



The
7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION
PDF BOOKLET



BY PATRICK WALTON

The **REVELATION OF** **JESUS CHRIST**

CONTENTS

Session One

“The Church Of Ephesus” (Revelation 2:1-7)pg. 5

Session Two

“The Church Of Smyrna” (Revelation 2:8-11).....pg. 17

Session Three

“The Church Of Pergamos” (Revelation 2:12-17).....pg. 27

Session Four

“The Church Of Thyatira” (Revelation 2:18-29).....pg. 39

Session Five

“The Church Of Sardis” (Revelation 3:1-6).....pg. 49

Session Six

“The Church Of Philadelphia” (Revelation 3:7-13).....pg. 59

Session Seven

“The Church Of Laodicea” (Revelation 3:14-22).....pg. 71

Session Eight

“Summary Of Revelation 2-3”pg. 83

The **REVELATION OF** **JESUS CHRIST**

THE Revelation of Jesus Christ is the great capstone of the entire Bible. All other 65 books throughout both the Old and New Testament flow in a stream making their way into the ocean of the Revelation. This glorious book is also the fourth largest book in the New Testament and the only book in the Bible titled *"The Revelation Of Jesus Christ."*

In this PDF Booklet titled "The 7 Churches Of Revelation" I have written about each of the 7 Churches mentioned throughout **Revelation chapters 2-3**. I have taken much time to research both the physical location's of these specific Churches and Jesus' words to them. It's my opinion that much of what Jesus said to these 7 Churches has very specific local implications based on where these Churches were located along with the specific challenges they were facing. **Revelation 2-3** agrees with the age old truth that "no two Churches are alike."

I have also included within this PDF Booklet a bonus chapter that is a summary of **Revelation 2-3**. The reason for including this bonus chapter was because of all the extra information I came across that I wasn't able to directly address within the previous 7 chapters. This bonus chapter was very convicting as I came to see the importance of hearing the Holy Spirit's voice afresh within The Revelation.

It's my prayer that you will take your time reading through this PDF booklet and like Jesus' Appeal to each of the 7 Churches, that you would in turn give your ear to the Holy Spirit and make the proper changes that are needed. There is much to discover within these two chapters (**Revelation 2-3**) and I hope that I have given you some tools to mine out as much as God will give you.



**PATRICK
WALTON**

Session One

“The Church Of Ephesus”

Revelation 2:1-7

The Church Of Ephesus

I) Introduction To The Seven Churches

- A) **Revelation 2-3** are Jesus’ address to seven historical, physical and literal Churches. They were all located in what was then Asia Minor, but we know the area now as modern day Turkey.
- B) These letters are laid out in a purposeful way with the 1st and 7th letter to the two Churches in greatest danger. The 2nd and 6th letters are written to Churches that are doing great. And the 3rd, 4th and 5th letters are to churches that are struggling.
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1) Ephesus | Bad shape |
| 2) Smyrna | Great shape |
| 3) Pergamos | Struggling |
| 4) Thyatira | Struggling |
| 5) Sardis | Struggling |
| 6) Philadelphia | Great shape |
| 7) Laodicea | Bad shape |
- C) Some have said that these seven Churches represent seven time periods in Church history;
- 1) Ephesus—first century
 - 2) Smyrna—persecution period of the 2nd and 3rd centuries
 - 3) Pergamos—the Church of Constantine
 - 4) Thyatira—the middle ages
 - 5) Sardis—the reformation
 - 6) Philadelphia—the Church of the modern missionary movement in the 18th century
 - 7) Laodicea—the Church of the 20th-21st century
- D) In my opinion, this is a dangerous way to interpret the scripture. Though many of these seven Churches might fit into a certain time period, it’s still not a solid, safe way to interrupt scripture.
- E) I believe in a threefold approach to rightly view these seven Churches. 1) Past (Literal, Historical Churches) 2) Present (The Church era) 3) Future (The final generation of Christians).
- F) It’s believed these Churches were selected because they were on a circular pattern with Ephesus being the entry point to the other Churches. These were believed to be distribution Churches, meaning that from these 7 Churches the message would have spread elsewhere.
- G) The seven Churches were believed to be in a circular path for the traveling preacher who had been this way before. It’s thought that from these Churches another messenger would then take the message to the other Churches. This was a common practice with New Testament letters.

- 1) **Colossians 4:16** *"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea"*

H) There is a common structure to all of the seven letters addressed by Jesus;

1) **The Address**

(i) *"To the angel of the Church in _____."*

2) **The Attribute**

(i) *"These things says He _____."*

(ii) In every address from Jesus to the seven Churches, Jesus shares unique aspects of Himself that He revealed to John in **Revelation 1**.

3) **The Approval**

(i) *"I know your works..."*

4) **The Accusation**

(i) *"Yet I have this against you..."*

5) **The Advice**

(i) *"or else I will come to you quickly..." "repent, and do your first works..."*

6) **The Assurance**

(i) *"To him who overcomes, I will..."*

(a) The assurance of reward isn't something that Jesus promises to the entire Church, but always to individuals. Jesus is offering incentives to those who overcome, but the rewards aren't automatic for everyone. There are 22 total eternal rewards in **Revelation 2-3**.

(b) The rewards of Jesus are for those that wait for the eternal future, not our temporal present. It's those only that have faith in Jesus to keep His promise that will have motivation by distant rewards.

7) **The Appeal**

(i) *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*

(a) This is a commandment to not only take Jesus' words into our ears, but also into our hearts.

(b) (The only place that this format is changed is in the last 4 letters, number 6 and 7 are reversed).

II) History Of Ephesus

- A) The city of Ephesus was the largest city of the seven Churches and a thriving metropolis. It was a large seaport that worked as an entrance into the other cities because of its proximity to the water. One of the seven wonders of the world was held there, which was the temple of Artemis.

- B) Ephesus boasted of a large sports arena, theaters, a museum and shopping. It was a wealthy city and very pagan in its worship of the goddess Diana who was covered in breasts. And in the midst of this corrupt city, was a Church.
- C) The Church of Ephesus was founded by Aquila and Priscilla (**Acts 18:18**) under the leadership of Paul.

III) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Ephesus

- A) **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..."*
 - 1) I believe that the word angel is best translated *Elder, Bishop, Apostle, Shepherd or overseer*. Jesus is addressing the leadership of the Church because the people are a byproduct of their leadership. By addressing the leadership, He will address the people.
 - 2) Jesus, in His post-resurrection is pictured here as holding the messengers in His hand and walking among the Church. This means that today, Jesus is still speaking, leading, guiding and directing His Church.
 - 3) **The Attribute** Jesus shares with this Church is that He holds the messengers in His hand and that He walks among the Church. Jesus is about the level one of the largest charges against any of the seven Churches to Ephesus. But He needs them to know that He is holding them and is willing to walk with them through the process.
- B) **Revelation 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; and you have preserved and have patience, and have labored for My namesake and have not become weary."*
 - 1) Prior to Jesus' giving them **The Accusation**, He is going to first **Approve** some of the things they are doing.
 - (i) They have labored well
 - (ii) They have patience
 - (iii) They hate evil
 - (iv) They have good doctrine
 - (v) They have persevered
 - (vi) And they aren't weary
 - 2) Jesus says to them that *"He knows their works."* This means that He has intimate knowledge of both the good and the bad that's taking place in their midst.
 - 3) From the outside, the Church of Ephesus was a thriving mega-Church enjoy great success.
 - 4) Resisting evil teachers was and is a huge undertaking in the Church. Jesus praised the Church for their stand for truth, and for calling out false apostles. There is serious repercussions for calling out false ministries within the Church.

C) **Revelation 2:4** *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."*

- 1) After Jesus' **Approval** for some of the positive things they are doing, He now gives them **The Accusation**. Jesus, in great tenderness tells them the positives before He shares the negatives.
- 2) In the midst of serving others, defending doctrine and addressing false ministries, the Church of Ephesus had lost its original reason for becoming a Christian, the love of God.
- 3) This letter tells us that the leadership over the Church of Ephesus was serving others more than they were serving Jesus which resulted in a congregation that was busy working for Jesus, but had lost their love for Jesus.
- 4) This is a serious issue and it's prevalent today in much of the Church. 3 of the 7 Churches were in this very spot; Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea, working hard, but dull at the heart level.

D) **Revelation 1:5** *"Remember therefore where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent."*

- 1) Jesus' **Advice** to this church was threefold;

(i) **Remember**

- (a) Jesus was calling them to remember what it was like when they first fell in love with Him. Do you remember when you couldn't wait to get to the prayer meeting, read your Bible, be with other Christians? Remember, Remember.

- (i) **Jeremiah 2:2** *"I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness..."*

(ii) **Repent**

- (a) Jesus tells them to apologize for their neglect of Him. Call it what it is. It's not being busy, it's neglect.

- (i) **2nd Corinthians 7:9-11**

(iii) **Return**

- (a) This is a call to return back to the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. Return to prayer, giving, serving, reading, fasting and sharing Jesus with others.
- 2) Jesus' promise to the Church of Ephesus is that if they refused to repent, He would personally remove their lampstand from its place. I use to think that this had to do with losing your salvation, but now I understand it's speaking of their place of influence.
- 3) Because the Church of Ephesus was a lampstand Church, it was being held accountable for what they were exporting which was more negative than positive. They were going to do more damage than good in the long run and if they refused to repent, they'd be put out.

E) **Revelation 2:6** *"But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate."*

- 1) Jesus again affirms them for hating this destructive doctrine and He also says that He hates it too.

- 2) There is much thought around this idea, but some believe that this was a deacon from **Acts 6:5** who helped Christians sin under the grace of God. It's a doctrine that fills the Church today, and will continue to increase.
- F) **Revelation 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."*
- 1) Jesus gives the final **Assurance** of reward and the **Appeal** to listen. History tells us that close to the temple of Artemis there was a tree which created an asylum for convicted criminals if they could get to it.
 - 2) Jesus is very well implying that although the city of Ephesus allows criminals safety near this earthly tree, He will give them access to the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, if they overcome. This isn't an automatic reward, it's based solely on overcoming.
 - 3) And His final **Appeal** to the Church of Ephesus is that they would first give their ear and then their heart to the voice of the Holy Spirit and respond rightly.

Session One Extra Reading

Revelation 2-3 is the part of the Revelation which Jesus referred to in **Revelation 1:19** as *...the things which are...* Revelation Chapter One was what Jesus called *...the things which you have seen...* (**Revelation 1:19**) and now we are moving into the part of the Revelation where Jesus is going to give His address to the Seven Churches. In this Chapter, I am going to cover the Church of Ephesus, but prior to doing that, I am going to lay some ground work for us to rightly understand the Seven Churches as a whole.

After I had become a Christian I heard from lots of people that *every Church is like a finger print, there are no two that are alike*. This phrase was a powerful statement that helped me understand the great diversity in the body of Christ. It's not that every Church is so different that none of them has anything in common. It's that every Church is led by a different set of leaders who are as diverse as are the peoples of the earth. All Christian Churches have a set of beliefs that are common to all of us, or at least should be common to all of us. But on top of that, we build according to our personalities, our season in life and the culture in which Jesus has set us.

The same thing is true with these seven Churches Jesus is about to address. It's not that they were so radically different that no two Churches agreed on anything as being the same, it's that they each had a different set of strengths, weaknesses, struggles and both internal and external pressures. Jesus in His creativity addresses each of these seven Churches with words, phrases, scriptures and facets of Himself that are specific to each Church. In this Chapter I am going to cover the introduction to the Seven Churches, the history of Ephesus, and Jesus' address to the Church of Ephesus.

Introduction to the Seven Churches

After reading various commentaries and looking at different people's works on the book of Revelation and the Seven Churches of **Revelation 2-3** it's very apparent that people have lots of different ideas about those Churches. It's my passion to share some simple thoughts about these Churches that will help simplify what Jesus wanted us to understand concerning them. It's not that what I am going to share is the complete picture, but rather a simplified picture to help us understand in a safe way how to look at these seven Churches.

It's my belief and my understanding through reading the whole of the Bible that **Revelation 2-3** are Jesus' address to seven historical, physical and literal Churches. These seven Churches that Jesus addressed are located in what used to be called Asia Minor, but is now known simply as modern Turkey. And when you look at these letters in the way they are numbered it becomes very clear that they were placed in a very specific order by the Holy Spirit. Here is a breakdown of the Seven Churches and where they're healthy, from Jesus' eyes;

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Ephesus | Bad shape |
| 2. Smyrna | Great shape |
| 3. Pergamos | Struggling |
| 4. Thyatira | Struggling |
| 5. Sardis | Struggling |
| 6. Philadelphia | Great Shape |
| 7. Laodicea | Bad shape |

You can see from the layout above that the first and last Churches were in the worst shape. And the second and sixth Churches were in the best shape. Now a side note on the two Churches that Jesus didn't have anything negative to say against. Smyrna and Philadelphia were suffering persecution but were being faithful to God. So it wasn't that they weren't struggling, they just weren't struggling with sin and other issues like the Churches around them. But sandwiched in-between these Churches were three churches, Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis, which were a mixed bag of both positive and negative statements from Jesus.

The Churches which looked the best externally (Ephesus and Laodicea) were in the worst shape from Jesus' perspective. And the two Churches which looked the worst externally (Smyrna and Philadelphia) were doing the best from Jesus' perspective. This goes to show us that God doesn't evaluate things in the same way that man does; because the Churches which looked best in man's eyes were doing the worst in Jesus' eyes.

As I have already mentioned there has been much said about these seven Churches and what they mean. Here is another breakdown of what some theologians have assumed these Churches represented;

1. Ephesus—First century
2. Smyrna—Persecution period of the 2nd and 3rd centuries
3. Pergamos—The Church of Constantine
4. Thyatira—The middle ages
5. Sardis—The reformation
6. Philadelphia—The Church of the modern missionary movement in the 18th century
7. Laodicea—The Church of the 20th and 21st century

I have purposely included these beliefs about which Church represents which part of the past 2,000 years of Church history. I have not included these because I believe in them, but because I disagree with the breakdown and placing these Churches in various time periods. Although there may be some similarities with these various Churches and different time periods, I believe that looking at these Churches, primarily through this lens, is an unsafe way to interpret scriptures.

I have overheard various leaders in my denomination state that we are clearly in the *Laodicean hour* because of the lukewarm state of the Church and the only thing that remains is Jesus returning. That's all we are waiting for. But what about Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis? I see more similarities with these other four Churches than I do with the Church of Laodicea. Those other Churches represented Churches who had lost their first love, were working for Jesus but not with Him, were tolerating immorality in their midst, were thought by others to be alive and really happening but were actually dead on the inside, and so much more. To assume that we are one of the Seven Churches is not a safe way to view the Bible in part or in whole.

I personally believe in a threefold approach to viewing these seven Churches. Firstly, these seven Churches were from the *past*. From the past meaning they were literal, historical Churches that you can actually go today and see their ruins and what remains. They were real Churches. Secondly, there are present truths. What I mean by present truths is that ever since those letters were penned they have been relevant to the Church in every generation including this present one and will be in the future. And

thirdly they represent *future* truths. These seven Churches will be such a *strength* to the final generation of human history as God equips a people to endure the onslaught of demonic oppression, world tyranny, gross immorality, the temporal judgments of God and creation's groan. Beloved, those letters will be the breakfast of an entire generation that God is preparing to send into the midst of the greatest crisis in world history. So in my opinion, I see these seven Churches as having a past, present and future reality.

According to how these Churches are laid out geographically it's clear that they were on a circular pattern with Ephesus being the gateway Church to the other 6 Churches. They seemed to be laid out in **Revelation 2-3** in such a way that a preacher could start at Ephesus and work his way through the other 6 in a circuit. It's also believed that from these seven Churches the message would then spread far and wide through other preachers carrying the message to the other brother and sisters scattered throughout the world.

It was common that the various letters from the New Testament were sent around to the other Churches besides the one for which it was specifically written. Look what Paul has to say about this in **Colossians 4:16** Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. This verse so tickled me, for two reasons, the other day when I read it. Firstly, that they were passing letter around from Church to Church is a beautiful thing. What God says to one group He says to all groups. And secondly, there was and might still be a letter to Laodicea floating around. How cool is that. No, for whatever reason, Jesus didn't include it into the canon of scripture, but it's still existed and might still be around today.

Within **Revelation 2-3** there is a common structure that Jesus follows as He addresses each Church. It's actually a seven-fold structure that He uses, and I want to break it down briefly right now. Firstly Jesus gives the *Address*. This includes His words to the leader of the Church and it always goes like this To the angel (Preacher, Pastor, Shepherd, Elder) of the Church in _____. Jesus does this the same way to all seven Churches, greeting the leader or overseer of the ministry prior to Him speaking to them. Secondly, Jesus gives the *Attribute*. In the Attribute Jesus ascribes to the Church one of His facets that He revealed to John in **Revelation 1**, as a specific part of Himself that would apply to the direct situation the Church was in. The attribute is usually given like this These things says He. These Attributes give us insight in the specific area of Jesus that would strengthen them to repent and/or endure.

Thirdly, Jesus gives the *Approval*. Jesus' approval comes to every Church just like His Address. He says this to them I know your works. Fourthly, Jesus gives nearly all of the Churches, except a couple, an *Accusation* against them. Jesus' Accusation against the Churches comes across by stating I have this against you. What powerful, painful and healing words from the resurrected Man in glory! Fifthly, after Jesus' Accusation against the Churches He then gives them His *Advice*. Jesus surely isn't out to destroy the Churches, because He loves them dearly! But He also doesn't shy away from telling them the truth about their situation. But with the truth also comes His advice, which is His wisdom to them about how they can be restored back into right relationship with Him. In His advice He says something like Or else I will come to you quickly.....repent, and do your first works...

Sixthly Jesus would then give them His *Assurance*. The power of the Assurance is that, unlike the *Attribute* which is related to what He showed John from **Revelation 1**, the Assurance is from what He showed John in **Revelation 20-22**. Jesus' Assurance to the various Churches was that if, and only if, they overcame the pressure and difficulty that was before them, would He then give them a reward. For the math student, there are actually 22 eternal rewards listed in **Revelation 2-3** for the believer who not

only gives their life to Jesus, but also overcomes. Jesus, who knows all things, understands that the Church would have to have an incentive to overcome the pressure that would be stacked up against them throughout Church history as well as in the final generation. His Assurance to them sounds something like *To him who overcomes, I will.*

And seventhly, Jesus gives each Church an *Appeal*. His Appeal to them is the same for all seven Churches and it's said like this, *He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.* Jesus' appeal to the Seven Churches is that they not just give their ear, but also their heart to the various things He has to say with them. Because Jesus is trustworthy we must listen to Him, trust Him and give ourselves to the activity of the Holy Spirit so that we are with Him where He is. Jesus is such a beautiful preacher and the best, literally the *best*, sermon organizer.

It's my hope that this information about the Seven Churches as a whole is helpful, as we now start to look at the different parts of each Church in an individual study. Jesus has so much to say and it's important that we take time to look at the many moving parts as they relate to the city, the Church and the era of time they are in.

The History of Ephesus

Out of the seven total Churches that Jesus addresses in **Revelation 2-3** the city of Ephesus is by far the largest. By today's standards Ephesus would be considered a real metropolis, much like New York City. The city was filled with theaters, sports arenas, a museum and shopping, along with large pagan temples. Because of the city's proximity to the water it was a major trade center with ships coming and going, distributing merchandise to Ephesus to be sent from there to other places.

The city of Ephesus boasted of having one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Temple of Artemis. Ephesus was a very wealthy city, known for great worship of the pagan goddess Diana who was covered in breasts. But in the midst of this corrupt, struggling, sin-ridden city was a Church, the Church of Ephesus.

We are led to believe that the Church of Ephesus was founded by Aquila and Pricilla under the leadership of Paul (**Acts 18:18-19**). It's also said to have been later overseen by Timothy, one of Paul's faithful sons in the faith. The city of Ephesus would prove an old adage true that in the midst of great darkness, the light shines its brightest. The Church of Ephesus was surely a lampstand ministry to the region and even beyond.

Jesus' Address to the Church Of Ephesus

Just like all the other Churches, Jesus opens with His Address to the Church of Ephesus in **Revelation 2:1** by saying *To the angel (Pastor, Leader, Apostle) 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...* Jesus, in His post-resurrection, is addressing the leadership of this ministry. The people of the Church of Ephesus are a direct result of the leadership over the ministry. It's not 100% that way, but it's very common that the majority of a Church will either rise or fall to the level of leadership that is overseeing the ministry. So Jesus fully understands that if He speaks to the leadership He will hopefully be speaking to the people of the Church as well.

Recently I was thinking about this passage and the idea struck that Jesus, in **Revelation 2-3**, is in His post-resurrected body. What this means is that Jesus didn't only walk the earth, seeing things from a Human vantage point during His incarnation and His earthly ministry, but still today, in His resurrection Jesus is walking among His Churches. The implications of this truth mean that Jesus is currently leading, directing, overseeing, correcting, affirming and speaking to His Church. After Jesus gives the Address He then follows it with the Attribute.

Here, to the Church of Ephesus Jesus gives them the Attribute by stating ***I am the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands...*** We know from **Revelation 1:20** what the seven lampstands and the seven stars are. Jesus told John in that passage that the seven lampstands were the Seven Churches and the seven stars were the seven messengers of the Seven Churches. Jesus is pictured before them specifically as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and He who walks among the seven golden lampstands. This is very important for the Church of Ephesus.

Out of the Seven Churches Jesus is going to level the largest charge against them in just a few verses, but prior to doing that He wants them to know that He is holding them in His hand and that He will walk with them through the process of restoration. Jesus isn't just mad at them, hoping that they perish. He is desiring that they will see His tenderness and His commitment to them for the long haul, to walk with them through the process.

Jesus continues speaking to the Church of Ephesus in **Revelation 2:2-3**, giving them His Approval and saying ***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; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*** Prior to Jesus giving this Church His Accusation against them, He first gives them His Approval of them. Jesus, in His great tenderness, always speaks kindly to us telling us how He feels about us prior to sharing difficult information with us. The Church of Ephesus is the only one of the seven Churches that Jesus is going to threaten to close.

Jesus tells the Church of Ephesus that there were actually 6 things they were doing well. Jesus says to them that they have labored well, they've had patience, they've hated evil, they have good doctrine, they have preserved and even in their labors they haven't grown weary. Seriously, this Church by most standards is in a class of its own. By most western standards when it comes to healthy Churches the Church of Ephesus would take the cake.

But in the midst of this busy Church there was a large piece that had obviously been neglected. Jesus starts this passage by stating that ***He knows their works.*** To hear Jesus speak this phrase in the midst of the Ephesus all-church staff meeting would bring this busy ministry to a halt. This is the God Man, who literally and actually knows everything. It's possible to hide our hearts and our motives from others in the midst of our busy serving, but not so with Jesus. All things are exposed before Him and the sword of His mouth (**Hebrew 4:12**). Jesus is not just saying, *I know what you're doing*, but He's clearly saying, *I know why you're doing what you're doing*. This is a game changer with the Jesus.

From this passage about His intimate knowledge of their ministry, He now levels His Accusation against them in **Revelation 2:4** by saying ***Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*** According to Jesus, in the midst of their busy service to others, their defense of the Gospel and Doctrine, they had become like a porcupine, having lots of points but no love. The issue that Ephesus was facing

was a serious issue that fills many ministries today and has even captured my own heart from time to time. It's the place where we become so busy working for Jesus that we lose sight of our own personal relationship with Him. We turn in our intimacy with Jesus to ministry *for* Jesus. I hear God's servants often talking about what they are doing *for* Jesus. This statement hasn't any bearing in the Bible. Jesus really doesn't need us to do anything for Him, what He does want is a people to do something *with* Him. It's a partnership with Jesus. It's a marriage of equally yoked partners serving alongside Him in His Father's vineyard. It's such a prevalent issue that even 3 of the 7 Churches of **Revelation 2-3** are in the same place. They look good on the outside but are dead on inside. They are busy, but in their service of others they have neglected their ministry to Jesus.

Jesus, in great tenderness towards them, has some powerful Advice that will help them return to Him and be reconciled back with their Creator. In **Revelation 2:5** Jesus says to them Remember therefore 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 great God who remembers everything calls out the Church of Ephesus and gives them His Advice to remember both Him and where they have fallen.

The words of Jesus to the Church of Ephesus are reminiscent of His Father's words to the nation of Israel in **Jeremiah 2:2** when they were also in a backslidden state. God calls out to a people that are wandering from Him and says I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness... God was then calling out to His people as He's calling out to them now, saying *Remember Me, because I remember you! I remember when you went after Me in the wilderness, when you pledged yourself to Me. I long for you to remember Me!* Jesus' plea with the Church of Ephesus is the plea of a Lover. He's a Bridegroom who is unwilling to share His bride with anyone else and on top of that, He also longs to be central in all the work that she (the bride) is doing on the earth.

Jesus' advice includes a call for repentance. It's hard to understand a Church culture today in the 21st century that struggles to call people to genuine repentance when it's the only way we can be reconciled to God; it's a powerful gift given to us by God. It's the primary thing that joins us back to the Father from the place of sin and compromise; we have such a struggle to talk about it because of so many excuses. Beloved, Jesus doesn't mind calling His own Church, and every human He's ever created, to repent, so why should we who are working as ambassadors for Him and His Kingdom. The call isn't just for the Church of Ephesus to say they are sorry, it's to call their busy life in ministry and their neglect of intimacy exactly what it is, *sin*.

Upon the heels of Jesus' advice to the Church of Ephesus about repenting and being joined back together with Him is also the warning that if they refuse to repent, He will remove their lampstand (**Revelation 1:5**). I use to think that this was referring to this group of believers losing their salvation but I no longer believe that. I now believe that the Ephesian Church was an epicenter for the distribution of the Gospel to the nations of the earth, and that's why it is characterized as a lampstand ministry. It's a ministry that has been given great influence, alongside great responsibility, because how they deliver the ministry of the Kingdom is how others are also going to carry it out.

I believe that Jesus was saying to this Church *I have called you to be an influential Church among the nations of the earth. But if you continue working without intimacy with Me and without returning to Me and putting the commandments back in their proper order you are going to end up exporting more negative than positive. And My only option at that point, if you refuse to repent, is to close the doors to*

the Church and the ministry. Jesus is passionate about the Church, and when the Church moves into a place where it's doing more negative than positive Jesus will step in, to address those things that must be addressed. Jesus, who loves the Church more than any other person, also doesn't mind shutting the doors when it's not run according to His plan.

From the place of Advice to the Church of Ephesus, Jesus now gives them their final Assurance and the Appeal. **Revelation 1:7** says 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 assurance that Jesus gives them is directed not to the ministry as a whole, but to those individuals that make up the ministry. And it's not a general promise to those that are saved, but specifically to those that overcome the unique challenges that are set before us. The eternal rewards listed in these two chapters are not a *given* for the believer, but for the believer who overcomes that which is stacked up in front of them. They are contingent upon overcoming in their day. It's important that we don't see these rewards as automatic, but as something that must be reached for, strived after and sought out.

From the Assurance of reward Jesus does something that's common to all seven Churches, He gives the Appeal to listen to the Holy Spirit (**Revelation 2:7**). Jesus' Appeal to them is that they wouldn't just give their ear to hear the Holy Spirit, but that they would allow those words to go into their heart and change the way they are living, in light of what they have heard. Something powerful to note is the plural connection with *Churches*, not just Church. Jesus clearly expected that each of these letters were to be read to each other and to others as well.

As the Church of Ephesus comes to a close there is one big idea that I want to leave you with. The big idea is that Jesus longs to be involved in both the activity of our hearts and our hands. Jesus doesn't just long for intimacy and no ministry, or ministry and no intimacy. What Jesus longs for is to have a people that love Him in the way that He loves them and to love others in the way that He loves others. This is Jesus' passion for the people of God and for the Church. The Church of Ephesus shows us that we must live in the tension of both loving God and working with Him. Because, although they were doing great with ministry and reaching people, they were losing their love for Jesus; the result will always be a loss of love for others. Just like the Church of Ephesus, we also must repent and invite Jesus back into the center of our world and allow Him to be the Chief Cornerstone in everything that takes place.

Session Two

“The Church Of Smyrna”

Revelation 2:8-11

The Church Of Smyrna

I) History Of Smyrna

- A) The city of Smyrna which today is called Izmir is located about 35 miles north or two days journey from Ephesus. During the time in which the Revelation was written (90-95 A.D.) it's been suggested that there were around 100,000 people there. Today Izmir hosts around 200,000.
- B) Smyrna's population was made up of about 9 urban districts. Today, the city is 99% Muslim and still holds a very small population of Christians. Because the Church of Smyrna loved Jesus and remained faithful to Him, there still exists a small remnant of Christians in an almost fully pagan community.
- C) The city was known for its beauty and not the natural beauty of the city, but the buildings. The Church of Smyrna was a Church that persisted through persecution, pressure and tribulation. It's been said that Jewish leaders officially excommunicated Christians as heretics beginning around 80 A.D. as a way of deflecting from them.
- D) It was around this time that Domitian the new Roman Emperor passed a law requiring people to worship him at the penalty of death. Refusing to burn incense to Caesar made Christians an enemy of the state and they were burned at the stake or killed by wild beasts.
- E) It's also possible that the fragrance of Myrrh had a strong connection to the city of Smyrna. The power of Myrrh is that it usually speaks of suffering. Every verse in this letter speaks of Myrrh, or resurrection, tribulation, suffering and death;
 - 1) **Revelation 2:8** *“...who was dead, and came to **LIFE** (resurrection)...”*
 - 2) **Revelation 2:9** *“I know your works, **TRIBULATION**, and poverty...”*
 - 3) **Revelation 2:10** *“...don't fear...those things which you're about to **SUFFER**...”*
 - 4) **Revelation 2:11** *“...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second **DEATH**.”*
- F) Polycarp, a Church father from Smyrna in the first and second century, who was known to be a disciple of John the Beloved, was burned at the stake for refusing to burn incense and join in emperor worship.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

- A) **Revelation 2:8** *“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...”*
 - 1) Jesus opens the letter to the Church of Smyrna with His Address to the overseer of the Church. This is something that's common in all seven Church's.
 - 2) Following Jesus' Address to the Church leadership, He then gives the Attribute to them.

- 3) **Revelation 2:8** *"...these things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life..."*
- 4) In Jesus' Attribute to this Church He speaks to them from the **Revelation 1:17-18** vision that John seen.
- 5) Jesus is being very intentional about the Attribute He gives to Himself. In the following verse Jesus is going to call the Church into a place of tribulation, suffering and eventual death.
- 6) For a Church who is suffering already, and headed into martyrdom, you couldn't receive a better greeting and reminder from Jesus who also tasted suffering, persecution, pain and death.
- 7) Just like Jesus encourages John in **Revelation 1:18**, He does the same thing to the Church of Smyrna by also reminding them that though He suffered and died, He's also been resurrected from the dead.
- 8) Jesus is acting as the divine Prophet of God by telling them what is on the horizon for their lives and ministry. It's important that we don't silence the voice of God and the voice of His prophets.
- 9) Jesus in great humility reminds this small, struggling Church that though He is First and Last, He also suffered and died under the leadership of His Father.
 - a) **Luke 9:23** *"Then He said to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny Himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."*
- B) **Revelation 2:9** *"...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."*
 - 1) Jesus continues with His Approval of the things they are doing by saying to them *"...I know your works, tribulation and poverty..."*
 - 2) If there's Anybody who can Approve what this Church is doing, it's Jesus. Jesus' words to this Church are beyond His divinity and speak more to His humanity.
 - 3) Jesus as a Man fully understands their current struggle and pressures. Jesus would say to them *"I know what it's like to be rejected by your own countrymen, by your family and to be persecuted for righteousness sake. I know what it's like to suffer under the will of God. I know the pain of your difficulty, and I fully understand. Not because I'm withdrawn and God, but because I also am a Man like you. I KNOW!"*
 - a) **Revelation 22:16** *"...I am the Root and the Offspring of David..."*
 - b) **Hebrews 4:15** *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin."*
 - c) **1st John 1:1** *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life..."*
 - d) This verse also lets us know that tribulation and poverty go hand in hand. Their poverty wasn't linked to the economy but because of their allegiance to Jesus and His Church.

- e) Their poverty was the result of looting, confiscation of property and the difficulty of earning a living in a hostile environment. The tribulation was coming from three areas 1) The state 2) Jews (Outward) and 3) Gentiles
- f) They were broke physically, but rich spiritually, which is the opposite of the Church of Laodicea.
 - (a) **Revelation 3:17** *"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..."*
- g) We also know that this situation will play itself out not with the Church of Smyrna but with all those that love Jesus and His Church during the great tribulation.
 - (a) **Revelation 13:16-17** *"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."*
- h) In Jesus' approval of them He also has this to say to them *"...and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
- i) That word blasphemy is better translated as *slander, or that they were being spoken evil of by others*. It's not just by anyone, but by their own countrymen, other Jews.
- j) To keep the Roman government off their backs, these Jews who hadn't given their lives to Jesus would deflect the government from them, but turning in these Jews who had become Christians.
- k) The idea that it's the synagogue of satan simply means that they are worshipping idols, and demonic things other than Jesus, though they might be doing it in traditionally Jewish fashion.
 - (a) **Romans 2:29** *"...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*
- 4) **Revelation 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, you will have tribulation 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*
 - a) The Church of Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only ones that receive nothing negative from Jesus in the form of an Accusation.
 - b) But in the midst of their suffering Jesus has straightforward and very challenging Advice for them.
 - c) Under His leadership, Jesus is going to approve the death of His beloved ones as a witness to the Truth of who He is in the midst of suffering. Jesus is going to testify to these Roman authorities through the suffering of His beloved ones.

- d) The goal of our lives is to agree with the leadership of Jesus more than we fight against it and question it with our choices and decisions.
 - (a) **Philippians 1:9-10** *"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ..."*
 - (b) **Luke 7:23** *"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me"* (because of My leadership, because of My methodology)."
- e) Beloved, offense will be a central issue in the season of the Lord's return.
- f) Mark Driscoll says *"the Church shouldn't be tribulation free, but tribulation proof."*
- g) Jesus also gives the Assurance to the Church that if they overcome He will give them the crown of life.
 - (a) **1st Corinthians 9:24-25** *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate (moderate, self governed, not in excess) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus; not with uncertainty. Thus I fight; not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*
- h) Connected with the Assurance of the crown of life, is also the promise that the second death wouldn't hurt them from **Revelation 21:8**.
- i) Jesus is telling them that it's better to die in martyrdom in the first death (death of the physical body) than to die in the second death (body and spirit) in the lake of fire. The second death is spoken of 4 times in **Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8** and always refers to eternal separation in the lake of fire.
- 5) **Revelation 2:11** *"He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches..."*
 - a) Jesus' final Appeal to the Church of Smyrna is that they would listen, and trust the words of the Holy Spirit in their time of suffering and difficulty.
 - b) The temptation is to trust our own wisdom and logic, but it must become subject to the voice and will of God.

Session Two Extra Reading

Recently I have been reading several biographies about great men and women who have suffered physically for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Reading their stories is inspiring and terrifying. It's inspiring to know that people throughout history have been stacked up against great odds and have overcome, even through their physical death. But it's also terrifying to think about personally walking through the same difficulties because of my allegiance to Jesus Christ. Brother Yun is one of the stories.

Brother Yun, or *The Heavenly Man* as his peers call him is the story of a man who gave up all to see the Kingdom of God advance throughout Communist China through the 1970s to present. Brother Yun in his book *The Heavenly Man* tells his story about suffering beyond human ability because of His unwavering love for Jesus Christ. He was imprisoned over thirty times, beaten too many times to count, electrocuted dozens of times, had both of his legs broken above the knee from a sledge hammer, urinated on, defecated on and left abandoned in tiny 4x4-foot steel rooms for countless months. The power of Brother Yun's story is that he found his hope, his strength and his source of life through Jesus Christ and the Church of Smyrna. More than one time, the Holy Spirit would recite verses from this struggling Church that was about to face death and He would encourage him to be faithful unto death and that Jesus would give him the crown of life.

I think it's easy for most of us in the Western world who, up to this point in 2012, haven't received much physical persecution for our faith in Jesus. It's easy to read the story of the Church in Smyrna, and not appreciate their struggle since we haven't much personal connection to it. But for me recently reading these biographies, along with **Revelation 2:8-11** and thinking about what lies in store for the body of Christ world-wide, I have a new gratitude for those who have suffered for the Gospel's sake. In this chapter I will look at both the background of the city of Smyrna and the Church Jesus addressed, to see what God was saying and what God is still saying to those that love Him.

The History of Smyrna

Today, what was once called Smyrna, is now called Izmir, pronounced *Izz-mirror*. This city is located about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus which was about a one to two day journey by foot. During the time in which the Revelation was written (90-95 A.D.) it is estimated that around a hundred-thousand people lived there, but that number has grown today; now the city is host to over two-hundred-thousand people. The city of Smyrna's population was made up of about nine separate districts much like downtown Manhattan in New York.

Today the city is 99% Muslim with a very small, but present Gospel witness there. The reason there is still a small, but present Gospel witness in the city is because those Jesus addressed in **Revelation 2:8-11** were faithful to Him in the place of death. Unlike some of the other cities Jesus addresses in **Revelation 2-3** which didn't respond to Him in a God honoring way, Smyrna/Izmir still exists.

The city of Smyrna was known for its beauty. It wasn't the natural beauty of the city's landscape but of their great architecture. The Church of Smyrna persisted through persecution, pressure and tribulation in a faithful way that honored Jesus' own life and struggle with the Jewish leaders of His day. The Church of Smyrna was primarily suffering persecution from the various Jewish leaders who were excommunicating their fellow brethren because of their conversion to Christianity. Because emperor

worship was so strong, these Jewish leaders would actually turn in their brethren who had become converts of Christ and followers of the apostolic teachings, as a way of deflecting the Roman authorities from themselves. Turning in their brethren would take the pressure off them and allow them to remain practicing Judaism.

In his book *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, Colin J. Hemer states that myrrh might have been a significant spice both in their time and in the city of Smyrna specifically. The reason he says this is because of the amount of suffering mentioned in these four short verses. In fact, every verse in the letter to the Church of Smyrna has something to do with *resurrection (which comes through death), tribulation, suffering or death*. I have broken it down below;

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Revelation 2:8 | <i>..who was DEAD, and came to LIFE (resurrection)...</i> |
| 2. Revelation 2:9 | <i>I know your works, TRIBULATION, and poverty...</i> |
| 3. Revelation 2:10 | <i>...don't fear...those things which your about to SUFFER...</i> |
| 4. Revelation 2:11 | <i>...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second DEATH.</i> |

Through the scriptures myrrh is spoken of as a spice that's associated with suffering, death and difficulty. Though it's a sweet aroma, those who knew the fragrance knew it was associated with death; it was for embalming. History tells us that Polycarp, whom some believed to be a disciple of John the Beloved, was burned at the stake during the second century for refusing to burn incense to Caesar and join in with emperor worship. It's clear that the Church of Smyrna was stacked up against great difficulty as they were working to keep Jesus central to their lives and city.

Jesus' Address to the Church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

Jesus opens this letter to the Church of Smyrna in the same way that He addresses all seven letter in Revelation 2-3 and that is by speaking with the Church leadership in that specific city. He gives His **Address** in **Revelation 2:8** by saying *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...* Jesus' words are first for the leadership of the ministry and by that He knows that He will also touch the people in the ministry. As John Maxwell rightly says, *everything rises and falls on leadership*. But following the Address to this Church, Jesus continues right into the **Attributes** of Himself that are specific to them.

For all of the seven Churches Jesus comes revealing different **Attributes** of Himself that He previously revealed to John in **Revelation 1** that are powerfully unique to the specific Church He is addressing. The facets of Himself that He reveals to the Church of Smyrna are listed in **Revelation 2:8** and they are *...these things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life...* These **Attributes** are coming from **Revelation 1:17-18** when He revealed Himself to John.

Jesus is incredibly intentional in revealing Himself this way to a Church that He is, in the following verse, going to call into the place of suffering, tribulation and even physical death. In the same way Jesus encouraged John in **Revelation 1:18** He encourages the Church of Smyrna reminding them that He also suffered, died and was resurrected from death. Jesus is acting as the Divine Prophet of God helping them understand what's on the horizon of their ministry and for the people specifically. Something that this verse tells us is that we can't silence the voice of the prophet in the body of Christ. The purpose of the prophetic and the prophet is so that people are prepared with the heart and passion of God prior to things happening. Jesus doesn't want us to get caught off guard with that which is up ahead of us, so He

speaks to us about more than dates, times and seasons, but of His heart and His feelings of us. We must listen to the prophetic voice in our midst so we can be with Jesus where He is, doing what He's doing and going where He's going.

The humility and condescension of God as He who is the ...First and Last... reminds this small struggling Church that He also suffered and died under the leadership of His Father. This is beyond my ability to comprehend. He who was rich, became poor for our sakes. The questions that arise from that statement are too vast to record. Jesus is bowing so low to come to this ministry and remind them that He also suffered as they are, and that it was all under the leadership of His Father.

From Jesus revealing various Attributes about Himself to the Church, He then moves into His **Approval** of them. He says in **Revelation 2:9** ...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 of the synagogue of Satan. When the power of this passage touched my heart it did something inside me, so sweet and tender. Do you understand that if there was Anyone who could say to this small, struggling Church ...I Know... it was Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus is the only One who could say to them that He knew what was going on.

It's here that Jesus is speaking more from His Humanity than His Divinity. In other words Jesus was saying to them *I know what it's like to be rejected by your own countrymen, by your family and to be persecuted for righteousness sake. I know what it's like to suffer under the will of God. I know the pain of your difficulty, and I fully understand. Not because I'm withdrawn and God, but because I also am a Man like you. I KNOW!* How sweet would that be to have Jesus bend down and come to you in the midst of your struggle and tell you, *I fully understand, because I also am a Man like you are?* When Jesus says that He knows, He really means it.

Through this passage when Jesus says to them ...I know your works, tribulation and poverty... in **Revelation 2:9** He is letting us know that tribulation and poverty go hand in hand. But something that must be stated is that their poverty wasn't linked to the economy but to their unwavering allegiance to Jesus in the midst of persecution. Their poverty was actually a result of looting, confiscation of property and the difficulty of earning a living in a hostile environment. Much like the Jews in WW2, they were literally forced from their businesses, livelihood and the personal wealth they had accrued, all because of their race and Hitler's great war machine that was coming against them.

The Christians in Smyrna were suffering from three primary areas; *the state, outward Jews and Gentiles*. These were the three primary places that their suffering was coming from. But what's powerful is that though they were financially broke, Jesus said they were internally rich toward Him. This is the opposite of what Jesus said to the Church of Laodicea in **Revelation 3:17** when He said 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... The Church of Laodicea was externally rich, with lots of money, but Jesus said that internally they were *broke* towards Him. But to the Church of Smyrna He said they were externally *broke* but internally rich towards Him. Our goal would be to have both external wealth for the Kingdom and internal riches towards Jesus, but if we had to choose one or the other, we would always want to take the road of the Church of Smyrna and be rich internally towards Jesus.

The situation that the Church of Smyrna was in wasn't just a once-in-history case because it's actually going to play itself out again, but this time on a global scale under the Antichrist and the harlot Babylon. John wrote in **Revelation 13:16-17** that He (the Antichrist) causes all, both small and great, rich and

poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of His name. Just like the Church of Smyrna, the people of God are one day going to be forced into a decision: either love Jesus and suffer the challenge of not being able to participate in the world economy, or to turn our backs on Christ, sealing our fate into the Lake of Fire, taking the mark of the beast in order to enjoy life in this age for a little while longer.

When Jesus says to them *...I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan* He was affirming the way they were being treated by their fellow countrymen in the city. The word *blasphemy* is better translated *slander*. As I said in the beginning of this chapter, because of the pressure of the Romans for Jews to participate in Emperor worship, many of the Jews who hadn't converted to Christianity were actually turning in their brethren to deflect the Roman authorities off their backs, to allow them to continue in Judaism while the authorities chased down the Jews who had given their lives to Jesus.

When Jesus says that these Jews are from *the synagogue of Satan* He is simply saying that any worship other than of Jesus, is the worship of demons and that which isn't God. He is saying that these Jews are only Jews outwardly, not inwardly with new life in Christ. They are still worshipping in a traditional Jewish fashion, which isn't always a negative, but when Jesus isn't involved, it *is* a negative because it's actually keeping them from eternal life. The blood of Jesus is better than the blood of bulls and goats and no longer do we have an earthly high priest, but we now have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens and made atonement for sinful man, once and for all. Paul clarifies this in **Romans 2:29** by saying *...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

As Jesus continues speaking to the Church of Smyrna He now moves away from His Approval of them and into His **Advice** for them. I don't know if you noticed, but the Church of Smyrna and the Church of Philadelphia are the only two churches out of the seven that *receive no Accusation* from Jesus. This truly is the high water mark for any ministry seeking to love Jesus in the way He loves them and to love others in the way that He loves others.

His **Advice** to them is found in **Revelation 2:10** when He says *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, you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* In the midst of their suffering Jesus has some very straightforward words for them for what they are about to endure for His name's sake. Under His leadership, Jesus is actually going to approve the death of His beloved ones as a witness to the Truth of who He is in the midst of suffering. What's powerful, and also very challenging to understand is that Jesus is going to testify to the Roman authorities through the suffering of His beloved saints. This was something that Brother Yun also experienced in his personal suffering. He often reminded the Lord of His important role in the Chinese house Church and that he didn't understand why the Lord would put him in prison. Then the Lord would gently whisper to him *Yun, be faithful unto death. One day, I will be exalted in all the earth.* It was in these moments that Yun would be reminded that all of this was about Jesus' exaltation in the earth. Just like the Church of Smyrna; this would put Yun back in the right frame of mind to suffer faithfully for Jesus.

The goal of our lives is to agree with the leadership of Jesus more than we fight against it and question it with our choices and decisions. Paul gave a powerful prayer to us in **Philippians 1:9-10** when he said *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you*

may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ... I believe that offense towards Jesus is going to be one of the central issues in the days to come. And that offense will spring out of anger and a lack of knowledge about Jesus' leadership over our lives and His methodology. There are times when Jesus breaks people out of prison and there are times He allows them to die, but in all of the times we must agree with Paul that our love would abound still more and more; that we would be without offense even until the Day of Christ. We want to learn now to agree with Jesus' leadership over our lives in whatever it might look like. Today is a day we have, right now, to learn to trust Him in all things. To lean into the understanding that this Man does everything for the sake of love and for the good of them that love Him. He is safe; wild, but always safe.

Pastor Mark Driscoll in his recent sermon 2012 sermon series titled *The Sevens* made a statement regarding the Church of Smyrna stating *The Church shouldn't be Tribulation-free but it should be Tribulation-proof*. What he's saying is that the Church will always have tribulation but that the tribulation we encounter shouldn't move us from following Jesus and being with Him. We are safe with Jesus even though we might suffer like the Church of Smyrna.

From Jesus' Advice to them He now gives them the **Assurance** of reward if and only if they are faithful in overcoming that which is before them. Jesus says to them in **Revelation 2:10** ...be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. There is much conversation around just exactly what this *crown of life* was, but at the end of the day, we should see it as simply the Assurance of victory; a race well run with the promise of reward from Jesus. Though it might have other meanings, I believe this to be a safe and simple connection to what Jesus was saying.

They are also **Assured** that in overcoming they wouldn't be hurt by the second death (**Revelation 2:11**). According to the Revelation the second death is the death of both our body and spirit as opposed to the first death which is only the death of our physical body. Those that have loved Jesus and who die prior to His return are promised that they will only experience the first death, the death of the physical body. But those that reject Jesus throughout their lives will actually die twice, which is what's called *the second death*. It's not just the death of their physical bodies, but also the death of their spirits as well, when they are sent by Jesus to the Lake of Fire.

The promise to this Church is that it would be better for them to suffer now and die in the first death, than to reject Jesus, deny the faith and then die again in the second death. Jesus is **Assuring** them that if they die a martyr's death for Him now, then they won't be subjected to the second death which will be painful in a way that we can't imagine.

Jesus now closes His letter to the Church of Smyrna by giving them the final **Appeal**. Jesus' **Appeal** to the Church of Smyrna is the same appeal that He gives to all seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. He says to them in **Revelation 2:11** He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Our temptation as humans that naturally rebel against God is to trust our own wisdom and logic, but it must become subject to the voice and will of God. Our decisions are often contrary to that which Jesus would have us to do. Suffering, tribulation and physical death aren't on most of our radar when we lay out our grand plan for life. But like this Church, thousands of other Christians before them, and possibly millions after them, we also must listen to the Holy Spirit while in the place of confusion when our wisdom runs opposite of God's. Help us, Holy Spirit, to respond to You and Your wisdom in the difficult places in our lives.

Session Three

"The Church Of Pergamos"

Revelation 2:12-17

The Church of Pergamos

I) History of Pergamos

- A) Pergamum was a city many came to in hopes of being healed by pagan spiritualists. This city boasted of having several prominent temples dedicated to various gods such as Zeus, Athena and Dionysus. Within this ancient city was a library said to hold as many as 200,000 books making this a very literate and cultured community. From Pergamum also came Parchments (Pergamene-charta) after which the city was actually named.
- B) Historically, the Church in Pergamum was faithful to Jesus but also tolerant of false teaching and practice, like much of the Church today in the Western world. The Church had what Pastor Mark Driscoll calls *a bleeding heart syndrome*, also known as *syncretism*. This is where Christians love, sympathize with, and even wrongly accommodate non-believers to the point that they are no longer distinct as disciples of Jesus.
- C) History tends to declare that Pergamum had the least amount of Jewish presence among the other six Churches located in Asia Minor or known today as Western Turkey. The reason for this was because of the city's separated location away from trade routes.
- D) In Jesus' address to this Church He mentions them dwelling where *Satan's throne is*. This reference was most likely made because of the many pagan gods that were worshipped there. But of those pagan gods, the worst was emperor worship. The emperor required citizens to worship him as lord and savior. This worship led to the death of one (Antipas) and the suffering of many.
- E) Unlike the Church of Ephesus, Pergamum rolled out the welcome mat for the doctrine of the Nicolaitans as well as the teachings of Balaam, of which Jesus said in **Revelation 2:6** that He hated. Though they were standing faithfully against external pressures, these internal errors would kill their devotion to Jesus quickly.
- F) The mixture of pagan deities, emperor worship and occult lifestyle made it very difficult for the early Church to live in Pergamum. This eventually led to them being the first among the other 6 Churches to have a martyr. Jesus recognizes this when He says in **Revelation 2:13** "... in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr..."

II) Jesus' Address to the Church of Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17)

- A) **Revelation 2:12-13** "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, these things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 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."

- 1) Jesus first **Addresses** the human leadership of the Church in the same way that He has **Addressed** the other two Churches prior (Ephesus and Smyrna).
- 2) From Jesus' Address to Pergamum He then gives the **Attributes** of Himself that are specific to the Church and what they were facing.
- 3) He says to the Church of Pergamos in **Revelation 2:12** *"...These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword..."*
 - (i) Pergamos is the only Church that Jesus gave just one **Attribute** of Himself to. This **Attribute** is coming in the form of a strong rebuke for the ministry's tolerance of immorality and demonic activity within the ministry.
 - (ii) **He who has the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 2:12)** = This is a reference to the convicting power of the Word of God. Jesus is coming to them as God who speaks truth and commands those that lead His Church to speak with the same level of truth as He.
 - (a) **Hebrews 4:12** *"For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*
 - (b) **Revelation 19:13** *"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word Of God."*
 - (iii) Jesus is coming to this ministry with a threat of judgment if they don't turn a corner, repent and take a stand for truth. Jesus requires that His Shepherds stand for what He stands for, loving what He loves and hating what He hates. Jesus will never co-exist with pagan deities (*co-exist, meaning agree with and endorse as right ways to God*).
- 4) Jesus now begins to **Approve** this ministry for some of the positive things going on within. He says to them in **Revelation 2:13-14** *"...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."*
 - (i) He **Approves** their faithfulness to Him in the midst of great external pressures which led to the death of Antipas, who was a faithful martyr (witness). These Christian converts in the Church of Pergamos, most likely came out from these various pagan cults which made their allegiance to Jesus challenging and very costly.
 - (ii) The reference to *Satan's Throne* and *where Satan dwells* is most likely speaking of the emperor worship that was taking place. Of course this worship of a man, which isn't new in the Bible, would be only a precursor to the antichrist who is still yet coming.
- 5) **Revelation 2:14-15** *"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. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."*
 - (i) Jesus, the greatest grace Teacher of all times, makes clear through His words to this Church that He is against a message of grace which diminishes wholeheartedness towards God.

- (ii) It's here that Jesus moves from His Approval of them to His **Accusation** of them. Just because they were faithful to Him under external pressure, doesn't mean that He is going to pat them on the back for gross internal errors.
- (iii) The majority of the warnings about false teachers in the New Testament weren't related to external teachers, but to internal teachers.
 - (a) **Jude 4** *"For certain men have crept in (into the Church) unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - (b) **2nd Peter 2:1** *"But there will be false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction."*
- (iv) These doctrines (Balaam and the Nicolaitans) were being tolerated by leaders within the ministry, and causing the very erosion of the foundation upon which it was built.
- (v) The Jesus of Western culture is a Jesus that doesn't have enough backbone to address issues within His own ministry. But here we see the Jesus of the New Testament taking up issues without hesitation. The God of Truth requires truth within His Shepherds.
 - (a) **The Doctrine of Balaam** (Numbers 22:1-15; 25:1-9; 31:16) = The Doctrine of Balaam is a set of teachings that promotes paganism, idolatry and immorality. It's a teaching that approves eating meals in fellowship inside pagan temples, offering worship to strange deities.
 - (i) Paul addressed people who were taking his Gospel and perverting it as well in **Romans 6:1-2** saying *"What shall I say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"*
 - (b) **The Doctrine Of The Nicolaitans** = This Doctrine is often referred to as Antinomianism which basically reduces the grace of God to lawless *freedom in Christ*. It's a perverted grace, or distorted grace message which reduces Jesus' call of wholeheartedness to passivity.
 - (i) Jesus uses the same words here as He does in **Revelation 2:6** when He spoke to the Church of Ephesus saying *"...the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate..."* The modern teaching of grace is often distorted, empowering people in a life of sin, under the banner of Jesus' blessing.
 - (ii) **Titus 2:11-12** *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..."*
 - (iii) According to Titus and the overall testimony of the New Testament, the grace of God should empower us to become free from sin, not empowered to continue dwelling in it, as the Doctrine of Balaam was teaching.

6) **Revelation 2:16** ***"Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against you with the sword of My mouth."***

- (i) Jesus, the Great Shepherd of our souls, doesn't leave us only with an Accusation, but now gives **Advice** to become free from bondage and sinful teachings.
- (ii) The sword of **verse 12** is now taken up in the sword of His mouth with a commitment to fight against them with it, if they refuse to take seriously their sinful situation. Jesus would love for them to fight their sin with the help of the Holy Spirit, but if they refuse, He Himself will get involved and through judgment, fight against them.
- (iii) Many today see a distant and disconnected Jesus, but this passage alone declares His commitment to having purity and wholeheartedness without compromise within His Church. His commitment to them was that He would come quickly.
- (iv) The post crucified Jesus, in His resurrection has no problem entering into contention with spiritual leaders inside His Church and calling them into holiness and separation from sin and sinful, destructive doctrines.

7) **Revelation 2:17** ***"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."***

- (i) From Jesus' Advice to them He gives them a final **Appeal**. To this ministry that was loving Him externally by being faithful in the midst of persecution, but struggling internally by being tolerant of gross sin, must listen to the Holy Spirit's words to them with a hearing ear and then respond both rightly and aptly.
- (ii) Jesus finishes His words to this ministry by giving them **Assurance** of reward IF they will repent and love Him on His terms not their own. Many people love a cultural version of Christianity but reject a Bible based Christianity.
 - (a) The promise of reward is for those who stay clean in a dirty world, who stay Christian in a pagan culture and those who keep straight in a crooked day.
 - (i) Hidden Manna = The promise of receiving hidden manna from Jesus is made to those who overcome their sin by repenting and loving Jesus in the way He has loved them (wholeheartedness).
 - 1. I believe that the hidden manna can mean much, but at the end of the day, it seems to speak of greater revelation of Jesus and His heart (**Exodus 16:32-34; Matthew 6:9-13; John 6**). This seems to be similar to the promise of being satisfied by Him from **Matthew 5:6** based on our hunger for Him.
 - (ii) A white stone = The promise that the overcomer would receive a white stone with a name written on it that nobody knows but he who receives it can mean many things. But it seems to speak of two primary things.

- (iii) Stones throughout both the Old Testament (**Joshua 4**) and in the New Testament (**1st Peter 2:5; Revelation 21:14, 19-20**) spoke of memorials, or stories of what God had done. Just maybe, this stone will tell the story of how that person loved God while they were on the earth, when no one was watching (**Matthew 6:5-6**). Names throughout the Bible speak of destiny, or the story of their past, present and future!
- (iv) The other possibility is that this stone represents a pet name between God and the receiver. *Pet name* meaning an endearing name that's spoken only between God and that person.
- (v) Personally, I have endearing names that I call Jennifer (my wife) at home that no other person alive will ever hear or know. And if someone did hear it they might think it was silly or frivolous, but when she hears it she feels my tenderness behind it. This stone might be something like this. It's personal whatever it is specifically.

Session Three Extra Reading

Today within the body of Christ there is much conversation about the grace of God and the many freedoms that we have in our relationship with Jesus, through the Cross. Though I do not claim to be a scholar on the subject of the grace of God nor do I assume that my knowledge of His grace is adequate in light of what the Bible offers me, it seems to me there is also much confusion about what the grace of God really is. In this chapter about the third Church in the seven Churches mentioned in **Revelation 2-3**, the Church of Pergamos, we will look at what was happening with this ministry that was abusing and distorting the true grace message of Jesus Christ.

I will not be covering the subject of the grace of God in a comprehensive way throughout this chapter. I will only be sharing a few scriptures and mainly looking at this ministry (the Church of Pergamos) that Jesus sternly corrects for their poor handling of something that is precious to Him, His grace. Moving back to my opening statement, what's powerful about **Revelation 2:12-17** is that the distorted grace message we have in the Church among the Western World today, is not a new issue, but an age old one. It seems that the biggest issue Jesus takes up with the Church of Pergamos is that they were misusing the grace that was given to them.

Solomon rightly said in **Ecclesiastes 1:9** *...there is nothing new under the sun...* Solomon wasn't saying that God is confined to moving only one way throughout history, but rather the many things that surface today in the arena of sin, compromise and rebellion aren't *new* sins but *newly packaged old sins*. The devil is a one man band; meaning, he has to reinvent himself with every generation. Fortunately his workshop has only a couple of benches and a few different tools; but unfortunately those tools are effective at both distracting non-believers and moving believers away from Jesus. As those who are looking to press into the *more* of Jesus, we must be aware of the many pitfalls along the way. One of which is the distorted teaching on the *Grace of God*.

The History of Pergamos

Pergamum, also known as Pergamos, is the third Church on the Circular Circuit of seven total Churches located in the ancient world of Asia Minor, now known as Western Turkey. History tells us that Pergamum was a city many traveled to in hopes of being healed by pagan spiritualists. Pergamum was home to several prominent temples dedicated to various gods such as Zeus, Athena and Dionysus. Here in Pergamum there was said to be a library that held as many as 200,000 books which made this city very literate and cultured. This was a remarkable number of books in a time where reading wasn't available to all, but only the rich and upper-class.

Parchments (Pergamene-charta, after which the city was named) were used for writing. Some parchments containing books of the Bible were actually discovered in Pergamum. Historically, the Church in Pergamum was faithful to Jesus while also being tolerant of false teaching, like much of the Church in the western world today. This Church had what Pastor Mark Driscoll calls *Bleeding Heart Syndrome* also known as *syncretism*. Syncretism is where Christians love, sympathize with, and even wrongly accommodate non-believers to the point that they are no longer distinct as disciples of Jesus.

History declares that Pergamum had the least amount of Jewish presence among the other 6 churches mentioned throughout **Revelation 2-3**. Though there are many reasons for this, it seems that the main

reason was because of the city's location, away from the majority of major trade routes. This led more opportunistic Jewish folks to shy away from settling within Pergamum.

Within this letter (**Revelation 2:12-17**) Jesus mentions that they were dwelling where *Satan's throne is*. As best as I can research it seems that this statement was made because of the many pagan gods that were worshipped in Pergamos. But among that plethora of pagan gods, the one among them that was most damaging was the Emperor Worship that was taking place. Emperor worship something that was taking place all throughout the region and it required the local citizens to address the emperor as lord and savior.

But unlike the Church of Ephesus (**Revelation 2:1-7**) the Church of Pergamum actually rolled out the red carpet for both the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (both of which I will explain in detail later), which doctrines Jesus hates (**Rev. 2:6**). It's clear that though they were standing faithfully against the external pressures, these internal errors were killing their devotion to Jesus, quickly. This mixture of pagan deities, emperor worship and occult lifestyle within Pergamum made it very difficult for the early Church to live within the city. This difficulty eventually gave way to the first martyr Jesus mentions within the seven Churches of **Revelation 2-3** as He says to them in **Revelation 2:13** *...in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr...* Jesus, who understood the grace of God more than any other human, doesn't just approve them for their external faithfulness, He rebukes them and threatens them with judgment for their tolerance of internal, destructive doctrines. Let's take a closer look at Jesus' specific words to this ministry.

Jesus' Address to the Church of Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

The consistency of Jesus' address to these seven Churches really helps us understand His systematic process in addressing the ministries of which Paul says He is the Head (**Colossians 1:18**). His seven addresses also allow us to see that He is concerned with the leadership that's overseeing His Church in a very personal way. It's not that He has observed His Church from a distance, but rather from an up close and personal vantage point.

He opens His letter to the Church of Pergamum in **Revelation 2:12-13** by saying, *And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos write, these things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 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.* Through this passage we will look at three parts of Jesus' seven point address to this ministry; His Address, His Attribute and His Approval. We will start with His **Address**. Jesus speaks to this ministry in the same way that He has **Addressed** the previous two Churches, Ephesus and Smyrna. As usual, He speaks directly to the human leadership that is presiding over this ministry who are the primary ones responsible for the health and condition of the ministry.

After He concludes His Address to them, He then moves into sharing an **Attribute** of Himself that is specific to the Church and the various issues they were currently facing. The prophetic nature of Jesus is that He is able to apply **Attributes** of Himself that are exactly what each ministry would need to hear from Him. He has whatever is needed in whatever situation that we face. He is the Great I AM! The **Attribute** that He chooses to share with them is that *...He...has the sharp two-edged sword...* After looking at all seven Churches including this one, Pergamos is the only Church that Jesus shares just one **Attribute**.

The **Attribute** Jesus shares with them comes in the form of a strong rebuke for the ministry's tolerance of immorality and demonic activity within their midst. What Jesus means by saying *...I am He who has the sharp two-edged sword...* is that He Himself is the convicting power of the Word of God. He is coming to them as the God who speaks truth and commands those that oversee His body to also speak with the same amount of truth as He speaks. Jesus requires that if we are going to speak on His behalf that we also share the same common value for truth. It's called *loving what He loves and hating what He hates*. This **Attribute** rings true with a couple of other passages through the New Testament. In **Hebrews 4:12** it says *For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* And speaking of the Word of God it's said of Jesus in **Revelation 19:13** *He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*

It's clear through this **Attribute** that Jesus is coming to them with a strong threat of judgment if they don't turn a corner, repent and take a stand for truth. This **Attribute** makes crystal clear Jesus' commitment that His Shepherds stand for what He stands for, loving what He loves and hating what He hates. Though many today think that Jesus co-exists alongside other pagan religions and cults, it is simply not true. Jesus will never co-exist (co-exist meaning agree with and endorse as right ways to God) with pagan deities and occult practices. Many today, even in the body of Christ participate with various popular movies celebrating witchcraft, spells, demonic activity and dark spiritualism. Beloved, this is never something that Jesus will be found in the midst of. It's a subtle distraction, moving us away from vibrancy in Christ.

Now that Jesus has revealed His Attribute to them, He now shares with them His **Approval** of them for some of the positive things that were going on within the ministry. He **Approves** their faithfulness to Him in the midst of great external pressures which actually led to the death of Antipas, who as a faithful martyr (witness). For the Christian converts living in Pergamos, life was very difficult because most of them had come out of the various pagan religions which were so prevalent in their city. Leaving such faiths, to turn to the true and living God created great social pressures for those who made the switch.

Within this passage we also hear that Jesus makes reference to *...the place where Satan's throne is and where Satan dwells*. In researching the answer to what this meant, I have been most satisfied with the explanation that Jesus was referring to the many temples, pagan deities and emperor worship that was taking place within the city. Emperor worship might have been the specific reference because it was then and always has been the precursor to the antichrist, who is yet coming. The antichrist will be the last great opponent of the human race, not something that will move Jesus, but the antichrist will move many humans dwelling on the earth during his short, temporal reign.

What happens next is something that only Jesus can do as well as He does it. Though He just got finished Approving them for the positives within the ministry, He now moves into His Accusation of them for the things that were lacking among them. He starts in **Revelation 2:14-15** by saying *...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. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* In these two verses lies the crux of our discussion about the grace of God.

It would be foolish to disagree that Jesus was, is and always will be the greatest grace Teacher of all time. And as we read these verses it's important that we keep this in mind. What is also clear through

these passages is that Jesus is totally against a message of grace that diminishes wholeheartedness towards Him, His Father and the Holy Spirit. Though many today are sharing a message that does just that, God never approves such a message. As Jesus **Accuses** this ministry that was faithful to Him under external pressures, He is not going to pat them on the back for their gross internal errors.

And as I have looked at the New Testament it also seems true that most of the false teaching we are warned to stay away from is actually taking place within the Church, not outside of it. **Jude** says in **verse 4**, *For certain men have crept in (into the Church) unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.* And Peter says in **2nd Peter 2:1**, *...There will be false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

These two warnings listed above, are just two of hundreds of warnings throughout the New Testament, not to mention the Old Testament about false teachers among the family of God and our need to be on guard against them and the destructive doctrines they bring.

Within the Church of Pergamos, the doctrines that were being tolerated were the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. What's so wild about this is that these believers were giving their physical lives externally for the sake of Christ while eroding the very foundation internally by tolerating these destructive doctrines. I think that it's easier to defend truth externally against those that don't know Jesus, than it is to defend truth internally among those that know Christ. The call to leadership within the body of Christ is a call to take courage.

The Jesus of Western Culture is a Jesus that doesn't have enough backbone to address the various issues within His own ministry. But through both the New Testament and Jesus' words to the Church of Pergamos, we get clarity about the Jesus of the Bible who doesn't mind taking up issues among Church leaders. The God of Truth requires truth within His shepherds.

The doctrine of Balaam, which is clearly seen in **Numbers 22:1-5; 25:1-9; 31:16**, is a set of teachings that promote paganism, idolatry and immorality. It's a teaching that approves eating meals in fellowship inside pagan temples, offering worship to strange deities. Paul addressed people who were taking his gospel and perverting it as well in **Romans 6:1-2** when he said *What shall I say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who have died to sin live any longer in it?* This doctrine that was being kept within the ministry was causing the people of God to stumble into various sins under the banner that God was okay with it.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans on the other hand is a doctrine that is referred to as Antinomianism which basically reduces the grace of God to lawless *freedom in Christ*. It's a perverted message of grace, or a distorted message of grace which reduces Jesus' call of wholeheartedness to passivity. When Jesus speaks to the Church of Ephesus in **Revelation 2:6** He says *...the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate...* It's this modern teaching of grace that is often distorted, and it empowers people in a life of sin, all under the banner of Jesus' blessing.

Titus tells us in **Titus 2:11-12** *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...* According to Titus and the overall testimony of the New Testament, the grace of God

should be empowering us to become free from sin, not empowering to continue dwelling in it, as the doctrine of Balaam was teaching. It seems today that much of the conversation about the grace of God is teaching which diminishes wholeheartedness which is totally against what the Apostolic writings say to us. And for those of you that might scream: *Our culture is different today, than it was then!* we must remember that though life in this age changes, God never does. He is holy, and He calls us to live our lives just like He lived His. And we are able to do this through the Power of the Holy Spirit, Who was given to us at Salvation. We must make sure that the grace of God we are hearing about, and sharing with others doesn't diminish their wholehearted pursuit of God, but rather empowers them to be further abandoned to God.

The Good Shepherd of our souls and the overseer over the body of Christ doesn't leave this ministry without practical **Advice** on how to return to Him and vibrant relationship in Him. He says to them in **Revelation 2:16** *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against you with the sword of My mouth.* It's clear that the sword of **verse 12** is now taken up in the sword of His mouth with a commitment to fight against them with it, if they refuse to take seriously their sinful situation. Jesus would love for them to fight against their sin with the help of the Holy Spirit, but if they refuse, He Himself will get involved and through judgment, He will fight against them.

Many today see repentance as a terrible thing. It's something that preachers and shepherds within the body of Christ shy away from, preferring other words in its place. But in all reality we only run from this word because we don't understand the joy of being restored to Jesus. It's not that repenting is always fun, that would be a lie. Often times it's painful, honest and real as we bare our hearts before God. But the joy of being convicted by the Holy Spirit of something that's separating us from Jesus is truly wondrous. The age to come will tell the story of our gratitude, of how we saw the subtle prompting of the Holy Spirit leading to restored relationship with Creator God.

It seems today that people see a disconnected Jesus, a Jesus who is removed from what's taking place both within His Church and within the Earth. But this passage alone declares His commitment to having purity and wholeheartedness without compromise within His Church. It's not that He would someday make His way to this ministry to straighten things out, but that He was willing to come to them quickly, if they refused to repent. Many see a reference to the second coming here, but that's not at all what Jesus was saying. He was simply telling them that if they didn't repent and return to Him, He would come to them quickly and fight against them.

Unlike the majority of Jesus' Addresses to the Churches within Revelation 2-3, He switches around His Appeal and His Assurance. In **Revelation 2:17** He gives them the strong exhortation through His **Appeal** to them by saying *He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches...* If this ministry had any chance to being around to further impact it's culture and society they would need to listen earnestly to Jesus' rebuke and make the proper changes. It's not just that they would need a hearing ear, but also a willing heart to actually do what they have heard. Hearing is good and it's one part of the two-part equation. The other part is *doing*. They must put feet to what they have heard if they are going to be restored into right relationship with Jesus.

And lastly, after His Appeal, Jesus gives them **Assurance** of reward, based on their turning from sin and compromise to wholeheartedness with Him. He says to them in the second half of **Revelation 2:17** *...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.* The promise to this ministry, and the people within it, is for those who would stay clean in a dirty world, stay Christian in a

pagan culture and stay straight in a crooked day. It's not just an automatic reward because they are Christians. This reward and the Assurance of it is based on their response to Him and their faithfulness in the midst of the present pressures and hardships. The same thing is true for us today as well.

The first thing that Jesus promises them is that He would give them hidden manna to eat. It seems that this promise of hidden manna is speaking about greater revelation of Jesus and His heart for the overcomer (**Exodus 16:32-34; Matthew 6:9-13; John 6**). This promise is much like the promise that Jesus said would be had by those that hungered and thirsted for Him from **Matthew 5:6**.

The second thing Jesus Assures them would be theirs if they repented and overcame what was in front of them was that they would receive a white stone with a name written on it which nobody knew but him who received it. I believe that this stone speaks of two primary things. Firstly, stones throughout the Old Testament (**Joshua 4**) and the New Testament (**1st Peter 2:5; Revelation 21:14, 19-20**) spoke of memorials, or stories of what God had done.

My basic thought about this stone is that it might tell the story of how we have loved God throughout our time here on earth, in this age. Names throughout the Bible speak of destiny, or the story of their past, present and future! And secondly, it might be that this stone represents pet names between God and the person receiving it. Pet names are endearing names that are spoken only between God and man. I personally have endearing names that I call Jennifer (my wife) at home that no other person alive will ever hear or know. And if someone did hear it they might think it was silly or frivolous, but when she hears it, she feels my tenderness behind it. This stone might be something like this. Whatever it means exactly, it's very personal, I know that much.

We can learn much from Jesus' words to the Church of Pergamos in our day and time. Life is creeping into the Church in an alarming rate. And what I mean by life is *sinful culture*. It's not that I think the Church should not live life among those that don't know Jesus; I simply mean that the Church is embracing things God is clearly against. The goal of the Church and the people of God is not to see how much we can get away with in the grace of God, but to see how far He will let us go in our abandonment towards Him. Be honest with Jesus about your life and what you're tolerating that's separating you from Him and be restored to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. Just repent, call it what it is, listen to the Holy Spirit, give yourself to the Word and Godly community.

Session Four

“The Church Of Thyatira”

Revelation 2:18-29

The Church Of Thyatira

I) History Of Thyatira

- A) Along the circuit of the Seven Churches, the Church of Thyatira is mentioned as the fourth Church of **Revelation 2-3**. It was located in a valley between Pergamos and Sardis. This city is the smallest and least important of the seven cities mentioned.
- B) But it's also the city that receives the longest letter from Jesus related to their ministry. Thyatira was a small military outpost on the way to Sardis. It wasn't known as either a highly religious or political city. The main thing Thyatira was known for was their numerous trade guilds.
- C) Recent findings in Thyatira have unearthed inscriptions that attest to the many trade guilds including; wool-workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze smiths. These trade guilds were the forerunner to what we know now as modern trade unions.
- D) The difficulty with these trade guilds, was to work meant you also participated in pagan celebrations with gods, goddesses and sexual immorality. To work was to attend the guilds parties and not attending the parties meant you didn't work which led to great social and financial pressure.
- E) The Church of Thyatira (**2:18-29**) was totally opposite of the Church of Ephesus (**2:1-7**). Ephesus had loved Doctrine to the detriment of people, and was decreasing in love. But Thyatira loved people to the detriment of Doctrine and were increasing in love for Jesus.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

- A) **Revelation 2:18** *“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...”*
 - 1) Jesus' **Address** to the Church of Thyatira is the same as it has been to the previous three Churches. It's for the leadership of the ministry.
 - 2) From Jesus' Address to the Church, He now applies to Himself **Attributes** that He previously revealed to John in **Revelation 1**.
 - 3) Jesus reveals three different facets of Himself as He says *“...says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass...”*
 - (i) The Son of God (Rev 1:11) = This is speaking about His divinity as opposed to His humanity (Smyrna). Jesus is making it clear that He has power, as God to intervene in their ministry.

- (ii) Eyes Like A Flame Of Fire (Rev. 1:14) = This is speaking about His passion to help and deliver weak, struggling Christians, or to judge rebellious Christians who refuse to repent. Our response to Him determines what the fire of His love means.
 - (iii) Feet Like Fine Brass (Rev. 1:15) = This is speaking about His eagerness to step into the affairs of His people and crush sin, rebellion and immorality.
 - (a) Jesus will either deliver us from sin in partnership with Him, or He will do it Himself. **Revelation 2:16** tells us either we fight against sin with the Sword of His Word, or He will fight against us with the Sword of His mouth.
- 4) **Revelation 2:19** *"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first."*
- (i) Jesus now begins His **Approval** of the positive things they are doing. This list includes five things; love, service, faith, patience and greater works. This appears to be the only Church of the seven that are functioning well in both commandments (Love and Service).
 - (ii) I love that in great tenderness, Jesus usually affirms us prior to correcting us.
 - (iii) As God, Jesus is making it clear to them that He sees and knows of their patient endurance in the midst of persecution.
- 5) **Revelation 2:20** *"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow (tolerate) that women Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants into sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."*
- (i) From Jesus' Approval of them, He moves into His **Accusation** against them. Jesus' correction of us, isn't the same thing as His rejection of us. Jesus can give correction without rejection.
 - (ii) Jezebel was a female, self proclaimed, influential prophetic teacher in the midst of this ministry who was preaching and teaching a cheap grace message which empowered the people of God to sin under the banner of the "grace of God."
 - (a) **Jude 4** *"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - (iii) The Church was under severe social and financial pressure because to not attend the trade guild parties meant they lost their livelihood. Jezebel was teaching many in the Church that God was okay with them attending these parties which included idolatrous practices, sexual immorality and pagan worship.
 - (a) **Titus 2:11** *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age..."*

(iv) The Old Testament Jezebel of **1st Kings 16:31** was thrown from a window and trampled underfoot by Jehu in **2nd Kings 9:33**. And the New Testament Jezebel of **Revelation 2:20** is threatened by Jesus Himself, with His feet like bronze that He is ready to also trample her if she doesn't repent.

6) **Revelation 2:21-23** *"And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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."*

(i) It's clear that Jesus is patient with struggling sinners, but never tolerant of our sin and immorality. Many people mistake God's Approval of them with His Acceptance of their sin and compromise.

(a) **2nd Peter 2:3** *"...for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."*

(b) **Romans 2:4** *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance."*

(ii) Jesus, in His post-resurrection is continuing with His **Accusation** against this ministry by telling both Jezebel and her followers that He is committed to doing three primary things;

(a) *"...I will cast her into a sickbed..."* = The Greek word here for sickbed is Bed. It's the Greek word #2825 and it means couch for sleep, sickness or bed. It's the same word used in **Matt. 9:2,9:6; Mk. 4:21, 7:30; Lk. 5:18, 8:16, 17:34** which all speak of sickness.

(i) Jesus is willing, in love to make people sick who won't stop sinning (**1st Cor.11:30-32**).

(b) *"...those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds..."* = It's not just Jezebel that He will send into great trouble, but those who commit adultery with her. Those who cause others to sin and those who sin with them receive judgment from Jesus.

(i) The Greek word # for tribulation is 2347 and it means pressing, pressure, affliction and distress. This isn't the eschatological great tribulation of **Matthew 24**, but it's the same exact word. In fact it's the only word used for Tribulation from Matthew to Revelation.

(c) *"I will kill her children with death..."* = Jesus warned of killing her children or those that followed this teaching. In love, Jesus is committed to killing His own people.

(iii) Jesus is wanting people **to know** that He has zeal to deliver His people from immorality and that others **would know** when He casts unrepentant believers into a sickbed.

(iv) Our life before God is personal, and separated from the Church. *"And I will give to each one according to your works."*

- 7) **Revelation 2:24-25** *"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. But hold fast what you have till I come."*

- (i) Jesus now shifts from His Accusation to His **Advice** for the Church of Thyatira.
- (ii) In His Advice to them, He is calling them to repent and calling this teaching by Jezebel *"the depths of satan."* The cheap grace message which fills much of the Church today, is considered the depths of satan because of the deception it steeps well meaning Christians in.

- 8) **Revelation 2:26-28** *"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potters vessels, as I also have received from My Father, and I will give him the morning star."*

- (i) Jesus is now closing His letter to the Church of Thyatira by giving them **Assurance** of a reward if they overcome.
- (ii) Our often western Gospel, which tells people that if you repent, you will become healthy, wealthy and happy is something totally different than what Jesus preached. Jesus is promising this Church reward in the age to come, if they overcome the adversity set before them in this age.
- (iii) For the Church of Thyatira to overcome, they have to lose their livelihood, endure persecution and provide for their families without a social connection.
- (iv) Our understanding of the pre-millennial reign of Christ and the eternal age are critical in order for us to overcome life in this age. Jesus is promising this Church ruler-ship in the age to come over nations in order for ruling their bodies through the power of the Holy Spirit in this age.
- (v) The reward in the age to come has three facets;
 - (a) Power over nations = Power
 - (b) Ruling with a rod of iron = Ruler ship
 - (c) The morning star = The experience of Glory (Revelation 22:16)

- 9) **Revelation 2:29** *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches."*

- (i) Jesus now closes with His fervent **Appeal** that this wouldn't be a powerful conference, summit, letter or service, but a warning from God to repent and endure, looking beyond this age and into the age to come.

Session Four Extra Reading

It's been my pleasure to help give leadership to the body of Christ over the past 10 years in various departments from the tape ministry, to ushering, youth pastoring, overseeing youth ministries across the Pacific Northwest, as an Associate Pastor and currently as a Lead (senior) Pastor. The blessings and lessons learned are more than I could count at this time. My Pastor always told me that *more is caught than taught* and I truly believe that to be a correct statement.

But leading the body of Christ also has its challenges. The Church has been around for a couple thousand years as a light in darkness to many places around the world. But here in the Western part of the world, one of the many challenges we are coming up against in the Church is holding out truth in the midst of a culture that's moving farther and farther away from Jesus, the Bible, the Church, and from Truth as a whole. The difficulty with this is that sharing the many things the Bible requires preachers to share often separates and alienates us from a majority of people in the culture in which we live. In the short amount of time that I have been leading in the body of Christ I have taken my fair share of *pop shots* working to establish a plumb line of truth in the midst of the people of our my culture. It's cost me ministry influence, money, and friendships among others things. Though I believe this to be just the beginning of difficulty that I will encounter in the days ahead for holding out the word of Truth I have received a taste of what it's like in a Church culture that often shies away from the challenging truths in the Word of God and various facets of Jesus Christ.

The Church of Thyatira was in the same exact place that I have just mentioned. Living for Jesus, leading the Church and being faithful to the Word of God was very costly for them. Some inside the ministry were doing well with it, while others were struggling with compromise based on the difficulty of holding out the word of Truth in the midst of their culture. Let's now take a look at both the City and the Church of Thyatira.

The History of Thyatira

Along the circular circuit of the Seven Churches of **Revelation 2-3** in Asia Minor the Church of Thyatira is mentioned at the fourth Church. This Church was located in a valley between Pergamum and on the way to Sardis. The City of Thyatira is the smallest and least important of the seven Churches in **Revelation 2-3**.

Although this city is considered insignificant by many, it actually receives the most words from Jesus out of all seven Churches. It's said that Thyatira was a small military outpost on the way to Sardis and it wasn't known for being either highly religious or highly political. What made Thyatira something was its numerous trade guilds. Recent inscriptions found in the ruins of ancient Thyatira have noted trade guilds that included: wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze smiths. These trade guilds were the forerunner to what we now know as modern trade unions. They were the big business that protected the workers and took care of the paperwork which empowered the people to work without the red tape.

The big problem with these many trade guilds was that when you joined them you were also forced to attend the parties that were connected to these various trades. These parties in essence were drunken orgies mixed with worship to pagan gods and the eating foods that had been sacrificed to idols. Here's

the dilemma; to work meant you were also attending these parties as well; to not attend the parties meant that you couldn't work. For the Christian who loved Jesus and longed to honor His word, the answer was simple but painful. This led to huge social and financial pressure for the believers living in Thyatira.

Something noteworthy is that the Church of Ephesus and the Church of Thyatira were totally opposite of each other. The Church of Ephesus were so busy working for God and defending Doctrine in their city that they began to lose their love for God and it led to the loss of love for the people in their city. The Church of Thyatira on the other hand loved the people of their culture so much that they lost their love for solid Doctrine, but in the midst of all of this they were actually increasing in their works and love for God. God's passion would be to have a people that love Doctrine and love people and continually increase their works for God. That neither one would be neglected, but that both would increase. Now let's look at the Jesus' address to the Church of Thyatira.

Jesus' Address to the Church Of Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

Now that we have looked at the City of Thyatira a little bit, I will take the rest of this chapter to look Jesus' words to the Church of Thyatira. Following the same pattern that Jesus has carried with the previous three Churches (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos) He continues by **Addressing** the leadership of the Church of Thyatira. He opens in **Revelation 2:18** by saying *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.'* Jesus is once again addressing the human leader overseeing the Church at Thyatira. It's through the leadership that Jesus knows He can also get to the people. Sheep are primarily a result of the shepherd and Jesus fully understands this. After His Address He then begins sharing various **Attributes** that He has previously revealed about Himself to John in **Revelation 1**.

In the revelation of His **Attributes** to the Church of Thyatira He reveals three facets of His personality to them that are dynamically related to what they are facing as a Church. He says to them *...says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass...* Firstly He reveals to them that He is the Son of God. This direct phrase about Jesus being the Son of God is the only time it's said in the entire Revelation. And through it Jesus is declaring His Divinity as opposed to His humanity. Now, if you remember, He revealed Himself to the Church of Smyrna in His humanity and not His divinity. But here, He is making it clear to the Church of Thyatira that He has power as God to intervene in their ministry.

Secondly, He says to them He has *eyes like fire*. Jesus' eyes like fire are speaking about His passion to help and deliver weak, struggling Christians, or to judge rebellious Christians who refuse to repent. Our response to Him determines what the fire of His love means. It's my belief that we get to choose what the fire in His eyes means. It's either going to be His passion and love to help us in our weakness, or it's going to be His passion in love to release judgment upon those who refuse to repent. Something that we must learn to reconcile in Christ is that His passion for weak believers and His judgment are two sides to one coin called love. In love Jesus helps and judges; those two realities aren't a contradiction. Jesus has passion for the repentant people of Thyatira to help them, but He is also willing to release judgment if they continue in sin without repenting.

And thirdly He comes to them as *Him whose feet are like fine brass*. The brass of Jesus' feet is speaking about His ready commitment to trampling the sin of His people either through partnership with them, or against their will. Brass throughout the Old Testament is a clear message of Jesus' commitment to crush sin, rebellion, compromise and immorality, specifically sexual immorality. When Jesus came to the

Church of Pergamos He said to them in **Revelation 2:16** *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.* Jesus is saying to this ministry and the people who love Him in their midst *either you fight against your sin with the Sword of My Word, or else I will come to you and fight against you with the Sword of My mouth.* Beloved, Jesus is committed to delivering His people from sin and comprise. He longs to do it in partnership with us, but if we refuse, then He will personally get involved and do it Himself. This is what He is telling the Church of Thyatira with His feet like brass.

From Jesus' revealed Attributes to the Church of Thyatira He begins with His **Approval** of the various things are doing right. In **Revelation 2:19** He says to them *I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.* Jesus' approval of the things they were doing well includes a total of five things. He says they were loving, serving, being patient, and working well, even increasing in their works as opposed to decreasing them. It's a beautiful thing that Jesus comes to us and approves us before He accuses us. It's not always common that people in our lives do this, but it's true of Jesus. Remember, Jesus is going to say some of His most challenging words to this ministry for what they were tolerating in their midst, but before He does, in great tenderness He lets them know they were doing some positive things, even increasing in them.

After the tender understanding, God Approves them for the things they were doing well, He then breaks into His **Accusation** of them for the negative things they were doing. Jesus says in **Revelation 2:20** *Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow (tolerate) that women Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants into sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.* Something that will really help us in the process of serving Jesus is understanding that His correction of us isn't the same thing as His rejection of us. For many of us in life when we are corrected by others they are also rejecting us. What I mean by rejecting us is that after they share the negative information with us, they withhold their heart from us, but this isn't so with Jesus. Because His correction of us is always rooted in deep love for us, He's able to level serious charges against us while never withholding His heart from us.

According to Jesus' Accusation against the Church of Thyatira in conjunction with history we are led to believe that Jezebel was a female, self-proclaimed prophetess. She was an influential teacher among the Church who was preaching and teaching a *cheap grace* message that empowered the people of God to sin under the banner of the *Grace of God*. Through her Bible studies with the people of God she was telling them that God was okay with them going to the trade guild parties and participating in their feasts in the *grace of God*.

Jude addressed this specific issue in **Jude 4** when he wrote *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.* Remember, Jude is writing to Christians when he says this. He is stating that various people have crept into the Church and they teach the same message Jezebel was teaching; it's called a *cheap grace* message. The reason why it's dangerous is because as Jude says, it actually denies the Lord and the nature of Jesus Christ. It denies Jesus, because those that should be helping the people of God are actually telling them they are okay without repenting while living in sexual immorality.

The Church of Thyatira was under serious social and financial pressure because not attending these parties meant they wouldn't be able to work. For a husband to be unable to work meant that he would also be unable to provide for his family. On top of that, he would have heavy social pressure because of

going against the grain, in regards to what the majority of the people are doing.

The power of Jesus' words and the Attributes He showed the Church of Thyatira has a deeply rooted connection to what took place with the Old Testament Jezebel. In fact the Old Testament Jezebel of **1st Kings 16:31** was thrown from a window and trampled underfoot by Jehu in **2nd Kings 16:31**. And this New Testament Jezebel is being threatened by Jesus Himself, with His feet like brass that He is ready to also trample her underfoot if she refuses to repent. Jesus is saying that this New Testament Jezebel is going to die in the same way that the Old Testament Jezebel did, and for the same reasons. Jesus is tender towards weak believers that are struggling with sin, but He is a Man you don't want to cross if you're steeped in rebellion, refusing to repent and helping lead His people astray into dark holes of immorality. His feet are like brass.

The statements and severity of Jesus' plans concerning Jezebel continue in **Revelation 2:21-23** when He says *And I gave her (Jezebel) time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not. Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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 according to your works.* What's clear with Jesus is that He's patient with sinners and with sin, but He's never tolerant of our sin and compromise. What I mean by *tolerant* is that He's never approving of our sin and sinful decisions. It's common that people today assume that because God hasn't struck them down with lightening that He's okay with their sin and compromise. This is a grave mistake, and it's actually insulting the Spirit of Grace. Beloved, the reason Jesus hasn't struck you with lightning in your sin and compromise is because He's patient, longsuffering and kind at heart, longing for you to repent and be reconciled. But never take His patience for granted, because though He is patient, longsuffering and kind He's ready at a moment's notice to step into the affairs of His people.

Through Jesus' **Accusation** of this Church leadership and specifically Jezebel in the passage stated above, Jesus is telling them that He's committed to doing three primary things. Firstly, Jesus says *...I will cast her into a sickbed...* The Greek word for sickbed is Bed. It's the Greek word number 2825 and it means a couch for sleep, sickness or a bed for sleeping. It's the same word used in **Matt. 9:2, 9:6; Mk. 4:21, 7:30; Lk. 5:18, 8:16, 17:34** which all speak of physical sickness. It's clear that Jesus is making a statement to both Jezebel and those that follow her that He is willing to make her physically sick if she refuses to repent (**1st Cor. 11:30-32**). Secondly, Jesus says *...those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds...* Jesus is telling them that on top of making her and her followers sick, whoever they are; He is also willing to send them into great tribulation.

That word *tribulation* used there is the Greek word number 2347 and it means pressing, pressure, affliction and distress. I want to make this clear that this great tribulation isn't the eschatological Great Tribulation at the end of this age that is spoken of in **Matthew 24**. But, the word *tribulation* used from Matthew to Revelation is always the same word. What this means is that the eschatological Great Tribulation is only an accumulative amount of trouble that will increase, but it's the same type of trouble that has plagued the Body of Christ throughout world history. What Jesus is saying is that He's committed to sending them into a large amount of trouble if they refuse to repent.

And thirdly, Jesus says to both Jezebel and her followers *I will kill her children with death...* No, I wish that this word meant something different than it does, but it doesn't. It means what it says and it says what it means. Jesus is warning them that in love He is committed to killing them with physical death if they refuse to repent. It's not just Jezebel that He is committed to killing but also all those that follow her teachings. It's not just that Jezebel is guilty but also that those who follow her are guilty. Through

this phrase Jesus is making it crystal clear that His people **know** He has zeal to deliver them from immorality but also that others **would know** when He casts unrepentant believers into a sickbed.

Now that we have made it through this *challenge* portion of scripture as Jesus gives the Accusation He is now going to give them His **Advice**. In His **Advice** to the Church of Thyatira Jesus is calling them to repent and even calling this teaching of Jezebel ***the depths of Satan***. I believe that the reason why Jesus calls this a *cheap grace* message (which was the teaching of Jezebel) *the depths of Satan* is because of the deception in which it steeps the people of God. This teaching works to approve the people of God under the false pretense that they are okay with God without repenting and denying the sinful works they are participating. It actually works to remove the people of God away from God while attending Church, reading the Bible and praying. The reason for this is because the teachers and preachers that Jesus has set over the ministry to keep the people of God safe aren't doing their job telling the people to repent. And because the people don't hear the message to repent their hearts start to grow dull and disconnected from God while they are trying to reach for God. They struggle to find Him because their sin and compromise is separating them from Him. They don't know that because the preacher won't tell them, based his fear of man. His Advice is simple; *repent, be restored and run the race set before you*.

From Jesus' Advice to the Church of Thyatira He speaks to them of the **Assurance** of reward for those that overcome. Jesus says to them in **Revelation 2:26-28** ***And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potters vessels, as I also have received from My Father, and I will give him the morning star.*** Jesus' Assurances of reward are beyond comprehension in light of what Jesus is asking them to do right now in the present age. It's common in our Western approach to ministry, that we tell people if they repent, Jesus will make them healthy, wealthy and happy in this age. This ideal, is totally foreign to the ministry of Jesus both in His incarnation and in His Resurrection. What Jesus is promising this Church through their repentance and steadfastness to Him in the place of suffering is that He will reward them primarily in the age to come, not primarily in this age. In fact Jesus knows that for this Church to honor Him, they are going to lose their livelihood and their ability to provide for their families. It's really unto the place of death in the midst of suffering that Jesus is calling them to be faithful in.

Our understanding of the pre-millennial reign of Christ and the eternal age help us make sense of these difficulties in a way that empowers us to be faithful in this age with our hearts wrapped up in the age which is yet to come. To the Church of Thyatira, those that rule their spirits well and keep themselves free from sexual immorality will actually receive power over nations in partnership with Jesus in the age which is yet to come. The **Assurance** of reward is connected to three primary things; power over the nations; power, ruling with a rod of iron; rulership and the morning star, the experience of Glory. Beloved, if we knew what Jesus was promising us in the age to come, we also would be empowered to endure those things which are set before us in a faithful way.

Jesus closes His letter to the Church of Thyatira in the same way that He closes all letters to the Seven Churches, and that's with His fervent **Appeal**. Jesus **Appeal** to them comes from **Revelation 2:29** when He says ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.*** What Jesus is believing for is that beyond a good conference, beyond a good Christian summit, and a cool teaching series, they would see this letter from Him as a warning from God to repent and endure, looking beyond this age into the age which is yet to come.

Let's give ourselves to Jesus' words in such a way that it's not just a good teaching but it is life changing material that we not only hear, but also put into practice. Jesus is faithful to help us, if only we will ask.

Session Five

“The Church Of Sardis”

Revelation 3:1-6

The Church Of Sardis

I) History Of Sardis

- A) According to the Greeks the city of Sardis was once among the greatest cities of its Day. History records this city under several different names reached its peak around 700 B.C. and from there was on a steady decline.
- B) Within Sardis there was a tiny Citadel which became a wartime refuge for people who lived below as it was much safer up higher. But now, most of what was formally Sardis has fallen off the Cliff due to erosion. Sardis throughout history has suffered several earthquakes with a major one in 17 A.D. some describing as the greatest disaster in human memory.
- C) In the streams and rivers that flowed through Sardis it was said there was gold dust and this is attested as fact not fiction throughout history that Sardis was a wealthy city. So much so, that after the large earthquake of 17 A.D. the city was rebuilt in less than 9 years.
- D) The culture of pagan gods in the city was typical of its geographic location having both emperor worship and local and regional deities.
- E) It's clear that there was time when the Church of Sardis loved Jesus but at the time of the letter their outward devotion to others wasn't matched by their inward devotion to Jesus. The Church in the city wasn't suffering outside persecution (**Smyrna**) or inward heresy (**Pergamos/Thyatira**), but had become complacent in their spiritual state. It seems that spiritual poverty and complacency were leading the Church into moral error.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

- A) **Revelation 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 are dead.”*
 - 1) Jesus' again **Addresses** the human leadership of the Church in the same way that He has the other four Churches.
 - 2) After the Address Jesus gives the **Attributes** of Himself that are specific to the Church of Sardis and what they were facing.
 - 3) To the Church of Sardis Jesus reveals two facets of Himself by saying *“...these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars...”*
 - (i) He who has the Seven Spirits of God (Rev. 1:4) = This is a reference not to seven different Spirits of God, but the Sevenfold Spirit of God. **Isaiah 11:2**;

- (a) **(1)** The spirit of the Lord **(2)** Spirit of wisdom **(3)** Spirit of understanding **(4)** Spirit of counsel **(5)** The Spirit of might **(6)** The Spirit of knowledge **(7)** The Spirit of the fear of the Lord.
- (b) Jesus is making it clear to a Church that barely hanging in there and ready to die, that He possess all that's needed to turn things around in Sardis. He has the fullness of the Holy Spirit ready to help them.
- (ii) He who has the seven stars (Rev. 1:16, 20) = These seven stars are clarified in **Revelation 1:20** as being the human overseers/messengers of the Churches.
- (iii) Jesus is telling this Church that though they are separated from Him, He's not separated from them, though they have forgotten Him, He hasn't forgotten them. He's holding them in the power of His right hand in tenderness.
- (iv) This also speaks to Jesus concern about what kind of messenger they were becoming. Jesus doesn't just care about the work getting done, but He also cares about the kind of worker that's working.
- 4) The Church of Sardis as a whole like the Church of Laodicea receives no words of **Approval** from Jesus.
- 5) Jesus says to the Church in His **Accusation** against them "...I know your works, that you have a name you are alive, but you are dead (or dead on the inside)."
 - (i) Jesus is saying to them *"Your works might be passing before others (you have a name that you are alive—reputation) but you're not fooling Me. I have the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, and it's clear to Me that you're dead on the inside."*
 - (ii) It's clear from Jesus' words that the Church of Sardis was known by others for doing great but according to Jesus, they were dead, like a corpse internally (Greek word #3498). This was the crisis of 3 of the seven Churches (Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea).
 - (iii) Because Jesus is the Faithful Witness, He always tells us the truth, regardless of what others say about us. Beloved, we must talk to the Spirit and ask Him what Jesus thinks about us. Do assume, get clarity about your life.
- B) **Revelation 3:2** "Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God."
 - 1) Jesus moves from His Accusation of them to His **Advice** for them.
 - (i) The idea of watching and being watchful here isn't mainly about waiting for the Lord's return, but about being sober, alert and steadfast in the midst of a Church who's fallen asleep. The word watch and watchful is Greek word # 1127 and it means to *perceive, take heed, recover full vision and to see clearly*.
 - (ii) The Church of Sardis had been in the past what Ephesus was in the present, a thriving city filled with the life of God, but apart from their repentance, Jesus is letting them know that the ministry is at the point of death.

(iii) The idea that their works weren't "perfect" simply means they were inadequate, incomplete or lacking. They were immature as opposed to mature.

C) **Revelation 3:3** "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."

- 1) Jesus continues His **Advice** to them by calling them to remember and repent. They are exhorted to remember the start of their love relationship with Him, and from there, hold fast what they first received. Because God doesn't forget, He calls us to remember!
- 2) Most people see this verse primarily a second coming passage. I see it primarily having to do with the Church of Sardis and secondarily about the second coming.

(i) The coming of Jesus to this Church was a coming of Judgment, or a day of reckoning with those in the Church. He's telling them that He's coming to them, so repent, remember and return so that I don't have to destroy that which I love, the ministry.

(ii) But what Jesus says is a principle that's also true of His second coming.

(a) "...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."

(iii) Jesus doesn't intend for the Church to be caught off guard by the season of His return or the moment of His return. To the praying, sober and alert Church, His return won't be sudden and like a thief. But those who refuse to watch will experience it like a thief in the night.

(a) **1st Thessalonians 5:1-6** "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 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. But you, brethren are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."

(iv) In both passages the Bible is telling us that those who refuse to watch will experience His coming to them like a thief in the night.

D) **Revelation 3:4** "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."

- 1) Jesus moves from His Advice for them with His **Assurance** of reward to them, if they overcome.
- (i) It's clear that the entire Church wasn't disconnected from Jesus, but most and that only left a few that weren't in the same place of judgment. Jesus is turning from the unworthy majority to the worthy few.

- (ii) Jesus first addressed their name as their reputation (**Rev. 3:1**) but now uses names to speak of a few individuals among the majority.
 - (iii) The rewards listed in this verse and the following verse aren't automatic just because they are Christians. These promises are only invitations until we respond to them. God's promises are contingent upon our response to them and Him. Without the proper heart response to those promised rewards they remain only invitations and not guarantees.
 - (iv) It seems that the white garments are speaking of walking with Christ in victory during the 1,000 year reign and beyond. During the Roman era it was common during holidays and celebrations and specifically around a great triumph to wear a white Toga. And to a struggling Church and weak city, the promise of victory would have been sweet.
- E) **Revelation 3:5** *"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."*
- 1) Again, the **Assurance** of eternal reward is connected to them overcoming the lethargy of the majority and to become reconnected with Jesus at the heart level.
 - 2) Jesus also lets the Church of Sardis know that if they don't repent and return to Him, He is willing to blot out their name from the Book of Life.
 - (i) Jesus is clarifying to us that though our name was once written in the Book of Life (Salvation) it can be removed. Those that don't overcome in victory are in danger of having their names literally scrapped off the parchments with a knife.
 - (ii) Blot is Greek word # 1813 and it literally means to smear out, to obliterate, erase, tear, blot out or wipe away.
 - (a) **2nd Thessalonians 2:3** *"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..."*
 - (iii) Jesus was saying to them "in the same way a civic register contained the names of the citizens so also does God have a book that has the names of the citizens of heaven (**Ex. 32:31-32; Phi 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 21:27**).
 - (iv) Because of the compromise of the Church in the city, it was hard to preach the truth of Jesus straightforward. So Jesus promised them, if they will be faithful to preach His name to others, He will also preach of speak their name to His Father.
- F) **Revelation 3:6** *"He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*
- 1) From the Assurance of eternal reward to those who overcome Jesus issues the final **Appeal** to the Church of Sardis.
 - 2) In great tenderness, not wishing to punish His people, **Appeals** to them to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and press into the message in way that they have never done before.

Session Five Extra Reading

I have had the privilege of running in fulltime ministry for nearly ten years straight with a few breaks in-between along the way. In the start of running fulltime in the place of ministry I was enjoying the open doors God was setting before me. It seemed like door after door of opportunity continued to open before me and before I even knew it I was head-deep in overseeing two ministries which claimed much of my daily time and energy. It was common for me to leave Raymond on a Friday, drive eight hours to a far away city, preaching at a Church Sunday morning and Sunday night, drive home Monday and preach again Tuesday night to my youth ministry; then turn around and do it all over again on Friday. This happened consistently between 2003 and 2005. During the first year, I actually put around 70,000 miles on my car preaching the gospel, leading students, directing camps, planning events and building leaders across the Pacific Northwest.

But something happened during the closing services at Summer Camp in 2006. I had a brewing frustration with my spiritual state before Jesus. During the early summer of 2006 I had purchased a dirt bike and was riding it nearly four nights a week or more. I longed to get out of the office and take off riding, to escape and fill my mind and time with something other than ministry. The thing that I longed to do, felt called to do and was graced by God to do in ministry was now something I resented. My resentment towards ministry was because I had lost my identity in my occupation and was starting to feel the pain of my distant heart from Jesus. What I used to love to do, reading the bible and spending time alone with Jesus, was now a necessity to prepare for another sermon, another conference, another meeting and another upcoming year of busyness in doing things *for* God not doing things *with* God.

During this time I had gotten a hold of a little book by Dwayne Roberts titled, *One Thing: Boldly Pursuing All That Matters* which started to chart a new course in my heart and life, calling me back to my first Love. While reading this book it dawned on me that I had misplaced my identity in my occupation; I was slowly losing my passion for why I originally signed up for Christianity. What I mean to say by this is that I know the pain of doing things *for* God instead of doing things *with* God. I know the pain the Church of Sardis was experiencing, in having a name that they were alive, but to be dead on the inside (**Rev. 3:1**). Answering the call of the Holy Spirit to repent and return to my first Love was the best thing that ever happened to me. Through the process of returning to Him, I have worked in partnership with the Holy Spirit over the years to make sure Jesus has a central place in my heart, my family and my ministry. Now I seek to love God well in intimacy while I am working *with* God in ministry. I'm not perfect, nor do I claim to have it fully figured out. I just know that I don't want to do ministry separated from the place of intimacy in Jesus.

As we look at the Church of Sardis, it's clear that Jesus was addressing a Church who had once loved Him, once lived for the Glory of His name, but now was busy working *for* Him trying to produce the results of a lover. They had become little more than a worker who used to love. Jesus' words are strong and pointed for this group of people who were fooling others with their *so-called passion* but not fooling Him who knows all things.

The History of Sardis

The city of Sardis was situated in the hill country in between Thyatira and Philadelphia on this circuit of Churches in what is now known as Turkey. And according to Greek history the city of Sardis was once

among the greatest cities of its day. The city is said to have peaked in population and influence around 700 B.C.; from that time it was on a steady decline.

The city of Sardis had a tiny Citadel which acted as a wartime refuge for people who lived below, as it was much safer to be elevated in the times of trouble that often came through this small city. The region where Sardis is located has suffered terribly from severe earthquakes throughout history with its greatest one taking place in 17 A.D. Some labeled it *the greatest disaster in human memory*. That earthquake was said to have actually been closer to Philadelphia, greatly impacting and devastating them as well as Sardis.

Because of the wealth this city possessed they actually rebuilt the entire city in less than nine years, through both their own personal wealth and a generous donation from Tiberius. The rivers that ran throughout the city were known to have a large quantity of gold flowing through them which speaks to the wealth this city possessed. The challenge of the personal wealth in this city is that it left them self indulgent, complacent and self dependant.

The religious climate of Sardis was like most of the cities in Asia Minor in their day: a mixture of Emperor Worship with local and regional deities. The city wasn't known for the overt idolatry of Pergamum and Thyatira but it was still taking place, to some degree, within the city. And as I stated already, through the specific address given them in **Revelation 3:1-6** we can clearly see that the Christians in this city once loved Jesus, but had since grown cold in their relationship with Him.

What is interesting to note about the Church in this city is that they weren't struggling from outside persecution like Smyrna, or holding onto false doctrine inside like Thyatira, which means that they had become self indulgent and their message of Truth was so compromised that it wasn't provoking any response from those outside. Our goal isn't to provoke our cities to hate us, but if we faithfully preach the Gospel as Jesus, the Apostles and the Prophets of Old preached, it's common to draw a similar response from those in our cities. The Church of Sardis had moved from a place of passion to a place of compliancy and it left them *spiritually broke* which ultimately led them into moral error. Let's now take a close look at Jesus' words to this Church.

Jesus' Address to the Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

As an overseer of a ministry I can only image what it must have been like to receive this information from Jesus in letter form. The One who fashioned you, who formed you and made you the way you are, is now addressing you publically about your private life, in the presence of the people you serve. And it's even worse since this Church, is one of only two Churches of these Seven who receive nothing good from Jesus. The other is the Church of Laodicea.

Jesus begins His address to this ministry in the same way He has addressed the previous five Churches by saying in **Revelation 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. Just as Jesus has done for the previous Churches He starts by **Addressing** the human Apostolic leader of the ministry in Sardis.

Following Jesus' **Address** He then reveals some very specific and very important **Attributes** about Himself to the Church. His **Attributes** are seen in the phrase ...these things says He who has the seven

Spirits of God and the seven stars... Firstly, Jesus tells the Church of Sardis that He has the seven Spirits of God which is a reference to what John has already seen in **Revelation 1:4**. The seven Spirits of God aren't to be taken as seven different Spirits of God, as if God has multiple Spirits, but rather that God the Holy Spirit is the seven-fold Spirit of God. The clarity to this statement comes from the famous Old Testament passage where it's said about Jesus that He would have the seven-fold Spirit of God upon His life. The seven facets of the Holy Spirit are broken down in **Isaiah 11:2** in this order **1)** The Spirit of the Lord; **2)** The Spirit of Wisdom; **3)** The Spirit of understanding; **4)** The Spirit of counsel; **5)** The Spirit of might; **6)** The Spirit of knowledge; **7)** The Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Through this reference to the seven-fold Spirit of God, Jesus is making a huge statement to this spiritually struggling ministry. In a few more words Jesus is going to tell this Church they are dead. The idea that Jesus possesses the seven-fold Spirit is to encourage them that He possesses the fullness of God the Holy Spirit to help turn their situation around. Though they are in a bad place, moving further away from His blessing and into His judgment, He's still able to help them, but they must invoke Him in order for Him to act. It's not that they are strained, because He is there to help them, but He won't do it uninvited.

The second **Attribute** Jesus reveals about Himself to this ministry comes from the phrase **...He who has the seven stars...** The reference to the seven stars was seen by John in **Revelation 1:16** and then further explained by Jesus in **Revelation 1:20**. In **Revelation 1:20** Jesus is explaining what John has seen in **Revelation 1:16** that those seven stars in His right hand are actually the seven angels of the seven Churches. Now, as I have already broken down in previous chapters, that word *Angel* in the Greek is the word *Messenger* and it can mean either human or angelic. I take it to be human in this instance as opposed to angelic.

The reason Jesus reveals this **Attribute** to the Church of Sardis is to say to them, *Hey, though you're separated from Me, I'm not separated you. And although you've forgotten Me, I haven't forgotten you.* It's here that Jesus is pictured as holding them in the power of His right hand which speaks about His commitment to them. One of the powerful qualities about Jesus is that though He has something negative to say to us, He never separates Himself from us in the process of correction. But the other implication of Jesus holding them in His hand is His passion for the quality of ministry. Jesus isn't just happy when we're busy doing things, He longs for us to be becoming *holy* and *fascinated* in Him as we are working with Him. He doesn't just care about the work getting done, He also cares about the type of worker who is working and so He holds us in His hand to strengthen His commitment to us.

From Jesus revealing His various **Attributes** to the Churches, He normally moves into His **Approval** of them, but as I previously said, both the Church of Sardis and Philadelphia receive nothing positive from Jesus. Without an **Approval** of this Church, Jesus begins to talk to them about His **Accusation** of them. This **Accusation** of them is seen in the statement **...I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead (or dead on the inside).** Jesus, the Overseer and Head of the Body is the only One who can truly say to them **...I know your works...** Because of Jesus' commitment to the various ministries He starts, He observes them from an up-close-and-personal place and thereby has the authority to speak to those who oversee them.

Though the Church of Sardis is fooling the city they are not fooling Jesus. In essence Jesus is saying to them *Your works might be passing before others, but they're not passing before Me. I have the Spirit of Wisdom and Knowledge, and it's clear to Me that you're dead on the inside.* That word *dead* is the Greek

word #3498 (Strong's Concordance) and it literally means *corpse*, or to be totally dead internally. Now it's important that we understand Jesus is talking to Christians, people who have given their lives to Him and are in the faith. It wasn't that they were dead in Christ meaning they weren't regenerated. When Jesus says to them that they were dead inside, He's saying that their heart before Him had grown cold and distant, like a corpse towards Him.

Because Jesus is the Faithful Witness He will always tell us the truth regarding our spiritual state before Him regardless of what others might say about us. Jesus lives in the Fear of the Lord, which means that He will speak to us what's best for us in the eyes of the Father without regard for the others around us. What this means for us is that we must talk to Jesus about our lives and never assume that things are okay. We often don't know until we ask.

Jesus continues speaking to the Church of Sardis by giving them His **Advice** when He says in **Revelation 3:2** Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Now when it comes to Jesus' **Advice** to this Church, He wasn't telling them to primarily watch for His return, but rather to live sober, alert and steadfast before Him and others. That word *watch* in the Greek is word #1127 and it literally means to perceive, take heed, recover full vision and to see clearly. What seems to be happening is that Sardis had been in the past what Ephesus was in the present, a thriving city filled with the life of God. But apart from their repentance, Jesus is letting them know that the ministry is also, an in Ephesus, at the point of death.

And when Jesus says to them ...I have not found your works perfect before God He's not using the word *perfect* as most American's would use it. Jesus is simply saying that their works were immature, or lacking and inadequate. It's not that they were to be without fault and perfect meaning *perfection*, but rather that Jesus wanted them to be mature and adequate in their works before the Father.

Jesus' **Advice** continues for the Church of Sardis in **Revelation 3:3** as He says to them 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. Through this passage Jesus is calling them to remember and repent. He is asking them to remember in the early days of the revival when He first touched their heart and return to that place of passion and longing for more of Him. His **Advice** for them is that they should remember those early days, and work to stay there with Him. The power of God's name is that He doesn't forget us even when we forget Him, so He calls us to remember Him, because He always remembers us.

Something else that many people like to read into this passage is a primary statement about the Second Coming and the Rapture of the Church. I personally see this passage, stated above, as a primary statement to the Church of Sardis and a secondary statement about the Second Coming. In all reality, the coming of Jesus to this ministry was a coming in judgment not a coming in His return in the sky. Jesus was warning them that if they didn't return to Him in repentance that He would come to them in judgment, quickly. Jesus doesn't want to crush His people or the thing which He loves so dearly, the Church. But because He is Faithful and True He requires us to respond to His words. But if we choose not to, He promises that He will come to us quickly and deal with us.

Secondarily, this passage also gives us a second coming principle. Jesus tells the Church of Sardis ...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. The reality here is that Jesus didn't want to come to the Church as a thief, but if they refused to watch, then He would. Many assume that Jesus is going to come to the earth like a Thief and

that nobody can know the season of the Lord's return, but this idea simply isn't Biblical for the praying and watching Church.

The only people that Jesus will come to as a thief, upon His return, are those that refuse to live sober, alert and watching for His appearing and the season of His return. For those that watch, they will be ever ready, longing for that Day to come sooner than it will. Look at what Paul says in **1st Thessalonians 5:1-6** *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 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. But you, brethren are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.* Paul starts out by stating that that Day of Lord so comes as a thief in the night. But then he goes on to clarify who those are that are in darkness, or of the night. It's not the praying and engaged Church that's alive with Jesus in the greatest hour of human difficulty. Those that refuse to watch and live alert in that season will experience Jesus' coming to them and the events surrounding His return like a Thief. So, either primary or secondary, Jesus is making it clear that those who refuse to watch for Him now, or at His return, will experience His *coming like a thief*.

Now that Jesus has given the Church of Sardis His Advice He is going to share with them the **Assurance** of eternal reward, pending they overcome. Jesus says to them in **Revelation 3:4** *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.* We get a glimpse into something powerful through this verse. It's clear that the entire Church wasn't dead on the inside but rather the majority. But among the majority there were only a few individuals that were walking with Jesus in hot pursuit. Jesus has moved His conversation from the dead and unworthy majority to the faithful, worthy minority. It doesn't take an entire Church to turn things around, only a few, and maybe even just one person who loves God and is willing to live radically before Him.

When Jesus first **Addressed** the Church He was **Addressing** their reputation that they had among the people in their city and maybe even beyond. But now, Jesus moves from addressing the reputation of the majority to the faithfulness of the minority, which in this case were only a few individuals. And to these faithful few, Jesus gives the Assurance of eternal reward based on them overcoming the challenges set before them. And just like the promise of reward to the other Churches of **Revelation 2-3** what Jesus was telling the church of Sardis wasn't based on an automatic reward, but on their overcoming.

When it comes to the eternal rewards Jesus offers not only these Churches and Christians, but also to us today, is that they are only *invitations* to rewards until we respond to them with the proper heart response. The way those invitations become a reality in our lives is based solely on how we respond to them in the grace of God. Jesus offers concrete promises but until we respond with the appropriate heart response, to match the promise given, they are only invitations and not guarantees. We must press into the Lord's heart in order to see those things that He has promised us become a reality.

But regarding the promise given in this passage, Jesus is offering them to be able to walk with Him in white. During the time period in which this was written, it was common for Rome to host parties where the people would wear white togas to celebrate a major holiday, a large conquest or a victory. To this

struggling band of faithful Christians in Sardis, the promise of walking with Jesus in the celebration of victory would have been really appealing to these faithful few.

We must remember that the Assurance of reward is given to this ministry based on their overcoming the lethargy of the majority and remaining connected to Jesus at the heart level. This is not easy to do, and it was going to be a large task for this Church to overcome. So much so that Jesus connected a reward if they were able to do it. The Church is further threatened by Jesus that if they refuse to repent and return to Him, that He will blot out their names from the Book of Life. Here are His words from **Revelation 3:5** 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.

Through this passage we are able to see that though our names were once written in the Book of Life, it's possible to have them blotted out, or removed. For those who refused to turn from their spiritual deadness were in jeopardy, down the road, of having their names blotted out. The idea of their being blotted out is saying that their names were in jeopardy of being literally scratched off the parchments with a knife. The word blot in the Greek is word #1813 and it literally means to smear out, to obliterate, erase, tear, blot out or wipe away.

Jesus is letting them know that just as the city in which they live keeps a civil registry, so also does He keep a heavenly registry with people's names in it. Because of the Church of Sardis' compromise of the truth in order to live an easy life within the city, it made sharing the difficult truths about Jesus challenging. And because Jesus knows this, He tells them ...but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Jesus is telling this faithful group of individuals within this larger, but internally dead ministry, if they will be faithful to speak about Jesus' name, Jesus will be faithful to speak their name before His Father. The reward for sharing Jesus' name and the difficult aspects of Jesus' name in public holds an eternal reward that's beyond our comprehension.

Jesus is now at His final **Address** to the Church of Sardis and He is giving the final **Appeal** to them to listen to the Person and voice of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says to them in **Revelation 3:6** just like He says to every other Church in **Revelation 2-3** He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. The God Man, in great tenderness, not wishing to punish His people, **Appeals** to them to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and press into the message in way that they have never done before.

This **Appeal** is equally applicable to us in our day. We must heed the words of God, the word of Christ, the words of the Prophets and the words of the Apostles. We must allow the Holy Spirit to have entrance into the very fabric of our lives in order for us to be able to hear what He is saying and to rightly respond to Him. Beloved, give Him your ear, and from there allow those words He shares with you to touch your heart and change the way you live your life before Him and others.

Session Six

“The Church Of Philadelphia”

Revelation 3:7-13

The Church Of Philadelphia

I) History Of Philadelphia

- A) The city of Philadelphia is situated about 30 miles East, South East of Sardis and it's now called by the name Alasehir. The word Philadelphia literally means brotherly love and it's made up from two Greek words. This city was name Philadelphia because of Eumenes 2nd great love for his brother.
- B) The city of Philadelphia suffered a major earthquake alongside Sardis in 17 A.D. that nearly devastated the city. And because of the volcanic activity in the area, it created a really rich fertile soil for things to be grown in.
- C) Philadelphia was well known as the gateway to the East. In fact, some have said that this city was actually built as a pagan missionary for all those people traveling through. It was a large crossroads where several major thorough ways connected. Because of the large amount of temples Philadelphia was actually called “little Athens.”
- D) Because of the fertile soil the area was well known for its vineyards and wineries. Supposedly there was even an edict against the vineyards by Domitian around 92 A.D. This city exported spirits of two kinds.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

- A) **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.”*
 - 1) For the sixth and second to the last time Jesus **Addresses** this portion of the letter to the leadership of the Church in Philadelphia.
 - 2) As Jesus finishes His Address He then reveals to the Church some specific **Attributes** of Himself that are unique to their current situation.
 - 3) The specific Attributes that Jesus gives the Church of Philadelphia are *“...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.”*
 - (i) He who is holy = Jesus is letting them know that He is the holy One of God, or the one who was set apart to be faithful to His Father. This facet is to strengthen this Church in their costly commitment to remain set apart for Him.

(ii) He who is true = Jesus is revealing His unchanging, eternal nature to this body of believers. His promise's in **Revelation 3:10,12** are going to seem too good to be true and He needs them to trust Him fully.

(a) **Revelation 19:11** *"...And He who sat on Him was called faithful and true..."*

(iii) He who has the key of David (Rev 1:18) = Jesus is directly quoting **Isaiah 22:22** which speaks directly of the key of David. Through this facet (the One who holds the key of David) He's strengthening the Church that not only are the promises big, and His word true, but He also possess the ability to deliver on the promise given.

(a) **Isaiah 22:15-25** speaks about the key of David being taken from Shebna and given to Eliakim empowering him to have access to the royal treasuries of the nation.

(b) Jesus is letting them know that not only does He permanently have the key of David as the greater David, but He will share it with them.

(i) **Revelation 22:16** *"...I am the Root and the Offspring of David..."*

(iv) He who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens = Though this ministry is having the door of fellowship closed to them by their fellow countrymen and other gentiles, Jesus is making it clear that He alone opens and shuts doors.

(a) He opens doors of ministry, opportunity and influence. And instead of focusing on closed doors we must refocus our sight on Him who opens and closes doors.

(b) And though many nations are closing their doors to the Gospel we shouldn't focus our attention on the closed doors as much as the God who opens closed doors.

4) **Revelation 3:8** *"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."*

(i) After Jesus reveals His various Attributes to them, He then shares with them His **Approval** of those things that they were doing.

(ii) Jesus' Approval of them and their situation must have encouraged them in the same way it encouraged the Church of Smyrna (**Revelation 2:8-11**). Sometimes knowing that Jesus is in the midst of your struggle is enough, even if the circumstance doesn't immediately turn around.

(iii) Just hearing the God Man say *"...I know...I see, I'm here, I'm not removed...I'm fully engaged with your struggle and I am helping you and am committed to helping you..."*

(iv) The open door that Jesus has set before them seems to be two-fold if not even more multifaceted than just two parts.

(a) It's an open door of missions, ministry and opportunity = Even though they were being removed from their place of worship, Jesus is promising them influence as they share Him with others in their city and beyond.

- (b) It's an open door of intimacy to His heart = There's a privileged place of intimacy that the saints on earth share with Jesus that no angelic beings experience.
- (c) Those around His throne work as servants, but the saints He considers more than servants, but friends.
 - (i) **John 15:15** *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."*
- (d) The Church of Laodicea was called upon God to open up their doors to Him, and we know that door isn't primarily speaking about salvation, but about intimacy with His Church.
 - (i) **Revelation 3:20** *"Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me."*
- (v) **Revelation 3:9** *"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."*
 - (a) The Church of Smyrna and the Church of Philadelphia, were in similar situations with their fellow countrymen and they are also the only two of the seven Churches who receive no **Accusation** from Jesus.
 - (b) Without an Accusation He is now going to give them the **Assurance** of promise and rewards towards them for their continued faithfulness to Him in the midst of pressure.
 - (c) He starts by saying *"...I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."*
 - (i) In Philadelphia the Christians weren't only suffering from those worshipping pagan gods but also from Jews who troubled the others Jews for their commitment to Jesus.
 - (ii) The idea that Jesus is declaring to them is that there will come a day when those who are naturally Jewish outwardly, but not inwardly (in Christ) will come and worship Christ before them, understanding that Jesus loves the Church as well as them.
 - (iii) Right now for orthodox Jews, not secular Jews, but devout Jews who don't love Jesus, His name, His Church and the New Testament is a stumbling block to them, but it won't be this way forever.
 - 1. **Romans 11:11-16** Speaks of the Gentile role, through the body of Christ to provoke Israel to jealously.
 - (iv) Jesus is also declaring His zeal to vindicate those whom He loves.

B) **Revelation 3:10** *"Because you have kept My command to preserve, 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."*

- 1) This passage which is a part of Jesus' continued **Assurance** to the Church of Philadelphia that He will walk with them through both the present trouble in their city and the great trouble at the end of this age.
- 2) Many Christians see this phrase as a mention of the Rapture but this isn't at all what Jesus is saying.
- 3) The word Keep that is used here is Strong's Greek word #5083 and it means to set a watch, to guard from loss or injury, keeping the eye upon and it's opposed to the Strong's Greek word #5442 which means to escape.
- 4) The other primary time that this word *keep* is used is in John **17:15,18** which says *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."*
- 5) Jesus' intentions aren't to take them out of the present trouble or the great trouble at the end of this age, but His commitment is to keep them through the midst of it.

C) He strengthens this truth when He breaks into a short piece of **Advice** for them in **Revelation 3:11** by saying *"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."*

- (i) His promise to come to them quickly wasn't of calamity to them, but of comfort for them. He was assuring them that He was coming to help them, so they should hold on in the meantime until He gets there. Making sure that they don't lose those things which they have worked for.
- (ii) This wasn't the same for all the seven Churches. His coming to some was a warning of judgment, not an encouragement of comfort.
- (iii) We must understand that though He is offering them a crown, it's not automatic. It's contingent upon them overcoming and not giving up or losing heart in the process.
- (iv) There's much sadness with people who pass away having very little possessions in this age, but how sad for the person who hasn't stored up any treasures in the age which is yet to come.

D) **Revelation 3:12** *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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."*

- 1) Jesus continues with more **Assurance** of eternal reward. History tells us that the ruler of Philadelphia would enshrine outstanding locals by placing their names on pillars that were placed in various spots around town.

- 2) Jesus is calling the Church to sow their treasure into the age which is yet to come. And though their names didn't make it onto an earthly pillar, if they overcome, He will place their names on an eternal pillar.
 - 3) The Holy Spirit would say "Let go of the earthly pillars, clothe yourself like a servant, lay your earthly robes aside, gird yourself with a towel and wash the feet of the lowly."
 - 4) To man who can't stop chasing fame in this age, the Holy Spirit would say "set your eyes on that which is eternal, that which will never fade away and disappear."
- E) "...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."
- 1) Jesus' gives the Assurance of three more rewards;
 - (i) I will write on him the name of My God = This is speaking about possession and position.
 - (a) **(Possession)** Aaron, the high priest, wore on his forehead a golden plate with the engraving "HOLY TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36-38). This spoke of God's people as God's possession. They belonged and do belong to the Lord.
 - (i) **Revelation 13:16** "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their FOREHEADS..."
 - (ii) **Revelation 22:4** "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their FOREHEADS."
 - (b) **(Position)** This means that we are recipients of His desire, His authority and the revelation of Him.
 - (i) **Hebrews 10:16** "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them."
 - (ii) 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 = This is speaking about our unusual place of authority in the city. Some are given a key, or called a father of a city, but Jesus has given us access to His Father's city.
 - (a) This is the first clear statement about the eternal city, heaven coming to earth in the Bible.
 - (iii) And I will write on Him My new name = This is speaking about intimacy with Jesus in way that we can only peer into in this age.
 - (a) **Revelation 19:12** "His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself."
- F) **Revelation 3:13** "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."
- 1) For the second to the last time, Jesus closes this letter with the earnest **Appeal** that they would hear what Holy Spirit is saying to them. Because if they lock in, eternity will look totally different for them.

Session Six Extra Reading

There are times when I am meditating on the Person of Jesus Christ that all of the sudden I realize He's really *real*. It unexpectedly touches my heart and I am aware that He's fully alive and totally engaged with me and my life. Now, I can surely understand how silly this might sound to you, coming from a person who is currently being paid as a fulltime occupation to search out God, lead His Church and tell others about Him. I totally get it. And if the truth be told, I think I still might be far more shocked than you when I see Him as He is.

It has happened about ten or so times over the past twelve years of being in relationship with Jesus. Sometimes it's been in the place of solitary prayer with Him and other times it has been while I am preaching to others. What usually happens is that while I am talking to Him, or talking to others about Him, all of the sudden I connect with the idea that what I am saying is really *true*. This might sound like I'm not convinced personally about what I tell others, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I am very convinced about what I believe, but there are times in my personal experience where I am quickened to how real what I believe *is*. It's a really powerful experience and a great reminder that it's easy to treat common things with a subtle familiarity.

The other reality to this experience I have mentioned above is that there are also times it seems Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and life in Him are way too good to be true. The culture in which we live breaks so many promises, or offers us things that become different when we actually read the fine print. There's often a catch, a gimmick or extended payments after the first initial payment that you didn't know about when you originally signed up.

To the Church of Philadelphia, this very well might have been their response to the promises made them by Jesus. This Church was a smaller, struggling-but-faithful-to-Jesus type Church. But when they hear the letter and the specific information Jesus has for them, the temptation to question whether or not He is able to deliver on His promises might have, at the very least, been a passing thought. As we take this entire chapter and look at both the historical setting of the city of Philadelphia and Jesus' address to them, we want to come to grips with a God who promises much but is also able to bring to pass what He promises. What Jesus offers humans is not *too good to be true*.

History of Philadelphia

The city of Philadelphia is situated about thirty miles East, Southeast of Sardis in this circular pattern and is today called by the name Alasehir. The word Philadelphia literally means *brotherly love* and it's made up from two Greek words. The city was named Philadelphia because of the great love of Eumenes the Second for his brother.

History tells us that the city of Philadelphia suffered a major earthquake along with Sardis around 17 A.D. that nearly devastated the entire city. The region which was formerly Asia Minor is now modern day Turkey, an area riddled with earthquakes. Along with earthquakes and fault lines, there was also a nearby volcano whose eruptions created incredibly fertile soil. The city is known as the gateway to the East, because of the several major thoroughways connected to it and through it. And in fact, some have said this city was actually built as a pagan missionary city.

Because of the fertile soil of the area, there were a plethora of vineyards, wheat, grain and corn. There were so many vineyards that during the time the Revelation was written 90-96 A.D. Domitian actually passed an edict against the vineyards in favor of tax-generating wheat and corn crops. Because there were massive amounts of vineyards in the area, they needed room to grow wheat, grain and corn crops to fund the government as well as the life of the city. So it was true that the city was exporting two types of spirits from the many temples and large pagan culture: wine and demons.

Jesus' Address to the Church Of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

The Church of Philadelphia tells us many things, things which I don't even claim to have a grasp on. But two primary things I do know and see clearly from Jesus' words to this Church are that God doesn't evaluate things the way we do, and that Jesus makes big promises which He fully intends to fulfill. Because the Church was a smaller body of believers, we could tend to look at them as not being very influential, but to Jesus this Church meant so much to Him. And secondly, Jesus makes some of the most outlandish promises to this Church, but He first qualifies Himself as the One who can fulfill what He promises.

Jesus open this letter in the same way that He opens all seven letters in **Revelation 2-3** by saying here in **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. Through this introduction Jesus is **Addressing** what I believe to be the human leadership of this body of believers. Jesus is very intentional in **Addressing** the leadership because He clearly understands that the best way to the ministry is through the leadership. From His Address to them, He then moves right into the revealing of some specific **Attributes** of Himself that will directly help the Church. In this one verse I have identified a total of four **Attributes** Jesus uses to describe Himself to the Church of Philadelphia.

Firstly Jesus says, I am He who is holy... Through this **Attribute** Jesus is letting them know that He is the Holy One of God, or the One who was set apart to be faithful to His Father. Because this ministry was receiving trouble from outside relationships for their faithful witness for Jesus, Jesus Himself is working to strengthen them with the understanding that He knows what it's like to remain holy to God when it costs greatly. Jesus knows the costly commitment to remain holy unto God while living in this present evil age. Jesus received much persecution for His commitment not only to remain pure, but to tell others what the Father had said about Him.

Secondly, Jesus refers to Himself as ...He who is true... It's here that Jesus is telling them about His eternal nature. As I have already mentioned, the promises that Jesus is going to give this group of believers in **Revelation 3:10, 12** are going to seem too good to be true, but they aren't. So prior to sharing with them what the promises are, He is letting them know that His eternal, unchangeable nature is that of truth. **Revelation 19:11** says ...He (Jesus Christ) who sat on him was called faithful and true...

Thirdly, Jesus reveals Himself as ...He who has the key of David... Jesus is directly quoting **Isaiah 22:22** which is the only verse in the Bible speaking about the key of David other than this reference here in **Revelation 3:7**. In **Isaiah 22:15-25** God makes a promise to take the Key of David from Shebna because of pride, and give to Eliakim temporarily. This key was to be set on his shoulder as a sign of authority with permission to use the key as he deemed right. The key of David granted to whoever had it the right to access the royal treasuries of the nation of Israel. We know through other passages such as **Revelation 5:5** and **22:16** that Jesus is the Greater David. This **Attribute** of Jesus lets us know that not

only does He eternally possess the key of David, but because of His benevolent heart, He will also share it with us eternally. Through this, Jesus is letting the Church know that He is Holy, He is True and that He has the resources of heaven to fulfill His words of promise to them. They can believe what He says to them, because He possesses the ability or the key of David eternally. He will never lose it like the men of the Bible did. For everyone, other than Jesus, that key was given temporarily.

And fourthly, Jesus says to them *...I am He who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens..* One verse later Jesus is going to make it known that many are closing the door of fellowship to this group of believers but that He alone is the One who closes *open doors* and who opens *shut doors*. This Church was losing the extended hand of fellowship from their countrymen, much like the Church of Smyrna. Jesus fully understood their situation as He had experienced the same thing. Jesus is the One who opens doors of ministry and influence; instead of focusing on the closed doors we should, like this church, refocus our eyes upon the God who opens closed doors.

Jesus follows the same order He has with the previous six Churches and moves from His Personal and specific Attributes to His **Approval** of the things that they were doing well. In Jesus' Approval to the Church of Philadelphia from **Revelation 3:8** He says *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.* Jesus' **Approval** of them and their situation must have encouraged them in the same way it encouraged the Church Smyrna (**Revelation 2:8-11**). Sometimes it's enough to know that Jesus sees and understands my troubles, even though they don't turn around in that moment, just knowing He's involved is often enough.

Jesus tells the Church that He has set before them an *open door*. There is much to be said about this open door, as open doors throughout the scripture have various meanings. And in all honesty, there are people who have spent years researching the open door and I don't claim to understand a fraction of what they have discovered. But to simplify it a little bit, and at least get you started in your study of this glorious truth, I see two primary things related to this open door. Firstly, it's an open door of mission, ministry and opportunity. Even as they were being removed from the place of fellowship with others, Jesus is setting before them an open door of powerful and fruitful ministry both there and beyond. This happened with Corrie Ten Boom and her family as the Germans were shutting the door to Jews. Corrie and her family received an open door from God to serve the Jews in the midst of one of their greatest struggles. Though all doors close around us, remember not to look at the closed doors, but to the God who sets open doors before us.

And secondly, this open door that Jesus set before them is what I believe to be an open door of intimacy to His heart. We, the saints of God possess a special place of privilege here in this age that the rest of God's heavenly created order doesn't get to experience. Our worship of God isn't because we have to, but because we want to. Those that serve around God's throne are just that, servants. But for us, who are alive in this age, the Bible doesn't only call us servants, but also friends. Jesus Himself said in **John 15:15** *No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.* The Church of Laodicea was called upon by God to open up the door of their heart to Jesus and allow Him entrance. Though this passage from **Revelation 3:20** is often applied to sinners, it was Christians that Jesus was speaking to. And the door He is asking them to open, is the door of their heart or the secret place of their affections. Jesus wanted entrance.

To receive an open door into Jesus' heart is beyond what we are fully able to comprehend in this age specifically but maybe even in the age which is yet to come. That the God of glory, the uncreated God Man, would choose to open up His heart to us, inviting us into it to experience His depths, is something that I believe will continue to move us throughout this age and into the age which is yet to come.

The Church of Philadelphia was in an uncommon place in relationship to the other six Churches. In fact, it wasn't just Philadelphia that was in an uncommon place, but also the Church of Smyrna. These two Churches were the only two among the other five Churches that Jesus didn't have anything negative to say. So instead of having an **Accusation** for them, Jesus instead moves right into His **Assurance** to them of reward for those among the ministry who continue to persist and overcome.

Jesus says to them in **Revelation 3:9** *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.* The close relationship between the Church of Smyrna and the Church of Philadelphia had more in common than only that Jesus had nothing negative to say to them. They also were both suffering at the hands of their own countrymen. The church in the city of Philadelphia wasn't only receiving persecution and trouble from the state and those who worshipped pagan gods, but also from fellow Jews.

This situation they were facing in the city was exactly the same situation the Church of Smyrna was facing. Because the pressure the state was placing on those who didn't worship the Emperor, these Orthodox Jews, were outing their fellow Jews who had have given their lives to Christ, in order to get the government off their backs. So Jesus is saying that they are only Jews outwardly, but not inwardly, in that they don't believe in Christ yet. Paul helps clarify this idea through the book of Romans, that Jews in the New Covenant must not only be circumcised externally, but also internally, at the heart (**Romans 2:29**).

But their struggle for loving Jesus and staying faithful to Him in the midst of great pressure isn't going unnoticed by Him. Because of Jesus' great love for those who say yes to Him, He can't help but get involved in the affairs of their lives. So Jesus makes a promise to them: that if they remain faithful to Him, He will make those Jews, who are only Jews outwardly, come and worship Christ at their feet. His purpose is to let those outward Jews know that Jesus has also loved their own countrymen and the Gentiles as well. Because of Jesus' strong love, He loves to vindicate His people publically. It's not enough for Jesus to love in secret, He loves to love openly, in public and to let others around us know that He loves and cherishes greatly.

Jesus' **Assurance** of reward continues into **Revelation 3:10** when He says *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.* This promise from Jesus has two primary applications, and there might even be more. But for the purpose of this chapter, I will share the two primary applications that I see from this passage. Firstly, Jesus was surely speaking directly to the Church of Philadelphia when He made them this promise, because of their present trouble and the trouble they would continue to face. The reason why I say Jesus was speaking directly to this Church is because many people take this to be a passage speaking only to the saints of God about the Rapture of the saints, which wouldn't leave any application to this physical ministry of the Church of Philadelphia. But secondly, I see its application as a primary truth related to the Great Tribulation and the great trouble Jesus promises that the saints at the end of this age would walk through.

For us to understand better what Jesus was saying, we have to look at what the word *keep* meant and means. According to the *Strong's Concordance*, the word *keep* that is used here is Greek #5083 which simply means *to set a watch, to guard from loss or injury, to keep an eye upon something*. This word *keep* that many falsely assume to mean *take away*, is actually opposed to the Strong's Greek word #5442 which means to escape. The other time that this word is used in the New Testament is found in **John 17:15** and **18**. As Jesus is just about to head into the dark night of His soul on Calvary, He prays to the Father saying *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...as You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* Jesus not only uses this word *keep* in such a way that it clearly has no reference to being taken away, He continues in verse 18 by saying that He doesn't want them taken out of the world, but sent into it. Jesus here in **John 17:15** and again in **Revelation 3:11** is making His intentions clear to the Church of Philadelphia.

He does not want to give them a false hope about what He is going to do with them. It's clear that Jesus isn't planning on taking the Church of Philadelphia out of their current crisis, or the greater crisis that's coming to the earth at the end of this age. But what Jesus wants this Church specifically to know is that He fully intends on walking with them, keeping His eye upon and being near them as they continue to walk through both their present trouble and the great trouble at the end of this age. So again, the application is two-fold, being both for their present circumstance and also through the end of this age.

The typical address from Jesus to the Seven Churches takes a slight deviation from the standard format He has previously used and now jumps into some **Advice** for the Church of Philadelphia, before continuing with more Assurance or reward. Jesus' Advice to them is seen in **Revelation 3:11** as He says to them *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* In this portion of **Advice** that Jesus gives them, He is saying the same thing He has said to other Churches, but it doesn't mean the same thing. This isn't the first Church that Jesus has told He was coming to. But His coming to the Church of Philadelphia was different than His coming to the Church of Sardis. To Sardis, it was a coming of *judgment*, if they refused to repent and return to Him. But to the Church of Philadelphia, it was a promise of *comfort*. Jesus was assuring them that He was going to break into their world with grace that would enable them to stay faithful to Him, even in the midst of trouble.

But in order for Him to help them, they needed to remain faithful to Him even in the midst of their current struggle. Jesus makes it clear through His **Advice** that there was the possibility to lose their crown. If that weren't so, then Jesus need not say *...hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* If you could see my Bible, you would see this portion circled with the words written above that say *losable*? What was true for this Church was also true for the other six churches and is also true for us today; the rewards Jesus promises aren't automatic. What I mean by automatic, is that just because Jesus says they can be ours, doesn't mean they will. What Jesus is giving us is an invitation to respond to a great promise. But if we don't respond in a faithful manner, that promise remains just an invitation and not an automatic reality for us. We must press into the heart of God and ask for help to remain faithful to Him under great pressure.

As I previously said, Jesus jumps from the normal format of how He has addressed the five previous Churches. From His Advice to them, He returns to more **Assurance** of reward for the faithful Church. In **Revelation 3:12** Jesus says *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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.* I

think it's important at this time to remember the specific way Jesus revealed three primary Attributes of Himself to this Church.

Jesus opened the letter to this Church by revealing three primary facets of Himself to them. He said *...I'm He who is holy...He who is true...and He who has the key of David...* Through these specific facets He is letting this Church know that He has suffered for costly obedience (like they were), that He doesn't just tell the truth, but rather that His eternal nature is entirely truthful and that He has the key to access all the resources of heaven to fulfill His Assurance of reward to them, if they will overcome. Beloved, if we stopped for a minute and allowed the truths of who He is and the promises that He makes not only to them, but also to us, our minds would be blown for decades. Only Jesus can make such outlandish promises and only Jesus can fulfill such lofty **Assurance** of reward for those that overcome.

History tells us that that the ruler of Philadelphia, during the time the Revelation was written (90-96 A.D.) would actually enshrine outstanding citizens with a pillar, either down the mainstream of town or around their religious/political temples. On this pillar he would put their names on it as a testimony to those that saw it. But here, Jesus is most likely speaking directly to the local situation that the Church of Philadelphia was stacked up against. When Jesus first offers to make them a pillar in the temple of His Father, He is calling the Church to live their lives beyond this age and into the age which is yet to come. To the one who struggles with fame in this age, the Holy Spirit would say *let go of your earthly pillars, clothe yourself like a servant, lay your earthly robes aside, gird yourself with a towel and wash the feet of the lowly. Quit looking at those earthly pillars and set your eyes on eternity and the pillars that never fade away.* It's my belief that the primary reason we can't let go of earthly pillars with our names on them is because we simply haven't seen that God promises to give us one in eternity, if we live in a manner that is worthy of His calling on our lives. Mike Bickle has often said, *If you don't think rightly about heaven, you won't think about it at all.* I believe this to be a very true statement, not only for me, but for most Christians I know.

In Jesus' continued **Assurance** of reward to the Church of Philadelphia, and after the promise of His making them a Pillar in eternity, He also offers three other promises to the overcomer. Looking again at **Revelation 3:12** Jesus says *...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.* Let's take a brief look at the three rewards Jesus promises. Firstly Jesus says to them *...I will write on him the name of My God...* I believe this promise to be speaking about two primary things; *possession* and *position*. Speaking of possession, Aaron the High Priest was instructed by God through Moses to wear a golden plate on his forehead which had the engraved words **HOLY TO THE LORD (Exodus 28:36-38)**. This spoke of God's people being God's possession. In **Revelation 13:16** we see that during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation the antichrist will require a mark, which will be placed either on the right hand or on the forehead. And in **Revelation 22:4** we see that in the Eternal City, we will see not only God's face, but also His name shall be on our foreheads. It's clear that the antichrist will be working to steal the possession which belongs to God, by taking the place of ownership with his counterfeit mark.

But having God's name on our foreheads is also about our position in Christ. This position that we have received in Christ means that we are recipients of God's desire, His authority and the revelation of Him. The writer of Hebrews speaks about the life of the Spirit being poured out through Jesus' death in **Hebrews 10:16**. The passage reads *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.* We have a measure of

this promise in this age, but in the age which is yet to come the promise will be in fullness for overcomers.

Secondly, Jesus says ...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... Through this passage, the Greater David, the Great Davidic King who came forth from king David, the One who eternally possesses the Key of David, is granting us access and authority in the heavenly city. Because of our relationship with the Son, the Father is going to give us access and authority in the Eternal City. It's true today that people give mayors or prominent leaders a symbolic key to the city, or carve their name on a gate. Well, Jesus is offering us the same thing through this passage. And something else that Jesus slips in, for the first time in human history, He tells us plainly that the New Jerusalem is actually coming out of heaven to this physical, present earth. Now remember, John was well acquainted with the Old Testament and the concept of the Greater David ruling and reigning on the earth, but to hear this plainly from Jesus would have blown not only John's mind, but everyone else that heard it.

And lastly, Jesus promises the overcomers in the Church of Philadelphia ...And I will write on him My new name. Jesus has already promised this Church the temporal blessings of His nearness to them in the midst of their present and future struggle. But this is speaking about an eternal blessing of nearness to Jesus which we are only able to peer into from this age. It's physically impossible to fully understand or grasp the level of intimacy with Jesus we will experience in the age to come. But through passages like this, and many others, we can look from a distance and dream about what it will be like. **Revelation 19:12** says His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. This passage tells us that Jesus has a name that nobody knows but Himself. The reality is that the God Man knows Himself in a way that's entirely separated and far from anyone's opinion of Him. Jesus has secrets about Himself that He has reserved to share only with those who overcome. What motivation to overcome that Jesus is giving us!

And finally, we come to the close of Jesus' address to the Church of Philadelphia; He ends it in the same way He has ended the previous five letters, with His **Appeal**. One of the primary things I love about Jesus is His utter honesty and His passion for us to be receiving everything He has for us. Because of His honesty, He's forced to tell us the truth, not only about this age, but even more so, about the age to come. But because of His passion, He longs that none of His people would come up short of any eternal rewards, so He's constantly calling us to a higher level in Him for the purpose of making sure we don't suffer loss when we stand before Him.

He calls out to the Church of Philadelphia, and to all those that love Him, through **Revelation 3:13** by saying He who has an ear to hear, let him what the Spirit says to the Churches. And so, we must turn our ear to the voice of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to bring back to our remembrance all things that Jesus said. May we be found as a people who listen to the Holy Spirit, who cooperate with Him by responding to His words and leadership in our lives.

Session Seven

"The Church Of Laodicea"

Revelation 3:14-22

The Church Of Laodicea

I) History Of Laodicea

- A) The city of Laodicea was like many other cities Jesus addressed as it was very wealthy and important in the eyes of men. The cities wealth came from its location situated on the convergence of three important trade roads.
- B) The convergence of these roads became a prominent factor to its wealth as it was known for banking and large industry. The city was known for beautiful black woolen cloth used to make clothing and carpets. The city also had a medical school which was particularly known for its ear ointment and for "Phrygian Powder" used to make eye ointment.
- C) Mark Driscoll states *"that recent archeology digs in the city have found ancient housing foundations that are upwards of 3,000sq ft with centralized water system's and indoor plumbing."* This is a huge statement to the wealth of those living in Laodicea.
- D) But unlike most major cities, Laodicea was built about 6 miles away from a water source. This meant that a large 6 mile aqueduct made of stone had to be built to move water into the city. Where the aqueduct started the water coming in was from a hot springs with temperatures upwards of 95+ degrees Fahrenheit.
- E) But because of the 6 mi distance that the steaming hot water had to travel, by the time it reached the city it was only tepid or lukewarm. And because of the long distance, the stone collected large amounts of calcium which induced vomiting in those that drank from it.
- F) The wealth of this city was so great that around 60 A.D. the city was toppled by a large destructive earthquake and the inhabitants actually rebuilt the city without the help of Rome.
- G) The Church isn't noted for struggling from Roman oppression or from Jewish persecution but had rather become much like their city. They were complacent in the Gospel, compromising the truth for acceptance in the community.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Laodicea (Revelation 14-22)

- A) **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..."*
 - 1) Jesus opens His **Address** to the Church by speaking to the leadership and **Addressing** those who are in charge.
 - 2) From His Address to them, He then reveals various **Attributes** about Himself that are very specific to the circumstances that the Church of Laodicea was struggling with. Jesus says to them *"...these things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God."*

- 3) Jesus is going to level a huge charge against this ministry, and He is making it clear that He all authority both in heaven and on the earth to say the things He's about to say.
 - (i) Says the Amen = He is declaring Himself to be the *so be it of God*. The truthful One.
 - (ii) The Faithful Witness (Rev 1:5) = Jesus is assuring them that they can trust His words as truth to them in their broken, complacent state. He's the Faithful Witness of God.
 - (a) **Revelation 11:17** *"We give You thanks...because of You have taken Your great power and reigned."*
 - (b) **2nd Corinthians 8:9** *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."*
 - (iii) The Beginning of the creation of God = Jesus is declaring His Divinity and His Eternality as the One who is equal with God. Don't just trust My words because I'm the Amen of God or the Faithful Witness, but because I am also God.
 - (a) Jesus is letting them know that He is qualified to say what He's about to say.
- B) **Revelation 3:15-16** *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."*
 - 1) The Church of Laodicea is only one of two Churches (**Sardis**) out of the seven Churches mentioned in **Revelation 2-3** that receive nothing positive from Jesus in the form of an **Approval**.
 - 2) Jesus then **Accuses** the Church for their gross complacency and inability to deliver the Gospel of the Kingdom to the city in which they live. Jesus' words in these two verses (**Rev. 3:15-16**) are among the most quoted verses in the Bible.
 - 3) There is no evidence that this statement is found anywhere else in the Bible, but it seems to have an entirely local connection.
 - 4) I believe that Jesus was addressing their elaborate and lengthy aqueduct and what it did to the water by the time it reached the city. Jesus' threat to spit them out of His mouth has more to do with heartsickness, than anger and frustration.
 - 5) The water was neither cold (refreshing) or hot (healing) but rather lukewarm and because of its temperature it was ineffective. He's **Accusation** to them was they were more ineffective than halfhearted.
- C) **Revelation 3:17** *"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..."*
 - 1) Jesus continues His **Accusation** to the Church by addressing their confession of themselves. The Church was under the judgment of God for the very blessings that had come from God. The blessings of God not stewarded rightly can end up being His judgment against us.

- 2) The Church said that they were rich, but Jesus says that they were poor. This was very different from the Church of Smyrna who said they were poor, but Jesus said was rich.
- 3) It's not physical possessions that Jesus is talking about, but spiritual possession to which the Church of Laodicea was entirely broke.

(i) **Matthew 5:3** *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."*

- 4) The Church had become independent and didn't need God. It's true that our prayer meetings only thrive in an environment where people actually see their need for God.
- 5) In the middle of the Churches ignorance about their true spiritual state, Jesus lets them know that their confession of themselves is different than His confession of them.
- 6) We have to work to make sure that the confession of our lives agrees with Jesus' confession of our lives. Beloved, these Christians didn't know what Jesus thought about them (**Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea**). We can't assume, we have to ask.

D) **Revelation 3:18** *"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."*

- 1) Jesus then gives this Church His **Advice** which is to stop purchasing things in this age to fix themselves and come to Him.
- 2) The Amen, the Faithful Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God is giving **Advice** from eternity into the present. We must cherish His words, be fed by them and hold them out in this age.
- 3) Based on the 5 Accusations Jesus gives them (*wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked*) He gives them **Advice** on how to resolve those various issues in three primary ways.
 - (i) Buy gold from Me...that you may be rich = Jesus is calling out to this wealthy banking city, that the gold they have (Rich) and are being offered won't do anything in regard to Him or their current state. Their wealth is empowering lethargy towards Him.
 - (a) It's a call to embrace the crucified life, to hold out Jesus' words and no longer go with the flow of society and their culture. That's what's caused their spiritual poverty and compliancy in the first place.
 - (ii) And white garments that you might be clothed so that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed = The city produced a remarkably soft wool that was raven dark, glossy and from it made a great living.
 - (a) A pagan omen in the city had dead people dressed in white and living people wearing black.
 - (b) In light of this pagan practice, Jesus **Advises** them to buy white garments from Him, because the looms of their city were unable to provide them with proper garments.
 - (c) And If they continued down the same road, they will suffer loss when they meet Him which includes being found naked before Christ.

- (iii) And anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see = This is a call from Jesus to not purchase medicine in the city which won't profit them, but to purchase medicine from Him.
- (a) The city profited extensively from an ointment developed locally from certain materials that were most likely kept secret from rival business. To a city that was treating the short sidedness of others they had lost sight of their own life before Christ.
 - (b) Beloved, these passages are terrifying. Jesus is speaking to His bride, His beloved, to Christians, to Saints and to those of His household. They were unaware of how God viewed them and in their busy life, they were moving further and further away from Him.
 - (c) Jesus' cure for their short sightedness wasn't to purchase ointment in the city, but to come to Him, in the supernatural and purchase it from Him.
- 4) Jesus wants me to be wealthy, clothed and to have perfect eyesight. Therefore He tells me the truth about my life in this age.
- 5) This isn't the purchasing of the spiritual or Jesus with money, but it's about purchasing that which we can't get on our own. It's about purchasing the grace of God through a rigorous lifestyle of prayer, fasting, Bible study, community living and serving.
- E) **Revelation 3:19** "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."
- 1) Jesus was training the Church of Laodicea in the same way that He trains us, through judgment. That word scourge *literally means to inflict suffering and pain*.
 - 2) Jesus knows that this Church will be deeply saddened on that Day when they stand before Him, if they don't repent. So, He doesn't mind inflicting pain upon our present for the purpose of changing our future.
- (i) **Hebrews 12:3-11**
- (ii) **Hosea 2:5-7** "...for she said, I will go after my lovers, who give me bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. They she will say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now."
- 3) The mercy of God is actually hidden in the thorns. What looks like pain, is actually the activity of God in the present for the purpose of changing the future.
 - 4) Because Jesus loves us, He doesn't mind disrupting our present if it changes our future. This is what **1st Corinthians 3:5-15** is speaking about when it says some will suffer loss.
 - 5) From this reality, we can view His activity in the nations not as an angry God, but a God who burns with jealousy for humans, releasing His judgments to remove those things which hinder love. His judgments aren't to stop love, but to cause love to increase.

- 6) Trusting Jesus with our lives (salvation) should be no different than trusting His evaluation of us right now. When we see God rightly, we cling to conviction as the greatest gift God gives to humans.
- F) **Revelation 3:20** *"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."*
- 1) Jesus is standing before the leadership of the Church in Laodicea, knocking at the door of the heart and asking for entrance. Though the Church often uses this passage to speak to non-Christians, this isn't the context of this passage.
 - 2) Jesus is not asking for entry into a portion of their lives, or a room in their house, but rather into the entirety of who they are. Because Jesus has opened wide the entirety of His heart towards us, He asks that we also open up the entirety of our hearts towards Him.
 - (i) **Revelation 4:1** *"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."*
 - 3) This knock is on a door called voluntary love and it only opens from the inside out, not the outside in. It's not enough to hear Him knock, many hear Him but refuse to open up. Jesus says *"...if anyone hears My voice AND opens..."*
 - 4) Sharing a meal in ancient times had more meaning than it does today. Sharing a meal then, meant sharing intimacy, confidence and affection. Jesus was chided by the religious leaders for eating with people (**Luke 15:2**). Peter was rebuked, not for preaching to a gentile, but eating with him (**Acts 11:3**). And Paul said that Christians shouldn't even eat with other Christians who are in gross unrepentant sin (**1st Corinthians 5:9-13**).
 - 5) Beloved, Jesus is offering to sit down with one of the most broken, spiritually naked and bankrupt Churches of their day to help them sort through their spiritual crisis before Him.
 - 6) **John 21** tells the story of Jesus in His post-resurrection sitting down to share a meal with Peter in the midst of His greatest hour of personal crisis.
 - 7) Hearing Jesus' voice is good, but you must then in turn open the door in voluntary love in order to receiving healing and be restored.
- G) **Revelation 3:21-22** *"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. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*
- 1) The Amen (The Truthful One), The Faithful and True Witness (The Trust Worthy One) and the Beginning of the Creation of God (God) is giving **Assurance** of outlandish reward to the overcomer. And He finishes with His **Appeal** to them that they would move from spiritually poverty to outlandish wealth.

Session Seven Extra Reading

The last of the seven Churches mentioned in **Revelation 2-3** is the Church of Laodicea. There are several passages that are mentioned to this Church by Jesus in **Revelation 3:14-22** that are among the most quoted scriptures in the body of Christ. The phrase *I wish you were either hot (on fire) or cold (frozen), but since you're lukewarm (halfhearted) I will vomit you out of My mouth* comes from this Church (**3:15-15**). The parentheses were added by me about what most assume Jesus was saying through those two verses, but through study I have come to a different conclusion, which I will cover later in this chapter. And lastly another great popular preaching phrase comes from verse **20** when Jesus says *...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.* Again, the phrase I just stated I will cover at length later on in this chapter as we look at Jesus' address to this Church line by line.

It's amazing to me how some of these passages become some of the most quoted verses in Christendom. It's important when reading the Word of God that we work to take what was being said in its proper context. And when it comes to the Revelation, it's not always easy to understand the local context of what was taking place when these verses were written. The Bible gives us some information, history gives us a little more and even ancient markings and archeology help as well. One of the most powerful and insightful things for me during this current study, is seeing what is most likely a large amount of direct references to the local settings of these seven Churches. At first glance and a causal reading of **Revelation 2-3** it would be overly easy to spiritualize much of Jesus' conversation, but when looking a little deeper we can see that there is most likely a lot of local references to these specific cities.

Some of the things Jesus says to the Church of Laodicea seem to have an entirely local meaning, which apart from understanding what was taking place during this time period, we can only guess and speculate what's being said. A book that greatly helped me understand these Churches in their local setting is called *The Letters Of The Seven Churches To Asia In Their Local Setting* by Mr. Colin J. Hemer. Through this book, the author doesn't do away with the spiritual application of **Revelation 2-3** but rather helps to put the spiritual conversation from Jesus in its practical or local setting. Many other commentators have alluded to the local setting of these Churches, but none to the extent that Mr. Colin J. Hemer has. This Church, the Church of Laodicea has much local application that we shall now look at directly.

The History of Laodicea

The city of Laodicea was like many other cities Jesus addressed throughout **Revelation 2-3**, wealthy, affluent, enjoying deep relationships within the city through compromising the truth of the Gospel and important in the eyes of men. Laodicea's wealth was generated from its location being situated on the convergence of three very important trade roads. It was the convergence of these trade roads that was a prominent factor to their wealth, as it was then known for banking and large industry.

Within the city they profited greatly from a beautiful, raven-black wool that was used for expensive carpets and clothing. Within this city they also had a school of medicine that was specifically known for treating ear and eye issues from a local powder called *Phrygian powder* that was used to make a special ointment.

Speaking about this city's wealth Mark Driscoll states *Recent archeology digs in the city have found ancient housing foundations that are upwards of 3,000 square ft. with centralized water systems and indoor plumbing.* When stacked up against today's large housing, these homes don't compare, but when looking at the time period in which they existed, including centralized water and indoor plumbing, this is opulence that we couldn't even imagine. We know not only from history, but from this Jesus' words to this Church that they were experiencing great wealth.

Another reason why centralized water and indoor plumbing was such a luxury for this city, is because unlike most cities, it was built about six miles away from the nearest water source. This meant that a giant aqueduct had to be constructed to transport the water from the source into the city. The water was taken from a place where temperatures reached upwards of 95-degrees Fahrenheit and some places even as hot as boiling. But because of the length of this aqueduct, when the water was received in the city, it was no longer hot, but rather lukewarm or tepid. This aqueduct, because of its large amount of stone (6 miles or 31,680 feet) also collected a large amount of calcium deposits which was said to induce vomiting among those that consumed it. Jesus' reference to the lukewarm nature of this ministry, I believe had to do more with ineffectiveness than half-heartedness, but I will cover that later.

Again, speaking to the wealth of this city and the people of this city, including Christians, history tells us that around 60 A.D. the city was toppled by a large, very destructive earthquake. But while this city lay in ruins, Rome offered to help finically in the rebuilding of Laodicea, but upon hearing the news, the city rejected the money and rebuilt the entire city with their own wealth.

The Church of Laodicea, mentioned in **Revelation 3:14-22** isn't spoken of as struggling from Roman oppression or from Jewish persecution. Instead, they are spoken of by Jesus as having become much like their city, compromising the truth of the Word of God for comfort within their community. The Church of Ephesus was too conservative, defending doctrine to the neglect of the lost. While Laodicea was too liberal, embracing sin and immorality within the city to the detriment of solid Bible Doctrine. Jesus wants us to be with Him, where He is, not too far ahead of Him (liberalism) and not too far behind Him (conservatism).

Jesus' Address to the Church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

For the seventh and final time, Jesus' **Addresses** the Church of Laodicea in the same way He has **Addressed** all previous six Churches by speaking to the human leadership of the ministry. He says in **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...* But from Jesus' Address to this Church, He then goes to reveal various **Attributes** of Himself that are specific to this ministry and the things they were facing.

Among the Seven Churches, the two Churches that received the strongest words of rebuke from Jesus would have to be Ephesus (**2:1-7**) and Laodicea. But what I love about Jesus is He usually qualifies Himself to us as One who is able to say what He's about to say. This is exactly what He does to the Church of Laodicea. In the revelation of His **Attributes** to this ministry, He reveals three primary facets of His personality to them. Firstly He says, *...I am the Amen...* Through this statement Jesus is declaring Himself to be the *so be it of God*. He is saying I am the Truthful One, the One who speaks truth, the *and all* of God or the Great I AM. Secondly, He says to them *...I am the Faithful and True witness..* What's revealed through this **Attribute** is the assurance that they can trust His words as truth to them in their

broken, complacent and lethargic condition. Jesus is the Faithful Witness who always tells the truth to us in our situations.

Paul said in **2nd Corinthians 8:9** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* For the reasons Paul mentions, we also love the Lamb. We can trust His words now in this age, because when He was in the eternal age, having everything and needing nothing, He left it all, took on flesh and became incarnated for the sake of humans. We love Him, and trust Him because when He had all things, He left them. This is part of that revealed **Attribute** to this struggling ministry.

And thirdly, Jesus says *...I am the Beginning of the creation of God...* In this phrase Jesus is telling the ministry that they shouldn't just trust His words because He's the Amen of God and the Faithful and True Witness, but because He is God. He was there at the beginning of creation, which qualifies Him as God, the transcendent One. Jesus is establishing His credibility with the ministry prior to entering into His confrontation with them. He is mainly stating through these 3 revealed **Attributes** that they should trust all the things that He is saying to them, and even more than trust they should hear them and obey them, because He is God. To the Church of Smyrna He revealed His humanity as the Suffering Servant, but to this Church He is revealing His Divinity as God, the One who was at the beginning of the creation. Jesus is making it crystal clear that He is well qualified to speak to them. Oh, if we only knew Who was talking with us.

The Church of Laodicea, along with the Church of Sardis (**3:1-6**) are the only two Churches out of the seven that actually receive nothing positive from Jesus in terms of His **Approval** of some of the things they are doing. Both the Church of Sardis and the Church of Laodicea are in a terrible place before the Holy One of Israel. And because Jesus has no Approval for them, He moves right into His **Accusation** of them. Jesus says to them in **Revelation 3:15-16** *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

This Church is in the process of being strongly rebuked by Jesus for their gross complacency and their inability to deliver the Gospel of the Kingdom to their city. As I have already stated these two verses are among the most quoted scriptures in Christianity. In my personal research I have come across several different thoughts about what Jesus is saying, but among the many theories there is a common theme that runs through them, which I much more readily agree with. The one thing that is concrete is that there is no mention of this phrase anywhere else in the Bible, which leads us to think that Jesus' words to them from verses **15-16** have an entirely local context.

I have heard this passage quoted many times in various sermons, and generally it's coming from a mean-spirited preacher, who's trying to use it to motivate the unmotivated so they *Get with the program* before Jesus throws them up. This approach has always turned me off and made me wonder a little bit about what was really going on. The idea that I have come to is a mixture of the tender hearted Bridegroom Who is talking with them along with their lengthy 6 mile aqueduct. From the Bridegroom perspective of the heart of God, I believe it has more to do with heartsickness from Jesus, than it has to do with flat out anger and disappointment. It's common for us as humans, that when we have grieved relationships with others, we can often feel a pit in our stomach, and have the feeling that we need to throw up to make it resolve itself. I believe this is exactly what Jesus is saying to this ministry.

And related to the aqueduct, we know that because of its large amount of stone (6-miles worth) it collected calcium deposits which would regularly induce vomiting in those that drank from it. And because of its length, the water started very hot, but by the time it reached the city it had become lukewarm or tepid. I believe that this has more to do with the ineffectiveness of the water than it has to do with it being lukewarm. Cold water is refreshing and wonderful to enjoy on a warm day. And in the same way that a hot springs has medicinal purposes for the human body that soaks in it, so this water was at its starting point, but by the time it reached the city it was unable to do anything either positive or negative and thus Jesus deems it *lukewarm* or *ineffective*. Again, this conclusion is a mixture of understanding the heart of God (Bridegroom) and understanding the local context (the 6-mile stone aqueduct) that Jesus was most likely addressing.

Unfortunately for this ministry, Jesus isn't done with His **Accusation** against them. He continues in **Revelation 3:17** with a really heavy rebuke stating against them *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.* If you notice, Jesus' **Accusation** of them is solely based on the confession of their lives before both Him and others. We all know that our confession includes much more than our words, in fact it includes the way we live our lives before both God and others. What's also clear about the judgment of Jesus against this ministry is that the very thing God used to bless them, has become the very thing that Jesus is now judging, their personal and cooperative wealth. For many this truth is hard to swallow, but it's something that can't be ignored.

Many people are given a leadership gift from the Holy Spirit, but it's also that very same gift, not stewarded correctly that can end up being the downfall of their lives. It's not that what Jesus gives is bad, it's just that when we don't steward it rightly before Him and others, we can end up on the other side of His judgments. For this ministry, God had sowed them in a wealthy region, but because they didn't steward it rightly, the wealth ended up enslaving them and trapping them in lethargy. They were now ineffective in their presentation of the Gospel because they had become wealthy externally, and didn't need God for anything. This is the challenge of wealth.

Often times when I don't have wealth, I reach hard for God, but when financial increase comes my way, I can tend to back off from my persistent pursuit of Him. The idea is this: God doesn't want me broke so that I pray more, or rich so I don't pray at all. He wants me in the middle of the road, praying and reaching hard for Him whether I have wealth or not.

According to Jesus, this Church's confession of themselves was very different than His confession of them. They said that they were rich, but Jesus said they were poor. The Church was externally wealthy but spiritually broke internally. They had money externally but no heart-connect internally with Jesus in the midst of it. This Church had become independent and didn't need God. It's true that that our prayer meetings within our Churches only thrive where people actually see their need for God. If there's no need for God, then the prayer meetings wane and dwindle. Because only humble people pray.

In the middle of this Church's ignorance about their true spiritual state, Jesus lets them know that their confession of themselves is different than His confession of them. It's important that we work to make sure that our confession of ourselves agrees with Jesus' confession of our lives. It has occurred to me, while preaching through this book, that five of the Seven Churches (**Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea**) had no idea how Jesus thought about them. In the following Chapter I am going to spend ample time breaking open this very thought. But for now, it should terrify us that it's entirely

possible to be running hard in *ministry* even impacting others while moving further and further away from Jesus. These five Churches were so disconnected from Jesus' evaluation of their lives that He had to physically step in and bring it to their attention in the most dramatic ways.

Operating within the same structure as Jesus has done with the other six Churches, He moves from His Accusation of them to His **Advice** for them. This is something that makes Jesus so incredible. Though this ministry is laden with great compromise and complacency, Jesus is going to give them **Advice** on how to move away from His judgments to His blessing. Jesus does this because He doesn't want to condemn this ministry, He wants to promote it. But because He is the *Faithful and True Witness*, He is forced to tell them the truth. He says to them in **Revelation 3:18** *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.*

This Advice from Jesus is based on His eternal perspective not their temporal one. Because Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega He sees the end from the beginning, which causes Him to speak from His eternal abode back into the present, helping us to make changes here based on where we are going. When Jesus **Accused** them, He mentioned five specific things they were struggling with and needed to get free from. He said to them *...you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked...* His **Advice**, which is going to be three primary things (buy gold, buy white garments and anoint your eyes) are going to be in direct response to these five areas that He addressed within them.

Firstly, Jesus says *...buy gold from Me...that you may be rich...* Jesus is instructing them to stop purchasing gold within their city in the natural and instead to buy gold from Him. The earthly gold is actually keeping them steeped in lethargy and the gold that Jesus gives will move them into wholeheartedness. Laodicea was a wealthy banking city and what they were trading in the natural wasn't helping them at all. Purchasing gold from Jesus means that we embrace a crucified life of holding out Jesus' words to the world in which we live. It means that we no longer go with the flow of our culture or even the Church culture.

Secondly, Jesus says to them *...and buy white garments that you might be clothed, so that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.* Within this city they were producing a large amount of extremely soft, glossy, raven black wool that was bringing them a mighty profit. History says that there was also a pagan practice of dressing the dead in white and the living in black, and to this, Jesus might have been contrasting what the majority of the city was doing, by telling them to get white garments in the living. Jesus is making it clear that the woolen looms of their city weren't able to cleanse their internal iniquity. Because Jesus is the tenderest Man in world history, He doesn't want this ministry to suffer loss when they stand before Him and He have to expose their nakedness, so He tells them the truth now, in this age.

Thirdly, Jesus **Advise**s them to *...anoint their eyes with eye slave that they may see...* Within this city there was a large, fairly prominent medical school that was known for something called Phrygian powder. From this powder they would make both an eye and ear ointment that was well known throughout the region. But to this city that was known for treating the shortsightedness of others, they were unable to see their own shortsightedness. We call this a blind-spot which is simply an area in our own life that we just can't see on our own without the help of others. But Jesus' cure to their shortsightedness was to stop purchasing and using medicine in the natural and to purchase medicine from Him that would change their spiritual condition before Him.

The truth is, Jesus wants me to be wealthy, clothed and to have perfect eyesight. And because of this, He is relentless in talking to me about my life. It's important to say that this isn't talking about purchasing the spiritual or Jesus with money, but about purchasing that which we can't get on our own. This is a call to use the grace of God that we have been given to respond to Jesus in a wholehearted manner, with a rigorous lifestyle of prayer, fasting, Bible study, community living and serving. The grace of God that we have received through the free gift of salvation is strong enough to motivate anyone into a wholehearted lifestyle which is why every person who names the name of Christ is called into one (**Matthew 5-7**). Wholeheartedness as opposed to complacency is for everyone, not just the spiritually elite. This is Christianity 101, or basic Christianity.

While still giving them **Advice** He encourages them by saying in **Revelation 3:19** *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.* Jesus was training the Church of Laodicea in the same way that He trains us today, through His judgments. That word, *chasten*, literally means to scourge, to inflict suffering or punishment. Yes, I just said that your Beloved Jesus inflicts suffering and punishment upon those He loves for the purpose of refining them and removing those things within us that hinder love through us. He is committed to raising up a pure bride who is fully made ready for the Day of her wedding, and He goes to great lengths to make sure it takes place. Because Jesus is eternal, He knows that this Church is going to be extremely sad on that Day when they stand before Him if they don't make any changes, so He doesn't mind inflicting pain into our present for the purpose of changing our future.

From this reality, of how and why He deals with individual Christians and ministries, we can also see how He deals with cities, regions and nations. It's not that God judges cities, regions and nations because He's angry, but rather because He's in love. His judgments are being released among the nations, and will only continue to increase as we continue to approach His return. His purpose is to produce more love in the nations, not less. His judgments are removing everything that hinders love. This means that we should trust Jesus' words and activity in our lives in with the same intensity that we trust Him to save us from hell. It's the same Jesus who intervenes in our lives to tell us the truth that saves us from hell. This means we ought to cling to the conviction of Christ and allow it to move us from complacency.

Jesus continues in the Ravished heart mode in **Revelation 3:20** when He says *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.* As I stated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, this is another one of the most quoted verses in the Bible. Although it's often used for compelling non-Christians to give their lives to Jesus, this is not of the context of this passage. It's okay to use it for people to give their lives to Jesus; it's just not the context of the verse. The context of this verse is that Jesus is knocking on the door of the heart of this Church's leadership who are already in Christ. This Church is in a very broken state, and Jesus is standing before them asking for entrance into the entirety of who they are to help them sort through the mess they are currently in.

Jesus isn't knocking and asking for entrance into a small part of their lives, or a portion of their heart, but into the whole of who they are. Because Jesus has already opened wide His heart to them, He is demanding (asking forcefully) that they also open up theirs to Him. In the very following chapter, **Revelation 4:1** this is what John has to say *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.* I love that right after Jesus asks them to open up their heart to Him, they see the wide open heart of God towards them. This is true of our Beloved

Shepherd; He doesn't ask us to do anything that He's not also willing to do. We are to open our hearts to Him because He has opened His heart to us.

I like to call this knock at the door of the heart the *knock of voluntary love*. It's my belief that this door only has a handle on the inside and not on the outside. The reason I believe this way, is because God has given us the dignity of choosing to love Him or not, which means He doesn't want robots that love Him because they have to. He wants voluntary lovers that have said *yes* to Him because they want to, not because they have to. So instead of breaking down our door and forcing Himself upon us, He stands outside and knocks, asking, hoping, insisting that we open up to Him and allow Him to come in and help us. I mean seriously, how absurd is it that we often resist Him, fight against Him, when God Himself is longing to come into our lives, sit with us in our brokenness and share a meal with us. The uncreated God, the Eternal One, is longing to eat with humans, who are struggling with deep sin and compromise. Because we see so foggy in this age, we often do the unthinkable: hear Him knocking and refuse to open. God help us.

Meals also meant something more in the ancient world than they do today in our modern world. To eat with someone meant you were sharing intimacy, communion, confidence and affection with them. Jesus was chided by religious leaders for eating with people (**Luke 15:2**). Peter also was rebuked, not for preaching to a Gentile, but for eating with him (**Acts 11:3**). And Paul even went as far as to say that Christians shouldn't even eat a meal with other Christians who are in gross unrepentant sin (**1st Corinthians 5:9-13**).

Hearing Jesus' voice is good, but hearing it and responding to it in a worthy manner is best. I know many Christians that hear Jesus' voice but seldom respond to it in a God honoring fashion. I myself have struggled to always respond to Jesus' knock at the door of my heart. Often times what He's asking me to do is so personal and difficult to let go of, I can fight Him off, resisting Him and His kindness to me in my struggle. Our heart is deceitful, wicked and full of abomination. It's a dark cavern that I never want to mine out.

And lastly Jesus gives both the **Assurance** of eternal reward and His final **Appeal** to this incredibly jacked up Church. He says to them in **Revelation 3:21-22** *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.* Time will not do me justice to open up the eternal reward that's being offered to this ministry if they respond to Jesus rightly. And in all honesty, I haven't a clue what even the surface meaning of it is. To one of the most struggling Churches, they are offered a throne to sit on, like the one Jesus received from His Father??? How is that even possible? These rewards are beyond our ability to comprehend in this age. But just because it's hard to understand, it shouldn't detour us from going after it with all of our hearts. Just think about it, your worthy heart response, through the power and Person of the Holy Spirit in this age, could land you on a throne judging nations and sharing Jesus' rule and reign in the age which is yet to come.

Jesus' **Appeal**, is endearing, tender and compassionate. He's is pleading not only with the Church of Laodicea but also with you, with me, that we would listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and make the proper changes so that the shame of our nakedness isn't exposed on that Day. I personally want to live in the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit in such a way that I don't fight Him, resist Him or reject Him. Let His voice enter into our ears but then move into our heart, producing the change that's needed!

Session Eight

“Summary Of Revelation 2-3”

Summary Of The Seven Churches In Revelation 2-3

Preaching, teaching and leading is often more about what’s going on inside the preacher/teacher than it is what he or she is actually sharing with others. Recently, I had a very influential mentor help me understand that all of my research, studying, preparation, reading, praying and preaching was most likely doing more for me than it was for others. Now he wasn’t saying this because people didn’t like what I was saying, but rather, because I put the majority of the time into it and was greatly impassioned about it, that God was doing more in me than He was doing through me. To me, this insight was what I would consider to be a truth statement.

With this being said, it never ceases to amaze me what God shows me and reveals to me as I am actually preaching/teaching the lesson that I didn’t see when I was preparing the material. I call this *the beauty of revelation*. It’s the revelatory knowledge and insight that doesn’t come from flesh and blood, but through the Person of the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 16:17**). There’s something to be said for the preacher who spends ample time searching out a truth, to share only a portion of what they gleaned. I believe the excess that’s gleaned, but never gets shared, strengthens the researcher in a way it doesn’t strengthen the hearer. There’s a blessing for the listener and for the one threshing out the wheat in the stall and thank God He gives us some of the first fruits, even before the others eat.

As I have been preaching and teaching through the book of Revelation at New Life on Wednesday nights, I have started to see various truths and connections throughout **Revelation 2-3** from Jesus’ letters to the Seven Churches that have deeply touched me. There is a powerful common thread that He weaves throughout all of the Churches that speaks not only to their present circumstance but also to their future with Him in the New Jerusalem. It’s in this chapter that I would like to share with you a few of these truths and connections with the hope that they touch you in a similar way as they have touched me. In this chapter I am going to share three primary truths that touched my heart as I have preached through **Revelation 2-3**. Firstly, I want to talk about *the power of understanding the age which is yet to come* as the primary means to produce patient endurance in this present age. Secondly, we will look at the need to overcome both our personal sin and the various obstacles that are before us. And thirdly, I am going to cover the importance of understanding Jesus’ perspective of our lives, in contrast to how we view our lives or how others view our lives.

The Importance of Seeing the Age Which Is Yet To Come

It’s clear from even a brief reading of both the **Revelation** and various commentaries on the **Revelation** that those whom John was writing to, under the influence of the Holy Spirit were in need of motivation to look beyond where they were presently. The letters were written to Churches and to Christians in need of something to motivate them to overcome the trouble facing them both internally and externally. It wasn’t just that the Churches had external pressures (emperor worship, persecution, idolatry and immorality) but they also had the internal pressures of sin, compromise with being too conservative or too liberal and holding onto truth in Christ.

This is where the conversation from Jesus becomes central to their hope of overcoming both internal and external pressures and sin. If these Churches and Christians were to look only at their present circumstances they would have great reason to both continue where they were going in a negative way, or to quit because the trouble, both internally and externally, was too great. And even though each of the Church's internal and external pressures were different, they were all motivated by Jesus in the same way. His motivation to them was to look beyond what they could presently see (this age) and look at that which they couldn't see (the age which is yet to come). In short, Jesus was calling them to live for another age.

The Churches were all different, and struggling with different things, but each of them receives the same motivation from Jesus: that they should anchor their lives in the age which is yet to come, and disconnect their lives from this age. For instance the Church of Ephesus (**Rev. 2:1-7**), which was separated from Jesus because of their extreme conservatism, was told that if they returned to Jesus, repented and continued with Him over the long haul that He would grant them access to the Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God. Their promise wasn't one primarily in this age, but in the eschatological Kingdom that would come at the consummation of this age. They were being called out by Jesus, to first return to Him, but secondly, to put their hope not only in this age but in the age which is yet to come.

The Church of Smyrna (**Rev. 2:8-11**) on the other hand was suffering severe persecution (external pressures) from their fellow countrymen, the Jews. Because of Emperor Worship, the natural Jews in the city who didn't yet love Jesus were turning in their fellow Jews who loved Jesus in order to get the state off their backs so they could continue practicing Judaism. Jesus encouraged them that even in the face of death, if they stay faithful, He will give them the crown of life and that they wouldn't be hurt by the second death. Now these promises that the Church of Smyrna received seem to have a solely eschatological connection. Jesus knows that this group of people who are about to suffer unto death, under His leadership, will need something strong to keep them faithful, so He offers them seemingly outlandish promises from the age which is still yet to come. The purpose of setting these promises before them is to once again anchor them in the eternal age, not this temporal age. To a temporal Church, or a Church connected to this age, it would be nearly impossible to let them know that they were about to die under Jesus' leadership but they should still stay faithful to Him because there's some sort of reward in the end. Jesus' words would be too much for a temporal Church to bear.

Part of our problem in the Western world is that so much of the promises we are offered from the pulpit have the majority of their connection to this age, not in the age which is yet to come. What we must not do is pick and choose whether to have promises in this age or in the age which is still yet to come. This would be unbiblical. But to have the majority of our hope in this age, leaves us without much hope for the age which is yet to come, and the age which Jesus talked most about is the one which is still yet to come. I have never added up the percentages but I would guess that Jesus spoke mainly of promises connected to the age to come about 60-70% of the time, which leaves 40-30% of promises being spoken of for here in this age. The number might even be higher, but this is at least a safe guess. In order to overcome both now and in our near future, we must be people who are storing up our treasures in the age which is yet to come, more than we are enjoying them here.

The last Church I want to look at from **Revelation 2-3** is the Church of Philadelphia in **Revelation 3:7-13**. In my personal opinion, this Church received the most seemingly outlandish promises related to the age which is yet to come. Jesus identifies this Church as being smaller, struggling with external pressures both from the people in the city and from their fellow countrymen, much like the Church of Smyrna

(Rev. 2:8-11). Today, many of us would most likely reject this Church from its external appearance, but the Church of Philadelphia is one of only two Churches that Jesus addresses in **Revelation 2-3** where He has nothing negative to say. To the natural eye, this Church would be rejected, but because Jesus' eye is perfect, this Church is very dear to Him.

History tells us that the ruler of the city of Philadelphia would inscribe the names of local citizens that were either remarkable people, or large financial contributors on large pillars in various places through the city for all to see. And it's to this group of people that Jesus promises if they overcome, He will make them a pillar in the temple of His God. Jesus speaks to this small, struggling Church that the primary way they would overcome would be to take their eyes off earthly pillars and set them on eternal pillars. Jesus' advice to them was to stop setting their eyes on that which is, and to set their eyes on that which is yet to be seen. Paul said something similar when he wrote **2nd Corinthians 4:18** while we don't look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Paul was also challenging the people of his day to look beyond what they could see, because the things which they could see (earthly pillars) were passing away, but the things which they couldn't see (eternal pillars) were eternal.

Related to this whole idea of motivating people to live for the age which is yet to come, Mike Bickle has a powerfully true statement. He says *If you don't think rightly about heaven, you won't think about it at all.* What Mike is saying is that when we fail to understand the age which is yet to come, we also fail to live there; we anchor our lives more here than there. There hasn't been a generation on the earth that Jesus didn't expect should live as if He could return within their generation. This means that our lives should be lived in light of where we are headed, more than they are where we are presently located.

These Churches from **Revelation 2-3** help us understand that Jesus motivates our lives in the same way He motivated theirs. There is something transcendent about living beyond this age; for when we do it in real time, we truly becoming pilgrims who are living for another age. Jesus doesn't care nearly as much about this present evil age as He does about the age which is yet to come. But, because this age is the preparation for that coming age, He cares about it greatly. Therefore we can't separate this present evil age and the age which is yet to come. They are dynamically connected.

Many notable people have considered this age to be the *dress rehearsal* for the age to come. Some have also called it our *job interview*. Whatever you want to call it, it's true that we are training our bodies in this age, working to have dominion over them. Because in the age to come we will receive dominion over nations, if we work in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Beloved, Jesus has offered us thrones to sit upon if we stay faithful to Him in this age (**Revelation 2:24-28; 3:21**). We will then exchange the partnership with the Holy Spirit in this age, for real time partnership with Jesus over the nations in the age to come. But once again, receiving these promises is connected to our response to Jesus in this age as we work to overcome both our personal sin and our external circumstances.

The Need to Overcome Our Personal Sin/Struggles and Our External Sin/Struggles

After spending some time looking at the various Churches in **Revelation 2-3** it was clear that though they were very different Churches and had different circumstances, the two things that were common, were that Jesus was motivating them with truths about the age to come and that they all needed to

overcome. Overcoming was a central message to all the Seven Churches.

Richard Baukham in his book *The Theology of the Revelation* states *John the beloved clearly understood, that there were only two options facing the Christian of his generation: overcome, or surrender to the beast and worship a system that hates Jesus*. Richard isn't saying that they would be subject to worship the Antichrist, but rather that they were already being forced to openly worship a system with a godlike man, and if they couldn't overcome that one, then they surely wouldn't be ready for that coming man and his system. At the end of the day, Richard is saying the same thing that John was clearly communicating: there was much *overcoming* to do.

I think that it's common in our understanding, coming from a Western perspective, that once we are saved, we are in. There isn't much else we need to do. For the majority of the Christians I know, they are under the false assumption that we are going away to heaven forever, where we will be floating around on an ethereal cloud, playing harps all day, bored out of our minds. It's no wonder we don't think about heaven, and the glory of what that age will include for the person who loves Jesus in this age. But it's not the issue of heaven and hell that's necessarily at stake for the believer, it's what our time in the age which is yet to come will look like that is the issue. When I say *look like* I am referring to the judgments and rewards that will be given at the Judgment Seat of Christ, based on our overcoming in this age.

Did you know that there are around twenty-two eternal rewards offered to the overcomer in **Revelation 2-3** alone, not to mention the other rewards offered throughout the whole of the Bible? But what we must understand is that those rewards aren't automatic because you have given your life to Jesus. They are only guaranteed to those who overcome both their personal sin and struggles as well as the external sin and struggles we face as we journey through this age, on our way to the Eternal City.

It's not that the eternal rewards Jesus offers aren't guarantees; it's just that they are only *invitations* to guarantees based on our response to them. If we respond to the promise offered by Jesus, in a worthy manner, then we will receive the reward. But if we hear the eternal reward, and choose not to respond both to it and to Jesus in a worthy manner, we lose out on that reward, though we are still saved. Many have a false assumption that just because we have said yes to Jesus, we automatically receive everything God has to offer us in the age which is yet to come. For many, if not the majority, this empowers a lethargic approach to Jesus where we don't have an appetite for prayer, for Bible study, for worship, for Christian fellowship, fasting and other various spiritual disciplines. Because we have an *automatic* mindset, we don't engage with Jesus in the mundane areas of our lives to receive not only what He will give us in this age, but primarily what He will give us in the age which is yet to come.

Looking at the Churches in **Revelation 2-3** we can see clearly that Jesus connected the eternal rewards to their overcoming the various internal and external things that would work to hinder them. Let's take a look at what Jesus expected them to overcome. To the Church of Ephesus (**2:1-7**) they were expected by Jesus to repent, to return to Him and to remember from where they had fallen if they wanted to receive the eternal reward He was offering. The Church of Smyrna (**2:8-11**) was expected by Jesus to suffer unto death from the hands of the devil under Jesus' leadership if they were to receive the crown of life and be free from the second death.

To the Church of Pergamos (**2:12-17**) they were expected by Jesus to repent from their agreement with the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans if they were to experience some of God's *hidden manna*. The Church of Thyatira (**2:18-29**) was expected by Jesus to repent from their toleration of the teaching of Jezebel if they were to *sit on thrones judging nations* with Him in the age which is yet

to come. The Church of Sardis (**3:1-6**) were expected to *wake up*, repent for having a name but being dead on the inside, if they were experience victory with Christ and hear their names confessed before the Father. The Church of Philadelphia (**3:7-13**) were expected to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of great external pressures if they were to receive an eternal pillar, having both God the Father's name and Jesus' *new name* written on their foreheads.

And lastly, the Church of Laodicea (**3:14-22**) were expected to repent, return to Jesus by purchasing gold, clothing and ointment from Him, if they also were going to sit on a throne in the same way that Jesus sat down on His Father's throne. The reality throughout all of these Churches is that they present a truth for you and I today. That truth is, if we want to receive the eternal rewards that Jesus has offered both them and us in the age which is yet to come, we have to respond to Him in a worthy manner which equates in our overcoming the various things in front of us.

The last thing I want to point out related to our need to overcome in this age, is what Paul had to say about this very issue in **1st Corinthians 3:11-15**. This is what Paul had to say For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for that Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work, is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. There is so much in this passage, but I want to look at just a couple of parts.

As Wes Martin says, *Thank God for His truthfulness to us*. Because Jesus loves truth, and is actually called *the Truthful One* (**Revelation 19:11**) He longs to speak to us in this age about the many things we must overcome, so on that Day (the Judgment Seat of Christ) as we sit before Him we suffer loss in nothing. What we must remember is that Paul is talking to Christians through this passage and He is not talking about heaven and hell issues, but about *rewards* and *judgments* that will be meted out by Christ to those who have said yes to Him. This Day, when Christians will sit before Jesus is the most important day of our lives; what we are doing here in this age will directly reflect what that coming Day looks like.

Again, Paul is not talking about heaven and hell in relationship to this Judgment seat. I have found that most Christians stumble over this idea of the Judgment Seat of Christ. In fact many Christians that I know have much fear about this coming Day before Christ at the Judgment Seat, because they are worried they might be going to hell. This is not what Paul is addressing here. The Judgment seat that will send people to hell is the Judgment seat of **Revelation 20: 11-15**. The Judgment Seat of **1st Corinthians 3:10-15** is a judgment seat for Christians that is better described as an *evaluation seat*, where Jesus will either hand out rewards, or burn up our life's work, but it won't be about heaven and hell for those who are currently Christians. The Judgment seat of **Revelation 20:11-15** is called *The Great White Throne of Judgment*. That judgment seat is an evaluation of non-Christians and everyone who sits there will end up in the lake of fire, eternally.

But, as many preachers have rightfully said, *this idea that Paul presents in 1st Corinthians 3:11-15 is terrifying when we think about what it might mean to suffer loss on that Day when Christians stand before Christ*. Now, we know why these Christians will suffer loss on that Day. Paul said they will suffer loss because of the way they built their lives in this age. Another way to say that, related to our conversation of the Seven Churches in **Revelation 2-3**, is to say *those Christians who don't overcome or respond to Jesus in a worthy manner will be saved but suffer loss*. The reality is we all have many internal

and external pressures that we must overcome in this age if we are expecting to receive eternal rewards in the age which is yet to come. Beloved, you can make sure that on that Day when you sit before Christ, you won't suffer loss in anything, by making sure you talk to Jesus about your life right now in this age. If we talk to Jesus about our lives now, we can make changes based on the age which is yet to come. Because it will be too late, when we are seated before Christ, to make any changes with our lives then.

We must overcome, but being able to overcome also means that we understand what needs to be changed in our lives. It's clear to all of us that we aren't perfect, and there are many things that we need to change. But only when we start talking to Jesus about our lives and asking Him, can we truly understand what it is that Jesus wants to change. This leads us into the last section of this chapter where we will cover the importance of seeing our lives from Jesus' perspective.

Seeing the Importance of Getting Jesus' Perspective on Our Lives

Until the past few years, the idea of getting Jesus' perspective of my life wasn't on my personal radar at all. In fact for the majority of my experience in Christianity I never really thought twice about what Jesus felt about my life (my money, my time, my entertainment, my friendships, my thought life, etc...). I figured because I was serving, trying to read the Bible, working to build a (shabby) prayer life and doing fulltime ministry, Jesus was really proud of me and just wanted me to keep my head down while grinding it out. It wasn't until I started understanding the age which is yet to come, that I was actually able to begin viewing my life differently.

I hear often that we don't need to study Eschatology and think about heaven, because we have too much work to do right now. That being preoccupied with the future will only take me away from my work in the present. This advice is not Biblical, but also it's not helpful at all. One of the greatest things Eschatology has done for me is to change my present. It's not that it made me work harder, but rather it makes me work smarter. Understanding the age which is yet to come, helps me hit rewind in my life, from the future back into the present, so that I can make the changes now based on *how* I am working.

AS I said at the beginning of this chapter, when I started preaching through the Seven Churches of **Revelation 2-3** I was totally blown away that five out of the seven had no idea how Jesus viewed their lives and ministries. Beloved, that terrified me. What it said to me is that it's possible to assume that we are loving God, and partnering with Him even though we really aren't. This is why I believe it's critical to receive Jesus' perspective on our lives in contrast to how we view ourselves and even how others view us. If we only view our lives from our personal perspective we can be tempted to discredit the great activity of God in our lives, or over-exaggerate that activity and make it more than it is. And if we take the perspective of others, the same thing can happen; we either seem like we aren't making any progress in the Gospel or that we are *the greatest thing since sliced bread*. We don't want to base our lives on what we say or what others say, but on what Jesus says.

Let's take a quick look at five of the seven Churches in **Revelation 2-3**. The Church of Ephesus (**2:1-7**) which was commended by God in roughly six different areas was also rebuked by Jesus for having abandoned their First Love. In their busyness of ministry, they had forgotten God. They were working hard but wouldn't have realized without the intervention of God and His personal rebuke of them, that they were close to having their ministry shut down. The Church of Pergamos (**2:12-17**) was actually embracing doctrines that Jesus hated, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Though they were encouraged by Jesus in a couple positive areas, they didn't know that Jesus was

willing to come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth, if they refused to repent. This doctrine they were embracing, Jesus said that He hated **(2:6)**.

The Church of Thyatira **(2:18-29)** who was also approved by Jesus in a couple areas, was most likely totally shocked when Jesus exposed this woman Jezebel in their midst, who as one of their co-workers was teaching a demonically inspired doctrine. When Jesus said that this woman was teaching a doctrine that was from the depths of satan, it was most likely a total shock to these Church overseers, because Jesus rebukes *them* for tolerating her. Beloved, they had no idea that Jesus was ready to personally step into their ministry and cast this woman into a sickbed and physically kill her disciples with death. How scary that we can be approved by Jesus in some areas, while other areas can be totally out of line according to the will of God for us.

The Church of Sardis **(3:1-6)** was spoken of by Jesus in only negative terms. The Kindest Man to ever live, had nothing positive to say to this ministry, although everyone else loved them, Jesus hated what was happening at the heart level. Jesus said that they had a reputation in the city, and maybe even among the nations, but that they were totally dead at the heart level towards Him. This ministry was influencing many in their city and beyond, but according to Jesus they were totally *dead* at the heart level. Did you know that it's possible to be commended by men and even cities and nations for your work in the Gospel and have Jesus tell you that you're simultaneously dead at the heart level towards Him?

And lastly, the Church of Laodicea **(3:14-22)** was another Church that Jesus had nothing positive to say to. According to the confession of this Church they were rich, had become wealthy and didn't need anything. According to the natural eye, they were correct in their perspective of themselves. But what Jesus thought about them was very different than what they thought about themselves. According to Jesus they were poor, wretched, miserable, blind and naked. This Church is probably the most glaring example of a ministry and a people who couldn't be more separated from Jesus' perspective of them. This ministry was running hard, filled with great finances, growing and influencing their city, but all the while totally bankrupt at the heart level towards Jesus. In the words of Allen Hood, *They had a large stature but a shriveled heart*. Beloved, this is terrifying.

It should greatly concern us that it's entirely possible to be running hard for God, but totally separated from Him at the heart level, not understanding that the more you run and *influence* others, you're actually moving further and further away from Him. Five out of the Seven Churches had no idea that they were facing the suffering of loss when they stood before Jesus if they didn't repent, and overcome the various things facing them. Don't run on your own assumption of your life or on others' assumptions of your life. Get in sync with Jesus, by talking to Him about what He thinks when it comes to the way you're living your life. So many of us don't take the time to ask the One who knows more about everything, what He thinks about our lives. Beloved, it's my belief that He longs to tell us, but is also looking for an invitation from us. Give Him permission to speak to any area of your life. Don't let the pain of holding onto something in this age keep you from receiving rewards in the age to come, because it can. Make the necessary changes today, so that you don't suffer loss on that Day!