

Week of December 30-January 5

SWEET & SOUR

Scripture Reading: Read Revelation Chapter 10

If you've ever been to a Chinese restaurant, you may have ordered sweet and sour chicken or pork. The "sweet" part of the recipe often comes from brown sugar (and possibly pineapple) while the "sour" is usually supplied by vinegar. The combination of the sweet and sour elements makes for a tasty main course for dinner.

The apostle John was invited to eat a sweet and sour meal too. It wasn't from a Chinese takeout restaurant, though, but food from heaven. You'll find it at the end of today's chapter reading. *"Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour."*

God gives John a vision that describes in picturesque language the sweet and sour message he is to prophesy regarding "many peoples, nations, languages and kings." It is not unlike the experience the prophet Ezekiel had in the OT (Eze 2:8-3:11).

The sweetness of John's message, no doubt, rests in the fact that for those believers who overcome, eternal blessing awaits. They will reign with Christ forever. Victory is around the corner. God wins! Christ's enemies will be defeated and this is certainly sweetness to a church that is being persecuted for its faith.

The sour element of John's proclamation, however, probably rests with the fact that the church will undergo great difficulty before the victory at the end. Even when John wrote, believers were being put to death for their faith in Christ. Such acts of evil against the church have continued unabated through the centuries and, indeed, have intensified in numbers over the last century or so. In fact, more people died for Christ in the twentieth century than were martyred in the first few centuries of the church's existence. Today, you can be put to death in some countries simply by becoming a Christian. It's not easy being a child of God in a hostile world that thumbs its nose at Christ. Victory may be in store in the end but it's not without persecution and difficulty in the meantime (cf. Acts 14:21-22). In addition, another aspect of John's sour message likely has to do with the judgments he is called to proclaim. His declaration of woe and wrath by way of the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls is a message of doom and gloom. It's much sweeter to proclaim a message of hope, healing and wholeness filled with life and joy than it is to proclaim a message of judgment that is soon to be poured out on an unbelieving world. Yet, both the sweet and the sour were part of the same message. Life and death, grace and wrath are both part of the same message. It's a truth we may have forgotten in the 21st century with our overemphasis on God's love. Revelation 10 can serve as a sweet and sour reminder.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Check your message. Make sure it's both sweet & sour. Pray for the Lord to bring your proclamation into biblical balance.

Take-a-way: *God's sweet and sour message contains both hope and judgment.*