

Revelation- Part 4 | 5/14/17

- The letters to the churches
 - Jesus in giving His revelation to John addressed letters to 7 different churches.
 - These churches were not the only ones that were established but He chose them for a divine purpose as He had some very specific things to address to each of them.
 - These letters contained words of encouragement, praise, correction and promise.
 - While these were real churches that existed in the first century and what Jesus said was directed towards them. His words apply to the church of every age.
- The Church in Ephesus | Revelation 2:1-7
 - **Read Revelation 2:1-7**
 - Jesus praised their work, toil and patient endurance.
 - This church apparently was a serving church and they toiled (which means to the point of exhaustion).
 - This church was likely quite active and they were always doing something for the Lord.
 - They showed endurance and kept going even when it was hard or difficult.
 - They tested those who proclaimed Christ to be sure they were not false teachers.
 - Regardless if you lived in the first century or the 21st century the world is full of false teachers.
 - There are many false religions and teachers of all sorts of beliefs.
 - There are those who might even proclaim Christ, but still bring a false witness and false teachings.
 - This church understood the importance of a true witness for Christ who spoke truth and not deceitful lies.
 - They showed spiritual discernment and would evaluate those who proclaimed Christ to be sure they were truly of God.
 - Correct doctrine was important to them.
 - Paul warned the Ephesian leaders to watch out for “men speaking twisted things” to draw the church from the truth.
 - Acts 20:28-31
 - “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise **men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.**”
 - **What do you think these “twisted things” might have been?**
 - There is only one true Jesus and one true Gospel, but Satan will try to deceive
 - 2 Corinthians 11:3-4a
 - “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted...”
 - 2 John 7
 - “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

- Satan will do his best to deceive the world and we must as Christians see through the lies.
 - Christians should always be on their guard and be aware of false teachers so that we are not lead astray.
 - Not everyone who proclaims “Jesus” teaches the truth of the gospel.
 - Not everyone who labels themselves a “Christian” is a Christian.
- They also rooted out the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans
 - Now exactly who the Nicolaitans were we cannot be for certain as the Scripture does not further elaborate.
 - However, the writings of the early church fathers from the 2nd century (like bishop Irenaeus) shed some light on who they likely were.
 - Irenaeus believed they were a group who was led by Nicolas from Acts 6 who had become a deacon.
 - However, he was a false believer that led many from the church astray and into immorality.
- **What can we do to prepare ourselves to that we can more easily be made aware of false teachings when we hear it?**
- Jesus also saw room for correction, they had lost their passionate love for Christ.
 - Jesus said, “But I have this against you”, they were not perfect and Jesus sought to write them a letter of correction.
 - They abandoned the love they had at first, which was their first passionate love for Christ.
 - We are called to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds. While the people at the church of Ephesus had once done this, they had over time lost the passion.
 - Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is full of a call for a passionate love of Christ.
 - Ephesians 6:24
 - “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”
 - It wasn’t that they lost all love for Jesus of course but they lost their fervent passion, they had lost the “honeymoon love”.
 - **They lost the fire that new Christians have for Christ where their newfound love in Jesus is above all.**
 - They were doing the motions and activities of church, but they were not doing it with a heart full of love for Christ.
 - **All too often we can see this today in ourselves. We go through our obligations of attending church, reading Scripture, praying and serving.**
 - **But it is possible to do these things without the passionate love for Christ that we once had.**
 - **We must NOT neglect this love.**
- Jesus tells us how we can return to this former love.
 - Remember where you have fallen
 - The wisdom from Jesus was simple, to return to the time in which you lost your passion and love for Him.
 - With anything in life that we get off track there is always a moment in time that we can trace the beginning of our falling to.

- If we have lost our passion and love for Christ we need to look and back and see when this began, then we can return there and put ourselves back in the right direction.
- Repent
 - Most likely when we walk back our steps and see when we fell off track, sin may very well be involved.
 - It may be when we returned to our old habits and vices that we had gotten away from.
 - It could be a new sin of neglect, selfishness or a desire of the flesh that pulled us away.
 - We must repent of this wrong and give it to God.
- Do the works you did at first
 - We must return to the things we once did that brought us into a that deep loving relationship with Christ.
 - Prayer, reading the Scripture, attending church and small groups. Whatever it was that brought you into a deep loving relationship with Christ we must return.
- **Do Christians go through these times today where we lose that passion for Him?**
 - **Has Jesus's wisdom on how to return worked in your own life?**
- Jesus warned the church in Ephesus that He is in control and could remove their light.
 - The church is a lampstand that hold the light of Christ.
 - But Jesus said that He would remove that if they did not repent and return to their previous ways.
 - We cannot think that God will continue to bless a church that is simply going through the motions of "church", but lack the passion and true love for Him.
 - He desires a church that does it out of love from their heart and He will prune and correct those who do not.
- The tree of life is given to the overcomers (conquers)
 - The overcomers or conquers is not a special group of Christians, but it references ALL Christians.
 - 1 John 5:4-5
 - "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"
- The Church in Smyrna | Revelation 2:8-11
 - ***Read Revelation 2:8-11***
 - Jesus gave a word of encouragement to the church in Smyrna as they were going through a very difficult time of persecution.
 - They were persecuted by those that "said" they are Jews.
 - These are Jews who were "Jews" but false in the sense that they denied Christ.
 - Romans 2:28
 - "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, not is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."
 - It was the Jews after all that persecuted and had Jesus strung up on the cross.
 - The Jews who did not believe in Christ, gave the Christians a difficult time.

- They performed healing rituals with snakes.
 - **Interestingly enough their insignia (serpent entwined on a staff) is still a medical symbol used today.**
- Pergamum had those in the church who had compromised their faith with false teachings and committed “spiritual adultery”.
 - **Unlike the church of Ephesus who sought and removed false teachings, the church of Pergamum kept them within the church and did not remove them.**
 - They had members who with one hand worshiped Christ, but with the other were doing things that are detestable to the Lord committing “spiritual adultery”.
 - The teachings of Balaam began back in Numbers 22-25 in the Old Testament.
 - There was a prophet named Balaam who was paid by King Balak to curse the people of Israel.
 - God intervened and the curse did not happen, but Balaam told Balak to make friends with Israel and to integrate with them.
 - This ended up having many Jews who inter married and turned to idol worship.
 - The results of what happened in Numbers was still affecting many of the Jews at that time.
 - This compromise could have consisted of continued association and participation with idol worship.
 - It could also be those who gave into emperor worship. There were many Christians documented in history who feared Rome and while they worshiped God they still said, “Caesar is Lord” to escape punishment.
 - **What are some modern-day examples of Christians compromising their faith, when they worship Christ with one hand, but on the other do things that are detestable?**
- Those who conquer will receive hidden manna and a white stone. | Revelation 2:17
 - What this “hidden manna” might be isn’t clear, but it could represent communion and fellowship with Christ.
 - Likewise, with the white stone there isn’t any additional context to help us with its meaning.
 - During that time period a white stone was given to winning athletes and it was also a “yes” vote in trials.
- The Church in Thyatira | Revelation 2:18-29
 - **Read Revelation 2:18-29**
 - Jesus began this letter with praise.
 - He stated how they showed patient endurance like the church in Ephesus.
 - That their works in the later years of the church were greater than the first, so they were growing and doing great things for the Lord.
 - Jesus then called the church out for tolerating evil within the church.
 - They like Pergamum had mixed proper worship of Christ with sin and immorality.
 - **The woman’s name likely wasn’t actually Jezebel** as that name was infamous to the people of Israel, however her actions were similar and Jesus used that name to describe her.
 - She had brought a mix of pagan religion that contained sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols.
 - **She was influencing the church with the “deep things of Satan” to attempt to turn them from the truth and many had done so.**
 - Satan has and uses this tactic today within the church.

- Satan has many ways that he can tempt people into sin and to persuade Christians to do things contrary to what God desires.
 - **We should not be surprised that he has those within the church that try to even very subtly turn people from the truth.**
 - To make it “ok” for us to commit spiritual adultery and to compromise our beliefs.
 - **There are many churches that while they proclaim Christ, do many things that are contrary to the teaching of Scripture.**
 - **Where the church tries to align themselves with sinful worldviews to try and “fit in”.**
 - Jesus showing His grace and mercy still gave this person time to repent.
 - **Even though what she was doing was evil, Jesus showed His grace and mercy just as he does all throughout Revelation.**
 - Jesus just wanted her to repent from her evil ways and return to Him.
 - This is what He desires from all sinners, regardless of the type or “level” of sin.
 - But if she does not repent, Jesus promised judgment and tribulation.
 - Jesus sees the hearts and minds of all and He will know where she truly stands.
 - For the Christians who were in Thyatira and had not given in to the temptation, Jesus said to “hold fast”.
 - The words of encouragement for those who had to endure was simply to hold fast and wait for Christ to come.
- To the Church in Sardis | Revelation 3:1-13
 - **Read Revelation 3:1-13**
 - The Church in Sardis had a reputation of a church that was alive, however in time they had become dead inside.
 - Previously this church had been doing great things for Christ and they had a reputation for doing so
 - But in time they had lost their fire and had begun to die on the inside.
 - They likely were still going through their normal actions of “church”, however it was only the external actions. They had no heart.
 - **No matter how many programs and ministries or how many days a week the church is open, it is meaningless if there isn’t a passionate heart at the center.**
 - A church that is dead on the inside can fake the appearance of being alive for a time, but eventually they will decay and die.
 - This unfortunately has been the fate of many churches over the years.
 - **What can cause a church to become dead on the inside? What are the signs?**
 - Jesus desired for them to “wake up”
 - Jesus still had plans for that church, He wanted them to wake up and put life back in them.
 - **Jesus doesn’t want a world filled with churches that are dead on the inside, He wants them alive so they can do the work he has called them to.**
 - A church who is dying must wake up before it is too late.
 - Jesus provides us reassurance that Christians will never be blotted out of the book of life.
 - How wonderful are the promises of Christ, that we will not lose our salvation. That our names are permanent in the book of life.
- To the Church in Philadelphia | Revelation 3:7-13
 - **Read Revelation 3:7-13**
 - The church in Philadelphia received similar praise as did the other churches. They had great works of obedience to Christ and they stayed true to not denying Him.

- He encourages them that those Jews who were persecuting them would one day realize the truth.
- Jesus tells them that they will not have to endure the tribulation.
 - Here Jesus tells them that they will not have to endure the hour of trial, which is the 7 years of tribulation that will be experienced by the lost in the world.
 - This is a wonderful promise that speaks to the rapture prior to the tribulation.
- Jesus again gives us a great description to the rewards and joy of being a Christian.
 - The Christian will be a pillar in the temple of God, never will they lose their salvation.
- To the Church in Laodicea | Revelation 3:14-22
 - **Read Revelation 3:14-22**
 - The church in Laodicea is known as the “lukewarm” church.
 - Jesus evaluated their works and they were neither hot or cold, but lukewarm.
 - Jesus makes it clear that to be “lukewarm” is detestable to Him, so what does that mean exactly?
 - There are a couple of different perspectives on what is meant by the hot and cold.
 - One view is that hot water is an example of burning fire for Christ, while the cold is one who rejects Christ. To be lukewarm is an example of a hypocritical Christian.
 - The lukewarm Christian being one who professes to know Christ, but is consumed with their possessions and selfishness and are not really saved. The ones Jesus spoke of on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:21-23).
 - The other perspective is that both hot and cold are desirable things, that lukewarm is the only one detestable.
 - Understanding the context with who Jesus was speaking to, culture and geography may help here.
 - When looking at the location of Laodicea we see that it was actually in between 2 different cities Hierapolis and Colossae.
 - Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs which provided soothing hot water that was used like medicine.
 - Colossae was known for its cold refreshing mountain water. This would have been very refreshing drinking water.
 - However, the water at Laodicea was piped in a very long distance from Hierapolis. By the time it made it to them, it would have been lukewarm and would not have been anywhere near as desirable.
 - This undesirable water would describe how Jesus felt about Laodicea.
 - Jesus then gave examples of why “lukewarm” was detestable to Him.
 - The church was not living for Christ as they should and were taken over by their desire for possessions and wealth.
 - They took comfort in their material things and lost focus on what truly made them rich.
 - In fact, their love for possessions showed that they were actually wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.
 - They were Christians who had let the world creep in and overshadowed the reason they were truly there.
 - In modern day, they would have more care for their church building, the comforts of being in church then actually preaching and teaching the Gospel.
 - An inward focus instead of an outwardly focus.

- They had become blind to the truth and were consumed with a shroud of Satan's lies.
- **What are other examples of being "lukewarm"?**
- **How often do churches today find themselves "lukewarm" or dangerously close?**
- Jesus reminded them that only He can give the "spiritual possessions" that would make them rich.
 - Only by keeping their eyes focused on Christ and being obedient, would they receive the spiritual gifts that truly matter.
 - Only what Jesus offers is truly valuable.
- Jesus stands at the door and knocks
 - Jesus in closing to the Laodicea church tells them that He is knocking at their door.
 - This Church had pushed Jesus out the door.
 - Instead of it being a Christ centered church focused on Christ, He was outside.
 - A church that does not have Christ within it is most certainly going to be lukewarm and detestable to Him.