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**FOLLOWING CHRIST IN A FRIGHTENING WORLD:
MEASURING UP
Revelation 11:1-14**

A week ago I was preaching at Memorial Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, Alabama. William Vanderbloemen is their young, dynamic pastor. He has taken a church that has experienced not one, but two splits led by two previous pastors, and by the grace of God, begun to turn it around. They have doubled their worship in two years. They have built a family activity center. They are getting ready to build a sanctuary. Sound familiar? He asked if I would come and preach and lead his session in some visioning. I was scheduled to speak to his session at 2:00 Saturday so I flew out Friday at noon. Plenty of time, right? Wrong. I connected through Dallas-Fort Worth. They had thunderstorms all day. I sat for four hours waiting for my connection only to be told that it had been cancelled. They put us up at a Howard Johnson. Actually, it was a has-been Ho Jo. It wasn't even good enough to be a Ho Jo anymore.

The next morning I got up, put my same clothes back on, headed for the airport...and waited some more. Another two hours. Finally, we loaded the airplane and headed for Montgomery. We landed at 1:30. I grabbed my luggage, jumped in the car and dashed for the church. We walked in at 2:00...with pillow head, dirty clothes, exhausted. "Hi ...I'm your consultant!"

Actually, in spite of all that, those three hours were probably the most productive of the entire time. I had sketched out my remarks, but I could hardly get to them. The elders were so interested in what we had done here at Chapel Hill. All I had to do was witness to God's faithfulness here. Somehow, God was able to use that. Dirty clothes, pillow head and all.

This morning we meet two remarkable people. They don't dress very well. They are in a hostile environment. But their passionate witness for Jesus Christ ends up saving most of a city.

Just like the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, we find ourselves in another break between trumpets six and seven. There are two parts to this text. First, there is a brief scene in the temple.

A year ago about now I was standing with forty-some friends on what is perhaps the most fought over, most controversial and most revered site in all the world: the temple mount in Jerusalem. If you were a first century Jew you wouldn't recognize the place today. At the south end stands Al Aqu'sa mosque, a huge Muslim place of prayer and worship with the most beautiful stained glass windows you have ever seen. Several hundred yards to the north stands the Dome of the Rock, perhaps the most recognizable holy site in the world of Islam.

No, a first century Jew wouldn't know where he was. For prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., this same massive esplanade was divided into a series of courtyards within courtyards. At the center of all these courtyards was the Holy of Holies, the most sacred site in Judaism. Surrounding these courtyards was a 26 acre area called the Court of the Gentiles. The farther in you went, the more exclusive it became. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once a year. On the other hand, anyone could enter the Court of the Gentiles, pagan and believer alike.

John, who thus far has been an observer of this vision, now becomes a participant. What is he told to do? Measure the temple. On the riverbanks of the Jordan grow reeds. They can reach twenty feet in length. They are long, straight and light. Before the days of tape measures and laser devices, these reeds were used as measuring devices. John is given one of these measuring reeds and told to measure the temple and count the worshipers. (Of course, by this time the entire temple had been destroyed in 70 A.D. and most of Jerusalem with it. But this is Apocalyptic literature. Anything is possible in a vision.)

John would have understood exactly what this meant. It was an image out of Zechariah, the second to the last book of the Old Testament. Zechariah is the one who foretells the coming of the messiah on a donkey. Well, in chapter 2, Zechariah meets a man on his way to measure Jerusalem with a measuring line. He is concerned that the city walls are not big enough to contain all its

inhabitants. An angel stops him and says, "Don't worry about how big the walls of Jerusalem are. No matter how many people are within her, the Lord himself will be a wall of fire around her."

When we read about "measuring" in scripture, it is usually not concerned with how long and wide something is in feet and inches. "Measuring" is another way of describing something that is being set aside for protection. In Zechariah the entire city of Jerusalem is measured---set aside--- because God is going to be her protector. Here, it is the temple and its worshipers that are measured and counted. What does this mean? Who are the "true worshipers" in Revelation? The Church. The followers of Jesus. This image is a parallel of the theme we heard in chapter 7. Do you remember what God did there? He stopped ...right between the opening of the sixth and seventh seal... he stopped and put a stamp on the forehead of the 144,000. I shared at that time why I believe that represented the Church. Here, again, the theme is repeated. Even though the unbelieving world may be prepared to do its very worst to them, those who are numbered among the followers of Jesus are eternally safe. God has placed his stamp of ownership and protection upon them. He has numbered them and drawn them inside a place of safety.

Here's where this part of the vision gets really interesting, though. Suddenly there appear two witnesses. The worshipers might be safely measured inside the temple. But these witnesses don't stay there. They move out into the streets. They preach with great power and effectiveness. Fire comes forth from their mouths to consume their enemies. They have the ability to shut up the sky so that the rain does not fall. They can turn the waters to blood and bring plagues upon the earth.

Who are these two witnesses? Think back. Who was the Old Testament prophet that shut up the sky so that rain would not fall and called down fire from the heavens? Elijah. And who was the Old Testament character that turned the waters to blood and brought plagues upon the enemies of God? Moses. And remember this: just before Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the last time, he took James, Peter and John up on a mountain. What happened there? The transfiguration. Jesus became as bright as the sun. These three friends and disciples saw Jesus, for a

moment, in his heavenly glory. And who appeared on that mountain with Jesus? Elijah and Moses.

The Holy Spirit speaks to John in images he will understand from his holy scriptures and from his experience with Jesus. He has a vision of these two great men of faith: Elijah, the great prophet and Moses, the giver of the law. They have returned. And they are witnessing for Jesus Christ, prophesying to a world gone crazy.

Suddenly, but not before they are finished with their testimony, a beast appears. He comes forth from the Abyss, which was mentioned in chapter 9. This is the first mention of the one who will be called Antichrist and described in greater detail in chapter 13. In an apparent victory over the two witnesses, he attacks and kills them.

In the Middle East it is an ultimate offense not give a body a proper burial. But the bodies of the two witnesses are left on display for three and ½ days. They are mocked by people the world over who gloat and celebrate their deaths. They even send gifts to each other in their celebration. These pesky preachers are finally out of the way. Then, just when the party is really going, the life-giving God breathes life into them, the dead bodies stand to their feet and a voice calls out from heaven: "Come up here." The two witnesses rise into heaven just as their Lord had once done. At that moment a great earthquake strikes the city and 7000 are killed. The survivors, in sheer terror, apparently repent and acknowledge the God of the witnesses.

Wow! So...what are we to make of these two men? Some commentators view this as symbolic of the witness of the entire Christian Church. Faced with the persecution of a world gone crazy...where even the holy city of Jerusalem has been overrun by unbelieving evil...the Church continues to give testimony to the power of Jesus.

Perhaps that is so. But I need to say that the degree of detail in this story certainly raises the strong possibility that these are two actual men; two great witnesses who testify boldly for Christ, are killed by Antichrist and are raised to life again just as their Lord once was. Whether or not these are two actual persons, clearly this is a picture of powerful witness in the face of persecution.

There are two groups that I want to look at out of this story this morning: the Trampers and the Witnesses. Do you remember when John measured the temple? Did he measure it all? No. In fact, the largest part of the temple mount he is told to exclude, the Court of the Gentiles. Why? Because even this holy place is being overrun by rampant evil. And what are these Gentiles doing? Trampling! In Luke 21 Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be trampled on by the Gentiles---that is, by the non-believing world---until the time of the Gentiles had been fulfilled. This is the same word used here. The trampers.

A couple of weeks ago our facilities staff arrived one morning to discover that most of our shrubbery in one area had been destroyed by a vandal. He had systematically stomped right in the center of every little bush, splitting it apart and destroying it. He went right down the building destroying every bush in his path. This person, whoever he is, is a trampler. For some reason he was mad at the church and decided to do his part to destroy some of it.

The world is full of trampers who want to do harm to the Church of Jesus Christ. Even in our own country, no other religious group would tolerate the kind of abuse that we have heaped upon us, particularly by the media. Christian religious conviction has become a key issue in the Republican race particularly. Again and again we are pummeled with the term "radical Christian right." We live in a culture of trampers.

But you know what? Trampers are not only on the outside of the Church. The worst trampling usually comes from within. Far more harm is done to the witness of Christ by those who claim to be his followers than from those on the outside. We expect to be trampled on by non-believers. But it is when we who claim to follow Christ ---we who reside within the temple walls---do the trampling that the greatest damage is done. When we gather to worship Jesus on a Sunday and behave shamefully on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday---we are a trampler. When we talk about loving our fellow man on Sunday but abuse our spouse on Monday, we are a trampler. When we drink sacramental wine on Sunday and get wasted on Friday night, we are a trampler. When we pray "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," and then go home to nurse that bitter grudge we have against a mother-in-law or an employer, then

we are a trampler. Every time we who claim to be worshipers of Jesus sleep with our girlfriend, cheat on our husband, cheat on our taxes, slander our employer, gossip about our neighbor or make fun of the school loser, we are trampers. How do you measure up?

This text also challenges to consider how we measure up as witnesses. In this text, the two witnesses courageously shared the gospel of Jesus. They did so with power, passion and conviction. They did so in the face of persecution, even death. They left the safety of religious enclaves and went right into the streets, right into the midst of the trampers. Apart from the witness of Jesus himself, I can't think of another New Testament image that more powerfully presents the challenge of being a courageous witness for Jesus Christ. So ...how do you measure up? How is your witness for Jesus Christ.

I am ashamed, at times, of my lack of passion in my Christian witness. On the airplane going out to Montgomery, I sat next to a man. I wanted to read. I wanted to write. He wanted to talk. Trying to be polite, I engaged him in conversation. Soon, he found out what I did and wanted to talk about religion. I did so. I talked about Jesus. I tried to answer his questions. But I remember thinking nearly the whole time, "I want to be alone. I want to stop talking to this man. I need to prepare my talks on how a church can do a better job of evangelism." Well, I didn't think of it exactly that way. If I had I probably would have repented sooner of my lackluster performance. But here was a man who was interested in talking about Jesus. *And I really wasn't giving it much of a shot...to my shame.*

Last night I was reminded of what evangelistic passion is really all about. Rachel spent the day with a friend. Cyndi went to pick her up at 8:15. She was going to stop at the store for a few things on the way back. I put Cooper down and went back to work on my sermon. Suddenly I realized it was 9:15. No Cyndi. No Rachel. I became a little concerned. By 9:30 I was trying to remember whom Rachel had been visiting so I could call them. By 9:45 I was on my knees, literally, praying for their safety on the wet and dark streets. And I had decided that at 10:00, I was going to get Cooper out of bed, put him in the car and go looking for my two girls.

Have you been there? I know you have. You realize you are being silly. There's probably nothing wrong. But you begin to imagine accidents, phone calls from the police. I was very worried. At 9:58 the phone rang. It was Cyndi. She had stayed and visited for a while and didn't have her watch and lost track of time. She was so sorry. I chewed her out! Then she was so pleased that I was so worried.

The point is, I was ready to go on a rescue mission. I was ready to pack up my sleeping four-year-old and go hunting for my lost wife and daughter.

Man, I wish I had that kind of passion for the lost of this world. Thinking about this over the last week, I have started doing something I haven't done for a long time: praying for the lost of this community. Praying that God will use us to seek and to save the lost. The trampers. I have begun to ask prayer partners to do the same. Look at the difference courageous witness makes in this story. Did you notice? Nine-tenths of the city repent and turn to God after the powerful witness of these two figures. Even at this

late date, God is still using the witness of his people to redeem the trampers.

How do you measure up as a witness for Jesus Christ? What if every one of us this week determined that we would share our love of Jesus with one person? That we would bring one friend to church? That we would pray for one unsaved associate? Let us pray that God will stir up in us a passionate and genuine witness for the Lord Jesus.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
MEASURING UP
Revelation 11: 1-14

5 March, 2000
Pastor Mark Toone

- *Read Zechariah 2:1-5 and 4:1-14 as background to this vision. How is this passage similar to the interlude in Rev. 7:1-8? If the temple worshipers represent the Church, what is being*

said about them in this passage?

- *Remember, "measuring" usually means "set aside." Why is the Court of the Gentiles excluded from measuring? Notice that the months (42) and days (1260) are the same amount. Since all numbers mean something, what do you suppose these numbers mean? (Hint: what does 7 mean? What part of 7 years is 42 months?)*
- *What familiar Bible images are conjured up in the story of the two Witnesses? Do you notice similarities to Jesus' life and ministry? What is the impact of their witness? (v. 13)*
- *Pastor Mark spoke of "Trampers" and "Witnesses." How do you understand those terms from this text. How do you "measure up" in regards to each? When was the last time you boldly shared your faith in Jesus with someone? What do you suppose stops you? Pray for our common witness, that we might be bold for Christ and bring many unsaved to the Master.*