**Book of Revelation Sermon II**

**Letters to the Churches Part 1**

Theme of Revelation: Peel back the layers of history and even the terrible persecutions and what do we find? **The lamb is on the throne and God is in control.**

Message of Revelation: **Be encouraged and faithful to Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not.**

Objective: to comfort Christians going through great hardship.

Romans appeals to the intellect/mind

Psalms appeals to the emotions

Revelation appeals to the imagination.

Outline of Revelation

Ch 1 Prologue

Ch 2-3 Letters to the Seven Churches

Ch 4-7 The Seven Seals

Ch 8-11 The Seven Trumpets

Ch 12-16 Seven Mystical Figures

Ch 15-16 The Seven Bowls

Ch 17-20 Enemies of the Church Overthrown

Ch 21-22 The Kingdom of God Revealed

**Revelation Ch 1**

Last week: I asked you to form a mental image of Jesus. What do you see?

Rev 1:12-16 Q: Is this the picture one gets of Jesus in the gospels? Definitely not!!!

A voice “like a trumpet” v 10 (a loud and clear message)

Blazing eyes see everything very clearly. Nothing escapes his notice!

White hair, etc. purity

Bronze feet = strength

Double-edged sword coming from his mouth Literal? NO! = his absolute authority and power to judge by what he speaks

To sum up the image: Jesus is authoritative, holy, majestic, omniscient, powerful. He stands among the churches, he holds their fate in his hands. This should have been very reassuring.

Why? Because God’s purpose is to reassure the saints that God is in control.

Are we living in troubled times? Do we need an extra dose of assurance that God is in control—that what he says MUST happen (Rev 1:1)?

**Rev Chapters 2 & 3 The Seven Letters**

Who was the Revelation to? “to the seven churches…” Rev. 1:4

Rev 1:11 Specifically, to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Why them? Because these were the churches, more or less, that John himself was shepherd of.

Jesus is about to go on an inspection tour of OUR church. What will he find?

What is the current state of the Church of Christ in Bakersfield?

Uhhh… Are you feeling a bit uncomfortable—like waiting in the office for an interview? Hoping he does not notice? Are you expecting a rebuke? Are you feeling proud? Are you expecting a commendation?

Pattern for letters to the churches

1. Greeting

2. A description of Jesus (taken, in part, from Rev 1:12-16)

3. A commendation (except Sardis and Laodicea)

4. A criticism (except Smyrna and Philadelphia)

5. An appeal and a warning

6. Exhortation and promise

Rev 2:1-7

v. 1 Jesus has the seven stars (angels/messengers of the churches Rev 1:20) in his hand. And he is walking among the seven golden lampstands/churches.

What picture does this give you of Jesus and his church—especially ours?

He is aware of what is going on in our church. Nothing misses his eye.

He knows how the Newfield’s Bible talk is doing. He is aware what the dating situation is like in the campus group.

The churches are definitely not left as orphans. Despite all appearances, Jesus is caring for the churches. He is watching.

If you understand both that:

Jesus is watching and aware what we are doing and

Jesus is taking care of/protecting us

How might you behave if you understood this?

Remember in the following that this is the church John was the chief elder of!!!

Rev 2:2-7 What are they praised for?

* hard work
* perseverance
* staunch opposition to sin (unlike Pergamum and Thyatira)

Aside: v. 6 Nicolaitins = Nicholas of Antioch? Acts 6:5 a proselyte. Some scholars suggest these people were open to including pagan practices in the church.

The Ephesians were keeping worldliness out of the church!

* opposed false doctrine they tested the false apostles.

These Christians were not slackers!!! They were fully convinced that they were doing awesome. How are you doing? Great!!!

They were the right church, teaching the right doctrine, opposing what God opposes.

They are doing great, right?????

Below we will learn that these people had lost their first love. Question: Can we “not grow weary”(v. 3) if we have lost our first love? Apparently, yes.

Q: How would you describe these Christians? They were in the habit of Christianity after many years of doing the right thing. They were good at it.

2:4 What had they lost? How might you be like this?

Are you good at Christianity—at doing the good Christian things?

But their hearts were not in it, and to the extent it was, that “heart” was not focused on Jesus. “For Christ’s love compels us” was not for them. They needed to do the cross study again!

Is that you? Well…

2:5 The solution:

* Consider/Remember Q: What?
* Repent Q: How? I am doing the right things!

Can you repent of not having a particular feeling?

How? “Do what you did at first.” This is confusing, because they were doing all the right things.

Conclusion: Do it the WAY you did it at first. (what you did vs how you did it)

They shared their faith zealously. They prayed eagerly, they gave money excitedly, they fellowshipped joyously, etc. Become like a child.

I do not want Jan and I to act like young (immature) lovers.

You do not want to start acting like a baby Christian.

But there is a mature way of being like a young Christian.

There is a mature “first love.”

Again—sharing zealously, praying eagerly, give money excitedly, open yourself to going on a mission team, fellowship joyously…

Child-like, not childish.

Be like Vanessa Morris. Be like Mary Sheffield.

What is at stake? v. 5 I… will remove your lampstand. They will not all fall away, but their church will languish and eventually die.

2:7 Who has an ear? If you listen, Rev 21,22 will be for you.

Rev 2:8-11 Smyrna Q: Why does Jesus only have good things to say about Smyrna? Is it because they have no problems?

v. 9 The church was relatively poor. v. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty. Jesus is walking among the lampstands and he knows.

In what sense are they “rich” Poor in money but rich in spiritual wealth.

Q: Do you feel rich? Do you feel poor? 1 Tim 6:8 “If we have food and clothing we will be content with that.”

The “Synagogue of Satan” is the Jews who are persecuting the church

Above the Synagogue, typically, was a sign: “Synagogue of the Lord” above a Jewish place of worship.

v. 10 They will be persecuted (by the Jews in their city) for 10 days. Perhaps not a literal ten days. Represents a definite period of time.

How faithful does Jesus want them to be? ‘”Be faithful even to the point of death.” And you will get a crown….. v. 12 you will be untouched by the second death (Rev. 20)/hell.

Q: Would you be faithful to the point of death if asked to make a sacrifice to the Roman god?

Rev 2:12-17 Pergamum. Pergamum was the former Roman capital and largest city in Asia, known for its out-of-control paganism.

“Throne of Satan” was a huge altar to Zeus on a hill 800 feet above Pergamum

Altars to Zeus, Augustus, Tiberius, Roma and many more.

Library in Pergamum was the second largest in the world. 200,000 volumes. When they tried to get the librarian of Alexandria to come to Pergamum, The Ptolemies cut off the supply of papyrus, and thus parchment (pergamena) was invented.

2:12 the one with the sharp, double-edged sword. Watch out! I know where you live….

Faithful in the days of Antipas “my faithful witness” (*martus*, martyr)

Their problem: **Some** hold to Balaam’s teaching. Many—probably most were faithful and did not hold to this teaching.

Balaam (Book of Numbers): Idol-worship (read this as offering incense to Roma/the emperor)

**Some** hold to the teachings of the teaching of the Nicolaitins.

Their problem: lack of church discipline. They were too tolerant of sin.

Q: Is tolerance a Christian virtue? It is the ultimate virtue in a postmodern culture.

We tolerate differences, opinions, food, culture, age, teems root for, political parties,… But not sin.

v. 16 Does Jesus get angry?

Rev 2:17 Assurance: Hidden manna: I will meet your (spiritual) needs. White stone was used as a symbol of acquittal at a trial. It was also given to freed slaves as a token of their having been freed.

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Revelation 2:18-29 Thyatira. Like Pergamum, only worse!

A city with many trades, including dying of purple cloth (Lydia) and working in bronze. Trade-unions/guilds very important here. There was tremendous pressure for Christians to offer worship to idols as required to be part of a guild.

Description of Jesus: “feet of burnished bronze” (bronze a major industry in Thyatira)

Commendation (pretty short): giving and serving and even growing…more than you did at first. This is a growing church. They are doing fairly well—better than Ephesus!

But… the seeds of total disaster have already been planted.

They tolerated Jezebel. Same general problem as Pergamum, but considerably worse.

Jezebel almost certainly not the actual name of the woman. A prominent and charismatic woman.

Her sin: She encouraged taking part in idol-worship as part of trade guilds. It’s not that bad. Drinking is not that bad… Missing church for cultural events or sports events not that serious. You have to make compromises to get along in this world. Work tells you to come in on Sunday? No big deal!

Those who “committed adultery” with her (v. 22) and “her children” are the ones who have fallen under her influence. Theirs is a spiritual adultery.

Divisive spirit and undermining the leadership in the church is a very big issue.

God is going to come down on this woman big time. “I will deal with her.” He will not wait for the church to discipline her.

v. 24 “deep teaching” a probably reference to Gnosticism.

Assurance: Hang on to the end, and I will give you authority over nations! (1 Cor 6:2-4 We will judge angels)

Summary so far:

**Remember, repent and rediscover that first love**

**God knows our trials and suffering and will rescue us from them.**

**Tolerance of sin is NOT a virtue. We need church discipline and unity in the face of sin**

**If we do this God will give us a white stone!**

Rev. 3:1-6 Sardis.

Capital of King Croesus: the fabled richest man in the world.

Croesus went to the Oracles of Delphi. Shall I attack King Cyrus. The answer: If you do, the result will be the destruction of a king.

The result: Cyrus conquered Sardis 549 BC.

Sardis on the side of an extremely steep hill. So steep it was thought impregnable.

Yet, it was conquered by Cyrus and by Antiochus III The Great (218 BC). It was a city that had a reputation for being great, but twice, it had been overconfident and was conquered easily.

Also, known for robbers, as they could easily escape to the city.

Sardis was living on past glory.

Rev 3:1 So did the church in Sardis! For Sardis, the reprimand comes first. Jesus is losing his patience with these pretenders.

They were living on reputation. They looked good, but they were dead, spiritually.

Q: What was this church like? Remembering the glory days. Not doing very much.

Jesus: Wake UP!!! (Hebrews 2:1) (Note: Cyrus conquered Sardis, literally, because the soldiers of Croesus went to sleep)

Imagine the scene when this letter was read to the church in Sardis! Do you think they repented?

Their problem was not sin, per se, but lack of action and growth.

Maybe they were in shock because of a crisis like Covid-19 and were “stuck.”

Solution: Rev 3:3 Remember, obey and repent.

Jesus: I will come like a thief (kind of like the thieves in Sardis).

v. 4-5 “Yet, you have a few people…” We should remember that even if God judges the church and if the church is dead, some will be faithful. Judging a church and judging an individual are two different things.

v. 5 He who overcomes (any individual Christian) will, like the faithful Sardinian, be dressed in white.

The faithful will not be “blotted out” of the book of life. So much for “once saved, always saved.”

Rev 3:7-13 Philadelphia

Description of Jesus: Holds the Key of David. The Messiah. The true Jewish king.

A clear reference to Isaiah 22:21-22.

Context: They had been heavily persecuted by Jews in the city.

The church in Philadelphia was small and weak, but they were doing really great, especially considering the persecution. In fact, that is why they were being persecuted! Result: Jesus has only good to say to them.

Synagogue of Satan. The true Jews/Israelites were the Christians. (Gal 3:29, Gal 6:16, Romans 9:6-9 not all Israel are Israel).

I will make them come and worship at your feet. Wow!!! (Isaiah 60:14, v. 12 you will be the city of God)

Encouragement:

v. 10 You will not experience the worst of the coming persecution. I am coming soon.

I will make him a pillar (Philadephia was famous for erecting pillars for famous people). Never will he have to leave the city (they had a massive earthquake in AD 17 and people still lived outside the city. There is more encouragement for this church than any other. I will give you a new name (Philadelphia had recently been given a new name: Neocaesarea when Tiberius helped to rebuild the city.)

Rev 3:14-22 Laodicea

A center of banking, black wool and school of medicine (famous for its eye salve)

Laodicea: No commendation. Their sin? Spiritual lukewarmness. Hypocrisy

Wouldn’t it be better to be lukewarm (a little Christian) than ice cold (an enemy of Christianity or a blatant pagan)? NO!!!!

They made Jesus sick to his “stomach.”

3:17 How had they become lukewarm? By relying on self rather than God. By relying on the things the world has to offer for fulfillment. Self-sufficient. They believed in the prosperity gospel.

You say you are rich. (Deut 8: God gives us the ability to create wealth)

You say you do not need a thing. (1 Cor 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive?)

Reality check: You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Q: Who is wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked? All of us!!!!

3:18 Fortunately, it is not too late from them. They can “buy from me gold, refined by fire.” They can begin to put their treasures in heaven again. …and white clothes to wear. They can return to relying on Jesus, not on the world for salvation. They will still be wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked, but the white clothes will “cover” the nakedness.

I will put on the true salve for your eyes so that you can see spiritually (a reference to the famous Laodicean eye salve) John 9:41 those who claim to see are blind.

Q: Do you need some of this eye-salve? Where is your spiritual discernment, especially when it comes to finding fulfillment in the things of the world?

How will you get this “salve”? by rebuke and discipline (v. 19)

v. 20-21 If we are lukewarm, we keep Jesus at a distance. But, we can repent and re-establish that close relationship.

Note: The is the most commonly used scripture to support the “pray Jesus into your heart” doctrine. Q: Who is Jesus speaking to? Lukewarm Christians who need to repent.