**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.**

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

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?

Rev 2:1-7

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

* hard work
* perseverance

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

But… 2:4 But they had lost their first love.

2:5 The solution:

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

Conclusion: Do it the WAY you did it at first.

Rev 2:8-11 Smyrna

v. 9 The church was relatively poor. v. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty.

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

‘”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.

Rev 2:12-17 Pergamum

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

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

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.