



## REMOVING THE FEAR OF **REVELATION**

*"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever."*

— Revelation 1:17-18 —

**Date:** 3-8-2026

**Sermon:** When Jesus Evaluates the Church

**Text:** Revelation 2

Most of us assume we're doing fine spiritually if:

- We're active.
- We believe the right things.
- We're not denying Jesus.
- We're not giving into obvious sin.

**But what if Jesus measures differently?**

## Revelation 2



### **Ephesus – When Love Grows \_\_\_\_\_**

#### **Revelation 2:1-7 NLT**

1 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: 2 "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! 5 Look how

far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. 6 But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do. 7 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

Notes:

### **Commentary:**

With a population of approximately 250,000, Ephesus was the largest and most important city in the Roman province of Asia. The city was devoted to the cult of Artemis (Latin: Diana) and had a temple to the goddess that was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world. The church in Ephesus had been established by Paul, who continued to minister there three years after its founding (Acts 20:31). In addition to Paul, Ephesus had benefited from the personal ministries of Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, and Timothy, who was residing there when Paul sent him the two letters found in our New Testament. John probably had lived there before being banished to Patmos. No doubt he was eager to hear what Jesus would have to say to those at his home church while he was in exile.

Among *historicists* and some *futurists*, Ephesus is said to represent the condition of the church of the apostolic age, until the end of the first century.

## SMYRNA – When \_\_\_\_\_ Is Strong

### Revelation 2:8-11 NLT

8 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive: 9 "I know about your suffering and your poverty--but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life. 11 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.

Notes:

### Commentary:

Smyrna (modern Izmir) was the second largest and reputedly the most beautiful city in Provincial Asia and is the only city of the seven that is still in existence today. Smyrna was the first city of Asia to build a temple to *Roma*, the spirit of Rome, in 195 b.c. In John's day it was a city that had been "resurrected from the dead," in that it had been destroyed 700 years earlier and had lain in ruins for 300 years. This fact may be alluded to in

Christ's reference to His own resurrection in the greeting: **who was dead, and came to life** (v. 8). Of all the letters, that to Smyrna is the most brief and is one of only two that receives no rebuke nor call to repentance from Christ. In John's time, the Christians in Smyrna, like John himself (1:9), were experiencing **tribulation** (v. 9) which was going to continue and, possibly, intensify. In a later generation, the famous church father Polycarp would be the bishop of this church and would suffer a notable martyrdom. Though the thought that Polycarp may have **been the angel of the church in Smyrna** (v. 8) has some appeal, it cannot be seriously entertained, since this would place the date of the Book of Revelation unreasonably late.

Among *historicists* and some *futurists*, Smyrna is believed to represent the church during the period of persecution under the Roman emperors. This began with the brief but severe persecution under Nero in a.d. 64, but became more focused and deliberate under Domitian and many of his successors, from about 95 till 313. The tenth of these, it is said, began under Diocletian and lasted ten years (303–313). The year-for-a-day interpreters (*historicists*) believe that the **ten days** (v. 10) of tribulation promised to the Smyrnian Christians correspond to the ten years of this final persecution. "The ten days of Smyrna is one of the greatest arguments for the messages of the seven churches being applied to successive ages. This divine time measure forces the issue."

## **PERGAMUM – When \_\_\_\_\_ Isn't Enough**

### **Revelation 2:12-17 NLT**

12 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword: 13 "I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to

me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city. 14 "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. 15 In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. 16 Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.

Notes:

### **Commentary:**

**Pergamos**, or Pergamum, was the provincial capital of Asia. If Ephesus was the "New York City" of Asia, Pergamos was its "Washington, D.C." The city was noted for many things. It had the second largest library in the world—containing 200,000 volumes—exceeded only by the library at Alexandria, Egypt. Besides being the oldest city of Asia, Pergamos was the first to erect temples to Caesar Augustus, to Zeus, and to the serpent-god Asclepius. The latter was considered the god of healing, and people would journey to Pergamos seeking cures for their ailments. In this sense, it was a sort of "Lourdes" of the ancient world. The reference to Satan's throne (v. 13) may allude either to the Roman authority seated in Pergamos or to the

other demonic, idolatrous practices occurring there. The church at Pergamos is the only one of the seven known to have had a martyr—**Antipas ... who was killed among you** (v. 13), about whom nothing more is known. His death did not deter the faithful of the church from their loyalty to Christ. In referring to Antipas as **My faithful martyr**, Jesus dignifies him with the same eulogy as is used of Jesus himself in Revelation 1:5 (where the word “martyr” is translated “witness” in most versions).

Among the *historicists* and some *futurists*, Pergamos is seen as representing the imperial church after Constantine (313–606), wherein the church ceased to be officially persecuted and obtained access to the portals of political power. Pergamos, it is alleged, means “married to power.” It was during this time that the institution of the papacy had its inception. In 313, the Decree of Coronation made Rome (“where Satan’s throne is”) the center of Christendom. Like Israel in the days of Balaam, the church of this period was being seduced into immorality and the worship of idols through the rise of the papal system. Some who take this approach have suggested that Antipas does not refer to an individual, but to a class of men opposed (“anti-”) to the popes (“papas”), which men were martyred in great numbers in Rome and Constantinople. Christ threatens to fight this institution with the sword out of His mouth—e.g., His Word.

## **THYATIRA – When \_\_\_\_\_ Masks Drift**

### **Revelation 2:18-29 NLT**

18 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze: 19 "I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things. 20 "But I have this

complaint against you. You are permitting that woman--that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet--to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality. 22 "Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve. 24 "But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching ('deeper truths,' as they call them--depths of Satan, actually). I will ask nothing more of you 25 except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. 26 To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end, To them I will give authority over all the nations. 27 They will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots. 28 They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star! 29 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

Notes:

### **Commentary:**

Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi, was from the city of **Thyatira** (Acts 16:14). The purple cloth she sold was a major product of that city. However, Thyatira was known for little else of importance. Of the seven cities of Asia mentioned in Revelation, Thyatira was the least significant, though the church there received the longest letter. It is known that the city had many

trade guilds, and it would have been difficult to make a living without participating in one of them. Yet the guilds practiced idolatrous rites at their gatherings, which Christians could not countenance. Therefore, the Christians in Thyatira may have been hard pressed to support themselves and their families without resorting to some measure of compromise with idolatry.

In the view of *historicists* and some *futurists*, Thyatira represents the church of the period of papal triumph and persecution (606–1517). “It is the middle church of the seven, and likewise covers the Middle Ages.” Thyatira (says Caringola) means “to be ruled by a woman.” In this case, the woman is likened to Jezebel in the days of Ahab and Elijah. This woman made immorality and idolatry official policy for the society. Uriah Smith wrote: “A more striking figure could not have been used to denote the papal abominations.” As Jezebel caused Israel to worship the mother goddess Ashtaroth (called the “Queen of Heaven” in Jer. 44:17, 18, 25), so the church in the Middle Ages introduced the worship of Mary, “the Queen of Heaven.” Jesus threatens to “kill her children with death.” Some say that refers to the terrible plagues, including the Black Death (beginning 1347), that decimated the European population in the Middle Ages.

### **Application:**

#### **So here’s the personal question.**

If Jesus wrote a letter to us... What would He say?

Would He affirm our work — but question our love?

Would He commend our endurance — but confront our compromise?

Would He say we look weak — but are actually rich?

Would He say we are growing — but tolerating what we shouldn’t?

**Here are four diagnostic questions:**

1. Have I replaced love for Jesus with work for Jesus?
2. Am I defining wealth by comfort or by faithfulness?
3. Have I drawn any lines of compromise that I once would not have crossed?
4. Am I pursuing growth... without pursuing holiness?

**And let's become the kind of church that delights the  
One who walks among the lampstands.**

## **Life Group Discussion – Revelation 2**

### **When Jesus Evaluates the Church**

#### **1. Get to Know You**

When you evaluate how you're doing spiritually, what do you usually measure—activity, knowledge, consistency, feelings, something else? Why that metric?

#### **2. Digging Deeper**

Looking at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, what stands out most about how Jesus evaluates a church? Where do you see the greatest tension between how we measure spiritual health and how He does?

#### **3. Living It Out**

If Jesus wrote you a personal letter this week, what area would most likely need correction: love, faithfulness under pressure, compromise, or holiness? What is one concrete step you can take to align your life more closely with what He values?