

**The Two Witnesses**  
**A Sermon by Pastor Elizabeth Coleman**  
**Northwest Presbyterian Church**  
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**Text: Revelation 11**

As we enter Holy Week today, we are entering a most solemn period of reflection, of prayer, and of repentance. It is the holiest of spaces in time. It coincides with the most intense period of time in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he would reflect upon the costly price that he would pay for our redemption, when he would pray to our Father with such heartfelt intensity that his sweat would fall from his face like drops of blood, and in which he would surrender to God's will. He knew well what was about to happen to him: the betrayal, the beating that would be so severe as to render him unrecognizable as a human being, the nails being driven through his hands and feet, and finally the sword that would draw from him the blood of the New Covenant. Jesus recognized the calling that was upon his life, and he did not rest until it was completed.

This week, for Jesus, would catapult him from the heights of praise with palms waving and children glorifying him as he entered Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, into the territory of Satan. Leaving his divine power behind, Jesus entered this week not as the Lion of Judah, but as the sacrificial Lamb.

He willingly set aside the power of the kingdom of God to be fully in his human nature, open and vulnerable to the enemy, and laying himself on the altar of the cross as a sin offering.

The incentive for this great act of humility and self-sacrifice was a deep and abiding love that Jesus and the Father had for us human beings, even while we were still sinners, breaking his laws and doing harm to each other, to the earth, and even to Jesus himself.

"How deep the Father's love for us  
How vast beyond all measure  
That He should give His only Son  
And make a wretch His treasure."  
-Stuart Townend

It is fitting that today we are to study the mission of the two witnesses who came to earth to call the people to repentance for the last time. It was the great love that God had for Israel that compelled him to give his chosen people one more chance to receive the gift of salvation through Jesus the Messiah, and to turn from their sins.

John was instructed to measure the temple, the altar, and those who were worshiping there. This is symbolic of discerning or "sizing up" the state of the people of Israel, beginning with the religious leaders, priests, and scribes

who served the temple, and ending with all of the Jewish people who still worshiped God in the Jewish faith.

At this point, the Gentiles (all non-Jews) were left out of this tally. Gentiles were symbolized by the "court" that surrounded the temple. God had already given five trumpet warnings, signs and judgments upon the whole world, to convince all people to turn from their sins and to embrace Jesus as a refuge and Savior.

Now, God was remembering his chosen people, of whom 144,000 had been sealed for redemption. As he sent the two prophetic witnesses to preach the gospel of salvation to the Jewish people, God gave these two prophets great power to perform miraculous signs in order to convince the Jewish people that the two witnesses were indeed sent by God.

The two witnesses performed signs that were familiar to the people through Jewish history and the scriptural accounts of Moses and Elijah: shutting up the heavens so that it would not rain during the 1,260 days (3½ years) that they ministered on the earth, fire coming out of their mouths to destroy anyone that would try to harm them, and the power to bring plagues on the earth as often as they desired.

These two witnesses were anointed with a permanent anointing, as is symbolized by the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before God. Theirs was the task of calling God's chosen people to repentance through their testimony for three and one-half years.

After that three and one-half year period of wearing sackcloth and giving their testimony to the people, the Beast, who is Satan, was allowed to come up out of the bottomless pit and to make war with them and kill them.

The cup of God's wrath would have to be full before God would take back full control and end Satan's reign of terror on the earth. Satan was a fallen angel who had rebelled against God and turned one-third of God's angels in heaven against God by making a pact with them to commit insurrection to seize God's power through the human beings that God had made to share God's power and authority in the earth. Yet, even toward this traitor, God was just, fair and merciful, showing great patience, and giving even Satan every opportunity to repent. This is God's nature.

But his mercy also includes compassion for humankind who had been hurt and deceived by Satan, and when the time is fulfilled and the cup of God's wrath in seeing the suffering of humankind is fulfilled, God is just and fair in destroying those fallen angels and Satan for all of the evil and hardship that

they have brought upon God's creation and humanity. When the cup of God's wrath is full, the judgment to come will be unquestionably deserved.

God granted one last period of repentance for Israel to mend their relationship with God. God also granted Satan one last opportunity to return to the earth before he would be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

The two witnesses used their miraculous powers to turn the hearts of the people back to God, but even though all of the people saw their miracles and heard their testimony, only a remnant of the people repented. The rest of them hated the two witnesses, because of what they were suffering due to the plagues that they had initiated on the earth.

When the Beast came out of the bottomless pit, and killed the two witnesses, the unrepentant people were glad. They celebrated and exchanged gifts, and refused to bury the two prophets' dead bodies.

But, God in his mercy, after three and a half days of the two dead bodies being left by the people in the street, breathed the breath of life into the two witnesses and they stood upon their feet, to the amazement of all who saw them. The people were terrified at the sight of them being brought back to life.

A loud voice from heaven said to the witnesses, "Come up here!" They went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies watched them. Their ministry had been completed. Their mission of calling the people to repentance was fulfilled. Those who did repent were saved and gave glory to God when the earthquake and destruction and death of seven thousand people followed the entry of the two witnesses into heaven. Those who still refused to turn from their own evil ways were lost forever.

(God and his kingdom exist outside of our limited experience of linear time. We think in terms of a timeline in which one event happens, followed by the next event, but with God, there are no boundaries of time, and all of time is always present and visible. Therefore, when we study the events of Revelation, we should not imagine that each event is confined to a certain timeline.)

God is also a God of order, and God has given us this revelation in order for us to understand the lengths that God has gone to in order to give humanity every opportunity to turn from the deceptions of Satan that bind people to a false concept of what is important.

Satan would have us believe that the things of this world — wealth, power, position, influence, and the accumulation of desirable things, are worth spending one's life to achieve. But, that is not so. That is the lie that causes divisions, and damages our eternal souls.

The real goals worth living for are to glorify God our Creator and to live in mutual love, to build unity in community and fellowship, and to take care of the earth and of all of God's creation.

If we would strive as hard for the sake of the peace and security of others as we strive for our own comfort, our world would be quite a different place. In today's terms, if we could see Asian-Americans and Native-Americans and Mexican Americans as our true sisters and brothers worthy of our love, worthy of justice and equality, we would be having very different conversations nationally about them in our media. Instead of hearing of Asian-American men and women being randomly attacked and battered or killed on the streets as we have seen on the news this past week, we would be celebrating the rich diversity with which the benefit of ancient eastern medicines, art, music, and literature have enriched us as a nation by their presence.

When we belittle people that are different from ourselves, we are the ones who lose. Every human being is a gift of God that is given to the world for a specific purpose. When a Mexican or South American child dies in a detention center for immigrants at the southern border, we lose that gift from God, and the purpose for which God gave that gift to us goes unfulfilled.

If we could only see each and every human being — young and old — as a gift from God to fulfill God's good intention for blessing us, we would not be killing our blessings on the streets; we would not be marginalizing our blessings with policies that keep them in poverty; we would not be nonchalantly ignoring their cries for help, and turning a blind eye to their suffering.

If we care only for those who look like us, then we are no longer followers of Jesus Christ, who said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

How can we escape God's judgment if we have shown contempt toward our neighbors who look or think or act differently than us.



Jesus died for all of humanity, and calls us all to repentance, and his commandment is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This not only means providing food for hungry people, but it means supporting national policies that help to lift all people out of the suffering of poverty, to support the provision of a place of refuge for immigrants fleeing persecution or abject poverty in their homeland. It means supporting the regulation of the use and abuse of firearms that cause so many unnecessary deaths in this country.

God said to us through Moses long ago, "Choose life, so that you and your household can live." Choosing life means not only taking a stand against abortion, which we do, but also valuing and protecting life at every age, and making every effort to promote the laws and policies of our nation on all levels that secure the protection of the lives of all people.

Asian-American lives matter. Native American lives matter. Mexican-American lives matter. European-American lives matter. African-American lives matter. We are all the precious creation of God, and God has given us this opportunity, this Holy Week, to change our hearts and minds to be more like Christ, to repent of our sins of elitism and pride, and to begin to honor and value the precious lives of all of God's creation.

A plague still grips the earth, even as we speak: COVID-19 and all of its variant viruses, a limited taste of the results of our own sins, to get our attention and to call the whole world to repentance. This is not the first time that the sins of humanity have resulted in a plague, and it won't be the last. This is only the beginning of sorrows for an unrepentant world. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, who has instructed us to love one another, and who has shown us his great love by opening for us the door of salvation. That same Jesus Christ who died for our sins calls us to repentance.

When the Lord reveals to us sins of which we were not previously aware, our part is to repent and turn from those sins. This is an on-going process as we realize more and more clearly how far short of the mark we have lived. We are not confessing the same sins over and over. We are learning new aspects of the righteousness of God that shed more light on previously held concepts of what is acceptable, and as we realize our error, we correct it according to the word of God, which is our standard. *Anything that falls short of love for God and love for all people is sin.*

So, since we are all growing spiritually, moving from glory to glory, let us remove the rose colored glasses as we look into the mirror of God's word, and accept God's righteous judgment wherever it falls. We have an advocate with God, Jesus our Savior, who intercedes for us. Therefore let us repent of

our sins, fall into the arms of grace that Jesus has spread so widely to receive us, and come to the throne of God, washed in the blood of the sacrificial Lamb who gave his life on the altar of the cross for our reconciliation to God our Father.

Just as the two witnesses of Revelation 11 will call the people of the last days to repentance, we are invited to a time of reflection and repentance, as we continue to grow more and more like Christ.

This Holy Week is the moment in time that was sanctified and set apart for our return to holiness and righteousness. Let us avail ourselves of this priceless opportunity. Amen.