

Cornerstone  
Community Church

# REVELATION

*Part 1*

Chapters 1-20

*John Marc Wiemann*





## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF REVELATION [1 of 2]**

The study provided herein is based on the messages presented to Cornerstone Community Church by Lead Pastor John Mark Wiemann during 2021 and 2022. There were thirty-eight messages in the series.

The messages were provided in audio/visual form as well as written form on the Cornerstone Community web site: [Cornerstoneca.com](http://Cornerstoneca.com).

These messages are grouped in two parts that are available on the web site. They are also available in document binders at the church Information Counter. The two parts are as follows:

### Part 1

Chapter 1: "Introduction to the Revelation of Jesus Christ" [Revelation 1:1-3]

Chapter 2: "To Him Who Loves Us" [Revelation 1:4-8]

Chapter 3: "A Vision of the Glorified Christ" [Revelation 1:9-20]

Chapter 4: "Ephesus: When Love Grows Cold" [Revelation 2:1-7]

Chapter 5: "Smyrna: Be Faithful Until Death" [Revelation 2:8-11]

Chapter 6: "Pergamum: The Comprising Church" [Revelation 2:12-17]

Chapter 7: "Thyatira: The Church that Tolerated Sin" [Revelation 2:18-29]

Chapter 8: "Sardis: The Dead Church" [Revelation 3:1-6]

Chapter 9: "Philadelphia: The Faithful Church" [Revelation 3:7-13]

Chapter 10: "Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church" [Revelation 3:14-22]

Chapter 11: "Inside the Throne Room of God" [Revelation 4:1-11]

Chapter 12: "Worthy is the Lamb" [Revelation 5:1-14]

Chapter 13: "The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse" [Revelation 6:1-8]

Chapter 14: "The Wrath of the Lamb" [Revelation 6:9-17]

Chapter 15: "Evangelism and the Tribulation" [Revelation 7:1-17]

Chapter 16: "The Sound of Silence" [Revelation 8:1-13]

Chapter 17: "Fifth and Sixth Trumpets" [Revelation 9:1-21]

Chapter 18: "The Bittersweet Truth" [Revelation 10:1-11]

Chapter 19: "The Two Witnesses" [Revelation 11:1-14]

Chapter 20: "The Seventh Trumpet" [Revelation 11:1]

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF REVELATION [2 of 2]

### Part 2

- Chapter 21. “The War of the Ages” [Revelation 12:1-17]
- Chapter 22. “The Coming World Ruler” [Revelation 13:1-18]
- Chapter 23. “The Victory of the Lamb and His Followers” [Revelation 14:1-5]
- Chapter 24. “Three Angels with Messages” [Revelation 14:6-13]
- Chapter 25. “The Harvest of Judgment” [Revelation 14:14-20]
- Chapter 26. “Heavenly Preparation for God’s Final Wrath” [Revelation 15]
- Chapter 27. “The Bowl Judgments” [Revelation 16]
- Chapter 28. “Seduced by the World” [Revelation 17]
- Chapter 29. “Weeping and Rejoicing Over Babylon’s Fall” [Revelation 18]
- Chapter 30. “Heaven’s Hallelujah Chorus” [Revelation 19:1-10]
- Chapter 31. “The Glorious Return of Jesus Christ” [Revelation 19:11-21]
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- Chapter 34. “The New Heaven and New Earth” [Revelation 21:1-8]
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## CHAPTER 1

### “Introduction to the Revelation of Jesus Christ”

#### Revelation 1:1-3

*<sup>1</sup>“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

This morning we begin a journey into what is the most intriguing, and mysterious, and powerful but comforting book in the entire Bible. The book of Revelation has often been avoided because many seem to believe that it cannot be understood and that reading it, studying, and preaching from it will only lead to confusion.

But this book is not the hiding; this book is the revelation. The word revelation in the Greek is “**apocalypsis**”, which literally means unveiling. It is the sense of pulling back a veil or curtain to show something that would not have been seen any other way.

And what does the book of Revelation reveal? What does it uncover? What is so significant about this last book in the Bible?

Revelation reveals God the Father in all His glory and majesty, describing Him as holy (4:8), true (6:10), omnipotent (4:11), wise (7:12), sovereign (4:11) and eternal (4:10).

It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ as it reveals the preeminence, power, honor and glory of Jesus. He is the Alpha and the Omega (1:8; 21:6) The first and the last (1:17) The living One (1:18) The Lion that is from the tribe of Judah (5:5) The Root of David (5:5) The Lamb of God (5:6; 6:1; 7:9–10; 8:1 and others) the King of kings, and Lord of lords (19:16) The root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star (22:16)

Revelation reveals Christ’s ultimate victory over Satan, it describes the final political setup of the world, and explains the career of the final Antichrist. It also discusses the rapture of the church (3:10) and the seven-year time of tribulation. It explains the three and one-half years of the great tribulation (7:14), the second coming of Christ, the climactic battle of Armageddon, the thousand-year earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, the final great white throne judgment, the final state of the unbelievers in hell (the lake of fire), and the final state of the redeemed in the new heaven and new earth.

Revelation is God’s last word and it reveals that what began in Genesis now ends in Revelation. In Genesis you have the commencement of heaven and earth and in Revelation the consummation of heaven and earth. In Genesis you have the entrance of sin and the curse; in Revelation you have the end of sin and the curse. In Genesis you have the dawn of Satan and his activities; in Revelation you have the doom of Satan and his activities. In Genesis you have the tree of life relinquished in Revelation the tree of life regained. In Genesis death enters; in Revelation death exits. In Genesis sorrow begins; in Revelation sorrow is banished. In Genesis paradise is lost; in Revelation paradise is regained. But most central, in Genesis the Savior is promised; in Revelation the Savior is preminent.

It has taken me 21 years here at Cornerstone to now arrive at preaching through this book. Someone asked me this morning how many weeks, or months, or years that we would be in Revelation. I have absolutely no idea, but

I promise you this... it will be less than 21 years! And I can promise you that we are in for the journey of our lives, to see the glory of what is to come as God brings all redemptive history to its great climax.

### **This begins the study of Revelation with 1:1-3:**

We need to begin by briefly explaining the four methods of interpretation people take when they approach the book of Revelation. How you approach this book will determine how you interpret it; and how you interpret it will determine what you will receive from it. There are four primary interpretations of the book of Revelation. They are:

1. The Preterist Interpretation – This view sees the events recorded in Revelation as being a historical record of the events of the first century. The preterist view (the Latin word “*praeter*” means “past”) sees the words about Christ’s second coming as fulfilled in the destruction of the temple in AD. 70, even though He did not appear on that occasion.
2. The Idealist Interpretation – This is the liberal view. The idealist looks at the Revelation as a collection of allegories and stories designed to depict the struggle between good and evil. This view does not see the events of the Revelation as actual events, but as spiritual principles and ideas to encourage believers in their current trials.
3. The Historicist Interpretation – This view considers the Revelation to be a sweeping overview of church history. It sees this book as a timeline of church history from the apostolic era down to this present day. Most of the events in the book are considered to be past events. The historicist view takes the events of Revelation that happens in period of three and a half years and tries to spread it out over all of church history.
4. The Futurist Interpretation – this view holds that the book of Revelation is mostly prophetic in nature and takes a literal approach to interpretation. The futurist interpretation allows all the events of the Revelation to be actual events. Everything the book says from the rapture of the church to the second coming of the Lord Jesus to a literal millennial kingdom is seen as a real, actual, future event.

Generally speaking, proponents of the first three views are postmillennial or amillennial, while futurists are premillennial. Postmillennialists believe that the spread of the gospel will lead to a golden age of peace on earth followed by the return of Christ; amillennialists believe that the Christian’s present heavenly position in Christ is the true “millennium,” not an earthly kingdom; and premillennialists believe that the six appearances of “a thousand years” in Revelation 20 are to be taken literally as the duration of the earthly kingdom that Christ will establish between the return of Christ and the creation of the new universe.

It should not surprise you that the futurist interpretation is the path of interpretation that we will follow for our study. I will use the same hermeneutic that I have used for every passage of Scripture that I have preached through and that is the literal, historical grammatical approach of interpreting Scripture. In this approach we see chapters Revelation 4-22 as describing literal people and places and literal events that will be fulfilled in the future. When it comes to Bible interpretation someone has well said “If the plain sense makes good sense seek no other sense.”

Advocates of all four interpretive approaches to Revelation agree that it was written to assure the recipient of the ultimate triumph of Christ over all who rise up against Him and His saints. The readers of Revelation were facing dark times of persecution, and even worse times would follow. Therefore, they needed to be encouraged to

persevere by standing firm in Christ in view of God’s plan for the righteous and the wicked. Revelation was also written to challenge complacent Christians to stop compromising with the world.

Revelation had a word of blessing for the 1st century church just as it has a word of blessing for the 21st century church.

This morning, in the first three verses of chapter one, we will see four essential principles are given that govern the great revelation of Jesus Christ written to inspire and motivate us to faithfulness and obedience.

The Person of the Revelation Verse 1a .. <sup>1a</sup> *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ,”*

The Purpose of the Revelation Verse 1b ...<sup>1b</sup> *“which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants,”*

The Penman of the Revelation Verse 1c-2 ... <sup>1c</sup> *“and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw”.*

The Promise of the Revelation Verse 3 ... <sup>3</sup> *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and <sup>1</sup> heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

Friends, the heavens are opened in this book, and we are going to see the Lord Jesus in His sovereign majesty, power, and eternal glory. In the gospels, we saw Jesus in humility as the one who is made in the likeness of men in order to suffer the death on the cross. In the book of Revelation, we will see Him in power as the resurrected Christ who is coming to judge the world and make an end of sin.

In the gospels, we saw Jesus as the lamb without spot or blemish who has come to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind. In the book of Revelation, we will see Jesus as the “lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5) who will open the book of the 7 seals which contain judgments to come upon the earth.

My prayer is that you will know Jesus, the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the King of kings and Lord of lords and worship Him now and find great comfort, strength, and courage to be His witness.

## **I. The Person of the Revelation**

Verse 1a.. *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ”*

The word “revelation” is a translation of the Greek “**apokalypsis**”. The Greek word “**apo**” means “away” and “**kalypsis**” means “a cover.” So literally revelation is an “uncovering or unveiling.” Unfortunately, our English word apocalypse is today a synonym for chaos and catastrophe. But the Greek verb simply means “to uncover, to reveal, to make manifest.” In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world.

John’s prophecy is primarily the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the revelation of future events. You must not divorce the Person from the prophecy, for without the Person of Christ there could be no fulfillment of the Revelation. While all Scripture is revelation from God (2 Timothy 3:16), the book of Revelation is of Jesus Christ. While this book is certainly revelation from Christ (22:16), it is also the revelation about Him.

In Revelation 1–3, Christ is seen as the exalted Priest-King ministering to the churches. In Revelation 4–5, He is seen in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God, reigning on the throne. In Revelation 6–18, Christ is the Judge of all the earth; and in Revelation 19, He returns to earth as the conquering King of kings. The book closes with the Jesus the heavenly Bridegroom ushering His bride, the church, into the glorious heavenly city. You might say that Revelation is a “Him” book. It is a book about Him – Jesus our glorious Savior!

Notice again verse 1, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him”* – notice the capital H. God gave this book to whom? To Jesus Christ. Why did God the Father give this book to Jesus Christ?

Look at Philippians 2:5-11 with me... <sup>5</sup> *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup> *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* <sup>8</sup> *Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* <sup>9</sup> *For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,* <sup>10</sup> *so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* <sup>11</sup> *and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

John MacArthur writes, (quote) “Christ’s exaltation, promised in Philippians 2, is described in detail throughout Revelation. The book of Revelation is the Father’s gift to the Son in a deep and marvelous sense. As a reward for His perfect, humble, faithful, holy service, the Father promised to exalt the Son. The book of Revelation chronicles the Son’s inheritance from the Father, ending in the showing of the full glory of Christ.” (end quote)

The book of Revelation, then, details the Son’s inheritance from the Father. Unlike most human written wills, this document can be read because it is not a sealed, private document. But not everyone has the privilege of understanding it, only those to who know Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit in them.

And so as we move through this book in the coming months, we should always be asking, not only What is this passage revealing? but also, What is this passage revealing about Jesus? How can I know, worship, and honor Jesus as my Lord and Savior?

Because the Person of Revelation is Jesus Christ.

## II. The Purpose of Revelation

Verse 1... *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,”*

Many people read verse 1 and see the words “must soon take place” and think of the shortness of time. But it has been 2,000 since these things were written and most of them have yet to be fulfilled.

The word “soon” in verse 1 comes from two Greek words. They are: “en” which means “in” and “tachos” which means “quickness; swiftness”. We get our words “tachometer” and “taxi” from this word.

The purpose of the words “*must soon take place*” is that the action will be sudden when it comes, not necessarily that it will occur immediately. Once the end-time events begin, they will occur in rapid succession.

If you are in a city and need to get somewhere in a hurry, you flag down a taxi, you hop in and take off. That is the way the end time events will take place. Once they begin, they will “take off like a speeding taxi.”

The return of Christ is imminent, once these events begin, they will not cease until they are all fulfilled!

We also need to remember that God is not limited by considerations of time in the same way man is. 2 Peter 3:8–9 says, *“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*

We all must be grateful to the Lord for His patience - if you became a Christian 20 years ago, you thank God that Christ did not return 21 years ago!

Revelation’s emphasis on future events sets it apart from all other New Testament books. The first four books of the New Testament Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are about the past, especially the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the next twenty-two New Testament books (Acts and the Epistles) are about the present, especially the life of the church.

Revelation, though it contains some information about the past (Revelation 1) and the present (Revelation 2–3), it primarily focuses on the future (Revelation 4-22).

Look at Revelation 1:19... *“Therefore, write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”*

This verse is an outline for the whole book. The Book of Revelation may be divided into three parts based on Jesus’ words in Revelation 1:19 to record *“what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.”* The things which you have seen (Past) in chapter 1.

The things which are (Present) in chapters 2-3 addressing the seven churches of Asia Minor The things that will take place (Future) in chapters 4-22.

Acts 1:7 warns us to not to try to set the *“times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.”* Instead, we are always to heed their Lord’s warning in Mark 13 that Adrian read, we are to *“be on the alert, for you do not know which day or hour that your Lord is coming.”*

The knowledge that the events depicted in the book of Revelation are soon to take place has and the purpose is to motivate us to live holy, obedient lives.

We have seen the Person of the Revelation is Jesus Christ and the Purpose of the Revelation is to recognize the things which must soon take place to motivate us to live holy, obedient lives. Next we see:

### **III. The Penman of the Revelation**

Verse 1c-2... <sup>1c</sup> *“and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw”*.



Revelation is a blessed gift from God the Father which He gave to His Son which the Lord Jesus graciously shares with us.

**Notice the divine or heavenly chain of communication of this great unveiling: God  
→ Jesus Christ → angel → John → His slaves or servants (Gr. *doulos*).**

The book of Revelation is unique because it is the only book sent and communicated to its human author by angels. Not only were angels involved in transmitting the book of Revelation to John, but they also play a prominent role in the scenes of Revelation.

Angels appear in every chapter of Revelation except 4 and 13. The words “*angel*” or “*angels*” are used seventy-one times in the book of Revelation - more than in any other book in the Bible. In fact, one out of every four uses in Scripture of those words is in the book of Revelation. This book, then, is an important source of information on the ministry of angels.

But notice how verse 1 continues and goes into verse 2...<sup>2</sup> “*who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*”

The human agent to whom the angelic messengers communicated the book of Revelation is here identified as “His bond-servant John.” This was John the apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, one of the inner circles, a close friend of our Lord. He had beheld Christ’s glory on the Mt. of Transfiguration. He was there at the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension. Now, exiled on the island of Patmos (1:9) and writing this in the year 95 AD he is the penman of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Imagine how the enormity of the visions John received on that barren island must have staggered him. In the Gospel of John, John never directly referred to himself. Yet here he starts Revelation by mentioning how he received the revelation and in verse 9 where he was when he received it and he ends in 22:8 with, “*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.*” – which really expresses his amazement that he was receiving such overwhelming visions.

As he had loyally testified to the first coming of Christ in the Gospel of John and in his letters of 1, 2, and 3 John, so John faithfully proclaimed all that he saw concerning His second coming.

We have seen the Person of Revelation, the Purpose, and the Penman. Lastly, we see:

#### **IV. The Promise of Revelation**

Verse 3... . “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*”

The book of Revelation is the only book of the Bible that distinctly begins (1:3) and ends (22:7) with the promise that there is a special blessing for everyone who reads and heeds the prophecy of this book.

There are five other blessings in the book.

Revelation 14:13, “ *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!*” *‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them’* ”

Revelation 16:15, “*Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes on, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.*”

Revelation 19:9, “*blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

Revelation 20:6, “*blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection.*”

Revelation 22:14, “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.*”

The three participles in the promise of verse 3 are translated reads, hear, and heed and are in the present tense. Reading, hearing, and obeying the truths taught in the book of Revelation (and in the rest of Scripture) are to be a way of life for believers.

The purpose of Revelation is not to stir our imagination to wild speculative interpretations. It is to inspire and motivate us to faithfulness and obedience.

John wants us to read, hear and take heed to what is written in Revelation. Why? Because 1) we will be blessed and 2) the time is near. What we hear we need to obey. What we believe we need to live. The nearness of the Lord’s return is meant to challenge us to live faithful lives.

The phrase “*the time is near*” in verse 3 is like the phrase “*what must soon take place*” in verse 1 and refers to imminence. As believers we must be ready for Christ’s second coming. No one knows when these events will occur, so all believers must be prepared. We are called to live decisively and completely for God. Will you do that?

If you do not have a living relationship with the risen Christ, it is not too late for your repent and believe in Him. Revelation 22:17 says, “*The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*”

This is the wonderful invitation extended to you. If you recognize your sin, how you sin and fall short of the glory of God, and you realize that Christ is the only provider of salvation – then you need to come to repent and come in faith to Jesus while there is yet time before the judgment falls and it is too late. The gift of eternal life (here in Revelation 22 called the water of life) is free. It has been paid for by the death of Christ on the cross and is extended to all who are willing to receive it in simple faith.

Have you come to faith in Christ? Is He your true love? I have read the book of Revelation and I would not be serving you if I told you that you do not want to go through the tribulation, wrath and judgment that are coming to those who don’t belong to Christ. Do not wait for the day of God’s wrath. I beg you to repent and place your faith in Christ. Now is the day of salvation.

## Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What is your impression of the Book of Revelation? What questions do you have as we begin our study of Revelation?
2. Why does verse 1 begin with “The revelation of Jesus Christ” when it is written by John?
3. What sources did John say were the basis of this revelation?
4. For what purpose did God the Father give the revelation to Christ?
5. Who is the intended audience of Revelation? Can you say that you are a servant of Jesus Christ?
6. According to Revelation 1:1, 3 when will the events revealed in this book occur?
7. According to verse 3, what is promised to those who hear, read, and obey what they learn in Revelation?
8. Do you live your life as if “the time is near” for Christ’s return? If you knew Jesus was going to return tomorrow, what situations or relationships would you want to give your attention to?
9. How can you be praying for those who need to know the good news about our great Savior, Jesus Christ? What else can you do?

**CHAPTER 2**  
**“To Him Who Loves Us”**  
**Revelation 1: 4-8**

<sup>4</sup> “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—<sup>6</sup> and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. <sup>8</sup> ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Last week we saw The Purposes of the Book of Revelation :

1. To reveal Jesus Christ in His glory, honor, and power.
2. To correct the moral and doctrinal problems that existed in the seven churches of Asia.
3. To give encouragement and hope to believers who are suffering and inform them of the ultimate triumph of true believers and the final victory of our Lord Jesus Christ as He comes to earth in judgment and glory.

According to early church historian Eusebius, the Roman emperor Domitian was second after Nero to authorize harsh persecution against Christians. Particularly offensive was emperor Domitian’s insistence on being addressed as Dominus et Deus “Lord and God.” The refusal of the Christians to obey his edict led to severe persecution.

The chapel of San Giovanni in Olio outside of Rome marks the supposed site where Domitian decided to martyr the apostle John by boiling him in oil. To make sure that John died, Domitian even had the oil set on fire before John was thrown in. However, John did not die when thrown in the vat but survived the ordeal unscathed. Since Domitian realized that God’s hand was upon John and thus he didn’t have the power to kill him, he had John exiled to the Island of Patmos. John tells us in Revelation 1:9 it was there on Patmos that he received the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

When we are amid suffering, adversity, or persecution, we will be tempted to doubt God’s love. Not only do we struggle with our own doubts, but others may even say, “If God loved you, He wouldn’t have allowed this to happen.” My own experience suggests that we are far more inclined to question God’s love than we doubt either His sovereignty or His wisdom.

But Revelation 1:4-8 (see above) reveals to all true Christians, especially to those in the midst of painful trials, that Christ loves us and has secured for us a sure hope for the future.

In these verses we see a glorious Trinitarian greeting that focuses on Christ’s love, His saving work and the promise of His return. In verses 4-8 we find three truths of God’s gracious care of His children that assure you of Christ’s love and security even in your darkest trials.

First, we will see first a Sovereign Power in verses 4-5a, where grace and peace are wished for us from the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son.

Second, we will see a Supreme Provision in Christ's amazing love for us and His liberating us from enslavement and bondage to sin and His lifting us to be to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.

Third, we will see a Secure Promise in His return, our Lord's return that will be seen by all.

Whatever conflict and suffering you may be facing, the knowledge of Christ's love will sustain and strengthen you. To the One who loves us and the One who released us from our sins by His blood, the One who made us into a kingdom and made us priests before God, this book will give to Him the glory and the dominion that He deserves forever and ever. My prayer is that we each grasp God's amazing grace and have peace with God and experience the peace of God that comes from knowing, trusting and following Jesus Christ. And knowing how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, we will all reach a brand new and exalted level of capability to praise Christ and say with John, a hearty, "Amen."

Let's begin with:

## **I. A Sovereign Power**

Verse 4a... *"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come"*

The seven churches are named in verse 11... *saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

It is possible these seven churches were chosen because these cities lie on the major Roman roads through the province, and they were intended to be representative of the rest of the churches. We do know that there were more than seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey). For instance, the churches in Collosae, Iconium, Antioch and Lystra were there but not mentioned in this verse.

We will see in chapters 2 and 3 that each letter addresses the historical situation and needs of each of the seven churches in turn. At the same time, they are intended to typify the problems of all churches. The seven churches are representative churches in that the church in every age can look at the warnings and exhortations given to these churches as being for our own edification.

Verse 4 a... *"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come"*

Grace is God's unmerited favor; all that He does in redemption for underserved sinners and peace is first peace with God that comes through the reconciliation with God by faith in His Son that Adrian read in Romans 5:11 <sup>11</sup> *"And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"* and the peace "of God" that guards our hearts and minds in Christ that Philippians 4:7 describes <sup>7</sup> *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*



Revelation 1:4-5 describes all members of the Trinity as avenues, conduits, for the flow of grace and peace in our direction. John begins with the fountainhead, God the Father.

### **A. The Father is Perfect in His Person**

Notice verse 4, *“from Him who is and who was and who is to come.”* The focus is on God’s perfection as He relates to time and eternity. God the Father is distinguished from God the Son who is described in verse 5.

This threefold description views God in time dimensions (past, present, and future), although He is timeless. The eternal God is the source of all the blessings of salvation, all grace, and all peace.

God is who was, who is and who is to come is just as much in control of our unknown future and unnerving present as He is of our unpleasant past. Robert Mounce says, “An uncertain future calls for one who by virtue of His eternal existence exercises sovereign control over the course of history” In other words, little things or big things, all things are under His rule and control – past, present and future.

So, this is the eternal God who is sending us grace and peace. Then John moves to the second member of the Trinity,

### **B. The Spirit is Perfect in His Presence**

Grace and peace also run in our direction *“from the seven Spirits before His throne.”* The number “seven” signifies “completeness” and “perfection” in the Bible. In Genesis we see how the first mention of the Lord’s causing this number to have significance in the creation when He rested on the seventh day, and then decreed that the seventh day be set aside as holy unto the Lord. The number seven is used 49 times in Revelation (7 x7).

The seven spirits (capital S) is a reference to the Holy Spirit. This confirmed in Revelation 1:4 since this a Trinitarian greeting.

Look at Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 with me... 3:1 *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.’”*

4:5 *“Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”*

5:6 *“And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”*

John tells us, the Holy Spirit who energizes and equips the churches for service is the Spirit who proceeds from the very throne of God. We are indeed made sufficient for every assignment, every challenge, for the God who lives in us is the God who is before the throne! The One who is in heaven, is the One who also is in us!

### C. The Son is Perfect in His Provision

Though it is unusual, John places the Son last in this greeting from the Trinity for emphasis. John will say more about the Son here than he does the Father and the Holy Spirit put together because the focus of Revelation is on Jesus! The entire book is a vision of Christ sent to the persecuted, disheartened Christians in Asia Minor who were suffering immensely.

Notice three tremendous truths about Jesus are highlighted and explained in verse 5a...

#### 1. His Reliability – Verse 5a ... “*and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness*”

Verse 5a says Jesus is “*the faithful witness,*” the trustworthy revealer of the Father (John 14:9). By His perfect, sinless life and by His words and works He showed us the character of God.

A faithful witness is one who always speaks the truth. And Christ always speaks the truth, always the faithful witness, never deviates from what is true. In fact, in Revelation 3:14 He is called “*the Amen, the faithful and true Witness.*” Jesus says in John 18:37, “*For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*”

Jesus is sending us His testimony here in this book, and He is a faithful witness.

Second, verse 5 says Jesus is the “*firstborn from the dead.*”

#### 2. His Resurrection - verse 5a

Jesus did what no person has ever done: He died, rose from the dead, and stayed alive. However, He is not the only one who will do this, He is the firstborn, the first of a new order, the pledge and promise of our resurrection!

Firstborn in from the Greek “*prōtotokos,*” which means “preeminent.” Off all who have ever been raised before or after, He is the preeminent one. In Psalm 89:27, God says “*I shall make Him My firstborn,*” – that is – “My inheritor.”

This book is the story of God exalting the “*prōtotokos,*” the chief of all who have ever been or ever will be raised from the dead.

Then he gives Him a third title: “*The ruler of the kings of the earth.*”

#### 3. His Royalty –verse 5b

This is a recurring theme in Revelation (11:15; 17:15; 19:16). Note it is not He will be the ruler of the kings of the earth...He is the ruler of the kings of the earth! All authorities, spiritual and earthly, are under His dominion and rule. That is true now and it will be made crystal clear when He comes again.

All glory and dominion belong to the rightful king, Jesus Christ – all the more reason for the faithful to remain steadfast.

So, first we have an incredible blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Grace and Peace from the awesome Sovereign Power, next we see:

## II. A Supreme Provision

Look at the end of verse 5, *“to Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”*

### A. Christ’s Love – verse 5c

Isn’t this the greatest marvel of all, that Jesus should love me, and that He should love you though we have been utterly unworthy of His love? Yet He loved us of free, rich, sovereign grace. Not because we were lovely, but because He is loving. Not because we were gracious, but because He is full of grace.

Notice verse 5 does not say that He cleansed us from our sin, he liberated us from bondage to sin and then loved us. It does not say that Jesus took away our sin, and then loved us when we were clean. No, it is not “released and loved,” it is, *“loved and released us.”*

Romans 5:8 says, *“He loved us while we were still sinners”* and Romans 5:10 describes us as God’s enemies!

The love is first, and because He loved us in our sins, and in spite of them, He pays the ransom with his own life. It was His love for us that bound Him to the cross. Again Romans 5:8, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

John wrote in 1 John 4:8 that God loves us because *“God is love”* and in 1 John 4:19 *“We love, because He first loved us.”*

So, Revelation 1 is an exalted hymn of praise. In verse 5 it is *“to Him who loves us,”* present tense, this is abiding love. Jesus did not finish His love by His death. He loves you still. When He was poor on earth, and despised and rejected of men, He loved you, and now exalted at God’s right hand, and all angels fall down and worship Him, He loves you still, and He will always love you.

Paul says in Romans 8:38 *“nothing will separate us from the love of Christ”*. God’s love is not a past experience, it is a present reality. And His love for us at this present moment is in as full a force as it was when Jesus died on the cross.

The Lord’s unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. It is true whether you believe it or not. Your doubts do not destroy God’s love, nor does your faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.

But the experience of that love (and the comfort it is intended to bring) is dependent upon your believing the truth about God’s love as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Do you know the love of Christ? Do you believe it? Are you grateful for His love?

And as amazing as His love is, it is not just a sentiment but an action He takes, as verse 5 continues, *“To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”* Here we see His love that results in His liberating us from bondage to sin and the penalty of sin.

### **B. His Liberation – verse 5c**

The KJV and NKJV read He *“washed us”* viewing sin as a stain, and that is certainly true. However, the best manuscripts render the Greek text as He *“lost”* or *“set us free”* where sin is viewed as a chain that keeps us in bondage.

Before God saved me, I was living for myself, my own desires, my own pleasures. I got into trouble and was arrested by the police and I remember being handcuffed to a ring in jail. I did not have the key and there was no way to free myself. It really is a vivid picture of our condition apart from Christ. Enslaved and in bondage to sin.

If you grew up in morally upright or Christian home it can be difficult to understand your own depravity and true condition. Because you were generally upright and morally decent compared to others. It is difficult for us to see ourselves as God saw us, as wretched, miserable, rebellious sinners.

Listen to Paul’s description in Ephesians 2:1-5... <sup>1</sup>*“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:*<sup>2</sup> *‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;’*<sup>3</sup> *and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.*<sup>4</sup> *But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*<sup>5</sup> *Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.’ ”*

Jesus freed us from sin’s penalty, our justification.  
He is freeing us from sin’s power, our sanctification.  
He will free us from sin’s presence, our glorification.

Revelation 1:5, *“to Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”* “Blood” is a term referring to His entire atoning work. When you see the reference to the blood of Christ in Scripture, it is a reference to His full atonement. Blood signifies death, and in the case of Christ, sacrificial, substitutionary death for sin.

Through His death, His atoning work on the cross, He released us from our sins. My, what a great truth!

God could not remove our sins without an infinite cost to both Him and His Son. And because of their great love for us, both were willing—yes more than merely willing—to pay that great cost, the Father in giving His one and only Son, and the Son in laying down His life for us.

As Romans 8:1 says, *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* As we just sang in the hymn, “Guilty, vile, and helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!” Can I get an Amen?

Listen friends, our greatest need is not freedom from adversity. All the possible tragedies that could occur in this life cannot in any way be compared with the absolute tragedy of eternal separation from God. Jesus said in Luke 10:20 “*no earthly joy could compare with the eternal joy of our names written in Heaven*”. In like manner, no earthly adversity can compare with that awful calamity of God’s eternal judgment in hell.

God showed His love by meeting our greatest need—a need so great that no other need can even come close to it in comparison. If you want proof of God’s love for you, then you must look first at the Cross where God offered up His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Calvary is the one objective, absolute, irrefutable proof of God’s love for us.

He releases us from the chains of sin, that He may bind us with the bonds of love. If God loved me enough to give His Son to die for me when I was His enemy, surely, He loves me enough to care for me now that I am His child. Having loved me to the ultimate extent at the Cross, He cannot possibly fail to love me in my times of adversity. Having given such a priceless gift as His Son, surely, He will also give all else that is consistent with His glory and my good. Romans 8:32 says, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*”

To be loved, forgiven, released from the penalty and the dominion of sin, adopted as a child of God and credited with the perfect righteousness of Christ is more than enough... but Jesus does even more.

### **C. His Legislation – verse 6**

Verse 6... “*and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”

Jesus didn’t just save us, He “*made us to be a kingdom.*” What does John mean by that? We have a King, and we have common life under that King, under His authority. This is a collective designation for all believers. We who believe are all in this sphere of God’s rule through Christ, and that kingdom is entered by faith in Jesus Christ.

He loves us. He loves us so much that He released us from our sins through His blood, through His atonement on the cross. He loves us so much that He made us into a community of saints forever, bound together in the confines of a kingdom over which He rules; and we enjoy His loving rule and His loving sovereign, almighty protection.

Furthermore, says John, “*He made us priests to His God and Father.*” A priest is one who had the right to enter God’s presence. In Israel, the priest and the priest alone could go into the Holy Place; and once a year, the high priest into the Holy of Holies where God was.

The Old Testament priesthood sent a message that it wasn’t easy to approach God. The ordinary Israelite could not offer his own sacrifices; he had to go through the priest who offered his sacrifice for him. The priest served as a go-between to bridge the gap between God and man.

But 1 Peter 2:5 says to New Testament believers, you are “*a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”

In the Old Testament, they had a priesthood.



In the New Testament, we are a priesthood.

Every believer is a priest. You and I are holy a priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices thru Jesus Christ.

There is another way to look at what it means to be a priest. The Latin word for priest is **pontifex**, which itself comes from two words means “to make” and “bridge.” A priest makes a bridge between God and man. We are Christ representative here on earth to be bridge-builders for him.

We do that when we offer our lives to the Lord.

We do that when we worship God.

We do that when we love one another.

We do that when we give.

We do that when we witness to the lost.

We do that when we pray.

Paul calls us ambassadors. Peter and John calls us priests.

We have seen the Sovereign Power of Father, Holy Spirit and Son. We have seen the Supreme Provision of Jesus Christ in His Love, His Liberation and His Legislation. Finally, John ends with:

### **III. A Secure Promise**

Verses 7-8... <sup>7</sup>“*BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*” <sup>8</sup>“*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who<sup>1</sup>is to come, the Almighty.”

Having discussed Christ’s work of redemption, John now draws attempt to Christ’s day of consummation when He will return in triumph and bring history to a close. He closes with a three-fold promise.

#### **A. His Return will be Seen – verse 7a**

Verse 7, “*behold He coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him.*”

During the incarnation, Christ’s glory was veiled. Only Peter, James, and John caught a glimpse of it at the Transfiguration. But at His second coming every eye will see Him; His glory will be obvious to the entire human race.

#### **B. His Return will be Sorrowful – verse 7b**

Verse 7 continues, “*behold He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.*”

John now combines Daniel 7:13 with Zechariah 12:10 and notes the audience to this epiphany includes those “*who pierced Him.*” In that day Israel will see and understand that they (along with us) crucified their Messiah. And, “all the families of the earth will mourn over Him. This is certain. Amen.” Yes, Israel will mourn and the

nations will mourn. But (as we will see in Revelation 5:9-10; 7:1-17) by God's grace, some will mourn in repentance and salvation, Jew and Gentile.

Others, however, will mourn in remorse as the just and righteous judgment of God is poured out in the great day of wrath (6:16-17), what is called "*the great tribulation*" (7:14). Sadly, they will seek death not deliverance (6:16). Repentance will not be found in their hearts (9:21).

### C. His Return is Sure – verse 8

Verse 8... "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" says the Lord God, '*who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.*'"

"*Alpha and the Omega*" emphasizes God's omniscience. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last. All knowledge is conveyed through the letters of the alphabet; thus God's designation of Himself as the Alpha and the Omega affirms that He has all knowledge. He knows, therefore, the certainty of this promise.

The designation of God as the "*Almighty*" at the end of verse 8 affirms His omnipotence. Since He is all powerful, nothing can hinder Him from carrying out His sovereign will. No one or no one thing can possibly prevent Christ from returning in glory.

So, what are we to do with this information? What are we to do in light of His coming again? Let me close with three thoughts about what we should do with a message like this.

1. We should be sure that we are ready to meet Him when He comes. Are you ready? Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? Are living today as if He is returning tomorrow?

Jesus said in Matthew 24:44, "*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*"

2. We should be in prayer for those who are not ready; and we should get busy and tell them how to be ready.

3. You need to understand and rest in Christ's unfailing love for you.

In Psalm 13:1 David prayed, "*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*"

David had his doubts, he struggled with them. In fact, in the next verse he continues his struggle as he asks, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts?" He felt God had, at least for a time, forgotten him. But David, by the enabling power of God, won his struggle. He overcame his doubts. He could then say in Psalm 13:5-6, "*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.*"

You and I, like David, must wrestle with our thoughts. With God's help we, too, can come to the place, even in the midst of our adversities or struggles, where we will be able to say, "I trust in Your unfailing love."

Friends, Jesus came the first time in humiliation; He will return in exaltation. He came the first time to be killed; He will return to kill His enemies. He came the first time to serve; He will return to be served. He came the first time as the suffering servant; He will return as the conquering king.

*“To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What experiences in your life have tempted you to doubt God’s love and care for you?
2. When you have doubted God’s love, what has helped you regain confidence in His love for you?
3. What is significant about the number 7 in Revelation? What does it mean?
4. Why is Revelation only addressed to 7 churches? How does Revelation apply to our church?
5. What do “grace” and “peace” mean? How is grace extended to us by God? How do you experience peace with God and the peace of God?
6. How is Jesus described in verse 5? In what sense is He “the faithful witness”? The “firstborn of the dead”? The “ruler of the kings of the earth”?
7. According to verses 5 and 6, what has Christ done for us? How important is the present tense and past tense in verse 5? How is “His blood” a reference to His full atonement?
8. How are believers a “kingdom” and “priests”? What is our purpose?
9. According to verse 7, what will happen when Christ comes?
10. How does Revelation 1:4-8 assure you of Christ’s love for you and how will it embolden you to be a faithful witness for Christ?

### CHAPTER 3

## “A Vision of the Glorified Christ”

### Revelation 1:9-20

<sup>9</sup> “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ <sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; <sup>13</sup> and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. <sup>14</sup> His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. <sup>19</sup> Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. <sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.’ ”

In C.S. Lewis’ book *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* the children had yet to meet Aslan (the ruler of Narnia), when Mr. Beaver tells Susan that Aslan is a great lion. Susan is surprised, since she assumed Aslan was a man. She then tells Mr. Beaver, “I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” She then asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is safe, to which Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King.”

Aslan as the King is a metaphor of Jesus and His Kingdom. In our text this morning, John writes the vision He has received of the glorified Christ. The vision John sees is quite different from the Christ that John had experienced as one of his closest disciples. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we read of a Christ who is tender, humble, holy, loving, kind, compassionate, and patient. In this vision, we see Christ clothed in royal majesty, splendor and power.

This vision of Jesus Christ must have been a monumental encouragement to the persecuted, distressed, discouraged, beleaguered believers in Asia Minor. They were undergoing persecution under emperor Domitian that had resulted in John himself, the author, being exiled and banished to the isle of Patmos.

And in this very difficult time when it looked as if things were bleak for the church, it was a wonderful thing to receive a book which predicted the glory of Jesus Christ in the future - not only that, which defined and described the present glory of Jesus Christ as we see it here in chapter 1. Because this vision of Jesus Christ that we will look at is not a future vision, it is a present vision. It is not one that says this is what Jesus Christ will be like and what He will do in the future, it is one which says this is what He is like now and this is what He is doing now.

So, here in 1:9-20 we see a powerful vision of Christ’s present ministry provides great hope and comfort to the suffering church. What hope this brings to people dying for their faith; what encouragement this is to Christians

in need of courage and perseverance; what accountability it demands from those who are straying from the truth. We will learn the place (verses 9-11), purpose (verses 12-16, 20) and power (verses 17-19) of this vision of Christ's present ministry to His church. And as we study this vision of the glorified Christ, we will see the glory of Christ is to shine in and through His church, reflecting His glory to the world (2 Corinthians 4:6).

My prayer for you as you look at this vision with me is that it will open your eyes to see the glory of your Lord, the Lord of the church.

## **I. The Place of the Vision** **Verses 9-11**

We learned in 1:2 that John had been faithful to preach the Word of God and proclaim the testimony of Jesus. What did he learn? First, John learned there is:

### **A. Partnership in Suffering for Jesus – Verse 9a**

Verse 9a ... *“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus”*

John had every reason to lay out his resumé to get everyone's attention. “I, John – the author of the gospel of our Lord's life and ministry; the writer of three epistles; one among the three closest apostles to our Lord – sitting next to Him in the upper room; the only disciple to appear at the cross of Christ; the one our Lord gave custody of Mary, His mother.”

This is all remarkably true. However, John says, *“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the struggles of life in Christ.”*

John's own Lord and Savior had suffered, his brother, James, had been martyred. Paul and Peter were also martyred. Antipas (2:13) was killed because of his testimony for Christ. Many Christians share in the partnership of suffering then and now. As 2 Timothy 3:12 reminds us, *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

A second lesson we see is that there is

### **B. Perseverance in Suffering for Jesus– Verse 9b**

Verse 9b... *“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus”*

Notice the word tribulation – it means pressure, trouble, affliction don't need to sidetrack our walk with Christ.

Also notice the word kingdom “*basileia*” in verse 9. Jesus inaugurated His kingdom as a suffering Savior. We enter the kingdom and serve as suffering saints. The pain and the praise go together, reigning and suffering are not mutually exclusive. It is the way of our Lord. It is also to be our way.



Verse 9 says, “*I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*” Perseverance “*hupomone*” means to abide under a heavy load, to endure, to stay with it, hang in there, not throw in the towel or drop out of the race. John’s exile to Patmos was no accident. It did not catch God by surprise any more than any crisis or tribulation we face catches Him off guard or unprepared. It is in Christ, of Christ and for Christ. Jesus provided the needed strength for John, and He will do the same for us. James 1:4 reminds us <sup>4</sup> *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* ”

Serving Christ is not easy. It is costly! Patmos was a 10 x 6-mile mountainous island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). It may have been a penal colony for exiled criminals banished and sentenced to hard labor in the rock quarries. Why was John sent there?

End of verse 9... ,” *was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*”

But John’s exile to Patmos was no accident. It did not catch God by surprise any more than the martyrdom of the other disciples. It is in Christ, of Christ and for Christ. Christ will provide the needed strength for John, and for us, to endure extreme trials and adversity. He is a faithful Father who will never give up on us. John, like Peter, Paul and the Lord received his greatest revelation and climbed his highest spiritual mountain during a time of extreme suffering and persecution for Christ. It’s been said, “God’s pain always brings gain.” There is partnership in suffering, perseverance in suffering, and third:

### **C. Praise in Suffering for Jesus – Verses 10-11**

Verse 10 begins with, “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.*”

“In the Spirit,” is a phrase that occurs also in 4:2; 17:3; 21:10 for the trancelike state in which the Spirit gave the visions to John.

“*The Lord’s Day*” is a reference to Sunday. There is a different Greek construction to refer to the future and terrible “day of the Lord” when Christ returns in wrath and judgment.

In this verse, John refers to “*the Lord’s Day*” –used in the church as a reference to the day the church specially worshiped, for it was the day the Lord rose from the dead.

Ignatius, writing just fifteen years after John wrote this Revelation, said, “the Christians ceased to keep the Jewish Sabbath and lived by the Lord’s Day, on which our life shines, thanks to Him.”

Pliny, the unbelieving Roman governor, wrote around the same time – A.D. 110, and I quote, “The Christians gather on Sunday, the first day of the week, to sing praises to their Lord Jesus.”

Verses 10-11... .<sup>10</sup> “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’* ”

When John says ‘behind me’ it is simply an appropriate—if dramatic—way of describing a voice which comes unexpectedly from an unseen person. Given that Jesus speaks next, the voice obviously belongs to him. It is ‘loud’ and ‘trumpet like’: that is to say, the voice is clear, as well as great in volume. And what does the Lord say?

Verse 11... “*saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’*”

These were actual historical churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. He tells John to write and write he does, one of the most magnificent books of all time.

Now most believe John returned to Ephesus after Domitian was assassinated in 96 AD. However, do not forget that at this point in time John did not know that. As far as he is concerned, his best days of ministry are behind him. This is the end for John.

God was not finished speaking through John. There in the bleakness and loneliness and barrenness of Patmos, God came to John and revealed a powerful vision the glorified Christ. Why?

## **II. The Purpose of the Vision**

Read verses 12-16...<sup>12</sup> “*Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;*<sup>13</sup> *and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.*<sup>14</sup> *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.*<sup>15</sup> *His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.*<sup>16</sup> *In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*”

Having described the circumstances in which he received it, John then related the vision itself. This revealing and richly instructive look at the present work of the glorified Son of God discloses three aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ’s constant ministry to His church.

### **A. Christ Intercedes for His Church – Verses 12-13, 20**

Verses 12-13...<sup>12</sup> “*Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;*<sup>13</sup> *and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.*”

When John turns after hearing the voice behind him (1:10), he sees seven golden lampstands. This image is built on Exodus 25:31–40, where God commanded Moses to build a gold lampstand with seven branches - the sacred menorah that became a symbol of Judaism. In 1 Kings 7:49, Solomon placed five each on both sides of the altar of incense. In Zechariah 4:2, 10, lampstands signified “the eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth.” Here it is not one sevenfold lampstand but seven separate lampstands, referring to the seven churches. Which are to be shining lights for God in the midst of a hostile world.

In the middle of the seven lampstands stands Christ in His role as “*one like a son of man.*” This is taken from Daniel 7:13, which describes a messianic deliverer who opposes the four beasts and the little horn and is given

sovereign power over the nations. The fact that Christ stands amid the lampstands means He is not aloof from his people. He is deeply involved in their situation, superintending, and guiding them. Note the language: He is in the middle of them, holds them in his right hand (1:16), and in 2:1 we are told He walks among them (2:1). He is deeply committed and acting on behalf of his followers.

The robe here pictures Christ in His role as the Great High Priest of His people. That He was girded across His chest with a golden sash reinforces that interpretation, since the high priest in the Old Testament wore such a sash (Exodus 28:4; Lev. 16:4).

The book of Hebrews says much about Christ's role as our Great High Priest. In 2:17–18 the writer of Hebrews notes, *“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”* In Hebrews 3:1 he refers to Christ as the *“High Priest of our confession,”* while in Hebrews 4:14 he reminds believers that *“we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.”*

*Our Great High Priest is “able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”* (Heb. 7:25).

As our High Priest, Christ once offered the perfect and complete sacrifice for our sins and permanently, faithfully intercedes for us. As Romans 8:33–34 tells us, *“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”*

Jesus has an unequalled capacity to sympathize with us in all our dangers, sorrows, trials, and temptations. Hebrews 2:18 says *“since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”* Hebrews 4:15, *“We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”*

When Jesus was crucified, He was stripped of his garments, but now He wears the robe of righteousness and faithfully intercedes for His church.

1 John 1:9 tells us *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,”* because as 1 John 2:1 tells us in Him *“we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”*

Christ faithfully intercedes for His church.

## **B. Christ Purifies His Church – Verses 14-15**

Daniel 7:9 says that the hair of the Ancient of Days *“was white like wool,”* which in ancient culture represented accumulated wisdom and dignity. Interestingly, white wool was also a major industry in the region of Revelation's original audience, especially of Laodicea (Revelation 3:18).

The wool and the snow picture dazzling whiteness, as we saw in Mark 9:3 .. at the transfiguration where Christ's *"garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them."* The emphasis here is on Christ's incredible wisdom, purity, and splendor. White symbolizes both moral purity and absolute victory over the forces of evil. Ephesians 5:25-27, *"Christ ... loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."*

In Colossians 1:22 Paul explained that Christ *"has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."* In 1 Peter 1:15-16 Peter reminds believers that God expects them to *"like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"*

Continuing his description of the glorified Christ, John noted that *"His eyes were like a flame of fire."* His searching, revealing, infallible gaze penetrates to the very depths of His church, revealing to Him with piercing clarity the reality of everything there is to know. Jesus declared in Matthew 10:26, *"There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known."* Hebrews 4:13, *"There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."* The omniscient Lord of the church will not fail to recognize and deal with sin in His church.

This concept is further enhanced in verses 15 when it says, *"His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace."* The bronze altar in the temple was related to sacrifice for sin and divine judgment on it.

Verse 15 concludes with *"His voice was like the sound of many waters."*

When Christ spoke again, it was no longer with the trumpetlike sound of verse 10. His voice was now *"like the sound of many waters,"* a familiar analogy to the surf crashing on the rocky shores of Patmos in a storm. The voice of the eternal God was similarly described in Ezekiel 43:2, showing another parallel affirming Christ's deity.

The awesome voice of God (Ezekiel) and Christ (here) is proclaiming judgment upon the nations and salvation for His people. Today Christ speaks to His church directly through the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

Christ intercedes for His church, Christ's purifies His church, and third:

### **C. Christ Protects His Church – Verse 16**

Verse 16a.. *"In His right hand He held seven stars",*

As the head of His church (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), Christ exercises authority in His church. In John's vision, Christ is holding seven stars in His right hand, identified in verse 20 as *"the angels of the seven churches,"* which symbolized those authorities.

Verse 16b... *"and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; "*

Christ's presence also provides protection for His church. The *"sharp two-edged sword"* that came *"out of His mouth"* is used to defend the church against external threats. The sword was the primary image of Roman might,

called the *ius gladii*, “the law of the sword.” The message here is that Rome is not in control; Christ is. The Old Testament background is Isaiah 11:4 (“*he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth*”) seen through Isaiah 49:2 (“*He made my mouth like a sharpened sword*”).

His word is potent (Hebrews 4:12–13) and will be used against the enemies of His people (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8), so that all the power of the forces of darkness will be unable to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ from building His church.

Verse 16c... “*and His face was like the sun shining in its strength*”.

John’s vision of the glorified Lord of the church culminates in this description of the radiant glory evident on His face. And as Adrian read from 2 Corinthians 4, the glory of God through Christ shines in and through His church, reflecting His glory to the world.

We have seen the place of the vision, the purpose of the vision, and finally:

### **III. The Power of the Vision**

Notice three effects of this vision:

#### **A. Overwhelming Fear**

Verse 17a... “*When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.*”

John fell at the Lord’s feet as though he were dead! And this is the apostle who leaned on Jesus’ chest! (John 13:23) A vision of the exalted Christ can only produce awe and fear.

#### **B. Compassionate Assurance – Verses 17b-18**

Verses 17b-18 ...” *I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,<sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’*”

The Lord reassured John by touching him and speaking to him. “*Fear not!*” is a great encouragement for any child of God. We need not fear life, because He is “*The Living One.*” We need not fear death, because He died and is alive, having conquered death. And we need not fear eternity because He holds the keys of hades (the world of the dead) and of death. The One with the keys is the One who has authority.

The third effect of this vision is:

#### **C. Steadfast Duty – Verse 19**

Verse 19 .. “*Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*”

The One who controls death and the power of death now turns His attention to John, the chosen messenger for these apocalyptic truths. He has already commissioned John to write in 1:11. This passage goes further and enumerates the content of the prophetic messages. Considering Jesus' cosmic victory over death and the evil powers, John is now commanded to write down what God is revealing to him. John is steadfast in his fulfilling his duty to His Lord.

Verse 19 outlines the book. First, "*the things which you have seen,*" the vision John had just seen and recorded in verses 10–16. Next, "*the things which are,*" a reference to the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, which describe the present state of the church. Finally, John was to write "*the things which will take place after these things,*" the prophetic revelations of future events unfolded in chapters 4–22. This threefold command provides an outline for the book of Revelation, encompassing (from John's perspective) the past, present, and future.

What a Sunday this was for John! As far as he was concerned, he was stuck on Patmos and would never go home again. At this time for John and now for us, when Christians face their greatest times of insecurity, God reminds us of His supremacy and provides a marvelous vision of the glorified Christ. God revealed it to John and to us on the Lord's Day.

There is partnership, perseverance, and praise in suffering for Jesus. Why? Because Christ intercedes for us, He purifies His church and He protects His church. The power of the vision of the glorified Christ should overwhelm us, assure us, and embolden us to be steadfast in our witness for Him.

Ephesians 3:21 says "*To Him be the glory in the church.*" He wants to shine through His church. The glorious, exalted Lord of the church, present to empower, to intercede, to purify, to protect, and to be glorified through His church.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. When in your life have you had the most profound experience or encounter with the living God? What happened? How were you affected?
2. How can suffering, trials, and adversity help us mature and grow in Christ?
3. What are some of the characteristics that John and his believing readers share?
4. How was John “in the Spirit” when he received the vision?
5. What is the difference between “the Lord’s Day” and “the Day of the Lord”? Why does it matter?
6. What is the significance of Christ’s robe and the golden sash?
7. What does the description of Christ’s “head and hair as white as snow” mean?
8. What is the “sharp two-edged sword” that comes from Christ’s mouth? How does this provide comfort to Christians?
9. What effect did this vision of the risen Christ have on John?
10. Why is Revelation 1:19 such a significant verse in relation to our understanding of this book?





**CHAPTER 4**  
**“Ephesus: When Love Grows Cold”**  
**Revelation 2:1-7**

*<sup>1</sup>“ To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:<sup>2</sup> ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup> and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’”*

Churches develop reputations. “There is a conservative church ... liberal church ... strong Bible-teaching church ... socially minded church ... traditional church ... contemporary church ... elder led church ... the congregational run church ... and the list goes on.

However, of all the things that could be said about a church, I believe nothing could be more precious and meaningful than it be said, “that is a church that loves Jesus fervently. It is clear that Jesus is their first love.” Well, of all the many good things one might say about the church at Ephesus, that is the one thing you could not say. In fact, nothing could be more alarming or upsetting to hear Jesus Himself say, “*I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*”

Why does a church stop loving Jesus and what, if anything, can be done about it? To those questions our Lord provides an answer in our text.

This letter was written to the church at Ephesus. But each member of the church was responsible for his response. So was every member of the seven churches that will be addressed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. In these special messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gave each church an “X ray” of its condition. But He intended for all the churches to read these messages and benefit from them. (Note the plural “churches” in Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.)

While the letter was not written to us, it was written for us. And as we study each of the letters written to the seven churches, you must examine your own heart. So let me be up front and ask you:

Is Jesus the first love of your life? Is it clear you love Jesus by how you spend your time, what you pursue, and what you talk about?

Has there been a time when you loved Jesus passionately with all your heart, but now that love has waned and even grown cold?

Thankfully,

Jesus not only exposes the problem but provides the solution. In our text Jesus provides four steps to expose the issue but also inform us how to return to Christ as your first love.

My prayer is that each of us has Jesus as our first love. The church in Ephesus had a reputation for being biblically, doctrinally, theologically, educationally strong. And in many ways the same can be said about Cornerstone Community Church. But if love for Jesus and love for others is not the primary motivation of our hearts, then Cornerstone Community Church will begin to die. That's the warning that Jesus gives here. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:1, "*Knowledge makes one conceited, knowledge puffs up, it makes for a big head and small heart but love edifies people, builds up.*" Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:5, "*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*"

We need the proper balance of truth and love. Like a bird needs two wings to fly, so we each need truth and love. The first step that Jesus takes in the church in Ephesus is:

### **I. Jesus Examines Their Reputation Verses 1-3, 6**

Ephesus had become a center of commerce, one of the most prosperous cities in the ancient world. Three major trade routes met at Ephesus. It also contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the temple of the goddess Artemis (see Acts 19), which at 425 feet by 220 feet was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. The gospel was introduced to city of Ephesus by Paul's close friends and partners in ministry, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18–19). They were soon joined by the eloquent preacher and powerful debater Apollos (Acts 18:24–26). Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos laid the groundwork for Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 20).

Paul's protégé Timothy served as pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16, 18) and Tychicus (2 Tim 4:12), two more of Paul's fellow laborers, also ministered at Ephesus. Finally, according to the testimony of the early church, the apostle John spent the last decades of his life at Ephesus, from which he likely wrote his three epistles (1,2,3 John). John was no doubt leading the Ephesian church when he was arrested and exiled to Patmos.

So, the church at Ephesus was a strong church with a rich biblical heritage and from this church the rest of the seven churches were founded. It is now four decades later when Jesus begins his address in verse 1... "*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this*":

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word "**angelos**". The word's principal use in the Bible is in reference to heavenly angels. But it is also used to refer to human messengers (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52). In fact, the Scriptures are always given to men, to messengers and to leaders. And since we don't get to the futuristic part of the book until chapter four, there is every reason to assume that the word angel here in verse 1 means messenger, which would be a representative from the Ephesian church, most likely the pastor.

Jesus identifies Himself to this church as the one "*who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the golden lamp stands.*"

"*Holds*" means to firmly grip, indicating the authority Jesus exercises over the leadership of the church. The "*right hand*" is a place of strict accountability, strong protection, and strategic usefulness.

Christ walks among the seven golden lampstands, the seven churches, evaluating them. Church growth experts teach the key to growth is to ask what guests see when they visit your church. But the real key is to ask what Jesus sees as He walks through the church.

What does Christ see in our worship services, preaching, teaching, community groups, Bible studies, Sunday school classrooms counseling sessions?

What does Jesus see in our offices and parking lots?

What does Jesus see when He follows us home from church?

In verse 2, the Lord delivers His evaluation and begins with the declaration, *“I know.”* Jesus makes this statement to each of the seven churches. He says it to us today, *“I see all things and I know all things.”* You can fool some people all the time. You can fool all people sometime. You can never fool Jesus. He knows us fully, perfectly, and completely.

But notice the letter begins with compliments, not criticism. It begins with commendation not complaint. Christ tells the church what’s right before He tells them what’s wrong. He starts with their:

### **A. Sacrificial Deeds**

Verse 2 says, *“I know your deeds, your toil and your perseverance.”*

“Toil” means to work to the point of exhaustion. They wore themselves out for the mission and message of Christ. “Perseverance” means to endure under a heavy load. There were times when it was difficult for the members of this church to follow Christ. But they did not forsake the Lord. They carried heavy burdens for Christ without giving up. The church in Ephesus was not only known for their sacrificial deeds, but the Lord also commends their:

### **B. Sound Doctrine**

The doctrinal fidelity of this church is seen in their holy intolerance of sinning members. Verse 2 says, *“I know... you cannot tolerate evil men.”*

Verse 6 says, *“Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”* The Nicolaitans are only mentioned twice in Scripture. Their deeds are mentioned here in Revelation 2:6. Their doctrine is mentioned in Revelation 2:14-15... <sup>14</sup>*“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”* <sup>15</sup>*So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”*

Back in Numbers 22 and following, Balaam came along and seduced God’s people into idolatry, seduced God’s people into immorality. Balaam was a prophet but came along and instead of leading people to godliness, he led them to sin, to idolatry and to immorality. That’s what Balaam did. The letter to Pergamum links the Nicolaitans with Balaam’s false teaching that led Israel astray.

Clement of Alexandria identified the Nicolaitans as those who “lead a life of self-indulgence” (The Stromata 2. 20). Tertullian asserted that the Nicolaitans aimed at destroying the happiness of sanctity by their lust and luxury.

How in the world this could ever be allowed in the church, as it was in Pergamum in 2:15, is shocking, but here in Ephesus it was not allowed. They could spot a Nicolaitan because they could test the false teaching and immoral living. They were faithful to teach the truth and to obey the Lord even when it came to church discipline. They took the word of God literally and obeyed what Jesus said in Matthew 18. They called sin by its name. They could not tolerate counterfeit Christians.

In Acts 20:28-30, Paul instructed the Ephesian elders: *“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 from 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.”*

Paul’s ominous predictions came to pass. But false teachers were unable to harm the church at Ephesus. Notice again Revelation 2:2 says: *“I know... how you put to test those who call themselves apostles and they are not, and you found them to be false.”* When an “apostle” showed up, the church in Ephesus tested him. If he did not line up with the apostles’ doctrine, they rejected him.

Third, the Lord commends their steadfast diligence.

### **C. Steadfast Diligence**

Verse 3 says... *“and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake and have not grown weary.”*

Christians were persecuted, ridiculed, and maligned. But the church at Ephesus “patiently endured.” Verse 2 says they could not tolerate those who are evil. Using the same word, verse 3 says they have endured for Christ’s name’s sake.

They were faithful to the Word, faithful to the work, faithful to the Lord, faithful to the criteria by which you judge people; and in it all through the spiritual discernment, through the trouble, through all of it, they had never grown weary and always with the right motive – notice in verse 3 *“for My name’s sake.”* Which means they did it all for the glory of Christ.

In Paul’s parting words to the church at Ephesus he declared in Acts 20:27, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* The Ephesus church knew the counsel of God. They not only had heard it, but they had seen it exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul. They were zealous. They were biblically literate. They were evangelistic. They were solid in doctrine. They were committed to the Lord. But all of those combined could not substitute for the love of Christ they had forsaken.

So, Jesus first examines their reputation and secondly:

## **II. Jesus Exposes the Reality**

Verse 4... *“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”*

There are three verses of commendation. There is only one complaint. Verse 14 says to the church of Pergamum, *“But I have a few things against you.”* The Lord only had one thing against Ephesus. But it was so serious that he threatened to remove its lamp stand from its place if they did not repent. The heart of the problem was the problem of the heart. Jesus declares, *“You have left your first love.”* This complaint may point upward, inward, or outward. It may be love for Christ, love for one another, or love for the lost. The tone and content point to love for Christ.

To love the Lord is the main thing – in fact the vertical love determines the love on the horizontal. This church in Ephesus had everything but the main thing. They had not lost their first love. Jesus says in verse 4 *“you have your first love.”* It did not take place all at once. Little by little, the church drifted away until it abandoned its first love.

To the wives here, imagine your husband says to, “I don’t love you anymore. But nothing will change. I’ll still earn a living, sleep with you, and father your children. I just don’t love you anymore.” How would that make you feel? To leave your first love is to say, “Lord, I don’t love you like I once did. But I’ll still go to church. I’ll sing, I’ll pray, and I’ll give my money, my time and my talents. I just don’t love you.”

This is what happened in the church at Ephesus. They forsook their devotion to Christ. All that remained was dead orthodoxy, headless morality, empty religion.

Listen friend, it can happen to you! Loving theology cannot replace loving Jesus. Loving being right cannot replace humbly being right with Jesus. Labor is no substitute for love. Purity is no substitute for passion. Deeds are no substitute for devotion.

Ministry is based on love. In John 21 when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples and then reconfirmed Peter in the ministry, He did not ask Peter, “Are you willing to serve me, Peter? Have you got your doctrine straightened out, Peter? Do you know how to recognize a false prophet, Peter? Are you going to endure, Peter, through all the hardships? Are you dealing with sin, Peter? Do you hate sin?” No, three times Jesus asked him, *“Peter, do you ... love Me?”*

Has it happened to you? If there was a time when you loved Jesus more than you do now. Have you left your first love?

Jesus Examines Their Reputation

Jesus Exposes the Reality

### **III. Jesus Explains the Remedy**

Verse 5 .. *“Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”*

The church in Ephesus turned into the service of performance. It turned into a place where they defended their theology rather than love Jesus with all their heart, love one another, and love the lost. So, Jesus not only exposes the reality but He explains the remedy in three words, three imperatives, three commands:

#### **A. Remember**

Verse 5 says, “*Remember from where you have fallen.*” The church at Ephesus had fallen from the heights of devotion to Christ and needed to be restored. The first step was to remember from where they had fallen.

A lot of us have trouble in our Christian life, not from what we’ve never known, but from what we’ve forgotten. Some things you must remember. Remember what it was like when God’s grace first gripped you. You may not remember the moment you were saved. But you should remember the aftermath of God’s grace that saved you by the blood of Christ.

In two weeks, we have a Discovering Cornerstone class and one of my favorite parts is hearing the testimony of how people are saved.

Can you remember what it was like when you first came to Jesus and the weight of your sins was lifted from your heart? Can you remember when just the mention of His name brought tears to your eyes? Can you remember when your heart was tender and it felt like you were talking to Him face to face. Can you remember being so in love with Jesus you could not help sharing the good news of the gospel with your friends and family?

Go back to the time when your love for Jesus was all that mattered. What was it like? What is missing now?

## **B. Repent**

Matthew 22:37 records the Great Commandment: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*” Love for God is our greatest spiritual duty. Love for Christ is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. To know the Lord is to love the Lord. To allow love to grow cold is sin. The church at Ephesus was in sin. Jesus commanded them to remember and repent of their sin.

What is repentance? Repent (aorist imperative) – to change your mind resulting in a change of attitude and action. Think differently about your sin, sins of indifference, religious formalism, legalistic routine.

Do not pat yourself on the back for doing good things for the wrong reason. God looks at the heart. Where is your heart in all of this?

Jesus says remember, repent and:

## **C. Return**

Verse 5 says “*do the deeds you did at first.*”

Love is more than emotion. Love is what you do. 1 John 3:18 says, “*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*”

This is the second “first” in the text. There is the first love in verse 4; now there are the first deeds. What are the first deeds? Jesus does not specify. He leaves it to you to fill in the blanks. The first deeds are whatever you did when you loved Christ at first. Go back to the basics.

Back to reading the Bible; back to praying; back to witnessing; back to testifying; back to crying; back to praising His name; we need to get back to the things that marked us when we were deeply in love with Jesus. Get before Him today and ask Him to show you the way back.

The place where you first fell in love is the place where you first understood He loved you, not because you deserved it or could even earn it, but because He just did. The place where you first fell in love was probably somewhere near the cross.

The imperatives, three commands from the Lord: remember, repent and return.

Failure to obey His commands would bring dire consequences. Notice at the end of verse 5 Jesus warns, “*Repent, or else I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*” If this church did not heed the Lord’s final call, Jesus promises to remove your lampstand out of its place. The church is compared to a lampstand because we are to be a light for Jesus, but if the love for Him is gone then He will snuff the light out.

This is what ultimately happened. The city and church of Ephesus are no more. It is only as we love Christ fervently that we can serve Him faithfully.

We have seen Jesus Examines Their Reputation, Jesus Exposes The Reality, and Jesus Explains The Remedy.

#### **IV. Jesus Expounds the Reward**

Verse 7... “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*”

The letter to Ephesus closes with a three-fold exhortation and a promise.

##### **A. Commit**

Christ’s exhortation “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” is a call to commit to hear and put into practice what He teaches.

This emphasizes the sober responsibility that each of us must heed God’s voice in Scripture. Notice secondly Jesus addresses this, “*To him who overcomes.*”

##### **B. Conquer**

The term “overcomer” does not refer to those who have attained to a higher level of the Christian life but identifies all Christians. The apostle John defines it that way in 1 John 5:4-5, “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*”

Revelation 2:7 says, “*To the one who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*”

### C. Celebrate

The tree of life was in the Garden of Eden. The Lord banished Adam from the Garden, lest he also eat from the tree of life and so live forever in his fallen condition (Genesis 3:22-23). The second Adam, Jesus Christ, will grant the one who overcomes to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God.

At Calvary, Jesus said to the penitent criminal hanging beside him, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* All who trust the blood and righteousness of Christ will live with God forever. John 10:28 says, *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

In closing, we have learned from this letter to Ephesus that it is possible to be busy for God without being a blessing for God. In other words, it is possible to have religious efforts without redemptive effects; it is possible to have sacred activity without any lasting spiritual value. It is possible to love theology in your head but not love Jesus in your heart. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:2-3, *“If I have the gifts of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith . . . And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”*

It is possible to have a lofty reputation outside the church without having loving relationships inside the church.

I want you to be honest with yourself and with your Lord for just a moment. Have you left your first love? Are you busy, but busy out of duty and not out of love? Can you honestly say that you are filled with fervent, emotional, extravagant love for Jesus? Or would you have to say that your love for Jesus has grown cold and is not somewhat mechanical. It is not what it used to be, it is not what it could be, your love for Jesus is not what it should be. You need to remember, repent, and return to Him. If He has touched your heart, you need to run to Him. The time is now and the place is here.



### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How are Christ's care, presence, and protection communicated in verse 1?
2. What commendations did Christ have for the church at Ephesus?
3. How important is sound doctrine? How was doctrinal fidelity demonstrated in the church of Ephesus?
4. What is "first love"? Why are sacrificial deeds, sound doctrine, and steadfast diligence not enough to please Christ?
5. What things in your life have proved to be a distraction in your love for Christ? What things have you relied upon as "good enough" when your love for Christ has waned?
6. What is repentance? How is it connected with love and passion for Christ?
7. How important is it to keep remembering what Christ has done for you? How can you keep this a priority and daily practice?
8. What are some of the "deeds you did at first" when you first loved Christ? What are practices and habits that will help you grow closer to the Lord?
9. What will Jesus do if the church does not heed His warning?
10. Explain the concept of overcoming as used in Revelation 2:7. What reward does Jesus promise overcomers?



## CHAPTER 5

### “Smyrna: Be Faithful Until Death”

#### Revelation 2:8-11

<sup>8</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: <sup>9</sup> I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

We are studying the book of Revelation and in chapters 2 and 3, Jesus addresses each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. He calls the churches lampstands because the light of Christ is to shine thru the church in the midst of a dark world.

Last week we saw in Revelation 2:1-7 in Jesus’ letter to the church in Ephesus that they had everything but the main thing - they had left their first love. Jesus calls them to remember, repent, and return to Christ as their first love or else He will remove their lampstand, Jesus Himself will remove their light.

In our text today, the letter to the suffering church in Smyrna, they are also in danger of having their light removed – but not by Jesus. No, it is the enemy of Christ, Satan, who tries to extinguish the church in Smyrna.

So, Jesus writes this incredible letter to the suffering church in which He describes His care for His church and counsels them to be faithful until death.

We saw from the letter to the church in Ephesus in 2:1-7 that love for Christ and Christlike love for others is a primary distinctive mark of the church; but it is not the only distinctive marks of the church. Suffering is also a mark of the church and a mark of the Christian life. All people may suffer in this sinful world, but Christians get an extra kind of suffering from which other people are exempt. The suffering of persecution comes about specifically as a result of living out your Christian faith.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:22-23, “*Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.*”

Our Lord Jesus had to suffer to enter into His future glory, so we who follow Christ are going to experience pain as we journey along the path of future glory. And yet Christianity is not just a life of pain, but a life of painful joy.

Psalm 16:11 says, “*Lord, you will make known to me the path of life and in your presence is fullness of joy.*”

A Christian’s faith will be tested and this call to uncompromising faithfulness to Christ in the midst of persecution was especially pertinent in Smyrna, it was the first city in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) that had the honor of

building a temple to the Roman Emperor; and Smyrna prided itself on worship of the emperor. For Christians, this was a dangerous context to live especially because of the extent to which the worship of the Roman Emperor penetrated daily life.

The requirement in Smyrna was to profess Ceasar as Lord and to offer an annual sacrifice to to the emperor. But Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* – and often it is the kingdoms and rulers of this world that come into conflict with the kingdom of God. Jesus’ call here to the church in Smyrna, is a call to faithfulness in the midst of suffering. None of us have been put to death because of faith in Christ, but as your pastor I know that many of you are under great pressure, temptation, financial trials, physical pain, broken relationships, and opposition because of your faith and you may be tempted to question God’s love, God’s care and even God’s existence. You may be tempted to give in and deny Christ. I believe this timely letter to the church in Smyrna has invaluable lessons for you and me.

In four steps Christ instructs the church in Smyrna, and He instructs us why and how to be faithful to Him until death.

First, we will see in verses 8-9a, Christ’s Care for the Church  
 Second, in verse 9b-10a, Christ’s Commendations for the Church  
 Third in verse 10b, Christ’s Counsel to the Church  
 Fourth in verse 10c-11, Christ’s Comfort for the Church

My prayer is that we would not be fair weather Christians who compromise under pressure and capitulate under suffering, but be faithful to our sovereign, wise, and loving Lord in the midst of suffering, even until death.

## **I. Christ’s Care for the Church**

Notice Jesus directs the church in Smyrna to four truths about His care for them:

### **A. His Eternal Presence**

Verse 8... *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:”*

As we saw last week in verse 1.. *“angel”* refers to the messenger, the spiritual leader, the elder/pastor of the church. That church leader would receive this letter then deliver this message to the church. Here in verse 8, Jesus is described as, the **protos** and **eschatos**, the First and the Last. This is a title used of God in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Jesus is the eternal, infinite God, who already existed when all things were created, and who will continue to exist after they are destroyed. Jesus Christ transcends time, space, and the creation.

The believers in the church in Smyrna might have thought things were out of control, but here Jesus reminds them that they are in the firm grip of an eternally powerful, sovereign, infinitely wise, totally omniscient, and perfect loving Lord.

Jesus knows their situation right now. He has their future in plain sight. Time is in His hands. Friends, this is a Savior you can trust today, tomorrow, and forever. Jesus reminds them of His Eternal Presence, second, He tells them of:

## **B. His Extraordinary Propitiation**

Notice again verse 8, *“the first and the last, who was dead.”* Amazingly, the eternal God became man and was put to death. Why? 1 Peter 3:18 tells us, *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.”*

Christ died for sins because the sinful condition of the natural human heart separates us from a holy God.

Romans 3:23-25, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.”*

Propitiation is defined as: A sacrifice that bears God’s wrath to the end and in so doing changes God’s wrath toward us into favor. And this is what our loving Father has done for us. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:10, *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

Jesus accomplished our salvation through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus cares for His suffering church by remind them of His eternal presence, His extraordinary propitiation, and third:

## **C. His Excelling Power**

Verse 8 continues, *“The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life.”*

Jesus “died and has come to life again,” a description that would be very meaningful to a church under intense persecution. Should the believers in Smyrna face death at the hands of their persecutors, beside them is their risen Savior who conquered death (Hebrews 2:14) and who promised in John 11:25-26, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”*

Jesus care for His church with His eternal presence, His extraordinary propitiation, His excelling power and fourth:

## **D. His Engaging Partnership**

Notice how verse 9 begins, He says *“I know...”* Jesus knows every detail about the churches under His care. Imagine what it meant for these believers to hear the Savior say, *“I know your tribulation; I know the pressure of despair and death. I not only know what you are going through but I have been there – in fact I sweat drops of blood over it! I know!”*

Jesus Christ endured the most unjust and severe persecution anyone ever suffered. Hebrews 2:18 says, *“For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”*

Jesus knows what you are going thru and promises in Hebrews 13:5, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* In times of suffering, Jesus is engaged, sustaining us with his grace and interceding for us.

Jesus reminds us of His Eternal Presence, His Extraordinary Propitiation, His Excelling Power and His Engaging Partnership. Christ Cares for His Church! Second, we see:

## II. Christ's Commendation for the Church

At Smyrna, unlike Ephesus, there was no waning of love for Jesus Christ. Because the believers at Smyrna loved Jesus, they remained faithful to Him; because of that faithfulness, they were hated; because they were hated, they were persecuted; and that persecution in turn incited them to love Christ even more.

You see, persecution and suffering uncover and destroy false faith, and at the same time trials and persecution strengthen and refine genuine saving faith in Christ. In this letter, Jesus commends the church in Smyrna in four areas. First, Jesus commends them for their:

### A. Perseverance Under Pressure

Verse 9a, *"I know your tribulation."* The word "tribulation" in the Greek means, "trouble or pressure". This is a Greek word that was used in that day for a man being tortured to death by being slowly crushed as a huge boulder was dropped down upon him. Jesus is saying here, *"I know how you persevere under the crushing pressure of persecution in your life."*

The Greek word translated "Smyrna" was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew word for myrrh which was one of the sweetest fragrances in the ancient world. Of course, you have heard of myrrh — it was used for burials and was very expensive. It was present at both Jesus' birth — one of the gifts of the Magi — and at His death by Nicodemus, when Jesus's body was embalmed.

Myrrh is a resinous substance that comes from the myrrh tree, much like sap comes out of a pine tree. People harvesting myrrh slice wounds in the branches of the tree and allow the sap to bleed out. After it bleeds out, then it immediately becomes hard and glossy. Then it is crushed to release the fragrant aroma.

Like myrrh, the church at Smyrna was crushed by persecution and gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God. They had perseverance under pressure. Second, Jesus commends them because they had

### B. Plenty in Poverty

Verse 9, I know your *"poverty (but you are rich)"* This church was suffering religious, economic, physical and social opposition. They were marked out and ostracized. And they paid a price. It cost them to take their stand for Jesus. Those who did not give in to pagan pressure would lose their jobs; mobs would destroy their property and mistreat them.

However, Christ saw them not as poor, but "rich!" Materially they had little but spiritually they had everything. People on earth mocked them as poor paupers, but God praised them as wealthy saints. They had faith; they had holiness; they had love; they had joy; they had grace; they had peace; they had true friends. They had a divine resource. They had a sympathetic Savior. They had grace upon grace.

The believers in Smyrna lived for eternal values that would never change, riches that could never be taken away. In fact, their suffering for Christ only increased their riches. They had perseverance under pressure, and plenty in the midst of poverty. Third, Jesus commends them for their:

### C. Patience Under Provocation

Verse 9 ... *“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.”*

The term for “slander” is “blasphēmian”, used for blasphemy against God. Slandering God’s people is a form of blaspheming God. Smyrna, with the high number of Jews living there, was a center of this opposition against Christians. The rest of the verse sets the record straight - these persecutors are no longer “Jews,” for they have turned from God by rejecting their Messiah, Jesus Christ, and they are now tools of Satan against God’s true people, the church.

This is the same as when Jesus responded to his hostile Jewish opponents in John 8 when they claimed to be “Abraham’s children” Jesus said to them, *“You belong to your father, the devil”* John 8:44. So here in Revelation 2:9 the exalted Christ is saying that in reality they are *“the synagogue of Satan.”* The name Satan means “accuser.” He is called “the accuser of the brethren” in Revelation 12:10.

The devil was inflicting great persecution on believers in Smyrna hoping to provoke them to question God’s love, God’s care and even God’s existence and then deny Christ. The truth is, the worst and most wicked plans of Satan can only accomplish what God has ordained for us and in His infinite wisdom skillfully brings to pass.

Remember in the book of Job how Satan thought that by getting God to allow him to afflict Job, he would thereby get Job to curse God to His face. But Satan succeeded only in being an instrument to bring Job into a deeper and more reverent relationship with God.

Likewise, Satan was given permission to afflict the apostle Paul with a thorn in the flesh to torment him. Satan probably thought he would thereby nullify the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry. Instead, he succeeded only in putting Paul in the circumstance where Paul learned experientially the sufficiency of *“God’s grace and that God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness”* 2 Corinthians 12:9. Think of how many thousands of believers down through the centuries have found God’s grace to be sufficient for them through meditating on God’s words to Paul at that time in 2 Corinthians 12.

God’s wisdom, then, is greater than the wisdom of any of our adversaries, whether they be other people or Satan himself. Therefore, as Jesus says at the beginning of verse 10, *“do not fear what you are about to suffer.”* We should not fear what the persecutors seek to do, or even succeed in doing to us. Jesus says in verse 10 (whole verse)... *“<sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

*“Be faithful even unto death.”* “Which means that successfully resisting the devil does not mean that the devil cannot harm you, injure you or kill you. It only means he can’t do you any ultimate harm. He can only kill your

body. And he can't do that without God's permission. 1 Peter 4:19 says, *"Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."*

Jerry Bridges writes in his book *Trusting God*, "The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of Satan, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God.... All evil is subject to God, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it. God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family."

J.C. Ryle comments further: "Let us settle it in our minds that the Christian fight is a good fight—really good, truly good, emphatically good. We see only part of it yet. We see the struggle, but not the end; we see the campaign, but not the reward; we see the cross, but not the crown. We see a few humble, broken-spirited, penitent, praying people, enduring hardships and despised by the world; but we see not the hand of God over them, the face of God smiling on them, the kingdom of glory prepared for them. These things are yet to be revealed. Let us not judge by appearances. There are more good things about the Christian warfare than we see."

Jesus commends them for Perseverance Under Pressure, Plenty in Poverty, Patience under Provocation, and fourth for being:

#### **D. Positive in Prison**

Verse 10 says, *"you will be cast into prison and have tribulation for ten days."*

For ten days it will be a terrible time of severe suffering, but God will get them through it. God is ensuring them a manageable time in accordance with 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear."*

As Adrian read in 1 Peter 1:6: *"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."* Two points for us to remember: 1) Suffering is temporary ("a little while") and 2) under God's control ("if necessary"). So, what is the solution? What is Christ's Counsel to the suffering Church?

### **III. Christ's Counsel to the Church**

Verse 10, *"Be faithful until death."*

Notice that Christ did not tell them that they would not suffer, nor did He tell them that He would remove the suffering. If you are a born-again believer, you need to reject the false teaching of the "prosperity gospel." We Christians must never be in the place of thinking that once we have become Christians that everything in life is now going to be so easy for us. That is not the case. The Lord has never promised to His children the absence of trials, the absence of pain, the absence of persecution, or the abundance that the false prophets of these days proclaim.

The truth of what we see in Smyrna and in believer's lives ever since is that faithfulness is both the cause of suffering and the response to suffering – and it's hard to respond to suffering with the same thing that causes more



suffering! When that trial is “to the point of death,” the need for trust is all the greater. Jesus says, “*be faithful until death.*”

I think one of the worst insults you could receive is to be called a fair-weather friend. A friend who is faithful when times are good, but a friend who disappears when times are bad is not really a friend at all. As Proverbs 18:24 says, “*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*”

Many may be fair weather friends and disappear when the weather turns bad. But there is an incredible blessing in having a friend who is with you no matter what. Jesus is not a fair-weather friend, He has promised to be with us to the very end.

But we have to stop and ask ourselves “Do we have fair-weather faith? Do we only worship, trust and obey Jesus when things are going well for us?”

In His explanation of the parable of the sower and the soils, Jesus says in Mark 4:16, “*the seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word of God, immediately they fall away.*” Fair weather faith is not really faith at all.

Jesus says, “*be faithful until death.*”

We have seen Christ’s care for the church, His commendations for the church, His counsel to the church, and finally:

#### **IV. Christ’s Comfort to the Church**

End of verse 10, “*be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life.*”

Jesus “*will give you the crown of life.*” It is not a literal golden crown that you wear in heaven, but it is the outcome of genuine saving faith, it is eternal life. It is the reward for all whose faith is in the crucified and risen Christ. The Greek word for “crown” is “**stephanos**” meaning a victor’s crown, not a metal, golden crown but a wreath that would be awarded to victors at the Olympic games.

If you have kept up with the Olympics in Tokyo, Alison Felix is not the most decorated track and field athlete with eleven Olympic medals. Her father, Paul Felix, was my Greek professor when I was in seminary. Guess how he started each Greek class? With a test. Every day in class there a quiz or test, and as much as I did not like being tested every day, I am so thankful the testing and instruction helped me to learn Greek.

James 1:12 reminds us, “*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has passed the test, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*”

Suffering, pain, persecution are tests to show that we belong to God, the devil cannot separate God’s children from God’s hand. True faith is always persevering faith; even though it might falter and stumble it always perseveres to the end; because true faith is a gift of God by His grace and no one can snatch us from His hand. And true faith has its eye not ultimately on the present hardship, but ultimately on the glory of God and the reward of God in the life to come.

Verse 11... *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”*

There is something worse, far worse, than physical death. It is spiritual and eternal death, what is here called “the second death.” In Revelation 20:14 it is called “*the lake of fire,*” which is another way to describe hell. Not annihilation but conscious, eternal damnation in hell.

Jesus did not come to rescue us from the first death, we are all going to die physically. Jesus came to rescue us from the second death Revelation 20:6 tells us because of Christ, this death “*has no power*” over born-again Christians. That is why Jesus says here in Revelation 2:11, “*He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.*” Overcomer is a word that is used repeatedly in Revelation to describe true believers.

If you are born twice here, born physically and by faith spiritually, you will only die once. If you have never been born again by placing your trust in Christ alone as your Savior, you will die any day now and then, you will be eventually judged, according to Revelation chapter 20, and you will experience the second death eternally in hell.

If you have been born only once, you will die twice. If you have been born twice, you will die only once. As a born-again believer the first death has no ability to harm us. Even if you are persecuted and put to death because of your faith, you are ushered into His presence in heaven where sin, suffering and pain will never be tasted again for the people of God as we enter a new world of pure joy and delight.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Should faithful Christians anticipate pressure and problems because of our faith? What Scriptures support your answer?
2. What types of problems have you encountered recently because of your relationship with Jesus?
3. What kind of pressure were the believers in Smyrna experiencing?
4. Even though the believers in Smyrna were financially poor, Jesus tells them they are rich. What does He mean?
5. What is the significance of the “ten days” of tribulation in prison?
6. Jesus informs the church that He is the “first and last” and the One who “died and came to life again.” How do these truths encourage you?
7. What does Jesus promise to those who are faithful until death?
8. How does suffering help us to understand the teaching of the perseverance of the saints?
9. Why should confidence in God’s sovereignty in the lives of people keep us from becoming resentful and bitter when we are treated unjustly or maliciously by others?
10. What have you learned from the letter to the church in Smyrna? How do these truths square with the expectations of most Western Christian



## CHAPTER 6

### “Pergamum: The Compromising Church”

#### Revelation 2:12-17

<sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: <sup>13</sup> ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. <sup>15</sup> So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’”

One of the challenges that the church will always face is how the Church needs to stay focused and strive to be what Jesus wants the Church to be and to do – not what we want the church to be and do, and certainly not what the world wants the Church to be.

In chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation we are looking at letters by the Lord Jesus written to seven churches in Asia Minor. They were actual historical churches, churches that really did exist. These messages were directly given to those specific churches because of the very specific issues at hand.

However, these letters transcend those churches, as do the letters of the New Testament which are typically written to churches or individuals and transcend those churches and individuals to be applicable to all of us. These letters in Revelation likewise describe not only a single church in history but a kind of church that exists through all the history of the church. And so these letters to the churches are very instructive for us.

We saw in 2:1-7 the letter to the church in Ephesus and the call to remember, repent and return to Jesus Christ as its first love. We saw in 2:8-11 in the persecuted church at Smyrna the call was to be faithful even unto death.

And now in 2:12-17 this letter is written to a compromising church in Pergamum that was beginning to accommodate the world’s thinking and living. So, how does Jesus address a compromising church that is enamored with the world rather than adoring Christ and being faithful to His truth?

We know that a boat is made for water and when a boat is in the water it is in its natural habitat. But when water is in the boat it is in grave danger. When there is a leak in the boat, something must be done.

So, in His letter to the church in Pergamum, Jesus commends those who were faithful to the Lord, even to point that one of them named Antipas had been martyred for his faith. However, many others in the church were compromising and adapting to the world’s values and looking more and more like the world. The water was coming into the boat and Jesus warns them of what will happen if they don’t repent.

Jesus's message here in Revelation 2 is the same that He prayed for His disciples in John 17:14-17. *"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*

We who belong to Christ are to live sanctified lives. We are to be distinct in that Jesus is our first love, we find our greatest satisfaction, identity and security in Christ and we listen and obey His instruction. We are to be a light in the world and not to become like the world. But the church in Pergamum was compromising the truth of God and becoming like the world around them and practicing idolatry and sexual immorality in the church.

So, in four steps Jesus deals with compromising church in Pergamum and shows us how to be faithful to His truth.

Christ's Communication to the Church Verse 12

Christ's Commendations for the Church Verse 13

Christ's Confrontation of the Church Verses 14-16

Christ's Counsel to the Church Verse 17

Jesus promises A Greater Satisfaction in Christ and A Greater Fellowship with Christ.

My prayer is that we are each humble enough to evaluate our own hearts and lives, that each of us individually and together as one church body, we humbly and honestly listen to what Jesus says here and repent and put off the sins that lead us to compromise so that we can find our greatest satisfaction in Christ and bring glory and honor to His name.

## **I. Christ's Communication to the Church**

Verse 12... *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:'"*

*"To the angel of the church in Pergamos."* This letter was addressed, as were other letters, to the angel or messenger of the church, which was probably the one we would call the pastor.

The city of Pergamum was the capital city of Asia Minor. It was renowned for its political power, its intellectual achievement, and its pagan worship. It was a wealthy city given over to luxury and fashion. There are three special features that caused Pergamum to stand out in its time.

First, there was a 200,000-volume library there. That may not sound like many books to us, but when you consider that every page of every book was handwritten on papyrus and parchment, it was quite an achievement. In fact, the city got its name from the parchment which was used. Parchment comes from the Greek word *pergamena* was a type of writing material developed from animal skins and far stronger than papyrus, which was made from reeds. This great library in Pergamum was later given to Marc Antony by his girlfriend, Cleopatra. She lugged it off to Alexandria in Egypt, and that library was considered the greatest library the world had ever seen.

A second feature that marked ancient Pergamum was its pagan temples. There was a temple in Pergamum to Aesculapius, the god of healing and medicine whose insignia was the entwined serpent on the staff (which is still a medical symbol today.) The temple of Aesculapius was filled with non-venomous snakes and when a person needed healing, they would go into that temple, lie down on the floor and spend the night there. If a snake crawled across them during their stay, they considered they were touched by the god himself and healed.

I can't help but think of how Satan is likewise symbolized as the serpent. 2 Corinthians 11:3 warns us, "*But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*"

The third feature of Pergamum was the three temples in the city that were devoted to the emperor worship cult. Once each year, every Roman citizen was required to walk into one of these temples, place a pinch of incense on an altar and say "Caesar is god." When Christians refused to do that, a severe persecution arose.

So, we read in verse 12... "*And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*"

This statement is both an encouragement and a warning to the one who read this letter. Because everyone in Pergamum was well acquainted and afraid of the Roman sword that was used to rule. But Jesus says the one who is truly sovereign and the One we should fear and obey is the One who is the holder of the sharp two-edged sword – that is the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ, as indicated back in 1:16.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "*the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" The apostle Paul also uses the metaphor of a sword to describe the Word of God in Ephesians 6:17. The sharp two-edged sword refers to the Word of God.

That the sword is two-edged depicts the Bible's potency and power in exposing and judging the innermost thoughts of the human heart. And for a city that was full of false religion, and a church that was compromising, only the Word of God exposes sin and points to the solution in Jesus Christ. To some it is the sword of salvation and to others the sword of death. We have seen Christ's initial communication with the church. Next, we see:

## **II. Christ's Commendations for the Church**

Verse 13... "*I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*"

### **A. Jesus knows their situation.**

Be assured, friends, Jesus knows your situation too. He is aware of our circumstances in intimate detail. He knows it when you are in a difficult marriage and struggling and tempted to compromise. He knows when you face adversity and even persecution in your job, at school, at home, or even at church.

Pergamum was the leading center of emperor worship in the province of Asia. And the cult of emperor worship certainly posed the gravest threat to the Christians in Pergamum. Each year citizens were required to drop incense on the altar and say, "Caesar is Lord."

It was when the Christians refused to worship the emperor, to declare that Caesar is Lord, that Christians faced execution. So, "Satan's throne" could easily be understood as a reference to the might of Rome under the "*god of this world*" (2 Cor. 4:4), blaspheming the true God by the emperor worship cult. One day Satan will be in hell,

but for now he is active in this world and at that time the devil took residence in Pergamum. Jesus knows their situation and He knows yours as well.

### **B. Jesus knows their steadfastness.**

Verse 13b, *“you hold fast My name.”*

In the midst of those difficult and trying circumstances, the believers continued to “dwell”—a word that speaks of permanent residence as opposed to merely passing through—in Pergamum. In modern terms, they “hung in there.” Despite the persecution and suffering they endured, the believers at Pergamum continued to hold fast the name of Christ and did not deny the faith. Instead of compromising and declaring “Ceasar is Lord” many in the church were faithful in their confession of “Christ is Lord” in Satan’s kingdom!

Jesus knows their situation, He knows their steadfastness, and third:

### **C. Jesus knows their sacrifice.**

Verse 13c... *“and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells .”*

The church at Pergamum maintained its faithfulness even in the days of Antipas, whom Christ described as My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you. Nothing certain is known about Antipas apart from this text. He was probably one of the leaders of the Pergamum church. According to tradition, he was roasted to death inside a brass bull during the persecution instigated by Emperor Domitian. The word “*witness*” translates from the Greek word “*martus*,” a word that eventually became transliterated into English as the word martyr, because so many witnesses for Christ like Antipas paid with their lives.

Martyrdom has always been with the Church, and it always will be. Jesus said in John 15:18-20: *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”*

While we may not be persecuted physically for our faith here in North America (at least at the present moment), many of our brothers and sisters in the world are suffering for their faith.

Jesus describes Antipas: *“my faithful witness.”* This is the exact same description that is applied to our Lord in Revelation 1:5! Jesus was God’s faithful witness unto death and Antipas was Jesus’ faithful witness unto death! The Son honored His Father in death and Antipas honored his Lord in death.

And so, the church at Pergamum remained loyal to Christ and Christian truth. It faithfully persevered at the very headquarters, as it were, of satanic opposition—even in the face of martyrdom. Yet all was not well at Pergamum. After commending the believers there, Christ confronts them.



### III. Christ's Confrontation of the Church

Verse 14... *"But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality."*

#### A. Corruption in the Membership

In Numbers 22–25, we learn that Balak the king of Moab was fearful of the Israelites because of what they had done to the Amorites. So, Balak the king of Moab, hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. After trying unsuccessfully three times to curse Israel, Balaam came up with another plan. Since he was unable to curse the Israelites, he decided to corrupt them by teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

He plotted to use beautiful Moabite women to lure the Israelites into the behavior of the godless world around them – to get the Israelites to commit sexual immorality and idolatry (Num. 25; 31:16). Likewise, intermarriage with non-Christians was a problem in Pergamum where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols. The apostle Paul likewise warned the church in Corinth, and he warns us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you.'"*

Like the Israelites who were seduced by Balaam's false teaching, some in the church at Pergamum were lured to compromise and sin. Despite the graphic example of Israel and the clear teaching of the apostle Paul, with which they were likely familiar, some in Pergamum persisted in following Balaam's teaching. They believed one could attend pagan feasts, with all their debauchery and sexual immorality, and still join the church to worship Jesus Christ.

They attempted to serve God but in the process allowed the prevailing cultural norms to shape both their thinking and their lifestyles. They had neglected the truth of Romans 12:2 which says, *"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."* They had forgotten the warning of James 4:4 which says, *"Adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So, whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy."*

Not only was their corruption the membership, but there was:

#### B. Compromise in the Leadership

Verse 15... *"So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."*

The leadership of the church is responsible to faithfully teach the truth to the congregation, but at Pergamum that compromised and allowed false teachers to continue in the church. We met the Nicolaitans at Ephesus in

Revelations 2:6., “*Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*” The Ephesian church rejected them. The Pergamum church embraced them. The teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are closely related if not identical. Immorality and idolatry were distinctive characteristics of these false teachers as well.

Theologically they were antinomians (against the law of God, against God’s commandments, libertarians). Doctrine mattered little and behavior mattered even less. With each passing day the distinction between the church and the world becomes more blurred and less clear. The lifestyle of one was barely distinguishable from the other. Worldliness, compromise, and tolerance had rushed into this church like a flood and she was on the verge of drowning.

You may have seen a story in the news a few weeks ago of a pastor who committed adultery with a professional baseball player’s wife. The sad thing is he was a classmate of mine in seminary. He even wrote a book about being a good father. But somewhere along the way he became corrupt in his thinking and turned the gospel into a license for sin. What a gross misunderstanding of grace and the gospel.

Jude 4 tells us, “*For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*” There was corruption in the membership, compromise in the leadership, and third:

### **C. Clarity in the Consequences**

Verse 16... “*Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*”

The majority of the believers at Pergamum did not participate in the errors of either heretical group. They remained steadfastly loyal to Christ and the Christian faith. But by tolerating the groups and refusing to exercise church discipline, they shared in their guilt, which brought the Lord’s judgment.

Friends, there is a mutual accountability in the church between the church leadership and the church membership. Church discipline that the Lord Jesus explains in Matthew chapter 18 is an important and necessary way for the Church to maintain its holy distinctiveness in the world. Though Church discipline may seem like a harsh or unloving thing; it is in fact the most loving thing a church do for the glory of God, the good of the sinning member and for the purity and witness of the church.

Jesus says the solution to compromise is to repent (aorist imperative) – involves 3 elements: 1) contrition of heart, 2) confession of sin, and 3) change in conduct. It is a total reversal, an about-face, a 180-degree turn. The imperative denotes urgency! Don’t delay! Do it now!

Notice Jesus warns in verse 16... “*Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*”

I can think of no sadder, more fearful, more tragic words. The entire Pergamum church faced the battle sword of Christ’s judgment, the heretics for practicing their heresy and iniquity, and the rest of the church for tolerating it. The change in pronouns from “you” to “them” reflects an underlying Hebrew idiom commonly found in the Septuagint; both pronouns refer to the entire church would be judged.

The “*sword of My mouth*” is His Word of truth in action. Antipas felt the sword of Rome, but Pergamos would meet the sword of Christ! They may compromise but Jesus will not!

We have seen Christ’s Communication to the Church in Verse 12

Christ’s Commendations for the Church in Verse 13

Christ’s Confrontation of the Church in Verses 14-16. Finally:

#### **IV. Christ’s Counsel to the Church**

Verse 17... *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”*

Jesus provides two incredible promises. First:

##### **A. A greater satisfaction in Christ**

Jesus promises to give them some of the hidden manna. Manna was a honey-flavored bread with which God fed the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 16:14 and following). According to Exodus 16:33, the Israelites were to memorialize that divine provision by keeping a jar of manna inside the Ark of the Covenant during their travels.

The hidden manna represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven. Jesus said in John 6:48–51, *“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. But this is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”*

Jesus said that He is the bread from heaven; and He sustains us in our wilderness here; but it’s also a reminder that when we abstain and fast from the food the world offers which will never fully satisfy but only leaves us longing something better and more lasting.

The Psalmist said it this way in Psalm 73:25, *“Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”*

When Jesus is your first love, your greatest treasure, when He is the bread of life to you, then you will know a satisfaction and contentment that the world will never be able to provide. You don’t have to feel as though we’ve missed out on something or always live with regret. Instead, you turn to Jesus the bread of life and find the greatest joy, purpose, and peace today, tomorrow and for all eternity.

And it’s hidden, because the world can’t see it, and we need faith to see it and wait for it. True satisfaction, security and strength is never found in the world but only found in Jesus Christ. Are you finding your satisfaction in Jesus? Is He your first love?

Secondly Jesus promises:

## B. A Greater Fellowship with Christ

Verse 17b... *“To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”*

“*To him who overcomes*” is a statement that is repeated in Revelation and always refers to true believers. To those how a living faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

There has been much speculation about what the white stone symbolizes. Some link it with the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:15, 30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8). Somehow, God caused those stones to disclose His will in a form beyond just the simple yes and no of casting lots. According to this view, by this white stone God promises the overcomers knowledge of His will.

Others identify the white stone as a diamond, the most precious of stones, symbolizing God’s precious gift of eternal life to believers.

But it seems best, however, to understand the white stone considering the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests. A white stone, inscribed with the athlete’s name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. In this view, Christ promises true believers’ entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

There will be *“a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”* *Kainos* (new) does not mean new in contrast to old in time, but new in the sense of qualitatively different. The new name will serve as each believer’s admission pass into eternal glory. It will uniquely reflect God’s special love for and adoption of every true child of His.

So, let me close by asking you: Are you actively separating yourself from the world to love Jesus and obey Him? Or, has your life been invaded by the “doctrine of Balaam”? Perhaps you have adopted so many values of the world that you feel trapped. Let me give two recommendations to you:

First, join a Community Group. I can’t think of a better time to be in a Community Group. Meeting weekly with a small group of Christians from Cornerstone to encourage one another, pray for one another, keep each other accountable to know Christ and make Him known. So, if you are not in one of our 10 groups, please join one this week.

Second, seek biblically counseling to help you see how to overcome temptation and live the life that God brings honor and glory to God and will bring great joy and peace to you.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How did Jesus describe Himself to the church at Pergamum?
2. What do we know about the city and church at Pergamum?
3. What external problems did the church face? How did Jesus commend them?
4. What internal problems did the church have? How did Jesus confront them?
5. What is the significance of Balaam and how was his teaching tied to the Nicolaitans? What was the problem with this teaching?
6. What did Jesus expect the church to do about these false doctrines? What effect was the false teaching having on the church?
7. Read John 15:19; 17:14-16; Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17. How can we be a witness to the world without conforming to the world?
8. What blessings are promised by Christ in verse 17? Can we experience these promises to a certain degree even now?
9. What have you learned from the letter to the church in Pergamum? How will you apply these principles to your life? What will you change this week?



**CHAPTER 7**  
**“Thyatira: The Church that Tolerated Sin”**  
**Revelation 2:18-29**

*<sup>18</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: <sup>19</sup> ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. <sup>24</sup> But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. <sup>26</sup> He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup> AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

One of the most stressful times of my childhood was when school reports cards were delivered to parents. I received my report card at school and then hand carried it home, hoping my parents would forget to ask to see it. And I remember one time I received a bad grade, a D in one my classes. And as I walked home this tempting thought came into my mind, “I think I can change the D and make it look like a B.” So, that is what I foolishly did. Of course, my parents recognized what I had done and it only made their discipline more severe.

In our study of Revelation, we have been reading personal evaluations of seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, which we could call report cards. Jesus Christ is in the process of evaluating His church – an evaluation where He makes no mistakes. He grades their motives and their works, judging their attitude and noting their spirit. He sends His report card to the leadership of the church for the entire church to read.

The letter to the church at Thyatira was written to the church in the smallest, least important city of the seven cities. Yet, this letter is the longest of all the letters written to the churches. It reminds us that Jesus doesn’t value things as the world does. Just because the Thyatira church is in a small town doesn’t mean He is less concerned with it. Jesus still knows what is going on in the church’s midst, cares for it, encourages it, and calls the sinning church members to repent so that the church would live up to His standard for what it ought to be and to do.

At the beginning of Revelation chapter 2 the church in Ephesus is praised for intolerance - they are intolerant of false teaching which attacks and denies God’s truth. But now in our text today Thyatira is condemned for tolerance because they are tolerant of false teaching which attacks and denies God’s truth and leads God’s people astray into deception.

In four steps, Jesus deals with the church in Thyatira that tolerated sin and He shows us how to be faithful to Him.

Christ’s Communication to the Church in verse 18, reminding them that He sees all things, knows all things, and His judgement is accurate and final.

Christ's Commendations for the Church Verse 19.

Their Ministries: Deeds and Service

Their Motives: Love and Faith

Their Maturity: Greater Works

Third, Christ's Confrontation of the Church Verses 20-23

The Corrupt Teaching

The Cowardly Tolerance

The Cloudy Testimony

Fourth, Christ's Comfort to the faithful believers in the Church Verses 24-29

Their Duty: Steadfastness

Their Destiny: Supremacy

Their Deliverance: The Savior

My prayer is that we all evaluate our own hearts and lives and ask: Are you listening to teaching, counsel, guidance that goes against God's truth? Are you living for the approval of others instead of the approval of God? Are you pursuing your own pleasure instead of the pleasure of God? Or perhaps you feel that you are in a no-win situation and that somehow God has abandoned or forgotten you. In our Bible text will see some very convicting but helpful instruction from our Savior in how we can change and how we can know that nothing will separate us from His loving care and sovereign purpose.

## I. Christ's Communication to the Church

Verse 18 begins with "*And to the angel of the church Thyatira.*"

The Greek word for angel is "**angelos**" and means messenger. So, the letter is written to the pastor who will read this letter to the church in Thyatira.

Thyatira was a smaller city on the Lycus River and was known for its commerce in wool, linen, leatherwork, bronze work and especially purple dye. It had an extensive network of trade guilds or labor unions that dominated daily and civic life. Each union had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal celebrations that often-included acts of sexual immorality. Apollo the sun god and Diana the fertility god were the more significant deities.

In Acts 16:14 we learn that Lydia, whom Paul led to faith in Christ at Philippi, was from Thyatira and a seller of purple fabrics. It is quite possible she was instrumental in evangelizing Thyatira.

And while this city boasted a special temple to Apollo, the "sun god," notice how the Lord begins His letter in verse 18 by introducing Himself as "*the Son of God*" (the only time in Revelation this title is used). Verse 18 tells us He has eyes like a flame of fire – this speaks of Christ's omniscience; His penetrating, perceptive, and piercing ability to see all that is. He sees all actions, thoughts, and emotions. Nothing escapes His vision and He sees through the deceptive and seductive teachings of Jezebel.

Notice verse 18 says Christ's feet are like burnished bronze, meaning there is strength, firmness and truth in His judgment. Thyatira was famous for its bronze work but their best pales in comparison to that of the Son of God. He is brilliant in appearance, unrivaled in strength, and utterly glorious as a judge. There is stability and permanence to the judgments He renders.



Jesus first communicates with His church and then we see:

## II. Christ's Commendations for the Church

Verse 19... *"I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first."*

The believers in Thyatira were busy, and Jesus commends:

### A. Their Ministries: Deeds and Service

Notice verse 19a, *"I know your deeds and your love and faith and service."*

The word for "*deeds*" in Greek is "**ergas**" and means there are consistent godly activity and works by this church. Service, comes from the Greek word "**diakonian**," which gives us our English word "deacon." There were busy meeting needs in the church and to others in the community.

Jesus commends them because those who know the love of God and who love God will express that love through meeting the needs of others. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us we are not saved by good works, but we are saved to do good works.

What was behind these works? Secondly, Jesus commends:

### B. Their Motives: Love and Faith v. 19b

Verse 19b... *"love and faith."*

Love here is from the Greek word "**agape**". It refers to an "unconditional, unceasing love that knows no boundaries and that is not influenced by the worth of the object being loved." It is God's kind of love. Everything we do is to be done out of a heart of love or as 1 Corinthians 13:3, without love our works are worthless.

Love for Christ and others, and faith in God inspired and moved this church to action. Sometimes there are ministry opportunities and yet no one wants to do it or they don't faith in God that they can do it. That was not a problem in Thyatira. There was work and ministry to do and plenty of people willing to do the work and to serve.

Unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for Christ had not grown cold. But unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for truth had grown cold. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us to *"speak the truth in love."* 2 and 3 John both emphasize the necessity of both love and truth for a balanced Christianity. Ephesus lacked love. Thyatira lacked truth. Unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise are both hateful to God. Like a bird needs two wings to fly, so the church needs love and truth in balance.

Jesus commends their ministries, their motives, and third He commends:

### C. Their Maturity: Greater Works

Look at the end of verse 19 with me... *“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”*

As far as their efforts and good works, they were literally, outpacing what they did in their earlier days. This church was busy, loving, committed, faithful, patient in suffering, and it was attempting even greater things for God than ever before. However, it was in great danger, whether the church knew it or not. Despite the commendation they received, all was not well with the church at Thyatira.

## III. Christ’s Confrontation of the Church

The problem was not external persecution, but internal compromise, not vicious wolves from outside the flock, but perverse people from within, not a pagan deity but a false prophetess. Jesus confronts three aspects of the church.

### A. The Corrupt Teaching

Verse 20... *“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”*

In the letter to Pergamum, Christ centered on the dangerous teaching; here he centers on the false teacher, the self-styled prophetess Jezebel. It is highly unlikely that her real name is Jezebel since that name was about as popular to the Jews as the name Judas would be to Christians. Although I did hear of someone naming their cat Jezebel – and I can totally understand them doing that.

More than likely, the Lord is speaking figuratively in calling this false teacher Jezebel since she was effectively doing the same thing in this church that Jezebel of old did in Israel. In fact, one commentator translates this phrase in verse 20, “that Jezebel of a woman.”

I Kings 16 describes the account of Jezebel, the wife of the King of Israel named Ahab. Jezebel was an idolater that King Ahab should never have married. She brought her gods with her into the palace. The chief god among them was named Baal. Baal was the fertility god, and the worship of this god involved imitating his sexual practices with goddesses by committing sexual immorality with temple priestesses as part of their so-called worship.

Jezebel was an enemy of God and an enemy of God’s truth and her name became synonymous with wickedness. And this woman in the NT church is called Jezebel to show that this woman was as dangerous to the church, and as much an enemy of God’s truth, as Jezebel had been in the Old Testament.

Look at verse 20 with me... *“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”*

The sin was twofold. First, they violated the biblical teaching of 1 Timothy 2:12 that women are not to be teachers or preachers in the church.

Notice in verse 20 Jesus says, “*she calls herself a prophetess*” In other words she claims that she receives special revelations from God and believes she is speaking on behalf of God, thus she thought she was qualified as an authoritative teacher in the church. And what was she teaching? Verse 20, “*She teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality (pornea – sex outside of marriage) and eat things sacrificed to idols.*”

Archaeologists and historians discovered that Thyatira had more trade guilds or labor unions than any other town its size in all of Asia. This created the problem for the church because each guild had a guardian god or goddess. If their business prospered, it was their god who was given the credit. If their business languished, it was to this god they prayed. The guilds or labor unions regularly feasted together, making offerings to their god before and after the meal. If you wanted to get ahead in the world, you had to belong to a guild and this included expected attendance at the feasts as a statement of identity and loyalty to your profession. At the end of these guild feasts, the pagan practices of the temple were indulged in. Most often this included sexual acts with temple priestesses, again, under the guise of honoring the blessing of their god.

So, what is the Christian to do? How can a Christian survive in their profession if they don’t attend the guild feasts? Because not participating meant economic ostracism. It meant loss, hardship and even poverty.

This is a good time to remind us that your work demands your skill but not at the cost of your soul. It is one thing to hard work and do your best at your job, but it is another to worship your job and compromise the truth of God. We can be as idolatrous in our business plans as Thyatira believers.

However, for these believers, the question remained, “Can a Christian participate in the idol feasts and even the sexual immorality of the temple and really be a Christian?” Evidently there was an influential, perhaps prosperous woman in the church who offered a solution to the problem. This Jezebel apparently argued that the answer was, “Yes, you can do all the above and still be a good Christian.” She taught “You can have your best life now!” She taught that Christians didn’t need to bear such loss and didn’t need to endure such hardship.

In fact, she might have been claiming that it could somehow bring you closer to God by engaging in this idolatry and immorality. Notice in verse 24, Jesus calls this teaching “*the deep things of Satan.*”

Two quick applications before we move on:

First, sin does not, cannot, bring you closer to God. It only ever brings you further from Him. And it wasn’t isolated to the church in Thyatira where people thought that somehow, going along with sin would enable them to prosper economically or understand or appreciate God better.

God may use our sin or our past to help us understand His amazing grace, but that is never an excuse to sin now – and those who use it as such should hear Jesus’ warning here.

Second application: sometimes being a Christian, means bearing economic loss. Maybe you work in a field where everybody sins to get ahead. They lie; they steal; they cheat; they are dishonest; they cut corners around the law;

but if you're a Christian, you don't. And the worldly treasure that you gain in going along with what everyone else does isn't worth the sin you commit and the consequences that will follow.

Jesus confronts the corrupt teaching. Second, He confronts:

### **B. The Cowardly Tolerance**

Verses 21-22... <sup>21</sup> *"I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."*

Graciously the Lord gave the false prophetess at Thyatira time to repent, but illustrating the sad truth that people love darkness rather than the light (John 3:19), she did not want to repent of her immorality. Her blunt and final refusal to repent would lead to a terrible judgment.

Here at Cornerstone, we want to be a welcoming church – we want to welcome anyone who walks through the doors – no matter their past or their present sins or lifestyles or beliefs or attitudes. But to welcome someone, and then affirm attitudes, desires, and actions that are sinful are two different things and Jesus didn't equate them. I could list endless examples – but let me give you just two – the woman at the well in John 4 she was living with a man who was not her husband and the woman caught in adultery in John 8 – Jesus welcomed them in grace but called them to repentance by His truth. When Jesus called people to follow Him, it was a call to faith and repentance – because you can't turn to Jesus without turning away from sin.

Verse 22... *"Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."*

*"Those who commit adultery with her"* are those who cowardly allowed her to teach in the church and those who have bought into her teaching. *"Her children"* in verse 22 were not her physical children but her "spiritual children" – those who followed in her path of wickedness and sin.

For those who try to convince themselves that God doesn't see their sin or care about their sin: Jesus promises that *"her bed of sin will become a bed of suffering; the pleasures of sin will give place to the pains of affliction."*

This is always the true ultimate end of sin. We think it will bring pleasure but it becomes affliction and brings death. God calls us to spiritual fidelity not spiritual adultery. God calls us to follow Him not follow the world.

1 John 2:15-17 tells us, <sup>15</sup> *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."*

Jesus confronts the corrupt teaching, the cowardly tolerance, and third:

### C. The Cloudy Testimony

Verse 23... *“And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”*

This church was not bringing glory to God and its testimony was cloudy and dark. Christ would receive glory when He judged Jezebel and her followers. When that happened, all the churches would know that He is the One who searches the minds and hearts.

After He judged the Thyatira church, all other churches would be warned against the evil of tolerating sin. They would also realize that nothing can be hidden from the penetrating gaze of the Lord of the churches.

Unfortunately, the average church in America has the reputation of refusing to deal with sin in the church, instead they tolerate it. We, this local church at Cornerstone, are one body. No one in this church body is insignificant to the ministry and testimony of this church. In fact, wherever you work and live, the reputation of this body is whatever your reputation is.

We, as a church body, will be seen as a bunch of hypocrites, if you are; Or seen as dishonest and unloving, if you are,

But we will be seen as honest people of integrity, if you are;  
 We will be known as loving and caring, if you are;  
 And pure and wholesome, if you are;  
 We will be known for putting Christ and the kingdom of heaven first if you are known for the same.

We have seen Christ’s communication, His commendations, His confrontation and finally to the faithful believers in Thyatira:

### IV. Christ’s Comfort to the Church

Verses 24-25... <sup>24</sup> *“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.”*

#### A. Their Duty: Steadfastness

To those who did not follow Jezebel, Jesus calls them to hold fast and stay the course. Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, *“he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* Vance Havner said, “faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.” Perseverance is a proof of our profession and evidence of our possession. The Christian life is not a single battle but a campaign.

This is the Lord’s will for us in these confusing days as well. He wants us to be faithful and stay the course for the glory of God. Just because everyone around us is taking a new path does and compromising or tolerating sin does not mean that we have to.

## B. Their Destiny: Supremacy v. 26-27

Verses 26-27...<sup>26</sup> *“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup> AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;”*

To the faithful believer Jesus says, *“I will give him authority over the nations.”* Christ honors His faithful disciples by allowing them to co-reign with Him in fulfillment of the messianic Psalm 2. This is a reference to His millennial kingdom (20:1-6). Believers will serve under Christ, jointly exercising His gracious, firm, and sovereign authority. Verse 27 tells us Jesus *“received this authority from His Father.”* He now shares it with His servants.

## C. Their Deliverance: The Savior

Verses 28-29...<sup>28</sup> *“and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Some connect the morning star with such passages as Daniel 12:3 and Matthew 13:43. (*“Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*) The promise would be that believers will shine like stars and reflect Christ’s glory. While Christians will reflect Christ’s glory, it is better to see the morning star as Christ Himself—a title He assumes in Revelation 22:16. *“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”*

Jesus promised believers Himself in all His fullness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12 the One whom we *“now ... know in part [we will] then ... know fully just as [we] also have been fully known.”* Sovereignty and power do not ultimately lay with Rome, only Jesus has true sovereignty and power.

Why would these final words bring great comfort to the faithful believers in Thyatira? Because it’s a turning of the tables. In their experience, the world oppresses and rejects the one who is faithful to Jesus. The steadfast believer seems to lose out, those who compromise with the world seem to win.

But Jesus is giving us a glimpse into the true winners and losers – not what the judgment of this world says – but what His righteous judgment will reveal to be true. By being faithful to Jesus, we may lose out in some areas in this life; but we will gain Him for eternity.

So, let me close by asking, whose approval are you living for? Whose pleasure are you living for? Is there someone or something else that has taken the place of Christ?

Christ has given you time to repent, just as He did these believers. Pray now for Christ to forgive that sin you are cherishing; that lifestyle you are leading; that reputation you are building. Say, *“Lord, I have ears to hear. Forgive me for wandering and straying into sin. I repent of that sin and ask You to cleanse me now. May I change course and live for your glory.”*

Join one of our Community Groups where you can have brothers and sisters in Christ to pray with and serve with.

Perhaps you are terrified at the thought of Christ's coming judgment because you have never been saved; never been born again. Now is the time to humble yourself, turn from your self-sufficiency and self-reliance and embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

There is nothing better than knowing Christ, now and for all eternity.

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. How did Jesus identify Himself to the church in Thyatira in 2:18? What do we know about this city and church?
2. What did Jesus know about them? Specifically, what did He commend them for?
3. How can a church faithfully keep truth and love in balance?
4. What problems did Thyatira have?
5. What do we know about Jezebel? How did the church in Thyatira resemble Jezebel?
6. How many modern churches have problems like Thyatira?
7. Are the lives of Christians judged by the Lord? See 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.
8. Are there practices or relationships in your life that are a hindrance to your spiritual growth in Christ? What steps do you need to take to prevent these from becoming a greater problem?
9. What practices and relationships are helping you to be more of a godly person? Attempt to identify as many as possible. How can you strengthen these?
10. What did Jesus promise the faithful overcomers? What is the morning star?

“Some may preach the gospel of Jesus Christ better, but no one can preach a better gospel.” - Adrian Rogers





## CHAPTER 8

### “Sardis: The Dead Church”

#### Revelation 3:1-6

*<sup>1</sup> “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. <sup>3</sup> So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. <sup>4</sup> But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. <sup>6</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

When we visited our daughter in England we had the privilege of touring some of the great places throughout Great Britain that represented our spiritual heritage. We went to places like Westminster Abbey in London (its correct title is the Collegiate Church of St Peter, Westminster) where 3,300 famous people are buried or commemorated inside its walls -among them are believers like William Wilberforce who put his faith into action in the abolition of slavery and David Livingstone missionary to Africa in the 1800's. We also visited Saint Giles cathedral in Edenborough where John Knox once preached the truth with great courage.

What struck me was that the cathedrals, which once housed congregations led by fearless preachers who taught the Bible had become, over time, museums, and mausoleums. Westminster Abbey had become a cemetery with a roof overhead. It was beautiful, with impressive architecture; in fact, there was a pulpit and pews, and small service was held and ceremonies were played out, and prayers were made and candles were lit.

However, these churches were, for the most part, dead. The buildings were costly, manicured, magnificent, indoor cemeteries. Churches with great history and reputation had become a shell of what they were, and such a church was the church at Sardis. It was reputed to be alive, but the Lord Jesus Christ pronounced it to be dead.

Like the rest of the seven churches, the church at Sardis was an actual, existing church in John's day. Yet it also symbolizes the dead churches that have existed throughout history, and, sadly, continue to exist in our own day.

Do you notice what was missing in this letter to the church at Sardis? There is no commendation by Jesus. There was no commending them for their steadfastness in the midst of suffering, no praise for their perseverance in the midst of persecution, no tribute for their truthfulness in the midst of trials.

There appears to not be any measure of strife or conflict in the church of Sardis. Tension and struggles may be unpleasant, but at least they are signs of life. This church in Sardis was so devoid of spiritual life they thought they had peace, but it was only the peace of a cemetery. But rather than officiate over a funeral, Christ gives five imperatives, five commands, five steps to revive the hearts of the saints who are slumbering the sleep of spiritual apathy and complacency, as if slipping into spiritual rigor mortis.

In six verses we will see Jesus gives His pronouncement in verse 1 including His diagnosis. Then we will see Christ's 5 step prescription for spiritual life in verses 2-3. And third, we will see Christ's incredible promises to the faithful believers in verses 4-6.

My prayer is that if you are here without a relationship with Christ, if you are dead, then you will come to faith in Christ and have life. And if you are in a spiritual stupor and falling asleep, or you are stuck in a pattern of indifference, then you will wake up and follow Christ's prescription for spiritual health. And if you are being faithful, I pray this text will be a great blessing to you as we consider Christ's incredible promises or spotless splendor and secure salvation. I am grateful to be part of such a spiritually alive church or faithful saints who want to know Christ and make His known.

## **I. Christ's Pronouncement**

Verse 1 .... *"To the angel (messenger pastor) of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.' "*

The church in Sardis had taken on the character of the city in which she resided. A little background on the city will help us understand the condition of this church.

Sardis was the capital city of the country of Lydia and located about 50 miles west of present city of İzmir, Turkey. Sardis was founded about 1,200 BC.

The original city sat on the top of a 1,500-foot-high plateau. There was one narrow road leading into the city. The other sides of the plateau were just steep cliffs. This made the city very safe and nearly impenetrable by invading armies.

Sardis was the home of Aesop, whose fables we all heard as children. Gold and silver coins were first minted here. The city of Sardis was also famous for the industries that operated there. Carpet, wool and dyed cloth were their primary products. It is said that the art of dyeing was invented at Sardis.

At one time, Sardis had been one of the greatest cities in the world. It reached its zenith under King Croesus. King Croesus and Sardis were famed around the world for their wealth. In that part of the world, it is still common to hear the phrase, "As wealthy as Croesus".

While Sardis reached its zenith under Croesus, it also fell under his reign. He and the people of the city became complacent in their wealth, their power and their city's apparent invincibility. When that region where Sardis was located came under attack by Cyrus the Persian, King Croesus and his people retreated to their city, believing they were safe.

One night, one of the Persian soldiers saw a Sardinian soldier drop his helmet over the wall of the city. He watched as that soldier followed a hidden path down the side of the mountain to retrieve his helmet. When nightfall came, Cyrus and his troops followed the hidden path up the side of the mountain, entered the city while the guards slept and conquered Sardis.

Sardis regained some of its former wealth under the reign of Alexander the Great, but was invaded and defeated by Antiochus the Great, who also entered the city at night while the guards slept.

At the time of this letter in Revelation 3, the city was proud of its past; it was proud of its reputation. But, its reputation was all it had left. For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived.

Apparently, the church in Sardis had adopted the atmosphere of the city. The church had become a thermometer that registered the spiritual temperature of the city instead of a thermostat that changed the spiritual temperature of the city. It is to this church that had become lazy, apathetic, and complacent that the Lord Jesus comes. Just as surely as the city of Sardis was dying, so was the church in that city.

Verse 1a... *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this..”*

### **A. His Deity                      v.1a**

Jesus comes to this church as One Who has the *“seven Spirits of God”* and as One Who is holding the *“seven stars.”*

The *“seven Spirits of God”* refer to the Holy Spirit in His complete ministry. The seven-fold ministry of the Spirit is defined in Isaiah 11:2. In Christ’s hand is the plenitude of the Holy Spirit. This is a reminder to the churches that we are to operate, not under the power of human skill, leadership, and organization, but under the awesome power of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the New Testament church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and the church’s life comes from the Holy Spirit.

Verse 1 also says Christ also holds *“the seven stars”* which we saw in Revelation 1:20 refers to the messengers of the churches - most likely to the pastors. John Stott writes, *“And Jesus intends to bring His hands together.”*

In other words, Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the church who mediates His rule through godly leaders and pastors. In His hand means the church and the shepherds are His possession and under His protection. He is responsible for them and they are accountable to Him.

Great privilege also entails great responsibility. The spiritual life or deadness of a church is often governed by the spiritual life of its leadership. No church rises above the level of its leadership. Sardis was a ship off course because its captain was asleep at the wheel.

### **B. His Discernment                      v. 1b**

Verse 1b, *“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive.”*

The church of Sardis appeared to be and claimed to be a healthy fellowship. *“You have a name”* – this is perhaps an indication of Sardis’s’ past faithfulness and accomplishments. In the past she was something genuine. There had been a time when reputation and reality matched up. There had been a day when she was doing great things for God. Now all they had was a name, and our outward reputation can be deceiving. We think we are one thing when we are altogether something different.

### **C. His Diagnosis                      v. 1c**

End of verse 1c, *“but you are dead.”*

Looks can be deceiving. A body that from all outward appearances appears strong and healthy can, upon closer inspection, be found to be racked with cancer or some other terminal disease. And in this case, the Lord puts His finger on the pulse of this church and pronounces them dead! They didn't even know it, and no matter what others thought, Jesus knew the truth.

It makes me think of the story of Samson, the strongest man in Israel in Judges 14-16. But through compromise he ends up telling Delilah the secret of his Nazarite vow. She cuts his hair and he loses his strength. The haircut wasn't really the issue, it just symbolized Samson's unwillingness to obey God, and when he didn't obey God, God took his strength away. But here is the sad reality. Judges 16:20 says, "*But Samson did not know that the Lord had departed from him.*"

The result was Samson's defeat, Samson's imprisonment, Samson's blindness, and Samson's death. And that miserable wreck, that pitiful, blind giant, tied with two brass chains, stooping over a grinding mill in the prison of Gaza, is depicted as one tragic figure.

That was Sardis, once strong, once alive, once a powerful church, began to compromise and sin, and it became weak and blind and dead and was grinding the grain of sin's prison, not even knowing that the Lord had long since departed the church.

An autopsy has been performed. Sardis is dead. What, if anything, can be done? Thankfully, Jesus is in the resurrection business. Because this church is His church there is yet hope of recovery, restoration, and revitalization.

After Christ's diagnosis, He gives a powerful five-part prescription.

## **II. Christ's Prescription**

### **Verses 2-3**

Verses 2-3... <sup>2</sup>“*Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.*” <sup>3</sup>“*So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.*”

In rapid-fire succession our Lord peppers the church at Sardis with 5 imperatives, 5 steps they must take if to be the Christians, to be the church, to be the body of Christ that Jesus saved them to be. There is hope, but you must act quickly. There can be no delay. Time is almost gone. You and I do well to listen to the treatment Jesus prescribes.

### **A. Rise and Wake Up**

#### **v. 2a**

Verse 2a... “*Wake up,*”

Twice before, the city of Sardis was destroyed because the watchmen were not on the walls and invaders were able to enter its gates. The church has committed the same error and so is commanded to “*wake up,*” to start being vigilant. They have fallen asleep spiritually and are allowing sin to invade their church.

It's hard to get out of spiritual sleep. It's hard to get out of physical slumber!

Have ever had a hard time getting out of bed? There have been times that I set my alarm clock on the other side of the room so that I must rise and wake up and not remain in slumber.

Jesus says, rise and wake up!

### **B. Return and Fulfill the Mission v. 2b**

Verse 2b... *“and strengthen the things that remain”*

The church in Sardis had lost sight of her mission and purpose. The church was content with a halfway completed work, it was content to be mediocre. But God says, *“strengthen the things that remain.”* In the original language, this does not refer to strengthening people, but strengthening spiritual realities. In other words, the spiritual realities of the church – the things which made it distinctive and pure and focused and passionate – needed attention. Our mission is the same mission of all the Lord's churches: to know Christ and make Him known.

There is no perfect church, every church needs to evaluate what needs to be strengthened? Have you seen any trouble spots?

And this challenge is not just for the church in general, but for every Christian in particular. Christ will end this letter, in Revelation 3:6, like every other letter, *“Is anybody listening to what the Spirit is saying? What needs to change in your life? Where are the weak spots in your spiritual life?”* Return and strengthen those things so you can fulfill your mission.

### **C. Remember the Truth v.3a**

Verse 3a... *“So remember what you have received and heard”*

Literally, this means to keep on remembering. In other words, *“Do not allow yourself to forget what you received.”* Remember the grace of God which saved you. Do not forget your life before Christ. Remember His strength which sustains you. Do not forget His amazing grace. Remember the measure of His love. Do not forget the truth of His word. Remember the responsibility you have to the church body. Do not forget your service for Christ. Remember your mission to the world. Do not forget your body is now God's temple. Remember your skills are God's gifts to be used for His glory. Do not forget to watch for His soon appearing.

A good memory means nothing for the church if it does not affect our feet and our hands and our mind and our heart. The church that is slipping into a comma is a church that may remember its past but forgets why it mattered. Rise and Wake Up! Return and strengthen! Remember and don't forget! Fourth:

### **D. Resolve to Obey v. 3b**

Verse 3b, *“keep it.”*

It is one thing to recall the truth, it is another thing to do it. The truth of the Christian faith is a precious treasure never to be taken for granted. Jude 3 says earnestly contend (fight) for the faith. Jesus says hold fast what you received and heard. Do not let it slip away.

When I was flying in the Navy one of the things, we would need to diligently guard against was drift in our navigation. If a compass was off or there was a slow drift in our inertial navigation systems, then it would take us off course and in a direction, we did not want to go. Spiritually, if you are not vigilant, diligent, and actively pursuing spiritual growth in Christ then you just begin to drift, and you never drift anywhere worth going.

That is why the elders here at Cornerstone ask that you not only attend a worship service on Sunday, but that you also attend a Community Group that meet in homes on Sunday, Monday, Tues, Wednesdays. Why? So we can help each other to fulfill our mission.

Rise and wake up, return, and fulfill the mission, remember the truth, resolve to obey, and fifth:

### **E. Repent of Sin**

### **v. 3c**

Verse 3c, “*repent.*”

The last command, *repent* means to change your mind and change your direction.

Repent of your sin and turn in faith to Christ for forgiveness and to be brought from death to life. Repent from compromise and turn to living by biblical conviction. Repent from slothfulness and laziness and turn to God’s Word and watchfulness. Repent of keeping the gospel to yourself and not sharing it with those who need salvation and pray for courage and for opportunities to share the good news of Christ with others.

The Lord warns in verse 3c... “*Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.*”

The picture of the Lord’s coming as a thief always carries the idea of imminent judgment (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; I Thessalonians 5:2). This threat is not related to the rapture of the church or the Lord’s second coming, but a reference to the suddenness of His coming. A thief comes to take away what is valuable. Again, the believers in Sardis would easily understand this picture.

In other words, “Just like those soldiers stole into your city and took away your freedom; I will slip in while you are unaware and take away your testimony. Since you have no need of the Spirit whom you ignore, your church will no longer have the Spirit’s presence and vitality. You might hold services and hand out bulletins and shake hands and listen to sermons and sing some songs and hymns, but you, the famous church in Sardis, will be pronounced irretrievably and permanently dead – with no spiritual fruit or testimony.”

The fact that a godly man named Melito served as bishop of Sardis one hundred years after the time of John’s letter would indicate a wonderful revival and return to the scriptures. In fact, Melito wrote a defense of Christianity and sent it to the Roman emperor. It is also interesting to me that Melito wrote the first commentary on the book of Revelation and especially on the literal millennial reign of Christ.

We have seen Christ’s pronouncement, Christ’s prescription, and third:

### III. Christ's Promises

#### Verses 4-6

Verse 4... *“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”*

The church had become polluted by the world; they had become soiled by the sinful values of the world around it.

They hadn't taken up Jesus' call to live differently, because living differently is described as wearing white. If you've got a bunch of people covered head to toe in mud, and you've got a bride in a bright dazzling white dress right in the middle – that bride is going to stand out; and be noticed; and be detectable to any onlooker.

Notice again verse 4... *“worthy.”*

Hebrews chapter 11 describes all the hardships of the people of God who lived as exiles in this world – all the persecution they endured at the hands of the world – and then the writer simply comes to a stop mid-sentence and says in Hebrews 11:38, *“men of whom the world was not worthy.”*

And I love that because it's not saying that we have earned worthiness before God; but it's a reminder that when the world rejects the people of God, God embraces them. He finds worthy what the world rejects as unworthy; and you can either live to be found worthy by the world; or you can live to be found worthy by Jesus – but you can't have both.

You can't live for the world and live for Jesus; you can't deny Jesus before the world and expect Him to accept you before God.

For the faithful few, times had been tough. They had not compromised and sinned. They were perhaps beginning to wonder “is it worth it? Has God given up on us as well?” To such questions our Lord provides two promises of future blessings for those who stay faithful in the present.

#### A. Spotless Splendor

#### v. 4

Verse 4... *“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”*

Because of their refusal to defile their garments while under great cultural pressure to do so, Christ will replace their humanly preserved, clean garments with those that are white by divine standards. White garments represent purity and holiness. Christ promises to clothe Christians in the brilliance of eternal purity and holiness.

#### B. Secure Salvation

#### v. 5-6

Verse 5... *“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”*

Christ further promises every true Christian that He will not erase his name from the book of life but will confess his name before the Father and before His angels. Incredibly, although the text says just the opposite, some people assume that this verse teaches that a Christian's name can be erased from the book of life. But verse 5 is not a warning but a promise that a true Christian's salvation will never be taken away.

In the apostle John's day, rulers kept a register of the citizens of a city. If someone died, or committed a serious crime, their name was erased from that register. Christ, the King of heaven, promises never to erase a true Christian's name from the roll of those whose names were "*written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.*" Revelation 13:8.

On the contrary, Christ will confess every believer's name before God the Father and before His angels. He will affirm that they belong to Him. Here Christ reaffirmed the promise He made during His earthly ministry in Matthew 10:32, "*Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.*"

The comforting truth that true Christians' salvation is eternally secure is the unmistakable teaching of Scripture. Nowhere is that truth more strongly stated than what we heard Adrian read in Romans 8:28–30.

Let me close with three thoughts:

1. It is possible to have the appearances of spiritual life without the reality of spiritual life.

If you now realize you are in a deep sleep or perhaps you are spiritually dead, but you hear the call of Christ -wake up and respond to His call!

2. It is possible to perform for God without being transformed by God.

Doing without being having a form of godliness without experiencing the reforming power of God is religion's testimony. Don't stay in spiritual apathy.

Many of us, myself included, have stayed silent out of fear about our faith in Christ when we have clear opportunities to share the good news of the gospel. And this doesn't mean that we need to find some way to inject Jesus into every conversation or redirect every conversation to Jesus. But it means that there's a time to stand firm; there's a time to be bold; there's a time to have some Spirit-given courage; and maybe we've been too timid, or too careful; or too concerned with being respectable or not being lumped together with the fanatics out there or being excluded from the world's acceptance and reward.

Our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. And when God gives the opportunities, we need to be faithful ambassadors of Christ and speak the truth of repentance and faith in the only Savior.

3. It is possible to regain spiritual consciousness and revive to a ministry of spiritual vitality.

In other words, it is possible to avoid the loss of a church's testimony and the death of a ministry and come back to life, not only as a church, but as a believer. How? By waking up, returning to the mission, remembering the truth, resolving to obey and repenting of sin.

This is the path to spiritual renewal.



### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How did Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Sardis? What is known about the city and church there?
2. What does Jesus mean by the terms “dead” and “alive” in verse 1?
3. Jesus has His finger on the pulse of the church and of each individual in the church. What would you say is His spiritual diagnosis of our church? His diagnosis of you?
4. The other churches faced persecution, but the church in Sardis did not. Why not? What lesson can we learn about faithfulness to Christ?
5. What did Jesus command the church in Sardis to do about their problems?
6. In verses 4 and 5, Jesus addresses the faithful believers in the church. Must a faithful Christian leave a congregation that is in spiritual decline or in sin? Why were some believers in Sardis accepted by Christ, yet most were rebuked?
7. What is the significance of the white garments in verse 5?
8. What is “the book of life” in verse 5? How can you know if your name is written in it?



**CHAPTER 9**  
**“Philadelphia: The Faithful Church”**  
**Revelation 3:7-13**

<sup>7</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this’: <sup>8</sup> ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. <sup>9</sup> Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and 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 My new name. <sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”

We have studied the letters from Jesus Christ to five churches, and today is church number six – the church at Philadelphia. Thus far we have learned the following primary truths from the letters to:

- Ephesus – it is possible to love doctrine, but not love Jesus;
- Smyrna – being in the middle of God’s will may include suffering;
- Pergamum – tolerating false doctrine may be the first step to disobedience to Christ;
- Thyatira – tolerating compromise in the church dishonors God and is a poor testimony to others;
- Sardis – it is possible to have an impressive past, but no effective future.

So far, all these letters (except the letter to the persecuted church in Smyrna) have been sent to churches that were called out and rebuked by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

- Ephesus was cold and unloving;
- Pergamum was no longer guarding true doctrine;
- Thyatira was riddled with division and tempted by immoral leadership;
- Sardis was asleep at the wheel, resting on its past, and not passionate about its future.

These problems exist in the churches not only in the first century, but in the twenty-first century. In other words, the dangers and deceptions and temptations of the first century church still exist today.

So, in the midst of these letters to seven churches, we need to ask: Was there a church that could provide a biblical model? Was there a church that had their eye on the right goal, for the right reason; that was attempting to teach the right things; pressing forward in the right ministry; holding the right standard; experiencing the approval of God? The answer is, “Yes!”

As you read this letter, you become quickly aware that this is a church that the Lord is using for His glory. In fact, down through history, the kind of churches God has used most often, fit into the Philadelphia mold.

The word Philadelphia means “love of the brethren.” Certainly, brotherly love is an important mark of the Christian. We are “taught of God to love one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9): by God the Father (1 John 4:19), God the Son (John 13:34), and God the Spirit (Romans 5:5).

But it is not enough to love God and our fellow believers; we must also love a lost world and seek to reach unbelievers with the Good News of the Cross. This church had a vision to reach a lost world, and God set before them an open door which they faithfully walked through.

Philadelphia was situated in a strategic place on the main route of the Imperial Post from Rome to the East, and thus was called “the gateway to the East.” It was also called “little Athens” because of the many temples in the city. The church was certainly located in a place of tremendous opportunity.

So, as we study our text we need to pray and ask: Lord, is Cornerstone a church that you are pleased with? Is Cornerstone a church that is taking advantage of opportunities to know Christ and make Him known? And we each individually need to pray, “Lord, I want to be a faithful servant that you can use. Show me this morning through Your Word what I am doing that is praiseworthy and what I am doing that needs to change for your glory and the good of others.”

In our text we will see how Jesus commends and comforts the faithful church in four steps:

- First, we will see the Christ of the Church in verse 7 – His attributes and activity.
- Second, Jesus commends the Condition of the Church in verse 8 – the privileges, power and priorities of this church
- Third, we will see Jesus address the Challenges of the Church in verses 9-11
- Fourth, we will see Jesus give Comfort to the Church in verses 12-13.

## **I. The Christ of the Church**

The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine author of the seven letters, always introduces Himself with a description reflecting His character. In the previous five letters, those descriptions had come from the vision recorded in 1:12–17. But this description of Him is unique and not drawn from that earlier vision.

Look at verse 7 with me...Notice two aspects of Christ: *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:’ ”*

### **A. His Attributes**

There are two immediate attributes described here. First, Jesus is holy - That is, He is without blemish! He is perfect and sinless.

The title “*Holy One*” is used in the New Testament as a messianic title for the Lord Jesus Christ. In Mark 1:24 a terrified demon screamed, “*What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!*”

In Luke 1:35 the angel that announced Christ’s birth described Jesus as “*the holy Child.*” In John 6:69 Peter affirmed, “*We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.*”

And because Christ is holy, His church must be as well. 1 Peter 1:15 says, “*Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.*”

Second, Jesus Is Honest –Not only is Jesus Christ the Holy One; He also describes Himself as He who is true. “*Alēthinos*” (true) denotes that which is genuine, authentic, and real. In the midst of the falsehood, perversion, and error that fills the world, the Lord Jesus Christ is the truth. Jesus said in John 14:6... “*Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’*”

Jesus is the only One worthy of faith, trust, and obedience! He is the One to follow! The church God uses will always be a church that makes much of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Cornerstone of our faith!

## **B. His Activity**

Verse 7 continues telling us that Jesus is the holder of “*the key of David.*” Look at Revelation 5:5... “*and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’*”

As the root and offspring of David, Jesus in the fulfilled sense controls the entrance to David’s house, which ultimately refers to the Messianic kingdom. Jesus alone has the sovereign authority to determine who enters His messianic kingdom, He has the keys to salvation and blessing.

Verse 7 ends with the words, “*who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.*”

That description stresses Christ’s omnipotence: what He does cannot be overturned by someone more powerful. In Isaiah 43:13 the Lord declares, “*I act and who can reverse it?*” No one can shut the doors to the kingdom or to blessing if He holds them open.

This is the Christ of the Church. Second, Jesus addresses:

## **II. The Condition of the Church**

Verse 8... Notice three things about the condition of the church. “*I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*”

## A. The Privilege They Enjoyed

There are a couple views regarding what Jesus means when he says, *“I have put before you an open door which no one can shut.”* The first view is that the *“opened door”* speaks of a sure entrance into the messianic kingdom, promised to this church as a reward for their faithfulness. No one, not even those of *“the synagogue of Satan”* in verse 9 can shut them out. Jewish opponents would seek to deny Gentiles, such as Christians in this city, entrance into the messianic kingdom, but Jesus is holding the door open.

The second view is that the term *“open door”* in the New Testament speaks of opportunity for ministry. Acts 14:27 tells us, *“When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”*

Paul writes in Colossians 4:2-3, *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned.”*

Jesus gave the church at Philadelphia assurance that He is the open who secures our salvation and He holds the door open into His messianic kingdom. But He also gave them assurance that there is a great opportunity for ministry, that was the privilege they enjoyed. I trust He will give us opportunities for ministry as well.

On Tuesday flew back to Maryland to see my parents. I usually pray for opportunities to talk to others about Christ and for me to have the courage when the opportunity is there, but honestly, I don't think I prayed for that this time. I was at the SLO airport on the phone speaking with some friends here at Cornerstone, and when I ended the call a younger gentleman across from me started talking to me...

What a privilege we enjoy having the good news of the gospel and to share it with others. Secondly, Jesus commends:

## B. The Power They Exhibited

Notice the middle of verse 8, *“because you have a little power.”*

At first glance the words *“you have a little power”* seems to be a negative comment about their frailty and feebleness, but it is a commendation of their strength.

*“Dunamin”* is the Greek word from which we get our English word dynamite. He says, *“You have a little power.”* This was a humble group of believers which did not have impressive numbers, buildings, or programs. The Philadelphia church was small in numbers but had a powerful impact on its city.

What a wonderful reminder that it is not the size of a church that determines its fruitfulness in ministry, but faith in the call and command of the Lord. It has been said, *“God's commandments are God's enablements.”* If Jesus Christ gave them an open door, then He would see to it that they were able to walk through it!

Most of the Philadelphia church members may have been poor, from the lower classes of society. But with Paul they could say in 2 Corinthians 12:10, *“I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Despite its small size, spiritual power flowed in the Philadelphia church. People were being redeemed, lives were being transformed, and the gospel of Jesus Christ was being proclaimed. Those are the same priorities for Cornerstone. We are to know Christ and make Him known.

We have seen the privilege of an open door to heaven but also open doors to share with others. We also saw the power that this small church exhibited. Third:

### **C. The Priorities They Embodied**

Verse 8 ends with *“and have kept My word and have not denied My name.”*

We do not know how the church in Philadelphia was founded. What we do know is it was a church that pleased Jesus. How do we know that? Well notice two priorities they embodied.

First, They Possessed The Right Standard Of Faith – They *“kept His Word”* meaning this was a church that was walking in obedience to the Word of God! The Bible was their standard of faith and they refused to deviate from it!

Second, They Possessed The Right Statement Of Faith - They had not denied His Name. That is, they were a people who were all about Jesus! He was the centerpiece of their worship and their praise. He was why they gathered and He was all important.

They were not ashamed of Christ’s death on the cross. They were not ashamed to preach salvation by faith through grace. They wanted the world to know about their glorious Lord. Because they made much of Jesus, He made much of them! This is the kind of church we ought to strive to be!

## **III. The Challenges of the Church**

Verse 9... *“Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet and make them know that I have loved you.”*

### **A. Persecution**

As was the case in Smyrna (Revelation 2:9 .. *“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”*), Christians in Philadelphia faced hostility from unbelieving Jews. Because of their rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they were not at all a synagogue of God, but a synagogue of Satan.

*“The synagogue of Satan”* was apparently composed of professing Jews, worshiping in the synagogue, and claiming to be the true Israel. Satan is named as the leader of such a synagogue because of the persecuting habits of this group.

Though they claimed that they were Jews, that claim was a lie. Racially, culturally, and ceremonially they were Jews, but spiritually they were not. Paul defines a true Jew in Romans 2:28–29: *“For he is not a Jew who is one*

*outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”*

So, the first challenge they faced was persecution. The second challenge was:

## **B. Perseverance**

Look at verses 10-11a, <sup>10</sup> *“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour, which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”*

What is the hour of testing?

Notice three aspects of this wonderful promise in Revelation 3:10. First, the test is for a definite, limited time; Jesus described it as the *“hour of testing.”* Second, the test is worldwide in scope, since it will *“come upon the whole world.”* Third, and most significantly, its purpose is *“to test those who dwell on the earth”* - a phrase used as a technical term in the book of Revelation for unbelievers (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8).

The *“hour of testing”* is Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:25–27), the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), known as the seven-year tribulation period in the future. The Lord promises to keep His church out of the future time of testing that will come on unbelievers.

Unbelievers will either pass the test by repenting or fail it by refusing to repent. Revelation 6:9–11; 7:9–10, 14; 14:4; and 17:14 describe those who repent during the Tribulation and are saved, thus passing the test; Revelation 6:15–17; 9:20; 16:11; and 19:17–18 describe those who refuse to repent, thus failing the test, and are damned.

Because the believers in Philadelphia had successfully passed so many tests, Jesus promised to spare them from the ultimate test. I believe this verse promises that the church will be delivered from the Tribulation, thus supporting a pretribulation Rapture. The Rapture is the subject of three passages in the New Testament (John 14:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:51–54; 1 Thess. 4:13–17), none of which speak of judgment, but rather of the church being taken up to heaven.

There are three views of the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation: that it comes at the end of the seven years of Tribulation (post-tribulationism), in the middle of the Tribulation (mid-tribulationism), and the view that seems to be supported by this text, that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation (pre-tribulationism).

So, verses 10-11 is a challenge for these people to carry on for the Lord, knowing that one day He is returning to take them out of this world. Obviously, the Lord didn’t return in their lifetimes, but that does not change the fact that He is coming! Our duty to Him is to live every day like He will return at any moment

## **C. Protection**

Verse 11b... *“; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”*



The members of the Philadelphia church had been faithful and loyal to Christ; He commanded them to remain so. Those who persevere to the end thereby prove the genuineness of their salvation (Matthew 10:22; 24:13).

It is true that believers are eternally secure because of the power of God. Yet the means by which He secures them is by providing believers with a persevering faith. Christians are saved by God's power, but not apart from their constant, undying faith. Paul writes in Colossians 1:22–23 that *“He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.”* According to 1 John 2:19, those who abandon the faith reveal that they were never truly saved to begin with: *“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”*

Christ's promise to the one who faithfully perseveres is no one will take your crown. Revelation 2:10 defines this crown as the *“crown of life,”* or as the Greek text literally reads, *“the crown which is life.”* The crown, or reward, for those who faithfully endure to the end is eternal life.

We have seen the Christ of the church, the condition of the church, the challenge of the church, and finally:

#### **IV. The Comfort of the Church**

The Lord closes this passage with a wonderful word of promise to the people in the church at Philadelphia.

##### **A. His Stability**

Verse 12a, *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.”*

They are promised that they will stand as pillars in the Temple of God in Heaven. History records that influential citizens of Philadelphia would often be honored in the city with a pillar placed in their name in one of the pagan temples. It isn't very likely that any members of the Philadelphian church were ever recognized as outstanding citizens in this pagan city.

However, the Lord tells them that He is watching and that He will set them in His Father's Temple in glory!

Of all the pagan temples that stood in Philadelphia, with all their thousands of pillars, exactly none are still standing today!

You see, the honor of men is fleeting, but the honor the Lord promises these people in Heaven is eternal! What a powerful reminder to not live for temporary recognition here but live for eternal stability there with our Lord.

The Lord comforts by reminding us of stability in Christ. Second:

##### **B. His Safety**

Verse 12, *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore.”*

This is a reference to the fact that Philadelphia was built near an active volcano. When that mountain began to rumble, the citizens of the city would be forced to flee. In many ways it was a very unsafe place to live. Jesus reminds them that they are headed to a place of safety in Heaven. This world may be changing and there may be dangers on every hand, but those who have the door of Heaven opened to them find a place of eternal safety, peace and rest!

They are promised His stability, His safety, and third:

### **C. His Security**

These people receive the wonderful promise that they will be identified as the people of God forever. They will have His Name upon them. They will be identified as citizens of Heaven. They even have the precious promise that they will bear the Name of the Savior. What He is talking about here is their security.

This is the incredible great reward of the gospel: God Himself. When we risk our lives to run after Christ, we discover the safety that is found only in His sovereignty, the security that is found only in His love, and the satisfaction that is found only in His presence. This is the eternally great reward, and we would be foolish to settle for anything less.

The Philadelphia church was a faithful church that lasted longer than any other of the seven churches mentioned here. Until the thirteenth century, it had a continuous existence. It was destroyed by the Turks when they came in and brutally murdered all the believers who were left in this church. But it was also a missionary church that was faithful to know Christ and make Him known.

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What do we know about the church and city of Philadelphia from verse 7?
2. How did Jesus describe Himself to them? In what sense is He holy? True?
3. What key did Jesus have? What verse is referred to here? Explain the significance.
4. What had Jesus opened for Philadelphia in 3:8?
5. Whom does the Lord Jesus describe as “the synagogue of Satan”? What does He say about them?
6. Jesus noted the patient endurance of the Christians in Philadelphia. How patient are you? How can you become more patient?
7. What command had they kept and what would result in verse 10?
8. According to verse 11, what should they do to be ready for His coming?
9. What reward is promised overcomers in verse 12? What is the significance of being a pillar in the temple?

**CHAPTER 10**  
**Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church**  
**Revelation 3:14-22**

*<sup>14</sup> “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:’ <sup>15</sup> ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.’ <sup>17</sup> Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, <sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. <sup>21</sup> He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”*

Have you ever had lunch with someone and as they are talking you notice they have part of their food that is stuck on the side of their mouth, or on their chin or in their mustache. And as your friend is talking you are having a hard time listening to what they are saying because you are so focused on that crumb or glob of mayonnaise or ketchup that is stuck on their face. And you wonder, “Do I say something? Are they going to figure this out? Should I just reach over with a napkin and wipe that off for them?” You may even try to give signals and point out the problem without saying anything. And really you are not hearing a word they are saying because you are just thinking about the food on their face. So finally, “Excuse me, but you got a glob of food right here on your cheek.”

And if you are the one with food on your face, you are the last one to see it. C.S. Lewis wrote an essay called “The Trouble with X.” The X stands for the person that makes life difficult for us. And we will say to someone else “You know what the trouble with X is...”. You know what the trouble with Sally is, she talks too much and she can’t even see it. Or you know what the trouble with Javier is, he is too critical and he cannot see how he is driving people away.”

But C.S. Lewis writes that you are not even aware that you are the X in someone else’s life. At some point, someone has said, “You know what the trouble with John Marc is. God bless his soul, he loves the Lord and is a wonderful pastor, but the trouble with John Marc is he preaches too long.” And I bet others have agreed “yes, the trouble with John Marc is ...but he cannot even see it.”

C.S. Lewis writes what we really need to do is love ‘X’ more; and we must learn to see ourselves as a person of exactly the same kind.

That is the problem of the church of Laodicea. They thought they were they had it all together. They perceived themselves as fruitful, visionary, and successful, but Jesus says they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. They considered themselves to be healthy and Jesus says “You are so rotten and so unpleasant, you make me sick to my stomach.”

The church in Laodicea thought they had it all together. But their perception did not match the reality of what Jesus knew them to be. Jesus says, *“You have convinced yourself you are rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing, and you do not even realize that you are wretched, poor, and blind. Jesus says, You nauseate me, you make me sick.”*

And verse 20 reveals just how bad it is in Laodicea because in verse 20 we discover that the church is functioning without Jesus! He is on the outside of His own church. They are operating in their own strength for their own glory.

So, Jesus wants us to listen this morning and evaluate your own heart. You need to ask yourself: Am I operating in my own strength, following my own agenda, living for my own comfort, seeking my own glory? If you are like me I want to please the Lord not make Him sick.

So, in our text Jesus confronts the church at Laodicea for their lukewarm faith and provides promises for those who repent and passionately follow Him. And He does this in four steps:

The Perfection of Christ	Verse 14
The Problems in the Church	Verses 15-17
The Prescription of Christ	Verses 18-19
The Promises of Christ	Verses 20-21

My prayer is that we will each evaluate ourselves and ask how the Lord would describe me, am I hot, cold or lukewarm. How will Christ evaluate me? Jesus is perfect in His evaluation and that is how our text begins in verse 14... *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:”*

## I. The Perfection of Christ

Jesus begins by describing two aspects of His character.

### A. He is Infallible v. 14a .. *“The Amen, the faithful and true Witness”*

The word Amen means to recognize what is sure and valid, true and trustworthy. It affirms what is certain, reliable, true to reality. To be infallible means incapable of making mistakes or of being wrong. Infallible means never failing, always correct and effective. In applying this to Himself, Christ affirms He is the answer to all the promises of God. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, *“For all the promises of God are yes in Jesus, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”* As the Amen, Jesus is the faithful and true witness.

This description of Jesus stands in stark contrast to the true condition of the Laodicean church. Jesus is reliable, they are not. He is faithful, they are not. He is the True Witness, they have no witness at all. You may not trust the words and witness of Laodicean Christians, but you can trust what Jesus says every time. He is infallible. Second:

### B. He is Invincible v. 14b .. *“the Beginning of the creation of God,...”*

Notice in verse 14 Christ referred to Himself as “*the Beginning of the creation of God.*” The English translation is somewhat ambiguous and misleading. As a result, some have attempted to use this verse to prove that Jesus is a created being.

However, there is no ambiguity in the Greek text. The word **Arche** is translated “beginning” in the NASB and the word means ruler or origin. It does not mean that Christ was the first-person God created, but rather that Christ Himself is the source of creation. In Revelation 22:13 Jesus says, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*” Hebrews 1:2 tells us that through Christ’s power everything was created and John 1:3 says, “*all things came into being through Him.*”

Jesus is first in time and position. But Laodicean Christians forgot or ignored the exalted and preeminent place that belongs only to Jesus. They lose sight of who He is and what He has done and is doing and what He has called them to do. We are to exalt Jesus. Our mission is to know Christ and to make Him known.

On our flight home Wednesday on United airlines, we were boarding our plane in Baltimore and the flight was completely full (Southwest), and as we approached our row, I said to Paula...

Elana’s husband had been unfaithful to her and it had taken a toll on her. Paula talked with her for the whole 2.5-hour flight explaining that Jesus is faithful and that Elana needed to turn to Him in faith.

Jesus is perfect, infallible, and invincible. But the Laodiceans had problems.

## II. The Problems in the Church

Verses 15-16... <sup>15</sup> “*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.*” <sup>16</sup> “*So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*”

### A. Lack of Purpose

The words in verse 15 “*I know your deeds*” are here filled with irony. It says in effect, “This is the best I can say about you.”

Verse 15... Many interpret Jesus words of temperature here to mean: “I would rather you be cold and in opposition to me or hot and on fire for me.” However, it is difficult to explain why Jesus would rather they be cold spiritually than lukewarm. The key is realizing that the metaphor stems from the region’s water supply.

Laodicea was a wealthy city – one of the wealthiest – of the region. It was located at the intersection of two important imperial trade routes. The city was a wealthy commercial center. It was known for banking, the manufacturing of clothing (especially a shiny black wool), and a famous medical school with specialized ointments for the ears and the eyes.

So wealthy was the city that following a devastating earthquake in the year AD 60, Laodicea rebuilt herself without any assistance at all from Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus said of her, “Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from Rome.”

The city and church alike saw themselves as self-sufficient. They did not need the help of anyone including God. They were just fine all by themselves. But the city did have one major weakness: a lack of an adequate and convenient source of water.

Hieropolis was 6 miles to the north and had natural hot water springs. The hot water was used for medicinal purposes and thought to have healing properties.

Colossae was a city to the south, that had cold water which was good for drinking – it was cool and refreshing and appealing and satisfying to the taste of the one who is thirsty. It’s life-giving and life-restoring.

But Laodicea had no water supply of its own – it had to pipe in water from miles away and by the time it reached Laodicea it was lukewarm – tepid, unclean, undrinkable – useless – worthless – tasted so bad that the taste of it made you want to spit it out onto the ground.

So, Jesus is characterizing them as having a useless and worthless spirituality over and against two images of healthy spirituality.

If they had been hot spirituality – their faith would be beneficial and healing to those around them; if they had been cold spirituality – their faith would be life-giving and refreshing to those around them. But they have lukewarm spirituality – faith that doesn’t serve any useful purpose; they had such a lukewarm faith that the taste of it makes you want to spit it out.

Jesus says in verse 16.. *“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”*

You kind of need to have that feeling to sense what Christ is describing here in our text. The Greek word for “*spit out*” is literally to vomit. Since a term meaning “to vomit” often carries somewhat vivid connotations, ἐμέω in Rev 3:16 has frequently been translated as “to spit out of my mouth.” But it literally means ‘to vomit out of the mouth’ as an idiom meaning ‘to violently reject because something is rotten.’”

You have all experienced vomit – both throwing up and smelling it. It’s gross. To be nauseous is an awful feeling. I remember when one of our boys was about 7 years old, he had got a stomach bug and the idea of throwing up was foreign to him. So, as he went to bed, we gave him a big salad bowl and told him that if he was going to upchuck to do it in the bowl. Well, sure enough the time came but instead of simply leaning over that bowl and let it rip, he ran up and down the hallway yelling, “I’m going to throw up! I’m going to throw up!”

Jesus says here to the Laodiceans you are so foul that I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. They have useless, worthless, good-for-nothing spirituality – because Jesus isn’t a part of it.

And to make matters worse, they could not see their lack of purpose. The second part of the problem is their:

## **B. Lack of Perception**

Verse 17... *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,’ ”*

We can see how self-deception runs deep. Jesus works with those who are healthy and He works with those who are sick. But Jesus does not help people who are sick but think they are healthy.

Jesus wants people to see their true condition, humanity is sick and sinful. The blind cannot see and they know it, and Jesus will open their eyes. But like the Pharisees the Laodiceans thought they could see when they were blind. In John 9:39 Jesus said, *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”*

The Laodicean Christians are deceived Christians. A comparison of their self-estimation with that of the Lord is tragic and sobering. They could not have been more wrong in who they thought they were. They lived with a pervasive attitude of self-sufficiency – they needed nothing or no one, including the Lord.

I can so easily fall into the same mindset and mode of operating. When my father died two weeks ago on Saturday night and I preached here on Sunday morning and then got on a plane on Monday morning to fly back east, I felt incredibly lonely and a great loss with my father gone. I don't like feeling that way. I am the one who ministers to others and I am the one who has answers and a plan. But here I was feeling so lonely and in a dark place and I reached out to the elders and told them how I felt and asked if they would please pray for me. I need the Lord more than anything.

The Laodicean Christian claims to have reached his lofty spiritual status on their own and that they needed nothing or no one, including the Lord. Jesus, however, has a completely different perspective on this church and the picture is not pretty. Using imagery and illustrations that would hit them right between the eyes and right where they lived, Jesus exposes their spiritual destitution, deception, and desperate condition.

You do you not know (you do not realize) that you are spiritually (5 things):

- 1) wretched – pathetic, in a devastated condition.
- 2) miserable – the object of extreme pity and compassion.
- 3) poor – extreme poverty, poor as a beggar or pauper, a slap at a city that bragged of its wealth, commerce and banking industry.
- 3) blind – a rebuke to a city prided itself on its famous medicinal eye ointment.
- 5) naked – a slap at a city that boasted of its famous glossy black wool.

Jesus is the true one who see us for who we really are. We cannot fool Christ as He is is the Amen and the faithful and true witness.

Psalm 139 talks about God's knowledge of our lives. Turn to Psalm 139 with me. Notice verses 1-3... 7... 11-12... David recognizes that God intimately knows him, and David prays in verses 23-24...<sup>23</sup> *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”*<sup>24</sup> *See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

You may ask: David, if you say God knows everything about you, then why are you asking God to search you? Because David is saying, “Look and see any offensive way in me so that I can follow you in the everlasting way. Lord, I do not want to be offensive to You, I do not want to make You sick. Lord, I do not want to be lukewarm for you.”

Do you do enough of that in your life? Do you pray, “God you know me intimately and I know I cannot fool you. Lord I don’t want to make you sick, so please show me the ways that I am offensive, ways that I am keeping the door shut. Lord shows me my hypocrisy and my sin so that I can by your grace live in the truth.”

We have seen the Perfection of Christ, the Problems of the Church, and third:

### III. The Prescription of Christ

Jesus provides a two-fold prescription.

#### A. Treasure Christ

Verse 18... *“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.”*

They are poor and so Jesus says they *“need to buy from Me”*; they are blind and so they need spiritual eye salve; they are naked and so they need *“white clothes to wear.”*

Jesus is acting as their financial advisor. He tells them that they have been shopping at the wrong store, and they need to change their buying habits in three ways. These areas relate to three major sources of Laodicean wealth and status.

First, their banking and commerce were well known, and they thought their accumulated possessions had made them rich. But in reality, they were poverty-stricken because all their worldly wealth was nothing but fool’s gold.

1 Timothy 6:17 says, *“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”*

Find your security and satisfaction in God. This is true wealth and will never perish like worldly riches do.

Second, the city was famous for its clothing industry and had developed a glossy black wool that was prized throughout the Roman world. The principle here is that, contrary to popular wisdom, clothes do not make the person. Looking good is not the same as being good.

White garments, on the other hand, indicate honor, symbolizing righteousness, being washed in the blood of the Lamb .. Revelation 7:13–14.. <sup>13</sup>*“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’* <sup>14</sup>*I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’.. We dare not stand in the filthy rags of our own righteousness and good deeds.”* We desperately need the righteousness of Jesus.

Third, Laodicea was famed for its medical center and the eye salve it had developed, but the Christians were blind spiritually. Jesus is telling them that earthly accomplishments are meaningless if they are not right with God. The



Laodiceans needed to be anointed with God's eye salve so they could see their true spiritual condition, repent, and receive healing from Christ. And that is the second part of the prescription of Christ:

## **B. Trust Christ**

Verse 19... *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”*

*“Those whom I love I reprove and discipline.”* This is an important principle in Scripture. Jesus still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. His discipline is a proof of His love to correct them and lead them to fulfill their God given purpose.

Jesus' love is a real love that brings small and short-term unpleasantness to avoid real and long-term danger; or deprives us of small and short-term happiness in order to bring about real and long-term joy and fullness.

The discipline of a loving God and all-wise heavenly Father is a demonstration of His love and of His treating you as His child; so don't resent it; don't resist it; don't waste it; but receive it and respond to it with a soft teachable heart that trusts God's hand through the process even when the process may not seem to make sense to you.

God's discipline can be confusing; it can feel like darkness or abandonment or forsakenness; it is painful and difficult; and often in the middle of it we don't see the purpose of it. But you will one day whether in this life or the next. And until then we would do well to remember the words of Charles Spurgeon who said: “God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”

There can be only one proper response for the Laodiceans: to repent and change their conduct. Notice the two verbs at the end of verse 19, *“be zealous (or earnest) and repent,”* indicate a zeal to get right with God, the sorrow for sin that naturally follows, and a desire to live rightly for God from that time on. The Laodiceans had been blind to their complacent spirituality, immersed in their affluent lifestyle rather than concerned for the things of God. They needed to continue in their enthusiasm but channel it away from the things of this world and toward serving God.

Jesus concludes with incredible promises.

## **IV. The Promises of Christ**

Verse 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 will dine with him, and he with Me.”*

### **A. Endless Personal Fellowship**

This is one of the most famous passages in Scripture, but it is often misunderstood as referring to evangelism when it really deals with church revival. The picture of Christ at the door is one of a visitor knocking at the door of a house, seeking admittance. Jesus has apparently been standing outside for a while and the church is so self-reliant and so self-assured, they do not even notice they are doing ministry without the presence of Christ!

“*Dine*” is from the Greek word indicating the evening meal, the last meal of the day (Luke 17:8; 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Christ’s offer to dine with the repentant church speaks of fellowship, communion, and intimacy. Sharing a meal in ancient times symbolized the union of people in loving fellowship. Believers will dine with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9), and in the millennial kingdom (Luke 22:16, 29–30). Christ urged them to repent now and have fellowship with Him before the night of judgment fell and it was too late forever. He promises endless personal fellowship. Second, He promises:

### **B. Eternal Powerful Fulfillment**

Verse 21 ... *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

“*He who overcomes*” (all believers) receives a wonderful promise: Christ will grant to that person to sit down with Him on His throne, as He “*also overcame and sat down with the Father on His throne.*” To enjoy fellowship with Christ in the kingdom and throughout eternity is sufficient blessing beyond all comprehension.

But Christ offers more, promising to seat believers on the throne He shares with the Father (see Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29–30). That symbolizes the truth that we will reign with Him (1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

As did the other six letters, the letter to the Laodiceans closed with Christ’s exhortation, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

Are you listening? Friends, we can easily be self-deceived. And that is why it is so important to go to the Lord in His Word and in prayer. To have brothers and sisters in Christ who speak the truth to you. People at church, in your Community Group, and in your Bible study who love you enough to tell you the truth and to pray for you.

Jesus hasn’t spit the Laodiceans out of His mouth yet; verse 16 he says He is about to. But in His patience and grace He is stomaching that which is repulsive to Him in the hopes that repentance will turn them from distaste into delight.

He calls them to repent – but He’s patient; He’s waiting; He’s knocking; He’s giving time and opportunity and calling them to do so. And He is doing the same for you this morning.

We have learned in our study of these letters to the seven churches some incredible principles:

From the church in Ephesus, we learned that a church or a Christian must be careful not to lose your first love.

From Smyrna, we learned you must trust God in the midst of suffering and be faithful until the end.

From Pergamum, we learned to not compromise in biblical doctrine.

From Thyatira, don’t tolerate immorality.

From Sardis, be on guard against spiritual deadness.

From Philadelphia, walk through open doors for sharing the gospel.

And from the church of Laodicea, don’t be lukewarm but instead be zealous in growing in Christ and living for His glory.

Friends, revival is an individual matter. God deals with people one person at a time. Sometimes, like Laodicea, we have everything in our life and in our Church except the Lord. God forbid that that would be true of us, of you, or of me.

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What were the main problems in the church at Laodicea? 10-17-21
2. What are the biblical priorities of a local church and how can Cornerstone keep them?
3. What does Jesus mean by the terms “hot” and “cold” in Revelation 3:15-16?
4. What does it mean to be a lukewarm Christian? Why is it so distasteful to Christ?
5. In what ways have you become lukewarm in your relationship with Christ? How can you become “hot” in living in for Him?
6. Read Titus 2:11-14. Salvation is not only a change in position (set free from the slavery of sin), but it is also a change in attitude, appetite, ambition, and action. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
7. How does Christ’s truthfulness, trustworthiness, and omnipotence influence your daily decisions?
8. According to verses 18-19, what is Christ’s prescription for the lukewarm church?
9. What does Jesus promise in verses 20-21? How can these promises influence your daily thoughts and actions?
10. What main truths from Revelation 3:14-22 will you put into practice this week? Who will you ask to pray for you to be faithful in implementing these truths?



**CHAPTER 11**  
**“Inside the Throne Room of God”**  
**Revelation 4:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’ <sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; <sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. <sup>7</sup> The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.’ <sup>9</sup> And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’”

How many of you have seen the movie Chariots of Fire? Do you remember the opening scene?

The film opens in 1978 in a church at the funeral of one of the 1924 Olympic runners, as a stately gentleman and aged athlete reminisces that, now, “There are just two of us;” still alive, he describes how they back when they were young, they all had “hope in their hearts, and wings on their heels.” As the scene crossfades to the beach, we initially hear just a thrumming, percussive sound, mimicking the patter of footsteps on sand. French horns punctuate the percussion, majestically bellowing; they evoke nobility, a military march. Even if you have not seen the movie, you will recognize the music.

The runners move as if performing an athletic ballet, and in slow motion the camera n several faces. Some, like Harold Abrahams’ are stern and focused, while others, such as Eric Liddell’s, are rocked back in pure delight. Few film scores have captured so intently the sensation of running, especially of running with others - not necessarily what it always is (the pain, the effort), but rather that fleeting moment of euphoria that it promises. That tension— between the joy of the race, and the exertion of running - creates the crux of Vangelis’ musical score and of the film.

Liddell, the beloved Scottish athlete, and Christian missionary, represents the soul of the movie. In the film, Eric Liddell’s sister desperately wants him to quit running so that he will fulfill his true calling as a missionary in China. Yet the possibility of competing in the Olympics beckons, and so he takes her for a walk in the Scottish Highlands, where he goes for his daily run. He explains to his sister, “I believe that God made me for a purpose. For China. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

In 1988, I had finished my Navy flight training in California and had received orders to report to my first squadron in Jacksonville, FL. A high school friend flew out to California from Maryland to join me in the car trip cross country. When we got to Arizona we went to the Grand Canyon and paid for a helicopter tour. It was just the pilot and my friend Phil and me. The pilot asked us to put on the headphones so we could hear him talk. And as the helicopter approached the edge of the Grand Canyon unexpectedly the theme music of Chariots of Fire began playing on our headsets and suddenly the pilot took the helicopter down into the Grand Canyon and I was overwhelmed with the beauty and immensity and God's creation. It is an experience and a scene I will never forget.

This morning, as we return to the book of the Revelation, we will discover that God has an even more powerful and even more important 'opening scene' for us to consider.

The key word in Revelation chapter 4 is "throne," it is used fourteen times. In fact, this is a key word in the entire book, appearing forty-six times. No matter what may happen on earth, God is on His throne and is in complete control. Various teachers interpret Revelation in different ways, but all agree that John is emphasizing the glory and sovereignty of God. What an encouragement that would be to the suffering saints of John's day—and of every age in history.

John is given a vision into heaven and tells us who is on the throne, what is going on around the throne, and what is directed toward the throne. My prayer is that this opening scene inside the throne room of God will transform your vision of the power, preeminence and perfection of God and will be a scene that will help you daily.

## **I. The Sovereign on the Throne**

### **A. God's Plan**

Verse 1... *"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.'"*

Notice how verse 1 begins with the phrase "*after these things*" and then ends with the same words.

The first occurrence of "*after these things*" relates to John's personal chronology. It notes that this second vision followed immediately after John's vision of the risen, glorified Christ (1:9–20) and the letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22). The phrase after these things is used throughout Revelation to mark the beginning of a new vision (7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

The second occurrence of "*after these things*" at the end of verse 1 relates to God's chronology. "*Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.*" marks an important transition in the book of Revelation.

If you remember, Jesus' words in Revelation 1:19 form the outline of the whole book of Revelation, "*what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*"

The things which you have seen (Past) in chapter 1

The things which are (Present) in chapters 2-3 addressing the seven churches of Asia Minor

The things that will take place (Future) in chapters 4-22 (the Tribulation, millennial kingdom, and eternal state) that unfold in chapters 6–22.

So, the scene shifts both to heaven (mentioned 50 times in Revelation) and the future as God lays out for us His plan for the consummation of history. History is not aimlessly moving forward out of control. There is purpose in God's plan.

Notice in verse 1, John sees in heaven a door, "*standing open*." The Greek is the passive perfect participle, and literally means 'was opened'. This implies a divine action: God Himself opens the door in heaven for the seer.

Remember in 3:20...Jesus was standing at the door of the church at Thyatira and knocking so they would open the door. But now in 4:1 God opens the door and shows us His plan. Second, we see:

### **B. God's Preeminence**

Verse 2... "*Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.*"

John was amazed and astounded by what he saw, causing him to exclaim, "behold."

The cause of John's amazement was the throne of God that he saw "*standing in heaven*." This was not a piece of furniture, but a symbol of God's sovereign rule and authority in heaven (7:15; 16:17). According to Revelation 21:22 the heavenly temple is not an actual building: "*The Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*" are the temple. The use of the term "*temple*" symbolizes God's presence.

The throne was said to be standing because God's sovereign rule is fixed, permanent, and unshakable. The throne of God is vastly different than the throne of Caesar as God's immovable throne reveals He is in permanent, unchanging, and complete control of the universe. That is a comforting realization in light of the frightening end time events about to be revealed in chapters 6–19.

Earthly monarchs, rulers and presidents come and go, but this one remains forever. As Isaiah 6:1 says, "*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up.*" Psalm 47:8 adds, "*God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.*" In heaven, no one doubts who is in control. His authority is sovereign. God is preeminent.

### **C. God's Peace**

Verse 3... "*And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.*"

Jasper – probably refers to a translucent rock crystal (Revelation 21:11 .."*having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.*") , perhaps a diamond. It pictures God's glory and purity. Sardius stone – a blood red stone, pictures both the wrath of God poured out (Revelation 14:20 .."*And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.*") and the blood of Christ that purchased our redemption (Revelation 19:13.. "*He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*"). Rainbow – pictures God's

covenant to Noah (Genesis 9:16-17 .. *“When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.’”*) and His faithfulness to keep His word. Emerald – green, pictures life, even mercy as our God is the God of new life and new beginnings.

Taken as a whole these precious stones portray God in all His majestic splendor and glory. He is beyond description in appearance and utterly dependable in activity. He is awesome, magnificent, transcendent and spectacular.

God’s attributes always operate in perfect harmony. His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness. He is the sovereign on the throne. Second, we see:

## II. The Saints Around the Throne

Verse 4a... *“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones ”*

### A. Their Character verse 4a

Here in heaven’s court, there are twenty-four “*presbuteroi*” the Greek word that is translated “elders.” This reminds me of the little girl who was in Sunday school and the teacher got a little carried away and went a little more in depth and asked if anyone know what English word came the Greek *presbuteroi*. No one answered so the teacher said the word gives us our English word Presbyterian.

Well, on the way home from church, her mother asked this girl what she learned in Sunday school. She said, “We studied Revelation and the teacher said that only twenty-four Presbyterians made it to heaven.”

The identity of the twenty-four elders has been much debated. While some see them as an order of angelic beings, it seems best to view them as human representatives of the church. Why? First, the reference to the twenty-four thrones they sit upon indicates that they reign with Christ.

### B. Their Comfort

Verse 4b... *“and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,”*

Nowhere in Scripture do angels sit on thrones, nor are they pictured as reigning. The church, on the other hand, is repeatedly promised to rule with Christ (2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Corinthians 6:2–3; 2 Timothy 2:12).

What great comfort we have in knowing the truth of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:6 tells us, *“God has raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.”*

The Greek word translated “elders” is never used in Scripture to refer to angels, but always to men. It is used to speak of older men in general, and the rulers of both Israel and the church. There is also no clear use of this word outside of Revelation to refer to angels. Further, “elder” would be an inappropriate term to describe angels, who do not age.



## C. Their Clothing

Verse 4c... *“clothed in white garments,”*

While angels do appear in white (John 20:12; Acts 1:10), white garments more commonly are the dress of believers. That is particularly true in the immediate context of Revelation. Christ promised the believers at Sardis that they would *“be clothed in white garments”* (3:5). He advised the Laodiceans to *“buy from Me ... white garments so that you may clothe yourself”* (3:18). At the marriage supper of the Lamb, His bride will *“clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean”* (19:8). White garments symbolize Christ’s righteousness imputed to believers at salvation.

That the elders wore golden crowns on their heads provides further evidence that they were humans and represent the church. Crowns are never promised to angels in the Bible, nor are angels ever seen wearing them.

Each of the elders wore crowns of gold. These were not crowns of deity. There are 2 Greek words translated crown in the NT. One is the word *“diadem.”* This is the crown Jesus will wear, His crown of glory. This is the word *“stephanos”* and refers to a crown given to an athlete, who successfully competed and won the victory. Christ promised this crown to the overcomers, the loyal believers at Smyrna (Revelation 2:10; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12).

The redeemed people of God will be worshipping Him alongside the angels.

We have seen the one on the throne. We have seen the ones around the throne. Now we see what comes forth from the throne and who is before the throne.

### III. The Scene Before the Throne      Verses 5-11

#### A. The Power of the Creator

Verses 5-6a... <sup>5</sup> *“Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; <sup>6a</sup> and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass,”*

*“Flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder”* are associated with God’s presence in Exodus 19:16 and Ezekiel 1:13. These are indications of a coming storm and reminders of God’s awesome power (see Ex. 9:23, 28; 19:16). These “storm signals” will be repeated during the time of judgment, always proceeding from the throne and temple of God (Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). God has indeed prepared His throne for judgment (Ps. 9:7; note also 77:18).

Our world does not like to think of God as a God of judgment. They prefer to look at the rainbow around the throne and ignore the lightning and thunder out of the throne. He certainly is a God of grace, but His grace reigns through righteousness (Romans 5:21). This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.

The seven blazing lamps also stem from Ezekiel 1:13 and signify the powerful presence of God. These are not just lamps but the same “torches” that in Revelation 8:10 are linked with the *“great star”* that fell from heaven.

They often depict the blazing power of a falling star. The storm and the blazing torches are connected in Revelation not just with God's majesty but with the God of judgment and prepare for the outpouring of God's wrath later in the book. The torches are defined as the "seven spirits of God," which as before signify the sevenfold (perfect) Holy Spirit who joins the Godhead as the means by which God oversees and judges his world.

A sea of glass like crystal – unclear as to its meaning other than it adds to the splendor and brilliance of the vision. Some believe it represents: 1) There is no more need for cleansing from sin in heaven. 2) God's transcendence, holiness, and his unapproachability. 3) In mirror-like reflection the fact that all is revealed to God.

Hence the idea of cleansing and holiness, omniscience and majesty are presented. But we see not only the Power of the Creator, but next:

## **B. The Praise of Creation**

Verse 6b-9...<sup>6b</sup> *“and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”* <sup>7</sup> *The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.* <sup>8</sup> *And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.’* <sup>9</sup> *And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,”*

Ezekiel 10:15 specifically identifies the four living creatures are cherubim, an exalted order of angels frequently associated in Scripture with God's holy power.

Many people picture cherubs as naked babies who fly around on tiny wings, shooting people with arrows that make them fall in love. That may be good for Hallmark, but it is not true of heaven.

The cherub or cherubim (plural) are majestic, awe-inspiring creatures. It was the cherubim with their swords of fire that made sure Adam and Eve could not return to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). The angelic forms of cherubim were sculpted out of solid gold with their wings touching over the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31). With golden thread, the forms of the cherubim were woven into the veil of the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:1).

Notice in their power of perception and alert diligence is described as covered with eyes in front and behind so that no matter where they were they saw clearly. The translation “living creatures” is somewhat misleading since these are not animals. The phrase derives from a single word in the Greek text that can mean “living ones.”

Ezekiel's description of these angels notes that each one possessed all four facial features (Ezekiel 1:6). From John's point of view, the first was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face like that of a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. These descriptions view the four cherubim in relation to the created world and we see the praise of creation.

This praise of creation, the first movement, may be divided into several elements. The four living creatures begin by focusing on God's holiness: *“day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God.’”* The threefold repetition of *holy* is also found in Isaiah 6:1-3 which Adrian read at the beginning of our service. Holiness is the only one of God's attributes repeated in this way, since it is the summation of all that He is.

Next, the four living creatures refer to God's *power*. He is the Almighty, a title by which God identified Himself to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 “*Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him , ‘ I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.’* That term identifies God as the most powerful being, devoid of any weakness, whose conquering power and overpowering strength none can oppose. Because God is Almighty, He can effortlessly do whatever His holy will purposes to do (Isaiah 40:28: “*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.*” )

The four living creatures also praise God for His eternity, extolling Him as “*He who was and who is and who is to come.*” Scripture repeatedly affirms God's eternity, that He has neither beginning nor ending (Psalms 90:2; 93:2; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 1:17).

The praise of creation leads to:

### C. The Praise of Christians

Verses 9-11... <sup>9</sup>“*And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,<sup>11</sup> ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’*”

This scene in heaven ends in worship directed toward God on His throne. Here and in chapter 5 are five great hymns of praise, each gradually increasing in the number of singers—from a quartet (the four living creatures) with the twenty-four elders joining in (verse 10), then myriads of angels adding their voices (verse 11), and finally, all created beings in the universe filling in the mighty chorus of praise to God (verse 13).

There are two reasons sung of in this hymn:

1. Because of who God is! Notice Revelation 4:11a. “*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power;*” . . He is worthy, not only because of who He is, but for a second reason.
2. Because of what God has done! Continue to Revelation 4:11b. . . . “*for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*”

He alone has the right both to redeem and to judge His creation. The elders' song anticipates paradise lost in Genesis is now becoming paradise regained in Revelation.

Friends, there are two things I hope you will do this morning. First, I hope you will let John's description of God's revelation wash over your imagination; that you will allow the colors and the imagery and the worship to capture your heart with a profound sense of awe in light of the person, presence, power, perfection and preeminence of God.

But second, if we can do that, if God grants us even a tenth of that kind of sense of awe, then we must discipline ourselves to let this 'opening scene' be the 'opening scene' throughout our everyday. Let me explain what I mean.

What if you woke up and allowed this heavenly scene to be the 'opening scene' of your day? What would be different?

What if before you stepped into the classroom at school or the office at work, this scene was the 'opening scene' of your time at school or work? What would be different?

What if before you closed your eyes and bowed your head, this scene was the 'opening scene' of your time in prayer? What would be different?

What if before you spoke to your spouse or to your children, this scene was the 'opening scene' of that imminent conversation? What would be different?

What if before you made your choice at that place of temptation, in that moment when your flesh is enticing you toward the wrong, what if this scene was the 'opening scene' of your inner deliberations? What would be different?

What if before the tidal wave of obligations, what if before your device booted up, what if before the check is written, what if before your meal, your vacation, your Facebook post, your ambitions, your conversation with that unbelieving friend...this was the 'opening scene'?

What would be different? What should be different?

A true sense of awe in light of the person and presence of God will change things. It will humble us. It will correct us. It will encourage us. It will guide us. It will embolden us. It will set the tone for what is to come.

Let's not allow our 'opening scene' to be written by our own pride, or fear, or doubts, or anxieties, our lust, or some other lie.

Let's cry out to God this morning. Let's ask Him, through the sacrifice and victory of Jesus, to give us new eyes; eyes filled with this same vision.

When is the showtime for this 'opening scene'? It's every day, all throughout the day. Let's join the cherubim and the whole family in heaven as they worship God. Let's look and keep looking to the throne of God.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Should faithful Christians anticipate pressure and problems because of our faith? What Scriptures support your answer?
2. What types of problems have you encountered recently because of your relationship with Jesus?
3. What kind of pressure were the believers in Smyrna experiencing?
4. Even though the believers in Smyrna were financially poor, Jesus tells them they are rich. What does He mean?
5. What is the significance of the “ten days” of tribulation in prison?
6. Jesus informs the church that He is the “first and last” and the One who “died and came to life again.” How do these truths encourage you?
7. What does Jesus promise to those who are faithful until death?
8. How does suffering help us to understand the teaching of the perseverance of the saints?
9. Why should confidence in God’s sovereignty in the lives of people keep us from becoming resentful and bitter when we are treated unjustly or maliciously by others?
10. What have you learned from the letter to the church in Smyrna? How do these truths square with the expectations of most Western Christian



**CHAPTER 12**  
**“Worthy is the Lamb”**  
**Revelation 5:1-14**

*<sup>1</sup> “I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’ <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. <sup>4</sup> Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; <sup>5</sup> and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’ <sup>6</sup> And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’ <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ <sup>13</sup> And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped.”*

Our Bible text this morning includes a song praising Jesus, whose blood purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Let me share an example with you.

Three weeks ago, I was in Charlotte NC for the annual Association of Certified Biblical Counselors conference. Victor Zubarev was there as well, all the way from Moscow, Russia. In 2013, I traveled to Russia to teach Biblical Counseling classes at the Russian Bible Church in Moscow and at a seminary in Samara.

Moscow has a population of 12 million people. The city of Moscow is divided into 12 districts, and Victor’s church would like to plant a church in each district.

The first church in Moscow was started in 2009 with 25 church members today there are 342 members and over 500 people attending. Over the past year 60 people joined the church and 30 of them were baptized.

In 2018 the Novomoskovskaya Bible Church  
 A third church will be started in 2023 East of Moscow  
 A fourth church will be started in 2024 in Troitsk

Prayer for Victor’s family.

Pray the governing authorities will not interfere with ministry and education opportunities.

The events of chapter 5 follow immediately after those of chapter 4. The scene is once again the throne of God in heaven. The cherubim, the twenty-four elders, and the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold glory are all present.

John is given a vision into heaven and weeps because he realizes that God's glorious eternal plan cannot be completed until the scroll is opened. The centerpiece of this new scene is a remarkable scroll and a single individual who is qualified to take it from the hand of the one on the throne. The choirs of heaven sing, "Worthy is the Lamb!" because Jesus alone meets all of the qualifications to take the scroll from the Father's hand.

The text unfolds in four steps:

- |                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| I. A Mysterious Scroll    | Verse 1     |
| II. A Meticulous Search   | Verses 2-4  |
| III. A Magnificent Savior | Verses 5-7  |
| IV. A Marvelous Song      | Verses 8-14 |

My prayer is that you will enter into the worship experience described in this wonderful passage. That the song Worthy is the Lamb will be on your mind, heart and lips not just here but each day of the week.

## **I. A Mysterious Scroll**

Verse 1... *"I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals."*

Now, this is not a book like you and I think of a book. The Greek word here refers to a scroll. A scroll was a long piece of papyrus or animal skin, rolled from both ends into the middle. Scrolls were commonly used before the invention of the modern book. While Roman wills were sealed up with seven seals, this scroll is not a will but a deed or contract.

Dr. Robert L. Thomas explains: "This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and sealed with seven seals. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside. All kinds of transactions were consummated this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds. Support also comes from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different witness signing at each fold. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document."

Since God is holding the scroll, it must represent a decree from the King of the universe. What we will discover is that the scroll John saw in God's hand is the title deed to the earth, which He will give to Christ.

Unlike other such deeds, however, it does not record the details of what Christ will inherit, but rather how He will regain His rightful inheritance. He will do so by means of the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth (we will see that beginning in chapter 6). While the scroll is a scroll of doom and judgment, it is also a scroll of redemption. It tells how Christ will redeem the world from the usurper, Satan.



But it's a sealed scroll. And as the number of seals indicates, it is perfectly and divinely sealed. Only one who is “worthy” will be able to take the scroll and open the scroll and carry out the decree and plan of God it represents.

## II. A Meticulous Search

Verses 2-4... <sup>2</sup> “*And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’* <sup>3</sup> *And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.* <sup>4</sup> *Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;”*

The “*strong angel*” is not named. Some identify him as Gabriel, others as Michael, but he is anonymous. He spoke with “a loud voice” so that his proclamation would penetrate every corner of the universe. The angel sought someone both “*worthy to open the book and to break its seals.*”

As the echoes of his announcement end, there is silence. Notice verse 3 says, no one “*in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.*” A search of the entire universe turns up no one worthy to open the scroll.

Overwhelmed with grief at this turn of events, John tells us in verse 4... “*Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;”*

“*Weep*” is a word that expresses strong, unrestrained emotion. Interestingly, this is the only time in Scripture that tears are seen in heaven.

John wept because he wanted to see the world without evil, sin, and death. He wanted to see God’s kingdom established on earth. Yet John did not need to weep, because the search for the one worthy to open the scroll was about to end.

Friends, what a great reminder that our heavenly Father is completely sovereign, infinitely wise, and His unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. These things are true about God whether we believe them or not. Our doubts do not destroy God’s love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.

Psalm 33:10–11 tells us, “*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the lord stand firm forever; the purposes of his heart through all generations.*”

Numbers 23:19 says, “*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”*

## III. A Magnificent Savior

Verses 5-7... <sup>5</sup> “*and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’* <sup>6</sup> *And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.* <sup>7</sup> *And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*”

Notice in verses 5 and 6 there are three unique titles given to our Lord to describe who He is. First, He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The reference here is to Genesis 49:8–10, where Jacob prophetically gave the scepter to Judah and made it the tribe of the kings. (God never meant for Saul to establish a dynasty, because he came from the tribe of Benjamin. God used him to discipline Israel because the people asked for a king; then He gave them David from the tribe of Judah.)

The image of “*the lion*” speaks of dignity, sovereignty, courage, and victory. Jesus Christ is the only living Jew who can prove His kingship from the genealogical records. “Son of David” was a title often used when He was ministering on earth.

But He is also the Root of David, which means He brought David (and David’s line) into existence. As far as His humanity is concerned, Jesus had His roots in David (Isaiah 11:1, 10); but as far as His deity is concerned, Jesus is the Root of David. This speaks of our Lord’s eternity; He is indeed the “*Ancient of Days*.” How the Messiah could both be David’s Lord and David’s son was a problem Jesus presented to the Pharisees, and they could not (or would not) answer Him in Matthew 22:41–46.

Jesus is the One worthy to take the scroll because of who He is—the rightful King from David’s descendants - and what He is - the Lion from Judah’s tribe with the power to destroy His enemies.

As John looked at the incredible scene before him, he found his attention drawn to what he saw between the throne with the four living creatures and the elders. Instead of the anticipated mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah, John saw a Lamb. Look at Verse 6... “*And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*”

This is the third title, He Lord Jesus could not be the Lion of judgment, or the King of glory, unless He was first “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

The Greek word used here for “*lamb*” refers to a little lamb or pet lamb. The imagery derives from Exodus 12:36 and the Passover, when Jewish families were required to keep the sacrificial lamb as a household pet for four days before sacrificing it. While every lamb sacrificed under the Old Covenant pointed toward Christ, He is only referred to as a lamb once in the Old Testament in Isaiah 53:7. In the New Testament outside of Revelation, He is only called a lamb four times (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). But in the book of Revelation, He appears as the Lamb thirty-one times.

Several features indicate that this is no ordinary lamb. First, He is standing, alive, on His feet, yet looking as if He had been slain. The scars from the deadly wound this Lamb received were clearly visible, yet He is alive. Though demons and wicked men conspired against Him and killed Him, He rose from the dead, defeating and triumphing over His enemies.

Another feature about this Lamb that John noted was that it has seven horns. In imagery drawn from the animal world, horns in Scripture symbolize strength and power. Seven is the number of perfection and symbolizes the Lamb’s complete, absolute power. The Lamb in John’s vision also had seven eyes, again denoting perfect and complete understanding and knowledge. The eyes represented the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. The phrase “*seven Spirits of God*” describes the Holy Spirit in all His fullness.

Verse 7 records the final act in this heavenly scene. Verse 7... *“And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”*

When the Lamb came and took the scroll, the weeping ended and the praising began. We have seen a mysterious scroll, a meticulous search, a magnificent Savior, and fourth:

#### IV. A Marvelous Song

Verses 8-10...<sup>8</sup> *“When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*<sup>9</sup> *And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*<sup>10</sup> *You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’ ”*

The spontaneous outburst of worship results from the realization that the long-anticipated defeat of sin, death, and Satan is about to be accomplished. Christ will return to earth in triumph and establish His glorious millennial kingdom. The curse will be reversed, the believing remnant of Israel will be saved, and the church will be granted the privilege of reigning with Christ.

As they began their song of praise and worship, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Look back at 4:10... *“the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”*

Since they offer the same worship to Christ that they did to the Father this provides convincing proof of Christ’s deity, since only God is to be worshiped (19:10; Matthew 4:10).

As they bow down before the Lamb in worship, John notices that each one of the twenty-four elders is *“holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”* Harps were frequently associated in the Old Testament with worship (2 Samuel 6:4–5; Psalms 33:2; 71:22).

In addition to the harps, the elders were also holding *“golden bowls full of incense.”* These wide-mouthed bowls were used in the tabernacle and the temple (1 Kings 7:40, 45, 50; 2 Kings 12:13–14), where they were connected with the altar. They symbolized the priestly work of intercession for the people.

Scripture associates the burning of incense with the prayers of the saints in Psalm 141:2, Luke 1:9–10, and Revelation 8:3–4. The incense in these bowls represents the prayers of believers through the ages. Taken together, the harps and the bowls indicate that all that the prophets ever prophesied and all that God’s children ever prayed for is finally to be fulfilled.

Notice with me that these verses fully answer the question, “Why is the Lamb worthy? Why is He alone worthy to open the scroll?” Verse 5 told us He could open the scroll because *“He has overcome, He conquered”*. But just so there are no misunderstandings about what that means, verse 9 expands on that word “overcome.”

Verses 9-10...<sup>9</sup> *“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*<sup>10</sup> *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’ ”*

The Lamb, Jesus Christ, is worthy...He alone is worthy, because He did what no Davidic king could do before: He was perfectly obedient to God, every second of every day for His entire earthly life. And He continues that way. And because of His perfect obedience, He alone was able to give His life as a ransom, to reclaim, to redeem from the slave market of sinful humanity those “from every tribe [descent] and tongue [language] and people [race] and nation [culture].” Those four terms appear together also in Revelation 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; and 14:6 and encompass all of humanity.

1 Peter 1:18-19 says, *“knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”*

So, let me ask you: Do you belong to Jesus? Is He truly your Master? Or are you counting on your own merit and your own performance to get you to heaven?

To the extent you are clinging to any vestiges of self-righteousness or are putting any confidence in your own spiritual attainments, to that degree you are not living by the grace of God in your life. This principle applies both in salvation and in living the Christian life.

Yesterday I officiated the memorial service for our dear sister in Christ, Dianne Case. Dianne became a Christian at the age of 15 and really lived out the words of John 12:24. Dianne lived out the essence of gospel-humility – which mean not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less... True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. Dianne made every person feel special, and in the remembrances yesterday it was repeatedly shared that each person felt like they were Dianne’s favorite. And I think Dianne’s transformation and incredible freedom to love and serve others came from a heart of worship. It was a joyous worship but also a weeping worship. She sensed and experienced how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for her and it moved her all the time.

Jesus alone has conquered sin and death. And as a perfect man, without sin, God has appointed Him to perfectly judge the sin of all mankind. To break the book’s seals means to enact the judgments written in it.

The song moves on to express the results of redemption. Notice verse 10.. *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*

The use of *“them”* instead of *“us”* indicates the vastness and comprehensiveness of redemption. The twenty-four elders move beyond themselves to sweep up all the saints of all the ages into praise and adoration. The redeemed are a part of God’s kingdom, a community of believers under God’s sovereign rule. They are also priests to our God, signifying their complete access to God’s presence for worship and service.

The present priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9) foreshadows that future day when we will have total access to and perfect communion with God. During the millennial kingdom, Revelation 20:6 and 2 Timothy 2:12 remind us we will reign upon the earth with Christ.

Verse 11... *“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, .”*

Myriad means “ten thousand,” apparently the highest number the Greeks had in their language. The phrase “myriads and myriads” describes an uncountable host. Hebrews 12:1 also says that the number of holy angels cannot be counted. They number at least twice as many as the fallen angels according to Revelation 12:3–4.

Verse 12... *“saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ ”*

Once again, the emphasis is on Christ’s death providing a perfect redemption. He is worthy to receive recognition because of His power and the spiritual and material riches He possesses (Psalm 50:10–12). He is also worthy to receive recognition because of His wisdom and omniscience. For all those things and all His other absolute perfections, Jesus Christ is worthy of all honor and glory and blessing.

As the great hymn of praise reaches a crescendo, *“every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them”* join together. This all-inclusive statement is reminiscent of Psalm 69:34: *“Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them,”* and the concluding verse of the Psalms, *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!”* Psalm 150:6.

This mighty chorus cries out in verse 13, *“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”*

Endless worship belongs to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The creation is unable to contain its joy over its upcoming redemption. Verse 14 the four living creatures could only keep saying, *“Amen.”* That solemn affirmation means “let it be,” “make it happen.”

And in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, the stage for God’s ultimate plan has been set in the throne room of God. And having made sense of the basic elements of the scene in Revelation 5, I want us to think about how this vision should impact our spiritual vision; how you see God, yourself, and the world around you. Let me suggest two words that, for me, might represent the right response to this scene in chapter 5. The words are *“worship”* and *“weeping”*.

First, the Lamb’s reception of the scroll all creation, heaven and earth, rise up in worship. Was that your response? When you think of Jesus, when you think of Him as the *“Lamb of God”*, of His loving sacrifice and cleansing, liberating blood...when you think of Him as the *“Lion of the tribe of Judah”*, when you think of His authority, when you think of coming judgment and wrath...does it make you worship? Does it drive toward praise and adoration?

We talked last week about how we desperately need to see God for who He is, in His glory and greatness. We need the 'opening scene' from Revelation chapter 4 to be the 'opening scene' of our every day and our everyday experiences; of our every conversation, of our every deliberation when tempted.

But in that same way, we desperately need to see Jesus for who He is. We need to worship Jesus! And what we see here is that the fullness of our worship of Jesus is directly linked to how well we understand the fullness of His worthiness.

What does this look like? Think of the words and phrases we saw in the final section: *“the elders fell down”* (verses 8, 14), *“they sang”* (verse 9), they proclaimed *“with a loud voice”* (verse 12). Kneeling, singing, and

shouting are all classic expressions of worship. We find them throughout the Bible. But even more important than these expressions is the kind of heart that would lead you to kneel, sing, and shout at the top of your lungs...and all for God. Take time to personally consider that kind of heart. That's the heart of true worship.

But the second word “*weep*” is less obvious here. Verse 4 tells us John began to “*weep greatly*” when it appeared there was no one who could bring ultimate justice to the world. Now John must have known that Jesus was coming again. As the beloved disciple he heard Jesus talk about His return and about the coming judgement and about the hope of the coming kingdom. But clearly John believes here that all of that is in jeopardy; that maybe he has misunderstood something.

John’s heart breaks for the fate of a world that evidently will not receive divine correction or comfort. If our response to the reality of Jesus is one of worship, shouldn't our response to a life, to a marriage, to a family, to a community without Jesus, be one of weeping? Does your heart break, like John’s, when Christ is noticeably absent from the heart of a relative, friend, classmate, coworker, or neighbor?

Friends, these two things must go together in terms of a right response. Our hearts cannot burst with praise for Jesus, but then fail to have His heart for a lost and dying world. Ask God...ask God for a heart full of Jesus and for a heart for those who are desperately lost without Him.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What does John see in God's right hand? How does he describe this thing?
2. What question does the strong angel ask? What answer does he receive?
- 3.. What is John's reaction to this situation? What should our response be to a life, to a marriage, to a family, to a community without Jesus?
4. Why is verse 5 such a comfort to John and to us? Why was Christ worthy to take the scroll in chapter 5?
5. When John looks up to behold the Lion of verse 5, what does he actually see in verse 6? What is the significance of this?
6. Why is the blood of the Lamb so important? What other verses speak of the importance of the blood of the Lamb?
7. What does the incense in verse 8 represent? How should this have an influence on our prayer lives?
8. Verse 9 says the redeemed in heaven will include people from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." How should this fact affect our philosophy of missions?
9. Why is singing praises such an integral part of worshiping God?
10. How can getting a glimpse of worship in heaven help us worship better in this world?





**CHAPTER 13**  
**“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”**  
**Revelation 6:1-8**

*<sup>1</sup> “Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’ <sup>2</sup> I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. <sup>3</sup> When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come.’ <sup>4</sup> And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him. <sup>5</sup> When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.’ <sup>7</sup> When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.’ <sup>8</sup> I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”*

When I was ten years old my mother took me to Bogota, Colombia and to my uncle’s farm. He didn’t speak English and I did not speak Spanish, but I understood enough that he was telling his son to saddle up a horse for me to ride. Now, I had never ridden a horse so I wagged my finger to tell him this was not going to happen. But he insisted and put me on horse named Cuckoo (I thought my uncle was “cuckoo” for making me do this). But I have to say, by the end of the week you could not get me off that horse. My favorite part was running at full gallop.

Of all the animals on the planet that are interesting to watch, there is none more majestic to me than a horse at full gallop. One early morning in South Dakota our family was camping and we heard this noise, it sounded like the rumblings of an earthquake. The thunder of hoof beats could be heard even when they were out of sight. Then in the valley below we saw a herd of horses running at full speed.

Their strength, beauty, and speed are marvelous to watch. And of all the famous horses throughout the history of the world, without a doubt, the horses ridden by the four horsemen that appear on the scene in Revelation chapter 6 represent the most famous horses of all time.

Chapter 6 marks the commencement of the main content of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The first five chapters were introductory. Revelation chapter 1 was John’s preparation to receive the information. Revelation chapters 2–3 informed the seven churches of moral preparation necessary to avoid the horrors of what is to come. Revelation chapters 4–5 described the praise offered in heaven to the Father and Jesus. As the seals begin to be opened in chapter 6, the praise ceases in anticipation of the coming judgment. The scene now shifts from heaven to earth, the focus of events through the return of Christ in chapter 19 and His earthly kingdom in chapter 20.

A couple important questions must be answered before the events of chapter 6 can be understood. First, are the events which begin with the breaking of the first seal past or future? Some have tried to find fulfillment in the past (see Introduction), there are solid reasons for believing that the revelation concerns events yet future.

Since the scroll in 5:1 is “*sealed*,” the clear implication is that the seals are broken at a time after chapter 5. There is no sequence in history that clearly corresponds to the events of chapter 6. So, it may be concluded that they are yet future.

A second question arises: What is the relationship of the seals to the rapture of the church? The word rapture does not occur in the Bible. The term comes from a Latin word meaning “a carrying off, a transport, or a snatching away.” We saw the concept of the “carrying off” or the rapture of the church in Revelation 3:10 .. “*Because you have kept the word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*”

The rapture is to be distinguished from the second coming. At the rapture, the Lord comes “*in the clouds*” to meet us “*in the air*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17.. “*Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*”). At the second coming, the Lord descends all the way to the earth to stand on the Mount of Olives, resulting in a great earthquake followed by a defeat of God’s enemies (Zechariah 14:3– 4 .<sup>3</sup> “*Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.* <sup>4</sup>*In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south*”).

The doctrine of the rapture was not taught in the Old Testament, which is why Paul calls it a “mystery” now revealed. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, “*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*”

Beginning in chapter 6, however, there is no reference whatever to the churches or to the Rapture. Since neither the Rapture nor the church are the subject of Revelation 6–18, it appears that the Rapture of the church takes place before the events beginning in chapter 4 and thus precedes the Tribulation.

However, there is no mention of a rapture and removing believers from the events of the end in Jesus’ description of the end times in Matthew 24. A normal reading gives the impression that believing listeners and then the readers would or could experience the things He mentions.

Which brings us to the third question: What is the Tribulation?

Beginning in Revelation chapter 6, the scroll is unrolled and its seals broken. The unrolling of the scroll marks the beginning of God’s judgment on earth known as the Tribulation. The term “Tribulation” covers the entire seven years of God’s judgment but the term “Great Tribulation” is used by our Lord in Matthew 24:21 to describe the last half (3.5 years) of the Tribulation.

It seems best to understand the first four seals that we will look at today as taking place during the first half of the tribulation, the fifth seal stretches from the first into the second half (second 3.5 years) the “great tribulation” in 7:14, and the sixth and seventh taking place during that “great tribulation.” Apparently the seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments (8:1–11:19) and the seventh trumpet (11:15) contains the seven bowl judgments (16:1–21). The seven seals contain all the judgments until the end, when Jesus Christ returns.

The unfolding of the seven seals parallels Christ's chronology of tribulation events found in His own message in Matthew 24.

JESUS' WORDS	THE SEAL	ITS CONTENTS
Matthew 24:4–5	1st Seal	False peace
Matthew 24:6–7	2nd Seal	Worldwide war
Matthew 24:7	3rd Seal	Famine
Matthew 24:7	4th Seal	Earthquakes—death
Matthew 24:9	5th Seal	Divine judgment
Matthew 24:29	6th Seal	Cosmic darkness—physical destruction
Matthew 24:37	7th Seal	Cataclysmic events (the seven trumpets)

Just as a mother's birth pains increase in frequency and intensity as the time to give birth approaches, so the judgments will intensify throughout the tribulation until the arrival of Christ in judgment glory. The first four seals cover the period Jesus describes in Matthew 24:8 as "*the beginning of birth pangs.*" As terrible as those four judgments are, they are but the preliminary outpouring of God's final wrath in the last three seals.

So, let's look at the first seal. Revelation 6:1-2... <sup>1</sup> "*Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.'*" <sup>2</sup> "*I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*"

### **I. The White Horse of Deception**

As each seal is broken in the vision, what is written on the scroll is not read, but acted out. Immediately, John heard one of the four living creatures saying with a powerful voice of thunder, "*Come.*" In response to the angelic summons, a white horse came forth bearing its rider.

The first four seals involve horses and riders, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Horses in Scripture are associated with triumph, majesty, power, and conquest (Revelation 19:11, 14; Job 39:19–25; Proverbs 21:31).

Some, seeing a parallel with Revelation 19:11 .. "*And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.,*" identify the one who sat on the white horse as Jesus Christ. But since Christ opens the sealed scroll, He cannot be the rider.

Further, this rider in Revelation 6:2 is wearing a “**stephanos**” – a victor’s crown made of leaves, which withers and eventually dries up. The crown Christ wears in Revelation 19 is a “**diadema**,” which is the crown of royalty and of kings.

In fact, the verb “**edothē**” meaning “was given,” is used often in Revelation 6:2 to speak of divine permission for evil powers to carry out their wicked mission. It is a temporary crown. Mark this point – this rider is given his temporary position by God. He will ultimately fulfill the purposes of God. He might be riding a white stallion, but his horse is on a leash. The other end of that leash is in the hand of our sovereign Lord.

The rider of the white horse in Revelation will gallop in and bring three and a half years of peace. However, this is a false peace; it is peace before the coming storm – and the storm will come.

Clearly revealed is the amazing ability of mankind to blind itself to the truth in an effort to have peace – even peace promised to them by the demonically-inspired Adolph Hitler. The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain traveled to Germany at least on two occasions to get assurance of peace for Great Britain. On his second visit, while the western world was holding its breath, Hitler actually signed a pledge promising, in effect, not to harm England. When Chamberlain returned to England, he was a hero. The streets were lined with cheering crowds as he said to his countrymen, “Peace for our time.”

Everyone sang his praises, except for one man – Winston Churchill. Churchill said that Hitler was a snake preparing to strike. Later, when Churchill rose to speak to Parliament, decrying the pledge as nothing more than a sham, he was actually shouted down.

A few years later, Great Britain would be brought to the brink of annihilation by the bombers of Germany. The pledge of peace was an empty promise from a man who never meant to keep it.

Likewise, the rider on the white horse of Revelation chapter 6 represents a time of world peace, but it is a false peace that is to be short-lived and will be followed by war, famine, and death.

Even as the final doom of the world approaches, the Antichrist will promise a golden age of peace and prosperity. In gratitude, the world will honor him and elevate him to the position of supreme leadership. Yet his promises and the peace will be short-lived.

This leads to opening of the second seal and:

## **II. The Red Horse of Destruction**

Verses 3-4... <sup>3</sup>“*When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come.’* <sup>4</sup>*And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.*”

The world’s attitude of peace and harmony will be shattered as the second horse and rider appear on the scene. Red, the color of fire and blood, depicts war. God’s judgment descends and the false peace led by Antichrist dissolves into war.

Verse 4 begins with, “*And another.*” “Another” (*allos*) indicates that this rider is another of the same kind as the one to whom John called special attention under the first seal.

Concerning the rider, John first notes that “*to him ... it was granted to take peace from the earth.*” Again, all that happens will be under God’s control. He allows the false peace, and He ends it by bringing war on the earth. Contrary to the teaching of some, the judgments of the tribulation do not reflect the wrath of humanity or the wrath of Satan. They express God’s wrath poured out on the world.

Describing this time, Jesus said in Matthew 24:6-7, “*You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. ... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*” Men will kill one another on an unprecedented scale. While Scripture does not give the details, we know that advances in modern weapons suggest a terrible destruction.

Notice also in verse 4 “*a great sword was given*” to the rider. The Greek word for “*sword*” here refers to the short, stabbing sword a Roman soldier carried into battle. It was also a weapon used by assassins. The vision depicts a great sword to describe the extent of the war. Antichrist’s false peace will dissolve in battle and revolt.

The Antichrist will play a major role in the wars that follow. When wars break out all over the world, he will have no choice but to resort to war to preserve his power. He will be as skillful at war as he was at promoting false peace. When Jesus Christ, returns, Revelation 20:10 says the Antichrist will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

In Revelation chapter 6, verse 1, the first horseman comes riding on a white horse. He is a counterfeit prince of peace who offers a brief time of peace, primarily affecting Israel. In Revelation 6:3, the second horseman then comes riding upon a blood red horse to incite global unrest and murder. It is as if a blackout hits the planet and rioting, looting, killing, and wars break out all over the Earth. If this is not bad enough, the Lamb opens the scroll just a little further as another rider mounts up.

### **III. The Black Horse of Destitution**

Verses 5-6...<sup>5</sup> “*When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.*”<sup>6</sup> “*And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.’*”

As the Lamb broke the third seal, the mighty voice of the third living creature announced the coming of the third horse and rider. John’s use of the word “*behold*” reveals how startled he was by the rider’s appearance. The color black is associated with famine (Lamentations 5:10). Famine is a logical consequence of worldwide war as food supplies are destroyed. Jesus also predicted this future famine in Matthew 24:7. God has used famine as a means of judgment in the past, but this will be the most devastating famine in all human history.

The pair of scales the rider carried in his hand pictures the rationing that will result from the famine. Careful weighing of food shows it to be in short supply. Eating food by weight means conditions of famine

Following the appearance of the black horse and its rider, John heard “*something like a voice*” in the center of the four living creatures. Since the four living creatures were stationed around the throne (4:6), this is likely the voice

of God, the One sitting on the throne (4:2–3). God also speaks in connection with the fifth seal (6:11). But He speaks here as a reminder that the famine is a direct judgment from Him.

The famine's severity can be seen in the example given. One quart of wheat in the first century represented the daily need for one person to survive. The denarius was a Roman silver coin equivalent to one day's full wages. In other words, enough wheat to feed one man for only one day cost a full day's wages.

Imagine, you gather the family around your paycheck and decide that more than one person needs to eat today. Since you cannot afford one loaf of wheat bread anymore, you will eat barley. John records in Revelation 6:6 that a person can get about three times more barley than wheat for one day's wage. This means that a man will be able to feed his family – that is, if he has a job and gets paid – one day at a time.

Coarse barley bread was the food of animals and poverty-stricken people. This is runaway inflation! Following the outbreak of universal war and rioting, it is no surprise that Earth is plunged into worldwide famine.

God cautions people not to waste the oil and the wine. Basic food staples will become priceless luxuries. Olive oil and wine, used in the preparation and cooking of food, as well as the purification of water, will need to be carefully protected.

There is a coming world famine that will make all others seem insignificant. It will be one of the causes of over one billion people dying in a matter of months. However, the situation only gets worse.

Verses 7-8...<sup>7</sup> *“When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.’”*<sup>8</sup> *I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”*

#### **IV. The Pale Horse of Devastation**

“Ashen” refers to a sickly, pale, yellow-green color. The word to describe the fourth horse's color, *chlōros* (“pale green”), is the color of grass but in the present connection, designates the yellowish green of decay, the pallor of death. It is a pale ashen color that images a face bleached because of terror. It recalls a corpse in the advanced state of corruption.

The horse's color vividly portrays the pale-green pallor of death characteristic of the decomposition of a corpse. The rider who sat on it had the name Death. Death on a massive scale is the inevitable consequence of widespread war and famine. In this terrifying scene, John saw Hades following with Death.

Authority was given to Death and Hades to destroy a fourth of the world's population. If today's world population figure of 8 billion is used, to *tetarton tēs gēs* (“one-fourth of the earth”) means that Death and Hades have authority, which they apparently will exercise, to take the lives of 2 billion people. The magnitude of this catastrophe can hardly be grasped because nothing comparable has happened throughout history.

Verse 8.... *“I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”*

Notice, death will use four tools in his grim task. The first three elements, the sword, famine, and pestilence, are often linked together in Scripture (1 Chronicles 21:12; 2 Chronicles 20:9; Jeremiah 14:12), and all four elements appear in Ezekiel 14:12–21.

The sword (war) and famine have already been discussed in connection with the second and third seals. The fourth seal expands these conditions. “Pestilence” here may primarily refer to disease as the cause of death (2:23; 18:8) but is broad enough to encompass natural disasters such as the earthquakes predicted by Jesus (Matthew 24:7), floods, and volcanic eruptions. It could even refer to the effects of biological and chemical weapons.

At first glance, the inclusion of “wild beasts” with war, famine, and disease seems puzzling, since most creatures dangerous to man are either extinct or isolated in unpopulated regions. But one explanation may be that the deadliest creature of all, the rat, thrives in all populated areas. Rats have been responsible for uncounted millions of deaths throughout history by spreading disease. The most devastating occurrence of rat-borne disease was a fourteenth-century outbreak of bubonic plague that wiped out one-fourth to one-third of Europe’s population. In a world ravaged by war, famine, and disease, the rat population may run wild.

After such terrifying developments, could matters get worse? How can the gloom of the fourth rider be exceeded? The remaining seals will tell. After all, these are only “the beginning of birth-pains.”

These four horsemen have made me think of four words:

- Motivation – the potential of the church age ending in our lifetime causes me to want to communicate the gospel of Christ with every means possible to our generation.
- Evaluation – the end of days as we know them causes me to want to not only communicate the gospel but confirm the sincerity of my faith in Christ alone. Is your testimony a card signed at camp, a baptism experience at the age of twelve, or is it a fruitful relationship today with the living Lord?
- Anticipation – clinging to the promise of Christ’s coming, and to love and long for His appearing (II Timothy 4:8); knowing that before these horsemen thunder from the skies, if we are still alive, I believe we will be taken to the skies to meet our Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:17).
- Exaltation – the soon coming of Christ, the glory of His victory, the majesty of His kingdom, and the power of His new creation causes me to want to honor and exalt Christ our Redeemer and our coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The four horsemen and the coming world madness are horrific scenes of death and despair.

Frankly, every member of the human race was born in a funeral procession. However, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have left the funeral procession and joined a wedding party.

What are we to do until this reunion and the wedding reception as we, the bride of Christ, await our Savior’s return? The answer is motivation, evaluation, anticipation, and exaltation.

Thomas Watson, a Puritan theologian, and church leader, said, “The world is but a great inn, where we are to lodge a night or two, and be gone; what madness is it to set our heart upon this inn, and forget our home.” And what madness it is indeed to cling to Earth. For what madness is coming to planet Earth with the thundering, galloping hoof beats of the four horsemen.

We will leave the madness behind, and as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10, “*we will . . . serve the living and true God, and . . . wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*”

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What time period do the seven seals encompass?
2. What will happen at the end of this time period?
3. How do the first four seals relate to the Tribulation?
4. What does the first seal depict? Why and how is this going to contribute to the delusion of the people of earth?
5. What kind of judgment will the breaking of the second seal unleash upon the earth?
6. What will be the results of the breaking of the third seal?
7. What did John see when the fourth seal was broken and what does this foretell?
8. How do these future events dovetail with the events that Jesus described in Matthew 24?
9. How will the events of Revelation 6:1-8 impact your walk with Christ and your witness to the unsaved around you?



**CHAPTER 14**  
**“The Wrath of the Lamb”**  
**Revelation 6:9-17**

<sup>9</sup> *“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; <sup>10</sup> and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ <sup>11</sup> And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. <sup>12</sup> I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. <sup>14</sup> The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup> and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’ ”*

It is hard to believe we are already at Thanksgiving this week and then enter the Christmas Advent season. A Christmas passage that we are well familiar with is Isaiah 9:6... *“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”*. We don’t normally read verse 7 .. *“There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”*

So, here’s the question: Did Jesus accomplish that? No, not yet. Isaiah is speaking of the Kingdom Age when Messiah will reign in righteousness and justice from David’s throne. God had promised David that his dynasty and throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16); and this is fulfilled literally in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32–33; Zechariah 9:9), who will one day reign from Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:1–5; Jeremiah 23:5–8; 30:8–10). This kingdom is called “the Millennium,” which means “one thousand years.” The phrase is used six times in Revelation chapter 20.

But before Jesus returns to establish His millennial kingdom on earth, the world will go thru what is called the tribulation of God’s judgement. Revelation chapters 4 through 19 describe the 7-year tribulation.

In Revelation 6:1-8 we looked at the first of four seal judgments that will come upon the world. We saw the rise of the Antichrist, and the coming wars, famines and pestilence that will claim the lives of ¼ of the earth’s population. The first four seals deal with the first 3 ½ year portion of the Tribulation. The two seals we will consider today will deal with the last 3 ½ year portion of the Tribulation Period.

It may sound contradictory, or paradoxical to entitle my sermon The Wrath of the Lamb. A lamb is passive and gentle, meek and lowly. Wrathful? That is hardly a word to be associated with a lamb and yet Revelation 6:16 uses the words, *“The Wrath of the Lamb.”* And, it must not escape our attention: this is not just any Lamb but a very particular one. It is the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What will it be like and what should we learn when the wrath of the Lamb comes? We see three features in our text:

- The Response of the saints in heaven, the Saints Seek Justice in verses 9-11
- The Signs Announce Judgment in verses 12-14
- The Response of Sinners on earth who Hide in Fear in verses 15-17

My prayer is that we correctly understand what is coming in the wrath of the Lamb. That if you are an unbeliever, you will see your need to repent and give your life to Christ. If you are a believer, you can be thankful that you will not endure the wrath of the Lamb, but I pray you will be faithful to evangelize and bring the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unsaved so that they may be delivered from the Wrath of the Lamb.

Let's look at these three features of the wrath of the Lamb.

## **I. The Saints Seek Justice**

Verse 9.... *“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;”*

The fifth seal marks the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation, bridging the gap between the beginning of God's wrath in the first half of the tribulation and its full fury revealed in the second half.

At the opening of the fifth seal, John sees the souls of the slain *“under the altar.”* This image stems from the sacrificial system, in which the blood of the sacrificed victim is poured under the altar. These martyrs were sacrificed for God. It is unclear whether this is the altar of burnt offering, because of the image of the blood poured under it, or the altar of incense, favored by the prayers uttered. I suggest that the two are combined into one altar in this book.

We need to remember that the seal judgments are God's wrath against the earth dwellers, not against the redeemed. So, we cannot say that martyrdom for Christ's sake is a judgment from God. Rather, the fifth seals depict God's wrath and judgment on the evil. The force that is involved in the fifth seal is the prayers of the tribulation martyrs for God to enact vengeance on their murderers.

Who were these martyrs? To generalize and say they represent all Christian martyrs of every age loses sight of the fact that their persecutors are still alive on earth at the time they pray. I believe the church is raptured and spared from the wrath of the Lamb. So, these martyrs are those who are saved during the time of tribulation and are faithful to publicly proclaim the truth of the gospel.

Notice John describes the martyrs that he sees underneath the altar as “souls” because their bodily resurrection had not yet taken place. They are the first fruits of those who will be saved during the tribulation. Some will be Jewish, foreshadowing the salvation of Israel as a whole at the end of the tribulation (Zechariah 12:10; 14:1; Romans 11:26–29).

Why are they being slain? Verse 9 says *“because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.”*

They will correctly interpret what they see going on around them, calling on people to repent and believe the gospel. The Antichrist and his followers will not tolerate their bold preaching and will kill them.

The martyrs' prayer is described in verse 10... *"and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"*

We saw in Revelation 5:12 how the twenty-four elders and the angels loudly praised God. Now in 6:10 the tribulation martyrs will petition Him with a loud voice. In keeping with their call for vengeance and justice, they address Him as the *"Lord, holy and true."* The word translated *"Lord"* speaks of God the Father's power and authority. Because God is holy, He must judge sin (Psalm 5:4–5; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; 3:6) Because He is true, He must be faithful to His word and keep His promises (Numbers 23:19).

You may be asking, is it "Christian" for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers? After all, both Jesus and Stephen prayed that God would forgive those who killed them.

The great question, however, was not whether their enemies would be judged, but when. "How long, O Lord?" has been the cry of God's suffering people throughout the ages (Psalm 13; 74:9–10; 79:5; 94:3–4). The saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but they do not know God's exact schedule.

They are not trying to tell God what to do or when to do it; they are asking Him the question because they have a holy desire to see Satan and Antichrist destroyed, iniquity defeated, the wicked judged, and Jesus Christ reigning in glory on the earth.

It is not personal revenge that the martyrs seek, but vindication of God's holiness and the establishment of God's justice. Every believer today who sincerely prays, "Thy kingdom come!" is echoing their petition.

Verse 11... *"And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."*

Two elements make up God's response to His martyred saints: a symbolic gift, and a spoken word. The gift given to each of them was a white robe. These long, brilliant white robes were a reward of grace (7:9, 14), symbolizing God's gift of eternal righteousness. They symbolize all the glory that redeemed saints will enjoy in heaven. These were not actual robes, since this vision is before the resurrection of the bodies of the redeemed, which occurs for tribulation saints at Christ's return (20:4–5).

Along with this gift came God's spoken word, that they should *"rest for a little while longer."* That is not a rebuke for impatience, but an invitation to stop the cry for vengeance and enjoy heavenly rest until God's wrath arrives. The phrase *"for a little while longer"* (John 7:33; 12:35) indicates that the time will not be delayed.

God made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident; and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control. Psalm 116:15 says, *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His loved ones."*

The word rendered *"precious"* in English is the Hebrew word - רַקִּי *yâqâr* - means costly, as precious stones, something splendid and beautiful, something to be cherished. The idea is that the death of a Christian, the passing away of a believer, one of God's children, is something of incredible value before the Lord. That God regards it

as of importance; that it is connected with His great plans, and that there are great purposes to be accomplished by it.

The death of a believer is of so much importance, and so connected with the glory of God and the accomplishment of His purposes, that He will not cause it to take place except in circumstances, at times, and in a manner, which will best secure His ends. So, there is nothing to fear.

Martyrs have shed their blood in every generation for the love they have for Christ, for the courage of their bold witness for Christ. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers of the second century, said, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Several years ago, I met a Christian who had been imprisoned and beaten for his faith in another country. Many of his fellow Christian inmates were put to death. This brother was spared but it did not stop him from telling the unsaved prison guards, “the more of us you kill, the more of us there will be.”

So, first we see the saints seek justice.

## II. The Signs Announce Judgment

Verses 12-14...<sup>12</sup> *“I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;”*<sup>13</sup> *and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.*<sup>14</sup> *The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”*

By the time this seal is opened, the tribulation’s midpoint has passed and the world is in the “*great tribulation*” that Jesus describes in Matthew 24:21... *“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will..”* By then the final Antichrist has desecrated the temple in Jerusalem (the “*abomination of desolation*”), the world worships him, and a massive persecution of Jews and Christians has broken out. But the sixth seal will be so devastating and terrifying that it will be attributable only to God.

The first sign is “a great earthquake,” *seismos megas* in the Greek. The English word earthquake is not quite adequate to describe this seal because the heavens are shaken along with the seas and the dry land.

On the heels of the earthquake comes a second disaster, as the “sun became black as sackcloth made of hair.” Sackcloth was rough cloth worn by mourners, usually made from the hair of black goats. Following the violent earthquake that devastates the earth, the sun will turn as black as a mourner’s robe.

The prophet Joel spoke of these same phenomena in connection with the day of the Lord in Joel 2:31: *“The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”*

The third disaster is closely connected with the darkening of the sun, as the whole “moon became like blood.” There will be vast clouds of ash and smoke spewed out by the volcanic activity associated with the great worldwide earthquake. That ash and smoke will eclipse the moon, coloring it bloodred as it attempts to pierce the smoke-darkened sky.

Isaiah also described this strange and terrifying phenomenon, writing in Isaiah 13:10, *“The sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.”* Joel adds, *“The sun and the moon grow dark”* Joel 2:10, 31. These

phenomena will affect every aspect of life as the normal cycle of daylight and darkness is disrupted. The total eclipse of the sun and moon will add more reason for the world to be in panic.

Then, out of the darkened sky comes the fourth disaster; John records that the stars of the sky fell to the earth. The word translated “stars” can refer to actual stars, but it can also describe any heavenly body other than the sun and the moon. In this context it does not refer to actual stars, since they are far too large to fall to the earth and would incinerate it long before striking it. Also, the stars are still in place later when the fourth trumpet sounds in Revelation 8:12. This in 6:13 is most likely a reference to asteroid or meteor showers bombarding the earth.

The phenomenon is so large scale that it appears from man’s perspective that the stars are falling, when it is probably a very large meteor shower. The scope of the astral movement is so violent that it is likened to a fig tree that loses its unripe figs in a severe windstorm.

The fifth disaster in this seal affects the earth’s atmosphere, because the sky appears to split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up. This is the human perception of the magnitude of this judgment, but is not the final dissolving of heaven, which comes later in Revelation 21:1 .. “ *Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.* ” 2 Peter 3:10 .. “ *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.* ”

John describes a sixth devastating natural phenomenon, noting that every mountain and island were moved out of their places. The whole unstable crust of the earth begins to move and shift.

The devastating natural disasters accompanying the sixth seal will be the most terrifying events ever to affect the earth. Their cumulative impact will be far more destructive than any of the current doomsday scenarios about asteroids hitting the earth.

### **III. The Sinners Hide in Fear**

Verse 15... “*Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.*”

Every category of humanity is covered by the sevenfold classification with special attention focused upon the upper classes in the first five items of the list.

“*The kings of the earth*” refers to the heads of state throughout the world. “*The great men*” are the high-ranking officials in government. “*The commanders*” are the military leaders, while “*the rich*” are those who control commerce and business, and “*the strong*” may well be the influential. Together, they comprise the elite elements of human society. Ironically, these are the very people who ignored the warnings of God’s impending judgment and persecuted believers. “*Every slave*” and “*every free man*” encompass all other individuals.

But the reaction of the unbelieving world to the terrors unleashed by the sixth seal will not be repentance, but panic. They will finally acknowledge that the disasters they have experienced are God’s judgment. Yet their hearts are hardened and they will continue to follow the Antichrist.

The panic-stricken sinners will react irrationally as verse 16 tells us... *“and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;’*”

People will be so terrified that they would rather die than face the wrath of a holy God.

They understand at this point that God has been behind all the judgments. The fear Him who sits on the throne (referring to God) and more specifically, they “fear the wrath of the Lamb.” The Lamb, Jesus Christ, is the agent of direct judgment.

Verse 17... *“for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

*“The great day of their wrath”* is another term for the day of the Lord. These “day of the Lord” horrors precede the coming of the Lord and even anticipate the worst that is yet to come in the seventh seal, which includes the trumpet (8:1–9:21) and bowl (16:1–21) judgments.

The scene closes with the asking of the rhetorical question in verse 17, *“Who is able to stand?”* The answer is “No one.”

This picture, horrifying and frightening as it is, is not altogether hopeless. First, I believe the church will be raptured and delivered from this horrifying time of God’s wrath (Revelation 3:10).

Now, let me just take a few moments to explain why the church will be raptured and not go thru the time of the wrath of God known as the tribulation.

Adrian read 1 Thessalonians 5:9 *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says *“Jesus rescues us from the wrath to come.”*

How do we know that the wrath to come refers to the Tribulation? First, the context of 1 and 2 Thessalonians deals with the Day of the Lord and the judgment of God that precedes the coming of Christ.

Second, it is a wrath that you can be rescued from by the return of Christ. Thus, the wrath referred to then is the wrath of the Tribulation period and not God/s eternal wrath in general.

Third, Revelation chapters 4-18 gives the most detailed account of the wrath of God in the seven-year Tribulation period. If the Church were to be in the Tribulation period, surely, we would expect at least one reference to the Church in this time period. The Church, however, which is referred to nineteen times in the first three chapters of Revelation, is suddenly silent and never referred to in chapters 4-18. It is remarkable and totally unexpected that John would shift from detailed instructions for the Church in chapters 2 and 3 to absolute silence about the Church for the next 15 chapters if, in fact, the Church continued into the tribulation.

Friends, the wrath of the Lamb against sin is coming, and now is the time to find refuge in Christ. So, let me ask you: Will you find forgiveness through the grace of the Lamb or will you stand in fear before the wrath of the Lamb? I do not say this to scare you but I do say it to warn you. The great day of His wrath will come. Where on that day will you stand? If you have not fully surrendered your life to Christ, now is the time to embrace Him as your Lord and Savior. Today is the day of salvation.

And if you are a Christian, we are to live for God's glory and to be faithful to warn others of the wrath of the Lamb. 2 Peter 3:10-11 says...<sup>10</sup> *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”*<sup>11</sup> *‘Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,’* ”

God has called you to two infinite journeys: the internal journey of individual, personal sanctification and the external journey of the global advance of the Kingdom of Christ.

We will probably not die as physical martyrs, but we can die to self when we share the Gospel with an unsaved relative, a neighbor, a co-worker, or a total stranger.

I would like for you to write down the names of your unsaved family members, neighbors, classmates and coworkers. Maybe just start with ten of them. Pray for their salvation and pray for an opportunity to share Christ with them and for the boldness to explain the gospel with them.

Invite them as a special guest to our Dec 12 Christmas dinner where they will hear the gospel message. And take the invitations available at our invitation counter and go personally invite them to our Dec 24 Christmas Eve services where we will explain why Christ came.

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What did John see when the fifth seal was opened in Revelation 6:9-11? What is the meaning of the slain souls being at the base of the altar?
2. What did they request? Is it “Christian” for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers?
3. Why do the saints call God “holy and true”? How does their request relate to the theme of Revelation?
4. What is the significance of the white robes given to the martyrs?
5. Read Joel 2:28–32. How does this Old Testament prophecy of the great and terrible Day of the Lord compare to the description by John in Revelation 6:12–17?
6. What happens when the sixth seal was opened in 6:12-14? What effect do these events have on people?
7. What do they want the mountains and rocks to do in 6:16? Why?
8. What does a healthy fear of God look like? In what areas of your life do you fail to revere God and treat Him as holy?
9. As you study John's vision of the future and ponder all that is to come, how specifically are you motivated, challenged, and convicted to: walk with Christ? share your faith? worship God? study the Word? grow deeper in your relationship with God?





**CHAPTER 15**  
**“Evangelism and the Tribulation”**  
**Revelation 7:1-17**

<sup>1</sup> “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. <sup>2</sup> And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, <sup>3</sup> saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’ <sup>4</sup> And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: <sup>5</sup> from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, <sup>6</sup> from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, <sup>7</sup> from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, <sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed. <sup>9</sup> After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; <sup>10</sup> and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ <sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’ <sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ <sup>14</sup> I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. <sup>16</sup> They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.’”

When we think about the end of history, the rapture of believers, the Tribulation, and the second coming of Jesus, several important questions come to mind:

1. What are the purposes of the Tribulation?
2. Will people come to saving faith in Christ during the Tribulation?
3. If believers are raptured before the Tribulation begins, who will witness for Jesus during this time?
4. How is Israel involved in the Tribulation and Millennium? What is God’s plan for Israel?

Notice the contrast between the two groups of people described in this chapter. In verses 7:1-8 we have 144,000 Jews that are sealed on earth, and in verse 9-17 there are Gentiles from all nations in heaven before the throne of God giving Him praise forever.

While we are not told explicitly in Scripture that the 144,000 Jews are God’s special witnesses, and that the great multitude in heaven are saved through their ministry, this appears to be a logical deduction; otherwise, why are they associated in this chapter? The parallel with what Jesus says in Matthew 24:14 also indicates that the 144,000 will witness for the Lord during the Tribulation.

Isn't this what God had always planned from the beginning? He had called the nation of Israel to be the recipients of His love, grace and truth and to be the conduits, the messengers and be His witness to the world. And now we see it starting to happen. In three steps we see how God has a plan:

The Wrath Restrained	v. 1
The Sealed Jews	vs. 2-8
The Saved Gentiles	vs. 9-17

## I. The Wrath Restrained

Verse 1...*“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”*

The use of the words *“after this”* signifies that the vision of the sixth seal has ended and John is about to see a new vision. So, this is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. The scene now shifts from judgment on the ungodly to special protection for the godly.

From their key positions on the earth, these powerful angels ensured that no wind would blow on the earth, sea, or any tree. The phrase *“four corners of the earth”* refers to the whole earth by designating the four primary points on the compass (north, south, east, and west). The four winds are often associated in Scripture with God's judgment. Jeremiah 49:36 .. *“I will bring upon Elam the four winds, From the four ends of heaven And will scatter them to all these wind And there will be no nation To which the outcasts of Elam will not go”*. Daniel 7:2 .. *“Daniel said, “I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.”* Hosea 13:15.. *“Though he flourishes among the reeds, An east wind will come, The wind of the LORD coming up from the wilderness; And his fountain will become dry And his spring will be dried up; It will plunder his treasury of every precious article.”*

Stopping the winds implies a “lull before the storm.” Why did they stop the winds and withhold more judgment? Verses 2-3 gives us the answer...<sup>2</sup>*“And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, <sup>3</sup>saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’ ”*

## II. The Sealed Jews

John saw the angel ascending *“from the rising of the sun.”* That is a poetic way of saying from the east, the point of the compass in which the sun rises. From John's perspective on the island of Patmos, the east would be toward the land of Israel, the land where God's promised salvation came through Jesus.

The angel had with him *“the seal of the living God.”* This seal often referred to a signet ring. Kings or other officials would use such rings to stamp wax on documents or other items, affirming their authenticity and guaranteeing their security (Genesis 41:42 .. *“ Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck.”* and in Esther 3:10; 8:2, 8; Daniel 6:17; Matthew 27:66).

In Scripture, a seal indicates ownership and protection. Today, God's people are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13–14 says, *“In Christ, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”*

This is God's guarantee that we are saved, that He will not forsake us, and that He will one day take us to heaven.

Verse 4... *“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel”:*

Notice, the 144,000 are from every tribe of the sons of Israel. These Jewish believers and evangelists are the first fruits of Israel, which as a nation will be redeemed before Christ returns (Zechariah 12:10–13:1, 8–9; Romans 11:26).

Some have proposed that the 144,000 is a reference to the church. But commentator Robert Thomas states, there is “no clear-cut example of the church being called ‘Israel’ exists in the [New Testament] or in ancient church writings until ad. 160.... This fact is crippling to any attempt to identify Israel as the church in Revelation 7:4.” The term Israel must be interpreted in accordance with its normal biblical usage as a reference to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Jews will receive the Father's name as their seal, in contrast to the *“mark of the beast”* that Antichrist will give those who follow him in Revelation 13:17 ... *“and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.”* and Revelation 14:11; 16:2; 19:20.

The harm that will come to the earth, the sea, and the trees will occur when the four angels suddenly release the judgment they have been restraining. But the judgment has to wait until the angels had sealed the bond-servants of God on their foreheads. At this point they are to be protected so they can continue to witness about Christ. They will be the most effective missionaries the world has ever seen and will be instrumental in the conversion of both their own countrymen and the nations.

This passage reinforces the biblical truth that God is not through with the nation of Israel (Romans 9–11) and that the church does not replace Israel. Paul makes clear in Romans 11:1a *“I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.”* and in Romans 11:25-29.

Though Israel failed in its mission to be a witness nation, that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish people will come the greatest missionary force the world has ever known.

And this helps answer the question: What are the purposes of the Tribulation?

The first purpose of the Tribulation is to bring about the conversion of Israel, which will be accomplished through God's disciplinary dealing with His people Israel.

The Bible says there will be terrible conflict in Israel during the end times. That is why the time period is known as the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation, and the “*time of Jacob’s trouble or Jacob’s distress*” in Jeremiah 30:7. “Jacob” refers to the nation of Israel.

Daniel 12:1 says, “*there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.*”

So, the first purpose of the Tribulation is to bring about the conversion of Israel. Israel will finally recognize Jesus as their Messiah as prophesied in Zechariah 12:10 and Israel will be regenerated, restored, and regathered as Paul speaks about in Romans 11:26.

The second purpose of the Tribulation is to judge unbelieving people and nations in *Isaiah 26:21* ... “*For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; And the earth will reveal her bloodshed And will no longer cover her slain*” and in; *Jeremiah 25:32–33*; *2, Thessalonians 2:12*).

The church does not have a purpose or place in the Tribulation, and that is why the church is raptured before the Tribulation.

After the seven-year Tribulation is over, the promises God made to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled in the Millennial reign of Christ. Those promises are revealed in the biblical covenants God made with Abraham, David and the New Covenant through Jeremiah.

These Old Testament covenants were literal, unconditional, and eternal. There are no conditions attached to the covenants and as such they promise Israel a future land, a Messianic rule, and spiritual blessings. These covenants await a fulfillment in the Millennium.

These 144,000 Jews in verses 4-8 represent the pledge and promise of God to redeem ethnic Israel to Himself. And while I have never met a Ninevite, a Girsashite, an Amalekite, a Hittite, a Jebusite, an Amorite, a termite or any other mosquito bite, I have met messianic Jews - Jewish men and women who have placed their faith in Jesus the Messiah who has come and who will come back. Men and women who know Him and are faithful to make Him known through their witness.

So, here we see the sealed Jews who have a fruitful ministry that results in:

### **III. The Saved Gentiles**

Verses 9-10... <sup>9</sup>“*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;* <sup>10</sup>*and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’*”

The phrase “*after these things*” in verse 9 introduces a new vision, distinct from the one in Revelation 7:1–8. The 144,000 came from the twelve tribes of Israel; this group comes “*from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues.*” That phrase describes people from every culture, descent, race, and language.

The 144,000 are beyond the reach of persecutors because they are sealed for protection from persecution on earth. This group is beyond the reach of any persecutors because it is already in heaven. They are clothed in the white robes of Christ's righteousness and they are holding palm branches in their hands.

You may remember that this also happened when Jesus Christ rode into the city of Jerusalem. The people took palm branches and went out and waved them at Christ as He entered the city (John 12). This created quite a stir. Why? Because waving palm branches before someone was an activity reserved for royalty. This was only done for kings.

Verse 10... *“and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”*

The redeemed martyrs constantly cry out with a loud voice in joyous, exuberant worship. Salvation is the theme of their worship, as it is throughout Revelation.

Verses 11-12... <sup>11</sup> *“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’”*

This is the only doxology in the Bible that begins and ends with the word “*amen*”. It means, “This is the truth!” This is a seven-fold doxology whereby the angels reinforce the worship of the saints by quoting from the résumé of God. They chant, “This is the truth...” We see a seven-fold statement of glory to God and praise Him for Who He is and for what He does.

1. He is worthy of **eulogia** – this is “blessing” – from which we get our word “eulogy,” which means, “to speak well of someone”. We usually reserve a eulogy for someone after they have died. But this eulogy is offered to the living God – He is worthy of all commendation and praise.
2. He is worthy of **doxa** – the glory derived from a good reputation.
3. He possesses all **sophia** – wisdom which is embodied in our God.
4. He is worthy of **eucharistia**– gratitude and thanksgiving.
5. He is worthy of **timae** – great esteem and honor.
6. He has all **dunamis** – power to act independently of anyone but His triune counsel.
7. He possesses all **ischus** – might throughout history – part of His divine résumé of attributes – His will is accomplished by His divine strength.

For how long is our God worthy of all this – for a month, or a year, or even a century? No, John writes, . . .” *forever and ever*” . . . In other words, God is worthy of this without end. . . . Amen. This is the truth!

Verses 13-14 .. <sup>13</sup> *“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ <sup>14</sup>I said to him, My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are*

*the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ”*

Notice at this point, an interesting conversation has begun between John and a believer in verse 13. This believer is an elder, who represents the church, raptured to heaven prior to the Tribulation. This elder is emphasizing to John the importance of recognizing who these white robed saints are. He asks John, in Revelation 7:13b, . . . “*who are they, and where have they come from?*” We read John’s answer in verse 14a. I said to him, “*My lord, you know.*” . . . In other words, “I don’t know who they are. My lord, you know!”

The elder knew the answer, but this was his way of opening the conversation to clarify for John, and us, that these were NOT members of the church, already raptured. These were believers who had been saved through faith in Christ during the Great Tribulation and then died.

Jesus used the phrase “*great tribulation,*” in Matthew 24:21, to refer to the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week. This is the final 3½ years of the Tribulation period – the last half – when disaster and persecution rise to unprecedented levels of horror and devastation.

So, when the elder says to John in verse 14, “*These are the ones who come out of the* – definite article – *great tribulation . . .*” This is not just “*great tribulation,*” which the church has suffered over the centuries, but “the Great Tribulation.”

The original language uses a present participle it can literally be translated, “These are the ones who are presently coming out of the Great Tribulation”.

In other words, the early vision of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are preaching on earth is occurring simultaneously with this vision of all these believers, now literally pouring into heaven, who have just died on earth. Imagine this scene. As John is watching, the number of people entering heaven is growing. Like people streaming through the gates into a football stadium, these people keep coming.

The fact that this multitude is standing before the throne and not seated around it indicates that these people are not identified with the twenty-four elders. In fact, John himself did not know who they were! If they had been Old Testament believers, or the church, John would have recognized them. That the elder had to tell John who they were suggests that they are a special people, which, indeed, they are.

Verse 14 says, “*they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” They are before God’s throne by virtue of receiving God’s forgiveness and Christ’s imputed righteousness by faith. The Lamb’s blood made it possible. The white robes (7:9, 13) and the cleansing they picture (7:14) are the basis for the position of this multitude before the throne.

Verses 15-17... <sup>15</sup> “*For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.* <sup>16</sup> *They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;* <sup>17</sup> *for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.*”

While today, in most parts of the world, it is relatively easy to confess Christ, this will not be the case during the Tribulation, at least during the last half of it. Then, unless persons wear the “mark of the beast,” they will not be able to buy or sell; and this would leave them without even life’s bare necessities. Verse 16 indicates that they suffered hunger, thirst, and lack of shelter.

But what unfolds is a glorious description of the promises of salvation this group enjoys, and 5 different facets or aspects are highlighted. Though these promises are particularly for this group, these promises also belong to us as well. If you know Christ as Lord, if you are born again, you are promised five incredible things:

1. We are promised sanctification. In verse 14, believers’ robes were made white in the blood of the Lamb. Washed and made white (aorist) indicates once-for-all actions. Take our ugly, sinned, soiled garments and plunge them into the blood of the Lamb and miraculously, supernaturally, they come out white. We are promised sanctification.
2. We are promised service. Verse 15 Serve –worshipful service. Day and night – continually, unceasingly, without interruption. In His temple – the present heavenly dwelling place of God. And in eternity (Revelation 21:22), He is Himself our temple.
3. We are promised security. Verse 15 God spreads His tabernacle (his tent) over them – calls to mind the memory of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Leviticus 26 ff.), the pillar of cloud and of fire (Exodus 13:21-22), the Shekinah Glory of God’s radiant presence in the midst of His people (Exodus 40:34-38) and the incarnation of the Son (John 1:14). God is with them, right there in their very midst. Never again will they feel forsaken, never again will they be tortured and tormented. They now enjoy the supreme presence and protection of the Lord God Himself.
4. We are promised satisfaction. Verse 16 Hunger and thirst were constant obstacles and threats in the ancient world. They remain so for much of our world today, but not so in heaven. Starvation, thirst, and the burning heat of the hot sun will find no place in heaven. This is almost a direct contrast with what the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse bring in 6:1-8. They bring the curse and wrath of God to earth, but in heaven God blesses. They bring suffering and sorrow, but God gives us satisfaction.
5. We are promised a shepherd. Verse 17 the Lamb will be our shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. He will guide (lead) us to “*the springs of the water of life,*” – the emphasis falling on “*life,*” a stark contrast to the thirst the world offers but which it can never satisfy. Finally, even the sorrowful memories of pain and suffering are removed as the Great Shepherd will guide His flock to springs of the water of life and wipe every tear from their eyes. In heaven there will be no pain or sorrow.

Humble yourself and trust in Christ alone for salvation. And as a Christian, we are humbled at how God-centered the inhabitants of heaven are. By God’s grace let’s not boast about our works, our intelligence, our money or achievement. May we Stop all your boasting. Do not boast about your works, about your intelligence, about your money or your achievements — do not boast about anything. “*Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord*” 1 Corinthians 1:31. Salvation belongs to our God.

On final thought: Commit yourself to the Great Commission and to Missions. Pray for our missionaries and pray for your faithfulness to our mission to know Christ and make Him known.

We would like to hear more about neighborhood evangelism, how you share Christ with your classmates and coworkers. Sometimes we get discouraged. Sometimes we don't see the fruit of our efforts. It is such an encouragement to hear how God is saving others through your efforts. So please take the time to write a short testimony of how God has answered prayer and how you share the good news of the gospel with others. God calls us to be His faithful witnesses. We are not responsible for the results, we are responsible to be faithful messengers.

Here is what happened just yesterday in my neighborhood. Multiple homes in our area have changed ownership and Paula and I were discussing this week how we could have a welcome reception at our home. Would any come? And then one of the new neighbors who is Jewish texted us on Thanksgiving, saying how thankful they are for us and the way we welcomed them and then the wife invited Paula to her house and asked that she bring others. So, pray that we can be a witness of God's truth and love to our neighbors and share the good news of Jesus the Messiah with them.

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. Where are the four angels standing in Revelation 7:1? What are they doing? According to verse 2, what power has been granted to the angels?
2. How will God use the Tribulation to bring about the conversion of Israel? See Jeremiah 30:7; 31:35-37; Ezekiel 20:37; Daniel 12:1; Zechariah 12:3; 13:8-9; Romans 11:25-29.
3. What is the significance of the seal placed on the 144,000? What does the seal stand for?
4. God has chosen not only to save Jews from the tribes of Israel but to use them to evangelize and lead many non-Jews to faith in Christ. How does this affect your view of God and His faithfulness to His promises? What does it do to your view of evangelism?
5. What do Jehovah's Witnesses claim the 144,000 and the great multitude represent? How can you disprove their view?
6. As believers, how are we sealed? See Ephesians 4:30.
7. How do our momentary troubles compare with what is described in Revelation 7:15-17?
8. What will you do to rekindle your efforts to share the message of Christ with your neighbors, coworkers, and classmates?



**CHAPTER 16**  
**“The Sound of Silence”**  
**Revelation 8:1-13**

*<sup>1</sup> “ When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. <sup>3</sup> Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. <sup>4</sup> And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. <sup>5</sup> Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. <sup>6</sup> And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. <sup>7</sup> The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. <sup>8</sup> The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, <sup>9</sup> and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed. <sup>10</sup> The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. <sup>12</sup> The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. <sup>13</sup> Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’ ”*

When Paula and I were in Jacksonville, Florida last weekend, we passed by a restaurant that brought back memories of us as newlyweds eating dinner at that place and watching a hurricane pass by the coast – far enough off the coast that it was not a serious threat to us and thus the restaurant was still open.

A hurricane is a tropical cyclone - a rotating low-pressure weather system that has organized thunderstorms but no fronts. When the storms’ sustained winds reach at least 74 mph, it is called a hurricane.

Hurricanes are unique storms in that they can develop an “eye” in the middle of the storm. The “eye” is a circular calm and cloud-free zone, some 20 to 30 miles in diameter at the center of the vortex, which can be seen very clearly on satellite pictures

The strongest winds around a hurricane are usually just outside the eye, about 25 miles from the storm center. But in the eye itself, the winds are very light, and survivors of severe hurricanes have told of the strange experience of winds of unbelievable strength ceasing suddenly as the eye arrives. They have also told of being able to look upwards at a pure blue sky surrounded by a rolling mass of angry walls of clouds spiraling tens of thousands of feet into the sky. As one observer with a poetic bent described it:

The cyclone's roar grew softer,  
 As the rain cleared from the sky;  
 And we felt the eerie quiet of  
 the calm within the eye.

But we knew the lull was short-lived,  
 And that back would come the gales,  
 To lash from another quarter  
 With their shrieks and banshee wails.

Well, as we return to our study of the book of Revelation, chapter 8 begins with something very unique, a scene that must be a first in heaven. Six seals of famine and devastation have already been opened but in chapter eight when the seventh seal is opened: Absolute silence reigns in heaven for one-half an hour. It is like the eye of the storm before all the most severe judgment and destruction that will follow.

When Jesus opens the seventh and last seal on the scroll that is the title deed to the earth (5:1), the judgments of the day of the Lord will intensify and expand dramatically. In our text we will begin to see the outpouring of God's wrath through the first four of the seven trumpet judgments. These will come in direct answer to the prayers of the people of God for justice against their enemies. As their prayers ascend to Heaven, God hears them and His wrath is flung like a fire ball to the surface of the earth.

And what we see in our text today is God's just response to an unrepentant world. Each judgment in chapter 8 affects a different part of life on planet earth: the material world (the first trumpet), food supply, trade and commerce (the second and third trumpet judgments), heat and light (the fourth). These judgments together demonstrate that those who live only for this world have chosen foolishly, for only in God can there be true life.

Our text unfolds in three stages:

The Preparation in Heaven	Verses 1-6
The Desolation on the Earth	Verses 7-12
The Proclamation of the Eagle	Verse 13

And if you are here today and you do not have a living relationship in Christ, then my prayer is that you will embrace Christ as your Lord and Savior while you still have time. This is a narrow window of opportunity. This is the day of God's salvation. This is the time of God's grace before He starts unleashing these events.

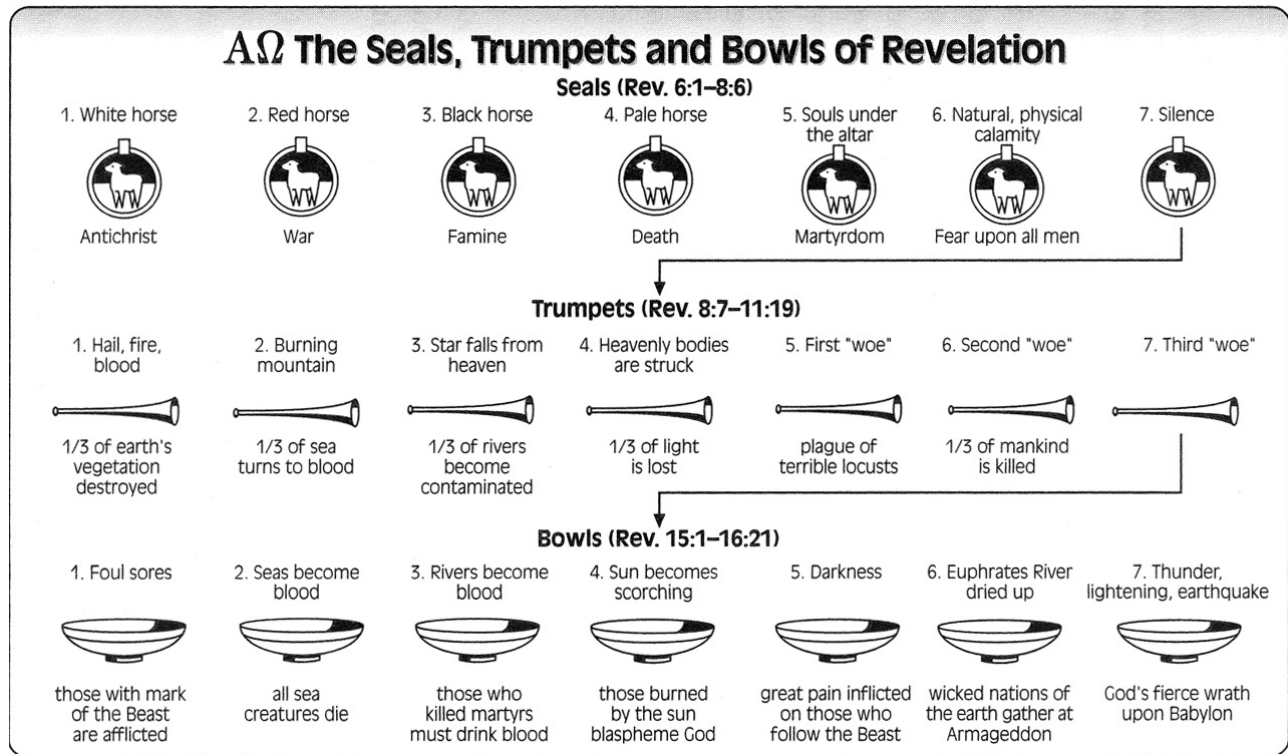
And if you are already a Christian, if you have a living relationship with God through faith in His Son. If the Holy Spirit is alive in you, my prayer is that you will be faithful to share with others the good news of salvation in Christ alone.

When people ask you tomorrow how your weekend was, you can tell them about the sound of silence and how to know Christ and the joy of a relationship with God and to be delivered from the judgment to come.

## **I. The Preparation in Heaven**

This final seal contains within it all the remaining judgments of the time of the great tribulation, including the trumpet and bowl judgments. Though some believe the events of the trumpet and bowl judgments happen simultaneously with those of the sixth seal, it seems better to understand them as telescoping out of each other sequentially.

The graphic of the seals, trumpets and bowls is helpful.



In his book, *Light on the Last Days*, C.A. Blanchard writes: “The series of three sevens are really included in one series of seven, that is, the seven trumpets are included under the seventh seal and the seven bowls are included under the seventh trumpet, so that we have in fact a single series in three movements” (*Light on the Last Days*, p. 58).

So, the seventh seal encompasses all of God’s final wrath up to the return of Christ- it includes all the events from Revelation 8:1 through 19:10.

Here in the first six verses of chapter 8, we see the preparation of heaven in three ways: silence, sounding and supplication.

Notice verse 1.. “*When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*”

### A. Silence

Until this point, heaven has been filled with amazing sounds. In chapter 4 there is lightning flashing with peals of thunder and the four creatures before the throne of God chanting “*Holy, Holy, Holy*” In chapter 5 there is the amazing singing of the saints and in chapter 6 there are the cries of martyrs before the throne of God. In chapter 7, millions of saints are waving palm branches and shouting, “*Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.*” So, heaven is a filled with loud praising, singing, and praying.

Yet we are told here in verse 1 that when Jesus breaks the seventh seal, both the redeemed and the angels in heaven are reduced to silence as all the remaining judgment becomes visible on the scroll. The redeemed and the angels

face the reality of the future destruction they see written on the scroll and their only answer is silence and awe at what God is about to do.

Silence is a powerful thing. You may fall asleep in a church worship service, but just let the preacher fall silent (pause for 30 seconds) and you will snap to attention.

Silence can also be nerve shattering! Imagine you have asked your girlfriend to marry you and she just sits in silence for thirty minutes.

What we see in verse 1 in these thirty minutes of silence, is the lull before the storm. The judgment of God is about to fall on the earth and heaven has thirty minutes of silence before the judgments commence.

Here on earth, we often see people call for a moment of silence in the aftermath of tragic events. We saw that kind of thing after 9/11. We stop for a time of silence after the event because we have no way of knowing when tragedy will strike. Heaven, on the other hand, calls for a moment of silence before the event. Heaven knows tragedy is about to strike and the inhabitants of heaven fall silent in the face of impending judgment.

After 30 minutes of silence, we see seven special angels that are given trumpets to sound.

## **B. Sounding**

Notice verse 2... *“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.”* and verse 6... *“And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.”*

As John watched, seven trumpets were given to these angels, in preparation for the trumpet judgments that will shortly follow. As angels participated in the seal judgments that we saw in chapter 6 (6:1, 3, 5, 6, 7) and we will see their involvement in the bowl judgments of chapter 16 (16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17), so the angels participate in the trumpet judgments. That involvement is consistent with the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 13:39–41, 49–50; 16:27; 25:31 that angels will play an important role in God’s future judgments.

Each of the seven trumpets unleashes a specific judgment of greater intensity than the first six seals, yet not as destructive as the seven bowl judgments that we will see in chapter 16:1–21. The first four trumpets destroy the earth’s ecology (8:6–12), the next two produce demonic destruction of humanity (8:13; 9:1–11, 13–19), and the seventh trumpet introduces the final outpouring of God’s wrath contained in the seven bowl judgments.

Having been introduced and given their trumpets, notice that the seven angels did not immediately blow them. They had to wait for other important events to transpire. The preparation in heaven included silence, sounding and third:

## **C. Supplication**

Verses 3-4...<sup>3</sup> *“Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.”*<sup>4</sup> *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.”*

This angel, different than the seven that are about to sound their trumpets, makes his appearance with a golden censer in his hand. A censer a small hand-sized vessel containing hot coals on which incense was sprinkled.

When I was growing up in Maryland, my mother being from Colombia would take my siblings and I to Spanish speaking mass at the Roman Catholic church where the priests were from South America. I don't remember a lot of what was said during the service, but I do remember that incense was used. The priest would take the censer which was a metal container connected to a chain, with a little door in the side. The priests would put orange crystals of incense on coals that were already burning inside the censer, which would create fragrant smoke. The priest would swing the censer back and forth, and at the apex of its swing, puffs of smoke would come out. In this way, the whole place would be filled with the aroma of this incense.

Here in Revelation 8 this angel offers up the smoke of the incense together with the prayers of all the saints especially of those who martyred as revealed in the fifth seal of Revelation chapter 6.

The fragrant smoke of these passionate prayers rises before the throne of God, pleading with God to intervene for justice against their persecutors. The angel offered the incense on the coals before God, and then, taking the censer with the fire still in it, he threw it to the earth.

Notice verse 5... *“Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”*

The angel's act of throwing the censer to earth reveals that God's judgment will come in direct response to the prayers of Christians. The cumulative effect of the prayers of innumerable righteous men and women will be very powerful as in James 5:16 ... *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*

And in direct contrast to silence we saw in verse 1, now the immediate effects of the firestorm of wrath that bursts upon the earth are “peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”

First, we see the preparation of heaven. Second, we see:

## **II. The Desolation on the Earth**

Verse 7.. *“The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”*

The first trumpet judgment parallels the seventh plague of Egypt (Exodus 9:18–26). Egypt was the center of a godless world system, so it is logical that the plagues in Moses' day would be repeated on a worldwide scale during the great tribulation. Hailstorms can do terrible damage, but when fire is mixed with hail, the possibilities of desolation are staggering.

In Revelation chapters 8 and 9 there are thirteen references to “one third part.” In verse 7 we are told a third of the earth was burned up, making the soil unusable. Then a third of the trees were burned up, destroying fruit all over the earth. Finally, all the green grass was burned up. The effects of such catastrophic fires would be

widespread and devastating, including destruction of crops, death of animals on a massive scale, loss of wood for construction, and the destruction of watersheds.

While the first trumpet judgment affects the earth, the second trumpet affects the sea, turning one-third of it into blood and killing one-third of its creatures, as well as destroying one-third of the ships.

Verses 8-9... <sup>8</sup>*“The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, <sup>9</sup> and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed..”*

The massive object plunging through the sky looked to the terrified observers on earth *“like a great mountain burning with fire.”* This is evidently a giant meteorite or asteroid, surrounded by flaming gases set ablaze by the friction of the earth’s atmosphere. The current doomsday scenarios about an asteroid hitting the earth will come true with a vengeance.

You may have heard or read in the news just a few weeks ago that NASA launched a rocket from here in California on a mission called DART - which stands for the Double Asteroid Redirection Test. NASA isn't aware of any asteroids headed for Earth in the next 100 years. But the agency expects enormous space rocks to approach our planet eventually, and it has a plan to hit them and try to redirect them so they do not hit planet earth.

However, no one will be able to redirect God’s judgment here in Revelation 8 in the time of great tribulation just before Christ returns. The giant meteorite or asteroid in verse 8 will strike somewhere in the world’s oceans with an explosive power far greater than that of an atomic bomb. Because all the world’s oceans are connected, the devastation will spread across one-third of the ocean waters, causing a third of the sea to become blood.

Three catastrophic, supernaturally designed effects result from the collision: (1) one-third of the sea became blood; (2) as a result of that effect one-third of the creatures which were in the sea died; and (3) giant waves will destroy a third of the ships on the world’s oceans, capsizing huge vessels and completely swamping ports. The resulting disruption of commerce and transportation will cause economic chaos.

So, the first two trumpets will bring devastating judgment on both the land and the sea, which are the beginning of the final catastrophes God will unleash on a rebellious world.

The third trumpet affects the rivers, making their waters bitter. Look at verses 10-11... <sup>10</sup>*“The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.”*

Wormwood is mentioned only here in the New Testament. It is a shrub whose leaves are incredibly toxic. Wormwood is mentioned eight times in the Old Testament, where it is associated with bitterness, poison, and death (Deuteronomy 29:18; Proverbs 5:4; Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7; 6:12). In three of those uses, wormwood is connected with poisoned water. Whatever the poison represented by the name Wormwood is, it destroys a third of the fresh water. The repeated pattern of one-third destruction demonstrates that these are not natural events, but divine judgments.

With the third trumpet judgment, John records that many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. The rivers will run with deadly poison. The wells will become springs of death. The lakes and reservoirs will be filled with toxic waters. Yet, the worst is yet to come.

Verse 12... *“The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way”*.

As the fourth angel sounded his trumpet, the focus of divine judgment shifted from the earth to the heavens. The heavenly bodies are hit with a plague from God so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. This partial eclipse is temporary, as later in chapter 16 God will increase the amount of heat coming from the sun. But at this point, the loss of heat from the sun will cause temperatures to plunge drastically all over the world. That will severely disrupt the earth’s weather patterns and the seas’ tides, leading to violent, unpredictable storms and tides, the destruction of crops, and further loss of animal and human lives.

We have seen the preparation in heaven, the desolation on the earth, and third:

### **III. The Proclamation of the Eagle**

Verse 13 ... *“Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”*

The imagery is that of a strong bird of prey rushing to consume its victim. In this case, it refers to the rapid approach of God’s final vengeance. Depicted in the vision as flying in midheaven, the bird would be at the height of the midday sun, visible to all. His loud voice assures that everyone will be able to hear his pronouncements.

The eagle’s triple pronouncement of *“woe, woe, woe”* introduces one threat for each of the remaining three trumpets about to sound (9:1–21; 11:15ff.). The eagle’s dire warning is that the last three trumpet judgments will be even more devastating than the first four.

So, friends, the judgment of God is unstoppable; and the fact is your appointment with God is unavoidable. Hebrews 9:27 says, *“It is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment.”*

You have been warned by this description of judgment to come – mankind may try to avoid a crater formed by a meteorite but humanity cannot avoid the Creator of life, and neither will you and I. And so the question is: Are you ready? If God were to ask you, *“Why should I let you into heaven?”* How will you answer?

Jesus told His disciples in John 14:1-6, <sup>1</sup>*“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup>In My Father’s house are many dwelling places, <sup>3</sup>if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way where I am going.”* <sup>5</sup>*Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?’* <sup>6</sup>*Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”*

Jesus is the source of eternal life. When He says “*I am the way . . . I am the truth . . . I am the life.*” “I am the starting point of life . . . I am the source of life.” “I am the Alpha and Omega; I had the first word and I will have the last word. Follow Me and live forever in My coming new heaven and new earth.”

### **Questions for Review and Reflection**

1. What happened when the 7th seal was first opened in 8:1? What is the significance?
2. What were the seven angels given in 8:2? What is the significance of trumpets?
3. What did the angel with the golden censer do? What purpose did the golden altar serve in the Old Testament?
4. Where else have we read of prayers of saints? How does this relate to chapter 8? 12-12-21?
5. How does your observation of the effect of the prayers of the saints influence your own prayer practice?
6. What did the angel do with the fire from the altar? What was the result? Explain.
7. What happened when the first trumpet sounded? What harm followed? What is the significance of one third?
8. What happened when the second trumpet sounded? What harm followed?
9. What happened when the third trumpet sounded? What is wormwood? What harm followed?
10. What happened when the fourth trumpet sounded? 11. Someone might read Revelation 8 and conclude that God is an angry deity only seeking to inflict pain on people. How would you respond to such an accusation?



## CHAPTER 17

### “The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets: Demons From the Abyss / Armies From the East” Revelation 9:1-21

<sup>1</sup> “Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. <sup>2</sup> He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. <sup>3</sup> Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. <sup>4</sup> They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. <sup>6</sup> And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. <sup>7</sup> The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. <sup>8</sup> They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. <sup>9</sup> They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. <sup>10</sup> They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. <sup>11</sup> They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. <sup>12</sup> The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. <sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, <sup>14</sup> one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ <sup>15</sup> And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. <sup>16</sup> The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. <sup>17</sup> And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. <sup>18</sup> A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. <sup>20</sup> The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; <sup>21</sup> and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.”

Happy new year! As we start the year 2022, and we think of new year resolutions I hope that you will prayerfully consider a couple very important priorities. The first is reading the Bible. We have a daily reading plan on our church app that will take you thru the entire bible in one year.

The second priority is that you join one of our community groups. Our mission here is to know Christ and make Him known. Community groups give us a way to join with others in a home and discuss how we can take the truth we hear on Sunday and move them from the head to the heart to the hands. How can we live out our faith as a family, as servants and as missionaries. Our groups meet on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.

We are studying the book of Revelation, the very first words of chapter one verse one tells us it “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1:1) since it comes from Him and centers on Him. It begins with a vision of His glory, wisdom, and power in chapter 1, and portrays His authority over the entire church in chapters 2–3. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain and declared worthy to open the book of judgment in chapter 5. His righteous wrath is poured out upon the whole earth in chapters 6–18, and He returns in power to judge His enemies and to reign as the Lord over all

in chapters 19–20. He will rule forever over the heavenly city in the presence of all who know Him in chapters 21–22.

The seven judgments in chapters 6–18 consist of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Three consecutive series of judgments, so that the seventh seal is the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls.

In chapter 8, we saw the first four trumpet judgments. At the end of chapter 8 a warning was given that the next three trumpets would be more severe and devastating than those which preceded them. The triple woe announced by an eagle warned of coming judgment. How severe will it be?

Well sometimes when we are extremely embarrassed or severely disappointed, we carelessly use the statement “I wish I could die.” We don’t really mean it when we say it. It simply expresses our strong feelings and emotions in a situation or circumstance we are not happy about, that we wish were different. However, we will see in our text today that there is coming a day when men will say “I wish I could die” and they will mean it. But amazingly they will not be able to find it though they seek it with all their heart.

Imagine that: a day when men will desire death more than life, when they will desire death even more than they desire God. When, you might ask, will that be? Answer: When demons arise from the abyss and armies come from the east, when the 5th angel sounds his trumpet in Revelation 9.

This chapter divides evenly into 2 parts: the 5th trumpet comprises verses 1-12 and signals the demons from the abyss. The 6th trumpet is detailed in verses 13-21 and records the coming of an army of 200 million, as well as humanity’s steadfast refusal to repent of its sin. In all that is recorded the absolute and awesome sovereignty of God is on full display. He is in total control. Even demons do His bidding. What is it in particular God would want us to learn from this frightening chapter?

## **I. God Uses Demons to Carry out His Judgments. 9:1-12**

Because our world is the theater where the glorious, God-honoring story of redemption is played out, Satan and his demon hosts have attacked the human race, turning the earth into the main battleground in their cosmic war against God, the holy angels, and the elect. Satan launched his first assault in the Garden of Eden, where he successfully tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God. The disastrous consequences were that *“sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”* Romans 5:12.

After the Fall, in Genesis 3:15 God graciously promised a Savior who would come to destroy Satan and deliver people from his power.

From the beginning to the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, Satan fought with all his power against the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil tempted Christ for forty days at the beginning of His ministry, futilely seeking to turn Him aside from the work His Father sent Him to accomplish (Matt. 4:1–11).

Satan tried to destroy the faith of Peter, the leading disciple, requesting from God the opportunity to test him severely (Luke 22:31–32) with the intent of destroying his faith (as he had tried unsuccessfully to do with Job). The test was allowed by God and was severe. It brought Peter to fear and denial of his Lord on three occasions (Luke 22:34, 54–61), but Peter repented (Luke 22:62) and was restored (John 21:15–23) to become the great preacher of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff.).

Satan also battled the apostle Paul, hindering him from visiting the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 2:18) and tormenting him with “*a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan*” in 2 Corinthians 12:7 – the passage that Adrian read. Notice in that text, Paul did not rebuke Satan but prayed to God because he knew that God sovereignly allows and oversees all of Satan’s assaults and fulfills His purposes in spite of them and through them. Satan is the servant of God.

In Revelation 9 we see that Satan will serve God’s purpose by being permitted to launch another deadly assault against the human race. That attack comes at the sounding of the fifth trumpet, during the time of God’s judgment in the Great Tribulation (7:14).

While the destruction caused by the first four trumpet judgments will be catastrophic, the remaining three will be far worse. John needed only 6 verses to set forth the first 4 trumpets of chapter 4. Now he devotes an entire chapter, 21 verses to trumpets 5 and 6, the 1st and 2nd woes. Demonic activity will dominate the plagues and judgements associated with both. God uses demons to carry out His judgments.

### **A. Satan is Their Leader.           Verses 1-2**

Verse 1...*“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.”*

In Revelation 6:13 ... “*and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.*” and 8:8 ...*“the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, .”*, the apostle John had already seen several heavenly bodies plunge to earth. Unlike them, however, this star was not an inanimate piece of celestial matter, but an angelic being.

The Greek verb tense here in verse 1 is perfect: a completed action in the past. This is the star that had fallen in the past. Now this star is given a key to unlock the abyss, allowing a demonic horde to billow out like smoke from its shaft.

Satan is called in Isaiah 14:12 “*morning star, son of the dawn.*” The King James version famously translates that “*Lucifer.*” “*How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!*”

Revelation 12:9 depicts him as a dragon that was thrown to the earth. “*The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*” We will see in Revelation 12 that with his dragon tail, he sweeps a third of the stars from the heavens and throws them to the earth. The stars, then, represent fallen angels, or what we know as demons.

Jesus said in Luke 10:18, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*” This language of falling or being cast down is repeated again and again. It seems clear that the fallen star is Satan.

Verse 2...*“He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.”*

The star, Satan, is given a key to unlock the shaft to the abyss, which had been locked before. The smoke has not been allowed to billow out. The word “abyss” in the Greek literally means “bottomless,” a pit so deep it has no bottom at all. This word is used seven times in Revelation to refer to the prison of demons. The word shaft conjures a narrow neck coming up from the pit, somewhat like a mining shaft. Unlike other demons, these demons are not allowed the freedom to roam over the earth like Satan is. God said to Satan in Job, “*Where have you come from?*” and he answers, “*From roaming over the earth.*” The demons in the pit seem to be restrained as if they had been thrown in a prison, so they are not able to roam on the earth.

In Luke 8 Jesus asked a demon possessed man, “*What is your name?*” *Legion* [6000 Roman soldiers] *he replied, ‘because many demons had gone into him, and they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.’*” It seems clear that the abyss is a holding place for demons, gathered and thrown there by the power of Almighty God. Jesus would have that power as well.

Their freedom is restrained, but it is not their final judgment. They are being held under restraint for final judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 says, “*God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.*” Not only is Satan the leader of fallen angels, but:

### **B. Suffering is Their Legacy.**

### **vs. 3-10**

Verse 3... “*Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*”

The fact that these locust-and scorpion-like creatures come from the pit and that their leader is the “*angel of the abyss*” (9:11) indicates that demons must be in view in this scene. There are two natural analogies being given to help us understand what these demons can do: a combination of a swarming invasion like that of a locust plague and torment through stings as those of scorpions.

Verses 4-5... <sup>4</sup> “*They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.*” <sup>5</sup> “*And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.*”

These demons are given four limitations. First, they are forbidden from harming green and growing things. Notice that the green grass has recovered from the first trumpet. It may look like a contradiction since all the green grass was previously destroyed in the first trumpet. But grass is resilient — within a season, it has grown back, but the demons are not allowed to touch it.

Second, these demons are restricted specifically to what people they can attack, they cannot attack all people. They are not allowed to harm the elect, those marked with the seal of God on their foreheads. That mark is the seal of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God on believers, those who have crossed over from death to life, The seal protects them from the demonic attacks.

The third limitation is that the demons cannot kill people but only torment them.

The fourth limitation is the timeframe — they are given five months to do their work. These limitations demonstrate God’s sovereignty through great wickedness.

That five-month period will be one of intense spiritual and physical suffering inflicted on unbelievers by the judgment of God. You might be tempted to think, “This is only going to last for five months. When five months are up, these demons are evidently commanded back to the Abyss where they will wait until called again.” You might think, “It’s only five months.” However, five months is a long time if you are waiting for something exciting to happen, but it is an eternity if you are waiting for something terrible to end! To the human race, it will seem as if this will never end and so, they will try to end their lives.

Verse 6... *“And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.”*

Any method of suicide will fail as unsaved humanity longs to die but is not allowed to. In other words, the pistol will not fire, the knife will break, invisible forces will keep them from jumping off tall buildings, poison will not work, they will float when they land in the river and they will survive.

Do not miss this – demons only operate under divine permission and for divine purposes.

Verse 1 – *“the key . . . was given to him (Satan)”* – he did not have the key and could not get it if he wanted to – it was given to him.

Verse 3 – *“power was given to them”* – delegated, temporary power.

Verse 4 – *“They were told not to hurt the grass or trees”*

Verse 5 – *“they were not permitted to kill anyone”*. Our sovereign Lord is firmly in total control of even the demons, even though it seems that the Earth is, at this moment, totally controlled by them.

This is true not only in the future Tribulation, but in our present tribulation. Your world might be in total chaos, but God is in total control of the chaos. He knows how long it will last – five hours, five months, or perhaps five years. In your times of tribulation, it is true as well that God has determined the depth of its pain and the extent of its sting – He has told it to go only so far and no further. Even in total chaos, Jesus Christ is in total control. Romans 8:28-29...<sup>28</sup> *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*<sup>29</sup> *“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;”*

Verses 7-10...<sup>7</sup> *“The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.”*<sup>8</sup> *“They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.”*<sup>9</sup> *“They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.”*<sup>10</sup> *“They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.”*

John is trying his best to describe these demons with comparisons and analogies repeatedly he uses the phrase *“like”* — meaning “looks like,” “had something like,” or “resembles”.

The demons are like horses, powerful, mighty, bold, and ready to charge into battle. They have crowns representing their power and authority. They are invincible and all-conquering. They have faces like humans — they are rational rather than mindless. They know exactly what they are doing; they possess intelligence. They

have an alluring beauty — woman’s hair. Just as Satan masquerades as an attractive angel of light, so these demons are in some senses attractive or seductive.

They have teeth like lions, ready to rip and shred flesh. They have breast plates like iron, meaning no weapon fashioned against them by humans will prevail. They cannot be killed. They have thundering, deafening wings, indicating mobility to move wherever they want quickly. There will be no escape from them — nowhere to run or hide. They have tails and stings like scorpions. Their sole purpose is to inflict agony on human beings, to torment for five months, the length of time restricted by God’s command. As it is now, so it will be then — the demons are subject to the sovereign control of Almighty God.

Verse 11... *“They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.”*

Some identify this angel as Satan, but the devil is not associated with the abyss until he is cast into it in Revelation 20. This angel in verse 11 is better viewed as a high-ranking demon in Satan’s hierarchy. John notes that *“his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.”* John uses both names to emphasize his impact on both ungodly Jews and Gentiles. Both words mean “destroyer,” an apt name for the head of the devastating army of demons that rises from the abyss.

Verse 12 .. *“The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things”.*

In Verse 12, we have a terrifying warning of what is yet to come. Two woes (the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments, including all the bowl judgments) are still coming after these things, so there will be nothing more than a brief sigh of relief before still more fearful judgments follow.

We have seen in verses 1-12 that God Uses Demons to Carry Out His Judgments.

## **II. God Uses Armies to Carry Out His Judgments vs.13-21**

If Revelation teaches us anything it teaches us that God is in control. He is Lord, He is sovereign. History has a purpose and that purpose is God’s. History is following a plan and that plan is God’s.

### **A. God’s Judgment is a Demonstration of His Sovereignty.**

Verses 13-14...<sup>13</sup> *“ Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, <sup>14</sup>one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”*

The sixth angel sounded his mighty trumpet. Immediately, John *“heard a voice.”* The Greek text literally reads “one voice.” The voice is not identified, but it is possibly that of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. He was pictured earlier standing near the throne (5:6), when He took the seven-sealed scroll from the Father’s hand (5:7) and broke its seals (6:1). This could also be the voice of the angel whom John had seen standing near the golden altar of incense (8:3).

While identifying the exact source of the voice is not possible, its message is clear, *“Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”* That the four angels are bound indicates that they are demons, since holy angels are nowhere in Scripture said to be bound.

The perfect tense of the participle translated *“bound”* implies that these four angels were bound in the past with continuing results; they were in a state or condition of bondage until God’s determined time came for them to be released to execute their function as instruments of divine judgment.

The great river Euphrates is a symbol which the Jews would have recognized as the northern boundary of the promised land, beyond which is the land of the Gentiles. The area beyond the Euphrates to the east is traditionally the source from which enemy attacks came against Israel like the Assyrians and Babylonians. So, there's a boundary, and now these four powerful fallen angels control a huge demonic army that will cross this boundary and wage war against fallen mankind when God releases them to do so. How big an army?

Look at verse 15-16... <sup>15</sup> *“And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. <sup>16</sup> The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”*

The shocking purpose for the release of these four demon leaders and their hordes was so that they would kill a third of mankind. The judgment of the fourth seal killed one quarter of the earth’s population (6:8). This additional third brings the death toll from these two judgments alone to more than half the earth’s pretribulation population. That staggering total does not include those who died in the other seal and trumpet judgments.

John briefly describes those who sit on the horses in verse 17... *“And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.”*

The color of fire is red; that of hyacinth, dark blue or black like smoke; that of brimstone, a sulfurous yellow, describing the rock which, when ignited, produces a burning flame and suffocating gas. Those are the very colors and features of hell Revelation 14:10 ... *“he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”* And in Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8.

Horses are frequently associated with warfare in Scripture, but it is clear that these are not actual horses. Using the descriptive language of his vision, John noted that the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions. John noted three ways that the demon horses killed their victims in verse 18 *“A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.”*

John saw that the devastating result of this deadly demonic assault was that *“a third of all people were killed by these three plagues.”* The word *“plagues”* will appear frequently in the remainder of Revelation (11:6; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18) as a term for the destructive final judgments. As if the description he has already given were not frightening enough, John sees more about the deadly power of the demons. He is made aware that not only is the power of the horses in their mouths, but also in their tails. Verse 19... *“For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.”*

Unlike the scorpion stings inflicted during the previous demonic assault (9:5), the snakebites inflicted by this host will be fatal. God's judgment is a demonstration of His sovereignty.

### **B. God's Judgment is a Demonstration of Man's Sinfulness.**

Verses 20-21...<sup>20</sup> *"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; <sup>21</sup> and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."*

Despite all that has occurred, the rebellion of the rest of mankind is unmitigated. Their hearts are not softened – they are hardened. Mankind clings to five sins John records five sins that are clung to by mankind. These include:

1. Idolatry – Mankind will still cling to their idol the antichrist and worship the demon world and the natural world. As unbelievable as it may seem, men and women will remain committed to creation rather than the Creator.
2. Murders – Gone is all value of human life. People are surrounded by decaying corpses and think nothing of adding to their number. It is the "law of the jungle," as people mimic the demon bloodlust.
3. Sorceries – This is a word that comes from the Greek word "farmakeia" (φαρμακεια), which gives our English word "pharmacy or pharmaceuticals". It is the word for drugs. The word has an elastic use and can be used for incantations, charms, séances, witchcraft, contacting mediums, and spells.
4. Immorality – This is unrepentant immorality, which is the Greek word "porneia" (πορνεια) and is the root word of the English word "pornography". It is a general term for sexual relations of any kind outside of marriage. Imagine, even in the face of death; even having survived scorpion demons and fire-breathing demon riders, mankind will cling to sexual addictions – pornography, adulteries, and drug fixes – as he abandons himself to the lusts of the flesh.
5. Theft – The word used has to do with stealing. Stealing will literally become a way of life. Morality and honesty will be nonexistent as people compete for the scarce supplies of food, clothing, water, shelter, and even medicine.

This is a grim picture indeed, is it not?

Isaiah the Prophet was told this when he was sent to Israel about how long he would preach. Isaiah 6:9-10 says, they will be *"Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

This exact passage in Isaiah 6 is quoted in each of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) to explain why the Jews didn't repent at the river of grace and miracles that came through Jesus. So, here you have the opposite extremes: You have a river of kindness shown through Jesus Christ. Every kind of disease healed. Their empty stomachs filled with the bread of Heaven. He raised the dead, He healed lepers. He showed such a tender grace and kindness, they still didn't repent. And now, the other end of the spectrum, we have the most horrific physical trials anybody could ever go through, they still don't repent.



What that means ultimately, friends, hell itself will produce no converts. In our day, criminals are sent to correctional facilities to be corrected and reformed – but change can only happen through the heart and only some come to repentance and saving faith in Jesus Christ. But Revelation 9:20-21 tells us that none of that will happen when the 6th trumpet is sounded and there is hell on earth.

This is a sobering and grim chapter. But I believe a chapter like Revelation 9, however grim, can accomplish several responses in the believer's life.

1. This chapter increases our appreciation of the sovereignty of God.

God remains enthroned, in control, and working out His plan. Neither the sins of mankind nor the schemes of Satan will hinder God from accomplishing His will in His time to His glory.

2. This chapter magnifies for us the mercy and grace of God.

God could easily move to wipe mankind from the face of the Earth in one sweep of His hand, yet He will take several years to warn humanity and warn them and warn them and warn them and warn them again and again. By pulling back the curtain in Revelation and giving glimpses of His wrath that are coming and showing people the terrors of hell that await those who rebel against Him. This is a chapter that says, "There is no hope but in Jesus Christ, so run now to His mercy!" God sent Jesus to die in our place, to drink in this kind of torment in our stead, that we might be free from condemnation and live forever in the peace of God. Not by works but only by simple faith can you be free from all condemnation. You can cross over from death to life, so do that now. Let today be the day of salvation for you.

Turn away from wickedness and sins, from sexual immorality, from darkness and hard heartedness and turn to Christ while there is still time.

3. Third, use this account of the coming terror to share the gospel.

Perhaps tomorrow you will have an opportunity to talk to some non-Christians. When they ask you about the new year and what your plans are, tell them about the best news in the world: how Jesus came to save us from the wrath of God against sin and explain how they too can be saved.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What happened when the fifth trumpet sounded? What do stars often represent?
2. Where else do we read of something/someone falling from heaven?
3. What power was given to him? What does a key represent? What is the abyss? Who has the key of the bottomless pit?
4. What did John hear when the sixth trumpet sounded? Where have we read about the golden altar, and what is its significance here?
5. What happened when the four angels were released in 9:15? What is the significance of 1/3?
6. Read Revelation 9:20-21. How do these comments affect your understanding of God's judgment? How do these statements affect your understanding of people in general? How do they affect your understanding of salvation?

**CHAPTER 18**  
**“The Bittersweet Truth”**  
**Revelation 10:1-11**

*<sup>1</sup> “I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; <sup>2</sup> and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; <sup>3</sup> and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. <sup>4</sup> When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.’ <sup>5</sup> Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, <sup>6</sup> and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, <sup>7</sup> but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets. <sup>8</sup> Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, ‘Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.’ <sup>9</sup> So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, ‘Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.’ <sup>10</sup> I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.’ <sup>11</sup> And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’”*

We are studying the book of Revelation. The word Revelation means unveiling. Revelation pulls the veil back between the physical and spiritual world as no other book of the Bible does. As we peer into the invisible spiritual world, we see more than we could have conceived with our unaided imaginations. Certainly, the most significant invisible reality we see by the book of Revelation is the glory of the triune God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Father seated on a throne of eternal glory. God the Son, Jesus Christ, pictured as a lion and as a lamb. God the Spirit pictured as a seven-fold light blazing, shining, a lampstand with the fire of holiness. No book in the Bible so powerfully reveals the hidden nature of the triune God as does Revelation.

The Apostle John was the human instrument for the book of Revelation. He was in exile on the island of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus. Patmos is a tiny, rocky, deserted island off the coast of modern-day Turkey. On that barren island, Jesus Christ communicated a revelation of Himself to John.

John heard the voice of Christ, and he saw a door standing open in the heavenly realms. Revelation 4:1 the Lord told him *“I will show you what must take place after this.”* As John went through the doorway, the first thing he saw was a throne in heaven with someone seated on it. That throne, the throne of Almighty God, is the central and most important reality of the universe; it shows the glory of God, who is seated there. He is celebrated in Revelation 4 as the glorious Creator of the universe, all things visible and invisible. He is worshiped there by twenty-four elders seated on their thrones, and by four living creatures, and by 100 million angels. Revelation 4 celebrates God the Creator.

In God’s right hand, as He sits on this throne, is a book or a scroll sealed with seven seals. A mighty angel calls out in Revelation 5:2, *“Who is worthy to open the book and break the seals?”* No one is found worthy until Jesus Christ appears. He is portrayed as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and also as a lamb that was slain. He takes the

book from the right hand of Him who sits on the throne. When Jesus does so, cascading worship erupts in heaven for Christ the Redeemer, who by His blood purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

In Revelation 6 Jesus breaks open the seals one at a time. As he does, judgments come on the earth. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride on the surface of the earth bringing judgments and suffering. Martyrs, Christians who have been slaughtered for the testimony of Christ, cry out for justice and vengeance. The sixth seal brings the end of the physical universe as we know it — the sun, moon, and stars falling, and every mountain and island removed from its place.

When the sixth seal is opened, the inhabitants of the earth flee from the wrath of God, looking for a refuge. They cry to the mountains and to the hills in Revelation 6:16-17, *“Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* It is an incredible question, and something that we need to heed now. Where will there be a refuge from the wrath of God?

Revelation chapter 7 answers that question. The refuge is Jesus Christ. Those who flee to Christ, including 12,000 who are sealed from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and a multitude greater than anyone could count from every tribe, language, people, and nation, seem to be the answer to the question *“Who shall be able to stand?”* Sinners who are redeemed and saved by the shed blood of Christ. In fact, all who trust in Christ stand fully forgiven in white robes celebrating the salvation that God alone can give.

The Lamb breaks open the seventh seal as Revelation 8 begins, and the seventh seal contains seven trumpets judgments. They start to flow, bringing a level of suffering and judgment on earth such as we can hardly imagine. The first four trumpets in Revelation 8 are terrifying judgments on the ecology of the earth: on the green vegetation, burning up all the green grass, a third of the trees, and a third of the earth; on the oceans, turning a third of them into blood and killing a third of all the aquatic creatures in the ocean; on the fresh water, turning a third of the water to poison so that people cannot drink it; and on the sun and the moon and the stars, reducing their light by a third.

In Revelation 9, the fifth and sixth trumpets unleash a horde of demons coming up out of a shaft from deep in the earth. It is a demonic assault on the human race likened to a plague of locusts and the attack of scorpions. People are in agony for five months, crying out for death, which will elude them. This is followed by an invasion of a demonic army, 200 million strong, bringing death to one-third of earth’s population.

Then we come to Revelation 10 and to a dramatic pause in the action before the seventh trumpet sounds, similar to the pause in Revelation 7 between the sixth and seventh seal. A respite is needed for John and his readers because the judgments are so overwhelming in Revelation 8 and 9.

And in this interlude, John has a vision of a mighty angel with a little book. The angel is sent by God to recommission John to speak future words of sweetness and bitterness that we desperately need to hear and eat.

The apostle John tells us the truth of God is bittersweet. God's Word contains both a sweet message and a bitter message. The prophet Jeremiah testified: *“our words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart”* Jeremiah 15:16. The message of reconciliation and forgiveness is sweet, but

the message of condemnation is bitter. The gospel is sweet to those who embrace it, but bitter to those who reject it.

The Bible is truth that cannot be simply intellectual. It moves from the head to the heart to the hands. It changes our lives. Anyone who really believes the truth of the Bible cannot afterwards live for self or live for the world. Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

That truth believed, makes immature Christians mature; it makes worldly people heavenly; it makes selfish people generous; it makes hateful people loving, it makes careless people earnest.

Like the apostle John you may love the word of God and it tastes like honey, but you know taking the word to the lost, to the unsaved is challenging, and it makes your stomach turn. The difficulty of sharing God’s word to rebellious and obstinate people makes it a burden.

Speaking the truth of God’s message to the lost world is hard. Non-Christians don’t want to hear the truth which interrupts everything they are doing. But we must be faithful ambassadors for Christ. We can’t take the book and enjoy its sweet honey goodness and then not share it. Sure, evangelism is a burden, and it can be bitter when the message and the messenger is rejected and in the case of the apostle John persecuted and exiled, but we must speak it for the glory of God and the love of others.

This important message in Revelation chapter 10 moves in three stages. First we will see the angel’s appearance in verses 1-5, the angel’s announcement in verses 6-7 and then the apostle’s assignment and application in verses 8-11.

## **I. The Angel’s Appearance**

Verse 1.. *“I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;”*

Each time that John begins with the words *“I saw”* it marks the beginning of a new vision. Following his vision of the first six trumpets, John saw a vision of someone new. This strong angel is distinct from the seven angels who sound the seven trumpets. And what is really different is that location of this vision changes from heaven to earth, as the angel descends from heaven (10:1) and stands upon the earth

Some suggest this angel is literally Jesus Christ. However, the Greek word for *“another”* indicates another of the same kind, like the previously mentioned trumpet angels. Christ is never called an angel in Revelation, particularly *“another of the same kind.”* Whenever Jesus Christ appears in Revelation, John gives Him an unmistakable title. So, the best identification is to see this angel as similar to but distinct from the trumpet angels.

Angels are extremely active in the book of Revelation. Just how? 73 of the 188 references to angels in the New Testament are in the book of Revelation. Since Revelation is all about the unveiling of the invisible spiritual realms of the future, it is not surprising that angels figure so prominently.

The Greek word for angel, **angelos**, literally means “messenger.” In Revelation 1:1 it says, “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.*” The angel was in between Jesus and John, delivering the book of Revelation.

Perhaps the most important role of these heavenly messengers is to bring the Word of God from God to prophets and apostles to communicate to us.

Having introduced this powerful angel, John describes his spectacular attire. Verse 1 .. “*I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;*”

He was clothed with a cloud, wearing the drapery of the sky over his mighty shoulders. That symbolizes his power and the fact that he comes bringing judgment. Clouds are elsewhere associated with the second coming of Christ in judgment (1:7; 14:14–16; Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27).

John also saw a “*rainbow upon his head.*” While the cloud symbolizes judgment, the rainbow represents God’s covenant mercy in the midst of judgment (4:3). After the flood, God gave the rainbow as the sign of His promise never again to destroy the world by water (Genesis 9:12–16). The rainbow with which the angel is crowned will reassure God’s people of His mercy in the midst of coming judgments.

John also notes that “*his face was like the sun.*” His brilliant, radiant glory lit up the earth like the blazing sun. John next described the angel’s feet and legs as being like firm, stable, immovable pillars of fire. That symbolizes his unbending holiness in stamping out his judgment on the earth, pictured here as fire that consumes the ungodly.

Verse 2 ... “*and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;*”

Verse 2 says the angel held “*in his hand a little book which was open.*” It is called “*little*”, based on the Greek word John used... perhaps the book or scroll appears tiny compared to the massive messenger, but the impact on the truth of God in the book is as great as the impact of a tiny acorn which grows to a massive forest of oaks

Jesus had progressively broken the seals and opened the scroll in chapters 5–6, and now he has given it to his angelic representative to finish the task. Some think the scrolls of chapters 5 and 10 are two different documents, but it is better to see them as one and the same. The first scroll, containing God’s plan for ending this age, was progressively opened as each seal was broken, and the contents of it continued to be revealed in the trumpet judgments.

So, the “*little book*” literally the “*little scroll*” here refers to the events yet to be revealed in the seven bowl judgments and the rest of this book. The book was closed in the hand of God, opened by the Lamb, and now lies open in the hand of the angel so as to be related to the church. This is the theme of 10:1–11 - the “*sweet*” and “*bitter*” aspects of the coming events for God’s people.

In contrast to the size of the book is the huge size of the angel. In verse 2b we are told, “*He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land.*” His stance gives a sense of the awesome size and power of the angel.

Even more, though, the message he brings encompasses every realm that God made. It will affect all the creatures in the heavens, for the angel's head reaches up to the clouds and his face is like the sun. It will affect the earth because his left foot is there. It will affect the sea because his right foot is there, with the word of God lying open in his hand, small though it may seem, will have a huge impact on all those realms. Psalm 33:6 says, "*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth*" and as Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*"

Verse 3... "*and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.*"

In keeping with his huge size, the angel "*cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars.*" His loud cry reflects the power and authority of God.

After the angel cried out, an amazing thing happened—"the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices." "Seven" speaks of completeness and perfection. "Thunder" is often a mark of judgment in Scripture (8:5; 11:19; 16:18; 1 Samuel 2:10; 2 Samuel 22:14). These seven loud, powerful voices cry out for vengeance and judgment upon the sinful earth. The thunder was separate from the angel's voice and may have represented the voice of God (1 Samuel 7:10; Psalm 18:13). The text does not reveal what the thunder said but hearing it certainly would have added to the terror of the scene of judgment.

Verse 4... "*When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."*

In other words, God said, "John don't reveal to anyone what you've just heard. Keep it a secret." We are not told why John was forbidden to write what the seven thunders uttered; this is the only "sealed" thing in an otherwise "unsealed" book.

But it is a reminder that what we hold in this Bible is perhaps not everything we would like to know, but it is everything we need to know.

The apostle John wrote earlier, in his gospel account about the life of Christ in John 21:25, "*And there were also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*"

In other words, we do not even have a fraction of what Jesus Christ taught and did while on Earth. Would you not love to have a little more information? One more verse; something about Christ's childhood; another miracle He performed; another sermon or two He preached; perhaps an answer to someone's question that would cause you to say, "That's the question I've been asking for years!" We do not know everything we would like to know, but we have been given everything we need to know.

There are some mysteries that God will not reveal ahead of time. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.*" We do not know everything we would like to know, but we have been given everything we need to know.

Look at verse 5-6a... <sup>5</sup>"*Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven,* <sup>6</sup>*and swore by Him who lives forever and ever,*"

The angel takes this powerful stance and raises his right hand to heaven and takes an oath. The taking of an oath is given for the purpose of giving a sense of absolute certainty to John and through him to us. This angel swears by the ETERNAL GOD... the God who lives forever and ever, whose Kingdom never changes 6. He swears by the CREATOR GOD... the King of all creation. It extends to all the SPHERES of creation, heaven, earth, the sea... and it extends also to all the creatures who dwell in those spheres. The God who made the HEAVENS and all that is in them, the EARTH and all that is in it, and the SEA and all that is in it.

How important is a belief in theistic creationism? It is the defendant for the truthfulness of God's word. It also justifies God's judgment. Since He is the Creator of all things, He has the prerogative of destroying all things and replacing it with His new creation, if He pleases. However, if God did not create all things, He would need someone's permission to destroy it – unless He is simply impolite. No, this is God's creation.

This is the God of the universe... The angel says, "*by the Creator, I swear.*" And we say, OK, what do you swear?

## II. The Angel's Announcement

End of verse 6 into 7, "*that there will be delay no longer...*"

In other words, there will be no further delays as God accelerates His kingdom program. The seventh angel is about to sound and all the judgments delivered by the prophets concerning this day of the Lord – this time of great judgment – will be finished; culminated.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet brings the final judgment depicted in the bowls of fury poured out on the earth. The time of God's patience is seen as having ended.

At that time verse 7 says "*the mystery of God is finished.*" Mystery in Scripture refers to truths God has hidden and will reveal in His time. Mysteries hidden in the past that the New Testament reveals include :

- the "*mysteries of the kingdom*" (Matthew 13:11),
- the mystery of Israel's blindness (Romans 11:25),
- the mystery of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51),
- the "*mystery of lawlessness*" (2 Thessalonians 2:7),
- the "*mystery of Christ*" and of "*Christ and the church*" (Ephesians 3:4; 5:32),
- the mystery of Christ in the believer (Colossians 1:26–27),
- and the mystery of the incarnation (1 Timothy 3:16).

Paul saw himself as a "steward" or guardian of these great mysteries (1 Corinthians 4:1), to "*bring to light*" these mysteries "*which for ages have been hidden in God*" (Ephesians 3:9).

The mystery of God of which the angel spoke is that of "*the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth*" (Ephesians 1:10). It is the consummation of God's plan in bringing His glorious kingdom in Christ to fulfillment. It involves the salvation of the elect and their place in His glorious kingdom and all that goes with that. It includes the judgment of the unsaved and the judgment of demons. The mystery previously hidden refers to all the unknown details that are revealed from this point to the end of Revelation when the new heavens and new earth are created.



And to believers living at that time in the great tribulation, in a world overrun by demons, ecological disaster, massive amount of human death, the realization that God's glorious plan is on schedule will bring great comfort and hope in the midst of judgment.

Robert Thomas writes, "To those who have believed in Christ during the Tribulation – living in the world now overrun by demons, murder, sexual immorality, drug abuse, thefts, and unparalleled natural disasters – the promise in this verse that God's glorious plan is actually on schedule and the promised kingdom is near, when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14), will bring great comfort and hope in the midst of Earth's judgment."

We have heard the angel's announcement. Now let us notice the apostle's application

### III. The Apostle's Application

Verses 8-10... <sup>8</sup> "Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, 'Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.' <sup>9</sup> So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.' <sup>10</sup> I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter."

The act of eating the book symbolized the absorbing and assimilating of God's Word.

Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Your words were found and I ate them and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart."

Psalms 19:7-10 says, <sup>7</sup> "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. <sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb."

And here in Revelation 10, when John took in the divine words concerning the remaining judgments as the Lord took possession of the universe, he found them both "sweet as honey" and "bitter."

Every word of God is sweet, in fact, as sweet as honey. Yet, as its truth is understood or digested, it can bring bitter tears, sorrow, uneasiness, and discomfort because of its message. John is to literally eat the revelation of God's further judgment. The words of God are sweet to him, yet the realization of the terrible doom awaiting unbelievers turned that initial sweet taste into bitterness.

By faith we accept both honey and bitter; both sweet and sour; both pleasant and painful aspects of all that God's word demand.

The outcome of the Book of Revelation is utterly glorious, the final salvation of the elect from every nation on earth and a New Heavens and New Earth, a New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband... radiant glory shining everywhere... what could be sweeter than that?? But it comes at a terrible cost

as we travel the journey there... the destruction of the world, and all the unbelievers, their condemnation under the wrath of God, is bitter for us... this is why Jesus wept over Jerusalem; this is why Paul was in unceasing anguish for the lost among the Jews. The carnage of the Book of Revelation is all yet to come... and the events of Revelation should be both bitter and sweet.

In the end it will be incredibly sweet, for in heaven there will be no more grieving or mourning or pain for anything.

God knew the temptation would be there for even those who truly know Him to resist the bitter announcement; the offensive nature of the gospel; the truth about heaven and hell. So, God addresses this temptation even with John in the last verse of Revelation chapter 10 verse 11... *“And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’”*

In other words, “John you must deliver the truth.” “Don’t hold back – it won’t help you and it certainly won’t help the human race. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It’s bittersweet but deliver it all. Obey it all – the easy parts and the difficult parts too!”

This is the Word of God. We need to hear the message that God gave to John through that awesome angel... and know that every word is true. God hasn’t told us everything, but we know enough.

The assignment that the angel gave to John should remind us of our responsibility to prayerfully read and assimilate the Word of God and make it a part of the inner man. It needs to move from the head to the heart to the hands. It was not enough for John to see the book or even know its contents and purpose. He had to receive it into his inner being.

In the Bible God’s Word is compared to food: bread (Matthew 4:4), milk (1 Peter 2:2), meat (1 Corinthians 3:1–2), and honey (Psalm 119:103).

God will not thrust His Word into our mouths and force us to receive it. He hands it to us and we must take it. Nor can He change the effects the Word will have in our lives: there will be both sorrow and joy, bitterness, and sweetness. God’s Word contains sweet promises and assurances, but it also contains bitter warnings and prophecies of judgment. The faithful Christian bears witness of both life and death (2 Corinthians 2:14–17).

If you are a Christian, you too must solemnly swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. We cannot deny the truth of God nor can we dilute it.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. A new Christian says to you, “Is all this punishment and wrath in Revelation really going to happen? Why would a loving God do this?” How will you respond?
2. How do we know that the strong angel in verse 1 is not Jesus Christ?
3. What did the angel have in his hand in verse 2? Where did he stand? Explain the symbols.
4. How is God described in verse 6? How is creationism tied to the truth of God’s Word?
5. What is the mystery in verse 7? In what sense was it declared to the prophets?
6. What is John told to do in verses 8-9?
7. How is the Word of God bittersweet for the believer? What is bitter about it? What is sweet?
8. What other Bible verses describe God’s Word as something to devour, eat, and consume? What are ways that you are getting regular intake and nourishment from God’s Word?
9. What assignment is John given in verse 11? How is this a challenge to us? What is our responsibility?



**CHAPTER 19**  
**“The Two Witnesses”**  
**Revelation 11:1-14**

*<sup>1</sup> “Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. <sup>2</sup> Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. <sup>3</sup> And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. <sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. <sup>6</sup> These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. <sup>7</sup> When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. <sup>8</sup> And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. <sup>10</sup> And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. <sup>12</sup> And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. <sup>13</sup> And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. <sup>14</sup> The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”*

We are studying the book of Revelation. The word Revelation means unveiling. Revelation pulls the veil back between the physical and spiritual world as no other book of the Bible does and tells of what is to come in the future.

And as start chapter 11 we need to understand the context of what is happening here. In God’s right hand, as He sits on this throne, is a book or a scroll sealed with seven seals. Jesus is the only one authorized to take the book and open the seals one at a time. As He does, judgments come on the earth.

The seventh seal contains seven trumpet judgments. They start to flow, bringing a level of suffering and judgment on earth such as we can hardly imagine. The first four trumpets in Revelation 8 are terrifying judgments on the ecology of the earth: on the green vegetation, burning up all the green grass, a third of the trees, and a third of the earth; on the oceans, turning a third of them into blood and killing a third of all the aquatic creatures in the ocean; on the fresh water, turning a third of the water to poison so that people cannot drink it; and on the sun and the moon and the stars, reducing their light by a third.

In Revelation 9, the fifth and sixth trumpets unleash a horde of demons coming up out of a shaft from deep in the earth. It is a demonic assault on the human race likened to a plague of locusts and the attack of scorpions. People are in agony for five months, crying out for death, which will elude them. This is followed by an invasion of a demonic army, 200 million strong, bringing death to one-third of earth’s population.

These events have been absolutely staggering. But without someone interpreting them for the people who are on earth, saying, “This is happening because of your sins”, they will not know to view it as a religious event. Thus, these two witnesses are a grace from God to unbelievers, who do not have the Bible, to explain what is happening.

These two witnesses will fulfill the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:14 the “*gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*”

These two witnesses will also be used by God to bring salvation to Israel. We saw in our study of the book of Romans that the apostle Paul anticipates a huge event when he says in Romans 11 verse 26, “*all Israel will be saved.*” That event will shake the world. This cannot refer to the small trickle of Jewish believers across the centuries or even the growing stream of Jewish believers today. Paul’s words picture a tidal wave of Jews coming to Christ when He returns to the earth in power and great glory.

Now Paul’s words “*All Israel shall be saved*” does not mean that every Jew who has ever lived will be converted, but that the Jews living when the Jesus our Redeemer returns will see Him, receive Him, and be saved. Zechariah 12:10 predicts, “*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.*”

So, God will use these two witnesses as a final warning to the Jewish nation to turn and trust in Christ, and I believe that they will be effective. In the end, God will take hardness or blindness away from the Jewish nation, and they will turn and believe in Christ.

The best guideline to follow as we seek to understand this passage is to take each fact literally. In line with this principle, a literal temple that is mentioned in verses 1-2 will be in existence during the Great Tribulation, and the city should be considered the literal city Jerusalem in keeping with its identification in verses 8. The time periods of 42 months (verse 2) and three and one-half days (verses 9, 11) again should be considered literally. The earthquake in verse 13 will kill literally 7,000 individuals, and the two witnesses should be considered as two individual men.

These two witnesses will fearlessly proclaim the gospel during the last half of the seven-year tribulation. During that time of horrific divine judgments on the earth, their gospel preaching will be part of a final expression of God’s grace offered to repentant and believing sinners.

And as we look at the incredible events of this chapter today, we each need to prayerfully evaluate our own hearts and ask am I living by fear or am I living by faith? Our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. You and I have the truth; we have the answer; we have the only hope of how to have hope in living God. To know that we can be forgiven, reconciled and adopted by a holy Father through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In a world that is trying to find their identity in themselves and drowning out their sorrow and fear with all the wrong solutions of self-identity, self-image, and self-pleasure. And in a world that attempts to silence the pounding of their hearts in fear over the future of their world, God has put us here to be His light and His witness. In the same way as these two witnesses, the issue is not the response of the world; the issue is our obedience to the word of God.

So, in this chapter God raises up two powerful witnesses who fearlessly proclaim the gospel during the last three and a half years of the seven-year Tribulation. We will notice four aspects of the two witnesses:

The Authority of the Witnesses	11:1-6
The Suffering of the Witnesses	11:7-10
The Resurrection of the Witnesses	11:11-12
The Impact of the Witnesses	11:13-14

## I. The Authority of the Witnesses 11:1-6

First let's look at how the text begin with verses 1-2... <sup>1</sup>“ Then *there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. <sup>2</sup>Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months.’*”

Remember, there is no temple standing in Jerusalem when John writes the book of Revelation. It had been destroyed twenty-five years earlier in 70 AD. The history of the temple is a sad history, illustrating the cycles of faithfulness and unfaithfulness of the people of God.

The first temple was built by Solomon centuries earlier but had been destroyed. The second temple was reconstructed by Zerubbabel after the exile but had been destroyed as well. The third temple had been built by Herod by the time of Christ, but then, just as Christ predicted in Matthew 24:2, not one stone of the temple had been left upon another. This prediction of judgment came true in A.D. 70 when Titus, the Roman general, overran rebellious Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground. The only thing left standing in Jerusalem from this temple was a portion of the Western Wall. It is most often referred to as the Wailing Wall, for to this day Orthodox Jews come there day after day, especially on the Sabbath, and pray, “May it be Thy will that the temple be speedily rebuilt in our own time.”

What we see here in verses 1-2 is the fourth temple that will be reconstructed in Jerusalem, perhaps just prior to and lasting through the Tribulation period. Based on prophecy from the book of Daniel, at the end of the world a powerful ruler will rise up and make a covenant with the Jews for the rebuilding of the temple and the establishment of the animal sacrificial system.

The Tribulation temple is the place where the Jews will resume animal sacrifice, but halfway through the final seven-year period, the Antichrist will break His covenant with them and put an end to animal sacrifice and set himself up as God within that temple.

In fact, the apostle Paul clearly speaks of the antichrist's desire to be viewed as God by seating his worship in this Tribulation temple that he initiated building. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, “*the man of lawlessness will be revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.*”

All of this will be elaborated in Revelation chapter 13.

Verse 2... *“Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months.”*

We find John being commanded to measure the Tribulation temple – literally the Holy Place; the “naos,” which included the Holy of Holies. Obviously, this was not an effort to determine its physical dimensions, since none are given, but an act which signified ownership.

If there is any doubt about our property lines, we call a surveyor, who measures the property lines and puts stakes into the ground. Then we know where we can build a house, or plant our trees, or put up a fence.

This measuring signified something good, since what was not measured was evil. It is best to see it as God’s measuring of Israel for salvation and His special protection, preservation, and favor. The prophecies yet to be given to John will distinguish between God’s favor toward Israel and His wrath on the world.

John’s instructions on measuring the temple included a significant omission. John was told not to measure the outer court because “it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months.” The forty-two months (three and one-half years) correspond to the evil career of Antichrist, which dominates the last half of the tribulation (13:5). That period will be the culmination of the “*times of the Gentiles*” that Jesus spoke about in Luke 21:24—the many years during which Gentile nations have in various ways occupied and oppressed Jerusalem.

During this same forty-two-month period, the second half of the 7-year tribulation, God will shelter many Israelites in a place He has prepared for them in the wilderness (some speculate the rock city of Petra). Revelation 12:6 reads, *“Then the woman (Israel) fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”* Many Jews will follow the Lord’s warning to flee to safety.

The rest who remain will face terrible persecution from the forces of Antichrist. At that time, God will bring salvation to Israel, using the two powerful preachers who will appear in Jerusalem.

Verse 3.. *“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”*

God empowers the two witnesses. This is like Acts 1:8 where Jesus told the disciples, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses.”* The real power of the prophets will be in their words from their mouths. The two witnesses will proclaim that the disasters occurring during the last half of the tribulation are from God. They will warn that God’s final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow.

They will be bold and unafraid and will stand firm though surrounded by rage and hostility. And they will preach the gospel, calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The period of their ministry is twelve hundred and sixty days, the last three and one-half years of the tribulation.

Verse 3 says they are *“clothed in sackcloth.”* Sackcloth is a sign of mourning and grieving over the seriousness of the sin of the nation, of the people. Elijah wore it continually as he prophesied to the people, as did Isaiah. Their demeanor is also serious, in keeping with their clothing. They will preach a message something like this:



*“Hear now, you inhabitants of the earth, listen to what we have to say. ‘You are suffering as no generation has ever suffered in history. You are suffering ecological disasters, torment and death — a third of earth’s population has died. None of these things is accidental. They are sent as judgments from Almighty God, the God who created Heaven and earth, the sea and everything in it, the earth and everything in it, the sky and everything that flies through it. This God you have rejected and mocked. You are idolaters, wicked and sinful.’ ”*

“But God, in His grace, sent His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, under the wrath of God, to take away the penalty of sin. If you repent from your sin and turn to Christ, trust in Him, all your sins will be forgiven; you will not suffer the worst torment which is eternity in hell.”

Verse 4... *“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth ”*

The description of the two witnesses as olive trees and lampstands has an Old Testament background in Zechariah 4:2–14. These two men will be extremely unpopular because of the message they have been sent to deliver. As a result, many will try to kill them. But these men are under divine protection.

Verse 5... *“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.”*

Everyone who tries to kill them will be killed by them. They will have the power to destroy their attackers with fire from their mouths (and you thought your bad breath could kill others).

Verse 6... *“These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.”*

Like Elijah they will have power to stop rain and will have power like Moses to turn water into blood and to bring on plagues. In the midst of the unbelief, apostasy, and satanic power of the Great Tribulation these two witnesses will be a threat to the entire wicked world for a literal period of 1,260 days.

## **II. The Suffering of the Witnesses 11:7-10**

Verse 7... *“When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. .”*

With the ministry of the two witnesses ended, God permitted the beast that comes up from the Abyss 9:1–2, 11; 17:8; 20:1, 3) to overcome them. This is the first of thirty-six references in Revelation to the beast and anticipates the more detailed information about him to come in chapters 13 and 17. He is introduced here with emphasis on his origin. He is said to come up *“out of the abyss,”* indicating that he is empowered by Satan.

Since Satan is depicted as a dragon in 12:3, 9, this figure is not Satan. The revelation about him in chapter 13 indicates that the beast is a world ruler called Antichrist who imitates the true Christ and demands to be worshiped (13:1–8). Though he is a man, the beast is energized by the demonic presence and power coming from the abyss. To the great joy and relief of the sinful world, the beast will finally overcome the two witnesses and kill them. After the witnesses were killed, their bodies were left unburied in Jerusalem, figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, because of the people’s apostasy and rejection of God.

For three and one-half days the whole world gloated over their dead bodies. This implies some worldwide display, now made possible by television. Now we can livestream any event on our phones and computer. That is a big part of 21st century culture. It is not so hard now to imagine how the death of these two will be viewed by the whole world will be able to gaze on their bodies ... and sadly the world will celebrate.

Verse 10... *“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”*

Ironically, this is the only mention in Revelation of rejoicing. Sinners will be happy because those who declared God’s judgments are dead. This emotional response graphically reflects the finality of their rejection.

### III. The Resurrection of the Witnesses

Verses 11-12.. <sup>11</sup>*“But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. <sup>12</sup>And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. ”*

The partying and gift giving of “Dead Witnesses Day” will be suddenly and dramatically halted by a most shocking event. *“After three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into [the two witnesses] and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.”*

Panic will seize the world as their hated and reviled tormentors suddenly spring to life. If this is viewed on television, it will be replayed repeatedly.

The phrase *“Come up here”* is likely the voice of the Lord. The two preachers went up into heaven in the cloud, as their enemies watched them in awe. This two-man rapture will no doubt also be replayed endlessly for the entire world to see. It is reminiscent of the ascension of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and the mysterious death and burial of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5–6).

But at this point, the hearts of those watching do not change. That should not be surprising. Jesus Christ said in Luke 16:31, *“If unbelievers do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”* Indeed, after hearing the teaching and observing the miraculous ministry of the Son of God, unbelievers rejected and killed Him.

### IV. The Impact of the Witnesses

Verses 13-14... <sup>13</sup>*“And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. <sup>14</sup>The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”*

Punctuating the resurrection of the two witnesses, *“in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell.”* Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake. The term “people” in the Greek text is literally “names of men.” That unusual phrase may indicate that the seven thousand who were killed were prominent people, perhaps leaders in Antichrist’s world government.

As a result of the violent earthquake, and the astonishing resurrection of the two witnesses, “*the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*” The phrase “*the rest*” must refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Jews who will come to faith in Christ. Supporting that interpretation is the fact that giving glory to the God of heaven is a mark of genuine repentance in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture (4:9; 14:7; 16:9; 19:7; Luke 17:18–19; Romans 4:20). This passage, then, describes the reality of the salvation of Jews in Jerusalem.

On that positive, hopeful note, this interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet ends. For the unbelieving world, however, it ends with the sobering warning that “*the second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.*” The seventh trumpet (the third woe, 9:12) will soon sound, bringing with it the final, violent bowl judgments and the return of Christ in glory to set up His kingdom.

Let me close with three points of application:

1. If you are lost, I would urge that you flee to Christ.

You do not know when the Antichrist and all these details will happen, but you also do not know when you're going to die. This very day might be your last day on earth, so come to Christ, trust in Him while there is still time.

2. Second, for those who are already Christians, having crossed over from death to life, our job is to witness to those who have not crossed over yet.

We can show a striking lack of courage and boldness. Pray to the God who gave the two witnesses incredible boldness to give you boldness this week to share the Gospel, to say something to somebody. Invite a friend to lunch, or to your house for dinner. Have a conversation, talk about the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Because the sad truth is you may sing about Him inside the church but will never say anything about Him outside the church. Our mission to know Christ and make Him known. “*I’ll be a witness for my Lord,*” is not just song lyrics – it is a lifestyle. We gather here to be edified thru the Word of God and to know and exalt Jesus Christ. We leave to go and make Him known in our actions and our words.

Think for a moment about the order of things that is once again revealed in Scripture to us today. There is Obedience to the call of God which leads to Suffering which leads to Victory.

The other option is Disobedience (compromise) which seems to lead to a sort of “Victory” (comfort) but in the end leads to Suffering. There are no other options.

Which path will you take? The issue is not the response of the world; the issue is our obedience to the word of God. I am not saying that you should go and seek suffering, but I am saying do not fear suffering. Remember, the two witnesses were invulnerable until their mission was complete and they did exactly what the Lord commanded them. So, you too, are empowered and protected until God decides when your testimony hear stops.

God uses the suffering of the witnesses to maximize His glory; He will do the same in your life. So do not fear! God exercises meticulous, sovereign control over all His enemies. As Psalm 1:6 says, “*The Lord knows (watches over) the way of the righteous.*”

So, whether you fear the mockery of your officemates or classmates or the possible physical danger of serving as a missionary to a Moslem people group, know this: God is in control. No suffering is pointless. To live is Christ. To die is gain.

3. Speaking of those who take great risk for the call of Christ, please attend our annual missions conference.

I am asking you to support our missionaries by your presence at our Cornerstone Missions Conference on Sat March 5 and Sunday March 6. Eric Zeller is flying in from the United Arab Emirates and missionary pilot Brian Pruett and his family will be here as well – and there will be video updates from our other missionaries around the world. Registration for the March 5-6 conference will begin next week, but please come and show our dear missionaries how much we love them and care for them – especially knowing how lonely and dangerous it can be for them.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Why would we interpret 11:1-14 literally?
2. What is the significance of measuring the temple? What was not to be measured in 11:2? Why?
3. Where else do we read about 42 months (1260 days, three and a half years)?
4. How would you describe the ministry of the two witnesses? What other passages speak about the significance of two or three witnesses?
5. What are the two witnesses compared to in 11:4? What power do they possess to deal with those who seek to harm them?
6. Who opposes the witnesses? Where does he come from and what does that tell you?
7. What does the beast do to the witnesses? What happened to the bodies of the two witnesses? Where was this done?
8. How were the dead bodies viewed and treated in 11:9,10? How did people react? What is the point?
9. What happened to the two witnesses after three and a half days – 11:11? What is the significance?
10. What was the impact of their witness?
11. How does this text relate to world missions? Will there be a day when witnessing is no more and will be replaced with worship? How does looking forward to “that day” speak to “this day” in which we now live?
12. What keeps you from being a more active witness for Christ?



**CHAPTER 20**  
**“The Seventh Trumpet”**  
**Revelation 11:15-19**

*<sup>15</sup> “Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ <sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. <sup>18</sup> And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.’ <sup>19</sup> And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”*

Handel’s Messiah was composed in the year 1741. Handel composed the music in only 24 days. A friend recounted that George Frederic Handel would not open the door and he would not eat while writing Messiah. After three weeks, when they finally opened his door, they found him swimming in a sea of paper, surrounded by notes, tears streaming down his face. Handel said, “Whether I was in the body or out of the body as I wrote Messiah, I know not. God knows. But I think I did see all Heaven opened before me and the Great God Himself.”

The most famous part of Messiah is the Hallelujah Chorus. The Scripture that is quoted in the chorus is Revelation 11:15, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.*”

For 280 years, music lovers have thrilled to hear the truth of Revelation 11:15 set to incredible music. Handel’s music captures so well the truth of the text. The kingdom of the world is small and fading and failing compared to the majestic kingdom of God and of Christ who will reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!

The sounding of the seventh trumpet marks a significant milestone in our study of the book of Revelation. As we finish chapter 11 today, we come to the midpoint of the book of Revelation, chapters 1-11 is the first half and chapters 12-22 are the second half.

But more importantly our text today sets in motion the final events leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the establishment of His earthly millennial kingdom followed by the new heaven and new earth and the eternal kingdom.

With the sounding of the seventh trumpet comes the final completion of the whole redemptive plan of God for the present universe. The seventh trumpet includes the seven bowls of terror dumped out on the world, the final world battle at Armageddon, the return of Jesus Christ in glory and His fierce judgment on the ungodly, the establishment of the millennial kingdom. All of that is going to flow out of this blowing of the seventh trumpet. So, from here on, we move into the final phases of judgment right on through chapter 20 where the kingdom is established, chapter 21 and chapter 22, the final new heavens and the new earth.

Although the seventh trumpet sounds in 11:15, the judgments associated with it are not described until chapter 15. Chapters 12–14 are a digression, taking readers back through the tribulation to the point of the seventh trumpet

by a different path. They describe the tribulation not from God's perspective, but from Satan's. Chapters 4–11 focused on Christ's taking back what is rightfully His by means of the seal and trumpet judgments. Chapters 12–14 focus on the ultimate human usurper, the final Antichrist, whose career spans the same time period as the seal and trumpet judgments.

Remember back in Revelation 8:13 we read...<sup>13</sup> *"Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'"*

The three final woes constitute the fifth trumpet, the sixth trumpet, and the seventh trumpet. In Revelation chapter 9 the fifth trumpet (and the first woe) results in a terrifying plague of "demonic locusts" that arise from the abyss and attack and torture the unsaved for five months.

The sixth trumpet (and the second woe) involves an army of two hundred demonic forces who kill a third of humanity (Revelation 9:15-16).

And the third woe is the seventh trumpet, Revelation 11:15 tells us the seventh trumpet (and the third woe) sounds, and immediately there are loud voices in heaven saying, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."*

This is now the moment that encompasses the final completion of the whole plan of God for the present universe, this is the culmination of God's judgment that the prophet Joel declared in Joel chapter 2 in speaking of the Day of the Lord. We are now near the end of the seven-year tribulation and the return of Christ.

In chapter 10, notice verse 7: *"In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants, the prophets."* The seventh trumpet marks the finishing of the mystery of God.

This trumpet signals the answer to what Christ's disciples prayed and to believers throughout the centuries praying, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* How many hundreds of millions of times have those words been prayed to God? Here at last, God has answered all those prayers; the time has come. The seventh trumpet brings the consummation of His eternal plan.

So, when the seventh trumpet is blown, what happens in the seventh trumpet extends all the way through the rest of the book of Revelation into chapter 20, right up to the establishment of the kingdom. The introduction of the seventh trumpet in our text today sets in motion the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole earth. The scene unfolds in three stages.

The Praise for the Sovereign Ruler	11:15-17
The Plan for the Savior's Redeemed	11:18
The Promise of His Special Presence	11:19

My prayer is that you will see the mystery of God revealed to us and your heart will be overwhelmed with the glory of God like Handel was when he wrote the Messiah and the Hallelujah chorus.



## I. The Praise for the Sovereign Ruler

Look at 11:15-17... <sup>15</sup> “*Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’* <sup>16</sup> *And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,* <sup>17</sup> *saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.’*”

We can see there is unrestrained joy that the power of Satan is to be forever broken, and Christ is to reign supreme. The setting up of Christ’s long-awaited kingdom is the apex of redemptive history.

Notice the use of the singular term “*kingdom of the world*” instead of the plural “kingdoms.” All of the world’s diverse groups are in reality one kingdom under one king. In Matthew 12:26, Jesus was accused of casting out demons by Satan. And He said, “*If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?*” The point is, his kingdom stands because it is an undivided kingdom. We look at the world and we see it divided into all kinds of nations. It is politically, it is socially, it is linguistically, it is in terms of traditions and customs and geography; but it is one kingdom under one king, being ruled by Satan and his demonic hosts.

Jesus affirmed that Satan, though a usurper and not the rightful king, is the present ruler of the world. Three times in John’s gospel Jesus called Satan “the ruler of this world” in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

Notice verse 15 says, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord.*” In the Greek this is called the proleptic aorist tense. The tense of the verb translated “has become” describes a future event that is so certain that it can be spoken of as if it had already taken place.

With the blast of the seventh trumpet, it is as though heaven is saying it is finished; it is as good as accomplished, even though there are many chapters left in the book of Revelation. Imagine watching a football game in which something so decisive happens on the field that you realize the game is over; there is no way the other team can recover. That is the feeling here: the declaration of the seventh trumpet is so decisive that there is no way the powers of evil will recover.

Heaven rejoices as if the long-anticipated day when Christ will establish His kingdom had already arrived, although some time on earth must elapse before that happens.

The phrase “*the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ*” emphasizes two realities. “*Lord*” usually refers to Jesus throughout the New Testament, while in Revelation it more often refers to God the Father, emphasizing their equality of nature. This phrase also describes the kingdom in its broadest sense, looking forward to divine rule over the creation and the new creation.

So, the end of Satan’s power has come, the establishment of the sovereign kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the universe. We’ll read more about it. We’ll see it in chapter 12. We’ll see it in 17, 19, chapter 20. And His final dominion will take place in the twentieth chapter when He establishes His millennial kingdom, and binds Satan for the thousand years of the duration of the kingdom, at the end of which He casts him into the bottomless pit to burn forever, and sets up the new heaven and the new earth and the eternal state.

All of God's people throughout all of history have anticipated this. In fact, let's look at Revelation 15:2-4...<sup>2</sup> *"And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God."*<sup>3</sup> *And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!'*<sup>4</sup> *"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."*

They were singing a very old song, very old, a song out of the Pentateuch, the original books of the Old Testament, the law; an old, old song; the song of Moses. It goes all the way back to the fifteenth chapter of the book of Exodus. They are singing it at the pouring out of the final bowls of judgment at the end of human history. What does the song say? *"Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed."* The very song of Moses in Exodus 15, written 1500 years before the birth of Christ anticipated the moment when the Lord Jesus Christ became King of the world.

The book of Daniel was written 530 years before Christ. Please turn to Daniel (in your Old Testament, between Ezekiel and Hosea) Look at Daniel 7:13-14....<sup>13</sup> *"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him."*<sup>14</sup> *"And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."*

So, Daniel sees the image of the great, glorious, final kingdom of Christ.

Daniel 7:18... *"But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come."*

Daniel 7:22... *"until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom"*.

Daniel is given a vision far into the future to see the glorious events described under the seventh trumpet, when the kingdoms of this world become – when the kingdom, I should say, of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Daniel 7:27, *"The sovereignty, the dominion, the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him."*

What an incredible promise; and yet this is the repeated promise that the Messiah will rule the whole world, the whole world.

Malachi chapter 4 talks about it. *"A day coming like a furnace, and the destruction of the ungodly; and here comes the Son of Righteousness rising with healing in its beams,"* of course, *establishing a kingdom of righteousness*".

Zechariah 14:9, “*The Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.*”

Revelation 11:15, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.*” This is the final righteous government of Christ.

In John 18:36 Jesus was being tried in the mock trial before Pilate. Jesus answered Pilate and said, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.*”

The kingdom that Christ came to bring the first time was a spiritual kingdom. But in His second coming His final kingdom will be a sovereign, political, social, worldwide rulership.

Revelation 11:16 .. “*And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,*”

As representatives of the glorified, raptured church, these elders had been eagerly waiting for Christ to take back the earth from Satan. Their joyous cry of praise is filled with gratitude. Verse 17... saying, “*We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.*”

The elders’ praise focused on three of God’s attributes. First, “*almighty*” describes God’s sovereign, omnipotent power. Nine of its ten New Testament uses are in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). It has the sense of God exercising His all-encompassing will by means of His irresistible power.

Second, the phrase “*who are and who were*” expresses God’s eternity. As the living God, He had no beginning and will have no end.

Back in Revelation 1:8 it says, “*The Lord God is the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come; who is, who was, who is to come,*” present, past, future.

Then in Revelation 4:8, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty who was, who is, who is to come,*” present, past, future.

But when you get to Revelation 11:17, the “*who is to come*” is dropped, because it is time for His arrival. It’s not any longer in the future. He is here. He has arrived.

Third, the elders also praised God for His sovereignty, because He had “*taken His great power and ... begun to reign.*” The verb translated “have taken” signifies the permanence of God’s sovereign rule. So, point number we see the praise for the sovereign ruler.

## **II. The Plan for the Savior’s Redeemed**

Verse 18... “*And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.*”

Notice first that the joy of heaven is not shared by the inhabitants of the earth. The coming of God's kingdom enrages the people of the earth. They have NOT been praying, "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" The kingdom of God and of Christ is repulsive to them, to every fiber of their being. It is the very thing they do not want. They do not find Jesus' yoke easy and his burden light. They are not excited that a thrice holy God actively reigns over every aspect of His kingdom, not thrilled that God is light and in Him, there is no darkness at all. They are not attracted to the person and work of Jesus Christ. They hate this work of God and are filled with rage.

This rage is clearly depicted in Psalm 2. Revelation 11:15-18 has very similar language to Psalm 2. That which was promised in Psalm 2 written about 1000 years before Christ is now seen as imminent.

Look at Psalm 2 with me. Psalm 2:1-3 says... <sup>1</sup> "*Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup> 'Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!' "*

The kings of the earth, who have always been enemies of Christ, have taken their power and authority at every stage of history and fought against the Lord and against His Christ. They do not consider His yoke easy; they want to throw it off. Psalm 2:4 gives God's reaction... "*He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.*"

If all the demons—everyone—were together against God, if every created being took their stand against Him, He would still laugh. He is omnipotent.

This is God's decree and action after that laughter. Psalm 2:5-9...<sup>5</sup> "*Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, <sup>6</sup> 'But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.' <sup>7</sup> 'I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. <sup>8</sup> Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. <sup>9</sup> 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.' "*

Then the psalmist gives some advice in verses 10-12... <sup>10</sup> "*Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!*"

The flavor of Psalm 2 finds its way into the remainder of this part of the book of Revelation. You will find reference to Psalm 2 in Revelation chapter 12, chapter 14, chapter 16, 17, and even in chapter 19. Psalm 2 will have its final fulfillment at the battle of Armageddon when the King triumphs over all wicked hosts who have gathered against Him to fight.

Not only will the seventh trumpet signal the outpouring of God's wrath on earth, Revelation 11:18 says it will also indicate that "*the time has come for the dead to be judged.*" "*Time*" translates a Greek word that refers to a season, era, occasion, or event. The establishing of Christ's kingdom will be a fitting time for the dead to be

judged. The great white throne judgment (20:11–15) is not in view in this passage, since that judgment explicitly involves only unbelievers.

Notice verse 18 says the judgment will be the time for God to reward His “*bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear His name, the small and the great.*” Though the power to serve God in a way worthy of reward is a gift of God’s grace, still believers are encouraged to work in view of those promised rewards.

In Revelation 22:12 Jesus declared, “*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.*” To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “*Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor*” 1 Corinthians 3:8. The reward promised believers is that they will inherit the kingdom, in both its millennial (Matthew 25:34–40; Mark 10:29–31) and eternal (Revelation 21:7) phases. Believers are also promised crowns, including the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), the crown of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10), and the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4).

The phrase “*Your bond-servants the prophets*” encompasses all who have proclaimed God’s truth throughout redemptive history, from Moses to the two witnesses we saw last week in Revelation 11:3–13. All the faithful ones who stood for God in dark days and against opposition will then find their work revealed and rewarded.

Another group to be rewarded is the saints, further defined as those “*who fear Your name*” (cf. Psalm 34:9; Luke 1:50). “Saints” is a common biblical description for the redeemed in both the Old and New Testaments (5:8; 8:3–4; Psalm 16:3; Daniel 7:18; Matthew 27:52; Acts 9:13; 26:10; Romans 1:7; 8:27). All of God’s saints, “the small and the great,” will receive rewards.

The judgment will also “*destroy those who destroy the earth.*” That is not a reference to those who somehow miss their car smog checks and pollute the environment, but to those who pollute the earth with their sin. That includes all unbelievers, especially in the context of Revelation of the false economic and religious system called Babylon in Revelation 18:2 where people worship the Antichrist and Satan himself. The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 that the “*mystery of lawlessness*” is already at work in the church age, but during the tribulation period it will reach its pinnacle of destructive activity, shredding the very fabric of society in every evil way.

Given stewardship and dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28), humans instead fell into sin and throughout their history have continually corrupted the earth (Romans 8:19–21). When that corrupting reaches its apex, God will destroy the earth and create a new one (21:1).

### III. The Promise of His Special Presence

Verse 19... “*And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.*”

Bound up in the seventh trumpet is the promise to believers of unbroken fellowship with God forever. That fellowship is symbolized by the imagery of verse 19. The opening of “*the temple of God which is in heaven*” (the place where His presence dwells from chapters 4, 5) revealed the ark of His covenant. The ark symbolizes that the covenant God has promised to men is now available in its fullness. In the midst of the fury of His judgment on unbelievers, God throws open the Holy of Holies (where the ark was located; Exodus 26:33–34; 2 Chronicles

5:7) and draws believers into His presence. That would have been unthinkable in the Old Testament temple, when only the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year (Hebrews 9:7).

The ark symbolizes God's communion with the redeemed because it was there that blood sacrifices were offered to atone for men's sins (Leviticus 16:2–16; Hebrews 9:3–7). Also, it was from above the ark that God spoke to Moses (Numbers 7:89). The ark of the covenant is called in Scripture the ark of testimony (Exodus 25:22), the ark of God (1 Samuel 3:3), and the ark of God's strength (Psalm 132:8). Inside it was "*a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant*" (Hebrews 9:4). All that symbolized that God would supply His people, was sovereign over His people, gave His law to His people, and entered an eternal, saving covenant with His people.

Along with the ark in the heavenly temple there were "*flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.*" Similar events are associated with God's majestic, glorious heavenly throne in 4:5. In 8:5 and 16:17–18 they are associated with judgment. Heaven is the source of vengeance on unbelievers, as well as covenant blessings for the redeemed.

The message of the seventh trumpet is that Jesus Christ is the sovereign King. He will one day take the rule of the earth away from Satan and human rulers. When He returns, He will bring covenant blessings to the redeemed, but eternal judgment to those who reject Him.

I want to share one closing thought with you. One of the big differences between Christians and non-Christians is we are looking forward to and cannot wait for this Kingdom to come. Non-Christians are enraged at the coming Kingdom. We need to pray, as never before: Oh God, may your name be held in honor, may it be hallowed all over the world, and may your kingdom come, and may your will at last be done on earth in the same way that it is being done right now in heaven.

And then we need to embrace, believe and practice what Jesus says in Matthew 6:31-33, "*So do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" What does it mean to seek first His kingdom? It means to pray for it to come, to evangelize and embrace missions to talk to lost people about this, and to look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What did the voices say about the reign of Christ?
2. How did the twenty-four elders respond in the wake of the message of the heavenly voices?
3. What is the kingdom of God and how does it differ from the kingdom of the world? Is the kingdom of God present or future? Or is it both present and future?
4. How did the elders describe “the Lord God, the Almighty”?
5. What is the response of the nations of the world?
6. Whom did the elders describe as deserving a reward? Whom did the elders describe as deserving destruction? What does the promise of both reward and judgment mean to you personally? 1-30-22
7. Where else in Revelation have we read of God’s temple? What is the significance of the fact it is open?
8. How are you personally impacted by the truth/reminder in these chapters that God is sovereign and that all events (past, present, and future) are under His control?
9. What is one specific act you could perform this week to advance the kingdom of God in your neighborhood, school, office, or home?