

“What Would Jesus Say to Me and Mine”

The Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

Detailed outline from the Sermon on August 10, 2008

Revelation is the most controversial book in the Bible, mostly because it can be interpreted in so many ways. Martin Luther struggled with Revelation and wondered why it was canonical. John Calvin wrote commentaries on every New Testament book except for Revelation. From the earliest days, people argued over canonizing the book because of its potential for weird interpretations and resultant division. That fear has been realized, of course, and entire movements have risen and fallen based on extremist approaches to interpreting this book. So we approach it humbly.

About apocalyptic literature

Revelation is the common English translation for Greek “apocalypsis”, literally meaning, “unveiling”. More specifically it is “the unveiling of transcendent truth.”

Apocalyptic literature was popular in the immediate centuries before and after Christ. It became the successor to the Old Testament prophetic literature. In prophetic literature, prophets would speak for God out the narrative of events in known history. The apocalypse reveals divine truth in the framework of a narrative that appears to have current and futuristic implications. Daniel is considered the first of its type, and there are many examples of apocalyptic literature that are not canonical. The apocalypse of John (Revelation) is canonical because of its author and its voice (Jesus).

John’s greeting (1:4-8)

This is the revelation of Jesus, and was given to John by Jesus. John is an agent, transported into different levels of awareness and vision; then he becomes the faithful reporter of what he’s seen and heard. These messages are directed to seven churches of Asia Minor (Turkey), but the churches are considered prototypical. The word to these churches is both actual and representative.

John’s extraordinary revelation (1:9-20)

John starts with a doxology (celebration of who Jesus is), and then tells us what he sees and hears. He’s on the island of Patmos when a voice like a loud trumpet tells him to write on a scroll. He turns to see the source of the voice and finds an angelic being among lampstands holding seven stars. A double-edged sword comes from his mouth (God’s word). When he speaks, we know that this

is Jesus – the First, the Last, the Living One, dead and raised alive forever. He holds the keys to death and Hades (place of the dead). “Write what you see. The stars are the angels of the 7 churches. The lampstands are the churches.”

1. Ephesus (2:1-7) ***The loveless church***

Write this to the church at Ephesus (the chief city in Asia Minor).

This hard-working church has wisely filtered out false teachers and has not grown weary in matters of the faith. But, can they regain the passion of their first love? Doctrinally sound and theologically “fervent”...but where is the love?

“You have lost your first love.”

“Remember the height from which you have fallen.”

“Repent, or I’ll have to remove your lampstand.”

“If you do, I’ll let you eat from the tree of life in God’s paradise” (reverse the effects of the curse in Genesis).

2. Smyrna (2:8-11) ***The persecuted church***

Smyrna is the Capital city of Asia Province

This hard-pressed church in the midst of poverty is struggling under the onslaught of slander and persecution. Will their richness in Christ be enough to keep them going?

No upside mentioned here – just a reminder that they are rich even though they are poor and suffering. “It’s going to get worse; but then you’ll be blessed. Overcome! I’ll give you the crown of life and I’ll make sure you’re safe from the second death.”

3. Pergamum (2:12-17) ***The overly-tolerant church***

Even through tough pressures in a difficult setting, this church has held it together. But some people in the church are following false teachers. Can they overcome the influence of bad thinking?

Pergamum is at the center of Emperor-Worship (Imperial Religion) and the worship of the Goddess Roma. No easy place to be a Christian, but they’ve held strong. Except...smatterings of folks are trying to straddle both worlds. Some even follow the Nicolaitans.

Balaam followers – not literal but prototypical. It means idol-worshippers and people who live the wild life.

Come around or else Jesus finds himself fighting against his own...sad. If you do come around, I'll:

- Give you hidden manna.
- Get you a white stone with a new name on it.

4. Thyatira (2:18-29)

The compromising church

On the upside, this church earns accolades for active love, faith and perseverance. But on the downside, they've been too tolerant of a false prophet in their midst. Will they have the courage to clean house?

Jezebel prototype:

Apparently, there's a woman who teaches false doctrine. Jesus has strong words for her and consequences for those who follow.

- Is she teaching a Gnostic heresy? "Deep secrets," is a phrase that might give us a clue.
- "Just hold on to what you've got..."
- Overcome and I'll give you authority over the nations. I'll also give you the morning star (various views: authority? A fixed place in God's heaven?).

5. Sardis (3:1-6)

The sleeping church

In the ancient capital of the old region of Lydia.

This church has a great reputation. Unfortunately, they've begun to live on their reputation. There are enough standouts to carry the church forward. But will the church wake up, strengthen the areas that are dying and build a future that's brighter than the past?

"You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead! Wake up! Strengthen what remains. Shake up what is dying. You're not done yet! If you don't wake up, I'll come like a thief. Some of you are doing great. You'll walk with me in robes of white. Your names are secure in the book of life. I'll acknowledge you before God and angels."

6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

The struggling church

New and lesser city, but a wine center.

It's not a strong church. Somehow they're still chugging along. More trials are coming. Can the church hold onto what they have and come into its full potential?

Much like Smyrna; holding on, but...tough times are coming. No downside to this church, except the repetitive encouragement to keep going...and Jesus will protect them from coming trials. He'll make them pillars on Gods temple. He'll seal them by writing God's name on them, the name New Jerusalem and Jesus' new name (Jesus' secret name referenced in 19:12-13 and other places).

7. Laodicea (3:14-22) ***The lukewarm church***

Laodicea is the best known church. This is the lukewarm church – neither hot nor cold. This is the wealthy church without a keen sense of need. This is a church that is blind to its own desperate condition. Will they find the humility to earnestly repent and open their hearts to Christ?

“Those whom I love, I discipline.”

“Behold I stand at the door and knock.”

“If you change, I'll come in and eat with you.”

“Overcome and I'll let you sit with me on my throne.”

If Jesus sent personalized revelations to us today, what would he say to:

- Our church?
- Our small group (mini-church)?
- Our family?
- Each of us personally?

Consider the benefits of life in the flow of Christ's best plans for our lives:

- The right to eat from the tree of life in God's paradise (2:7)
- The crown of life (2:10)
- Protection from second death (2:11)
- The hidden manna (2:17)
- A white stone with a new name (2:17, 3:12)
- Authority over the nations (2:26)
- The morning star (2:28)
- The white clothing of worthiness (3:4)
- A secure name in the book of life (3:5)
- Protection from the hour of trial (3:10)

- A chance to be pillars in the temple of God (3:12)
- Christ will come in and eat and be with (3:20)
- A place with Christ on the throne (3:21)