

How do you grow in confidence that something promised will actually happen? Say someone asks you to marry them. It's one thing to say the words, it's quite another to actually get things in place to get married. Will they go through pre-marital counseling with you and be willing to address issues and prepare for a life long relationship. Are they willing to change their living arrangements? Are they willing to incorporate you into their life plans? Have they employment or a willingness to contribute to the ongoing financial needs of couple and family? If you see effort and sacrifice by the other person towards marriage, your confidence grows that the wedding and marriage will actually happen.

Or someone could say to you "I promise I'm going to build a new house for you." But what backs up that statement? Do they have money to pay for the house? Have plans been drawn up that detail the house? Have tradespeople been contracted who can look after the various pieces of the house build? The more you see plans, contracts, finances and preparations, the more likely you are to gain confidence that the house will actually be built.

Someone can promise with words "I will change." But will they take tangible steps to change? Will they honestly examine themselves and look at the issues? Are they willing to have others speak truth into their lives? Will they go through the program or the learning necessary to address whatever issues they have? If so, your confidence grows that change will actually happen.

Our confidence that a promise will be kept depends greatly on the one making it. We almost automatically discount the promises made by some people – like some advertisers or some used car sales people, some politicians. When someone in our life promises to do something, our confidence that the promise will be kept depends a lot on their track record in promise keeping.

So how confident are you that God will keep His promise about a future glorious life with Him? Throughout Scripture we see promises of a time when all wrongs will be made right; evil will be destroyed; sin will be removed; paradise will be enjoyed; creation will be renewed; the dead will be resurrected; living believers will be changed in the twinkling of an eye to be Christ-like.

But when we look around, it doesn't seem like this promise is close to fulfillment. Wrong is now called right. Evil seems to be winning. Sin seems to be expanding. Paradise can only be experienced for a couple of days during vacation. The dead have not been raised.

Our confidence in the fulfillment of this promise might have weakened. Imagine what it was like for first century believers living under the tyranny of the Roman Empire. It dominated their world. Roman soldiers, temple & statues of their gods were everywhere. There was no sign of a Christian leader raising an army that threatened Rome. The church was not ascending to the power structures of the society. In fact, Rome had turned her sights upon the church and Christians through various waves of persecution. Many had been martyred for their faith in Christ. Many people from the seven churches of Revelation mourned people who had been killed for their faith. Their confidence that God would keep His promise about the coming glorious life must have been shaken at times. The same might be true for us when we look at the world or look at our lives.

But God knows His people. God recognizes when we waver and lose hope. The next chapter in Revelation brings reasons to trust that God will keep His promise. So today, I invite you to think about your current level of confidence in God's ability to do what He has promised to do. We will then look at what He provides in this next chapter to strengthen our confidence. Then, we will see God's call upon us in the time before He fulfills His promise. Our text is Revelation 10. (Page 872 in the Bibles in front of you).

Revelation 10 (ESV)

10 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. ²He 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. ⁴And 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."⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven ⁶and 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, ⁷but 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.

⁸Then 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." ⁹So 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." ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

This chapter describes another vision John received from the Lord. It serves as kind of a pause in the advance of Revelation's story. John has just described the 6 trumpets and their accompanying plagues through chapters 8 and 9. But then he inserts the visions of chapter 10 and 11 before he continues with the 7th trumpet.

This vision centers on a mighty angel who delivers a promise from God. It's found in verse 7. "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. So here is God's promise. **God will be fulfilled.** Or "the mystery of God will be accomplished" according to the NIV translation. Or "the mystery of God will be finished" according to the King James Version.

But what is the mystery of God? We get some clues from other scriptures. The Apostle Paul refers to a mystery in Ephesians 1:7-10. "In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. So according to this passage, the mystery of God's will is "unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ's headship." In Colossians 2:1-2, Paul again refers to the mystery. (Colossians 2:1-2) – For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So here God's mystery is Christ in whom are hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But what is it? I looked for a simple summary of the mystery of God. There are some other clues throughout the Bible.

So people have tried to come up with a summary of the mystery of God. Here are some attempts. "The mystery of God stands for the whole divine purpose, to bring his people to salvation and evil to judgment (Leon Morris). Or "the mystery of God refers to His end time plan concealed in the prophetic books of the Old Testament (David Aune). The mystery of God, which He started in creation and made possible through the blood of the lamb, will be brought to its fulfillment.

But the more I looked, the more I realized the difficulty in summarizing this is because God's purpose and plan for the world is the most massive, comprehensive, complicated, time-transcending plan in all of history. But in looking at Scripture and some of these definitions, I think there are some common points. 1. God announced the mystery through

the prophets. 2. It centers on Christ, His life, death and resurrection. 3. It involves all people – those who receive God and those who reject Him. 4. It moves to an end point. The end of history, the return of Christ, the final judgment, the start of a totally new life free from sin, death and the devil. So here's my attempt to summarize the mystery of God. **God's saving plan will lead to an end point where all believers in heaven and earth are united under Christ and enter a glorious eternal existence while all who reject Him will be separated from this glory.** You can see that even with this part of God's plan are not mentioned because of it's vastness.

The angel promises this great plan will be fulfilled or completed. Big Promise.

But why should we have confidence that this will happen? The verses preceding the promise give us reasons. God is Mighty (10:1-3). He displays this through His mighty angel. This vision begins with a mighty angel descending from heaven. Now when you think of an angel, what image comes to your mind? We may imagine the chubby little angels portrayed by some artist or little tinsel fringed girls in Christmas plays. But the Bible portrays angels in two ways. Some look like humans and are recognized only by a few. But then there are apocalyptic angels. Eugene Peterson describes them as "vast, fiery sea striding creatures with hell in their nostrils and heaven in their eyes." This mighty angel stands with one foot in the sea and another on land. It's not like John saw another person standing on the beach. This angel has gigantic size. One commentator notes that the angel is mightier than most Greeks portrayed their gods. Yet this mighty angel is only a servant to a mightier God. Notice this angel also has a mighty voice like a lion in verse 3. We are told in Hosea 11:10 that the Lord roars like a lion. So here's an angel speaking like the Lord, yet he serves the mighty Lord.

Yet this angel reveals to us another reason to have confidence in God's promises. **God is faithful.** The angel appears with characteristics applied to God in other contexts. He is wrapped in a cloud like the pillar of cloud in the wilderness. He has a rainbow over his head like the rainbow over God's throne in Revelation 4. His face shines like the sun like Jesus face shining like the sun full strength in Revelation 1:16. The angel's legs are like pillars of fire similar to the description of Jesus' legs also in Revelation 1.

But notice also that these also point to God's faithfulness to His people in times past. The rainbow symbolized God's covenant with Noah after the flood to never flood the earth in that way again. The pillar of cloud indicated God's faithful guiding presence to the Israelites in the wilderness during the day. And the pillar of fire revealed God's guarding presence to them at night. So the angel's appearance reminds us of God's faithfulness.

Then through a series of events in verse 3-4, we see that **God is All-Knowing (10:3-4)**. In verse 3, the angel calls out with a voice that sounds like a lion. Seven thunders respond. They may be interpreting what the angel said or responding to it. John is about to write down what the seven thunders sounded. But a voice from heaven commands him not to write.

This voice limits the knowledge John can pass on. It reminds us that there is much knowledge we do not have. Yet God has it. He shared the seven thunders with John but it was only for John and not us. Some matters are not ours to know. Deuteronomy 29:29 states “the secret things belong to the Lord our God.” He keeps some knowledge from us and reveals other knowledge to us. Yet, He knows the background information needed to solve life’s mysteries.

So before giving the promise in verse 7, the angel has already emphasized God’s mightiness, God’s faithfulness and God’s infinite knowledge. But then in verse 5, the angel prepares to swear an oath. When you swear an oath, you usually swear or back up your word by someone or something greater than you.

So the angel raises his right hand and swears an oath by whom? **God lives forever and ever (10:5-6)**. This promise will be made by someone who is eternal. This promise is made by someone who will never die. This promise is made by someone who can see His people through death to life on the other side. This would be very encouraging to people who might face death for their faith. Only a God who lives beyond death can promise them life beyond their own death.

The angel further backs up his oath by referring to God as the creator. **God is the Creator (10:5-6)**. But he doesn’t just swear by God the creator. He swears by him who created the heaven and what is in it; the earth and what is in it; and the sea and what is in it. If you think about everything there is and all that has been created you see God’s creative power. You see plants, animals, people, mountains, oceans, lakes, plains, hills, valleys, waterfalls. Sea life & stars – all created by God.

So the angel takes an oath and swears by the eternal creator God that there will be no more delay – end of verse 6. Then he makes the promise that when the seventh trumpet sounds, the mystery of God will be fulfilled or completed.

Then he reveals one more reason for confidence in this promise. **God has consistently proclaimed it through the prophets**. This is not a new promise. This is not some new initiative of God that the angel announces. God has worked on this saving plan through history. He announced it through the prophets. He advanced it through Christ. He will complete it with the sounding of the 7th trumpet. This vision communicates to John and to us that God will certainly bring

history to an end and accomplish His great purposes. To back up this promise the vision reminds us of God's greatness, faithfulness, all-knowingness, eternalness, creation power and consistent announcement of this plan. Based on God's character, it is certain His mystery will be fulfilled.

So how are we to live in the meantime? We must take God's Sweet Word and bring it to our world despite its bitterness (10:8-11). We learn this from the last verses of Revelation 10. The angel holds a little scroll. A voice instructs John to go and take the scroll from the angel. We don't know what was on this scroll. Some think it's the same scroll Jesus took hold of chapter 5. But its contents are meant for John to proclaim. So John goes to the angel and tells the angel to give him the scroll. The angel responds by saying "take and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter but in your mouth will be sweet as honey." John takes the scroll and eats it. The angel's prophecy comes true. The scroll tastes sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. Then he is commanded to prophesy again to peoples, nations, languages and kings.

But what does this mean? John is not commanded to literally eat an ancient scroll. But he must take in the message so it becomes part of Him. John must not read the scroll and just pass on its information. He must internalize the message of this scroll and then proclaim it to others. When he does this, he will experience sweetness and bitterness.

But how can this be? Anyone who has taken God's word and then proclaims it out to others in the world has experienced this. When we receive God's word, it can be so sweet. When we accept it, we find the passages on forgiveness, grace and new life sweet. But if we reject God's Gospel, the talk of sin, forgiveness and grace can be offensive. So something sweet to us is bitter to others. The whole word of God includes the reality of judgment, final accountability and hell. These are very tough parts of God's message/word. They are bitter in our stomachs especially when we contemplate those who we love and know who reject Christ. Yet this is God's calling upon us.

We proclaim the promise of the fulfillment of the mystery of God in the hope that those we share it with see it's sweetness and respond with belief. We look forward with hope because God's own character backs up His promise to accomplish His glorious purposes in the world and our lives.

We began by thinking about our level of confidence of God's ability to fulfill His promise to bring us to that glorious resurrection life. I hope that your confidence has increased because of what God has revealed about Himself in this word today. So I want to invite you now to spend some time meditating on the reality that God will fulfill His promise to bring

all things to an end and bring us into the glorious eternal existence. (PAUSE) - Then let us ask for His strength to proclaim the sweet and bitter message to all until our lives end or God brings the end.