**The final triumph of the two witnesses (Ds. J. Waagmeester, Murerwoude)**

Text ~ Revelations 11: 11, 12 ~ *“Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘come up here.’ And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.”*

Read ~ 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Sing ~ Ps. 16: 3, 5

 Ps. 34: 9

 Ps. 48: 4

 Ps. 89: 7

 Ps. 89: 8, 9

**Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The righteous will live by their faith. That faith directs itself upon the salvation promise of the Lord, which is given for all times. The promise of the salvation, of the eternal blessedness which is in Jesus Christ. There is therefore a looking back and a looking forward in this faith.

Indeed the salvation promise is fulfilled in principle, and at the same time waits for its complete fulfillment. So we look back on the fulfilling of the promise, upon what God has already done in sending His Son into the world. I believe in Jesus Christ, Who is received from the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Who has suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and is resurrected from the dead. That is looking back to what our God has done for the salvation of His people in world history. But faith also looks forward; it expects the complete fulfillment of God’s promise in the future, and it lives by that promise. We hope upon the blessed future which awaits us. Within the heart of Christ’s bride there is a longing for unity with her heavenly bridegroom. We have a guarantee of eternal and imperishable life through our faith in Christ Jesus.

Otherwise it would be unsustainable, and we would sink into despondency and despair. If we only had hope in Christ during this life we would be the most miserable of all people. What would have become of those servants of God who were killed, taken away in the prime of life, and of whom we, as people, still expected so much? There is a continuation of their life here. They live now already with Christ, and will again eventually, fully redeemed, love and praise God with body and soul.

I believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life!

We must live more fully by this, by those promises for the future. For they are unshakeable. All of God’s promises are combined in the one mother promise from paradise: the crushing of the head of the serpent by the seed of the women, the victory of Jesus Christ over the serpent. He has already attained that victory, and in Him we are more than conquerors. Satan and his might are completely extinguished, and we will reign as kings. The lives of the servants of God do not disappear, they carry eternal fruit. Blessed are those who die in the Lord; yes, the Spirit says, so that they may rest from their labor; and their works follow after them.

Certainly, a time will come on the earth, that the public testimony of Jesus falls silent, the Church is subdued by the world. But that is not the end, and that cannot be the end. Christ’s victory will be fully realized. The end will be the eternal triumph of the church and the eternal destruction of the world powers. We will hear about:

**The final triumph of the two witnesses**

1) in their resurrection,

2) in their ascension to heaven.

**ONE**

Brothers and sisters, those, who were resurrected and ascended to heaven in a cloud, are the two witnesses which were talked about in the third verse. Christ speaks of them there: I will give My two witnesses power, and they shall prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.

From the time period of 1260 days it becomes clear that these two witnesses could not have meant two particular people. Because this period finds its beginning, according to chapter 12 verse 6, at the birth and ascension of Christ, and the end is found, according to the chapter of our text, in the appearance of the antichrist.

These witnesses prophesy during the entire time of the New Testament church. Thus they represent the genuine servants of the gospel and the true office bearers of Christ’s church, by whose service the Lord gathers, preserves and protects His elect congregation in the unity of true faith from the whole human race.

Verses 7 - 10 describe what occurs when they have completed their service. Then their testimony, which the whole New Testament dispensation had used to seek the peoples of the world in order to place them before the face of Jesus Christ, ended. Then, according to the God’s eternal counsel of salvation, the time came for the lordship of the beast out of the earth.

We see, with the eye of faith, the antichristian spirit, which works in the world and time and again raises its head in the church, in order to pull the believers away from the immovable Word of God. Godlessness is already at work in a mysterious way. Faith observes the working of the powers of apostasy which go about secretly. But when the restraining forces are removed out of the way, then the mystery of godlessness is unveiled. The godless one must be revealed when the time comes, the person that thirsts after the blood of all the devout. His brooding hate hangs over those who bear the offence of Christ. He will declare total war upon the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and …., he will overcome her. He will disturb the church service, and he will kill the office bearers and the preachers of the gospel. Their dead bodies will lie upon the streets of the great city, the center of the antichristian world power. God’s witnesses did not pull back from the commotion of the world like hermits, for they did make the testimony of God’s Word echo in the streets of the great city. There their corpses lie, unburied, exposed to the taunt and mockery of the people. A great international feast is organized, a feast celebrating the end of the preaching of the gospel, three and a half days.

Three and a half days, again that is also a symbolic number. In reality this time will be longer than three and a half days. Daniel calls the time duration of the rage of the antichrist a time, and times, and half a time (7: 25). Thus three and a half days is also: one day, and days and half a day. This means to say that after a period of persecution the end does not come yet, but that afterwards a new period of heavier oppression comes. Still the end is not yet. A third period comes which after a short while is stopped. For the sake of the elect God shortens those days.

God makes an end of it. Just like that, as the world stares at the sham that its feast will last forever, and nevermore will be troubled by the vexatious demand of the Gospel. Just like that, very suddenly, totally unexpected, an end will come to that jubilation.

After those three and a half days a spirit of life from God entered the two witnesses; and they stood on their feet. A mighty act from the King of glory, a miraculous work of the Almighty!

Everyone, who calculated only with earthly power and only saw what was before the eyes, had said: now it is forever done with the church. But God breaks up the counsel of the heathen, and does all that He pleases.

Yes, therefore God will allow afterwards, that His witnesses are killed. He will allow that the godless destroy the church service. The world must move on to the high point of its godlessness. The one who does injustice is to become more unjust, and the filthy must become more filthy. The evil ones must become ripe for judgment. The ever increasing evil and persistent godlessness will turn itself against the church of Jesus Christ. How could it be otherwise? The church is the great obstacle for the ongoing existence of evil.

Therefore God will eventually allow it. But God does not forsake His church. He does not take His hand away from those bought with the blood of the cross. They cannot remain in death. The salvation promise will be fulfilled. Hell cannot maintain the upper hand upon the earth, nor can the world feast last into eternity, because Christ has conquered the world for all of His own and vanquished the powers of hell.

Christ, our Lord, had hell and the whole world against Him, they crucified Him. He also has died and was buried. And oh, now they sealed His grave! The world was thankful, and felt relieved, that Jesus of Nazareth was dead. But they barely had time to prepare a feast, for on the third day He stood up from the dead. That was the great miscalculation of the world then!

And so the world will also be disappointed later. Because the triumph of Christ on Easter morning must be accomplished in all of His people. All those who are of Christ will rise in victory. That great event of the resurrection of the body is drawn for us here in the language of the book of Revelation.

The witnesses of God, whose dead bodies are seen as well pleasing (by God), become alive. A living spirit from God enters them, and they stand on their feet. They are at once alive and vigorous. God’s work is complete. They stand there alive, those who were killed on account of their testimony of Christ. Yes, all the believers, coming from the heart of the earth and from the depth of the sea, whether they were burnt or torn asunder, young and old, men and women, all, who died in Christ, will rise up.

The believers in the former times of the Old Testament will stand there. And the witnesses of Christ during all the centuries of church history afterwards will stand there: Stephen, the first blood martyr of the New Testament church, and James, beheaded by Herod: Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, and all the men and women who were devoured in the arena by wild beasts; and then the many victims of the Roman Catholic inquisition and the warriors against the beast of hierarchy, and all who will yet fall through the power of the antichrist; all those witnesses of Jesus whose goods were confiscated, who were robbed, whose bodies were killed, they will stand there on their feet, alive and vigorous, raised from the dead.

And the world shall see it! A great fear has fallen on those who saw it. The godless are now seized with tremendous fear and dismay, and no wonder! For why did they kill them? Because they did not want to accept their testimony, because they did not want to hear their voices. But now, in a moment, they are standing before them alive, and their first thought is about that testimony.

And the cause of their fear is that the gospel, which the witnesses had proclaimed, is actually true! The God of Whom they testified, lives! For this astounding miracle can only come about by God’s power. And the judgment of which they spoke, the destruction of the haters of Jesus Christ, will now come.

Fear falls upon their souls as a dark night, the fear of judgment, the fear of the bursting fire of judgment overcoming them!

Brothers and sisters, that is how it will soon come to be. The prospect of the blessed resurrection of the witnesses of Christ lies ahead! It is coming; the day of salvation and reward, the day of jubilation, the day of glory! The day of when those who fell asleep in God shall arise in victory!

Let us now live by faith!

Living through faith is also looking to the future which awaits us; looking toward the complete fulfillment of God’s promises in Jesus Christ, trusting that the Word of God will be accomplished.

And living by faith is seeing a reality different from what appears to the eyes. It is seeing Jesus, Who is the resurrection and life.

Those who are of Christ will live forever. They will all become renewed by God’s power. God vanquishes and rejects all those who are arrogant through their own might, and he removes them from their thrones. God puts an end to the oppression of His faithful. If they contest the violence and cunning, even when it becomes so costly; their blood, their tears and suffering is precious in His eyes.

**TWO**

The ascension of the church follows her resurrection. The two witnesses, made alive by the power of God, hear a loud voice from heaven which says to them: rise up!. Paul speaks of this loud voice in 1 Thessalonians 4: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”.

This voice must be heard over the whole world. Yes, the resurrection of the believers, and their ascension, will be seen, and the voice that calls them up, will be heard! These things will not happen in a remote corner, every emphasis falls on the fact that it will be public event. You read in verse 11 as well as in verse 12, that these wonders will be observed by the enemies of God’s witnesses.

It will not be like Enoch’s being taken up, quiet and unnoticed. Enoch was not to be found, because God took him to Himself. His ascension occurred without witnesses.

It is also different than Christ’s resurrection and ascension. No one saw Christ’s resurrection, and He only appeared to His church as the Risen One, and only eleven apostles were witnesses of His ascension into heaven.

But the resurrection and ascension of the church will be seen throughout the whole world. The worshippers of the beast are witnesses of the resurrection of the prophets of God, and they watch their going up to heaven in a cloud as by a heavenly carriage.

You understand brothers and sisters, that God does not act in such a way without good cause. The Lord publicly takes up the cause of His people. His witnesses are called out as righteous, as God’s beloved children, in public.

The world has cast them out and killed them. The antichrist has satiated himself with their blood. They are cleared out of the way like garbage on conveyor belts.

But God now comes to justify them openly.

The outcasts are led into the banquet hall.

Those for whom no place was found on earth are approved and ascend to heaven.

Those hated by the world proceed as beloved of God.

Those who are scorned by the antichrist are honored by the Lord Christ

Those killed for the Word of God receive the crown of life.

Their cause, condemned by earthly rulers and judges as heretic and irreligious, is pronounced to be the cause of the Son of God.

Thus they are taken up into the clouds together with the living remnant, and go to meet the Lord in the air.

Great is the fear which takes hold of the power holders. They will see the blessed exodus of the Church with stupefying amazement and inexpressible fright. They are left permanently standing outside as the believers of Jesus Christ enter into glory. World judgment is now immanent.

Yes, the thought of this judgment is rightly frightful and dangerous for the evil and godless. But it is very desirable and comforting for the devout and elect, because then their complete salvation will be realized, and they will now receive the fruit of their labor and troubles which they had to endure. Their innocence will be openly acknowledged by everyone, and they will see the terrible wrath which God will extend over the godless who had tyrannized, persecuted and subdued them in this world.

Brothers and sisters, do we not live too little out of this promise, which the Lord has given us, also for the future, and of whose fulfillment will certainly come? Is there not too little, all too little of that patient waiting for the hour of our total liberation? We expect the acceptance as children, the salvation of our bodies. Do we look forward to it, in the difficulties of these times, in the suffering of our brothers, with whom we sympathize?

This is not a human testimony and no idle prediction, but it is God’s Word which shall be fulfilled. Soon the clouds will be torn apart, and the Savior will make the clouds of heaven to be His victory carriage, wherein He takes His people along in His glory. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, bodily, visible to every eye; also they will see Him who have pierced Him. And those who have testified of Him in the world will hear that voice with great gladness: come up! And then they shall always be with Him.

Oh, what is defamation on account of His name compared to the crown of glory that awaits us? What is all the suffering of the present compared to the glory that will be revealed to us?

Will that great voice from heaven also say to you: come up? Do you know by faith that your name is also in book of life of the Lamb? At that day you will not be able to say: Lord, wasn’t I also written in the membership list of the church on earth? You can carry a mask before men, but not before the Lord of glory! The Lord knows those who are His.

Listen now, with full attention only to the voice of the Lord Jesus. You hear the voice of Jesus in the preaching of the Word, here and now. Do you believe His Word? Do you live by His promises? Are you standing in the world as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ?

Then fear none of those things which you will suffer! The final triumph is guaranteed you!

Lift your head high; you will bear the crown of glory.

By God, and by Him alone, for His eternal good pleasure!

Amen