all of his closest friends.

But still he testified to the goodness of the Lord Jesus. How? He sustained himself on God’s Word.

What about you?

**How God Commissions a Prophet:**

* See God’s Infinite **Glory**
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* Hear God’s Irrevocable **Promise**
* **Receive** God’s All-Satisfying Word
* **Proclaim** God’s Message to the Nations

***Have you seen God’s infinite glory, revealed in King Jesus?*** Have you heard that voice that thunders from heaven? Have you experienced the power of the Lion of Judah and felt the mercy of the Lamb who was slain for you? Jesus is the One through whom all things were made and for whom all things were made. He sustains the cosmos with the word of His power.

***Have you heard God’s irrevocable promises?*** Have you felt the force of the promises both of blessing and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus but also the warnings of judgment and eternal suffering for those who do not?

***Have you received God’s Word*** as sustenance for your soul? Do you feed on it every day? Do you receive His word with expectancy and faith? Do you taste the sweetness of honey in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?

And ***do you regularly share what you are learning*** with others? The Word of God will become sour inside of you if you keep it in. It must be digested and then shared.

Think of ***God’s Word like a meal being prepared.*** What good would it do if you prepared a four-course meal in your home but didn’t invite anyone over to enjoy it? The food would all just sit there until it got cold, congealed over and then spoiled.

Let’s go back to Ezekiel 2 as we close. He saw the vision of God’s glorious throne in chapter one.

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.’ And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.” Ezekiel 2:1-2

The Lord is speaking to each of us today, as He did with John, calling us to stand on our feet and listen to His voice. As we hear His voice, as we listen to God’s Word, His Holy Spirit fills us and lifts us up.

Oh, if you are down today, hear God’s Word, feel His Spirit lifting you up on your feet! If you are struggling and filled with sadness and doubts, hear God speaking to you calling you to stand up.

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me… I send you to them, and you shall say, “Thus says the Lord GOD.”’” Ezekiel 2:3-4

This was not an easy or happy assignment. ***The Jews were in exile.*** They were far from home. They were filled with doubt and fear and anger and bitterness. They were questioning the goodness of God and tempted to just settle into life in Babylon. They were tempted to sell out altogether to the lures and idols of the world.

And aren’t we as well? ***Don’t we live in Babylon?*** Aren’t we tempted to just settle in and make this place our home? Aren’t we enticed to worship the gods of money, power, romantic love and the American dream? What about the KINGDOM dream?

“And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words…” Ezekiel 2:5-6

Brothers and sisters, do you feel the call of God upon you? Why did God give us this book? What is the book of Revelation for? Is it just for us, to satisfy our curiosity? No. This book is our commissioning. It is the completion of the New Testament, and the fulfillment of the mystery. It’s all here. We have it. We are fed by it.

***But we must not keep it to ourselves.*** It turns bitter in our stomachs. We are supposed to baby bird the Scriptures. Eat it, share it. Eat it share it. Wax on, wax off.

You worry that **people won’t listen**. They won’t respond. Yuh. Take it up with Ezekiel. Or Jeremiah. Or Isaiah. Or Moses. Or… how about Jesus? Did they listen to him? The apostles? All killed except John.

People won’t listen. Right. But they’ll know that God has spoken. And don’t miss this. We have the assignment to ***make disciples of ALL NATIONS***. Unlike Ezekiel, we were not sent to the stubborn, hard hearted Jewish people. God may call some of us to reach out to Jews. But most of us just have the everyday pagan Floridians to reach.

And guess what? Some of them WILL respond. The harvest is plentiful out there. So, where’s the breakdown. ***The workers are few***. So, let’s pray that the Lord will send us out as workers into His harvest field!

Pray.