

# REMEMBER YOUR CALLING

SERIES: WAKE UP



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Paul Taylor  
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## *Revelation 8–9*

You probably haven't heard of Cher Ami. His name means "Dear Friend." He carried an important message that saved the lives of almost 200 men. This messenger barely made it to his destination. By the time he arrived, he had a bullet wound and was blinded in one eye. He died less than a year later.

Cher Ami came from a long line of messengers. His ancestors had been messengers. His whole life had been training to be a messenger. Cher Ami was a pigeon. A carrier pigeon. Maybe one of the most famous carrier pigeons ever to deliver a message. His body is now mounted at the Smithsonian.

His message revealed the location of the 77th division during World War I. Germans had surrounded them. The first pigeon they released gave the wrong coordinates. The next two were shot down by the Germans. The fourth, Cher Ami, was shot but managed to complete the 25-mile journey still to deliver his message.<sup>1</sup>

Some messages are really important. Some can be difficult to deliver. Some are a matter of life and death.

This morning we're continuing in our series on the book of Revelation, called "Wake Up." One of the themes we've seen throughout this book is that of being a witness or a messenger.

Jesus appears to John the apostle and tells him to write down what he saw. John writes it down and sends it to the seven churches in his area. John is a messenger, carrying a critically important message from God to his people.

We saw Jesus appear to John in an initial vision. Then we saw specific letters to those seven churches. After that, we were invited into the throne room of God where we encountered a scroll which represented God's plan to redeem the world. Then, one by one, we saw Jesus open those seals. After six seals, God sealed his people, protecting them from His judgment.

With the breaking of the seventh seal, the seven trumpets began. Last week we witnessed six different kinds of judgment from the first six trumpets. Today, once again, we have an intermission before the seventh trumpet.

In this interlude, John is given a reminder. God appears to him in cosmic power and re-commissions him as a prophet. It's God's way of making sure that John didn't get lost in all the details of what he has seen. God is bringing John back to the main point of all this. It's a message for people to respond to. It's critically important. It's difficult to deliver. It's a matter of life and death.

In this passage, we are given the same reminder. You will be encouraged to remember your calling.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are commissioned as a messenger of good news. It's not a simple message. It isn't easy to deliver. Sometimes it puts us in danger or causes us pain. The statistics of carrier pigeons for the 77th infantry division may be comparable. Two shot down. One delivers the wrong message. One arrives wounded and desperate, but with the right message.

Much of the book of Revelation is meant to encourage people who are suffering from deep persecution because of being outspoken about their faith in Jesus. It isn't easy to be a witness. How do we stay faithful to this calling we've been given?

Several years ago, when I was in college at Stanford, I was going for a walk around the lake on the far end of campus. I often took that time to pray and think through what was going on. As I returned to my dorm, I saw someone sitting by themselves at the edge of the water. I thought I should ask them if they were okay. I felt God leading me to talk to them and reach out. They seemed upset. Maybe I could help.

We'll get back to that story in a few minutes. First, let's take a look at how God reminds John of his calling. Maybe John's reminder can be ours as well.

## The seven thunders

Our passage opens with a dramatic scene.

### Revelation 10:1-4:

**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. 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."**

Can you see this picture? The angel comes down from heaven, wearing a cloud and a rainbow. His legs glow. He's holding a small scroll, but anything would look small in his hands. He plants one foot on the sea. The other crashes down on the land, and then he roars a message. His voice results in seven thunders sounding over the whole earth.

We're prepared for this. We've seen seven churches. Seven seals have been opened. We're in the middle of seven trumpets. So it makes sense to have another seven of something. But this one is different.

John experiences the thunders. He assumes that he's supposed to write it down. After all, he is a messenger. He's written down all the other sevens. But then the angel stops him. "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

This message is not the kind of thing we'd expect to hear. In the Old Testament, there was a prophet named Daniel. He was told to seal up his vision. In Daniel 12:4, he is instructed, "shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end." But this is the time of the end. Why would John be supposed to seal up his words?

In fact, at the end of Revelation, John is explicitly warned about sealing up his words. In Revelation 22:10, an angel tells him, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

So why are these thunders sealed?

Have you ever gotten pulled over by a police officer? They talk to you and tell you what you did wrong. And sometimes, they let you off with a warning. Isn't that the best feeling? You could have gotten a ticket, but you didn't—just a warning.

I think that's what is going on in this passage. There are several possible interpretations as to what these seven thunders mean. But the one that makes the most sense to me is that these are judgments that God holds back. It's another set of possible judgments, but God has decided to restrain himself.

This angel who straddles the world and roars like a lion speaks things which could be, but aren't. Even in the midst of the seals and the trumpets and later the bowls, God holds back some of his judgment.

What a refreshing relief in the middle of a book like this. Last week we saw God give away the key to the bottomless pit. We realized that most of the time, God restrains judgment on the world. But in the last days, God allows us to experience the consequences of our choices so that we might realize our desperate need and turn to him. Instead, most of the world blames him even more and hates him more deeply

Now we see that even in the judgment — even in the midst of allowing those consequences to play out — God relents. He has mercy even as he judges.

The other day I texted my wife and asked if we could go for a walk together after I got home. She texted back asking if there was anything, in particular, I wanted to talk about. I realized she might have thought this was a "Can we go for a walk. We need to talk" kind of invitation. But it wasn't. I just wanted to connect.

Our natural response is to focus on judgment. God is a judge. We expect judgment. When we read these words in Revelation, some part of us says, "I knew it. I knew God was angry." Mercy always comes as a surprise. What a gift in the middle of this book to be reminded of his mercy; to see not only judgment but grace.

God forgives. God includes. God redeems. God looks at us with favor—that's what grace means—even though we have turned our backs on him. God opens a way back into a relationship.

As we think about our calling to be messengers, we can start by remembering the heart of this great message. It's all about grace. Remember Grace.

Personally, this is a beneficial reminder to go back to the basics. There are so many things swirling around us. So many issues and questions. The reputation of Christians. Theological questions about how to interpret the Bible. Cultural issues we don't know how to address. The constant sense of busy-ness and frenzy and achievement. How do I fit my faith in all those things? How do I share my faith in light of all those things?

But then I remember the core message. The idea lived out in a community, which drew me to faith in Jesus. Grace. I am accepted. I am forgiven. I am included. I am enough. I was created for a purpose. God is at work in my life, redeeming me and leading me on the unique path that he has for me.

I grew up in the church. I knew all the ideas. What ignited my faith was seeing ideas turned into relationships. I knew God forgave me and included me. But when I was accepted and included by a group of people, that made faith real.

Grace lies at the absolute core of what we believe. I'm thankful for a reminder of that in the midst of a book heavy on judgment. Don't forget the grace of God. Remember grace.

## Answering the questions

We left the angel straddling the earth. After the instruction to seal up the thunders, he continues:

### Revelation 10:5-7:

**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**

One of our favorite questions to ask is "how long?" We ask "how long?" about almost everything in our lives. How long until we arrive at our destination? How long will the laundry take? How long until summer? How long does the movie last? How long until my kids grow up? How long until my kids come back for a visit? How long until this sermon is over?

You may not realize that asking "how long" is a deeply theological activity. It is rooted in a desire for God to act. For something to happen. In Revelation 6, we saw the saints—followers of Jesus—waiting for God to act. In verse 10, we read of their desperate question. "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

They were asking a question of God: When will you act? When will you intervene to fix all the broken things and restore life to its fullness?

But others have asked this question before them. Daniel asked this question in Daniel 12:6, "How long until these things will be?" The Psalmists asked this question in 13:1, "How long will you hide your face from me?" and 79:5, "How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever?" to name a few. The prophet Habakkuk asked this question, "How long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?" (Habakkuk 1:2)

This is the question the angel is answering in our passage. It's a direct answer to the question of the saints in chapter 6. But it's really an answer to the question of God's saints throughout history. It's an answer to the question that burns in our hearts.

The angel says, "There would be no more delay" and "The mystery of God would be fulfilled."

We are reading the moment when God's plan is brought to a conclusion. Next week we'll see the seventh trumpet is sounded. This moment is when God will step in and address all those things that we long to have answers for.

At that time, the mystery will be fulfilled. God will clear up everything. All the loose ends of history will come together in the person of Christ at the end of time. But until then, it's a mystery. We don't understand it. We can't see how it all fits together.

But it helps to know that the time is near and knowing that we can wait. We can trust even in the midst of chaos and confusion and suffering. We can trust the plan.

If you've ever assembled IKEA furniture, you know about trusting the plan. Maybe you bought a dresser. Or perhaps a bed. Or a kitchen table. It doesn't matter. It all comes in the same box and looks the same—sheets of manufactured wood with holes drilled in it.

You start to assemble the furniture, and it looks nothing like what you're aiming for. But eventually, everything comes together. You trust the instructions, and it all comes together.

We've talked about how to interpret the timing of Revelation. Is this giving us a roadmap for the future? Not exactly. But it is helping us to see what comes next. We read about what happens in the "end times", and we have a picture of what is happening now and what this will all lead to.

As believers, we work hard to bring God's kingdom principles to earth. We want to see justice. We want to pursue peace. And we are absolutely ought to do those things.

But we also realize that in some way, the world is going to get worse before it gets better. This book has shown us how pain increases. God removes his hand of restraint from holding back the consequences of sin.

That's hard to see, but it helps that God knew this would happen. He gives us some warning to assure us that this is part of his plan. We ought to expect political division and confusion about sexuality and hatred between different groups and the suffering of the poor. We ought to even expect the wavering of our faith.

Someone once gave me directions on how to get to their house. This must have been before Google maps. They said to turn on this road and keep going. You'll think you've gone too far and then a little bit farther you'll turn onto my street. I thought, "How do they know what I'm going to think?"

But sure enough - they were right. I started driving and eventually, I concluded I had gone too far. But then I remembered their prediction and kept driving. The road I was looking for came shortly after.

This is God saying, you'll think things have spun out of control. But don't worry. The mystery of God will still be fulfilled. This is how it will feel. It'll feel like I've abandoned you. You'll wonder how any of this can be according to plan. But then the seventh trumpet will sound, and it will all make sense.

In the meantime, trust the plan. Recognize the pain and suffering as part of what God knew would result. And when we do these things—remembering grace and trusting the plan—then we are prepared to remember our calling as prophets to the world. That's where the angel goes next.

## Eating the little scroll

This last part is the formal recommissioning for the apostle John.

### Revelation 10:8-11:

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

We saw a scroll earlier in Revelation. When we were invited into the throne room of God, we heard about a scroll that no one could open. This scroll contained God's plan of redemption for his broken creation. Only Jesus was capable of opening it.

In our passage this morning, we hear about a "little scroll". In verse 8, it's simply referred to as the scroll. There are lots of opinions about whether this scroll is the same as the scroll from chapter 5. My take on the issue is "Yes, probably."

If they aren't the same, they are certainly related. Only Jesus could open the other scroll. This one is swallowed by John. I'm compelled by one commentator's view that this scroll is essentially the same as the other scroll, except that it's our version.

Jesus had his scroll, which represented the path of suffering that he had to take for his part in the redemption of the world. This scroll represents the path of faithfulness and suffering which we take as witnesses to Jesus' redemption of the world.

We don't do all that Jesus did. But we are called to follow in his footsteps of faithful suffering.

We are not alone in our calling. Ezekiel was given a scroll to eat in chapter 3 of his book. It was also "as sweet as honey" in his mouth. Daniel was given a similar charge to preach to "nations, languages, and kings." Jeremiah



was appointed a prophet to the nations. And we are told by Jesus as his final words to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Just as Cher Ami stood in a long line of birds who carry messages, we stand in a long line of people chosen by God to carry his message to the world. Our role is to introduce people to the love of God the Father, expressed through Jesus Christ and made real by the Holy Spirit. This is our message.

But we aren't just given a message to carry. We, too, eat the scroll. We consume the message. It goes inside of us. It becomes part of us. The message isn't just a set of words, a mix of ideas. The message is our lives. It's everything about us.

What I love about this passage is that my experience with that message is validated. When I think about the grace and love and forgiveness of God, it is sweet. When I first experienced that message, it was sweet. There are times when I'm overcome with gratitude for Christ. Times when the beauty of the Gospel message is so clear.

But then it turns bitter. I get confused. I'm frustrated by the lack of response to the Gospel. I'm tired and overwhelmed, and it all just seems like one more thing. I don't want to explain judgment and repentance and humility. It's too much.

Maybe John felt that way after receiving the first part of this vision. Maybe that's why God gave him this encouragement and reminded him of his calling. At the end of all of this, John is told, "you must again prophesy about many peoples, nations and languages and kings."

We don't always want this calling. It's not always pleasant. But it is also a sweet privilege. We are called to tell the world.

Remember that person sitting by the lake that I felt led to talk to. I wish I had an incredible story of sharing the love of Jesus and a radical response. But I don't. By the time I worked up the nerve to follow this sense of leading, the person was gone. I was left with a sense of failure and disappointment.

To be honest, that's often my personal feeling when I think about the calling to tell the world. I wonder if some of you feel that way? Reading a book like Revelation can make it seem even more tricky. How do these pictures of judgment fit into my calling to invite people in? On the one hand, these pictures emphasize the urgency of helping people come to faith. On the other hand, they

highlight how confusing our message can be.

But here, in the middle of that message, is an encouragement from God. A gentle reminder of our calling, but also of how God empowers us in the midst of it. The angel feeds John the message. It nourishes him and changes him. God doesn't just tell him to get back out there and try again. He cares for him in the midst of it.

I'm always a bit surprised when God meets me where I'm at. It's usually in small ways. A good night's sleep. A time of rest. A friendship that encourages me. I remember one time I was standing in my kitchen feeling overwhelmed by life and praying to God. And this small cool breeze came through the window. It immediately refreshed me. I'm not sure why.

They say "You are what you eat." God feeds us the truth of grace and our lives become the message.

I'm learning that God doesn't want me to go do stuff for him. I've spent a lot of time trying to call forth something within me that just wasn't there. He wants to feed and nourish me so that I become a different person. God doesn't want me to witness about him. He wants to make me into a witness. It's about my whole being. He'll provide the nourishment to make me who I need to be in order follow the calling he has given to me.

Eat the scroll and become a witness.

## Conclusion

We bear a dangerous calling. Our little pigeon friend carried a message over the enemy camp asking for rescue. The 77th infantry division, taking fire, sent their coordinates to ask for help.

But our calling is to go into the enemy camp. Not to ask for rescue, but to offer rescue. We tell the world of the grace of God and invite them to experience freedom.

Next week, we'll see the seventh trumpet sound, and we'll hear about two witnesses. They show us what it means to be a witness for Christ. They represent us. It will be a realistic picture of how difficult it is to witness in a hostile world.

You are a messenger. Don't forget that calling in the midst of everything else going on. Consume the message. Become the message. Tell the world. God will guide us. He will sustain us. He will empower us to do His will.

There are always challenges to being a witness. But sometimes it seems like that is especially true in our culture. That's why in a few weeks, we're going to take a break from Revelation during Lent and focus on the barriers that we face as witnesses. We'll look at the barriers people in our culture have to believe the Gospel. And we'll look at the barriers in our own lives to sharing the message.

## EndNotes

<sup>1</sup> Cher Ami, *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cher\\_Ami](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cher_Ami)