

Introduction:

Before we get deep into this study, we should all agree that since none of us have ever lived through an actual Biblical Apocalypse, assume there will be somethings that might be interpreted differently. The book itself is one of the most debated and argued over. This ought to place in us a position of caution when either accepting or dismissing another's interpretation. We are going to be mature and agree to disagree agreeably.

The book of Revelation is called the *Revelation of the Apocalypse* or in Greek the *Apokalupsis*, which means "the sudden uncovering of something that has been previously hidden". This book is part of Biblical eschatology, a word derived from its Greek word eschatos meaning "last, utmost or extreme," and the word logos meaning "word." It means "the last word" or "last things". John is exiled on the Isle of Patmos by Emperor Domitian. He had been an eye witness to the incarnate Christ and now has a vision of the glorified Christ. In addition, God would also reveal to him what would take place in the future-judgement and the ultimate triumph over evil. He writes in an "Apocalyptic" form, a Jewish style that uses symbolic imagery to communicate hope to those in the midst of persecution. The events are ordered in terms of literary rather than strict chronological patterns.

The Book of Revelation is centered around 4 central revelations:

- 1) The revelation of earth's final seven years (Daniel's 70th week Daniel 9:27)
- 2) The revelation of the final judgements predicted by the OT Prophets
- 3) The revelation of the Messiahs return to earth establishing His Kingdom
- 4) The revelation of God's eternal plan for His people leading to an eternal kingdom

The vision is a “Revelation of Jesus Christ” and reveals Christ’s threefold ministry:

- 1) Jesus as High Priest (Rev. 1 :12-18)
- 2) Jesus as Judge releasing judgment against the ungodly (Rev. 14:14-20)
- 3) Jesus as King of Kings (Rev. 19:11-16)

There are 4 predominant interpretive views to the book of Revelation

- 1) The Preterist View believes that the majority of the events predicted in the book were fulfilled throughout the first century
- 2) The Historical View believes that the Apocalypse was fulfilled from the first century and has been fulfilled throughout the 1980 years of church history climaxing with Christs return
- 3) The Allegorical view believes that the book is an allegory and that many stories and the pouring out of judgement on the earth are to be interpreted allegorically in terms of a spiritual struggle between good and evil
- 4) The Futuristic View believes that Chapters 1-3 were messages to the 7 Churches in Johns time and that Chapters 4-22 reveal the future which is centered around a 7 year time frame of tribulation to be followed Christs return on earth and millennial reign.

ALL that having been said, for our study we are going to hold to a Futuristic interpretive view for most of the time. It doesn’t mean one view point is all right or all wrong. All the view points listed here will flow together at times being “Both, And” instead of “Either, Or”. Remember our “Giant Puzzle” analogy from Daniel? How pieces of the puzzle flow in and out all the time giving us glimpses of the future but not all at the same time? (Or not yet anyway?) That’s where we are. We are looking at a giant puzzle knowing pieces fit, not always knowing how or when or where.

Lets pray. Jesus we ask you for wisdom and insight into your Word. We ask you for understanding into the last days so that we may encourage others in their relationship with You and lead others to You. Strengthen us to finish the race well. Father, you are good, you are sovereign, and we submit to you. Jesus, you are King! And we worship you and praise you as such! Bless the hearer as we study. AMEN!

Chapter 1

1. Revelation is the only book in the Bible with a special blessing placed on those **READ, HEAR, AND KEEP** its instructions. (vs. 2-3)
2. In verses 5, John re-affirms Christ's mission "**that HE LOVES US and WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD.**" (vs. 6)
3. In vs 12, John writes, "And I turned to see the voice that spake to me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; (vs 13) And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle."
(KJV)

WHERE JOHN SAW HIM: (VS 12)

John sees into the Temple in Heaven which is **DIFFERENT** than Moses's Temple. (**HEBREWS 8:5**) Heaven's Temple has 3 main pieces of sacred furniture.

Here's what's there and why it important:

- 1) **The Menorah** (vs 12) – symbolizes 7 Churches; in the Jewish tradition it represented the TREE OF LIFE thus it speaks of eternal life found with God for His bride made available to all of us only through the blood of Jesus
- 2) **The Golden Altar** (9:13) -foreshadowing of Christ's work in Heaven interceding for us; its made of gold and built with a crown symbolizing the reign and royalty of Christ in Heaven
- 3) **The Ark of the Covenant**(11:19) – symbolized God's throne & presence from Israel's past; here it symbolizes an access to the throne of grace, the mercy seat and His presence as the final High Priest has applied the blood redeeming all who would believe

What's missing from Heavens' Temple and why it's important:

- 1) **The Brass Altar**: its missing because Jesus was our final offering and blood sacrifices are no longer needed (foreshadow of Christ's work on the Cross; this altar was made of brass and had no crown symbolizing His suffering and humiliation)
- 2) **The Brass Laver**: its missing as there is no necessity for ritual purification in the Heavenly Temple
- 3) **The Table of Showbread**: its missing as the "Bread of Life" is manifest through Christ himself and He is the "Bread of Life" (John 6:32-35)

WHAT JOHN SAW HIM WEARING: (VS. 13)

Christ's present ministry is that of our **HIGH PRIEST** who lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:24-28)

The earthly high priests wore 8 garments of beauty. However, on the **DAY OF ATONEMENT**, he removed the 8 garments replacing them with 4 linen garments. The priests would wear a linen coat from the shoulder to the floor, linen trousers, a girdle above the chest to hold the coat together, and a linen headpiece.

WHAT JOHN SAW HIM CARRYING: (VS. 16)

The 7 Stars in Christ's right hand are the **7 ANGELS OR MESSENGERS** (figurative language for pastors) of the 7 Churches.

WHAT JOHN HEARD HIM SAY: (VS. 17-20)

John is told specifically to write down:

- 1) THOSE THINGS THAT YOU HAVE SEEN (Christ in Chapter 1)
- 2) THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE (includes Chapters 2 & 3)
- 3) THOSE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER (chapters 4-22)

John can “see” into 3 realms:

- 1) Things in Heaven (4:1)
- 2) Things in Earth (11)
- 3) Things under the Earth(9:1-11)

Chapter 1 is done! We are just getting started. I hope this blesses you as much as it has me. Lets pray as we close out our time together. Jesus, you are the author and the finisher of our faith. We know you sit at the right hand of the Father interceding for us as we complete our mission here. We know you defeated Death, Hell and the Grave and hold the keys! Thank you for your sacrifice on the cross that set us free once and for all time. Thank you for your precious Word as we learn what it means follow you in the last days. Guide us Holy Spirit as we set about “understand last things” so that we finish this race well. We love you!

Amen.

As Chapter 2 begins, Jesus starts by issuing encouragement, correction and blessing to 7 churches in Asia minor. Before we get into each Church specifically, lets first get an overview of the cities and what Jesus had to say.

The Church	Christ's Message	The Blessing
1. Ephesus	They had lost their first love	Would Eat from the Tree of Life
2. Smyrna	They were enduring tribulation	Would not be hurt by the 2 nd death
3. Pergamum	They held onto false doctrine	Will eat from the hidden manna
4. Thyatira	They were tolerating a Jezebel	Will be given power over nations
5. Sardis	They had people dying spiritually	Will be dressed in white linens
6. Philadelphia	They were given an open door	Will be made a pillar in the Temple
7. Laodicea	They were lukewarm and would be spit out	Will sit on Christ's throne

There is a debate among scholars concerning a theory that teaches these seven churches also represent seven different church ages. The seven time periods are divided as follows:

The Church	The Church Age	The General Time Frame
Ephesus	The Apostolic Church	30-100 AD
Smyrna	The Persecuted Church	100-312 AD
Pergamos	The Roman Church	313-600 AD
Thyatira	The Dark Ages	600-1517 AD
Sardis	The Reformation Church	1517-1700 AD
Philadelphia	The Missions Church	1648-21 st Century AD
Laodicea	The Lukewarm Church	the Present situation

As we look at the 7 churches, we are going to use 3 methods of Bible study:

- 1) The **Primary perspective** will cover the historical setting of each Church in the 1st century and what it meant to them
- 2) The **Personal perspective** will cover our personal application for Church and Christian life today and what it reveals to us about our own walk
- 3) The **Prophetic perspective** will cover how these 7 churches have remarkable similarity to those 7 successive periods of Church history mentioned above

Lets get into it:

Our first city is Ephesus. The cities name means “the desired one”. In Revelation 2:2-4, Christ diagnosis’ the Church in Ephesus with mostly positive praise and one correction. First the praise:

It was a **Dynamic Church**; the church was known for its good works. One of the purposes for the local church is to “stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). We are not saved BY good works but we are saved FOR good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

It was a **Determined Church**; Christ wrote that the Ephesians had “persevered and had patience” in their work and labor. Their patience wasn’t passive, but active. They were patiently enduring suffering as they went about serving Christ. Biblical patience is proactive in its endurance. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon described the kind of “grit” the Ephesian church possessed when he said,

“Pray God to send a few men with what the Americans call “grit” in them; men who when they know a thing to be right, will not turn away, or turn aside, or stop; men who will persevere all the more because there are difficulties to meet or foes to encounter; who stand all the more true to their Master because they are opposed...”

It was a **Disciplined Church**; Christ identified the discipline of the Ephesians when he said in verse 2, “I know....that you cannot bear those who are evil.” They would not tolerate evil or unrighteousness in their midst and would exercise church discipline when it was needed. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Titus 3:10-11)

It was a **Discerning Church**; Their discernment was evident when they “tested” those who claimed to be apostles “ and have found them to be liars”. There would be know shortage of false apostles in the early or latter years of Church history-men who claimed to have been granted authority by Christ’s true apostles to lead churches. But the Ephesian church rejected these by knowing the truth of the Word. (Matthew 24:4-5)

Now the Correction: (Hebrews12:5)

It was a **Declining Church**; this was the one thing Christ held against them. He said, “Nevertheless I have this one thing against you, that you have lost your first love.” Everything about the church looked good on the outside but on the inside they had heart trouble. Their devotion to Christ was waning. It serves as a reminder to us that it is possible to do the works of ministry without being in love with Him! The Weymouth translation of the New Testament states verse 4 like this: “Yet I have this against you, that you no longer love Me as you did at first.”

Praise God Jesus doesn't end there! He then gives them instructions on how to return to their first love in verse 5. He tells them the 3 "R's"

- 1) **Remember.** He tells them to, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen". If we have left something or someone, the first step is to remember where we started. In this case, it means remembering, thinking back on, what ones relationship with Christ was when we were first saved and growing in Him. We lived our lives as a matter of trust: God said it, we believed it, and that settled it! Somewhere in the mix, our energy and passion dissipated. We became professional Christians. We go through the motions of doing the works without the passion. We settle into the routine instead of growing in the relationship. The Greek from used in remember in verse 5 is present active imperative. In other words, Jesus is telling them and us "keep on remembering your starting place with me".
- 2) **Repent.** "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent...." Repentance means to change your mind; it means to reverse course and go in the opposite direction. It is less a matter of weeping and wailing than it is a conscious choice of the will a decision to first turn and then return. Only when we turn around and go back to where we began with Christ will we do what he told the Ephesians to do: Remember. We never get back on the right road by remaining on the wrong road.
- 3) **Repeat.** After remembering and repeating and getting back to where we began, there is a third step: Repeat the former good works. Christ praised them works, labor, patience, discipline, and discernment. What they needed to do is what we need to as well: go and do the first works all over again. Paul tells the Corinthian church in chapter 13 that love is a verb not just a noun. That is also true of our love for Christ-it is demonstrated by actions that show our love for him. Those are the actions to which we are to return to.

Christ continued with the instructions by including a warning: “If you do not repent and do the first works, I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place.” That is, the church’s influence and power would be removed. There is a price to pay for drifting away from the Lord. Today, Ephesus is no longer a light for Christ.

Its sobering to think about that a Church could have its power and influence removed by Jesus for losing her first love! If that is something that is bringing conviction to your heart right now I want to encourage you to do the exact thing Jesus told the Ephesus church to do: Repent and Remember and Repeat!

The 2nd Church: Smyrna

It is known as the suffering church. This church is one of two of the seven churches to which Christ said nothing negative. The city's name means Myrrh, an aromatic fragrance used in anointing specifically bodies prepared for burial. Like the aromatic oil released by the crushing of a local plant, the believers in Smyrna were releasing the fragrant aroma of Christ in spite of their suffering.

Why they were persecuted? (Revelation 2:9)

Because they would not bow the knee to worship Caesar and foreign gods!

Remember from past teachings: Rome allowed you to worship whoever you wanted as long as you worshipped the Emperor/government above all others!

Jesus would summarize their suffering in three ways:

- 1) **Pressure**: Christ wrote to the Smyrna church, "I know your...tribulation." The Greek word for tribulation literally means pressure-like placing a boulder on a person's chest until it crushes them to death.
- 2) **Poverty**: the second thing Christ said He knew about them was their "poverty". The Greek word used here means "absolute destitution". It referred to a person who had nothing. Their poverty was due to their faith because they were likely banned from the city to earn a living and robbed of what they had. In other words, it likely meant starving possibly to death for one's faith.
- 3) **Persecution**: they were getting it from all sides including a group of so-called Jews "who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan." These Jews were only so in name and they attacked Christian believers for their worship of Jesus. (Romans 2:28-29)

Christ's Counsel to the Church: (Revelation 2:10)

- 1) **Be Fearless**: First something not to do: "Do not fear those things which you are about to suffer." Time and again the Bible gives us this command: Do not Fear! It's the most repeated command in scripture to believers. We are not required to be fearful in scary situations. Yes, it is a natural response but we live supernaturally through the power of the Spirit.
- 2) **Be Faithful**: Next we are told to be faithful unto death. Instead of being fearful Jesus says be faithful even to the point of dying.

2 Promises Jesus makes:

- 1) He promises the **"Crown of Life"**: Everyone in Smyrna knew about a prominent hill known as the "The Crown of Smyrna". But Christ promised a better crown as he closed out this letter to the church there. He said in verse 10, "Be faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." This is the same crown described in James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him."
- 2) He promises they would not be hurt by the **"Second Death"**: there are 2 deaths in scripture: 1) the first being our physical bodies death at the end of our earthly life. 2) the second death is for those who are judged when Christ returns and are consigned to an eternity apart from God. Believers in Christ will not experience the second death. (Revelation 20:5-6) Everyone in the world knows of the first death and many live in fear of it. But it is the second death that is more critical.

Romans 8:35-39 says,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The believers at Smyrna had nothing to fear from martyrdom. No matter how cruel the torture, the Romans could never separate them from God. Every believer in Christ today should take comfort in that same truth: Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The 3rd Church: Pergamos

One of cultures central themes in the last 40 years has been toleration, especially at the Church. We are expected to tolerate everyone and everything. Its actually a counterfeit to **biblical love**. The problem is that toleration has been and will continue to be the downfall of many churches and believers alike. The cities name means “united” or “marriage”. We get our English root words for “bigamy “and “polygamy” from the word Pergamos. The Church in Pergamos signifies a mixed marriage in the most objectionable sense of the word, it is the marriage of the World and the Church!

The Diagnosis of the Church: (Revelation 2:13-15)

Christ’s words point out why Pergamos could have been called “**Satan’s City**”: “I know where you live, where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful witness, who was put to death in your city, where Satan lives.” Pergamos was home to 4 Greek god temples and their worship: Zeus, Dionysius, Athena and Asclepius. In addition, there was also a temple to Caesar and the Nicolaitans were also there. (Nicolaitans were believers in name only as they compromised their faith in order to enjoy some of the sinful practices associated with worshipping the other gods. The term Nicolaitan was held by scholars to be the equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Balaamites.”)

4 things Christ knew about the faith of the Church:

- 1) He knew the **circumstances** of their faith: Pergamos was a center of idolatry so much so that Christ made the devastating connection to “Satan’s throne”. Pergamos played host to a temple of Zeus that contained an altar 100 feet square by 40 feet high with impressive sculptures around its base. Pergamos was also the center of worship for Asclepius, the god of healing. Temples to him were the nearest thing the ancient world had to hospitals. The believers in Pergamos were surrounded by false gods, false religions, and idol worship.
- 2) He knew the **conviction** of their faith: in spite of the pressure to compromise that was upon them, Christ commended them for remaining true to their faith: “And you hold fast to my name.” No matter the circumstances it is possible to hold fast to our faith in Christ. The Believers in Pergamos confessed their faith and when they did they did it knowing the consequences.
- 3) He knew the **courage** of their faith: Jesus recognized their courage as well as their conviction. “You did not renounce your faith in me even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-where Satan lives.” We don’t see him mentioned anywhere else in scripture or know anything about from history but no one escapes Jesus’ attention! Antipas actually means “against all” and that’s exactly what he did, stood against all, refusing to recant his faith in Jesus and it cost him his life.

- 4) Jesus also knew the **Compromise** of their faith: in spite of their faithfulness in some areas they had compromised in others. The church had allowed idolatry to creep in some way. Remember they lived in the midst of Satanic influence. Some of those influences had made their way into Church to promote the “doctrine of Balaam”. What’s the doctrine of Balaam?

Balaam was a prophet in the OT who claimed to have the ability to influence the “gods” and for a price would curse ones enemies. Balaak was a Moabite king who enlisted Balaam’s services to curse the Israelites on their way through Moab. The God of Israel would not be influenced by Balaam and the prophet could not only not curse Israel but actually blessed them! In return for money, Balaam told Balaak how to bring them under a curse: get the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men, marry them, then corrupt their relationship with God by intermingling the worship of God with Moab’s idolatry. (Numbers 25) In short, **if you cant curse them, corrupt them!**

In addition, we see the Nicolaitans mentioned again. Here is a more accurate understanding: Not only did the Nicolaitans bring in a compromised faith they also intended to subjugate people into their way of thinking. “Nicolaitans” is derived from two words meaning “to conquer the laity”. Commentators suggest that there was a hierarchy in the church that had gathered power unto itself and forced the laity into subservient status.

Christ’s demand of the Church:

He did not mince words! “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth”. “Them” refers to those who were promoting the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. In other words, he would destroy those who were destroying His church!

How does the Pergamos Church represent the Roman Church age?

A great question that needs a history lesson:

For 250 years (10 Roman Emperors), the church suffered under immense persecution most notably under Diocletian. But then Constantine became emperor of Rome approx. 4th century A.D. He would bring the Balaam doctrine into the church as a whole. What Diocletian couldn't accomplish by crushing the church, Constantine did by corrupting it.

Following the death of Diocletian, two roman leaders clashed to be the next emperor. On the eve of the deciding battle called the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine has a vision of the cross in the sky and the words "in hoc signo vinces" or "in this sign you will conquer". Constantine won the battle, declared himself a christian, and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. He then forces his own legions, under pain of death, to be baptized as Christians. Both Church and State were joined under his rule. When bishops met from all over the Empire, they decided they should carry him on a golden throne from which he presided as the Head of the Church and called himself "Pontifex Maximus". He becomes the 1st Pope of the Holy Roman Empire.

Pagan temples became Christian churches overnight and heathen festivals became Christian celebrations! The problem with this according to W.A. Criswell, scholar:

"Now that Caesar was a Christian, the priests of those temples hastened to their own baptisms to stay on the imperial payrolls. They declared the images of the gods to whom they formerly worshipped as the now the images of the Saints. Humble homes and catacombs and dungeons that had echoed with the hymns of God's children, whose singing was sometimes turned into shouts of the martyrs as they were dragged into the arena had now past. The rags of persecution were changed for the plush silk of the imperial palace."

The Church had **married** the world. There is never any evidence that Constantine was a believer. Christianity for him was a way for him to unify his empire. When Satan couldn't crush the Church, he employed the doctrine of Balaam. Satan caused it to compromise with the world and dilute the truth. The lesson for us: What you can't curse or crush you can corrupt through compromise. One word: **Tolerance**. G. Campbell Morgan said it like this,

"There is a toleration that leads to treachery. There is a peace which issues paralysis. There are hours when the Church must say NO to those who ask for communion with her, doing her work, upon the basis of compromise. Such standing aloof may produce ostracism and persecution; but it will maintain power and influence....the reason why men do not look to the Church today is because she has destroyed her own influence by compromise."

I am not saying we should be aggressive, combative or antagonistic. I am saying when we have to communicate the truth, we do so in **LOVE**. I am saying that we must guard our hearts above all else. We must remain vigilant and sober minded because our enemy the devil is looking for whom he may devour through deception and compromise.

Finally the Promises: in Revelation 2:17, Jesus talks about the blessings of the overcomer. He promises 3 things:

- 1) They would eat of the hidden manna: Every 7th day the priests were permitted to eat the bread from the table of Showbread. Now because of Jesus, the souls of those who overcame or gained victory over sin, persecution and trial through Christ be permitted to partake of that spiritual food which is laid up for the people of God by which they will be nourished forever. Easier said: Johns language explains they who overcome will be nourished through this life as if by that hidden manna; that they will be supplied all along through the wilderness of this world by that food supplied from the being in presence of God.
- 2) They would be a given a “white stone”: this has a 2 fold meaning.
 - a) Its called the tessera hospitalis or the Victor’s Stone. It gave to its possessor a claim of hospitality and access to special benefits from the giver. The stone is called white but is actually glistening or shining white like quartz or even diamond. In ancient times, a white stone was handed to pardoned criminals and those who were declared by the priest to be clean and worthy of entering the Temple. The white stone mentioned here identifies us as guiltless and worthy of entering Gods presence by Jesus our High Priest.
 - b) The second meaning would actually come from the priestly garment. The white stone on the garment would be a diamond, the Urim, borne by the High Priest within the breastplate of judgement with the 12 tribes names on the 12 precious stone next to the heart. None but the priest new the name on the stone. Jesus writes on the stone some new revelation of himself which shall be imparted to His people.

- 3) They would be given a new name: The new name expressed the step by which a person had stepped into a new higher, truer life and a change of heart had taken place. It would be a name indicating a new relation and possibly a characteristic of Christ unique to them.

The 4th Church: Thyatira

The city of Thyatira was a small town located inland in Asia Minor and was known for its color dyes. The city was constructed in a valley with many trade routes through it. It was a working mans town with many trade guilds. Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi, was a merchant from Thyatira. (Acts 16:14) The cities name means "continual sacrifice".

The Designation of the Letter:

- 1) The **Authority** of Jesus: Jesus always addresses himself differently to each of the Churches. Here in Thyatira "he has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass". The traits by which he reveals himself always fit the need of the Church and person in question. The problem in Thyatira was addressed by Jesus in such a way the he came referring to himself as the "Son of God". The phrase "Son of Man" refers more to His humanity, the phrase "Son of God" refers directly to His Diety and that brings with it a level seriousness!
- 2) The **Awareness** of Jesus: The reference to His "eyes of fire" is a reference to His complete moral judgement. He see with the exactitude of perfect righteousness and judgement.
- 3) The **Anger** of Jesus: The description of Him having "feet like fine brass". The symbol of Brass was two fold in the Bible: 1) it meant judgement 2) it was oft use to represent humanity. Jesus aware of the sin that was being allowed, was ready to judge them having himself already become a man and walked through judgement himself (falsely) Remember Hebrews 4:13-15.

The 4 Commendations for the Church:

- 1) They were a **laboring** Church: Jesus in vs 19 mentions their works twice. They were an active Church not a passive one. The word used here is the word we get for deacon meaning servant. They were a working serving church making an impact in their community.
- 2) They were a **Loving** Church: Jesus also said "...I know your love." They had become known for their "Agape", Christ like Love.
- 3) They were a **Loyal** Church: Jesus highlighted their faith. The Greek word "pistos" can be translated faith, faithfulness and are almost synonymous with each other. The church was loyal and dependable full of faithful people.
- 4) They were a **longsuffering** Church: Jesus' last commendation for the Church was patience. The meaning of patience literally means "staying power under adverse circumstances." When they pain and pressure came the Church stood her ground. Jesus even added to His praise when He said, "As for your works, the last our more than the first." The more pressure or persecuted they became the more faithful they became. We have to remember something though: Satan doesn't attack weak ineffective churches or people. So opposition is not an insult, but an indicator that the enemy doesn't like our direction as we press into Jesus.

The Problem in the Church: (vs. 20-23)

“Nevertheless, I have this against you: You **TOLERATE** (ALLOW) that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of foods sacrificed to idols. I have her given her time to repent, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”

On the Surface:

A female self proclaimed prophetess had come into some sort of authority either by manipulation or preying on the weak willed and had begun teaching something that was leading people into sexual immorality and participating in idol worship. The leadership was aware of what was happening and didn't address it. That's why Jesus said they had tolerated or allowed it to continue. Jesus isn't without heart here either: He gives her time to repent, BUT she chooses not to!

Going Deeper:

This a reference to a “Jezebel Spirit”. Yes its REAL! Kate and I have dealt with more than 4 of them in our time in ministry together. Its takes great discernment to recognize a person operating in it. Sometimes there is an influence and sometimes there is full blown spirit at work. How can we tell? Let me teach you what to look for:

- 1) Pray in the Spirit and ask for discernment.
- 2) Be aware of manipulation and motive. The how and the why of what someone wants, it will ultimately serve their motives and agenda
- 3) That spirit will look for leadership opportunities at high levels with/without proper credentials/training
- 4) They will follow leadership up to a point; then it becomes about their agenda
- 5) They will not give up control big or small. They will often refuse to bring alongside or pour into other leaders for fear of sharing influence
- 6) They are more than strong willed people and control enthusiast; often it’s the passive aggressive that will surprise you. Its control through unrighteous means: seduction, manipulation and intimidation.
- 7) It’s an equal opportunity spirit. We have seen both men and women have this. The strongest I have ever seen this spirit operate was on a gentlemen
- 8) The spirit can operate to a point without an “Ahab”. Old Testament, Jezebel was an actual prophetess in a cult leading Israel away from God. She got her control through Israel’s King Ahab. She remained in control by controlling Ahab and through seduction (2 Kings 9:30), manipulation (1 Kings 21:-28), and intimidation (1 Kings 19:1-2).

How do you deal with a Jezebel?

- 1) Pray and ask for discernment
- 2) Confront the person about their motives, behavior and control
- 3) Give them an opportunity to repent and submit to church authority
- 4) Remove them for a time from leadership and let them heal
- 5) If they wont repent and wont submit, you let them walk away.

Remember that our battle isn't with flesh and blood! Its with powers, authority and spiritual darkness in heavenly places! (Ephesians 6) The person isn't the enemy even though they may act like it. The person needs time and truth over and again to realize what's happening and repent. Sometimes they need time away from the body to do this. And some having done this take up the mentality of a victim and never come back.

Back to the Church in Thyatira:

The Jezebel Spirit had made its way into the Church by way a of a female prophetess and had begun to seduce its members into immorality. For some reason the leadership in the church had not rebuked the person and were acting like Ahab allowing it to continue.

Jesus' Message to the Cult:

He gives her 2 warnings:

- 1) **The Threat of Distress**: He gives her a chance to repent. She refuses. So He warned of her of this judgement: "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed." It means He will literally strike her with a debilitating disease. Figuratively, it meant that her bed of pleasure would now become a bed of pain through some judgement. It doesn't matter how so much as we remember that Hebrew says in Chapter 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".
- 2) **The Threat of Death**: the warning was also to those who would commit adultery with her. They would find themselves in "great tribulation" unless they repented of their immorality as well. Jesus said, "I will kill her children." The spiritual byproduct of this immorality Jesus would not tolerate in His Church!

Jesus' message to the Christians:

"But hold fast until I come." These words are for those who didn't engage with the cult within the church. There were those who stood their ground and Christ encourages them to stand firm until His return. They knew what God expected and would not budge.

Jesus' message to the conquerors or they that overcome:

Christ made 2 promises to them:

- 1) **The Power to Rule**: He would "give power over the nations". He is quoting Psalm 29, a Messianic prophecy that applies directly to Him: "He shall rule them with a rod iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potters vessels." Christ knowingly quoted that Messianic verse from Psalms and said those who remained faithful to the end would be given the same power to rule as He was given by the Father. This is a specific reference to the millennial reign of Christ.
- 2) **The Promise of the Morning Star**: the Promise is Jesus Christ himself. Revelation 22:16 He is called the "The Bright and Morning Star". One day most of us will fall asleep should Jesus tarry still, only to be awakened on a day in the future when the Bridegroom returns for His bride, the Church. Some of will alive but all who have stood firm to the end will meet the Bright and Morningstar and dwell with Him forever!

Let what Jesus said to the Church at Thyatira be watchwords for us as we wait with anticipation the Glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus!

The 5th Church: Sardis

Sardis was a wealthy city that actually resided in 2 locations: the older section of the city on top of a mountain and a newer section of the city was built in the valley below. The city itself had an interesting history.

During the reign of Croesus, the cities greatest King, Cyrus the Great was conquering westward though Asia Minor. Croesus was proud and arrogant and thought that no one could defeat him. After Cyrus defeated him and his armies, Croesus had to flee back to Sardis. For 14 days Cyrus and his armies laid siege to Sardis but without success. Sardis being located on top of a mountain, was impenetrable.

One day a Persian soldier observed a soldier of Sardis drop his helmet outside the wall. The Persian soldier was surprised to see the Sardis soldier appear at the base of the cliff and retrieve his helmet. That night, the persian soldier led a group of men to the base of the cliff wall and found the crack allowing entrance into the city. They found the city completely unguarded! Croesus thought the city was untouchable and didn't even post sentries. The Persian soldiers stole through the city, opened the gates and conquered it without a fight.

Sardis' history is a key to help us understand the letter to the Church. The cities downfall is a metaphor for the Church's downfall.

The cities name means "escaping one's" or "those who come out"

The Designation of the Lord (3:1)

Jesus introduces himself with another unique descriptive:

".....Him who holds the 7 spirits of God and the 7 stars."

The 7 spirits refers to _____.

The 7 stars refers to the _____ of the Churches.

The Problem with Sardis: Spiritual Death

Sardis received _____ commendations from the Lord. Instead they got a wake up call!

This church had a name and an outward appearance of life but inwardly they were dead! Nominal Christians or in name only. What does this look like exactly?

Jesus would say it like this in Matthew 23:27, “Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full hypocrisy and wickedness.”

In short, they are acting holy to cover up sin. Like the Pharisees, and Croesus, the church in Sardis was full of pride. They were living off their yester-years and former works when their hearts were humble. Much like King Saul, they started off serving humbly, whole heartedly, and full of the Spirit. Then sin when unrepented of somewhere and began to grow a cold heart. Here’s our great challenge: Pride produces religion and religion covers pride! Because we’re prideful we want to appear religious and holy and because we appear religious and holy, it feeds our pride. And on and on it goes... until one day we realize the Spirit has left. We are dead men walking. The sad part is like King Saul many churches don’t even know the Spirit has left them until it’s too late! Like King Croesus, we let our guards down and let the enemy in!

Where’s the encouragement?!

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MERCY!

JESUS DOESN’T LEAVE THEM WITHOUT HOPE! HE GIVES THEM 5 SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) “ _____ ” or “Wake Up”: In other words “Stay Awake.” 1 Peter 5:8, “Be self controlled and ALERT. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking forward someone to devour.”
- 2) “ _____ ” or “Strengthen what remains”: God always preserves a remnant! Just as Israel had a remnant left in Jerusalem during Babylonian captivity, so God will leave a remnant of faithful people because of His covenant made with Abraham. We are grafted into that vine as believers. Sometimes its easier to step out than step up but that’s exactly what Jesus encourages them to do by strengthening what remains.
- 3) “ _____ ”: specifically “Remember therefore what you have received and heard...” It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we hear and receive the Word of God in a life changing way. When the Spirit leaves, or is grieved or is quenched, (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19) a church will begin to die.
- 4) “ _____ ” says the New Living translation. Others say “Obey”. Either way Jesus encourages us by saying “Go Back to what you heard and believed at first; HOLD TO IT FIRMLY.” It’s a theme in the book of Revelation. It simply means remain true to it; obey it. When a church or believer abandons the Word, we remove the chief means of transformation into the image of Christ.
- 5) _____; turn around; be transformed by the renewing of your mind meaning our former way of life, thought, feeling, action and attitude are no longer viable means of living. We have been made new according to the Bible. The way of transformation is the same: turn around, go back to the baseline. The church is crying out for revival; it starts with repentance.

The Promises:

Jesus makes them 3 promises if they will do what He has told them

- 1) They Will _____: (vs.5) they would be set apart and made pure, dressed in fine linen, bright and clean. (Revelation 19:8) It also applies to a priest's induction into the priesthood by which he would receive white garments for ministry and claimed by the Sanhedrin. Those of us who believe in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior are "now a chosen people, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)
- 2) Their _____: their names will remain in the Book of Life. The image is that those who are faithful to Christ will never have their names blotted out of the Book. Luke 10:20 says, "...but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven."
- 3) They shall be _____: The cultural image is of honored citizens being processed before the emperor and having their names and deeds read aloud. Jesus promises that those who follow Him and "confess Him before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8, KJV)