***The Gospel is Both Sweet and Bitter

RV144-01***

We now look at Revelation 10:8-11. Our subject is "The Bittersweet Word of God."

After the judgment of the sixth trumpet, God the Holy Spirit inserts a parenthetical section of information beginning at Revelation 10:1 and going through Revelation 11:14. This parenthesis gives additional background information on the events of the tribulation which have previously been described by John. John, at this point in his vision, you will notice, is now viewing things from the position on earth rather than from the position that he has had previously in heaven. He is actually moving about as if he already had the kind of resurrection body that is described in Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 John 3:2 – the body, which will reflect the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. That frees it, of course, from the limitations of time and space. So, John has, in an instant moment of time, moved from heaven down to earth.

As you remember in the first part of Revelation 10, we saw that there was a huge angel standing astride a land and sea area, with one foot on the land, and one foot on the sea. The appearance of this angel is such that it indicates that he has been in the presence of God. The position that he has of land and sea under his feet indicates that he carries authority over the earth. He holds in his hand a small open scroll. The contents of this scroll are not revealed. He makes a loud roar-like shout, which is a signal for seven thunderclaps to break forth, and these thunderclaps express ideas and intelligible words. John is impressed with what he hears the thunders say, and he proceeds to write them down as part of the record that he's making. But he is told not to record that information for some reason. There are some divine mysteries. This divine mystery at this point, which was for John's ears only.

At this point, John sees the mighty angel lift his right hand in an oath. He swears, interestingly enough, by God, whom he describes in two ways: that He is eternal. Therefore, he truly is God, and He has no beginning and no end; and, by the fact that He is the Creator – He is indeed the omnipotent one, and He is the one who has brought everything together. Therefore, we are under His supreme authority. Therefore, there is none higher by which this angel could take this oath. The oath that the angel takes is that he promises that there will be no further delay in the execution of God's justice on tribulation humanity. God's once secret plans for Israel, which were referred to as a mystery, have now been made known over the centuries, and they will now soon be fulfilled. All of the covenants promised to Israel will come to full realization.

The plan of the millennial reign of Christ over the whole earth has been revealed by the Old Testament prophets. God's plan for the Jewish nation has historically been interrupted by our current age, which we call the church age. But God's plan for the Jews as a nation has never been canceled, and we have no indication of that anywhere in the Bible.

**A Voice**

So, we now begin at Revelation 10:8: "And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke unto me again." The word "voice" here refers to an intelligible communication. John hears this communication, and he indicates that it comes from heaven. Specifically, he is referring to the third heaven, the throne room of God. We have, therefore, an official communication. He indicates that this is a voice which has spoken to him previously. So, he says that it's now speaking to him again. What he is referring to by "again" is back in verse 4 where the seven thunders feel forth with an understandable, intelligible message. The message of those thunderclaps came from God in heaven. Now it speaks to John again. Because it comes from heaven, it carries a very important, authoritative message.

**"Go"**

The message is, first of all, "Go." In the Greek Bible, this is the Greek word "hupago." "Hupago" means to do something. It is directing John to take action. It is in the form of a command. It's in imperative mood. It is commanding him to do something. What it commands him to do is to take hold of something. The Greek word is "lambano." "Lambano" is also in the imperative mood. It is a command from God.

**"Take the Scroll"**

John is ordered by a heavenly voice, the voice of God, to take the little scroll from the hand of the angel: "Go and take the little scroll, which is open, in the hand of the angel who stands upon the sea and upon the earth." The little scroll contains some kind of information from God. Therefore, it is the Word of God. It is revelation. When the prophets of the Old Testament said, "Thus saith the Lord," they were telling us that God had told them something, and they were communicating it. When they said, "God told me this," God actually told them that. They actually heard the voice of God. They had communications. In the New Testament, these prophets, such as John, had the same experience. God gave them audible, understandable information.

It is not a good idea to be going around today and saying, "The Lord told me to do this." You may think that the Lord told you to do a lot of things, and you probably should not be doing them. Time will make it very clear to you that you should not have acted in that way; you should not have thought in that way; you should not have said what you said; and, you should not have made the conclusions you made. You might want to be careful about saying that the Lord told you to do something. It is a very popular thing in the charismatic circles to say that. Of course, everybody sort of, without saying it, implies that they're hearing messages from God, or seeing visions at the foot of their bed in the middle of the night.

However, this little scroll indeed is truly something that God has said. It is the Word of God. It is what we call (comparable today) the Bible.

**"Give me the Scroll"**

Verse 9 gives us the response of John which is obedience. John approaches the mighty angel: "And I went on to the angel, and I said to him, 'Give me the little scroll.'" This is a very bold action on the part of John. He has no hesitancy in doing this. Because he is moving about as if he has a resurrection body in this vision, he is able to approach this mighty angel, and boldly ask him for this scroll. That boldness, of course, comes because he is acting on principles of the Word of God. When you and I act on principles of the Word of God, then we have a ground for being very bold in what we have to say and what we have to do. If we do not act upon the principles of the Word of God, we quickly lose the lion heart that should characterize the believer.

The response of the angel is, "Hey, fella. Take it:" "And he said unto me, 'Take it.'" The angel was quite willing to give up the scroll. When he said, "Take it," he again uses our word "lambano," and again he uses it in the form of a command. He means for John to take possession of this word, because John is going to have to do something very important with a piece of the Word of God.

So, point number one to observe here is that John is commanded to take hold of a principle of a piece of doctrine – that doctrine contained in this little scroll.

**"Eat the Scroll"**

Then the angel adds a bit more information from God. He tells John to do a very strange thing. He tells him to eat the thing. The word "eat" in the Greek language is cut is "katesthio." In the Greek language, the word "kata" is a preposition, which means "down." "Esthio" means eat. So, in the Greek Bible, you say, "Eat something down." We say, "Eat it up." Well, when we eat something up, it doesn't look very good. The Greek is very accurate. It says, "Eat it down." That's what John is told to do: "Take this and," literally, he's telling him, "Devour it." This is in the future tense. He's telling John to do this in the immediate future. In fact, this is active voice here, which indicates that this is to be a continuous pattern of John – eating up the Word of God. He's told, in effect, that he is to feed on the Word of God, and he used to assimilate it – "Take it, and eat it up."

The Bible, of course, is indeed viewed in Scripture as spiritual food. That was true in the Old Testament, and it's true in the New Testament. This is a very simple principle. Most Christians aren't aware of it. Most Christians go through day-after-day of their lives, and they never think about the fact that they have spiritual nourishment that they need, and that they must think about that, and take action for that. They must indeed feed upon the Word of God.

For example, in Jeremiah 15:16, this concept is pointed out: "Your words were found, and I did eat them. And your word was unto me joy and rejoicing of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts." Here, Jeremiah says, "I ate up the Word of God, and when I did, it brought great joy to me."

In the New Testament, we have in 1 Peter 2:2, that same encouragement to eat the Word of God. Peter says, "As newborn babies desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow by it." When people come into the Christian life, they are brand new babies. They do not have much of a frame of reference for understanding spiritual things, but there are some easy basic milk-like things in the Word of God, and that is what they are told is the first thing they should feed upon.

Then, of course, there is the summary, dramatic statement that we know so well coming from the Lord himself in Matthew 4:4, where Jesus refuted one of the attacks of Satan by saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Here, He is indeed quoting a psalm. This is very interesting that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, because He had fed (because he had nourished) Himself upon the Word of God, when it came time to deal with Satan, had the Word of God assimilated in his soul to be able to meet the attack.

So, John is told that the Bible is the Word of God. And when it says to eat God's word, it is in fact telling you to learn Bible doctrine – to go positive to it. And going positive to it means that you learn it; you believe it; and, you think about it. You meditate upon it.

Psalm 1:2 says, "But his delight (that is the man who does not walk in the council of the ungodly; doesn't follow the path of sinners, and, doesn't follow the path of those who are contemptuous and scornful of the Word of God) is in the law of the Lord (that is, in Scripture), and in His Law he meditates day and night. So, we eat the Word of God by learning it, and then by meditating upon it.

So, this is what John is in fact told to do. He is to assimilate the doctrine which is contained in the little book, which is in the hand of the angel.

**Sweet and Sour**

However, the angel reminds John (points out to him) that something strange is going to happen. When he does eat this word, he is told that it's going to hit his stomach, and it's going to turn sour. It's going to be painful. It's going to make discomfort. It'll be bitter. But while it's still in his mouth, in the process of eating it, it's going to be sweet. And he says, "As a matter of fact, it'll be as sweet as honey."

So, you have the picture here that when John eats the scroll, it's like a little cake (a little thin piece of bread), which he may devour, and it's going to have a very honey-like taste. It will be something that is enjoyable in his mouth. But once it hits the stomach, he's going to need a spiritual Alka-Seltzer, because it's going to be very upsetting. It's going to turn sour, and it's going to distressing him. This is pointing out the fact that the Word of God has a contrasting effect in our experience. Anybody who has studied the Word of God knows that the knowledge of Bible doctrine truth is sweet to the person who receives it, and who is open to the Word of God. It is great to learn something of the mind of God. It is great to learn the details of what takes place in a certain passage of Scripture – the implications, and what it is teaching us. Doctrine is sweet for the reason that it dissipates all the bad and ugly tastes in our mouth from the world through which we pass. It dissipates the spiritual darkness, and that evil quality that is in our sin nature.

However, at the same time, this knowledge that is so sweet to the believer is a very bitter knowledge to the person who is an unbeliever, and who rejects it. The Christian finds himself, in fact, in the bitterness of sadness by the very fact that he has learned about the Word of God in this way. The reason that the Christian finds that the word (when he first received it) was very sweet now becomes to him a source of bitterness, is illustrated in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16. Paul says, "For we witnesses of God are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savor of death unto death; to the other, the savor of life unto life. Who is sufficient for these things?"

The apostle Paul says, "The same gospel message that we bring (the same explanation of how to go to heaven) to one person is a sweet morsel, because he believes it, and it is nourishment to his spiritual being. It gives him life that. That same gospel information, to the person who will not believe it (who is negative toward that principle), that bit of truth becomes a bitter thing in his mouth. He hates it. He spits it out, and it becomes, in fact, the cause of his own death, because he has spit out the very nourishment he needs to survive as a human being."

Here is a big, big doctrinal principle. I am overwhelmed by even trying to think of how to convey this to you so that you go out of here with a big impact. Consider yourself chosen of God, that you chose to be here today to perhaps become alerted to something that in many ways we all know, but which obviously we can so easily forget. And the consequences are bitterness in the lives of Christians. All we have to do is look around and realize that, even within this congregation, we have the evidences of lives that are being shattered because people are taking the Word of God, which once was sweet to them. They have turned their backs upon it; they're negative to it; and, now it has become bitterness in their very lives, and it is causing them spiritual disruption because they're suffering spiritual malnutrition.

This same concept is in Romans 9:1-3. These illustrate the contrasting effects of the same piece of doctrine: "I say the truth in Christ. I do not lie, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." Paul is burdened. He is bitter. His spiritual life feels a souring effect over something. What? Verse 3 tells you: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." What he's talking about here is that he who has rejoiced in the sweet, sweet Word of the gospel, finds that sweet, sweet word, a bitter pill to him as he looks upon the Jewish people, and realizes that the whole mass of them, because of their rejection of Christ, are walking lockstep into hell. It is no pleasure to know the consequences to someone who rejects the gospel.

When the Delta plane crashed at the end of runway 18 (which means it was heading 180 degrees south), two people on that plane who were killed (an older couple) were Jewish people. They were very prominent in the synagogue in Dallas. They were very highly esteemed for their good works; for their kindness; and, for their consideration to other human beings, and immediately those who knew them sensed the great loss. As I listen to that report, and as I looked at their faces on the television screen, the gospel (which brings joy of eternal life with consequences that cover every area of life now and in eternity), I had to look at those faces, and have a twinge of sadness as I realized that, as faithful Jews held in high esteem for their kindness to human beings, they had also rejected the sweet Word of salvation through the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Having turned their backs upon Jesus Christ, the agonies of their death in that plane crash, as they died from the asphyxiation of the smoke welling up in the back of that plane, was nothing compared to the smoke and the flames and the agony that surround them now. The same gospel that could have carried them into the arms of Jesus, carried them into the pit of the lake of fire.

In the Old Testament, this same principle was enunciated by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 30:8-14: "Now go; write it before them on a tablet; and, note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever." God is warning the people of Judah that they should not make an alliance with Egypt in order to resist the threat of the Assyrian Sennacherib. Isaiah is sent to give them information from God. He is giving them that which should have been sweet to their ears – that God has a plan for their national survival through the military means that God will provide for them, not the one they were following. So, Isaiah is told, "Go write this down. Put it in writing so that it's clear for them to read: "That this is a rebellious people."

What Isaiah is to tell them is that the course of action they are following is going to result in bitterness. God says, "Tell them that they are a rebellious people, lying children, and children who will not hear the Law of the Lord, who say to the seers (those who see the future), 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy unto us right things. Speak unto us smooth things. Prophesy deceits.'" You have to be an all-time crazy to have a direct communicator with God as they had in those days in the prophet, and say to the seers who could see the future, and therefore reveal it (that sweet insight into what God is trying to do, but what they saw was disaster for these Jews), to turn to a man like that and say, "I don't want you to tell me the terrible things that are going to happen to us." It would be equally crazy to go to your prophet and say, "Don't prophesy these bad things to us. Give us only good things," as if that were going to change anything.

In June of 1944, on the eve of the invasion in Normandy, General Eisenhower was the Commander-in-Chief of the allied forces. He was faced with making a decision as to whether the invasion should be turned loose on June the 6th. At that point, the English coast (the English Channel) was in a terrible storm – the worst in 20 years. He had to decide whether they should go or no-go, even though they had to go then in order to have the right currents and all the right conditions. The men had been on the boats for three days, and the boats were moving and tossing, and the men were seasick. They were not particularly in good shape to be hitting a landing on a beach. But the decision was going to be contingent upon what the meteorologists had to say. The English meteorologist who was in charge (a man of great capacity of analyzing what the weather patterns were, and what was happening, and what was going to happen in the next 24 hours) came to that meeting later that day with the chiefs of staff all gathered there together, and reported to them that a new high pressure area was building out over Denmark, and was moving down, and that they could expect settled conditions for a period of 24 hours.

During that 24-hour period, everything else would settle down; all conditions would be acceptable; and, they could insert the landing and get on the beaches. They had the advantage, of course, that the Germans thought that nobody would dare attempt a landing with weather that bad. They did not get that accurate an analysis. Eisenhower said, "OK, let's go," and everybody scattered out of the room and started setting things in motion. After the meeting was over, Eisenhower went up to the meteorologists and jokingly said, "We have committed ourselves, and we appreciate the work that you have done in bringing this report to us. And please try to hold it that way. Don't bring us any more bad news. Well, of course, the meteorologist couldn't hold the weather, and there was no way that he could assure the general that he wouldn't bring him any more bad news as to what the weather conditions were. Fortunately, thank God, the weather held, and the landings were successful.

However, this is what the Jews were doing – telling their prophet, 'Don't give us any more bad news. Keep us in the dark." What would have happened had the meteorologist said, "I know that these men have their hearts set on making this landing? I know that the men are sick there in the boats. I know that everybody is rearing to go and get started. I'll just give them a good report."

This is what I do on election night. If I find one channel that is not having good reports on my candidate, I turn to another that has better reports, and I watch that one, because I don't want to watch the bad news on the channel that is not carrying my candidate. This is the same nonsense that these Jews were doing here.

So, verse 11 says, "Get out of the way. Turn aside out of the path. Cause the holy one of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus says the holy one of Israel, 'Because you despise this Word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and rely on them, therefore, this iniquity shall be to you, as a bridge ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall (like a bulge in a wall that's moving out, and it's going to come crashing down suddenly on you in an instant). And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water out of the pit." God says, "I'm going to them break you in so many pieces as if a potter had broken a pot in so many small pieces that he couldn't even use one to scrape the ashes or the coals out of a fire, or to use it to scoop water out of a jug."

**The Sweetness of the Gospel**

The same word that they could have fed upon for victory is the word that's going to bring their defeat. Let me illustrate this more extensively. Let's just talk about the gospel – the sweet, sweet voice of the gospel. As we think about the sweetness of the gospel, perhaps there is, in your experience, that person who is no longer on this earth, who turned his back and ignored that gospel.

How well I remember many, many, many years ago – a man attending who was not interested in spiritual things. His wife was interested, and periodically he would show up on a Sunday night. This particular Sunday night, I don't remember the message, but the content was such that it stressed the gospel message. There was a serious emphasis about what a person must do to establish justification with God to be qualified for eternal life in heaven. Ron Blue was our song leader. He stood up after the service and kind of surprised all of us. He said, "You know, I just feel led for some reason to add a word of emphasis to the gospel presentation that Dr. Danish gave this evening." He had a few more words to say about the gospel, and the importance of taking this message seriously.

**The Bitterness of the Gospel**

At the end of that service, I'm standing here, and this man stands up; he goes to that door; he turns and looks back at me for some strange reason; and, he leaves out into the night. That week, he has an embolism in the brain; a stroke; and, he dies. That was such a vivid, shattering example to me, again, of the joy that that gospel could have been to him eternally, and to his family at that point in time. And the sadness that that gospel message came to us who knew him, knowing the night that he went out into forever. The same gospel that is sweet is going to be the gospel that is also bitter to those who reject it. However, it's also bitter to those of us who are believers because of the sadness of that husband; that wife; that child; that son; that daughter; that relative; and, that parent who does not believe, and has gone to the point where they've almost gone beyond the point of no return, where they cannot believe.

Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God, and the salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the gentile." It is good news indeed. No one is excluded.

Romans 3:23-24: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (absolute righteousness), being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." What a good message that is. It is a justification that is free – a gift from God.

Romans 3:27: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Wherefore we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." What good news that is – justified without any effort, and without any works on my part.

Romans 4:4-5: "Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned to him of grace, but of debt. But to him that does not work, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." What a terrific opportunity! Just believing God's message about what He has provided is all it takes to get into heaven.

Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We have peace with God. You can wake up in the middle of the night. You don't have to break out in a cold sweat, wondering if you die before the morning where you'll be forever out there on the other side: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." The word "hope" means something that you will most certainly experience – of all things, the glory of God.

Verse 8: "But God commended His love toward us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:20-21. Moreover, the law entered that the offense might have abound, but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that is, sin has rained unto death. Even so, my grace reigned through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." What a terrific statement! There is no sin too great for God's grace to cover. And what God's grace covers is eternal life. What God's grace covers produces eternal life. This is not just for six months. This is not just until you quit behaving yourself. This is not until your first gross sin, but eternal life by Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Romans 8:1 is a statement that is unbelievable to most human beings: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." This was so hard to believe, and so staggering, that someplace in the Middle Ages, some scribe (some monk) copying this text, looked at this and said, "That cannot be true. It says, ‘There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.' Well, what about the guy who's fooling around with immorality? What about the guy who's stealing? What about the guy who was doing this and that? That can't be right." And then his eye fell on the phrase at the bottom of verse 4: "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." And in the Textus Receptus, the Greek manuscript from which our King James was translated, he picks that up from verse 4, and he sticks it in verse 1. He says, "That must be the answer," so that it said, "There is no condemnation who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Then he felt better. He made it say, "There's no condemnation for those who behave themselves," but God says, "No." And those of you who have more recent translations, you will notice that it does not add that phrase. It doesn't belong in there. That is so hard for people to accept.

Ephesians 2 makes a very dramatic statement when it puts it all together for us in describing what God has done through the riches of His grace (through His kindness and through His consideration), making us who are spiritually dead, spiritually alive. Then in Ephesians 2:8-9 he says, "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that (referring to salvation) not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. What a terrific statement that is – that God has given us a salvation of such sweet, sweet purity.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

Then in 2 Corinthians 5:6, Paul says, "Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." What a sweet word of the gospel to know that the eye closes in death, and instantly you're in the presence of Jesus Christ. You're not in the presence of Satan. You're not in the presence of purgatory, filled with all those Roman Catholic popes trying to make it out. You're in the presence of the Lord. You have perfect salvation.

When you get to the very end of the Bible, Revelation 21:1-4, this same sweet sound is heard: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." All of this was because they believed the gospel. And then verse 4: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

That is the sweet, sweet sound. That is the sweet, sweet morsel of the gospel. But, unfortunately, we can't stop there. The opposite of that sweet morsel is that it becomes a lethal, bitter pill.

Notice in Revelation 20:11-15. For the people who turned their back on the "whosoever" of John 3:16, there is another "whosoever" in this passage: "And I saw a great white throne." When John sees the great white throne, he also sees that all the people who have ever lived who are going into the lake of fire stand before the great white throne. Only unbelievers stand before this terrible throne: "And him that said on it, whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of those things which are written in the books according to their works." They didn't have the work of Christ in their behalf. So, all they had was all these works that they performed; all their evil works; and, all the evil human good works.

So, the books are opened, and these are read. They didn't want the sweet Word of the gospel: "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life (that is, the Lamb's book of life) was cast into the lake of fire." So, the same gospel that could have taken them into heaven is the gospel that now must condemn them to the lake of fire.

**Lazarus and the Rich Man**

We had this vividly portrayed for us in Luke 16:19. This is the historical incident that Jesus used to illustrate the point of feeding upon the Word of God to secure eternal life, or ignoring it and securing eternal death. This is describing the rich man who lived a good life. Then it describes Lazarus, who was a beggar, who wasn't even physically well, who grabbed whatever crumbs he could reach from the rich man's table before the dogs got it. But the dogs, at least, had enough sympathy for him that they helped lick his sores so that they could heal him, as dogs heal themselves when they lick their sores. Lo and behold, the beggar dies (Lazarus dies), and the rich man dies. Lazarus goes into Abraham's bosom, the place of the saved in Hades. The rich man goes into the place of Torments in Hades. There's a gulf between the two of them. The rich man looks up; sees Abraham; and, sees Lazarus lying there (rejoicing, because he believed the gospel) in Abraham's bosom.

Verse 24: "And the rich man cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may just the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I'm tormented in this flame.'" Now none of us would have the feeling: "You got what you deserved. You had this poor beggar here, in his sickly condition, you would even give him food. You let him eat the crumbs if he could get them before the dogs got them. That's how you treated him. That's how you abused him. You deserve to be in hell. That's exactly what you've got coming." None of us can take any pleasure in that.

Neither did Abraham. Abraham said, "Son (a very tender address to this man), remember that you in your lifetime received good things; and, Lazarus, evil things. Now he is comforted, and you're tormented." Because of what? Because of the same Bible. Because of the same message. Beside all this, he says, "Between us there's a great gulf. We can't come to you, and you can't come to us." Then the rich man says, "Well, then send Lazarus back to life, because I've got five brothers, and they're as much the hell-raisers as I've been. They're as much as ungodly as I have been. And they have rejected the gospel, just like I have rejected it. I don't want them to come here."

It's interesting that this man, in his agony, had the tenderness to think about his brothers and say, "Now I want to be the witness." He wants to be a witness in hell, but his communication can't get across to the people who need to hear it. But that does not mean that they were without communication, which Abraham immediately points out to him – that his brothers have the Old Testament Scriptures. They have read the Old Testament Scriptures, and they had been taught the Old Testament Scriptures just as the rich man had. Their problem was that they wouldn't believe it. The sweet Word of the gospel, which his brothers received, is being rejected, and indeed it will become a bitter pill when they die.

Abraham establishes the principle: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded the One rose from the dead." And we know that this is true, because when Jesus raised the other Lazarus from the dead (the brother of Mary and Martha), the Jewish leaders, instead of being convinced that this was indeed the Messiah Savior, made the conclusion (made the decision) at that time that Jesus must be killed. That's when they said, "We've got to kill Him now. If we don't stop Him now, the people are going to go with Him, because this is this is convincing proof. They chose to reject the sweet evidence that should have brought conviction.

It is important for you to remember as the witness of God, that if people will not listen to the testimony of the Bible, your efforts will be wasted to try to give them some other kind of testimony. You may tell what it means to you, and what it's done for you, and there's a certain limited value in that. But if they do not believe the Bible, they have nothing on which to bring conviction noticeably.

Notice 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9: "Seeing is a righteous thing with God, to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you. And to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that do not know God, and that do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His Power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, because our testimony among you was believed in that day." Here's a statement again: "The Lord Jesus Christ is going to come, and for the people who would not accept that sweet gospel message, they are going to be judged with the agonies of the flames of hell forever. Who of us cannot be saddened, and find that a bitter thought?

Hebrews 10:26-27: "For if we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth." If you turn your back after someone has taught you doctrine: "There remains no more sacrifice for sins." Here, it is the particular doctrine of salvation: "But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." It does make us sad to know that the people who are close to us mean a great deal to us. They may be part of our family. There are people we have known as children; people we have known over the years; and, people we have known in their youth, and who now come to the latter part of their lives, and they will not eat the sweet Word of the gospel. And the doom that is upon them makes us sad, though we know that gospel message in a happy way for ourselves.

Revelation 14:9-11: "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night:" "No rest day nor night."

**Eternal Torment**

Have you ever had a bad fever? You know how restless you lie in your bed? You toss this way, you toss that way. You can't get comfortable. You can't settle down. There is no rest. These people have the fever of the lake of fire upon them. And there's never again a moment of rest. These who have: "Worshiped the beast and his image, and whosoever receives it the mark of the beast."

So, these passages of Scripture put together on the one hand show the sweet joy of believing the gospel. But on the other hand, they show the bitter tragedy of rejecting it. Christians who find God's Word sweet know that they are also going to have the sad experience of judging the Christ rejecters. Psalm 149:6-9 and 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 tell us Christians that we're going to have to be judging other people. I'm not looking forward to that. I'm not looking forward to have to look at somebody, and maybe somebody I know, and maybe that man who walked out that door that night, and say, "You know, you had a chance to know the gospel. You could have accepted the sweet morsel of the food from the Word of God. But you spit it out. Because you did that, God must now spew you out of His mouth, and we must continue to the lake of fire forever."

God says that we Christians, with Christ, are going to judge not only human beings, but even angels themselves. Judging and condemning unbelievers brings no pleasure to the child of God.

Ezekiel pointed that out very effectively many centuries ago when he said in Ezekiel 18:32: "'I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies,' says the Lord God, "wherefore, turn yourselves and live." That's kind of interesting, isn't it? God's Word brings sadness to Him in a way. God says, "I take no pleasure in the fact that the people who will not eat the gospel must have the bitter fruits of their rejection."

In Ezekiel 33:11, he points out the same principle when he says, "Saying to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" And that's the question we must ask people indeed. Why will you die?

John fully understands what he's being asked to do here. We will not read the Scriptures now, but I'll mention them for you. As you know, the things that are in the book of the Revelation are understandable to us because we go back into Old Testament Scripture where we find analogies or similar expressions. You will find in Psalm 119:103; Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 2:8-10; and, Ezekiel 3:1-14, this same analogy of the prophets of old saying, "I hate the Word of God, and it was sweet in my mouth, but when it hit my stomach, the same sweet word turned sour and became bitter." So, John knows exactly where God the Holy Spirit is getting this analogy that he is now using in the form of this angel saying, "I want you to eat this message." What's in the message of the little book is the rest of what God is going to do to tribulation humanity to bring in the reign of Christ. That is bitter, bitter fruit.

So, for you and me as Christians, there is this to be aware of. We need to feed on the Word of God. The Word of God will become bitter to us in two ways. We hear it, and we reject it. It will also become bitter to us because we never heard it. It is sad, and I confess that we tend to get impatient with people among us that we see shattering and tearing up their lives because they have to be stupid. They know the Word of God. They've been taught the Word of God. They know that their anchor point is right here in this room, every time this door is open for the instruction in the Word of God, but they're flittering and floating off someplace else. Then pretty soon, they'll come and they'll say, "Boy, I've been bruised; I've been shattered; I've been torn; and, I've been shredded." What are they telling me? They're telling me that the Word of God that was sweet and precious when they functioned on it has now become a bitter pill, because that same Word now condemns them and breaks them up. I cannot understand why Christians so consistently know principles of doctrine, and then turn their back upon it.

I will tell you this though: I'm beginning to have the conviction that there's another bitter pill associated with negative volition, and that is that when you will not obey the principles of doctrine (such a simple principle as assembling yourselves for instruction), then God denies you information that you need. I cannot believe how many times in recent weeks information has come across in one way or another that somebody I know needed, and they were not here to receive it. Part of God's judgment upon your negative, out-of-step lack of temporal fellowship, because you are not functioning on the Word of God, is that He closes the door to further information.

The hand of the Holy Spirit is a gentle hand. He will push you in a direction, but He will not shove you. If you resist Him, he'll let you go off on your own. You won't realize it until the house of cards that you built comes tumbling down around your ears.

John understood from the Old Testament Scriptures that eating the Word of God was sweet, sweet food, but being indifferent toward it was going to make it a lethal dose that he takes into the spiritual life. Where John was a very positive man, he was horrified by what he saw was coming on humanity. He was shocked, as we shall see later, when God showed him the Babylonian perversion of the church, the body of Christ. John was horrified. He thought there was some mistake. He could not believe that what he knew as the body of believers was going to become this corrupt thing in the Roman Catholic form. It saddened John to realize that the good Word of God was going to someday be so perverted. May we all take a renewed, serious look at how consistently we are in feeding upon the Word of God, and then acting upon it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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