

**2008**

# **[REVELATION BLOCK CLASS]**

Pastors' Block Class during Leadership Conference Nov. 17-2, 2008 Taught by Dr. Sam Horn

# **Revelation**

## **Living in the Light of His Appearing**

### *Series Introduction*

**Text: Revelation 1:1 & 1:19 & 22:10**

*Revelation 1:1* The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

*Revelation 1:19* "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

*Revelation 22:10* And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

#### **Introduction:**

- Years ago Winston Churchill described the former Soviet Union as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” (MacArthur, p.7)
- The ancient translator Jerome observed that “Revelation has as many riddles as it does words!” (Panosian, Bib Viewpoint, 121).
- In many ways, many Christians feel the same way about the Book of Revelation – it is a riddle presented in mysterious symbols and confusing images.
- Yet, the Apostle John is told to write the things he saw and to not “seal” them up since in some way their time was at hand!
- And perhaps most importantly, the things contained in this book constitute a revelation given to Jesus Christ by His Father precisely to make something known to all those who serve Jesus Christ.
  
- So, this book reveals something that God is manifesting specifically for all those who love Jesus Christ and long for His appearing.
- No other portion of divine revelation is introduced so solemnly – nowhere else is a portion of Scripture identified as the specific revelation of information from God the Father to His Son to make known to all of His servants!
- And those who preach it as well as those who hear and heed it are promised a special blessing for doing so! (1:3; 22:7)

## I. The Importance of Revelation

- Perhaps no book in the NT has generated more interest and at the same time been less understood than Revelation.
- It is a book that believers love to talk about but that is rarely read and even more rarely preached in churches.
- And when it is read, it is often read sensationally by those who long to see their newspapers reflected in their Bibles.
- When it is preached it is often more a commentary on what is going on in the news than as timeless truth designed by God for life and godliness!
- The result of all of this is that many preachers and Christians do not see the value or importance of Revelation for the NT church and therefore, it is rarely read and even less rarely preached from.
- But – it is a book of vital importance to the life and health of the Church and to her members.
- Revelation is important:

### A. *Due to its Inspiration as Scripture (1:2)*

- Paul reminds us that all Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable – or useful – for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.
- John claims that what he is writing down is every bit as inspired as what Paul and the rest of the NT writers wrote.
- John claims that he is merely testifying to the very Words of God Himself and to the testimony about those Words given by Jesus Christ. (1:2)

### B. *Due to its Function in the Canon*

1. Genesis introduces the Creation and explains what happened to it as a result of the Fall – the Curse.
2. Malachi ends the OT record by reminding the reader that the curse is still present!
3. Gospels introduce the Person who will remove the Curse and tell the facts about His life.
4. Acts records what happens when those facts were declared to the world at large.
5. Epistles explain, apply, and defend the Gospel. (Romans – Jude)

6. Revelation culminates the work of Christ in fulfillment to God the Father's plan in Human History!

**C. *Due to the Attacks mounted against it***

1. Genesis attacked due to literal creation and literal events leading to the Fall and resulting in the Curse and its consequences (flood, etc).
2. Gospel is attacked because of its insistence on a literal virgin born savior who was crucified and who physically rose again from the dead (1 Corinthians 1:21-23).
3. Revelation is attacked due to its literal and full fulfillment of all the promises of God given in both Testaments.

**D. *Due to the Blessings and Curses promised in it***

1. Blessing to those who preach it, hear it, and heed it (1:3; 22:7)
2. Curse upon the one who despises, rejects, or changes the words of the prophecy (1:18-19)

## **II. The Background to Revelation – Author, Recipients, Date**

**A. *The Author: John the Apostle writing from Patmos***

- Identifies himself as John 4x in the book (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8)
- Justin Martyr, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Church Father at Ephesus, testified to this in about AD 135:

*There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would take place.” (MacArthur p. 10)*

**B. *The Recipients: His bond-servants (1:1)***

- All true Christians (John the Apostle in specific)
- All true Churches (the 7 Churches in specific)

**C. *The Date: AD 95***

1. Some take an earlier date prior to fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 but most who do so have a theological agenda (preterist view)

2. Conservatives who interpret the book literally date the book in AD 95.
  - View of most of the early Church Fathers
  - Allows for the decline of the 7 churches as seen in Rev 2-3
  - Earthquake at Laodecia and her recovery (3:17) in AD 80.
  - No evidence that Smyrna existed in AD 60
  - Legend of Nero's wounded head and revival from death did not even develop until sometime in AD 80
  - Persecution seems more the one under Domitian than Nero

### III. The of Nature of Revelation – Prophecy

- Two terms help us understand the nature of the material contained in Revelation.

#### A. *Prophecy (1:3)*

- The content of Revelation is identified by God Himself as Prophecy.
- Prophetic literature has to do with the forthtelling of God's truth and the foretelling of God's plans!
- So Revelation is the proclamation of God's truth and it is also the prediction of God's plans to carry out His divine purpose in "regathering all things under one head Eph 1:10)
- It is also the divine record of how God intends to fulfill His promises to His nation, Israel.

#### B. *Apocalypse or Apocalyptic (1:1 – sent and signified it)*

- Term "signify" is the word used by John in his gospel for "sign"
- Tells us that this revelation would involve the giving of signs that would need to be interpreted for understanding to happen.
- Those signs would have been familiar to the first century reader and will gain their significance by a common meaning understood in the OT.

- So the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy much of which is given in signs or symbols that the reader will need to

interpret based on the meaning of those signs in the Old Testament.

- Therefore the question confronting the reader is this: How are we to interpret this book of signs and symbols in order that we might properly understand the prophecies it contains?

#### **IV. The Interpretation of Revelation – Futurist**

- Christian students of Revelation have answered that question (how are we to interpret these signs and symbols) in one of four ways:

##### **A. *Preterist View***

- Revelation was written in AD 60 and all of the events it contains are now past history because they have been fulfilled in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

##### **B. *Historicist View***

- Revelation reveals the unfolding of God's plan chronologically in human history starting with the time of John and going up through the present time in our day.
- It is kind of a time line or map given in codes and symbols that describe real events in human history.
- The trick is to figure out what historical event goes with what symbol in Revelation.
- For example – each of the seven churches represents a specific church age in the history of the Church.
- The problem is knowing when one church age ends and the other begins. An even bigger problem is that every age considers itself to be the last – the Laodecian age!

##### **C. *Idealist View***

- Revelation was not intended to be taken literally at all – it is not describing real events that will take place literally in history.
- Instead, Revelation is the story of the cosmic struggle that has always gone on between God and Satan!
- Revelation is an allegory of this struggle designed to comfort believers who are living in the midst of the

struggle and to assure them that God will win – this will give them hope and confidence to weather their particular circumstances.

- But it certainly is a mistake to try to take the book as speaking of literal historical events that will take place prior to His coming.
- Cyclical nature to the structure of the book – one truth repeated cyclically by using the number 7 in a series of visions.

#### ***D. Futurist View***

- Takes Revelation as normative communication
- Sees the material in 2-3 as referring to 7 actual churches existing in John's day but having application to all churches in every age.
- Sees the material in 4-22 as still future to be fulfilled literally by historical events that will occur as God has described them.
- Acknowledges the limitation of language – John was describing things in 1<sup>st</sup> century vocabulary that were yet in the distant future
- Acknowledges the danger of trying to fix a particular vision to a particular event in our day
- The time-table seems clear – after the rapture of the Church prior to the beginning of chapter 4 (no church present on earth).
- So we must be careful to not go beyond the legitimate boundaries set forth in Scripture – the truth is that all we can know for sure is that:
  - Jesus is coming and His coming is soon.
  - These prophecies describe literal events that will happen on the earth – we just don't know what they are since they speak to a time yet future.
- We must exercise Confident and Fervent Faith
- We must exercise Cautious and Responsible Exegesis

#### **V. The Purpose of Revelation: 1:1**

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place.*

- The purpose of Revelation is to reveal God’s plan to Christ’s servants!
- To show them the things which must take place
- To show them the things which will take place suddenly or quickly. In other words, these things are at hand – there is nothing to hinder them once God initiates the process!
- Well – what are these things that must shortly take place?

## **VI. The Message of Revelation: 1:7**

*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

- The message that God has given to Christ to show to His servants is that of His glorious appearing!
- Paul talked about believers “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)
- Revelation is the detailed account of what that glorious appearing will be like!
- It will be Jesus coming back in full power and glory (with the clouds)
- It will be Jesus in glory and power evident to the entire earth – the first time He came no one recognized who He was – now everyone will see and no one will have any question about who He really is!
- It will be about Jesus’ glorious appearing and the affect it will have on all the people on the earth at that time!
- The Jews will recognize their messiah and will mourn in repentance!
- The “earth-dwellers” will see their just doom and will mourn in anger and fear!
- The message of Revelation is that Jesus really is coming – so don’t be swayed by those who mock His coming (2 Peter 3:33-4).
- And when He comes – He Wins!

## **VII. The Structure or Plan of Revelation: 1:19**

*"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*

- Revelation is one of the few books in the Bible that gives it own outline this clearly in a 3-fold division

- A. *Things Past: Evangelization and Glorification (1)***
1. Christ the Divine Son of God
  2. Christ the Divine Savior of Men
  3. Christ the Divine Sovereign of the Universe
- B. *Things Present: Examination and Exhortation (2-3)***
1. The Judge – the Head of the Church
  2. The Judged – The Churches
  3. The Judgment – Commendation and Rebuke
- C. *Things Promised: Exaltation, Vindication, and Consummation***  
***(4-22) – Things in Heaven and Things on the Earth!***
1. Worship of the Lamb Invited (4-5)
  2. Wrath of the Lamb Revealed (6-19)
    - a. 7 Seal Judgments and effects (6-7)
    - b. 7 Trumpet Judgments and effects (8-16)
    - c. 7 Vial/Bowl Judgments and effects (17)
    - d. Fall of Babylon (18-19)
  3. Reign of the Lamb Inaugurated on Earth (20)
  4. Wife of the Lamb Introduced (21-22)
    - a. Her Habitation Described (21)
    - b. Her Husband Depicted (22)

## **VIII. The Response to Revelation: 1:3**

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

- What should be our response to all of this? In short – Read and Heed!
  - Live in the Light of His Appearing!
- A. *Live for the right things (2 Tim 4:8)***
- His plan not yours
  - The next life not this one
- B. *Live in right ways (1 John 3:2-3)***
- Holy and Blameless
  - Boldly and Confidently
- C. *Manifest Godly Conduct (2 Peter 3:11-15)***
- Love the Savior Passionately
  - Serve His Church Persistently

- Witness Aggressively
- Suffer Patiently

## **Conclusion**

- Paul loved his appearing and lived for it by working to advance it (2 Tim 4:8) – are you? (Are you willing to spend and be spent?)
- Peter believed in his appearing and the coming of a new heaven and earth and urged his readers to be “found in Him – spotless and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14) – are you making sure you are in Him??
- John believed in his appearing and purified himself from sins(1 John 3:2-3) – are you?

**Revelation**  
**Living in the Light of His Appearing**  
*Series Introduction*

**I. The Importance of Revelation:**

- A. *Due to its \_\_\_\_\_ (1:2)*
- B. *Due to its \_\_\_\_\_.*
- C. *Due to the \_\_\_\_\_ mounted \_\_\_\_\_.*
- D. *Due to the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ promised in it.*

**II. The Background to Revelation:**

- A. *The Author:*
- B. *The Recipients:*
- C. *The Date:*

**III. The of Nature of Revelation:**

- A. *Prophecy or Prophetic literature (1:3)*
- B. *Apocalypse or Apocalyptic literature (1:1)*

**IV. The Interpretation of Revelation – Futurist**

- A. *Preterist View*
- B. *Historicist View*
- C. *Idealist View*
- D. *Futurist View*

**V. The Purpose of Revelation: 1:1**

**VI. The Message of Revelation: 1:7**

**VII. The Structure or Plan of Revelation: 1:19**

- A. *Things Past: Evangelization and Glorification (1)***
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- A. *Live for the right* \_\_\_\_\_ (2 Tim 4:8)**
- B. *Live in right* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 John 3:2-3)**
- C. *Manifest* \_\_\_\_\_ (2 Peter 3:11-15)**

### **Conclusion:**

- Paul loved his appearing and lived for it by working to advance it(2 Tim 4:8) – are you? (are you willing to spend and be spent?)
- Peter believed in his appearing and the coming of a new heaven and earth and urged his readers to be “found in Him – spotless and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14) – are you making sure you are in Him??
- John believed in his appearing and purified himself from sins(1 John 3:2-3) – are you?

# Revelation

## Preaching from the Prologue

### **Text: Revelation 1:1- 8**

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,<sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.<sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.<sup>4</sup> John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.<sup>7</sup> Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

### **Introduction:**

Many books and dramatic works begin with a prologue. Often, we assume that the main purpose for having a prologue is to serve as a way to introduce what is to come.

While it is certainly true that “prologues” do introduce what follows them – that is by no means all that they do and very often, that is not even the primary thing they do.

The purpose and function of a prologue in a book or a drama is to set up the audience/readers for the major events to come by giving them information they need to know in order to make sense of the story that is to come.

Sometimes a prologue will introduce the major players and themes that will be woven together in the plot of the story yet to come.

That is in essence what John does here in the prologue that he presents in the first 8 verses of Revelation.

These verses are more than just an introduction to get us into the book and to whet our appetite for the “good stuff” that is about to come.

In fact, in some ways, understanding the “rest of the story” depends on how well you see and understand what John is saying to us in his brief but powerful prologue.

To be sure, these 8 verses do introduce the reader to the book by alerting us to:

- the nature of the book (prophecy),
- the author (God – Jesus – Angel – John),
- recipients (7 Churches),
- and theme (things that must soon take place – namely the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ).

And we looked at these facts in the two introductory messages to our series.

In this message we want to look again at this prologue to see at least three major actors and themes that will be playing out the Revelation Drama as John presents it in 22 acts or chapters.

If we miss these important themes and actors, we run the risk of misunderstanding or missing the message of Revelation.

So with that in mind, we want to look at the three primary actors/themes that are presented by John in the Prologue:

## **I. The Plan of God Announced: 1:1-3**

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

### **A. The Source of the Revelation -- God the Father**

- John makes it eminently clear as to the source of all that is to come – the incredible things that he saw and that he gave faithful testimony to were things that were ultimately sourced in God!
- This leads us to some important observations:
- First – everything John reports is reliable! It is true and accurate.

- Second – it is the final installment of the plan that God has been unfolding since before the foundation of time.
- Third – since this information has to do with the final outworking of God’s plan the things it contains **must** happen and they must happen **successfully!**

***B. The Nature of the Revelation – A Disclosure or a Mystery***

- The term “revelation” comes from the Greek word “apocalypsis” which comes from two words that mean “to remove the cover” or to uncover.
- The term came to be used to describe an uncovering or a disclosure of something that had been hidden up to that point.
- This term is related to another term (*mystery*) that we have encountered in our study of Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Church – where John pastored before being exiled to Patmos.
- We learned that a mystery is not merely a difficult riddle – rather, it is a divine secret that can’t be fathomed or even known unless and until God chooses to reveal it!
- The book of Revelation is described as the disclosure and explanation of a huge secret (mystery) that God the Father has been unfolding throughout all of human history.
- We have been introduced to some connecting parts of this mystery – for example the gospel; the church; the incarnation; etc., but now we are going to get full and final disclosure of the entire plan of God in human history.
- So exactly what is the content of this mystery that God is revealing here in Revelation?

***C. The Content of the Revelation – Things that must shortly come to pass***

1. These things concern His Son

- It is the revelation of Jesus Christ – one that was given to Him by His Father that He, Jesus, revealed to John.
- But – it has as its primary theme – Jesus Christ and His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in Glory!

- So He is both the one revealing God's revelation and the central subject of that revelation.
- What is God the Father revealing or uncovering about His Son?

## 2. These things concern His Sovereign Plan

- Things we already know and things we haven't known before!
- He is revealing how He intends to carry out His plan to sum up or re-gather all things under Christ's headship and authority (Ephesians 1:9-10).  
*Ephesians 1:9* having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, <sup>10</sup> that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him.
- He is revealing the final fulfillment of His plan to make His Son the preeminent one of many others like Him (Rom 8:28-30)
- *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, **that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.** <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*
- He is revealing how He intends to overthrow and overcome all earthy kingdoms and powers and establish the Kingdom of His Dear Son! (Daniel 2:37-44; Rev 11:15; 12:10)
- **Daniel 2:37-44** "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; <sup>38</sup> "and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all -- you are this head of gold. <sup>39</sup> "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. <sup>40</sup> "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. <sup>41</sup> "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of

*iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. <sup>42</sup> "And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. <sup>43</sup> "As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. <sup>44</sup> "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*

- ***Revelation 11:15*** *Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"*
- ***He is revealing the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of His Son in glory! (1:7)***
  - This was predicted by the Prophets
  - This was promised by Christ
  - This is being fulfilled by the Father who is sending Him!

3. These things concern His Servants – to show His servants.

- “His” servant’s is a reference to Christ and His servants
- These servant’s play an important role in the Father’s plan
- They display His glory, power, mercy, and wisdom in their individual salvation
- They display His ability to bring all things under Christ by their willing submission
- They display His indescribable glory by worshipping Him appropriately and passionately.
- They display His supreme worth by suffering and dying willingly for His name.

**D. *The Confirmation of the Revelation (1:2, 8)***

1. Confirmed by John – the faithful witness who saw then and is seeing now.
2. Confirmed by Jesus – the faithful witness was then and is now.

**E. *The Intent of the Revelation (1:3)***

- God intends all of this to be of supreme blessing to His people who will hear and obey what He is disclosing in the revelation He is giving about His Son – the one He gave to His Son to give to us!
- It blesses us by assuring us of our future – “hope of our calling.”
- It blesses us by strengthening us in suffering – which produces tested character.
- It blesses us by reminding us that the time is short and we must continue to work while it is yet day.

**II. The Presentation of Christ: 1:5-6**

The prologue also discloses three important facts regarding the Lord Jesus Christ that explain what is yet to come.

**A. *His Person – Who He Is***

<sup>5</sup> *and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.*

Three important descriptive titles are ascribed to Jesus that were also ascribed to Messiah, the seed of David, in Psalm 89:36-37, 27.

**1. The Faithful Witness – Focus on His Past Ministry**

- His role as perfect prophet
- Term “witness” has to do with testimony – Jesus gives accurate and authoritative testimony to the words and will of His Father.
- Term also came to mean “martyr” and signified those who gave their life for this witness.
- Jesus was the faithful martyr on account of the truth He bore from God about God.
- This is a reminder that many of His servants will be called to give this kind of testimony for truth – and it might cost them their lives!

**2. First-born from the Dead – Focus on His Present Ministry**

- His role as perfect priest
- First-born of the dead means at least that He did not stay dead and there are more resurrections to come!
- BUT it means more than this – it means that of all the ones who will ever be resurrected – Jesus is the preeminent One!
- This is in essence the theme of Colossians!
- This gives hope and assurance to all those who will give their life for their witness!

### 3. Ruler (prince) over all the Kings of the Earth – Focus on His Promised Ministry

- His role as perfect King
- His true Identity!
- He told Pilate that His kingdom was not “of this world” – that did not mean He wasn’t a king.
- Nor did it mean that He would not have an earthly kingdom.
- It meant that His kingdom would not be established like earthly kingdoms and it would not be ruled and governed like the kingdoms of the earth.
- It would be a kingdom given to Him on earth by Someone who was above all earthly kings – God Himself!

#### ***B. His Work – What He Is Doing***

*To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father,*

1. He is loving us – present tense participle
  - In spite of our sins and failures
  - In spite of suffering and affliction – that seem to deny this.
  - There is a supreme evidence that He does in fact love us:
2. He has loosed us from our sins – past tense (a definitive and permanent loosing)
  - KJV has “washing” but the term is really “loosing” or releasing.

- We were sold under sin (Rom 3:19) but we have been decisively delivered from the bondage and dominion of the power of Sin and we are no longer forced to serve it with our members!
- And He did this through His death!
- And He did this when we were still His sworn enemies!
- There could be no greater love than this!
- And that isn't all He did for us:

3. He has placed us in a kingdom where we will one day rule as Royal Priest! (Exodus 19:6 -- Col 1:13 and 1 Peter 2:9)

- In the meantime – as Royal Priests we are to serve Him accurately and minister for Him attractively by showing forth the praises of Him who called us.

**C. *His Worth – What He Deserves: Our Glad and Careful Worship.***

*to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

**III. The Preparation of the Saints (1:7)**

*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

- God is preparing us for His coming so that we will stand ready to play our part. He is doing this preparation:
  - A. *By Grace (1:4; Romans 5:1) – Our Standing before God***
    - This is a realm
    - We have been given permanent standing and access to this realm
  - B. *In Peace (1:4; Romans 5:1) – Our Relationship with God***
    - No longer enemies – friends and even Sons!
    - No longer under wrath – beloved because of the Son
  - C. *From God Through Christ by the Spirit (1:5-6; Ephesians 1:4-14)***
    - The grace and peace was orchestrated by God the Father
    - It was accomplished by Christ the Son
    - It was applied and secured by God the Spirit

*D. Despite Suffering (Romans 5:3-5)*

*E. For Ruling in Righteousness (Rev 5:10; 20:6; 22:5)*

## **Conclusion:**

God promises a special blessing to those who read this material.

What should be the response of everyone who reads and understands these eight verses? What will make them blessed of God?

1. Proclaim it Accurately study it carefully – reader = preacher
2. Heed it submissively and consistently – keep it
3. Prepare For His Coming Expectantly and Confidently
  - By repenting
  - By serving
  - By rejoicing

# Revelation

## Preaching from the Prologue

### **Text: Revelation 1:1- 8**

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. <sup>4</sup> John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. <sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

### **Introduction:**

Many books and dramatic works begin with a prologue. Often, we assume that the main purpose for having a prologue is to serve as a way to introduce what is to come. While it is certainly true that “prologues” do introduce what follows them – that is by no means all that they do and very often, that is not even the primary thing they do.

The purpose and function of a prologue in a book or a drama is to set up the audience/readers for the major events to come by giving them information they need to know in order to make sense of the story that is to come.

Sometimes a prologue will introduce the major players and themes that will be woven together in the plot of the story yet to come. This is in essence what John does here in the prologue that he presents in the first eight verses of Revelation.

In this message we want to look again at this prologue to see at least three major actors and themes that will be playing out the Revelation Drama as John presents it in 22 acts or chapters.

If we miss these important themes and actors, we run the risk of misunderstanding or missing the message of Revelation.

**I. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God Unveiled: 1:1-3, 7-8**

- A. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Revelation
- B. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Revelation
- C. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Revelation
- D. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Revelation
- E. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Revelation

**II. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ Announced: 1:4-6**

- A. His \_\_\_\_\_
- B. His \_\_\_\_\_
- C. His \_\_\_\_\_

**III. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Saints: 1:5-6**

- A. By Grace
- B. In Peace
- C. By Scripture
- D. Through Suffering
- E. For Ruling in Righteousness

## In the Spirit on the Lord's Day

2 Peter 3:10-13

Revelation 1:9

**Text: 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev 1:9**

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup> Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

### **Introduction:**

Mankind has an amazing and even astonishing propensity to forget the lessons of the past, even when most painfully endured, and after the passing of a little time – places himself squarely in the path of that same painful disaster in the future.

### *Illustration:*

On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Hurricane Camille slammed into the Mississippi shore along the Gulf Coast. When Camille came ashore, she brought sustained winds of more than 190 mph. Camille was the strongest hurricane to hit continental USA since 1935. We would not see another like her until the devastating hurricanes of the 2004 season.

Camille ripped through the Mississippi coast line and went inland all the way up through Charlottesville, VA. In her wake was a tangle mess of death and destruction. In one small town, over 100 people lost their lives during the winds and the flooding. For weeks rescuers searched for bodies of those lost in the storm – many were never recovered.

As you can imagine, the cleanup efforts were massive – an astonishing amount of federal aid was necessary to help all those who had lost everything – including their homes. The only thing

more amazing than the amount of federal aid granted to the victims was what some of them did with that aid – some of them used the aid to rebuild their homes in the exact same locations where they had been washed away in the flooding!

Why do men do this? Because even though they were aware of the events of the past – they somehow convinced themselves that they would not come again in the future. While it may be true that many years may pass in relative safety – so many in fact that the danger is all but forgotten – sooner or later the day of danger will come again – and for many of those people that day came this summer!

You say – how foolish! Why would anyone do such a foolish thing?

Answer – Because they stopped believing the danger to them was real. Oh, they still believed in hurricanes – they even believed that they were dangerous and devastating – however, they just stopped believing that the hurricane would ever come for them.

**This is exactly the danger that Peter is addressing in the closing paragraph of his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter – the danger of forgetting the coming of the Day of the Lord.**

This day was promised all throughout the Old Testament and Jesus, Paul, and John reminded the early New Testament Believers that God had not forgotten His promise – and the Day of the Lord would come!

But – over the passing of the years – a group of false teachers came into the church and were ridiculing the idea that such a Day of the Lord would ever come – the idea of the Second Coming was nothing more than a carefully invented story designed to “scare people” into living a certain way. Tragically, many people were being swept away into error by this false teaching – and, consequently, they were living as though there were no such thing as a second coming!

**When you and I stop believing in the Coming of Christ – I mean really believing so that it affects our living (we can believe theoretically – but I mean true heart belief that affects the way we live every day) – we place ourselves in great spiritual danger.**

In ancient times, the tombstones of heathen men and women revealed 3 terrible consequences of not believing in a Divine intervention or a Second coming -- that this life and this world is all there really is –

One commentator noted that these tombstones reveal three horrible consequences of living as though there were no Second Coming.

**A. It leads to Hedonism**

*“I was nothing; I am nothing; so thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry!”*

**B. It leads to Apathy**

*“Once I had existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me.”*

**C. It leads to Despair**

*“What is below? Deep Darkness. But what of the paths upward? All a lie! Then we are lost.”*

**In these four verses Peter stands before us and reminds us that the Day of the Lord is really coming – in spite of all the nay saying of those who ridiculed it – and we need to live in the light of its coming!**

**I. The Reality of that Day – 3:10**

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

This verse teaches us 3 important things relating to the reality of the Coming of the Lord – His Day!

**A. *Its Coming***

Peter wants to make sure we understand two things about the coming of that day:

**1. *It will be Sure***

*But the day of the Lord will come!*

- The verb “will come” is at the front end of the verse – very awkward in English but something like: “WILL COME” – what, Peter? What will come? “WILL COME THE DAY OF THE LORD!
- Contrary to what the false teachers were confidently asserting – “where is He appearing?” – He hasn’t appeared because He isn’t going to

appear! There is no such thing as his coming – what a ridiculous idea that Peter and Paul and the other apostles have taught you! No, as thinking people we know what the world is like and the idea of a 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is really absurd!

- Contrary to all of this – Peter wants us to know that there really will be a coming!
- It is like Peter gets right in the face of his reader and grabs his attention and says – “Look – give me your full attention – I don’t want you to misunderstand or miss this – I know what you have been hearing – but let me assure you with the same kind of authority that I taught you the Gospel of Grace – the Day of the Lord is really going to come!
- It is certain and for sure!

2. ***It will be Sudden***  
*as a thief in the night,*

- Not only would the Lord’s coming be certain – it would also be sudden.
- Imagery here is that of a thief who comes in the night – the idea is when we least expect the thief to come
- Jesus and Paul both used this exact image to teach this truth

**Matthew 24:43 (Luke 12:39)** *"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:2** *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

So – we know that the Day of the Lord – the Coming of Christ is sure/certain in spite of what scoffers and mockers might say – so we need to believe!

We also know from this verse that that Day will come suddenly – like a thief in the night! So – we need to

prepare! We need to live in constant and continual readiness!

But what will that day be like?

## ***B. Its Character***

There are two important clues in the text that tell us what this Day of the Lord will be like and what the world can expect.

### ***1. It is the Day of the Lord -- It is God's Day!***

- All through the Old Testament and in many places in the NT, the bible talks about a specific time in the future where God will intervene in a personal and very direct way in the affairs of this World.
- He has intervened in the past in very specific and massive ways – Sometimes He intervened to judge and punish sin and wickedness – some times He intervened to bless His people and deliver them from their troubles.
- For instance, He intervened in Noah's day – with a flood.
- He intervened in Abraham and Lot's day – with fire falling from heaven consuming the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
- He intervened in Moses' day when Israel was in bondage in Egypt with a mighty deliverance called the Exodus.
- He intervened in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day to judge Jerusalem and the Jews for their sins and rebellion
- He intervened in Mary and Joseph's day in order to deliver His people from their sins by sending a Savior.
  
- Peter – is telling us that God will once again intervene personally and directly into the affairs of men!
- So what will this intervention be like? Will it be for blessing or for burning?

## 2. It is a Day of Fire – it is a day of evaluation and judgment!

- The imagery of fire is clear in these verses
- Fire in the Bible often speaks of testing and evaluating.
- It is used to describe the destruction of things or people that don't pass the test.
- It is also used to describe the preservation and purification of people and things that do pass God's evaluation!

So, Pastor Sam, let me get this straight. You are saying that there is going to come a time in the future – and it could come at any time if I understand you correctly – where God is going to directly intervene in the affairs of this present world. Correct.

And you are saying that when He comes, He is going to evaluate everything and everyone in this present world! Correct. In fact that is exactly what we see at the end of verse 10 -- *both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

The phrase “will be burned up” at the end there is an interesting phrase – if you were hearing Peter speak that phrase in His language what you would hear is this – *“both the earth and the works that are in it will be laid bare – or be exposed”*

In fact, this phrase occurs in some other interesting places where it has the idea of being manifested or being “found out” – the idea here is examined and exposed for what you really are!

*1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found (exposed as or manifested as) faithful.*

*Philippians 3:9 and be found in Him (be manifested or exposed as), not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*

*1 Samuel 26:18* And he said, "Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand (has been exposed or manifested in me)?"

*1 Kings 1:52* Then Solomon said, "If he proves himself a worthy man, not one hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him (exposed or manifested), he shall die."

OK – so in other words, when this Day of the Lord comes – God is going to directly intervene and He will come and evaluate this present world and everyone in it! Right!

So what happens? What will happen to this world? Does it pass God's evaluation? What about the millions of people living in it?

### **C. Its Consequences**

*in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

On that great Day when the Lord returns and personally intervenes in the affairs of men – He will evaluate this world and all that is in it – and this text tells us that things will not go well for the World and those who are loyal to the God of this World!

- The text states that on that Day – God will “Roll up the Heavens” – pass away has the idea of rolling up like an old coat!
- The text also reveals that the fire of God's judgment will literally destroy the basic elements of this world – the “building blocks” – right down to the very atomic structure!
- So, when God comes to evaluate the World and its inhabitants – they will be weighed in the balances and found wanting – and so they will all be destroyed.
- The physical world will be burned up since it is not eternal – but because people have eternal souls – they will be burned but they will not be burned up – they will burn for all of eternity in a place called the Lake of Fire – God's Prison House for the Soul!

- This is perhaps one of the most sobering and serious realities ever presented in the New Testament!

Well, in light of this devastating picture, No wonder the false teachers wanted to reject this truth! But– how are we supposed to react or respond?

## II. Our Reaction to the Day – 3:13

*Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

- ***We are too long for this day – to try to hasten its coming (vs 12)***
- Peter gives us a very surprising – really shocking if you think about it – statement when he tells us we are too long for this Day to come!
- Why? Because Christ has promised us something unbelievable! Unlike those who do not belong to Him, we have an entirely different set of expectations to look forward to – a brand new world!
- The World and those who live for it can only look forward to God’s devastating judgment – but we are not of the world (we are in it but not of it – John 17) have been promised a brand new world!
- Illustration: Exodus – God intervened and it was devastating for the Egyptians but a great blessing for His chosen people! So it will be for us.
- So, what will this brand new world be like?

**A. *A New and Fresh World*** – “new” not in the sense that it is a new and never existed before thing but a fresh and unused thing!

- We are living in a World that has been totally ruined by sin and wickedness. For over 6,000 years the “god of this world” – the robber and thief whose sole goal is to steal and destroy has had this world under his dominion.
- This world is nothing like God intended it to be – under Satan it has existed in spiritual darkness and death
- We suffer disease, disappointment, despair, decay, and ultimately death – we live our lives in a dark and decaying world

- BUT – when He comes – it will all change! This old world will be remade into a brand new and fresh one!

### **B. A Pure and Righteous World!**

- This present world is in the grip of sin! Righteousness is a stranger and alien – and hunted down and persecuted on every hand!
- Everywhere we turn – there are things that grieve and soil us – we can hardly move without encountering the vileness of sin and persecution!
- BUT in that world – righteousness will be at home! God is preparing a world where the righteous will rule and reign!

So – Peter has talked to us about the frightening reality of the Coming of the Day of the Lord – and its horrible consequences for those who have rejected Christ!

And – He has also told us that we are to long for that day and to hasten its coming – because for us, that day will be a day of great blessing and rejoicing – we will get a new and fresh earth in which righteousness and purity will be perfectly at home! So, how do we actually go about doing this? How do we hasten the day?

### **III. Our Responsibilities in view of the Day – 3:11**

*Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,<sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*

- In light of this – since in point of fact, all these things (the world system) will be dissolved – what manner of people is it necessary for you to be
- This is not a question – it is an exclamation – In light of all of this – here is what kind of people it is necessary for you to be!  
*Mark 13:1 Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see **what manner of (what wonderful) stones and what buildings are here!**"*  
*1 John 3:1 Behold **what manner (how great a love) of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God***
- **In light of this day, we are to be a great and marvelous people – a wonderful kind of people. (Marked by 2 things)**

**A. *People who are living in light of His Coming***  
*be in holy conduct and godliness (note plurals)*

1. ***Holy Conduct*** – literally conduct that is set apart from the conduct of everyone else around us!
  - The way we treat one another – should be distinct
  - The way we work and do business should be different
  - The way we handle our families and wives should be different
  - The way we view our time and our money should be different
  - In other words – everything about us should mark us as people who do not belong to this world but to Him! We need to be non-residents!
  - Illust: Tourist in another country – everything about him marks him as a non-resident!
  
2. ***Godliness*** – idea here is living with the sole view of pleasing him
  - Pagans in Peter’s day would give great attention to pleasing their gods – they would go through great extremes to make sure they did not displease them even unintentionally
  - They coined the phrase – “may the gods smile upon you!”
  - We serve the true and living God and in light of His coming – Peter is stating – live right now so that He is smiling!
  - Live to please Him and not yourself!

**B. *People who long to hasten His Coming***

What can we do to hasten his coming? Well, the Bible actually says we can do 3 important things!

1. By Prayer -- “Your Kingdom Come!” (Mt. 6:10)
  
2. By Repentance -- Acts 3:19-20  
*“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*
  
3. By Evangelism – Mt 24:14

*"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

## **Conclusion**

What we really and truly believe in our heart of hearts affects how we really and truly live our lives. What we really believe about the Coming of the Lord will affect how we really and truly live our lives here and now as we look for and work to hasten the coming.

So – how are you really believing? When that Day comes and Jesus welcomes you into the new and fresh world where righteousness is at home – how well will you prepared in this life for that one?

Do you really think that Jesus is just going to overlook all the broken relationships  
Do you really think He is going to overlook all the things you are overlooking?

Do you think He will say, “welcome home, Sam – I have prepared a new world – a brand new and fresh one where righteousness will be the rule and the norm – AND – I have fully paid the penalty of all your unrighteousness – and – I gave you every thing you needed to grow in righteousness when you were on the old earth! I am so glad that you are here and now that you are here – well, bygones will be bygones. Those lies you told and never dealt with – no problem, lets not worry about them. That child support you intentionally failed to pay – well, that’s all in the past now. The fact that you slandered your fellow brother and cheated those you worked with – no big deal.

I know I said a bunch of things about not wanting you as my saved child to do those kinds of things – and I put some things in there about this judgment day – about appearing in front of the bema – but I was really not too serious about that. Now that you are here – lets just not worry about that – what is important is that you are here with me!

NOTE: I understand that our sin penalty and guilt is forever covered – but folks some of us are living as though we have no worry at all about any kind of future accountability!

### **Closing illustration: Shirt and Tie**

Fashion experts – tell me what is acceptable and what is not!

I had a problem today – actually a number of them

Shirt – got some coffee on it!

Tie – got caught in the shredder

Sleeves got caught when I was trying to get the tie out!

Now – I have a choice – I can change or cover

Change is time consuming and troublesome

Covering is easy – I'll just put my coat on and button up! No one will know!

That is where many of us live – we walk around and look great on the outside – but away from here there is no 'holy living' – AND – the God who sees all does not smile because there is no godliness.

Living in the Light of His Coming  
“In the Spirit on the Lord’s Day!”

Texts: Revelation 1:9; 2 Peter 3:10-13

**Revelation 1:9** *I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

**2 Peter 3:10** *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup> Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

I. The Reality of that Day

A. Its \_\_\_\_\_

B. Its \_\_\_\_\_

C. Its \_\_\_\_\_

II. Our Reaction to that Day

A. We are to long for a \_\_\_\_\_ World

B. We are to long for a \_\_\_\_\_

III. Our Responsibilities in View of that Day

A. We are to be people who \_\_\_\_\_ in light of His coming.

B. We are to be people who \_\_\_\_\_ to hasten His coming

## **The Mystery of History** ***Suffering Sovereigns***

Text: Rev 1:9; 12-13, 20

### **Rev 1:9**

*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

### **Rev 1:12-13, 20**

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, . . . <sup>20</sup> "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.*

### **Introduction:**

- Suffering Sovereigns is the ultimate oxymoron! How can such a thing be true in God's plan much less a point for rejoicing?
- Yet – this is precisely the position occupied by multiplied millions of God's people in the Church in her 2000+ year history.
- The word "martyr" comes from a Greek term that means "witness" or "testimony." The verb form means to give witness or to testify to the truth of something.
- Christian statisticians tell us there have been over 70 million martyrs since the founding of Christianity who have "witnessed" or "testified" to the truth of the gospel by giving their lives!
- I want to tell you the story tonight of just one of those martyrs – a man named Polycarp.
- Polycarp was a well known highly respected pastor of the church at Smyrna, a town in Asia Minor. In his youth, he had been a student of the aged Apostle John himself, and had learned the precious doctrines of the faith from the lips of the last living apostle. At the age of 86 he was brought before the Roman governor and asked to deny Christ and swear allegiance to Caesar or be cast to the beasts or burned in the arena. Here is an abridged

version of the story as recounted by the first historian of the Christian church, Eusebius.

*When the hour was come for him to go, conducted him to the city where he was met by the governors who, taking him into their vehicle, said, "What harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar, and to sacrifice, and thus save your life?" He replied, "I shall not do as you advise me." Failing therefore to persuade him, they uttered dreadful language, and thrust him from the car with great vehemence, so that as he descended he sprained his thigh. But not at all moved from his purpose, as if nothing had happened, he eagerly went on, and was conducted to the stadium. As he advanced, the proconsul attempted to persuade him to renounce Christ saying, "Have a regard for your age. Swear by Caesar and recant by saying 'away with those who deny the gods.' If you so swear I will dismiss you. Simply revile Christ." To this, Polycarp responded, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my king that has saved me?" The governor continued to urge him saying, "I have wild beasts at hand and I will cast you to them unless you change your mind." Polycarp responded, "Call them. For we have no reason to repent from the better to the worse." The governor continued his threats, "I will cause you to be burned with fire should you not change your mind. Polycarp's final answer was, "You threaten fire that burns for a moment and is soon extinguished, for you know nothing of the judgment to come, and the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the wicked. But why do you delay? Bring what you wish." Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History Book 4, chapter 15.*

- This has always been the lot of God's "witnesses" – often they have been called by God to testify through suffering and even death.
- The opening vision in Revelation contains a message from the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, that is intended to strengthen and encourage His Flock in the midst of what may at times seem to be overwhelming circumstances!
- Why is this so? Why do God's people suffer so brutally at the hands of those they are trying to reach? There are two primary reasons/causes for any persecution of God's true people in the culture they are called to reach:

- A. ***For their Proclamation of God's Word!***
- B. ***For their Presentation of a Gospel Witness!***

**I. The Reality of our Position: 1:9**

*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

This text reveals three important truths that God wants every believer to know and embrace in order to live in ways that advance the gospel!

- A. ***We are called to Rule in a Coming Kingdom – so don't capitulate and become defiled!***

*Colossians 1:12-13* giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

*1 Thessalonians 2:11-12* as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, <sup>12</sup> that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

*James 2:5* Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

- B. ***We will Suffer in our Present Situation—so don't exasperate and give up!***

*Acts 14:21-22* And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

<sup>NAS</sup> *2 Thessalonians 1:4-5* therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. <sup>5</sup> This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering

- C. ***We are to Endure with Confident Expectation – so don't complain and disqualify yourself!***

*Philippians 1:29* For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

**Romans 5:3** *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;*  
**2 Timothy 2:12** *If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

## II. The Reality of our Purpose: 1:9, 12

*I . . . was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. . . .<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,*

- The 7 lamp-stands here represent the Church – not Israel.
- They are seven separate lamps rather than the 1 lamp with seven branches that is typically used to represent Israel.
- They are specifically identified as such in verse 20.
- The Church is described in this way – as individual lamps in order to focus our attention on the specific function God wants the Church to perform while they are confidently enduring suffering as they wait for the coming of God’s Kingdom – they are to be:

### A. **To Be Voices Proclaiming God’s Word**

*. . . for the word of God*

### B. **To Be Lights Testifying of Christ’s Gospel**

*. . . for the testimony of Jesus Christ*

**Ephesians 5:8-13** *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),<sup>10</sup> finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.<sup>11</sup> And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.<sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.<sup>13</sup> But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.*

**Philippians 2:15** *that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

1. You are light – not just in the light so put off darkness
2. You shine in a dark place – so reprove the darkness

3. You bring others to the light – so let your light shine for others to see your good works and thereby glorify God!

AND – when you do this in the midst of darkness – you will suffer!

### **III. The Reality of Our Preparation: 1:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. <sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup> His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; <sup>16</sup> He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

Note: The Position of the Son of Man – in the midst of the Lampstands. This means He is not distant – He is right with us just like He said (I will never leave you nor forsake you)

- This means He is intimately aware of us – He makes right assessments!
- This means He is personally preparing us – we are in his hands!

#### **A. Perfected by a Perfect Priest: 1:13**

- Note the imagery of His garments – He is dressed in the raiment of a ruling Priest.
- These garments would have been worn by the High Priest and by the King – Jesus is both!
- What is our Priest Perfecting us for? -- To be Ruler/Priests with Him in His Kingdom!

*1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

#### **B. Purified by a Powerful Judge: 1:14-16**

1. He is Undeceivable: 1:14
  - All Wise – head and hair brilliant white
  - All Knowing – eyes like flames of fire!
2. He is Unstoppable: 1:15
  - Feet like bronze heated in the fire

- Feet – judgment; burning brass – unstoppable strength
3. He is Unanswerable: 1:15
    - Voice like many waters – crashing water
    - No one will overpower His voice
    - No one will overturn His decision
  4. He is Unassailable: 1:16
    - His right hand – strength and protection  
*Psalm 138:7* *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me.*  
*Isaiah 41:10* *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'*
  5. He is Invincible: 1:16
    - Sword – the long sword.
    - It will destroy His enemies in the Church (Rev 2:12,16)
    - It will destroy His enemies outside the Church (Rev 19:15,21)
  6. He is Inapproachable: 1:16
    - His face/countenance – was like the sun shining in its full strength.

So – here is what I know so far – I have a Priest that is Perfecting Me and that is great!

B UT – I also have a Judge that is Purifying Me and – who He is makes me afraid!

- His omniscience makes him infallible!
- His omnipotence makes him invincible!
- His omnipresence makes him inescapable!

No wonder John fell down as though he were dead! And if this is what happened to him . . . what are my prospects??

#### **IV. The Reality of Our Prospects: 1:17-18**

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last."<sup>18</sup> "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*

- John saw a true picture of the Lord and fell down as dead – remember, this was not the first time he had seen the Lord in this kind of glory!
- And – the Lord reaches down and comforts John and tells him not to be afraid – John, it is I! And the comfort comes in the 4 titles/descriptions Jesus uses to comfort John – and us!

**A. *He is the Sovereign One – First and Last***

- A title used of God in Is 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12
- First word and the Final word on any matter!

**B. *He is the Eternal One—He who lives***

- All throughout the Bible God is described as the “living God” in contrast to the dead and powerless idols of the pagans!

**C. *He is the Living One – was dead and am alive forevermore***

- Interesting that in the midst of two assertions of life is a statement regarding death – I am the one who is always living . . . and I am also the one who became dead . . . but am now alive for ever more!

**D. *He is the Conquering/Risen One – keys of Hades and Death***

- Because I became dead and then overcame death – I have the authority over death and the grave (keys – authority).

***So Don't fear! Nothing can happen to you that is outside of my loving and powerful control! And, if even you die (like I did) you will not stay dead! You, like me, will conquer death – because I have the keys to life!***

**V. The Reality of Our Practice: 1:19-20**

*"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."<sup>20</sup> "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.*

**A. *Live in Light of His Person . . . things which you have seen***

- Let him perfect you as your priest
- Let him purify you as your judge

**B. *Live in Light of His Presence . . . things which are***

- He knows your works
- He knows your weakness
- He has words to say to you – receive them, respond to them

**C. *Live in Light of His Purpose . . . things which must take place***

- Be a voice (Word) and be a light (Witness)

**Conclusion:**

In 1900 – a rebellion took place on mainland China known as the Boxer Rebellion – when it was all said and done – all the foreign missionaries had been expelled from China’s borders and 189 of them had been martyred for their faith – many of them women and children.

For all practical purposes to the outward eye – it looked as though darkness had triumphed! But – 100 years later on a little island on the South Pacific I met 16 men – some of whose ancestors witnessed this Rebellion and the “testimony” of these martyrs and as a result were saved.

Now their decendants are leaders of house church networks number in the 10’s of thousands! Conservative estimates place the number of Christians in China at over 100 million! There are more professing Christians in China than there are in the USA (some 66 million professing Protestants in the US)

So – in light of Christ’s plan and in light of His powerful presence – will you be willing to be a voice and a light in a dark place!

Even if it costs you in this life – it will never cost you your real life!

# **Learning to Love Again**

## **Recognizing and Repairing Our Relationship with Christ**

*More Lessons from the Church at Ephesus*

**Text: Rev 2:4-5**

*'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.*

**Matthew 24:12** *"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

**Matthew 22:37** *Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (cf Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27)*

### **Introduction:**

- This is the first in a series of letters that Christ is giving to His Church.
- These were letters sent to seven literal churches existing at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. These letters are valuable to us because they reveal how Christ feels about what He sees in His church. They give us a reliable way of evaluating our ministry today.
- Christ tells us what to look for – the points of commendation.
- Christ tells us what to avoid – the points of condemnation and confrontation.
- And – perhaps most importantly – Christ tells us how to fix what He confronts!
  
- These letters tell us what to look for , how to feel about what we see, and how to fix things so that our ministries please the Lord!
  
- When we first looked at this particular correspondence to the Ephesian church, we noted that this ministry was a large, well-established ministry in a very strategic location in Asia Minor. It was a “chief” ministry – and it was doing much for the Lord.
  
- It had been privileged with stellar leadership – founded by Paul, pastored by Timothy, Tychicus, and even the Apostle John!
  
- We saw that there were some important things that the Lord singled out for special commendation on the part of this assembly – namely

their enduring and committed labor in ministry and their faithfulness to biblical truth.

## **I. Their Practice Commended (2:2-3)**

We noted earlier that this church was praised by Christ for two primary things that they were still doing well after 30 years of existence:

### **A. *Their Service for Christ***

- They were laboring tirelessly for the Lord.
- They were working hard – to the point of exhaustion and yet, they were not growing weary of the work. They were persevering in their endurance under a heavy work load for the Lord!

### **B. *Their Stand for Christ***

1. They were unwilling to tolerate willful sin in their midst.
  - they would not “bear” moral iniquity or wicked conduct in their midst (in contrast to what the Corinthian church tolerated).
2. They were unwilling to tolerate false teachers or false spiritual leaders in their midst.
  - they tested those who claimed to be apostles and who were not true spiritually
  - these were apostles in the general sense – people sent out bearing authority from a local church in the first century.
3. They were unwilling to countenance false doctrine or evil deeds in their midst.
  - they hated/rejected the Nicolaitans.
  - This is probably a reference to a group of people who followed Nicholas of Antioch who was one of the 1<sup>st</sup> deacons in Acts 6.
  - Ignatius claims he apostasized from the truth and began to live as a libertine and eventually drew a large following.
  - This may have been a reference to a group who took Paul’s teaching on grace to an extreme and became licentious in their lifestyle.

- Whatever the case – Christ commends this church for rejecting their teaching and practice!
- Today, churches are commended for being gracious and tolerant of groups with divergent doctrine or practice (Catholics, Mormons, etc) – Christ said He hates this!

## II. **Their Problem Confronted (2:4)**

*'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

- After commending them, Christ brings a very serious and frank accusation before them –they had left their first love.
- This is not a gentle, kind rebuke. This is a blunt, strong statement – I have ought against you . . . and I am angry about it!
- This is a very clear and direct statement of divine displeasure.
- What would provoke this from the Lord? Especially in light of everything He has just commended them for?

### A. ***First Love Identified***

- Not talking about a “former” love – first chronologically or an earlier love.
- First here is the word that means foremost or chief. It speaks of priority or of rank rather than of chronological order.
- In other words – Christ has confronted them because He has been displaced as the priority or the chief object of their love!
- They are still serving Him but something has displaced Him as foremost in their love!
- Christ warned that this would happen – He said that the love of many would grow cold. And that had started to happen here.
- What makes the love of someone grow cold?

1. Iniquity – a gradual comfort with the increasing evil of the day.
2. World – Demas departed having loved this present world.

- Now – it had obviously not degenerated to that point because this church is still doing all the deeds they had been doing.
- What had changed was visible only to Christ – and as the object of their love, He knew He had been displaced and their hearts had grown cold to Him.
- So what would this look like in a church and how would we recognize it when it is happening?

### ***B. First Love Illustrated***

- Paul had illustrated what passionate fervent love looks like to this church when he wrote them in Ephesians 5.
- A husband and wife enjoy the deep committed love toward each other in marriage – and all of their deeds of service to each other spring out of that love – and make those deeds seem like a light thing no matter how difficult or burdensome they might be.
- However – 25 years into the marriage – many of those same deeds (or more) may be still happening faithfully – but – the love has cooled and something has taken the place or the priority in their hearts. Where once their mate held that pre-eminent spot – now something else is there.
- They are still faithful to each other morally – they still do the tasks and the deeds they always did for each other (earning a living, cooking, tending the home, etc) – but their “first” or chief love is not their mate!

### **III. Their Perspective Corrected**

- Jesus is confronting this church from a position of perfect knowledge – and what He knows is that they have displaced Him as their chief love!
- When He was on earth – He was asked about “chief things” – and His answer was clear – you shall love the Lord your God above any other person or thing in life!  
*Matthew 22:37* Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (cf Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27)

- In fact, He illustrated this in an unforgettable way in Luke 14:25-33 when explained what would be required of one who wanted to be His disciple.

*Luke 14:25* Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup> "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it -- <sup>29</sup> "lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> "saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'<sup>31</sup> "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> "Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup> "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. <sup>34</sup> " Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup> "It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

- Jesus is insisting on being the priority – having the chief place in the heart of anyone who wanted to be His disciple. In relational terms, Christ applied this in the most impacting way possible:

- A. *He demanded priority over any personal relationship in life.*
- B. *He demanded priority over any personal plan for life.*
- C. *He demanded priority over any pleasure or possession in life.*

And if a person insisted on living intentionally so that his love and loyalty to Christ came behind any of these things – Christ negated his claim to discipleship!

And – this had started to happen to the Ephesians! So, what can a church do to reverse this?

#### **IV. Their Prescription Conscripted (2:5)**

*'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.*

**A. *Start by Remembering!***

- Remember here is more than just a mental exercise – it is acting in light of something that you acknowledge to be true and consciously bring before your thinking!
- So what is it that I am to consciously and intentionally remember? Answer – my former condition!
- I was saved from a horrific sin debt – and my initial response was undiluted, thankful love! In fact, I was so overwhelmed by it that I thought I would never get over it!
- Jesus calls us to remember what we owe Him – and how we felt toward Him when we first received His forgiveness.
- Those people who have been forgiven much – love much! (Story of Simon the Pharisee and Jesus and the woman who washed His feet with her hair in Luke 7:36-50).
- But someone who grew up around forgiveness – and came to Christ early in life is going to at times struggle to understand and appreciate the forgiveness of Christ. They are the ones that most need to cultivate an active remembrance from Scripture of what they really owe and what they really received from Christ when He saved them!

**B. *Respond by Repenting***

- The idea here is to change your mind – to reverse your direction.
- In this context it means to return to your proper priority – to make a conscious decision to return Christ to His proper place in your life by removing whatever has taken His place from that place!

**C. *Return and Repeat the “first Works***

- Go back to what you are doing and now do them out of the heart you used to have for the Lord!
- There was nothing wrong with what they were doing – but it had lost its meaning to the Lord because it was not coming out of a heart that loved Him passionately.
- It is like a man who after one week of marriage stops and gets a flower and brings it home to his wife. It could have been a weed but she would have valued it as much as a

dozen roses because of the heart that it expressed. BUT – after years of passionless living the dozen roses that show up on the day of her anniversary are duly put in a vase and appropriate words are expressed but they are almost pointless to her because the heart of her husband has become dominated with other things that have pushed her out!

- And then something happens that wakes her husband up! And all of a sudden everything changes – and yet nothing changes! He still goes to work and works hard. He is still as faithful as he ever was. BUT – something has been rekindled! When he kisses her on the way out the door – it is different – like it used to be! When he brings home flowers – they go in a vase but they say much more than they used to say – their message is like it was when they first were married!
- This is what Christ wants from this church – and from us!

## V. **Their Promise Confirmed (3:6-7)**

- Christ ends His correspondence to the church by assuring them of two things – chastisement if they refuse His correction and blessing if they repent!
- He starts with a clear statement of the chastisement if they refuse.

### A. ***Chastisement for Refusing to Respond***

- I will remove your candlestick if you don't respond and repent!
- This describes an appropriate response to what they have done. They have displaced and removed Him from His proper place in their hearts and so He will remove them from their current place in His hand.
- The NT has very strong statements about those who willfully and intentionally refuse to love the Lord and to give Him His proper place – in fact, to love something or someone more than the Lord is nothing short of idolatry. And to do so intentionally and willingly is to reveal that He is not your Lord at all!

## ***B. Comfort for Repenting***

- If they will repent and restore Him to the preeminent place in their hearts – His reward will be great! He will grant them to eat of the tree of life in Heaven!
- They will be granted an unbelievable intimacy with God – the last people who ate of that tree were Adam and Eve and they ate of it freely in the cool of the evening in the garden of God where they had daily face-to-face fellowship with God.
- And this is what God promises to all who will respond to His counsel!
- This is unusually wise counsel because it is designed to reveal and expose the true heart condition of a person who claims to love the Lord. The only kind of person who will be interested in this reward is someone who truly has been totally given over to a passionate pursuit of the love of Christ. If someone loves something or someone more – than the promise of intimate fellowship with Christ is really not that appealing to them.
- You mean that’s all I get? Just fellowship with Him in His garden? Well – what else do you want? What were you thinking might be a good reward? And anything other than this answer reveals a heart that had displaced the Lord from His proper place!
- And such a person won’t be in heaven!

## **Conclusion:**

Christ has confronted this church painfully, personally, and very directly.

This church probably is more like Brookside than any of the other churches, although we will see different things in each letter that apply to us.

But – we are a church that is trying to serve the Lord faithfully and we have many people who have been serving and toiling here faithfully for extended periods of time and are willing to keep going!

We are a fellowship that works hard at keeping ourselves from sin and the world – we are concerned about the moral purity of our church and our members.

We are a church that is committed to sound doctrine and to sound practice based on that doctrine – and we are known for this in our community.

But – it is entirely possible that we have within our midst – a growing number of people who are serving hard and standing in the right place but who have displaced the Lord in their heart! They have started to love something else more than they love Him – and their love has started to grow cold.

It is to this kind of a person tonight that this message is directed!

Christ has a very strong and direct statement to make and His Spirit is making it right to your heart!

You need to remember where you were at one time and you need to repent of what you have allowed to happen to your heart – and you need to return as fast as you can to that precious place where Jesus meant more to you than anything or anyone!

You need to run back to the place where you can honestly say with the hymn writer – I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords to me!

## Loveless Living *Ephesus – the Loveless Church*

### **Text: Revelation 2:1-7**

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Revelation 2:1** "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ' These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; <sup>3</sup> "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup> "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

### **Introduction:**

You pass them every day on your way to work – houses that were once homes! Shattered windows—peeling paint—weather beaten shingles—overgrown yards and untrimmed hedges are all that remain of a house that once was a living, vibrant, growing home! A place where the shouts of laughter were once heard—now all that is left is the silence of a discarded, decaying structure. What a sad picture—seen even the decaying structure will disappear as a forgotten memory of days gone by. This happens to cities, to houses, and even to churches!

But – homes do not become houses overnight. And houses do not become ruins quickly – both processes take time and studied neglect!

And often, the process begins silently – for a period of time, life goes on as usual. Things happen on schedule, activity abounds, and yet the seeds of death have already been sown in the soil of the soul of the church. And unless someone recognizes the problem and calls it to the attention of those who can do something about it, the problem will continue to develop until it is too late!

That is precisely the problem that the Head of the Church is calling to the attention of this body of believers in the first of seven letters He wrote to His Church at the end of the first century.

Christ had promised Peter and the Apostles that He would build His church (Matt 16). He detailed the process by which He would build His church in Ephesians 4:7-16). And now, some sixty years later at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, He writes to seven of these churches to give them a personal, intimate, and accurate evaluation.

And what the Head of the Church has to say to this church exposes a danger that is true of every church – and if left unchecked – it will lead that church right down the path of spiritual demise!

NOTE: Discovery of Ephesus

It happened on the last day of 1869 – a weary archeologist named J. Turtle Wood had been digging along the banks of a weed-choked pond of stagnant water in eastern Turkey for over 6 years. Finally, on the last day of 1869 he uncovered the ruins of what had once been the grandest, largest, richest city in all of ancient Asia. Ephesus was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest city in the Roman empire with almost 250,000 inhabitants. Located by a harbor and a trade route this city teemed with life. The excited sounds of merchants bartering and the tinkle of silver were daily sounds along her streets. Within her walls was housed a massive temple of exquisite beauty – larger and wider than a football field and taller than a six story building, the temple of Diana was constructed of the finest marble in the ancient world. A large staircase carved from a single trunk of cedar was surrounded by exquisite and rare tapestries dyed with rare and expensive purple dye. It stood as the pride of ancient Ephesus and was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world!

However, in the middle of this city was something far more precious and magnificent – within the city existed a glorious temple made up of living stones that whose height and breadth and depth and width was unimaginable and immeasurable (Eph 3:18).

And yet, as the Head of the Church evaluated her, He saw and exposed the seeds that, if left to grow, would eventually prove to be her destruction.

BUT – we are getting a bit ahead of ourselves. This letter actually stands at the head of a group of seven letters that John records for his readers – these letters are all from Christ and are directed to the leaders of these churches.

These churches were seven real churches existing at the end of the first century together, they present a portrait of what is true about the Church at large during any particular period of time or era of her existence.

## **I. The Purpose/Plan for the Letters**

### **A. *The Plan of the Letters***

- Jesus promised to build His church in Matt 16.
- Jesus explained how He intends to build the church in Ephesians 4.
- Now – at the end of the first century, after the passing of the first generation of church leaders – He provides a detailed, authoritative, accurate evaluation of His church.
- But why does He do this?

### **B. *The Purpose of the Letters***

- To help us see and know exactly what He sees and knows to be the true condition of each church.
- To help us understand how He evaluates His church – what is important to Him and what does He focus on in making His evaluation
- To help us understand how He feels about these things when they are in His church – so that we will learn how to evaluate and respond when we see these things in churches today.
- Application: Most people today look at the wrong things when making choices about what church they will attend. Even worse, they tend to overlook things that God has given very clear statements about in order to remain in a church. These letters tell us that these considerations are important and that our choices must line up with His evaluation.

## **II. The Person of Christ behind the Letters**

### **A. *Generally Observed***

- He is writing as the Head of the Church – and as One who occupies this position – He has the right to speak this way. The question is whether or not the members and leaders of His church will heed what He calls to their attention.

- He is writing as One who has been described as priest and king – John’s vision in chapter 1 makes this exceedingly clear. In most of the letters (with the exception of Laodicea) some particular quality stressed in the opening vision will be brought forward in the opening comments of the letter.

**B. Specifically Stated (for all the letters)**

**1. *He holds the seven stars in His right hand -- authority.***

- This is probably a reference to the leadership of each of the churches and the fact that they are in His right hand would seem to point out Christ’s authority and rule over them.
- Whatever leadership and authority they have – they have because they are in His right hand (a symbol of power, strength, and authority).
- So, however difficult His words might be – He has the right to say them and the authority to demand obedience and corrective action from those who claim to belong to Him!

**2. *He walks among the seven golden lampstands -- accuracy.***

- This calls attention to His intimate position in His church. He is in their midst and He is fully and comprehensively aware of what is going on in each ministry.
- In each letter He states – “I know your works” – and this title explains why and how.
- He not only has the authority to make these statements – whatever He states about each church will be fully, comprehensively, and at times painfully accurate!

**III. The Praise: Commendation (2:2-3)**

*"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; <sup>3</sup> "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

Outwardly, the Lord's own testimony of this church would confirm that in many ways it was an active, vibrant, careful ministry that was hard at work for Christ.

**A. *Praise for Sacrificial Service: I know your deeds and your labor.***

- “Works” – literally deed or act – that which occupies you. Your business, undertaking, or energetic labor.
- This was a working church – and Jesus commends them for their diligent labor.
- They were not a lazy assembly nor were they hiding behind the walls of the church and basking in the “blessings” of the gospel. They were an active and aggressive group of believers who were hard at work in the Gospel.
- Vance Havner – Many believers are very occupied with the thought of His coming but they are not occupying till He comes. I know some that are always studying the meaning of the 4<sup>th</sup> toe of the right foot of some beast in prophecy who have never used either foot to go and bring one man to the feet of Christ!
- “labor” is actually a further description of their works – it is costly and exhausting labor.
- They were not just working – they were hard at work!
- It takes a large group of dedicated people working and laboring faithfully over long periods of time to advance the mission of the church in a strategic place! This is even more true today – we are to exhaust ourselves in labor for the mission of the church!

**B. *Praise for Steadfastness: your patience!***

- “Patience” here means endurance. It is a term that points to a perseverance or an endurance that occurs under pressure or extreme difficulty.
- It carries the idea here of continuing to serve even when a person is tired and has been doing so for a long period of time.
- It also has to do with the idea of doing so under opposition.
- It is one thing to serve the Lord and spread the gospel when there is no opposition – it is another thing entirely

to do so year after year in the face of strong opposition and direct persecution.

**C. *Praise for Spiritual Discernment (Separation) : and that you cannot endure evil men . . . and you found them to be false. (also v. 6)***

- We know from other places in the NT that false apostles were circulating among the churches (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11). In fact, the false teachers that Peter and Jude had predicted and warned against were now a real danger to the churches in these two chapters.
- But – this church was on guard. They guarded the gospel. They guarded the truth. They knew how to recognize false teachers and refute their error. And – they were doing it!
- They were doctrinally sound and were committed to remain so!

**D. *Praise for Steadfast Faithfulness : have persevered and endured and not grown weary!***

- Christ loved this church and praised them for not giving up when they suffered or when they were exhausted and had no strength!
- They were weary and exhausted in the work – but not of the work!

- **NOTE: Sometimes in our haste to get to the problem the Lord exposed about this church – we downplay the things the Lord praised in this church. And He did praise them specifically for these things.**
- And these things are the things that do please Him in every church. He is particularly happy with their efforts to stand for truth against error and to stay away from those who are disobedient teachers of such truth (Nicolaitans).
- This should be the testimony of every church!

#### **IV. The Problem: Condemnation (2:4)**

*"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

**A. *Declared – I have this against you . . .***

- Externally this church was a model church – a pastor's dream come true! From all outward appearance this

church looked like a pure clean church that could stand for ever!

- For all its outward appearance as a diligent, obedient church – the Lord revealed something that was of very serious concern to him.
- When He looked into the heart of this church that was working and sacrificing and discerning – He saw something crucial missing.
- And He went public with His concern – right to the leadership of the church. You have left your first love!

**B. *Described – You have left your first love.***

- Note – they didn't lose their first love – they left it.
- The love they have left is described as “first” but the idea is really “chief.” The term “first” is really referring to something that is first in rank or priority! And they had departed from this!
- 30 years earlier Paul had described the relationship between Christ and His Church with the metaphor of marriage – the love in their marriage had grown cold. They were still doing the service but the love had been displaced!
- This can probably be explained in that a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation had come up into the church. A generation who knew all the right things and who did all the right things but were missing something that was there among the first generation – a passionate, fervency for the one they were serving!
- They were in love with obedience and service and discernment – but they had relationally grown cold toward the Savior!
- They left their chief passion for God – then for their leaders – and eventually for one another!
- Paul warned that the love of some would grow cold – and theirs had! This is particularly a problem for us the longer we have been believers and the longer we have been hard at work for the Lord!

**C. *Defined – why do people leave their first love?***

- What had happened to this church?
- 30 years earlier Paul had prayed a very specific prayer for this assembly – that they, being rooted and grounded

in love, would know (experience) the love of God which passes understanding (Ephesians 4:14-21).

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,<sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,<sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,<sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height --<sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,<sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

- At the front of that prayer, Paul prays that they would be equipped and strengthened in their inner man by the Spirit so that Christ could dwell in their hearts by faith. The idea was that Christ would make a home in their souls by fitting their lives to His pleasure – and the end result would be that these believers would be rooted and grounded in love toward another and they would experience in their own lives the indescribable love of Christ.
- Something had aborted this process from taking place in the new generation of Ephesian believers!
- We can teach people to look right, talk right, live right, and even defend the right – without teaching them all of this on the foundation Paul did – the love of Christ that produces a love for Christ! Our goal should not just be to be obedient to Christ! Our goal should be to produce a love for Christ that displays itself in obedience – but the goal is love for Him!
- They were serving Christ and doing the right things but – He was not their chief love! Somehow, something had taken His place in their hearts!

#### **D. The Danger of a Loveless Christianity**

- Believers are warned that this possibility of falling away from loving Christ is a real danger to be guarded against!

- The love of many will wax cold – because of persecution and lawlessness abounding (Mt 24.9-13)
- Many will love the world and it will draw them away from loving Christ (Demas in 2 Tim 4.10)
- They had not obeyed Paul’s instruction to work hard to preserve the unity in the bond of peace! (Ephesians 4:1-3)
- And as a result – they were not walking worthy of their calling and Christ was about to take away their “place” in His hand.
- Part of what may have been happening here frankly, was that those who had been so fervent in their passion for Christ who had been the first converts in Ephesus had labored and guarded out of their passionate and fervent love for Christ Who had saved them.
- Now, a new generation was in place – and while they were still doing the “works” and doing them well – they were not doing them out of the same heart and fervent love for Christ and therefore, it would only be a matter of time before they stopped doing the works and guarding the doctrinal purity of the church.

**V. The Prescription: Counsel (2:5)**

*"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.*

The Lord gave them a sobering warning – if you don’t respond and correct this, I will remove your lampstand – your place as My church in your city.

**A. Remember – from where you have fallen**

- Remember here is more than just activating your memory of something – it is the idea of acting in a certain way based on a truth that is being intentionally brought forward for reflection.
- Remember what was going on at the first when you started out as a church – and go back to that place spiritually.

**B. Repent**

- The idea here is to change your thinking in such a way that it results in a change of action.

- The problem isn't what they are doing – in fact, they are praised for their deeds. The problem is the missing ingredient – love.
- Another way of saying it would be to observe that the problem isn't so much in what they were doing but in what was missing from the works. And what was missing was a deep, passionate, personal fervency for Christ!
- And – Christ is demanding that this change! They had to address this problem quickly and decisively.

**C. Repeat**

- They were to go back to the things they were doing – and for which Christ has praised them – but they were to do them out of a deep and passionate love for Christ that would root them and ground them as an unmovable and unshakeable church at Ephesus.
- And the evidence of this would be their passionate and fervent love for each other.

**VI. The Promise: Comfort (2:7)**

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." "*

- The person who “overcomes” -- idea here is to be victorious. To the one that deals with this instruction by heeding it and responding to it – to that person, Christ promises a personal share in the blessings of His eternal kingdom.
- This is probably more than just a cryptic reference to eternal life – it probably has reference to the blessings of divine fellowship and intimacy with God.
- Adam and Eve had an unbelievable intimate fellowship with God in the garden before the Fall.
- To a person who cultivates a life of passionate devotion to God – God will give them the object of their desire – an unusual fervent and intimate fellowship with Himself!

**Conclusion:**

We all know what it is to live and minister for the Lord in the midst of a busy and hectic life.

But – for a church to move forward and to be effective for Christ in a strategic place, it demands certain things of its membership.

It demands that those members devoted themselves to persevering in tireless service to Christ with all of their strength – and to stay at the task!

It demands that the leadership of such a ministry be committed to aggressively standing for righteousness and refusing to tolerate in their midst those who are committed to evil and sinful living.

It demands that the church aggressively and insistently “test” and expose those whose doctrines and deeds are contrary to that of Scripture.

And – yet, in all of this – it demands that the church be committed to developing and cultivating and passing on an atmosphere of passionate, fervent love for Christ in the lives of her membership.

May that be true of us!

Ultimately – we will endure and we will persevere at these things only when we do so out of a genuine, heartfelt love for our Savior!

**BUT** – be warned – a lack of genuine love for the Savior is a mark of unbelief! It is a mark of a lost person who may be very religious and determined to do many things for the church – but when a person doesn’t love Christ – they are not His!

## **Reaping the Harvest from Suffering for Christ** *The Letter to the Church at Smyrna*

Text: Rev 2:8-11

*" And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ' These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: <sup>9</sup> "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '*

*1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.*

### **Introduction:**

- There has been no greater question asked in the heart and mind of true believers throughout the history of the church than the question as to why God permits His righteous children to suffer.
- This question goes as far back as the book of Job in the Old Testament – probably written about events that occurred during the time of Abraham and the Patriarchs.
- The Song-Leader, Asaph, raised this question in the 73<sup>rd</sup> psalm – why do the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous suffer?
- ***Suffering has stalked the church from the beginning of her existence!***
  - A. Christ suffered so that we could live – 1 Peter 2:21-24  
*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: <sup>22</sup> "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; <sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.*
  - B. Early Apostles rejoiced at joining in suffering as did Christ – Col. 1.24  
*Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,*

The point is not that Christ did not suffer enough and we need to add to His work – but rather that the suffering of Christ did not end all suffering. There was still more suffering to come and when we suffer – we are in the same glorious category of Christ!

- C. Early Christians counted it an honor and a cause for rejoicing to suffer for Christ! Acts 5:41

*Acts 5:41* So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

- D. Suffering was an evidence of godly living in the midst of a pagan culture –

**2 Tim 3:12** Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Bottom line – the early Church had a far different approach to suffering than we do today as the Church of Christ!

1. ***Suffering was a reality for them – a way of life!***
2. ***Suffering was a reason for genuine rejoicing!***

How different is our approach to suffering as modern-day believers:

- We despise suffering
- We are willing to compromise to avoid it
- We complain in the midst of it
- We grow angry and bitter in it
- We distance ourselves from God and His cause because of it

And – our suffering is hardly the kind of suffering that this early church suffered and that the church of God has suffered around the world throughout her history – even up to today.

- We complain that we are suffering because:
- We have a physical ailment that results in aches and pains
- We struggle in a difficult marriage
- We can't overcome a sin pattern
- We are suffering the consequences of sin that touch us
- We don't have what we think we should have (supposed poverty)

However, the NT assures us that if we live as we should – then there will come into our lives individually and our life as a church – seasons of suffering.

One writer observed: *“Why should I tremble at the plough of my Lord that maketh deep furrows in my soul? I know that He is no idle farmer – He purposeth a crop!”*

What do we do to reap the rich spiritual harvest that comes from the plough of God in planting the seed of suffering in our lives?

Part of the answer to that question comes in the spiritual exhortation and encouragement given by the Lord to a small band of believers who were being brutally persecuted in the city of Smyrna.

- Smyrna was a prestigious city – very ancient, very famous. Around probably 1000 years before Christ.
- It was not just an ancient city – it was deeply religious. There were temples to many gods in the city precincts and the inhabitants were expected to live without offending any of them!
  - Temple of Cybelle – mother god / Temple of Apollo – sun god
  - Temple of Askelpios – healing god / Temple of Aphrodite – fertility / Temple to Zeus – Chief God
- In addition – Smyrna had a long and deep relationship to Rome – Cicero, the great Roman Orator/Senator described Smyrna as *“The city of our most faithful and ancient allies.”* It was one of the most important centers of emperor worship in Asia Minor.
- They were given the honor of building the only temple to the emperor Tiberius in Asia during his lifetime – “Caesar is Lord” was a very important rite in Smyrna.
- Only one group of people were given an exemption from the rituals and responsibilities associated with emperor worship – the Jews.
- For a good period of time, early Christians were viewed as a branch of Judaism and therefore granted by Rome the same political and religious exemptions as the Jewish population in their cities.
- But – the Jewish leaders hated the Christians and began intentionally calling attention to the fact that since they were not part of Judaism, they did not have the same exemptions and therefore should suffer the penalties that the Romans enforced on everyone else who refused to bow to Caesar who was not a Jew. Smyrna was a hard place to live for Christ!

- Polycarp – eventually was martyred and Jews brought the wood!
- To this persecuted and afflicted Church – Christ gives 3 things to help them endure as they suffer for His Name!

## I. **God's Assurance to A Suffering Church (2:8-9)**

*And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ' These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: <sup>9</sup> "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

### A. **Assurance Through His Names/Titles**

- Names in biblical times were designed to communicate something about the character or nature of the bearer – by using these names God is reminding the persecuted believers at Smyrna to consider the truth about His Character and rest confidently on that knowledge no matter how difficult their circumstances were or would become (note – there is more suffering coming their way!)
  - So what do His names/titles reveal about His character that is an encouragement to those who suffer for His name?
1. He is a Sovereign Lord/Master -- *I am the First and the Last*
    - I am on the throne of Heaven
    - I am in control over all things – including suffering. This did not catch me by surprise nor is it out of my control!
    - This is part of my plan for your life to bring me glory by advancing my Name!
  2. He is a Sympathetic Lord/Master – *I am the One Who was dead and came to life.*
    - He not only allows our suffering – He joined us in suffering! He suffered as much or more as any believer on earth will ever suffer!
    - He knows what it is like to be reviled, rejected, persecuted, and even killed!
    - Yet – He is alive in spite of all of this! He went through the worst suffering Satan could throw at Him and He came forth victoriously!

- One of the strongest assurances we have in times of suffering is the nature of our Savior – He is sovereign over all things that are happening around us, inside us, and to us – and He has endured all of them and more and triumphed! So will we!

***B. Assurance Through His Knowledge: (H knows 3 things)***

- Know here is not merely to be aware of or to be informed about – but rather to have perfect, full, experiential knowledge of something!
  - Someone who never has had cancer saying, “I know what you are going through” – maybe you know it technically or even clinically (as a doctor) but only one who has walked that path can say it convincingly and experientially!
  - So what are the three things He knows about suffering believers?
1. I know your intense Pressure and Deep Poverty
    - I know your works – what works?
    - The work of tribulation and extreme poverty!
    - Tribulation – crushing pressure that is constant
    - Poverty – not just barely able to scrape by – but the poverty of someone who had exhausted all of his resources – beggar!
    - For my sake you have labored in the face of intense and crushing affliction and in spite of the loss of all material resources – there was something more important to them than earning a living – it was being a witness for Christ in Smyrna!
    - It would have been much easier for them in other parts of the Empire in other cities more conducive to the gospel – but God placed them in Smyrna and in Smyrna many of them were willing to live . . . unto death!

2. I know your true Position in Christ – Rich
  - Their willingness to suffer tribulation and endure poverty revealed their true position in Christ – they were wealthy in every way that really counted!
  - What will it profit a man to gain the world and lose His soul?
  - What will a man gain if He wins the favor and affection of His Savior?
  - Jesus promised to recompense 100-fold anyone who suffered the loss of houses, lands, family, and even life for His sake!
  
3. I know your fierce Persecution
  - False accusations and fierce speech coming from Jews
  - People who claimed to worship the same God – Jehovah
  - BUT – because of they hated Christ, they hated Christians and were willing to betray them and turn them over to pagan persecutors!
  - They were a Synagogue – but not of God! One of Satan doing Satan’s work! Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter into my Kingdom! (remember, this is about God getting His Church ready to enter the kingdom!)

## II. God’s Instruction to a Suffering Church (2:10)

*"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

- A. ***Deal with Your Fear -- “do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer”***
  - Literally – stop being afraid!
  - You look at the circumstance of life that are coming upon you and that threaten to crush you and the natural response is to grow afraid – “stop fearing the future that is coming upon you!”
  - And in order to help them stop fearing Christ reveals some important facts about their approaching suffering:

1. Its Source is Satan – and God controls him!
2. Its nature is Temporal – ten days
3. Its limitations are physical – tribulation, prison, death!
4. Its purpose is testing – that you may be “tested”
  - Testing is something God allows to happen to you in order that others may see what He has done or is doing in your life!
  - Testing is God’s way of exposing the glorious work that He has done in transforming you into His dear Child!
  - How you respond to testing is a revelation of your true nature and where you are in the process of God conforming you to Christ!
  - Many say, I want to be like Jesus! God answers by sending testing to make them so!

**B. *Demonstrate Your Faithfulness – Be faithful unto death***

- In those days prison was not how the Romans punished – prison was the place you were sent to wait to be either exhorted and vindicated or condemned and executed!
- Many of these believers who were cast into prison were going to suffer martyrdom for Christ!
- In the face of this incredible future – Christ exhorts them to be loyal! To be faithful to His cause and to His Name no matter what it might cost!
- He was willing to suffer death that we might live for ever . . . are you willing to die in this life that His name might be glorified and His cause advanced in this life?

**III. God’s Promise to a Suffering Church (2:11)**

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*

**A. *Christ Promises them Comfort – “I will give you the crown of life!”***

- Crown – a victor’s wreath – a trophy or reward
- Point – I have not forgotten what you are enduring! I keep accurate books and you can be assured that I will not forget! I will reward you richly in the life that matters for your willingness to suffer for me in this little life on earth!

**B. *Christ Promises them Conquest – “He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death!”***

- Death is something that will happen to every man born on earth!
- But this death is not the one that matters – it is only the first death or the separation of our spirit from our body (James 2.26)
- HOWEVER – There is another death coming and this one is the one that really matters – this is the separation of the spirit/soul of a man from God!
- This first death is one we all face but it only lasts for a little while – and it has no power to hurt you in the long run!
- The second death lasts forever – and everyone who goes through that death will suffer eternally!
- And – if you are faithful and loyal to me even if it means your death on this earth – you will never experience the 2<sup>nd</sup> death – that death will never hurt you like it will your persecutors!

**Conclusion: Harvesting the Crop of Suffering!**

*What will help me not to tremble when God's plough cuts deep furrows into my life and I experience suffering as a consequence?*

1. **More important than reasons and explanations from God is a personal relationship with God!**
  - We want to know why God is doing this or that or allowing this or that to happen to us.
  - Or – we want to know when God is going to relieve us from the pain and pressure of our suffering.
  - BUT – God is wanting us to know Him and to love Him more than we love even our lives!
  - POINT: Most of us love ourselves, we love the world – and claim to love God with a token love.
2. **Resist a cut and dried theology that reduces the ways of God to a formula designed to keep life safe!**
  - An apple a day theology – read your bible, pray every day and everything will be OK! It won't!
3. **Remember who owns you and constantly remind yourself of His ownership.**
  - If you own you – suffering will frustrate you and enrage you because it thwarts your plans!

- If He owns you – then if He chooses suffering it must be for a reason even if He never explains it to you!

**4. Suffering Leads to Glory – If we follow the Path God lays before us!**

- He is not unjust to forget our faithfulness
- He is not limited in His ability to reward our faithfulness

*Suffering is a way for each of us to demonstrate who we really and truly love!*

- Are you willing to suffer reproach for His name?
- Are you willing to suffer revilement for His name?
- Are you willing to deny your flesh for His name?

# Conquering Compromise

## *Christ's Letter to His Church at Pergamum*

### Revelation Series

**Text: Rev 2.12-17**

*" And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ' These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup> "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."*

### Introduction

- Revelation 2 -3 contains the most comprehensive description of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church anywhere in the New Testament as seen from the perspective of her Head – Jesus Christ!
- This portion of God's word reveals in very direct and intimate terms exactly how God feels about what He sees to be true about His Church – and this information informs us and helps us to evaluate our own church in order to bring it into line with God's divine expectations!
- We tend to look at the church through a very different lens than the one God uses to evaluate whether or not one of His Churches is pleasing to Him – and at the end of the day – pleasing Him is the only thing that counts!
- We tend to do things and change things on the basis of who it pleases – and this works both ways! But these 7 passages remind us that we must not shape our thinking and our ministry on the opinions of the worshippers – but on the basis of whether or not it pleases our Head – Christ.

- And to help us – He has told us the things that please and displease Him in His church!
- So far, here is what we have learned from the two letters from Christ that we have already examined.
- We learned from His letter to *Ephesus* that God is not pleased merely by our commitment to orthodoxy in doctrine and in practice if that right doctrine and right practice is not wrapped up in a passionate and personal love for Him! *Ephesus reminds us of the danger of displeasing God by failing to love Him passionately!*
- We learned from His letter to *Smyrna* that He is pleased by the faithfulness of His people in the midst of suffering! One of the primary ways He has chose to advance the gospel in the world is through allowing His church to pass through the fire of suffering – and when we remain passionately, lovingly, faithful in the midst of the fiercest part of the fire – it please Him immensely! *Smyrna reminds us of our need to remain fervent and faithful in the fire of suffering!*
- Which brings us now to the third letter from Christ – this one to the church dwelling in the very heart of pagan darkness in the city of Pergamum.
- *Let's look quickly at three introductory matters that will help us rightly evaluate and apply what Christ had to say to them and by extension, to us!*

### **The City:**

- Pergamum was 70 miles North of Smyrna and about 15 miles inland.
- It was one of the more famous and prestigious cities in Asia Minor – in John's day, it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia.
- It has a long history of wealth and prestige – and was ideally situated for commerce, politics, and military ventures.
- Pergamum was the site of an immense library numbering some 200,000 volumes rivaled only by Athens and Alexandria in that part of the world.

- It housed the famous temple of Zeus with the largest statue of Zeus known in the world at that time – one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient world.
- And perhaps most importantly – it was the center of Emperor worship in that part of the world.
- Like Smyrna – it had been given the privilege of having a temple built to a living emperor when in A.D. 29 Augustus allowed a temple to be built and dedicated to his honor and worship.
- ***It was therefore one of the most strategic places for the gospel and yet at the same time one of the hardest places in the world of that day for the church to exist and maintain a faithful testimony to Christ and His truth!***

### **The Church:**

- We know very little about the founding or the history of this church other than there was a group of believers that God had called out of this pagan city and He had established them to be a beach-head for truth in the very center of one of Satan's most important strong-holds for darkness.
- These believers were living in the midst of the most idolatrous and immoral pagan culture – and they were willing to pay the price for standing for Christ in the midst of this moral and spiritual darkness.
- And – this pagan culture was not passive – it was aggressively acting against them to the point that one of their number – Antipas had already paid for his faithfulness to Christ with his own life as a martyr.
- Clearly – this was a church that was doing a great job standing for Christ against the external enemies that threatened them.
- BUT – they were not doing so well against another, more subtle enemy – Satan had infiltrated the church with people who were living lives that contradicted the truth of the Gospel – and this church was willfully tolerating those people!
- If this continued, Christ knew that it would prove to be the undoing of this great and strategic truth!
- Churches like this are not initially destroyed by false doctrine – they are more often destroyed by a toleration of false living by those in their midst who believe better than they behave!
- And if a church doesn't address the issue of false living – sooner or later, the door is opened to false doctrine!
- And so Christ comes both to commend and to cleanse this church.

**The Christ-Title: “He who has the sharp two-edged sword”**

- This speaks of Christ’s authority over His church to say what He will say.
- This speaks of Christ’s ability to evaluate His Church accurately.
- This speaks of Christ’s aptitude to execute righteous judgment on those in His church who ***propagate error, promote idolatry, practice immorality, and permit a disregarding of obeying the demands of sound doctrine.***

**I. Divine Approval (vv 12-13)**

*" And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ' These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

The Lord is pictured as having a sharp two-edged sword ready to evaluate His church. And there is much there which pleases Him about these believers living for Him in the midst of a pagan culture.

He assures them that He is fully aware of their works – that they live/dwell in a difficult place and are remaining loyal to His name!

**A. I Know Your Position: “and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.”**

- Christ assures them that He is fully aware of the difficult position to which He has appointed them – they are there representing Him and advancing His gospel in a very difficult place in the Roman empire.
- Dwell – permanent residence
- Satan’s Throne – the seat of Satan’s power in this part of the world. Here it is probably a reference to the Emperor Cult that was centered at Pergamum. In Smyrna the Synagogue of Satan referred to the Jews who were persecuting Christians there – here Satan’s throne is probably a reference to the fact that persecution is coming directly from the Emperor and his representatives.
- These believers were living for Christ in a city that was:
  1. Politically Correct –
    - Emperor worship was practiced rigorously here.

## 2. Religiously Perverted

- Along with emperor worship was the worship of many other gods and goddesses – Zeus, Askleios – and as a result, idolatry of every kind was rampant!
- Christians who refused to recognize the other gods were actually called “atheists” here!

## 3. Morally Depraved

- Along with idolatry was rampant immorality.
- In the midst of this dark and pagan place – God had established a beacon of light -- in the heart of this citadel of Satan God had established a beach-head for truth! The Church at Pergamum!
- And – His eye was on them – He knew their works!

### ***B. I Know Your Practice: “And you hold fast to My Name and did not deny My faith”***

- When God evaluated this band of believers living for Him in the midst of a hard place – He found something that pleased Him!
- How do we please Christ when we find ourselves under similar conditions – living in the midst of pagan depravity and facing the ruthless and relentless pressure to compromise to the ideals and moral practices common to such a culture?

1. You hold fast to Christ’s Name in the midst of tribulation
2. You remain true to Christian Truth in the midst of temptation

- And – you do this fearlessly – with out shame!
- And – you do this consistently – all the time under the most hostile of circumstances
- And – you do this committedly – even if it costs your life – and it will!

***But – in spite of the wonderful approval God gave to this church – there was a danger that He spotted in their midst – and in light of this danger, He gives them a direct admonition!***

## II. **Direct Admonition (vv 14-15)**

<sup>14</sup> "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

- They had been vigilant in keeping pure doctrine and maintaining their commitment to Christ in the face of strong pressure externally – but – they had allowed something to come inside the church that would eventually destroy them if they continued to tolerate it in their midst!
- There was in the midst of their commitment to sound doctrine a lax attitude toward sound living!
- In other words – they believed better than they behaved!
- The real problem was not what they were teaching – their doctrine was sound and their faithfulness to Christ's Truth was commended. Their problem was not what they were teaching – but what they were tolerating!
- And what they were tolerating were people who were “grasping or holding” to two very bad teachings – the teaching of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans!
- What were these teachings and how were they manifesting themselves among this church?

### A. *A licentious lifestyle*

1. Idolatry – the error of Balaam
2. Immorality – the error of the Nicolaitans

And this was being justified on some very deceptive grounds:

### B. *A loose approach to the application of Scripture*

- To justify their liberty and license they were appealing to a portion of the truth!
- In other words, they were justifying a lifestyle and actions on the basis of a portion of the truth that would be

actually prohibited by a proper understanding of the whole truth!

Illustration: Corinth and the eating of meat at idol temples (1 Cor 8)

- ***And, when the Head of the Church evaluated them – He not only called this to their attention by admonishing them – He issued a strong warning in which He directs them to repent!***

### **III. Strong Appeal (vv 16-17)**

<sup>16</sup> *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.* <sup>17</sup> *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."*

#### **A. The Spiritual Requirement – Repent!**

Christ is issuing a strong directive – do it and do it right now!

1. Warning – I will come quickly
  - Idea here is suddenly and unexpectedly
  - I am coming to wage war against my enemies!
  - I am coming to expose error and reveal sin!
  - I am coming to carry out a righteous judgment!
2. Wrath – I will punish severely
  - When we persist in living like God’s enemies or when we tolerate in our midst those who do – then God is not going to give a blind eye to this and He will come and purify us with His severity!

#### **B. The Spiritual Reward – “I will give. . .”**

1. Hidden Manna -- I will give strength and sustenance in the midst of this hard place!
2. White Stone -- I will give a new character that is pure and permanent!

3. New Name – this speaks of intimacy with God – only you and God will know this name!

- There are messianic and millennial implications to all three of these images!
- If you are faithful to me in this life in the midst of a pagan culture – and if you remain pure and holy by refusing to tolerate sin and the things I hate in your midst – then I will give you a sure and secure place in my kingdom!

**Conclusion: Are you Conquering Compromise or is Compromise slowly and subtly conquering you?**

- The real lesson of Pergamum for us today is this – it is not what we teach or believe that will ultimately destroy us – but what we tolerate in our lives and in our midst!
- The danger at Pergamum was their willingness to tolerate and give Christian fellowship to those who believed and taught that salvation gave a person a license to indulge in the perverse idolatry and immoral living on the surrounding pagan culture!
- *The church of Jesus Christ must not tolerate within her borders those who lower the standard of truth's requirements! This is not a question of holding the truth. The church at Pergamum was orthodox. It is a question rather of the right application of truth. The error of these men is one that in subtle form, threatens all churches even until this hour! It is that if a man's creed be right, his conduct does not so much matter. [But] truth never excuses sin! The test of doctrine is purity of conduct and character! (Morgan, p. 106-107)*
- **Lessons for Life:**
  1. Compromise never comes quickly  
*Not a headlong rush – a second glance, a look back, then a first touch, then a fatal embrace!*
  2. Compromise is always a departure in conduct from the application of sound doctrine!

3. Compromise may start in poor conduct but it always ends in the perversion of truth!

**Either we will adjust our lifestyle to the truth – or we will end up adjusting the truth to fit our lifestyle!**

## **Teaching from Thyatira** **What God Looks for In a Church**

### **Texts:**

**Revelation 2:18-29** "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ' These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: <sup>19</sup> "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. <sup>20</sup> "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. <sup>22</sup> "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup> "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. <sup>25</sup> "But hold fast what you have till I come. <sup>26</sup> "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -- <sup>27</sup> 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' -- as I also have received from My Father; <sup>28</sup> "and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

**1 Corinthians 4:2** Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

**Luke 16:10-11** "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. <sup>11</sup> "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

**Luke 19:17** "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'

### **Introduction**

We have been looking at a very important correspondence between Christ and His church.

We noted that these two chapters contain 7 letters in which Christ evaluates the Church He promised to build (Matt 16) to see how they have matured and whether or not they are building according to the plan and by the means He ordained in Ephesians 4:7-16.

In that chapter Paul reveals that the Head of the Church measured out a gift to every member for the purpose of edifying His church. In other

words, when each member uses the gift God has given him/her properly – then the church will grow into maturity and will look just like its Head in character and mind. Just like in a body where every part has something to contribute – the health and growth of the church depends on every member participating faithfully and fervently for the body to grow.

And for this to happen – God put gifted men in each church to teach the Word in order to equip these believers to do the work of the ministry so that the body/church would grow.

And the members would know this was happening when they were not tossed about by every wind of doctrine or by every wave of teaching that would periodically come crashing into the church and blowing through the pews!

***But – what would happen if a church were not committed to growing through the word for spiritual service that leads to maturity?***

What would such a church look like in real life?

And more importantly –how should a believer in such a church respond?

Now – just to recap – this is the fourth letter in a series of 7.

In the first letter – to Ephesus – Christ commends the church for her soundness in doctrine but criticizes her for her lack of love.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter – to Smyrna -- Christ comforts a church that was working hard and remaining faithful in the midst of extreme persecution.

In the third letter – to Pergamus – Christ confronts a church that had compromised herself with the surrounding pagan culture and had become defiled.

This is the fourth letter – the letter to Thyatira – and in our first examination of this letter we noted that Jesus Christ hands out the severest condemnation to this church – in fact, He announces that He is going to kill some of the members with “death” for their intentional, persistent disobedience to His will as their Head.

And this disobedience came in the form of tolerating teaching that was leading believers to immoral and idolatrous living!

Jesus, as the Head of His Church, demands that the members of His church exhibit consistent, constant personal faithful obedience to His commands and directives for His church.

He has no additional burden than this – that we walk worthy of our calling by walking in truth!

So --- what should we look for in a church that is faithful to the Lord and how can we recognize when a church is departing from that kind of faithfulness?

## **I. The Foundational Qualities that Please the Lord in a Church (2:19)**

### **A. *Passionate Love***

- Selfless love for the good of others – like Christ’s love for His church
- What Ephesus lacked

### **B. *Personal Faithfulness***

- Loyalty and commitment – long term obedience.
- What Pergamus lacked

### **C. *Practical Service***

- proper use of gifts in ministry or service to others and for the Lord.
- Ministry here as the sense of laboring and making up that which lacked in an area – meeting the needs of others spiritually and physically.

### **D. *Persevering Endurance***

- Persistent perseverance under adversity.
- What Smyrna had!

And – they had these in abundance and were maturing and growing in these qualities!

A church or a believer that desires to please the Lord must be focused on developing these qualities in abundance in the life of each member!

But – is this all that God looks for? Here is a church that has all of these qualities and yet receives the strongest condemnation of the 7!

## **II. *The Essential Consideration (2:20)***

*"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

No church on earth is perfect – and you would think that the things that were going on in this church for which the Lord commends them would be enough to over-ride any imperfection in the church.

And there are churches like this one at Thyatira today – churches that are known for loving people – churches that abound in works of faith and are consistently involved in ministry to their members and their communities – and who do this persistently in the face of opposition and criticism.

We have some of these churches right here in our town – they spend hundreds of thousands of dollars – even millions in their endeavors to care for the poor, feed the hungry, and cloth the naked and minister to the outcasts – they are constantly coming up with new and innovative ways to spread love to those who are lonely and they send hundreds of people on trips crisscrossing the globe to minister the love of Christ and at least some form of the message of Christianity to those in distant regions.

And – in some cases – churches like ours could learn from them.

Sometimes our love and passion for truth and “sound doctrine” ends up being expressed in an atmosphere that can seem cold and distant and at times even hard and sometimes harsh.

And the Lord warns the Ephesian church that while He is pleased with their passion for truth – He is not pleased with the atmosphere in which that truth is being lived out. They need to return to love without abandoning their good commitment to truth.

BUT – what about a church that is high on love and faithfulness and service and even perseveres in the face of opposition – BUT – is not high on truth and purity?

Jesus has an even greater condemnation for such a church – to a church that has given up sound doctrine and right living – Jesus says He is coming among them and He is bringing Death! Why? Not because of what they teach – but because of what they tolerate!

They are intentionally and willfully tolerating someone in their midst who was teaching people to sin in two particularly disturbing ways:

**A. *Teaching and Seducing believers to Immoral Living***

**B. *Teaching and Seducing believer to Idolatrous Practices***

It is clear that the leaders and the members of the church understood that God hated this – and it is also clear that they had the power to shut this down but were not willing to do so – they put up with it and permitted her to teach even though they knew it was displeasing to God and damaging to God’s people!

And this is precisely what is happening in the evangelical church today!

Churches are knowingly tolerating and permitting teaching in their midst that leads to immoral living and idolatrous practices among their membership!

They tolerate music and media that is full of immorality and they even encourage believers to engage in these things for the sake of “knowing” and “influencing” the culture!

These are the “deep things of Satan” in our age. For instance, “How can you hope to make a difference for Christ in this culture if you are so isolated that you have no idea what is going on in the culture – you need to be up on the movies and music so that you can use it as a means to advance the Gospel!

What about 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?

<sup>14</sup> *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* <sup>15</sup> *And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* <sup>16</sup> *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My*

people." <sup>17</sup> Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." <sup>18</sup> "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

### **III. The Serious Warning (2:23)**

<sup>23</sup> "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

This is an unbelievably strong statement from Christ – the one who loved the Church and gave Himself for her!

This is how strongly He feels about what is tolerated in His body by His people! He is willing to cast believers into a bed of affliction and even to bring their earthly existence to a premature end if they persist in tolerating what He has prohibited in their midst!

And the reason for this is that all the Churches would know something about Him – that He knows what is really going on in His Church and that He is indeed the true and powerful authority over His Church!

He is a loving Savior – but He is not a Savior who died to tolerate and ignore the willful, knowing, and continual disobedience of those He died to save!

And yet – modern day believers have an incredible tolerance for these precise kinds of teachings and behaviors in their churches!

I frequently meet people who are in a church like this one at Thyatira where this kind of teaching predominates – and they are perfectly content to remain in those churches and often they point to the four qualities that were true of this church as though that were reason or justification for them to remain in that church!

Sometimes we have people that leave this church to go to churches like that or to return to them!

Generally – in my observation – there are four or five reasons that people either remain in such churches or leave churches like ours for such churches:

**A. *Carnality***

1. They are carnal in the sense that they just don't know the Word
2. They are carnal in the sense that they are “of” the World!

**B. *Comfort***

They are comfortable there – their friends and family are there and to leave would stir up way to much trouble – they are in a comfort zone and as long as the church is loving and serving Jesus in some tangible way – they are comfortable and will stay!

**C. *Consequences***

Closely related to comfort is the fact that people often stay in a compromised church like Thyatira because the consequences are just to intimidating for them if they leave!

Consequences economically, socially, and familiarly!

***The next two tend to be reasons people leave a church like Brookside for a church that is compromised!***

**D. *Convenience***

We have people that literally leave a church like ours to return to one that is in serious compromise – after they have been taught to know better – simply because it is closer to home and gas is expensive. Or because there is really more opportunity for their kids. Or their spouse feels more connected and involved there! And for reasons like this – they are willing to overlook the kind of compromise that God has strongly condemned here!

### ***E. Conviction***

As soon as it becomes clear that spiritual growth, spiritual change, biblical obedience, and personal commitment and service are expected – people end up under conviction – and leave for a less demanding place!

So what does God expect a believer in a church like this to do? What response does God demand of Him?

## **IV. The Unbending Expectation (2:24-25)**

<sup>24</sup> "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. <sup>25</sup> "But hold fast what you have till I come.

Christ had specific and direct words to say to those who claimed to love Him in this church!

### ***A. Obey the Burden / Instruction I have already Given***

- Burden = instruction (Acts 15:28)
- I have already told you what to do about Immorality and persistently immoral people in your midst. (1 Cor 5)
- I have already told you what to do about Idolatry and idolatrous practices in your midst. (1 Cor 8-10)
- I have already told you what to do about disobedient brethren and disobedient teachers! (scores of texts)
- Nothing has changed – I have not given any different or new teaching about these matters!

### ***B. Continue Steadfast until I Return***

- This has the idea of constant vigilance and committed obedience!
- We will never do this if our primary way of deciding where we go to church is based on comfort, convenience, or carnality!

## Conclusion

And this matters because Jesus promised those who obeyed a:

- A. Participation in His millennial authority
- B. Portion of His millennial glory

How will He apportion this? Can I suggest that perhaps it is in line with His earlier statements about faithfulness and to whom much is given?

## **The Church at Sardis** **“A Morgue With A Steeple”**

**Text: Revelation 3:1-6**

*"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ' These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup> "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. <sup>4</sup> "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. <sup>6</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '*

### **Introduction:**

All of us have had the unsavory experience of purchasing something or attending an event based on the label or the name of the event and after the experience realizing that the name or label did not give an accurate picture of what was inside.

In a fallen world populated by spiritually dead people living in a dark culture characterized by death, God has established communities of light populated by people who are truly alive spiritually – and the label that He has put on this group of people to identify them to everyone in the culture is His own name – The Church of Christ!

However, sadly, just because a church has Christ's name on its sign does not mean that Christ is welcome or even present on the inside. In some cases, even though a church still may have a reputation for being Christ's – they are in fact more easily identified with the spiritually dead culture around them.

Such churches may have all the same rituals, sing the same hymns, and even read portion of the Bible – but they are filled with spiritually dead people and often they are led by spiritually dead leaders who speak to them about a Christ they don't know personally.

Illustration: Serving a Dead Queen

- Thursday, December 13, 1990 a terrible accident occurred in the Invertebrate House at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.
- Ed Smith, the keeper of the Zoo, announced that a catastrophic event had occurred sometime that day that signaled the extinction of a rare colony of “ants” from Trinidad.
- 4 years earlier, at great expense, a queen ant had been shipped from the only other Zoo in the country with this species of ant. This queen’s sole function was to lay eggs and reproduce worker ants to populate the colony.
- Queen ants usually have a lifespan of 14 years – and sometime in that period they produce the future queen who will in turn live another 14 years laying eggs and populating the colony.
- Now, four years after her arrival, the queen was dead! What apparently happened is that the worker ants were trying to move her into another chamber but the hole they were trying to squeeze her through was just too small.
- After immense effort, they got her through – minus her head!
- Mr. Smith noted that strangely enough – the ant colony refused to admit the queen was dead. They continued to bring food to the headless body and went on caring for her “needs.” *“At present, all seems strangely normal in the colony. Life goes on as usual! The ants seem in a denial stage. But—eventually the colony will ge and die away! Nature may be beautiful, but it is not perfect! Even an ant can make a mistake – a big mistake!”*

This letter from Christ to His Church at Sardis reveals that it isn’t just ants that can make this kind of mistake – it can happen even to churches that at one time were living, vibrant, obedient bodies teeming with spiritual life.

However, after the passing of time – churches can actually degenerate spiritually to the point that even though they are doing all of the function of a church and they have the reputation and the name of being a church – they are spiritually lifeless and dead!

And when the Living Head of the Church examines them – He exposes them as little more than morgues with a steeple over them!

There are churches like this – this is a very real danger for any church in any age – and the proof lies in a letter from the Head of the Church in which He declares and exposes the truth about one such church just a few generations after its founding! (Brookside is 25 years old this year – and

Sardis was probably about 30 years old at the time of this letter – how would Christ evaluate our Church?)

***These letter reveal the true spiritual condition of churches in Christ's body –***

- Some, like Ephesus, are orthodox but have lost their passion for Christ.
- Others are experiencing extreme suffering and persecution and the Church at Smyrna is an enduring example of what pleases God in a church experiencing those circumstances.
- Many churches have retained the truth of the Gospel but have compromised with the surrounding culture – like the church at Pergamos they have become filled with carnal and worldly people who are at home singing and talking about Jesus but whose lives have been deeply influenced and impacted by the carnal world they are supposed to be reaching.
- Some churches have even tolerated false teachers and false teaching to the point that the Head of the Church is killing some of its members for their willful immorality and idolatry.
- And – if things are not addressed, things can degenerate in a church or in a denomination to the point that there is little or no genuine spiritual life in the pulpit or in the pews. Imagine if you will an entire congregation of lost people singing hymns together and reciting liturgy and hearing passages from the Bible together being read to them by an unregenerate pastor!
- Are there such churches – that have a name that they live but are in fact dead? This text not only tells us that such churches do exist, it teaches us how the Head of the Church wants us to think and respond to these kinds of churches.

## **I. The Condition of Such Churches Described (3:1)**

*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ' These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*

### **A. Based on Intimate Knowledge**

- Seven Spirits of God – reference to the Holy Spirit
- Seven Stars – reference to the leaders/authorities over the churches

- He is in full authority over the church at Sardis and He has full and accurate information about them.
- And based on what He knows about their works – He gives a true and authoritative assessment – it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or how good your reputation as a church might be – here is My assessment and it is the one that counts!

**B. *Based on Internal Conditions***

- You have a name – “that you are alive”
- BUT – the reality is that you are internally dead!

How does a church that was at one time alive – die?

1. When it loses its passion for Christ
2. When it shrinks back from suffering and tribulation
3. When it tolerates and enables carnality and worldliness – when it allows carnal believers to be comfortable. (no confronting)
4. When it tolerates compromise and false teaching that leads God's people to immorality and idolatry.
5. When it does the Work of the Spirit in the Arm of the Flesh
6. When it mixes truth with error – and eventually error replaces truth and becomes the accepted version of truth!

**II. The Command to Such Churches Declared (3:2-3)**

<sup>2</sup> *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.* <sup>3</sup> *"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.*

**A. *The Divine Mandate (3.2)***

1. Wake Up – Become Spiritually Watchful/Vigilant.
  - These believers were on the verge of losing their church in the same manner that their city had been lost – a lack of vigilance!
  - City was on a cliff 1500 feet high! It was impregnable – or so they believed. One day their king, Croesus, decided to wage war against the Persian empire – and the Persian army under Cyrus not only rebuffed their attack but pursued them all

the way back to Sardis – but once inside, the Sardinian army thought themselves safe and didn't guard a section of the walls due to the steepness of the cliffs – and Cyrus's men climbed up that pass and took the city in less than 14 days!

- In fact, to “take Sardis” became a byword for accomplishing an impossible task in an unexpectedly easy manner!

## 2. Strengthen What Remains

- You are at the point of death – and you need to take what is dying and strengthen it – stand it back up on its feet.
- What are the things that needed strengthening?
- Not just the people – but the works!
- The genuine marks of a church that is truly alive need to be aggressively revived.
- Sound doctrine needs to be aggressively revived.
- Pure living needs to be aggressively revived.
- The propagation of the genuine gospel needs to be revived.

So – how are we going to actually do this?

## ***B. The Directed Manner (3:3)***

### 1. Remember the Truth

- More than just mental recall in view here.
- Bring the truth back to mind and put it in practice!
- What truth? The one you received and the one you heard!
- ***Received*** – speaks to the authoritative Apostolic doctrine
- ***Heard*** – speaks to the accurate teaching and application of that truth by their former godly leaders.

### 2. Remain in the Truth – Guard it!

- Not enough just to accept the truth and act in conformity to it – a church must aggressively and

carefully maintain the truth by guarding it against error or compromise.

- This means:
  - \*Remove false teachers
  - \*Reject false teaching
  - \*Regard holy living – insist on it personally and corporately.

### 3. Repent in light of the Truth!

- Literally – turn around or change direction!
  - a. Theologically
  - b. Spiritually
  - c. Morally

## **III. The Commission to Some in Such Churches Defined (3:3b-5)**

*Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* <sup>4</sup> *"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.* <sup>5</sup> *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels*

### **A. The Strong Warning**

- If you won't watch – if you won't heed this warning, then I will come as a thief in the night.
- Image here is the same in Matthew and Luke when believers are warned that Jesus will come and they need to be prepared for that coming lest they be found in an unprepared state.
- Jesus is telling this church – you are unprepared and I am telling you to clean things up and set things in order!
- And – this is all the warning you are going to get!

### **B. The Worthy Witnesses**

- There are a few who have not “soiled their garments” – reference to the wool and garment industry at Sardis.
- These will get a reward for they are “worthy”
  1. They will walk with me in white -- Roman triumph march.
  2. They will live forever! Names in Sardis registry were blotted out if they were exiled for criminal behavior or

if they died. This would not happen to these “worthy ones.”

3. I will confess their names before my Father and His angels.
  - Because they have not been ashamed to confess Me before men – I will not be ashamed to confess them before My Father and His angels (Mat 10.32).
  - The majority of people in this church, including her leaders, were more interested in having an acceptable name in the city – and this meant a certain denial of Christ and His most difficult teaching!

#### **IV. The Counsel to Us About Such Churches Demonstrated (3:6)**

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "*

- This is not telling us to go into churches like this and be a part of the infiltration process.
- This is not telling obedient Christians that they can remain and be tolerant and silent in these kinds of churches.
- This is telling all who are genuine believers to stand up and confess Christ and aggressively advance the truths that He has taught His Church – and they are to do this:
  - Boldly
  - Openly
  - Aggressively
  - Constantly
- And when this happens, either the church will get right and be revived or one of two things will happen:
  1. If you are an outsider – you won't be admitted if you are frankly and completely honest about your mission.

2. If you are an insider – you won't be tolerated and eventually you will be expelled (sooner rather than later generally).

### **Conclusion:**

1. So – are there churches like this one in existence today? Yes! Apostate ones.
2. Did they at one time have the truth? Yes!
3. Do they still have a reputation as being a Christian Church? Yes.
4. How did it happen – where did things go wrong?  
Carnality – Tolerance of Error – Shame of Christ and His teaching!
5. Are there still true believers in some of these churches? Yes – but few.
6. What should these believers do?

Start boldly and aggressively teaching and insisting on sound doctrine and pure conduct and accurate gospel and right living!

7. What will happen?

Either Revival or Expulsion!

### **Two Examples:**

- A. A Church on the Path to Spiritual Death – Read “Musicians Wanted”
- B. Steve Lawson – in Arkansas – 100 leaders in the church were saved – 400 of them were kicked out when they started insisting on right living!

## **The Church at Philadelphia** *God's Seal of Approval*

### **Text: Revelations 3:7-13**

*" And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ' These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens":<sup>8</sup> "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."<sup>9</sup> "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."<sup>10</sup> "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."<sup>11</sup> "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."<sup>12</sup> "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."<sup>13</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' "*

### **Introduction:**

How does a church know when her Head approves of her worship and her practice? What are the things that a church can look for to ensure that Her Head is pleased with what is going on in His body – the community of believers given to Him by His Father and for whom He died?

I have to believe that most of the under-shepherds in evangelical churches truly do want to have the approval of Christ over their ministries – and in many cases, I believe they are sincerely convinced that His approval rests upon those ministries.

And to a large measure – the things that confirm this to these men are the outward markings of ministerial success – strength that comes from size or influence.

Now – let's make sure we remind ourselves that there is nothing inherently wrong or unspiritual with a church that is large – in fact, in larger cities like Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Ephesus – the church there could number into the thousands. For instance, we know for sure that the church in Jerusalem was about 6 or 7 thousand members strong within a few weeks.

It is very likely that these churches we are studying in Revelation 7 at the end of the first century were somewhat larger churches – perhaps numbering into the hundreds.

But if we were to evaluate how the Evangelical community at large approves a ministry – what would you say are the primary factors?

And the answer in most cases comes down to two things – size and influence! And often the influence of a ministry is directly connected to its size (but not always).

In our day in the USA there are churches that have grown so large that there is a term that has been coined to describe them – “megachurches.” And in 2005 there were at least 1200 Protestant Evangelical churches like this with an average weekly attendance of 2000 or more. (Average megachurch is 3800-4000).

These kinds of churches tend to have a great deal of “strength” or influence in the eye of society because of their size – they have large facilities, a huge budget, a big staff (average one has 20 full time pastors, 22 full time staff members, and 285 volunteers who work at least 5-10 hours per week).

In our own state – there are 8 churches like this – the largest having about 6-8 thousand attendees at all of their services each week.

There are some even larger ones in other states – there are two ministries like this in Texas – Fellowship Baptist pastored by Ed Young with 13,000 people and Prestonwood Baptist pastored by Jack Graham with 14,000 people attending.

The three largest megachurches in the country right now are Saddleback Valley Community pastored by Rick Warren (22,000), 2<sup>nd</sup> Baptist in Houston with Ed Young Sr (23,000), Willow Creek by Bill Hybels (23,000), and Lakewood Church pastored by Joel Osteen (47,000).

These churches and others like them have gathered to themselves a great deal of notoriety and influence – these ministries make the national news, their pastors are given national platforms, and their influence often exceeds much farther than the boundaries of their geographic location.

Often, in Evangelicalism, these ministries are known for their evangelistic fervor or for helping people to reconnect with God in some personal way.

But – when one gets much beneath the general gospel presentation made by many of these churches – what is often revealed is a fatal flaw that would render to many of them the disapproval of Christ, based on what texts like the one before us reveal about how He evaluates and approves of the local churches that make up His Body.

The letter to this church at Philadelphia is an important reminder in the list of letters to 7 local churches at the end of the first century of what kind of a ministry will receive an even greater approval – that of Jesus Christ.

And, in fact, a ministry that receives this approval will more often than not be disapproved by the surrounding culture! There may be exceptions – but very few.

So – what does this letter to the church at Philadelphia reveal that will help us and encourage us to seek after His approval rather than that of our society or of the large group of compromised ministries that often seem to have great “influence” in a culture?

The best way to look at most passages is to go in the order in which it was given – but there are some things about how this text was laid out that perhaps might best be understood if we depart from our regular practice and sort of take the letter apart a bit – and then put it back together at the end.

## **I. The Recognition of their Ministry (v 8-9)**

*"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*

- This verse reveals 3 important qualities that were true of this church that brought about Christ’s approval.
- Only 2 of the 7 churches have no criticism from the Lord – this is one.
- Christ points out 3 things about this church that are important:

### **A. *They had little power or influence – “little strength”***

- Not talking about moral or spiritual weakness
- Talking about influence or ability
- Perhaps talking about smallness of size (but not necessarily)

I know that you have been given little influence and authority in your city and in your culture.

**B. *They had been persecuted –synagogue of Satan (v 9)***

- A reference to Jews
- Jesus referred to them as of their Father the Devil (John 8:44)
- NT is filled with vivid depictions of the brutal persecution that the Jewish leaders brought against Christians for preaching and proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah!
- Messiah was promised to them – how dare this group of Gentiles and renegade Jews claim to have the genuine messiah as their leader? And Jesus the Nazarene at that – a blasphemer whose crucifixion demonstrated God’s rejection and curse on him!
- Acts 4:1-22; Acts 5:17-18; Acts 6:9-15; Acts 7; Acts 13:50-52.
- But perhaps the clearest picture of what this kind of persecution looked like for the Christians in the average local church is recorded for us in Acts 8:1-3:

*Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.*

**C. *They had persevered (v. 8)***

- In what specific way did this church persevere?
  1. They obeyed His Word faithfully
  2. They did not Deny His Character (name = character)
- In their case – they had been given specific statements from Christ about staying away from immoral activities and idolatrous practices that were common in their city – and that other churches of their day were doing. AND they were obeying faithfully.
- And – there was a precise aspect of Christ’s identity that they were being persecuted for – their belief that He was Messiah – and they refused to deny this! This was part

of His character that was under attack and they were willing to endure suffering and persecution rather than deny it!

- How does a church often get influence and keep it? Two ways:
  - a. By disregarding something God has said – immoral activity
  - b. By denying something in God's nature or Character – idolatry
- We see this today in the worldly and carnal music of many churches – without which they would lose their crowds.
- We see this today in compromised churches that refuse to speak about the reality of Hell, or the exclusivity of the Gospel, or to condemn certain sins as sin, or to insist on right doctrine – and if such teaching were to return to these churches, much of their influence would be lost.

Illustration: What do you think would happen if Willow Creek or Saddleback were to completely do away with CCM music and actual start preaching against it like we do here? What would happen to their attendance if the music became traditional hymns and some of the newer good hymns?

What do you think would happen to the attendance at Lakewood if Joel Osteen started preaching on Hell – or made the statement that unless a person personally receives the Lord Jesus Christ, that person can't be saved, or if he preached actual sound doctrine week by week?

## **II. The Revelation of His Identity (v 7):**

*"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens':"*

- So who is the One who has been evaluating them – what is His true identity? And what are the implications of the revelation of this identity?
- Christ is described to this persecuted church by three statements:

- A. ***He who is holy -- speaks to His Uniqueness***
- Holy – set apart; in a totally unique category – no one else like Him in the universe.
  - He is described in the Luke and Acts as the Holy One of God (Gabriel, demon, and Apostle Peter).
  - He is the One that God uniquely set apart or appointed – no other One exists!
- B. ***He who is true – speaks to His Authenticity***
- Whatever it is that He has uniquely been set apart to – He is genuine.
  - True here is not a reference to “truthfulness” but to genuineness.
  - He is the unique and authentic item – and the next phrase reveals what this is all about.
- C. ***He who has the key of David – speaks to His Authority***
- This is a reference to Messianic Authority
  - There is only One genuine Messiah
  - The Jews have been waiting for him to appear and have been talking about him for centuries
  - You are being persecuted because you are proclaiming that I am that Messiah
  - WELL – you are right! I am the unique (holy) and genuine One that God promised to David!
  - David was told that he would have a ruler to sit on His throne forever and that ruler would reign over an everlasting kingdom? Well – I am that One!
  - And – God has given to me a key – the Key of David – and it opens a particular door that I have set before you!
  - What door do you think Messiah was going to open up?  
**THE KINGDOM!**
  - The Jews in that synagogue who are persecuting you want to keep you out of the kingdom.
  - But I am the only One who has the authority to open or to shut the door to that kingdom and I have opened it for you and no man will shut it!
  - The door is not mission activity or ministry activity – it is Messianic authority to enter into His kingdom – and of all the powerful and influential people in that city,

including His own race, the Jews – that invitation was guaranteed to the group that was most despised!

- And it was guaranteed because of their persistent obedience!
- So – what would this One who possessed the key of David do for believers like those at Philadelphia?
- He rewards them by giving to them certain promises and these promises are all future – they are all related to the Kingdom He will establish when He comes!

### **III. The Reward for their Fidelity (v. 9-12)**

<sup>9</sup> *"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. <sup>12</sup> "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.*

#### **A. He Promised to Vindicate Them (v 9)**

- The Jews who are now persecuting them will one day come to worship before their feet.
- Obviously, it is speaking here of a future generation of those Jews.
- Could mean at least that they will bow down and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2) – but the text points out that they will worship at their feet in some way.
- Probably a reference here to being under their rule in the messianic Kingdom – there will be a day when Jesus returns in Glory that the Jews will recognize Him and repent – and those that do will go into His kingdom and will serve Him for 1000 literal years.
- And guess who will be ruling with Christ over all the kingdoms of the earth in that day? These very Gentiles whom their ancestors persecuted!

**B. *He Promises to Validate Them (v 9)***

- The Jews believed that when Messiah came, He would love them and declare that love to all.
- But – here Jesus is saying, I will make them know that I have loved you!
- Why? Because you loved me and did not deny my name!
- You are not ashamed of me now, I won't be ashamed of you then!

**C. *He Promises to Protect Them (v 10)***

- Because you have kept my command to preserve – I will keep you!
- Idea here is to keep from a specific period of time – characterized as an “hour of trial” that is coming on all unbelievers to test them!
- Reference here to the Rapture – more next week!

**D. *He Promises to Establish Them (v. 12)***

1. **Spiritual Honor** – *I will make him a pillar in God's temple*  
Pillars in temple had names honoring individuals.
2. **Spiritual Stability** – *He will no longer go out*
  - City was plagued with earthquakes – some were so severe the citizens had to flee their home and go and dwell outside the city in tents.
3. **Spiritual Inclusion in God's Program** – *God's name*
4. **Spiritual Citizenship in God's City** – *new Jerusalem*
5. **Spiritual Intimacy with God's Son** – *“my new name”*

**IV. *The Reminder for their Ministry (v. 11; 13)***

<sup>11</sup> *“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown . . . .”* <sup>13</sup> *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

**A. *Assurance*** – *Behold! I come quickly! Imminence is important.*

**B. *Instruction*** – *Hold Fast what you have! How?*

- By obeying the truth
- By guarding the truth

**C. Warning – don't lose your crown! How?**

- *Like those at Ephesus – by losing your passion for God*
- *Like those at Pergamum – by compromise with the world.*
- *Like those at Thyatira – by disobedience to the Word*
- *Like those at Sardis – by departing from the Faith (doctrine)*
- *Like those at Laodecia – by indifference to the Spirit*

**Conclusion:**

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches!***

We may never be powerful or influential in this world – but we are not supposed to be living for this world!

There is a kingdom that is coming – and we are told how to be approved by the coming King so that we may rule with Him in glory!

## **The Power of a Promise** *Faithful Words to a Faithful Church*

### **Text: Revelation 3:10**

*Revelation 3:7 " And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ' These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens":<sup>8</sup> "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."<sup>9</sup> "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."<sup>10</sup> "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."<sup>11</sup> "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."<sup>12</sup> "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."<sup>13</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '*

### **Introduction:**

When the Commonwealth of the Philippines achieved semi-independent status in 1935, [President of the Philippines Manuel L. Quezon](#), a personal friend since his father had been Governor General, asked US General Douglass MacArthur to supervise the creation of a Philippine Army. MacArthur elected not to retire but to remain on the active list as a major general, and with President Roosevelt's approval he accepted the assignment.

When MacArthur resigned from the U.S. Army in 1937, his rank again became that of a general, and he was made [Field Marshal of the Philippine Army](#) by President Quezon. (MacArthur is the senior officer on the rolls of the Philippine Army today—he is also the only American military officer ever to hold the rank of field marshal).

In July 1941 Roosevelt recalled him to active duty in the U.S. Army as a major general and named him commander of [United States Armed Forces in the Far East](#) promoting him to a lieutenant general the following day. In December, he became a four star general yet again when the Japanese attacked across a wide front in the Pacific.

MacArthur's headquarters during the [Philippines campaign of 1941-2](#) was on the island fortress of [Corregidor](#). His fortress was clearly marked and was the target of Japanese air attacks, until Manuel Quezon cautioned MacArthur "not to subject himself to danger." In March 1942, as Japanese forces tightened their grip on the Philippines, MacArthur was ordered by President Roosevelt to relocate to [Melbourne, Australia](#), after Quezon had already left.

After first discussing with his staff the idea that he resign his commission and fight on as a private soldier in the Philippine resistance, with his wife, four-year-old son, and a select group of advisers and subordinate military commanders, MacArthur left the Philippines in [PT 41](#) (commanded by Lieutenant [John D. Bulkeley](#)) and successfully evaded an intense Japanese search for him.

As he left the troops of the army he had created – he made them a promise that would rank among the most famous words uttered during WWII – I shall return!

Two and ½ years later, MacArthur's invasion forces returned to the Island of Leyte in the Central Philippines and took the Japanese forces there by complete surprise. This was the beginning of the end for the Japanese.

As MacArthur waded ashore with his men, an American broadcaster heard him say, "I will stay for the duration now!"

What is interesting about MacArthur's promise – is that it is one of the most famous and at the same time debated promises made by a commander-in-chief during wartime. The wording of what he said has been debated (I will return vs I shall return). Where and when the promise was fulfilled has been debated (what island, what landing, what date). Some took offense at the implication of the statement – Roosevelt asked him to change it from "I shall return" to "We will return." But to the troops that day – there was no doubt. Their commander-in-chief had said he would return, and he did return just as he promised!

**The New Testament is the story, in part, of an army that God has formed for His Son Jesus Christ to lead.**

At times, that army has faced relentless attack from the enemy and in some cases, soldiers have lost their physical lives in the battle.

Our Commander-in-Chief made a promise to His soldiers that He would never leave them nor forsake them – and that He would be with them always (Mt 28:20).

However, shortly after making this promise – He ascended to Heaven leaving His troops to fight on for Him by taking the gospel throughout the earth.

Of course, He fulfilled His first promise by sending the Holy Spirit to strengthen us while we wait for His coming from glory (John 14-16) – and that promise was fulfilled in Acts 2.

However, Jesus made a second promise to His followers – one recorded in John 14:1-3 – a promise that one day He would return for us and take us to be with Him forever – in other words, when He fulfills this promise – part of its fulfillment will involve our never being parted from Him again!

*"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.  
2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

However – by the time we get to the letter to the church at Philadelphia – over 60 years had passed since the giving of the promise!

- Most of the first hand witnesses had passed away
- Jerusalem had been destroyed
- What value did a promise made by Jesus almost 6 decades earlier have for the church?

Tonight – I want us to focus on the power of a personal promise!

## **I. The Source of the Promise (3:7)**

*"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens":*

- A. One Who had Authority to Make it** – “keys of David” (Is 22.15ff)
- B. One Who had the ability to Keep It** – “who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens!”

C. ***One Who had the Desire to Keep it*** – I will cause them to know I have loved you!

## II. **The Recipients of the Promise (3:7, 13)**

A. ***Church in Philadelphia in Particular (v 7)***  
*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,*

B. ***Churches in General (v 13)***  
*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

## III. **The Reasons for the Promise (v. 8)**

*I know your works . . . for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*

I know your works – though you have little strength – in the midst of persecution (from the Jews) for Messiah’s sake!

A. ***Their keeping God’s Word*** – obeying without compromise

B. ***Their not denying God’s Name*** – testifying with boldness

Representing Jesus accurately and attractively in spite of the cost!

## IV. **The Nature of the Promise (3:10)**

<sup>10</sup> *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*

- Kept from something – “the hour of trial”
- Note four important things about this statement:

A. ***It is a definite period of time***

- Not just an atmosphere or a general idea of how the entire age will be characterized.
- A definite period of time characterized by something – for example, Jesus said, “My hour is not yet come” and he is talking about a specific period of his ministry that would be characterized by His crucifixion and the events leading up to it.

- Jesus is talking about a specific period of time that He is sending on the whole earth!

**B. *It is characterized by trial – “the tribulation, the great one”***

- Jesus talked about this time in Matthew 24:21
- John refers to it again in Revelation 7:14
- So by Revelation 7 this period of time is here
- No later than the 6<sup>th</sup> seal in Revelation
- I am going to argue it is from the 1<sup>st</sup> Seal onward!

**C. *It is coming on all the earth***

- not just a portion of the earth population but everyone!
- Everyone who is on the earth at that time will experience and go through whatever happens during this “hour” (not just unbelievers, not just Jews)

**D. It’s purpose is to “test” those who “dwell on the earth”**

- This is a very specific expression – “earth dwellers”
- It occurs 7x more in Revelation – and in every case it has reference to lost people who are intentionally rebelling against God and who are hardened in this rebellion. (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 18:8, 14; 17:8)
- The purpose of this “testing” is to reveal this hardness – to expose this rebellion.
- Even when they know this trial is from God – they will refuse to repent!
- And Jesus promised to keep His church from this hour!
  - the true Messiah
  - The Head of the Church
  - The One who had the Keys of David

**V. *When would this hour of Tribulation Be?***

- It would be characterized as a time of God’s wrath being poured out on the rebellious nations of the earth – the gentiles.
- It would be characterized as a time of God’s spiritual preparation of rebellious Israel – He is literally going to drive out their rebellion.
- It would last for 7 years (Daniel 9:24-25; Daniel 7, 12)
- It is described in full detail for us in chapters 6-19 of Revelation
- We have a horrific description of what God will do in fulfilling and pouring out the wrath that He has been revealing from

Heaven for 2000+ years – except during this time we are going to see visible and undeniable evidences that He is personally bringing to the attention of the World!

- It has to happen in order for the kingdom to come!
- And the One who is going to set up the kingdom is here promising to protect certain people from that “hour of trial” that must precede the coming of the kingdom!

## VI. What is the Nature of the Protection? (3:10)

*I also will keep you from the hour of trial*

- This is probably the most controversial portion of the entire book – all agree that Christ said He would protect His Church – but not all are agreed on the nature of that protection.
- The key term in the promise of protection is the term “from” – it comes from a little preposition that can also be translated “through” (ek).
- Basically, there are two possibilities based on the translation of this preposition.
  1. Protection **from** or “out” of the hour of trial (as is translated here)
  2. Protection **through** or “in” the hour of trial.
- The preposition occurs over 900x in the NT
- Three references in all the NT where it is translated “through” or “by”
  - **2 Corinthians 7:9** I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything **through** us.
  - <sup>KJV</sup> **Galatians 3:8** And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen **through** faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.
  - <sup>KJV</sup> **Revelation 18:3** For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich **through** the abundance of her delicacies.
- Greek has a word for “in” and it has a specific way commonly used to express the idea of “through.”
- In other words – if John wanted to say that we were protected “through” the hour of trial while yet remaining in it – he had a clear word and a very common grammatical structure for doing it!

- It seems clear to me that the promise is not that we will be protected through the trial (like the Israelites were in Egypt or like the Church is today in the World) – but that this is a very special promise made by Christ to His church that they would be kept “from” or “out of” the hour of trial that He was bringing on the earth!
- WELL – what about John 17:15?  
**John 17:15** "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.
- Only other passage where this sequence of wording is used “take them out . . . keep the from”
- Post-tribulation people argue that this is how God is going to do this – He is not going to remove His people from the world that is being tried and tested – He is going to protect them from the testing while they are in the world.
- Two major problems with this view:
  1. The testing is going to come on the whole world – not just the earth-dwellers who are unbelievers!
  2. The promise is not to be protected from the trial or the tribulation – but from the “hour” or from the period of time itself!
- Jesus has been keeping His promise in John 17:15 for 2000 years! He had been keeping it for 60+ years in Revelation 3:10!
- This is a second promise made by the same person – and just like He has been keeping the promise in John 17:15 – He will keep the promise He made here in Revelation 3:10!

## **VII. When will the Timing of the Rapture Be? (3:11)**

*Behold, I come quickly!*

- Three popular views:
  1. Post-Tribulation Rapture – at the very end after all the seals before the final victory!

- Main reasons -- Bible speaks of a second coming (singular) not second comings; church has always had to suffer!
2. Mid-Tribulation Rapture – after the first 5 (possibly 6) seals – at the end of 3 ½ years of the tribulation – we will be gone for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half.
  3. Pre-Trib – rapture is different from 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in Glory!  
Next event on the prophetic calendar!
- Two texts inform us on this:

A. 1 Thess 5:1-3; 8-10

**1 Thessalonians 5:1** But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

**1 Thessalonians 5:8** But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

- This is not the rapture – this is the “day of the Lord”
- They have been taught by Paul – the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night – when unsaved people will say “Peace and Safety”
- Paul does not call it tribulation nor does he describe it as a time exclusively marked as “tribulation”
- So – it will be sudden and total destruction – and obviously, it will include tribulation (based on Matthew 24)
- So – either the day of the Lord and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming does not involve tribulation and wrath from God as described in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-19 OR it is an extended period of time beginning at a period of time when pagans will believe they have finally achieved “peace and safety”.
- And God has promised to deliver His church from that time!

B. 2 Thess 2:1-5

**2 Thessalonians 2:1** Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our **gathering together** to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup> not to be

soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. <sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the **falling away** comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

- The Thessalonians had become confused by a false letter from Paul that seemed to teach that the “day of the Lord” had already come – and they were waiting for the rapture!
- Paul wrote this to correct their thinking and to assure them that they had not missed the rapture because the day of the Lord had not yet come.
- Two things had to happen before the day of the Lord could come:
  1. A great falling away – “apostasia” -- I think this is a reference to the rapture.
    - The term “apostasia” – means to remove away from or to depart from something.
    - In other words – Paul is saying that there must be a great departure before the Man of Sin can be revealed – and that “great departure from” is the departure of God’s people at the Rapture!
  2. The man of sin will be revealed – this will happen when the first seal is opened!
    - And Paul goes on to say that it is only is after he comes that God will send the great delusion in 2:11.
    - Many people who take the “apostasy” as a spiritual falling away go to verse 11 to explain the reason for such a huge and great apostasizing –
    - but the strong delusion of 2:11 happens after the man of sin has been revealed – and he can’t be revealed until this “great departure” has occurred!

## **Conclusion:**

Jesus made a promise to His Church – that He would keep them from the hour of trial that would come on the whole earth to test earthdwellers.

And the reason they would be spared from this terrible test is that they had lived under pressure and had passed the test by keeping His Word and not denying His name!

Are you one of those people? Are you obeying His Word? Are you someone who has not denied His name?

John said that everyone who has this hop in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure! Are you intentionally working on cultivating a pure life?

# The Calamity of Spiritual Complacency

## *Learning from Laodicea*

**Text: Revelation 3:14-22**

*NKJ Revelation 3:14 " And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ' These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: <sup>15</sup> "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- <sup>18</sup> "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. <sup>19</sup> "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. <sup>21</sup> "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. <sup>22</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' ' "*

### **Introduction:**

- This is the 7<sup>th</sup> and final letter from Christ to His Church in which He reveals what He knows to be true about the character and condition of each of His Churches.

\*He promised to build the Church in Matt 16

\*He revealed the pattern and plan by which He would do this in

Eph 4

\*He know evaluates and assesses the condition and position of each church.

- These letters are important to us because the tell us:
  - \*How the Lord evaluates a ministry – what are the things He looks at.
  - \*How the Lord feels about certain things He sees in ministries that bear His name and claim to belong to Him.
- And – they tell us how we should feel and what we should do when we see those same things in the Church today.
- By way of review –
- ***Ephesus*** tells us how the Lord feels toward a church that is right doctrinally but lacks the important component of love!

- ***Smyrna*** tells us of the Lord special care and approval of a church that is suffering persecution for His name.
- ***Pergamus*** tells us how the Lord really feels toward a church that has a mixed testimony – a church that is still doing many good things that please Him but that has allowed a deep and pervasive carnality to come in among its members.
- ***Thyatira*** tells us how angry the Lord is toward people who seduce His servants into a disobedient worship and an immoral life through false and deceptive teaching that is tolerated by the members and leaders of His church.
- ***Sardis*** contains the Lord’s strong and strident instruction to His people who are still in a church that still retains the outward signs and symbols of His Name but in reality are spiritually dead and lifeless.
- ***Philadelphia*** reveals the special promises that Christ makes to people in His church who refuse to deny His name or to disobey His Word even in the midst of strong opposition – even religious opposition!
  
- And this brings us then to the final letter – a letter to one of the wealthiest and most influential of all of the seven churches addressed, with the possible exception of the church at Ephesus.
  
- We actually know a great deal more about this church than we do about any of the other seven with the exception of the Ephesian congregation.
  
- This church was located in one of the most strategic and wealthy places in all of Asia Minor – the Lycus valley.
  
- 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:21 – subscription describes Laodicea as the “chiefest” city of Phrygia – one of 7 Roman provinces in Asia Minor.
  
- One of three important cities in the Lycus valley – 100 miles from Ephesus:
  1. Hieropolis – 6 miles north -- famous for hot springs
  2. Colosse – 10 miles east – famous for cold fresh water
  
- The city of Laodicea was famous for three things (all referenced in the letter):
  1. A center of commerce and finance – banking. (intersected by 2 trade routes)
  2. A city famous for her textile industry – sheep with black wool.

3. A city famous for her medical school – eye-salve called “Phrygian Powder”

- The only negative to the city was her lack of an independent water source – the water in the area was laden with minerals that made it almost impossible to drink. So it had to be “piped” in via aqueduct – and it usually was very tepid in temperature – very distasteful.
- We also have some biblical context for this church – this congregation is mentioned 4x in a letter Paul wrote 30+ years earlier to the Colossian church.
  - a. Col 2:1-2 – object of apostolic concern
  - b. Col 4:12 – object of ministerial intercession
  - c. Col 4:15-16 -- They were to read this letter (Colossians) and they had received their own letter from Paul (possibly Ephesians).
- And – at the heart of Paul’s instruction to them through the letter to the Colossians in this amazing paragraph: **Col 3:1-7**  
*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*
- Now, 30 years later Christ is writing to this Church and He is warning them that He is about to spew them out of His mouth! And the primary cause for all of their spiritual ailments is a consistent failure over time set their affection of the right things – and to live by eternal values instead of temporal ones!
- This letter makes painfully clear the fact that this church has set their affections on things below and have been hard at work seeking those things which are “of the earth!” And as a result, their own self assessment in their hearts was that they *were rich, had become wealthy, and have need of nothing (3:17).*
- ***And Christ has some serious words to say to such a congregation – things that we desperately need to hear in our own day and age!***

## I. **The Character of Christ Portrayed (3:15)**

*" And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ' These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

- All of the other letters have included a description of Christ at the head of His letter to that church and its leaders.
- Those characteristics played an important part in the correspondence because they marked out a particular aspect of Christ that was significant to what He had to say to that particular church.
- In all of the other letters – the characteristics or qualities that are highlighted were mentioned in the vision that John saw in the last half of chapter 1.
- Here however, we are given three unique and unusual descriptions of the Lord and none of them are mentioned in that initial vision in chapter 1.
- So what does Christ want us to understand in these three descriptions ?

### A. ***He is an Authentic Source*** – “the Amen” (cf. Isaiah 65:16)

- Idea here is that of veracity – certainty.
- Used more than 50x by the Lord Himself to stress the certainty of something He was saying.
- Speaks to authenticity and certainty – tied to the next title.

### B. ***He is an Accurate Source*** – “The Faithful and True Witness”

- Because I am “the Amen” – then my testimony is reliable and it is accurate.
- I am going to tell you the right thing and you can depend on it!
- It will not just be reliable – it will be “true” and accurate!
- NOTE: Whatever God states on a matter is the right thing and it is accurate, especially when it touches our lives! And often we tend to resist this! (K. Y).

### C. ***He is an Authoritative Source*** – “Beginning of the creation of God”

- Not the first person / being that God created – but the source of all created things!
- Same idea in Col 1:15 where He is described as the “firstborn” of creation and it there as reference to Rank and Prominence/Preeminence

## II. **The Condition of the Church Exposed (3:15-17)**

<sup>15</sup> "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked --

- Christ – gives an accurate and authoritative evaluation of this church. I know your works!
- And here is what He sees – and how He feels about it!

### A. ***It's Spiritual Context Examined – you are not cold or hot.***

- Talking here about regenerated people – not cold.
- But these people are not fervent or passionate (heated) in their desire or their service for Christ!
- They are not “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11)

### B. ***Its Spiritual Condition Exposed – you are lukewarm***

- They were not unregenerate and outrightly sinning
- But – neither were they spiritually passionate and fervent
- They were indifferent – comfortable and complacent
- And here is how He feels about that – I want to spew you out of my mouth just like you spew out the lukewarm water from your aqueducts!

*Illustration: A modern day example:*

*A young person in college gets on fire for the Lord and longs to be around other young people who are passionate and fervent for the Lord. He/she knows that the college they are currently at is full of people who are in outright rebellion against God – many even refusing to believe He exists, let alone concede that He has the right to rule their lives.*

*So – off this person goes to a Christian college/university like NBBC or MBBC or BJU – anticipating with great joy the idea of being part of a student body where hundreds or even thousands of young people are passionately, fervently living for God – “full on for Christ!”*

*But – upon arrival – he discovers that the majority of the people are not unbelievers – but they certainly are not passionate about God. In fact, they are seeking and pursuing with all their might the very same things the pagans at the old school were pursuing.*

*And when spiritual things come up – like bible reading, chapel, church attendance, encouragement to avoid ungodly habits and conduct – these students are surprisingly resistant – or at best – tolerant of these things.*

*And at some point – this person ends up deciding to leave and go back to the place where at least he knew the people around him were cold – and he could be “hot” in their midst!*

**So how did a group of born again Christians get this way?**

**C. *Its Spiritual Condition Explained—because you say. . .***

- The Lord is going to expose the heart of the matter by revealing what they are actually thinking in their hearts – remember – He is a faithful and true witness – so we know this is exactly what they were really thinking!

**1. No Sense of Spiritual Need – Self Sufficiency**

- You say – I am rich and need nothing!
- They had worked hard at seeking and pursuing the things of this world and their surrounding culture – and they had become affluent and full!
- That is really the position of most of our American churches

**2. No Enthusiasm for Serving the Lord –  
Spiritual Complacency**

- You are neither cold nor hot – you are lukewarm!

- You are not bold and arrogant in your sin – but you are not fervent and hot in your service to me.
- What moves you and motivates you is the pursuit of comfort – you are “full” and you want to stay that way!
- You pursue wealth and goods – for your own use, not Mine!

### 3. No Concern for Offending the Lord – Spiritual Ignorance

- You do not know – that you are wretched and miserable
- You do not realize that you are poor (in spite of banking), blind (in spite of eye salve), and naked (in spite of wool garments).
- You have literally lived poor and miserable lives because you were blind and you spent your efforts and you set your sights on the wrong things!
- I told you to set your affections on things which were above where I am seated with My father – but you did the opposite! You spent your energies seeking temporal things and you set your affections on things of this earth! (Demas -- 2 Tim 4.10)

### **III. The Counsel to the Church Exhorted (3:18-20)**

<sup>18</sup> *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. <sup>19</sup> "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*

- What does God have to say to a church that is in this sad and deplorable condition? He offers them loving counsel!
- And, in stressing His titles, He has already assured us that this counsel will be the right counsel and it will be true and reliable!
- It isn't too late – He hasn't yet spewed them out! They can still act to avert this chastening from God! But – what does He counsel them to do?

#### **A. *Work Diligently to Restore Yourself to Your Past Position***

<sup>18</sup> *"I counsel you to buy from Me . . .*

- “Buy from Me” -- the idea here is to change your focus and your practice – instead of seeking and living for what this world has to offer – intentionally seek out the Lord

and diligently seek to purchase from Him the things that He provides and sets forth in His Word.

1. Refined Gold – *true Spiritual wealth* – godliness with contentment and that will be “great gain!”
2. White Garments – *true Spiritual Purity* – so that you will not be soiled by the filth of the culture and the world.
3. Eye salve – Seek *true Spiritual Insight* and Understanding

- This is My counsel – live for these things that are from “above” – instead of what you have been living for – things on the earth!
- What will this look like? – Well think about your week. What do you live for? What do you spend your week “seeking?”
- Do you get up like most of the world gets up and rush out the door to ‘earn your living’ – what do you seek to do with what you earn? Will it go for eternal things – or will it go to make your life on this earth more palatable or for some pleasure.
- And – since you are a Christian – of course you give God the tithe and of course you take an hour or so out of your week to worship Him – but then it is back to what really interests you – and what really interests you is all on this earth!
- And then one day it is all over – the game ends – and the pieces go back into the box and the box goes into the ground!
- And what you have really lived for will be all left behind!
- And you will realize how poor you really are – how spiritually naked you are – and how blind you have been!

**B. *Walk Intentionally in Repentance of Your Present Position***  
<sup>19</sup> *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*

***So – Repent! Zealously!***

- I am not speaking to you this way because I hate you – but because I love you – and I chasten those I love!
- So – be diligent and passionate (heated) about turning your life around!
- Start living for Me – start thinking about the opportunities I will give you to represent me every day at work! Start thinking about the incredible difference you can make with all this money you are earning – how can it make an eternal difference? How can it advance the Gospel of Christ?
- And do this zealously and passionately!

### **Conclusion:**

- And if any man will do this – I am eager and ready to receive Him!

### **A Choice – I stand at the door and knock! (3:20)**

<sup>20</sup> *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."*

- I am ready to restore and enter in again!

### **A Comfort – to him that overcomes, I will grant him to sit with Me. (3:21)**

<sup>21</sup> *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

- This is where you should have been looking all along – where I am seated!

### **An Exhortation – He who has an ear, let him hear! (3:22)**

<sup>22</sup> *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' ' "*

## GETTING OUR BEARINGS . . . SETTING OUR SAILS

Considering “The Things Which Must Take Place”

An Overview of Revelation 4-5

### **Text: Revelation 4:1-2**

*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*

### **Introduction:**

This message begins a return to the book of Revelation that has occupied our attention and our devotion for the first three chapters of the book.

We are entering the most interesting part of the book – certainly the most debated and discussed portion of the book. Much ink has been spilled over how we are to interpret the material God announced in this section (4-19) and not a little blood!

However – before we jump into this wonderfully interesting section – we need to do two things:

- First, We need to recover the major teaching of the Book that we learned way back in chapter 1.
- Second, We need to make a concentrated effort to get our bearings in the book in terms of what John is doing with this extended section so that we don't get lost before we ever leave the safety of the harbor.

Let's just make sure we have a firm grasp on what we have learned.

1. Revelation is a message from God the Father about His Son, Jesus Christ. This message was given to John by an angel to show all of God's servants things which must shortly come to pass. (Rev 1:1-2)

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

So – what are those things that God is talking about in this message?

2. The Message from God about His Son – is His Second Coming to establish His Father’s Kingdom on Earth and rule over it with His Bride. (Rev 1:7)

*Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.*

- Now this coming is mentioned repeatedly throughout the Scripture.
- Daniel announced that there would be One who would be the Son of Man who would come with the clouds of Heaven – this one would be given by the Ancient of Day an everlasting Kingdom that He would rule over forever. (Dan 7:13-14)  
*Daniel 7:13 " I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.*
- Jesus announced it to his disciples in Matthew 24:30 and Mark 13:26  
*Matthew 24:30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.  
Mark 13:26 "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*
- Jesus declared it to His accusers at His trial when He answered the High Priest in Mark 14:60-63  
*Mark 14:60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" <sup>61</sup> But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" <sup>62</sup> Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." <sup>63</sup> Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses?"*
- But – no one believed Him! In fact, the very priests and scribes who had been given the responsibility to prepare God’s people to receive this kingdom – were the ones who led the nation to

reject Him. The High Priest himself tore his robes and accused Jesus of blasphemy!

- And now – some 60 years later – God the Father speaks – and unfolds a revelation about His Son – and that revelation has to do with His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming! IT IS ALL TRUE! AND – It is about to happen.
3. And the Function of this book and this message – is to prepare God’s people to receive that coming kingdom and to occupy their proper place in that kingdom. (Rev 1.5b-6)

*To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

- Some of the people who will enter that kingdom have already recognized and received the King and they are being prepared right now for the role God has appointed them in the kingdom – to rule over it with His Son.
- They are suffering tribulation and enduring trial on account of their loyalty to the King – and all of this is part of God’s preparation of them to be rulers with Christ over that kingdom when it arrives. (Rev 1.9)  
*I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*
- Some of the people who will enter that kingdom are still ardently rejecting, personally and nationally, the notion that Jesus is their Messiah/King.

**Romans 9:30-33** *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;<sup>31</sup> but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.<sup>32</sup> Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.<sup>33</sup> As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."*

**Romans 10:21** *But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."*

**Romans 11:1** *I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.*

- **Romans 11:25** *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* <sup>26</sup> *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;* <sup>27</sup> *For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."* <sup>28</sup> *Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.* <sup>29</sup> *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* <sup>30</sup> *For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,* <sup>31</sup> *even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.* <sup>32</sup> *For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.*

- God will one day prepare them to enter that Kingdom by taking them through suffering as well – a fierce time of tribulation that will result in them turning to God in desperation and they will finally recognize their Messiah – Jesus – and they will receive Him as their King and they will enter into the kingdom that God has promised them all throughout the Old Testament. **Zechariah 12:10** *" And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*

**Zechariah 13:1** *"In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.*

**Zechariah 14:9** *And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be -- "The LORD is one," And His name one.*

- And He is doing all of this for Israel to fulfill His promise and to make something known to all the Nations of the Earth – His Glory in, among, and over His People. (Ezekiel 39:21-29). Finally, after thousands of years of history, when all of the nations of the earth have finally gathered to wipe this defeated and shamed nation– Yahweh’s chosen people—of the earth, God shows up and displays His glory! **Eze 39”21-29** *"And I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them.* <sup>22</sup> *The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward.* <sup>23</sup> *And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword.* <sup>24</sup> *I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them.* <sup>25</sup> *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I*



And what is interesting is this – up to this point in the book, the Church has been on the earth. From here on out – every time you see the Church of Christ – it is in His Presence!

**Conclusion:            So what should I take away from this review:**

**1.     Remember the things that were – Live in the light of His Person!**

- *Who He Is – He is now Who He always Was – He has not Changed nor will He ever!*
- Peter and James and John saw His glory 2000 years ago on the Mountain of Transfiguration.
- 60 years later John sees it again and it is even more glorious!
- And one day His Father will reveal that glory before the entire race of Man and we will all see what the disciples saw and what John wrote down!
  
- So – live in the light of His Person. Make sure He is your Priest. Let Him be your King.

**2.     Remember the things that are – Live in the light of His Presence!**

- He is in the midst of His Church
- He knows us intimately and accurately
- He has words to say to us that tell us how He really feels about what He sees in our life!
- Conform your life to those words!

**3.     Remember the things which must come to pass – Live in the light of His Purpose!**

- He is establishing a Kingdom that will be over all earthly kingdoms.
- He is preparing His people to receive that kingdom.
- We as His Church will one day rule with Him in that kingdom.
- So – are you living as though He were your King?
- Does your life look like you are His subject – or are you trying to rule over Him?

- **Heaven – Throne Room of the Universe!**  
***The Throne of God***  
**Revelation 4**

**Text: Rev 4:1-11**

*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."<sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.<sup>3</sup> And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.<sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.<sup>5</sup> And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.<sup>6</sup> Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.<sup>8</sup> The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

**Introduction:**

From the earliest days of recorded history – thrones have been the symbol of a monarch's power and prominence over other men.

Thrones are powerful symbols of a ruler's authority, might, wealth, and power. So much so that the room in which they were located – the throne room – became the most powerful and important space in the entire realm.

There have been many famous thrones throughout the history of the kings and kingdoms of this earth. Some like the thrones of the Pharaohs of Egypt date back to the days of Joseph and later Moses.

In modern times – the world has been powerfully impacted by decisions made in the throne room of England.

Perhaps no throne has been more richly decorated or more sought after than the famous throne of Iran – the Peacock throne. Originally created in the 1600’s for the rulers of India, the Peacock throne was the glory of Dehli.

A French Jeweler who saw the throne in 1665 described it as being 6 feet by 4 feet rising on legs that were two feet high! In fact, there are pictures of rulers holding court sitting on the step leading up to the throne rather than on the throne itself.

The throne was completely covered by gold and inlaid with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, pearls, and a host of other precious jewels.

In 1738 the throne was taken from India to Iran by a conquering Iranian Shah where it remains to this day. The History Channel reported the value of this throne at over 1 Billion US dollars!

However – as impressive and as powerful as the thrones of earthly kingdoms might be – there is one throne that outshines them all! A very ancient throne that has never been usurped and from which the same monarch has reigned!

And that throne is the subject of the eleven verses that make up Revelation 4!

## **I. The Presentation of the Throne (4:2)**

<sup>2</sup> *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*

- Many people claim to have been to heaven and come back with all sorts of stories about what they saw while there – however – here in this chapter we have an account of a person who really was caught up into heaven and left us an inspired and accurate record of what he saw!
- And – the first thing that occupied his vision when he arrived in Heaven was an immense and majestic throne!
- In fact – this throne is going to dominate this section of Revelation! 47 of the 62 NT references to this throne are in Revelation and 19 of those references are in these two chapters! (14 in chapter 4 and 5 in chapter 5)
- John’s first words about heaven are “behold – a throne!”

- Behold is an important word – means to take note of! So – what is it John wants us to be sure to understand about this throne?

#### **A. *It's Permanence – Fixed***

- This throne was presented in the OT (Is 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1; Daniel 7:9)
- This Throne is pictured here
- And it is fixed – the idea in the grammar is that it has been an ongoing throne that has been permanently established!

#### **B. *It's Prominence – Central***

- This throne dominates the universe!
- Everything radiates out from the throne!
- Everything orients itself toward the throne!

Illustration: The Oldest Monarchy that exists today is that of the Imperial Emperors of Japan. It is believed their monarchy started in 660 BC and the current Emperor (Akhito) is the 125<sup>th</sup> direct descendant from that first emperor. The Japanese throne is called the Chrysanthemum Throne and the entire nation orients itself toward that throne – you go up to the throne or down from the throne even if geographically it is physically different. The Entire nation is viewed in terms of its locations and proximity to the throne!

The government and authority of this throne are:

1. Complete – over all things
2. Unchanging – without any variation
3. Permanent – without end! Forever.

## **II. The Person on the Throne (4:3, 5)**

<sup>3</sup> *And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald . . .*  
<sup>5</sup> *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

#### **A. *His Deity – Who He Is***

- All three members of the Trinity appear in connection to this Throne.

- The Father is sitting on the Throne (v 3)
- The Spirit is before the Throne (v 5)
- The Son (Lamb) is next to the Throne (5:6)

**B. *His Identity – What He is Like***

- This is one of the briefest descriptions of God on His throne in the Bible. We have at least four other descriptions in our OT of occasions where God’s dwelling place is described.
  1. Exodus 24:9-11 – Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 elders of Israel saw the God of Israel – 2x we are told this (v 12)
 

*Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. <sup>11</sup> But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.*
  2. Isaiah 6:1-4
    - This is 700 years later
    - This time it is in a temple and are given much more detail.
    - John is going to make clear that Isaiah was looking at Christ on the throne -- John 12:41.
  3. Ezekiel 1:1-28
    - 30 years into the captivity – Ezekiel gets an incredible vision
    - Most detailed of all the passages that give descriptions of God and His throne-room
  4. Daniel 7:9 -10
    - Toward the end of the captivity
    - This One has been ruling since before there were days
    - He is judging and recompensing all the little kings that have been sitting on their thrones in the short time there have been “days”.
- So, we come to this text in Rev 4 and John takes us forward by thousands of years and we have yet another

description of this throne room – and the same One is sitting on His throne! And this time He is getting ready to fulfill what Daniel saw some 2500 years ago!

- And John calls our attention to three specific things about God on His throne:

1. His Brilliant Purity – Jasper (diamond that sparkles with brilliant light)
2. His Powerful Justice and Righteousness (sardius – ruby – red in Revelation is associated with judgment and wrath)
3. His Personal Faithfulness and Loyalty to His Word (Rainbow like an emerald)

- So – who is this God and where have we seen Him before?
- He is none other than the God of the little nation we have read about all through the OT!
- These stones are mentioned on the ephod of the High Priest – the first one is Jasper and the last one is Sardius!
- When John gets to Heaven and sees Who is sitting on the Throne of the Universe – He makes a startling discovery – it is none other than the God of Israel!!

### **C. *His Activity – What He is Doing***

- He is Sustaining His Creation by the Word of His Power (Heb 1:3)
- He is Sovereignly Ruling over His creation (*Psalm 47:8 God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.*)
- He is Setting forth His Righteousness and Justice (*Psalm 45:6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.*)

## **III. The Personages around the Throne (4:4-8)**

## A. *The Elders*

- Big question as to their identity – some think Angels, others think OT Israel, others think NT Church, and some think both OT and NT people of God.
1. Described in four ways
    - 24 in number – could be 12 Patriarch and 12 Apostles . However – this section seems to be filled with OT priestly imagery and the Levitical Priesthood had 24 courses. Since the NT church is also described as a priesthood – it could be the NT Church since it is the only group that is fully seated on thrones in Heaven at the time of John’s writing (and now).
    - Throne-sitters – Only NT church is seen as presently sitting on thrones. (Eph 2:6; promised to Laodemia in Rev 3:18. In 11:16 it is clearly in the middle of the tribulation and this same group is still seated on these thrones rather than on the earth. In 20:4 this same group is still on the throne after the tribulation is over). Apostles, founders of the Church, were told they would sit on thrones and rule over Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30).
    - White Raiment – usually reserved for kings or priests. Seen in OT on priests and kings. Israel described as a kingdom of priests and kings (Ex 19:6) – BUT – Peter describes the church as a Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).
    - Wearing golden crowns – the ONLY group ever promised crowns is the NT church. (I Cor 9:25, Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:9; James 1:12; I Peter 5:2; and Rev 2:10).
  2. Identified as one group: This is the whole/complete NT Church in representative form much like the 24 courses of the OT Priesthood stood in for the entire priesthood.

So – if the 24 throne-sitters represent the NT church – what do the four living beings represent?

## ***B. The Living Beings***

- They represent the entire created order over which the One on the throne rules!
- They are clearly angelic beings.
- One like an Ox represents the domestic creation.
- One like a Lion represents the wild creation.
- One like the Eagle represents the heavenly creation (birds)
- One like Man represents all of humankind.
  1. They are all seen as submitted to God
  
  2. They are all seen as serving God
  
- This is what the universe was intended to look like and what it looks like in Heaven – but there is one tiny spot in the universe where this intended order has been disrupted – Planet Earth!
- Everything on that planet has been perverted – and is in total rebellion against this throne – with the exception of one group that has been put right with God – the Church.

## **IV. The Proclamation from the Throne (4:5)**

<sup>5</sup> *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

### ***A. Righteous Judgment Announced by the Throne***

- Similar to the Mountain of God when God first spoke in OT
- Signaling what is to come – wrath and judgment on the earthdwellers!

### ***B. Relentless Judgment Administrated from the Throne***

- These lamps are not the oil wick lamps like the ones in the parable of the 10 virgins – these are the flaming torches like the ones used by the soldiers when they came to arrest Jesus!

- Symbolic of the piercing, fiery judgment that will be administrated by the Seven Spirits of God – a reference back to 1:4 – Holy Spirit!
- The Holy Spirit will “convict or punish the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).
- This chapter is the background and the context for all the judgments that God is going to pour out on the earth in His wrath!
- So – why is God so angry? Why, after all of these thousands of years is His Wrath about to be poured out on these “earth-dwellers”. The answer is found in the text of a hymn that is sung in two parts!

## V. **The Praise toward the Throne (4:8, 10-11)**

<sup>8</sup> *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"* <sup>9</sup> *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: <sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

### A. ***The Source of the Praise***

- **His Creation – living Beasts**
- **His Church – 24 Elders**

### B. ***The Content of the Praise***

- **His Holiness (4:8)**
- **His Worthiness (4:11)**  
To receive glory, and honor, and power (similar to the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6).

### C. ***The Reason for the Praise***

*For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

- Because you are the Source of all Things
- Because you Sustain All Things
- Because you are Sovereign over all things!

- But – why is this praise song to God as Creator so important?
- Because of the refusal of one part of His creation to recognize this.

**D. *The Refusal to Praise . . . by the Earth-dwellers (Romans 1)***

- From the Fall Man has refused to recognize God as the Creator and to submit to Him as Sovereign Ruler of Creation.
- Instead Man has given recognition to every conceivable idea they can come up with to explain the universe.
- And this is not out of ignorance – but rebellion! Psalm 119 tells us that from their creation the Heavens have been showing God’s Power and Wisdom!
- And Man has refused to recognize that but has suppressed that truth! And instead has stolen the glory and honor that should go to God and kept it for themselves – or worse – given it to creatures that creep and crawl! And they have refused to submit to the Power of God!
- Neither were these men thankful to God for what He has graciously provided for them even in a fallen creation.
- That is exactly the point of the praise being rendered to God – Glory and Honor and Thanks.
- And for this reason – the One Who Sits on the Throne – the Almighty – is angry and He is about to pour out the fullness of that wrath on those men who have stolen His glory and given it to what is beneath them! Yet – He has been longsuffering in His wrath!
- And even in wrath – He has remembered mercy – which is the theme of chapter 5!

**Conclusion:**

So – if you want to know what is happening in Heaven – John tells us!

All of God’s creation is joyfully and submissively serving Him and exalting Him as their Creator! Everything in Creation is properly arranged before the Throne and they are joyfully so!

And – Jesus tells us that it is the will of the One who sits on His throne in Heaven that His will be done on earth as well.

So – how will He bring this to pass? Who will seek out to save those who are lost and in sinful rebellion so that they too may come before this throne and welcomed into His kingdom rather than being cast out into eternal darkness into the lake of fire reserved for His enemies and designed to be the prison house of the universe?

Answer – a Lamb! And that will be the focus of the next chapter!

BUT – before we leave this scene and this throne – are you rightly arranged to this throne or are you orienting your life toward another throne (yours) and another king (self)?

There is no question that He is King in Heaven. There is also no question that although He is king over the earth, He is not King on the earth yet. But there is this question – Is He your king?

If not – why not?

# **Piercing the Darkness**

## ***The Lamb that Rescued the Souls of Men***

### **Texts**

**Genesis 3:21-24** *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever-" <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

**Genesis 22:8** *And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.*

**John 1:29** *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

**Revelation 5:5-10** *But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." <sup>6</sup> And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

### **Introduction**

- From the earliest beginning of Man's journey – he has walked in spiritual darkness. The glorious light that God created in the first two chapters of Genesis was quickly veiled by the deep darkness of sin – and that darkness held the world in the bondage of universal sin and death!
  
- The saddest day in the human race came early in its journey – and it is recorded for us in the final words of the third chapter of Genesis – *He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the*

*way to the tree of life!* And we have been wandering around in the darkness, lost in our sins ever since!

- But that is not how it will end! There is another day coming standing at the opposite end of the spectrum as one measures the importance of a day.
- If the worst day in the history of the world was recorded in the opening chapters of the first book of the Bible – the best day in the history of the world is recorded in this chapter of the final book that records how Man’s story ends!
- And on this day another Adam stood before the throne of God to accept a scroll that only He is worthy to open!
- The scroll is filled with writing on both sides – and is sealed with seven divine seals – and the content of that scroll will be unfolded in the chapters that follow.
- In another sermon we want to look more closely at the details contained in this incredible chapter – but tonight – we want to take a few moments to consider the One standing before the Throne of God Who, after a thorough search of every part of the universe, is the Only One Counted Worthy to receive and open that scroll!
- Who is He and what has He done that has made Him Worthy in the eyes of all of the Universe?
- This chapter describes Him in at least three important ways:

### **I. His Eternal Identity: 5:5-6**

*But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." <sup>6</sup> And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

John stands before the throng and recognizes that the scroll in God’s hand is something that all of God’s people down throughout the history of the world since Adam have longed for and prayed for!

For in that scroll will finally come the fulfillment of a very ancient promise that God gave to our first parents, Adam and Eve on the same day that He punished them with the curse. On that day – the day He punished our first parents and placed them under His wrath – He also gave to them an Everlasting Promise – one that would outlast the curse and do away with the eternal part of the punishment for their disobedience.

And that promise was this – that He would send Someone who would crush the head of their ancient foe – Satan!

And John looks at that scroll and knows instantly that this is the ultimate fulfillment of that day! Finally – our ancient foe will be fully defeated and personally destroyed!

But who would be worthy of such a task? What would be His identity and from whence would He appear?

And just when it appears that there is no one worthy to fulfill such a task and complete this greatest and most precious of promises – one of the Elders directs John’s vision to the One who has “prevailed/overcome” and has been found worthy!

Who is this person and from where does He come? The answer is shocking! He is none other than the Messiah God promised to send His people!

#### ***A. Proclaimed – A Ruling Lion***

- As John weeps despairing that the promise that has been the hope of the world since its beginning will never be fulfilled – an Elder describes the One who has been found worthy as a Lion who will rule the Word!
- And He is described by two important and very ancient Messianic titles that would be familiar to every person even remotely familiar with the promises God made about His messiah.

##### **1. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah**

- This title comes from an ancient blessing given to the tribe of Judah by the Patriarch Jacob on his deathbed. It is recorded in Genesis 49:8-10.  
*"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your*

*hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. <sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

- It has reference to two important ideas – crushing the neck of his enemies (Satan) AND ruling over the nations (people = nations).
- But where will this Ruler come from? What is His lineage?

## **2. He is the Root of David**

- This is an ancient Messianic Title found in Isaiah 11:1, 10.
- And it was fulfilled in one other than Jesus of Nazareth who all through the Gospels and NT is described as David's Son!

### **B. Presented – A Redeeming Lamb**

- When John turns to look at this Lion from David's House who will finally take His rightful position as ruler over all of the Nations – He gets the shock of his life. For the Lion is a Lamb!
- And that Lamb is described in two important ways.
- First – it is a Lamb that has been slain. The term is very graphic – it has the idea of a lamb that has been sacrificially slaughtered. And the term “lamb” is the word for pet lamb – a favored, gentle, meek lamb that was slaughtered!
- BUT – though it is meek and mild (gentle), this lamb is not powerless. It is described as having 7 horns (perfect strength or fullness of strength) and seven eyes (identified as the Holy Spirit).
- This lamb so meek and mild was powerful enough to prevail . . . to overcome . . . against an enemy that the Bible describes as a roaring and raging lion seeking whom he can kill and ravage and devour! BUT this little lamb overcame him! How?

- By being slain! He overcame death by dying and by so doing proved that for those that are His . . . it is not death to die!

## II. **His Future Destiny (5:7-8)**

*Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

- Having seen the Eternal identity of the Worthy One – this Lion from Judah who was and is the Lamb of God slain but standing, John now turns to His future destiny appointed to Him by the One who sits on the Throne! And that destiny has two important components:

### A. ***Destined To Receive the Scroll -- to Inherit the Earth***

- This is what Jacob was talking about way back in Genesis 49 at the very beginning of our story as a race – that God would send a ruler who would be appointed as the ruler over all of the nations!
- In fact, David in Psalm 22 exhorted the nations to “Kiss” this Son lest He be angry against them and dash them to pieces!

### B. ***Destined To Open the Scroll – to Judge the Earthdwellers***

- This is the other part of Jacob’s prediction – this Son who will one day rule over all the nations as the Lion from Judah will judge righteous judgments!
- And when He judges – He will bring His wrath upon all those dwelling on the earth who resist His rule and reject His Person.
- And this incredible judgment is about to be poured out on these “earth-dwellers” in four series of 7 successive and horrific judgments!

***In other Words – this Lion from Judah is destined To Rule and Reign on the Earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all of the Earth! – This Lamb of God is destined to overcome and judge all of His enemies!***

*And – verse 8 tells us that all of God’s people throughout the long and painful history of our race have been praying for this day to come!*

*And come it will! But – what about in the meantime – while darkness still rules and reigns over men?*

### **III. His Present Activity (5:9-10)**

*And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,"<sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

While God’s people wait and pray for the coming of this day – this Lamb is not idle – He is doing something amazing! He is piercing the darkness He will one day banish forever but now He is driving it out of the hearts of men.

#### **9) A. He is Redeeming His People from their Personal Sins (v**

*And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,*

- Adam told his children about God’s promise – that God would send a Champion that would crush Satan.
- Abraham told Isaac that God would provide a Lamb for the sacrifice that He required of them.
- And for literally thousands of years – hundreds and thousands of little lambs were raised, loved, tenderly cared for – and on the appointed day they would be taken to the tabernacle/temple and brutally sacrificed on the high altar!
- In fact, on the Day of Passover scholars tell us that over 50,000 lambs were slain each year on the high altar at the Temple. And this happened year after year for thousands of years – all because men lived under the darkness of sin!
- But – one day one of those men was standing in a river baptizing his followers and he looked up and saw a man

walking on the bank of the river and said – “Behold, God’s Lamb! The One that bears away the sins of the World!”

- And when John is brought forward to the end of the age – He sees that Lamb and hears the testimony of His followers – and it is this: You have redeemed us to God by your blood!”
- And it was the World whose sins He bore – because in that group are people from every tribe and tongue and race (people) and nation!

**B. He is Preparing His People for their Permanent Service (v 10)**

*And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

- He is not just saving them to change their destination! In other words – the purpose of salvation is not just so people don’t have to go to Hell and get to go to Heaven!
- It is far greater than that – it is to conform them to be like Christ so they can rule and reign with Him forever!
- When we witness we should stress this component – “not just would you like to go to Heaven?” What idiot is going to turn that down? Here is the real question – “Do you want to become like Jesus –are you willing to let God cleanse you and transform you?”
- And the reason this is so important is this – only people who are like Jesus will get to live in Heaven!
- And what they will do in Heaven is serve God – and that means administrating His affairs for ever!
- And that is what Jesus Christ is doing now – He is saving people from their sins and then He is transforming them through the Spirit and the Word so that they will be like Him.
- And because they will one day rule and administrate the affairs of God forever – these people are called to use and rule over their little resources now in preparation for that great day!

## Conclusion

Illust: School of Business – invest with monopoly money in training for future investing of other people’s real money. This life is “monopoly money” that God has given us to invest to train us in faithfulness and righteousness in preparation for the day we get to “really rule” the earth.

So how will we respond?

1. Will we joyfully submit to the Lamb’s right to rule our life?
2. Will we fervently pray for the coming of His day (taking the scroll)?
3. Will we speak accurately of His invitation to take away the sins of men from every tongue and tribe and people and nation – or just the ones that are easy and comfortable or that are far enough away to be “safe.”
4. Will we use our resources and invest them for Him on this earth as we wait for the coming of His kingdom!

## **Sights and Sounds of Heavenly Worship** *Songs of Praise to the Sovereign-Savior*

**Text: Revelation 5:1-14 (v. 9-10)**

*And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,<sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

### **Introduction:**

We live in a world that is seemingly spinning out of control. Even a cursory reading of the history of the last 100 years of our history as a race reveals that all of our amazing scientific progress has not advanced us morally in the least little bit. If anything, our amazing technological and scientific advances have served only to aid to do more sinning and to do so in more creative ways!

All of our progress has in fact been in the wrong direction morally. The world has not become a safer place spiritually. It has not become a better place morally. Rather, it has become more corrupt, more unrighteous, wicked, and unjust than ever before in mankind's history!

And people who have been caught up in this endless moral degeneration end up in spiritual despair. And eventually this despair leads them to one or the other of two very wrong conclusions about human history in general and their personal life in particular.

- a. History and Life have no meaning – so live existentially and hedonistically.
- b. Turn to false gods and false religion to give meaning to this sad historical saga of which our life is a small, insignificant part.

God's people have always had a different solution – life and history both find their meaning in God's ultimate purpose and that purpose has been set forth in the story of the Bible.

However – as the decades have turned into centuries and the centuries to millennia – it does appear at times as though God's promises will be unfulfilled and His purposes unaccomplished.

However, this chapter in the Revelation God gave to His servant, John – He sets records in vivid detail the events that will take place in Heaven that will set the final consummation of His plan for human history in motion.

Those events have to do with a throne, a scroll, and a sovereign savior – and they are presented in an astonishing setting filled with breathtaking sights and awesome sounds! And John wrote down what he saw and heard so that we could share in this glorious hope as we wait and long for His appearing!

So – exactly what did John see and hear and what is the significance for our lives?

## **I. The Scroll (Rev 5:1)**

*And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*

- In the last chapter John has just described an amazing scene taking place in the throne room of the Universe.
- He saw the One seated on that throne – the Ancient of Days – and John recognized Him as the God of his own people, Israel. Moreover, the entire created universe (both creations, Old and New) rendered praise and worship to the One sitting on this throne and joyfully submitted themselves to Him as the Sovereign Creator over them.
- Now – John lifts his eyes and looks more closely at the Ancient of Days and saw that He was holding something – or more accurately, something was resting in His right hand – the hand representing His awesome power and supreme authority! And what he saw there was an unusual scroll.
- And as soon as he saw it – he understood immediately what it signified! This scroll in God’s hand is the most important document in the universe.

### **A. Its Description**

- In God’s right hand – signifying supreme authority.
- Written on both sides – very unusual for documents in the ancient world to be written on both sides like this.
- There is a similar scroll in Ezekiel 2:9-10 filled with lamentations, mournings, and woes and sealed in a similar manner with 7 seals.

- Sealed with 7 seals – represent authenticity as well as secrecy.
- The scroll in Ezekiel’s vision was sealed this way.
- Daniel was told to seal up his scroll in this way so people would not know the contents until the time was ready for it to be revealed.

**B. *Its Designation***

- As soon as John saw a scroll that looked like this, he would have immediately recognized it – only certain scrolls were written and sealed like this.
- These types of scrolls were legal documents that were either contracts or deeds to some important property or possession. The terms of the contract or the details of the title to the inheritance were written and then it was sealed with 7 seals. Then the contents of the scroll were summarized on the outside of the scroll so that people could identify the scroll for what it was without opening it – and they could verify that the terms had not been altered!
- This scroll is the title deed to something that God has promised to give to someone.
- God promised to give a kingdom to His Son that will be over all the nations of the earth and extending to all the ends of the earth!

*Psalm 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.*

- As soon as John saw this scroll – he recognized it as the title deed to that Kingdom – a kingdom Jesus had announced when He preached throughout Judea and Galilee – a kingdom for which John had been waiting and praying for his entire life! A kingdom for which he had suffered much and for which sake he had been persecuted.
- And now – authority was about to be handed over to the One to Whom that Kingdom had been given so that He could initiate events that would finally inaugurate that Kingdom on earth!
- And even more than that – its contents contain the story and plan of the consummation of God’s administration to “sum up” or “re-gather” all things in Heaven and on Earth in Christ! (Ephesians 1:9-10)

- But where is the One to whom this Scroll belongs?
- And as John looks – an strong and mighty angel appears before the throne and utters an astonishing proclamation!

## II. **The Search (Rev 5:2-4)**

*Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"<sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.<sup>4</sup> So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.*

- John saw a strong angel (also appears 2 other times in Rev 10:1; 18:21) who cried out with a loud voice.
- Possibly Gabriel whose name means “Strength of God” – or Michael, the archangel (based on his description in 10:1).
- This angel initiates a universe-wide search for someone who meets the requirements to open this scroll and loose or break its seals.
- Actually, seals will be broken first and they will bring about the events that will lead up to the actual possessing of the inheritance described in the scroll itself.

### A. ***The Requirement – Worthy (ἄξιος)***

- The idea here is not strength or virtue – but right or authority.
- In other words – who has the right and the authority to break these scrolls and open this scroll and bring about the events that precede him taking possession of the inheritance described in that scroll?

### B. ***The Result – no one was found worthy***

- The search was universe wide. All of heaven was searched – no one was found. All of the earth was searched – no one was found. Even the regions of the demons were searched – no one was found.
- Search was extensive and exhaustive – no one was found worthy!

### C. ***The Response – John wept much***

- This is intense weeping – deep sorrow

- Due to the delay in the fulfillment of something he had been praying for and longing for his entire life!
- Do we long so intensely for the coming kingdom – do we hunger and thirst for righteousness to be vindicated – do we long to see His appearing to the point that we weep when it is delayed?

### III. **The Sovereign-Savior (5:5-7)**

*But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." <sup>6</sup> And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*

**A. *His Identity – Ruler who is the Lion from Judah’s tribe.***

**B. *His Work – Redemption as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***

**C. *His Worthiness – Receives the Scroll and is given Authority***

- What makes Him worthy is His work in redeeming a people by His vicarious death!
- He is the “son of man” who was presented to the Ancient of Days in Daniel – this is the actual fulfillment of what Daniel saw centuries ago!
- ***Daniel 7:13-14*** " I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

### IV. **The Songs (5:8-14)**

- As soon as He steps forward and takes the scroll – there is an instantaneous, spontaneous response from every living being in Heaven!
- Finally what they have all been longing and waiting for God to accomplish will come to pass.

- And the response to this is joyful worship to the Lamb! And this worship takes two specific forms – harps (praise) and bowls of incense (prayers)

**A. *The Prayers (5:8)***

<sup>8</sup> *Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

- These prayers are coming from bowls held by the 24-elders. And they are filled with prayers.
- These elders are the church – and so these prayers are prayers that the church has been praying for – specifically what Jesus asked them to pray in Matthew 6 – “Your kingdom come!”
- Could also be the prayers of tribulation martyrs in 6:9-11.

**B. *The Praise (5:8-14)***

- This Praise consists of three songs
- It grows in intensity and exaltation – a mighty crescendo of praise.
- It involves every living being in the Universe

**1. *Praise for Redemption* – the Elders and Living Creatures (9-10)**

*And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,<sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

- This song is described as a “new” song – idea is fresh! Not that it is contrasted to pagan singing or that God’s people have not sung before (because they have been singing acceptably since the OT). This is a new and fresh expression of praise coming to God for the present ramifications of His past work!

- **The Elders** start by praising God for what He has accomplished for them personally in His salvation work – You were slaughtered and You purchased us (redeemed is from agorazo) – and the price was your blood!

➤ **It was a sacrificial death** – “you were slaughtered”

- *It was a redemptive death* – “you purchased / redeemed us to God”
- *It was a universal death* – “out of every tribe, tongue, people, nation”
- ***The Living Beings*** continue that praise by proclaiming that God has not just redeemed/purchased a people – He has made them (appointed) to be kings and priests! And has decreed that they will rule with Him in the kingdom He is about to establish on the earth!
  - As Priests they will witness of Christ to all the nations
  - As Kings they will rule with Christ over all the nations

## **2. Praise for Recognition – the Angelic Host (11-12)**

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"*

- So far the 24 Elders and the 4 Living Beings have responded in joyful adoration. Now a third group joins in adoring and praising the Lamb who was found worthy!
- All the angelic hosts – millions of them – ascribe a 7-fold praise to this worthy One.
- This 7-fold praise is directed to One the angels are recognizing as God’s Messiah – and He has received authority from the Father to rule on earth – and therefore, He is worthy of exalted praise and honor as Messiah/King!
- ***He is praised for His attributes*** –
  - Power – omnipotent ability
  - Riches – unconditional wealth in all arenas
  - Wisdom – unmatched words and deeds
  - Strength – unstoppable might
- He is praised for His worthiness –
  - Honor – exalted praise and recognition

- Glory – majestic radiance and worth
- Praise – exalted blessing and thankful praise

### **3. Praise for Exaltation – All the Universe (13-14)**

*And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"<sup>14</sup> Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.*

- Now the entire universe joins in the song of glorious praise – and the sound of it swells and fills the entire universe!
- And the entire Universe is directing all of the praise to the One sitting on the Throne and to His appointed Messiah – the Lamb!
- This Messiah isn't just worthy to rule over a kingdom on earth for a short 1000 years – He is worthy to rule the Universe and He will do so with His Father forever!
- And at this point the four living beings cry out, AMEN! And the 24 elders fall down and worship God Who lives forever and Who planned and accomplished all of this for which they are praising him!

**Conclusion: The Significance (and our response)**

***Heaven has responded decisively and joyfully!***

- The response of Creation – Amen!
- The response of the Church – Worship!

***And now we must respond!*** But what should our response be to all of this?

#### **1. Have We Recognized His Eternal Lordship?**

- Is our Jesus too small?
- Have we every truly seen Him in this light – as does all the Universe?
- We have made Him our friend and our brother and even at times our “buddy” – but have we ever seen Him in the light of His glory?

2. **Have We Rejoiced in His Future Plan?**
  - Evil doesn't triumph forever
  - Evil men won't go unpunished forever
  - God's people won't suffer forever
  - God's Kingdom will finally come . . . forever!
  
3. **Are We Responding to His Present Expectations?**
  - Are we submitted to His Will?
  - Are we shaped by His Word?
  - Are we sounding forth His Worth?
  - Are we sharing as His Witnesses?

## **Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God** ***The Seven Seals Judgments of Revelation 6***

### **Text: Revelation 6:1-17**

*Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." <sup>2</sup> And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. <sup>3</sup> When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>4</sup> Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. <sup>5</sup> When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." <sup>7</sup> When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>8</sup> So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. <sup>9</sup> When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. <sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. <sup>12</sup> I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. <sup>13</sup> And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. <sup>14</sup> Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. <sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" <sup>17</sup> "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

### **Introduction:**

On July 8, 1741 Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, Sinners in the hands of an Angry God. As he preached this sermon, a great conviction seized the hearts and minds of his audience – a conviction about the reality of something the Scripture speaks of plainly and repeatedly – the wrath of God.

Edward's point was that this wrath was both real and fierce – and the only thing restraining sinners from falling headlong into the fiery abyss of this divine wrath was the restraining, sustaining Hand of God! We live in a day and age where the wrath of God is an entirely neglected topic in Evangelical pulpits. We are appropriately familiar with the love of God and with His gracious mercy to forgive sinners and pardon their iniquity.

However, when God revealed to Moses that He was merciful, He also revealed something else that is just as true about His eternal character – His wrath!

*Exodus 34:6* And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,<sup>7</sup> "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Without question – God has repeatedly and consistently displayed His longsuffering toward the persistent and willful sin of lost men and even of the sins of His own people.

But the Scripture makes it clear – that His mercy will not endure forever! There is coming a day when His wrath will be poured out on the heads of sinners for their sins. And when that day comes – the writer of the book of Hebrews rightly warns: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:31*

There have been times when God's wrath has fallen after many warnings and lengthy periods of patient longsuffering.

World in Noah's Day – destroyed by a flood.

Cities in Lot's Day – destroyed by fire.

Israel in Isaiah's day – destroyed by Assyria

Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day – destroyed by Babylon

But – since the flood in Noah's day, there has never yet been a full display and outpouring of the fierce and unmixed wrath of God over all of the earth – that day is coming – and Revelation 6 speaks of this wrath.

## **I. The Preparation for this Revelation**

- Revelation 4 and 5 prepare us for this difficult portion of God's revelation and the horrific events that will ensue.
- We are introduced to the One who is orchestrating this revelation – God, sitting on His throne.

- We are warned about the fierceness of this wrath to come – the lightning and thunder coming from the throne of God (4)
- We are informed regarding the reason for this wrath – unworthiness and sinfulness in all of the universe.
- We are introduced to the One who has been given the right to execute this wrath – the Ruling Lion of Judah Who is the Slain Lamb of God.
- So when this section of Revelation is finally revealed – we know that whatever is happening and however horrific it might be – it is coming from One who has the authority to bring about these events.
- And it is coming from One who was willing to die for the people upon whom this wrath is coming!

## **II. The Reason for this Revelation**

- A. To give His Son His promised inheritance*
- B. To answer the prayers of His Saints – thy kingdom come!*
- C. To fulfill His divine purpose to re-gather all things under One Head!*

## **III. The Reaction to this Revelation**

- A. Agreement by the Living Beings – Amen*
- B. Adoration by the 24 Elders – Worship*
- C. Either Argument or Agreement by Us!*

## **IV. The Structure of this Revelation**

- A. Progressive in its timing*
  1. The Church Age has ended. (Rev 3:10)
  2. The 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel has started. (Daniel 9:23-27)
  3. The Day of Jacob’s Trouble is about to begin (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the tribulation) – it will end in joy. (Jeremiah 30:7)
  4. The Day of the Lord has come – it will end in justice. General day of the Lord for the greater part of the tribulation ending in the 24-hour period known as the

Great Day of His Wrath when He comes to earth and slays His enemies. (Is 2:10-22; Joel 3; Zech 14).

**B. Progressive in its intensity (sequential, chronological, telescopic)**

1. All the judgments are in these 7 seals – so the seals take us right through the entire tribulation.
2. The first four seals – are the horrors that men and nature will inflict on the earth during the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the tribulation.
3. The fifth seal speaks of the reaction against God’s people during the tribulation – persecution and martyrdom.
4. The sixth seal speaks of the horrific disasters that God will afflict the earth with by His Own Hand! This will take place at the end of the first half of the tribulation and will signify that even greater horrors are yet to come!
5. The seventh seal opens up and contains three more series of judgments (trumpets, thunders, and bowl judgments) that will all happen in rapid succession in the final 3 ½ years of the tribulation.

**V. The Details of this Revelation**

Note: God is the One orchestrating each of the seals – especially the first four! The Living Creature is the one who summons each horseman!

**A. *First Seal – False Peace (6:2)***

*And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*

- White Horse, bow, and a victor’s crown
- Went forth conquering and to conquer
- All speak of a world ruler who gains ascendancy by establishing a false peace without much bloodshed. Probably by political genius and political triumphs.

- May be the Leader Daniel speaks of that will make a covenant with Israel in Daniel 9:23-27.
- All the world will be rejoicing and enjoying peace and prosperity – but it is all a charade!
- It will only last a very short while – within months it will be shattered.

#### **B. Second Seal – War (6:3-4)**

*When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see."<sup>4</sup> Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.*

- Jesus predicted that during the tribulation, nation would rise up against nation (Matt 24.6-7)
- This Horseman rides a red horse signifying the violent bloodshed and devastation of war.
- And he will take away peace and will cause the earthdwellers to kill one another.
- And – he has been given a great sword – speaks to the power of his weapon. We possess weapons of mass destruction that can inflict death on a massive scale in modern warfare!
- As skillful a politician as the first rider might be – he will accrue to himself enemies! And there will be war on an unprecedented scale! In fact, this false “man of peace” will spend most of his 7 year rule fighting to keep his power over the rest of the nations!
- This alerts us that even the first half of the tribulation will be fiery and filled with horror and death! (In other words, it will also be tribulation – not just the 2<sup>nd</sup> half or last 42 months).

#### **C. Third Seal – Famine (6:5-6)**

*<sup>5</sup> When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."*

- If the horrors of unprecedented war were not enough for men to bear – they must now suffer the most severe famine the world has ever seen!

- Famine on a world-wide scale.
- The horse is black – speaks of woe and disaster.
- The basic staples of life will be limited – a quart of wheat was what normal people ate in a day. If you were willing to eat barley – three people could eat for a day.
- And it would cost you your entire day’s wage (a denarius was a day’s wage) to just get enough for yourself or at most 3 people on very meager rations!
- Nothing left over for even the basics of life such as shelter, clothing, transportation.
- And to add even more division – the famine would only afflict the poor people of the earth. The rich would be relatively unaffected – there would be plenty of oil and wine – but no money to buy them!
- HUNGRY PEOPLE are Desperate People! And they will resort to horrific measures to stay alive – as have people in past famines that were not nearly as severe or extensive. (cannibalism among Israel during military sieges)

**D. *Fourth Seal – Death (6:7-8)***

<sup>7</sup> *When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."* <sup>8</sup> *So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.*

- Only rider named – and he is followed by one called “Hades” – a real place where lost people go to await final judgment.
- Hades is more than the grave – it is a place of personal torment. BUT – it is not the final place of eternal torment. That is the Lake of Fire. However – there is no escape from Hades – it is not the Catholic idea of purgatory.
- Death comes on a massive scale – due to four things, two of which have already been mentioned (war and famine).
- However, two other horrors are now introduced – death or pestilence is the first and wild beasts are the second.
- In a world ravaged by war and by hunger – now comes the affliction of plague and disease – like we saw in the past with the bubonic plague or what we are seeing with the Aids virus.

- And even nature itself will turn against mankind and devour it!
- The peace that was initially so appealing will have long been forgotten – only months after it was initially celebrated!
- And the death toll will be staggering – ¼ of the earth's population!
- That means that in the first 3.5 years there will be a total of over 1.5 billion people killed or destroyed by war, famine, disease, or wild beasts!
- Imagine the emotional and sociological effect of this on the souls of men – they will be driven by fear, panic, and rage!
- They will all look for someone to pour out this anger and rage upon – and they will find such people – Christians!
- Christian people will explain to them why this is happening with an explanation that totally enrages them. And they will kill them!

**E. *Fifth Seal – Martyrs in Heaven (6:9-11)***

*<sup>9</sup> When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. <sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*

- These will be tribulation saints who are killed in the first half of the tribulation as martyrs.
- They will come to Christ after the Rapture – testimony, bibles, etc.
- They will remain faithful to Christ during persecution unto death – for the word of God and their testimony about that Word!
- They will be comforted by God
- There will be more of them yet to come – there is an appointed number of them!

**F. *Sixth Seal – Divine Wrath Displayed (6:12-17)***

*I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. <sup>13</sup> And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as*

*a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. <sup>14</sup> Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. <sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

### **1. *The Nature of This Judgment***

- Ends the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the tribulation period – 3.5 years to go.
- Up till now, the judgments have been coming from God – but applied through things on the earth – war, famine, pestilence, and wild animals.
- Now – there is no doubt at all in the minds of all the earth dwellers as to where this judgment is truly coming from – it is coming from God just as the martyrs have been saying.
- He will use the elements of the universe to rain down judgment on men – and in the midst of it will be what may be a giant meteor shower falling from heaven forcing men of every status to flee to the earth itself for safety!

### **2. *The Response to This Judgment***

- They will continue kill God's people around them
- They will flee from God's presence above them
- They will recognize God's Activity against them
  
- But they will not repent!
  
- And they ask a despairing question – who will stand in the day of His wrath?
  
- There is an answer to that question – there are people who will stand – and we meet them in chapter 7!

## **Conclusion**

So – how should you respond? How should this information, as horrific as it might be, affect us who are believers?

Do you agree with God about this?

Do you still adore Him now that you have seen the horrific wrath that He has in store for those who refuse to bow their knee to His throne?

Or are you arguing against this?

Men and women – if we honestly could see this wrath that is about to fall from heaven – we would do two things:

1. We would assure ourselves that we have numbered ourselves with the righteous and have availed ourselves of God's provision of escape from this wrath.
2. We would spend our days and our energy warning those who are still under this wrath!