

WOLBI: Revelation 1-5

Dr. John Barnett

Christ's Last Words to His Church

Assignment Sheet

Your Paper: The Devotional Method

In Revelation God Gives us the Most Complete Answers to the Most Important Questions of Life

Origin = How did I get here? Creator (Genesis 1-2)

Purpose = Why am I here? Redeemer (Genesis 3-Revelation 5)

Destiny = Where am I going? Judge (Revelation 6-22)

The Panorama of History

The Return of Christ to Rule

1,845 references in the Old Testament

17 books give prominence to the event

318 references in the New Testament

216 chapters

23 of 27 books give prominence to the event

For every prophecy of Christ's 1st Coming there are 8 of His 2nd Coming!

The Divine Outline Rev. 1:19

Revelation's Outline

The Things Which You Have Seen (Rev.1)

The Things Which Are (Rev. 2-3)

The Things Which Will Take Place After This (Rev. 4-22)

1. The Worship Scene in Heaven (4:1–5:14)
2. The Great Tribulation on Earth (6:1–18:24)
3. The Return of the King (19:1–21)
4. The Millennium (20:1–10)
5. The Great White Throne Judgment (20:11–15)
6. The Eternal State of Heaven (21:1–22:21)

Christ's LAST Words to His Church: The Book of The Revelation

Today¹ open with me to the only book exclusively devoted to introducing us to what our Master and Savior Jesus is doing RIGHT NOW: the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Have you paused yet today to check in with Jesus Christ? The best way to do that is through your Bible, because Jesus Christ is revealed to us as the Word of God. He is the Word, and the Word reveals Him. Each time we open God's Word we can hear His Voice.

At Creation God the Son, the Creator spoke and made all things; and through His Apostles and Prophets, His Word has been given.

As you open to the last book of your Bibles, you open to the climactic conclusion of God's Word written down for us.

The first word in the Greek New Testament text of Revelation is the word *apocalupsis* which can be translated as either "revelation" or "unveiling". The next two words are Jesus Christ. That means in this last book we are:

Getting to See the Real Jesus

So we are opened to the "revelation of Jesus Christ", or the "taking the cover off of Jesus Christ", or the "disclosure of Jesus Christ", or the "manifestation of Jesus Christ", or the "unveiling of Jesus Christ" the Word of God. There is so much to think about as we open to

¹ 110213AM CIW-01 Rev.do

these Last Words of Christ, God's Word.

Revelation completes God's revelation of Himself to humanity through Christ.

In Genesis the Creator, God the Son, walks and talks with Adam and Eve the first two humans to ever exist, created from the Hand of God. But God does not stay walking and talking to them. Because they sinned, He banishes them from the Paradise He made for them. Thus began all the sorrows and woes that have plagued humanity all these thousands of years.

But in the book of Revelation the Creator explains that He is back, actively walking on Earth again, among His people.

The Book of Revelation explains for us that God the Son, Jesus Christ the Creator is here on the ground guiding His Church to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Much like a coach on the floor with his team, Jesus Christ is walking around and watching us play our positions He gave us to play. That is perhaps the most arresting truth in all the Bible for us. We are not alone, the Coach Himself, our Creator is personally wanting to help us get done what He desires us to do.

To begin our look at Christ's Last Words, we need to listen to His Voice, and so join me in Revelation 1 as we read v.1-8, 19

Revelation 1:1-19 (NKJV) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. 4 John, to the seven churches which 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, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

Amazingly Jesus tells us that the events in Revelation are going to fall upon the earth: not gradually but quickly. V. 1 says "shortly" [Greek *taxos* "speed"; swiftness (speed), i.e. done as quickly (speedily) as is appropriate to the particular situation. From the same as *tachus*; a brief space (of time), i.e. (with *en* prefixed) in haste -- + quickly, + shortly, + speedily.

The Three Purposes of the Book of Revelation

By observation we can see that Christ's Last Words are divided into three parts, note the outline contained in 1:19, where John is instructed to write:

1. The **"things you have seen"** (this is chapter 1, or John's sight of the Risen Christ gathering with His local

churches).

Jesus is the Owner of our Team, He calls His Team the Church.

Jesus is right now on the ground, walking through life with us as His Church, seeking to see us accomplish His will and plan each day. He is watching our every move with His eyes that see everything, He never leaves our sides, and is always available to each of us at any moment.

2. The **“things that are”** (this is chapters 2-3, or Christ's Warning about the Challenges facing the Local Churches, after His personal tour around each of His local churches).

As the Owner of the Church, Jesus warns us of the pitfalls, dangers, and difficulties we will face.

As our Coach He explains what makes some team members displeasing their Master and Owner, and He warns us what to do, how to avoid these traps that render team members useless to their Savior and Master.

3. The **“things which shall be after those things”** (this is chapters 4-22, or the description of the End of Days as seen in both Heaven and on Earth).

Amazingly in the final chapters of Revelation, Jesus reveals that He has another team that He wants to use for that period of time.

The Church is His second team, He now reverts back to His first team called Israel. They did not obey Him and were set over to the side for two thousand plus years, but now He is ready to use them once again.

They become His witnesses and His visible sign to the world. Through the absolutely darkest days of humanity, they will shine as His Chosen People of Promise.

Applying Revelation's Message To Our Lives Today

So that is the message of the Book of Revelation. But what was God's purpose in sending it? The key lies in our response: how do we best use our days of life?

How can we respond to these truths that God has left us. When God sends us His final written message it has three parts. Each of these three sections of this final book has a clear message to our lives today.

What is chapter 1 all about? Jesus Christ our Owner and the One who calls the shots of our lives, our Coach: He is visiting us, checking on us, and watching us as His Church.

The lesson of Revelation is first and most importantly: the ONLY way to understand life, living, purpose, meaning, destiny, and anything else that matters is when Jesus Christ is shined upon our lives.

When He is unleashed, when His truth is unveiled, when His plans are opened and followed, life makes sense. The very first message we need to hear is all about what Jesus is doing now that He has risen and ascended back to Heaven. Revelation 1 is all about showing

us what is Christ's Highest Priority right now.

Revelation 1: Seeing the Risen Christ Gathering With His Local Churches

First, Jesus wants us to know He is walking among us and watching our lives.

The simple message Jesus Christ gives us is that His Highest Priority is gathering with His local church. Look where John first saw Jesus in v.12, He was walking around His local churches (that is what v. 20 says that those lampstands represent: Christ's local churches).

That means that He is right now watching us. He is walking around His gathered Church looking to see if we are being and doing what He left for us to be and do.

Notice that Christ walks about His Local Churches, places when people gathered in a recognizable community. Christ's Church is His priority, it is where He is spending His time. The first message of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is that the local Church is His PRIORITY, it is where He goes, what He does, and where He is at work in the world today.

For a moment ask yourself a question. If the local Church is Christ's highest priority, is it also my highest priority? Or have I ignored Christ's obvious priority of His local assembly of believers, and said that other things can also be priorities; and that I must make wise choices between the priority of work, the priority of school, the priority of sports, the priority of rest, and so on. In other words, instead of highest priority meaning what we do first, it becomes choosing between several activities that WE have decided are all equal in importance. Everything is not equally important to Christ, He displays by His actions, and says with His words that His chosen focus is His local church.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself if you really believe God's Word. If so, then you believe Jesus Christ is here right now. He walks among us looking at us as we gather to see if we are being what He asks us to be; and doing what He left us to do.

Doing and Being

What did Jesus ask us to be? His followers or disciples, those who learned by imitating Him and following him. So first, are you "being" His disciple by wanting to follow Him in all I do through each of my days?

Secondly, are you "doing" what He left you to do. What was that? Remember, Jesus said go and make disciples. Build your life around getting people connected to Christ through His local church.

Everything in this special period of time revealed in God's Word, revolves around the

church Jesus said He was building.

Are you doing and being what He asks each of us to do and be for His church?

Is Christ's Church your Highest priority?

We as His Church are Christ's focus, we are His Highest priority. He owns this team, He is here with us in the game of life wanting to help and encourage us to play our part in His plan.

Why not renew your decision in your heart that you will follow Christ's example and make Christ's local church your HIGHEST priority in life? Now look at the next section:

Revelation 2-3: Christ's Warning about the Challenges facing the Local Churches

The second message that we find in Christ's last words is that He warns us about areas that have tripped up past generations of believers. He wants us to stay on the right path.

Now look at the second section of this book: the "things that are" (this is chapters 2-3, or the State of the Local Churches as given by Christ Himself, after His personal tour around each of His local churches).

When Jesus toured His local churches He names seven of them, using seven local, geographic gatherings of believers. He describes each assembly and uses His assessment of these local churches to challenge all of the churches.

These churches were real gatherings of people 2,000 years ago. That means that Jesus saw seven different types of believers gathering at that moment in the history of His church. Have you ever thought about that? In some part of the end of the First Century AD there were Ephesian types of believers (2:1-7); Smyrna types of believers (2:8-11); Pergamos types of believers (2:12-17); Thyatira types of believers (2:18-29); Sardis types of believers (3:1-6); Philadelphia types of believers (3:7-13); and Laodicea types of believers (3:14-22).

Every believer back then was like one of these seven. But even more than just back then, these letters were written in God's Word to instruct all of us down through the ages that even to our time, more than likely, the Son of God has walked among us and has found here:

That some of us are like the believers in Ephesus: we have declined from that first love we had for Jesus. We are like them we had a great start, but now seem to lack that initial consuming love.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Love Me most; Come back to Me.*

Smyrna was in great persecution and stood fast through it; true believers discover Jesus is all I have, and need. Then by faith they remain faithful to Him, no matter what the price they have to pay. We like them can be purified by persecution, and be faithful to the Lord.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: Trust Me to the end; Stay true to the end; Suffer for Me.

Pergamum was drowning in worldliness; true believers will resist worldliness. Today in

every church there are some of these Pergamite Christians:

- Pergamites are wed to the world;
- Pergamites are worldly Christians with no standards;
- Pergamites have a focus and grip on their money, car and job;
- Pergamites are only doing what is socially acceptable;
- Pergamites are compromising the absolutes of Scriptures;
- Pergamites are more concerned with fashion than with Holiness.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: ***Stay separated from false doctrine and evil practices.***

Thyatira was being seduced by the false teacher Jezebel; true believers resisted all such evil teaching and lifestyles. Some Thyatiran Christians are believing and following false doctrine, with a social gospel not a divine call to the new birth.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Stay pure; live for Me.*

Sardis had a big name but no life; true believers did not defile themselves with the corpse. Some Sardian Christians, are dead as last week's cut flowers, cold and lifeless, in a spiritual stupor.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Live the Life for Me.*

But no condemnation for Philadelphia, no blame just a warning to overcome and hold on!! Some Philadelphian Christians, sound in doctrine, zealous in ministry, are outreaching the world and deeply in love with the Lord Jesus Christ!

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Speak for Me.*

Some Laodicean, are apostate, counterfeit and sickening to Christ. A member of the Christless church that will thrive in the tribulation under Satan's leadership.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Sacrifice for Me; invest in Me.*

Revelation 4-22: The Description of the End of Days As seen in both Heaven and on Earth

Finally, the last part of Christ's message to us is that He wants us to know what He has planned for the ending of the earth.

Starting in chapter 4 we learn things only hinted at in all the other chapters of God's Word. In the final section of this book we see woven together all the pieces that the apostles and prophets had reported, but now Jesus Christ Himself, God's Final Word to Mankind makes sense of all those pieces.

Probably this section holds more fascination, for more people than any other part of God's Word. And into that section pause with me briefly to feel the intensity of what God has given to us.

Revelation 4-22 continues the same picture that Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah,

Matthew, and Paul all share with Jesus: the End of Days is very easy to spot.

In Matthew when Jesus taught His disciples on the End of Days, He gives some irrefutable signs for when He would return. Those signs agreed with the signs already presented in the Old Testament. We could sum up Christ's words in Matthew 24 by saying He promises and predicts what the world will look like when He Returns.

Jesus gives an even clearer picture of what the last days will look like, so that we as His servants would not be caught off guard, and be unprepared for what will happen so swiftly, taxes on the Earth.

Seven Clear Indicators Given by Christ To Describe the End of Days

In Revelation Jesus Himself, the very Word of God explains the future to us His servants. He says that He is walking in His Church, encouraging us until our work for Him is done. Then, He will take us to surround His Throne and watch Him go back to His Chosen People of Promise and win their hearts back to Him.

So what does Jesus say that the world will look like when He comes back?

He says there will be seven clear trends that MUST be present for Him to return.

1. Global Travel (Daniel 12:4a) Revelation 6:1-4
2. Global Information/Data Explosion (Daniel 12:4a) "horseman earth" Revelation 6:1-4
3. Global Death/WMD (Matthew 24:22) Rev 6:8 "one-fourth"
4. Global Communications Revelation 11:9 "see"
5. Global Commerce Revelation 11:10 "send"
6. Global Currency/Digitalized Money Revelation 13:16-17 "number"
7. Global Weather Gone Wild (Luke 21:25-26) "scorch" Revelation 16:8-9

In the days ahead we will trace each of these trends in our Bibles.

Before we go ask yourself a question: If the local Church is Christ's highest priority, is it also my highest priority? If you really believe God's Word, then you believe Jesus Christ is here right now. He walks among us looking at us as we gather to see if we are being what He asks us to be; and doing what He left us to do.

Secondly, are you "doing" what He left you to do. What was that? Remember, Jesus said go and make disciples. Build your life around getting people connected to Christ through His local church.

Everything revolves around the church Jesus said He was building. Are you doing and being what He asks each of us to do and be for His church. Is Christ's Church your Highest priority? We as His Church are Christ's focus, we are His Highest priority.

Why not renew your decision in your heart that you will follow Christ's example and

make Christ's local church your HIGHEST priority in life?

God's Reminder to Us— Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Revelation 1:9-20

Revelation² is God lifting the lid off of Christ, or pulling back the wrapping paper on something very special about Jesus, but not yet fully seen or known. That is what the first word of this book says.

So, **chapter 1** is God holding out for us: What Jesus is doing right now.

Chapters 2-3 are God showing us what Jesus sees in His Church.

Chapters 4-22 are what God wants us to know about His plans for the future.

Each of these sections of Revelation is a disclosure, and an unveiling of things not yet fully seen, or even really understood.

So the summary of the last book of the Bible is: God knows we need reminders.

That's why we have the last book in our Bibles. It is a book to remind us: that God has a plan, His plan is on target, and all we need to do is keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

God wants us to know what Jesus is at work right now. The purpose of Revelation is to remind the Church to focus on what Christ was doing on Earth, of what He left us here to do, and how we can get it done. That's:

The Reminder God Gives His Servants

As we open to Revelation 1, think about the setting God used to send to us, Christ's Last Words to His Church. Remember that the believers of the 1st Century were normal people with real problems. That is true about even the one God chose to record the words we will soon read.

John the apostle was a fisherman from small seaside town of Galilee. Now he is all alone, banished on Patmos, a prison colony island, off the coast of modern Turkey.

Yes, there were probably many other prisoners, but John was far from his family. As far

² 110227AM CLW-02 Seeing Jesus.do

as we know from history he was completely isolated from his wife and children, so he had no family encouragement.

As far as colleagues: his own brother James as well as all the other apostles, even Paul had been hunted down and murdered. So John had no dear old friends left to encourage him. It is not a real stretch to think that at a minimum, these were hard times.

For John, those days of following Christ, when Jesus called and taught him and all the other Apostles, seemed a long way off.

If any of us were in John's sandals, trudging along the paths of Patmos, we could easily confess that Jesus felt far away at times. For someone who knew Jesus face-to-face for 3 plus years, having Christ ascended to Heaven meant at the least: Jesus and His plan, that used to be so clear, seemed distant.

But what God wanted John to know then, and us who live today to know right now is that:

Jesus Never Changes

Do you sometimes feel distant from the Lord? We have the Bible, we have the church, we have all those books and music, and tools that remind us of the Lord. But, as we go through all the struggles of life, most of us seem to arrive at those distant times, feeling far from the Lord.

Other times if we aren't careful to maintain spiritual disciplines, we get unhealthy. By not eating God's Word regularly and exercising ourselves in ministry, we become weak. Weakness can cause us to slowly drift away from some of the gracious assurances that we had felt in the past, and we just hurt, ache and struggle on going through the motions of a walk with the Lord.

If we take the time to fully understand what lies before us in this passage, we will find that Revelation 1 was a very special gift to the Church reminding each of them back 2,000 years ago, and each of us today that Jesus Christ is the same (as Hebrews 13:8 reminds us):

- **Yesterday** (when He walked the dusty trails of Galilee with the disciples, and later when He met with John on Patmos); and
- **Today** (as He walks up and down among us here in His gathered Church); and
- **Forever** (as we enjoy His presence in Heaven).

Did you catch that? Jesus wants His Church to know that He is still doing just what He did that Sunday morning with John on Patmos, and in the days that followed. So much of His ministry was assuring the disciples of what they already knew, and encouraging them to do what He left them here to do.

Revelation 1 uncovers, reveals, discloses, and displays for each member of Christ's church: what Jesus is *doing today*.

The purpose of Revelation, as v. 1 declares, is to SHOW us who are His servants the only

eye witness, complete description of the Risen Christ. It was on a Sunday, a Lord's Day like today.

And in the flawless record of that meeting comes a perfect description of what Jesus looks like. And from that description we find out exactly what He is doing then and now! God pulls back the wrapping paper and says, "Look and:

See Christ Today In His Church

Open with me to the last book in God's Word, Revelation 1.9-13. Stand with me, and as I read, notice the very precise specifics of what John saw about Jesus.

*Revelation 1:9-13 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lamp stands [read that as representing all churches, v. 20], 13 and in the midst of the seven lamp stands: **One like the Son of Man; clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.***

If you'll closely look at v. 13, you will find that John actually sees Him doing after the Resurrection just what He did while He was here on Earth before His death, burial and Resurrection.

Jesus is the same—yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). And how John needed that reminder—and so do we!

What did John see? Pencil these in your mind, mark them in your Bibles, and hold tight to them in your heart—He saw Jesus and tells us of it.

When John sees the Risen Christ, He is—

1. **Reminding us that He is Human.** v. 13a "One like a Son of Man". So He can truly have compassion upon us. **Jesus can feel my needs completely.**
2. **Praying for us as our Great High Priest.** v. 13b **Jesus is dressed like a priest to remind us that He is our High Priest.** "clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band". **Jesus defends us constantly as He prays and intercedes for us.** Jesus is the perfect priest, He can truly forgive us.

The purpose Revelation was written was to help Christ's servants: that's US! Jesus first revealed Himself as the help we all need.

Today, more than anything else, we need to experience Jesus Christ as He is right now. Starting in v. 13 we find a truth that keeps us through the daily struggles, and the growing

challenges that life will always bring.

What was the first truth that God wants us to see about Jesus? Above everything else, God reveals to His servants that we need to always remember and never forget that Jesus is “One like a Son of Man”. Jesus is completely human. Jesus is able to understand us where we are. He is not living so far away and above us that He is out of touch with where we struggle. That means the first truth God wants us to understand is:

Jesus Can Feel My Needs Completely: Do you Understand Christ's Humanity?

v. 13a “One like a Son of Man”.

All of the lessons of Revelation are previous truth that God wants to remind us about in a new, fresh, and powerful way. To grasp what is being said in this first half of Revelation 1:13, turn over with me to the book of Hebrews, chapter 2, where God's Word describes the purpose of the 100% humanity of Jesus Christ.

*Hebrews 2:14-18 Inasmuch then as the children **have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same**, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 **Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren**, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 **For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.** NKJV*

God wants to unwrap and hold out for us to see in a new, fresh, and powerful way that Jesus feels what we feel. He knows what we are going through. He understands where we are, what we struggle with and amazingly says that He has felt the same temptations!

Again, in Hebrews 4, Jesus reinforces this truth: He has felt what we feel, He has wrestled with what we wrestle with. Jesus is the only One who can really say to us, “I know what you’re going through.”

*Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, **but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.***

Jesus was made like us; He can feel our needs completely—so He can truly have compassion³ upon us. What we need in all of our struggles is compassion.

What we long for in all of our temptations is to know that someone understands what we’re struggling with.

As humans we have so many needs, such deep feelings, and such great struggles it often

³ Each of the eleven times in the Gospels that this verb *splangnidzomai* #4697 is used for a person, it is Jesus Christ that is described (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1.41; 6.34; 8.2; 9.22; Luke 7.13; 10.33 (Good Samaritan acted as Christ would have acted). The noun form also describes why God sent His Son in Luke 1.78; and is what each true believer is commanded to put on each day (Col. 3.12); and its presence is an evidence of salvation (I John 3.17).

helps most just to know someone understands what we're going through.

There is One who understands BETTER than anyone else. There is One who "feel together with us" that is what the Greek word *sumpatheo* from which we get the English word "sympathy".

Jesus has sympathy upon us. Jesus feels completely what we are going through. And instead of anger, instead of condemnation: Jesus feels compassion for us.

Jesus Feels Compassion As He Watches us Struggle

Every time the verb "showing/having compassion" is used in the New Testament (which is 12x) it always refers to Jesus!

As we read the Gospels, what do they emphasize about what Christ did on earth? They show His great compassion upon weak and wandering humans. Turn back with me to the first Gospel, by Matthew and look at chapter 20.

*Matthew 20:34 So Jesus **had compassion** and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.*

*Mark 6:34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was **moved with compassion** for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.*

When Jesus walked around and saw what we were going through it moved Him to compassion. When Jesus saw the struggles, the confusion, and all the temptations the Devil flung at fallen humanity: He felt compassion.

Never forget that Christ's most frequent emotion was not anger, or disappointment, or frustration. Christ's most often expressed emotion is feeling for us in our needs. Jesus is most characterized in His humanity by a love that shows itself in compassion.

So what is Jesus like now, today, here: as He looks at you and me right now? He has compassion upon us in all our needs!

Remember when John saw Jesus in Revelation 1:13 "...and in the midst of the seven lamp stands [One] like the Son of Man"? Jesus was with His Church, us believers, His born-again saints. So that means Jesus is here this morning!

In the days of the Gospels, anyone felt they could come to Him, Jesus was approachable: a woman with blood, a leper, a dad with dying daughter, someone with a sick servant. Jesus has compassion.

Jesus is Approachable

Jesus is checking our hearts to see if we came to church cleaned up and prepared to seek Him. And if He finds that we are cold, distant, wounded, sad, discouraged: He feels for us.

Jesus is standing right beside each of us gathered here today and waiting to help us.

- **Are you weak?** He understands, and looks upon you with compassion.
- **Are you afraid?** He is acquainted with all we face, and knows our fears—and looks upon us with compassion.
- **Are you alone?** He faced the long loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane, the Wilderness temptation, and the hours of darkness on the Cross—He know what it is like to be alone, He feels our weaknesses—and looks upon us with compassion.

Jesus Can Feel My Needs Completely: Do you Understand Christ's Humanity? He is full of compassion. He is right now: v. 13a “One like a Son of Man”.

Now, look at the second half of v. 13. Here is what the compassion of Christ prompts. Jesus who feels all we are going through doesn't just feel for us in our needs: He also responds with what we most need. What do we most need that Christ is doing for us?

Jesus Defends Me Constantly: Do you Feel Christ's Intercession & Forgiveness?

v. 13b clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band

What was the greatest miracle that Jesus did for people on earth? He went to the Father and asked for their sins to be forgiven. That was the greatest need of those He met, and the miracle that lasted forever. All His other miracles went away except forgiveness.

Watch what I mean as we turn back to the Gospel by Mark, chapter 2.

Mark 2:1-5 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

Forgiving sins was Christ's greatest, most enduring, and powerful miracle.

So what does He do now? He wants us to see Him still at work doing the same powerful miracle: He forgives our sins. Turn over with me to the Book of Hebrews, chapter 4.

*Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have **a great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

*Hebrews 7:24-25 But He, because He continues forever, **has an unchangeable priesthood**. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Jesus is at work meeting the greatest need each of us has.

Jesus knows that we fail, He knows that we are weak and tempted, and that we sin. He always lives to cleanse and free us from our sins. He feels for us, knows our struggles, and

wants us to rest in His never ending forgiveness no matter how many times we sin, no matter how badly we sin: He lives to forgive us!

- Do you feel defiled? He alone can forgive and cleanse.
- Do you feel the fear of future judgment? He can take that penalty you deserve away forever.

Jesus Prays for Me Constantly: Do you Feel Christ's Intercession & Forgiveness? He is right now as it says in v. 13b clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band, ever living to save us to the uttermost.

Jesus Can Feel My Needs Completely: Christ's Humanity means that He is full of compassion. He is right now: v. 13a "One like a Son of Man" standing by each of us with His arms open wide saying neither do I condemn you, follow me and turn away from those sins that beset you and displease Me.

Closing

Since Jesus is here, since He is 100% human and knows what we face as we struggle each day, why not thank Him right now?

And as we thank Him, invite Him to help you in whatever way you need this morning. There is a little chorus we can use to worship Jesus right now called: I Love you Lord. Why not join me singing that to the Lord.

I Love You Lord,
and I lift my voice,
to worship You,
Oh my soul rejoice;
take joy my King
in what You hear:
may it be a sweet,
sweet, sound
in your ear.

His Powerful Gaze: Christ's Ancient Power, Absolute Purity & Our Progressive Sanctification

Revelation 1:14

His Powerful, Penetrating & Purifying Gaze

As⁴ we open to Revelation 1:14 this is the second set of twin descriptions of Christ: His head and hair are white, like wool and snow; and His eyes are like burning flames of fire.

When John turned to see who it was that spoke to him, he turned and so the Ancient of Days Himself, in all His power, in all His holiness, and with those eyes ablaze with an inescapable and penetrating gaze. That is how Jesus Christ the Risen Lord appears at this moment, as we gather before Him. Let that sight get imprinted upon your heart:

Christ's Flaming Eyes of Penetrating Holiness

In the Old Testament world, and the New Testament era, white signified purity as well as signifying great age. By combining head, hair, snow, and wool we see a picture of Christ's being both the all-powerful Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9-10) as well as the pure and holy One. The first point John makes as he details Christ's appearance is to emphasize:

The eyes as a flame of fire speak of both power and purity. We see portrayed both the purifying work of fire as well as the unquenchable power of fire. Fires that are allowed to burn hot enough can refine and purifying metals such as silver, gold, brass, and iron.

The same fires can consume, and eat through even to the weakening of metal and crumbling of rock. When fires powerful flames are combined with the idea of Christ's eyes, it speaks of an unstoppable, all-powerful, purifying gaze.

Remember this is the second set of twin descriptions of Christ. Our loving, merciful God first reminded us in v. 13 that He is supremely the Compassionate Priest: "One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band."

Jesus is always first the One we can come to, cry out to, and share our struggles with. Hold on in your hearts to this great truth: Jesus does not condemn, rather He showers

⁴ 110306AM CLW-03 Sanctifying Jesus.do

us with compassion and intercession. Always remember:

Christ's Arms of Compassion and Love

So God first wants us as His servants who struggle through life to see: Jesus is a Compassionate Priest who ever lives to pray, encourage, help, and encourage us in our walk through life for Him.

This morning we are God's servants, and He wants us to understand this second facet of Christ's character that will focus and change us as we meditate upon Him.

Revelation 1.14-17. Stand with me, and as I read, notice what John saw about Jesus.

*Revelation 1:14-17 **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.***

The sight of Jesus looking at us with those power-filled, fiery eyes is not immediately a comforting sight.

But it is a truth we need to understand and respond to. As the Psalmist says about Christ's coming: mercy and truth have met in Jesus (Psalm 85:10).

We must never forget that there is only one of God's attributes that is stated in triplicate. You know which one I mean, right? Both Isaiah in chapter 6, and here in Revelation 4:8 we hear the anthem of Heaven, repeated over and over again around the Throne:

Holy, Holy, Holy is how that attribute is declared.

We never see God surrounded by angels singing Sovereign, Sovereign, Sovereign.

Nor do we see them saying a three-fold Omnipotence, any other attribute.

The compassionate, lovingly gentle intercessor of v. 13 is also the all-powerful Ancient of Days who with His white head and hair, and piercing eyes seeks to refine all sin from our lives.

This description of our Savior here in His Church calls us to deeply ponder the desire God has for our holiness.

This picture of Revelation 1:14 declares that:

Jesus Desires my Sanctification:

Are you Experiencing Christ's Holiness?

v. 14a His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,"

When we see God represented by Christ in the Old Testament He is called the Ancient of

Days (Daniel 7), and He is described as “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6).

This description of Christ combines those two elements into one.

The Ancient aspect and the Holy aspect are combined into a white head and hair, as white as wool and snow.

Jesus always kept this holiness aspect before His disciples as He spoke of His plans for them, and us.

- Do you remember when He promised the Comforter who would come to them, that Jesus described Him as the **HOLY** Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7-14).
- Do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples after the Resurrection? *Receive the **HOLY** Spirit (John 20:22).*
- Then, just before His Ascension, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46; Acts 1:4-8) before they did anything else for the coming of the what? The coming of the **HOLY** Spirit.
- Finally, on the Day of Pentecost God poured out His what (Acts 2:4)? He poured out the **HOLY** Spirit upon Christ's Church.

Notice what the first part of the Name of the third person of the Trinity always is: the **HOLY** Spirit.

So it is the Spirit of God living within us that is to cause us more and more to reflect the Holiness of Christ. He is the Spirit that causes Holiness, and He sent to live with us.

Christ's flaming eyes are representing His desire that we experience the purifying work of His Spirit at every level of our lives.

The workings of the Spirit inside of believers is not automatic. God's plans for our earthly sanctification must be unleashed by our participation.

God has chosen for the Spirit of God to reflect His pleasure with our faith and obedience, or His displeasure with our unbelief and disobedience.

That is the work of sanctification.

Sanctification Means Purity of Mind & Body

Since the Third Person of the Godhead is usually introduced by the word “Holy” before the word “Spirit”, it is clearly His primary ministry to purge and cleanse saints from their sins. The work of the Spirit is described as sanctification, or increasing our individual conduct in holiness or godlikeness.

When we are saved it is the Holy Spirit that does the complete cleansing of our hearts and lives, totally severing all the connections that had fed the lusts of habitual sin that characterized our pre-salvation lives.

Paul describes this sanctifying work to the new believers in Corinth by reminding them that, “You were washed, *you were sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus

Christ and *in the Spirit of our God*" (1Cor. 6:11; see also Titus 3:5).

During the ministry of John the Baptist one promise he made was that Christ's coming would bring the work of the Spirit with fire. That metaphor of fire pointed to the cleansing and purifying work that Jesus would bring when people were saved and baptized "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

When the Spirit of God is present He empowers us to reflect God more and more. Paul summarizes the direction of a believer's life as "being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another," we should be reminded that "this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Remember that God never commands me to do what He hasn't already given me the grace to accomplish by faith through His Spirit! Listen again to the theological description of this powerful doctrine:

*"Our participation in the process of **sanctification** comes only after we've been totally accepted and made right before God through faith in Jesus.*

So yes, we work hard at obeying God's word. We read our Bibles. We pray. We meditate on Scripture. We memorize Scripture. We share the gospel. We serve in our church. We fast.

God commands us in His Word to do many things, and our obedience is both pleasing to Him and brings His blessing to our lives. But not one adds to our justification, our standing before God, our eternal life.

*Only grace sustains lasting change and **sanctification**. Through the cross we overcome not only the guilt of sin, but the power of sin as well⁵.*

We can not sanctify ourselves, we must rely upon and desire for the Spirit of God to conquer more parts of our lives by His power (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2, cf. Rom. 8:4; 15-16), so that we realize each time we face the tug of sin, and feel the coldness to spiritual things that sinful desires, attitudes, and choices bring: we respond "*by the Spirit*". When we ask the Spirit to "protect me" we find are able to "put to death the deeds of the body". That is what growing in personal holiness is all about (Rom. 8:13; see 7:6; Phil. 1:19).⁶

When Jesus was describing the salvation He purchased for us on the Cross, He used the simile of the Spirit being 'like a powerful river'. Salvation means we have more than we could ever need when the Holy Spirit resides within, not less. So John 7:39 means we would be able to feel and know, and others would notice also the powerful work of God's Spirit pouring out

⁵] C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

⁶ Paraphrased from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, p. 639-44. Other elements of the atmosphere that the Holy Spirit can impart are truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:7), wisdom (Deut. 34:9; Isa. 11:2), comfort (Acts 9:31), freedom (2 Cor. 3:17), righteousness (Rom. 14:17), hope (Rom. 15:13; cf. Gal. 5:5), an awareness of sonship or adoption (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:5-6), and even glory (2 Cor. 3:8). The Holy Spirit also brings unity (Eph. 4:3), and power (Acts 1:18; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Acts 1:8).

into our daily lives.

Sanctification Means the Blessings of God Are Tied to Our Responses

Throughout the Bible we see examples of the Spirit of God blessing or removing blessing based on whether the events pleased or displeased Him.

But it is most clearly stated in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit can be so grieved that He ceases to bless those that grieve Him.

Paul warns the Ephesian Christians, “Do not *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30), and exhorts the Thessalonian church, “Do not *quench the Spirit*” (1 Thess. 5:19).

Paul gives a serious warning to Christians not to defile their bodies because the Holy Spirit lives within their bodies: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).⁷

Our choices will either grieve and offend the Holy Spirit’s work in us, or they will please and unleash His further work.

God the Holy Spirit does not force us to obey Him (see 1 Cor. 14:32).

But when we resist what He desires to do, He withdraws the blessings He was prepared to pour out upon us. The motivation for sanctification comes as we remember this sight of Christ:

His Eyes Can See Me Always: Christ’s Penetrating Gaze

v. 14b “His eyes like a flame of fire”.

Jesus wants us to see that He is watching for us to respond to the Holy Spirit, so that we reflect His purity, His power, and His Holiness. That reflection is called our sanctification.

The more we reflect His Holiness the more sanctified we’ve become, the less we reflect His Holiness, the less sanctified we have become.

Our final passage is First Thessalonians 5:23, if you’ll turn there in your Bible we are going to read the sanctification plan God gave to Paul.

The Lord wanted to start a recovery program in a rough, tough, vice-filled, seaport city named Thessalonica.

In AD 50 or 51, the Gospel had arrived in this thriving commercial transportation hub where intercontinental caravans met at the docks of a huge seaport. In less than three weeks,

⁷ Excerpts from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, p. 647. It is noteworthy that Jesus was completely without sin and the Holy Spirit “remained on him” (John 1:32) and was given to him without measure (John 3:34). Poured out blessings are seen in: Judg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14 vs. withdrawn blessings as we see in: Judg. 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14; Isa. 63:10.

a group of drunkards, sex-addicts, greedy and dishonest business people, as well as normal well-adjusted lost pagans and Jews had come to Christ.

What did God tell Paul to do? Teach the new saints the truth of Sanctification.

Before we read this Scripture, repeat these 5 words after me: “God’s Recovery Program is Sanctification”, okay, here we go: (repeat).

Now listen to that Sanctifying Recovery Program God designed:

First Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The moment salvation began in those lives, the sanctification work had also begun.

God’s plan for every believer is always sanctification.

Why not choose right now, as if you were on a bench in the Thessalonian church, and Paul was speaking and reminding you of the eyes of Jesus powerfully, penetratingly burning with purifying power.

If we could have heard Paul applying this verse 23 in the last chapter of First Thessalonians, we know based on the truths of sanctification he taught everywhere else, it would have sounded like this. In fact, why not make this a time when each of us say to the Lord, this is:

My Surrender to Personal Sanctification

God desires that each of us surrender to this process He wants to use right now, to make us useful and fruitful to Him:

“Sanctification is a process of becoming more like Christ, of growing in holiness. This process begins the instant you are converted and will not end until you meet Jesus face-to-face. Sanctification is about our own choices and behavior.

It involves work. Empowered by God's Spirit, we strive. We fight sin. We study Scripture and pray, even when we don't feel like it. We flee temptation. We press on; we run hard in the pursuit of holiness⁸.”

Sanctification is like being healthy spiritually. Just like our body needs proper nutrients combined with exercise, so our souls need regular intake of the Word mixed with choices to obey.

These two elements: the Word and active obedience to the Word is how the Holy Spirit works. He uses the power of His Word and fellowship with other believers, to peel away our desires for sin, renews our minds, and changes our lives.

The sight of Jesus looking at us with those power-filled, fiery eyes is not immediately a comforting sight. But it is a truth we need to understand and respond to.

The compassionate, lovingly gentle intercessor of v. 13 is also the all-powerful Ancient

⁸ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

of Days who with His white head and hair, and piercing eyes seeks to refine all sin from our lives.

This description of our Savior here in His Church calls us to renew our desire to respond with these 4 choices to renew our sanctifying habits:

1. **I want to:** Listen to God DAILY through His Word.
2. **I want to:** Respond to God throughout the day in prayer.
3. **I want to:** Make sacred vows to obey.
4. **I want to:** Share those plans with another believer so they can encourage your walk.

Make those your offerings of obedience to God today!

Appendix

Salvation is the start of a new life and walk, and as the Spirit of God lives within He longs for us to grow more and more into a holy lifestyle. One of the expressions of the Presence of the Spirit is described as the *“fruit of the Spirit”* within us (*“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,”* Gal. 5:22-23).

One of the ways that non-believers described the New Testament believers is that they evidenced a power greater than them, at work within. People couldn't explain it, but they did see something that was unexplainable, and they saw it flowed from believers. As Jesus said at His birth, when He came it was to bring God to be with us, and it is by the Spirit flowing out of us like a mighty river that God chose as the vehicle.

Sanctification Displays God's Presence

The Holy Spirit is 100% Co-equal and Co-Eternal with God so He manifests all the attributes of God. The purpose of God's Spirit is to radiate through us God's Presence. Just like a phone receives and transmits the wireless signal, so we as believers can broadcast the Presence of God into each situation where the Spirit of God wants to make Him known. There are many ways God's Word describes this happening by the Spirit:

- Sometimes the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of conviction, and people feel the weight of their sin (John 16:8-11).
- Other times the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of love, and people feel God's loves poured out upon their hearts (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Col. 1:8).
- Sometimes the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of joy that can be felt: *“The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom. 14:17; cf. Gal. 5:22).

Each time the Holy Spirit works He is making His Presence known by displaying His

character through us as believers.

Sanctification: Gives Us Assurance

God's Word describes one of the chief benefits of the Spirit is assuring us, as He bears witness "with our spirits that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit gives evidence that God is at work within us: "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 John 3:24).

Not only does the Spirit testify that we have become the children of God, He also lets us know God is in us. This assurance transcends merely having intellectual perception, because when God overflows into our hearts we can perceive Him subjectively with the emotions of joy and peace also.⁹

On the other hand, in the life of Christians whose conduct is pleasing to God, the Holy Spirit will be present to bring great blessing. We can know close fellowship and partnership with the Holy Spirit in our lives (2 Cor. 3:14; Phil. 2:1). In fact, so full and abundant will be his presence that Jesus could promise that he will flow out of our inmost being like "rivers of living water" (John 7:38-39).

Therefore it is important that all our ministry be done in the Holy Spirit, that is, that we consciously dwell in the Godlike atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit—the atmosphere of power, love, joy, truth, holiness, righteousness, and peace. But greater than these characteristics of the atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit is the sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit himself—to be in the Holy Spirit is really to be in an atmosphere of God's manifested presence. This is why people in the New Testament can walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31), and why it is possible just to be "in the Spirit" as John was on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10; cf. 4:2).

It is surprising how many particular activities are said in the New Testament to be done "in" the Holy Spirit: it is possible to rejoice in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21), to resolve or decide something in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:21), to have one's conscience bear witness in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1), to have access to God in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18), to pray in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20), and to love in the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:8). In the light of these texts, we might ask ourselves, for how many of these activities during each day are we consciously aware of the Holy Spirit's presence and blessing?

It is also possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; cf. Luke 1:15, 41, 67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9). To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the immediate presence of God himself, and it therefore will result in feeling what God feels, desiring what God desires, doing what God wants, speaking by God's power, praying and ministering in God's strength, and knowing with the knowledge which God himself gives. In times when the church experiences revival the Holy Spirit produces these results in people's lives

⁹ Excerpts from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, p. 644.

in especially powerful ways.

Therefore in our Christian lives it is important that we depend on the Holy Spirit's power, recognizing that any significant work is done "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). Paul is emphatic in telling the Galatians that the Holy Spirit was received by faith in the beginning of their Christian life (Gal. 3:2) and would continue to work according to their faith in their lives subsequent to conversion: "Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?...Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal. 3:3, 5).

Therefore we are to walk according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:12-16; Gal. 5:16-26) and set our minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-6). All our ministry, whatever form it may take, is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Christ's Chastening & Comforting Work in His Church By His Strong Feet and Loud Voice

Revelation 1:15

When¹¹ John saw Jesus that Sunday morning on Patmos, he collapsed and was like a dead man. It wasn't that he was old and weak, or overcome by emotion: John had seen that look in Christ's eyes before, and when he realized what Jesus was communicating, it overwhelmed him. John saw Almighty God the Son, Jesus Christ who was displeased with His Church.

Did you know that in less than 60 years, the original edition of Christ's Church had gotten to the point where 70% of the local assemblies were displeasing to God? That's right 5 out of the 7 churches that Jesus had visited were reprimanded and warned. Christ's expressed in 5 out of 7 letters His displeasure about the way that were living out God's plan for their

¹⁰ Excerpts from [Systematic Theology](#) by Wayne Grudem, p. 648-649 [670 words].

¹¹ 110313AM CLW-04 Feet Voice.do

lives.

Jesus had done an onsite examination, and now He was asking John to write the report and send it back to each of those churches. The report was not good, but the situation was not hopeless. In each instance all that was needed was a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. That is what Jesus asked for: repentance!

This message of Jesus we are looking at in Revelation is vital for each of us this morning. As we open to Revelation 1 we are seeing a divinely given portrait of the real Jesus visiting the “purchased with His own blood” congregations of the redeemed.

What we get in this chapter is a portrait that is three-fold. It is Divine, its is corrective, and it is very sobering.

The Divine, Corrective, and Sobering Portrait of the Real Jesus

The description of Jesus in Revelation 1:9-20 is unlike any other single passage in all of God's Word. In these verses we see Jesus as He is right now, and what we see isn't what we usually think of Him. That's why we need this portrait.

1. First, it is a **Divine Portrait**. This is the way God wants every person in Christ's Church to look on the Jesus we know and love. God sent this vision of Jesus to John for the believers of all the ages onward. So, this isn't John's opinion, it is exactly what God sent. Revelation 1 is a Divine Portrait of Jesus Christ as God wants us to see Him today! Yes, He is the compassionate, loving gentle Jesus with children on His lap, that we see in the Gospels. Yes He is also the fiery preacher with zero tolerance for unrepentant sin, warning of hellfire and endless doom who takes on the hypocrites mercilessly. Both are the real Jesus and God sent a Divine Portrait so we NEVER forget that.
2. Secondly, it is a **Corrective Portrait**. The churches by the end of the First Century had grown lax in those decades following Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. They had slowly moved away from the writings of the Epistles of James, Peter, Paul, and John that emphasized holy living, consecrated lives, and Spirit prompted walks. Believers seemed to be abandoning lifestyles that reflected Christ's ownership of them as His servants individually, and collectively as Christ's purchased Church. So Revelation 1 is a Corrective Portrait of Jesus that many early believers needed to get them back focused on Christ's desires for them in daily life.
3. Finally, it is a **Sobering Portrait**. Nowhere is the intolerance of sin that Jesus has for His Church more clearly seen than in this chapter. As Hebrews says, the way you know that you are a real son is if you get spanked by your father. Jesus says I have found disobedience in My Church and I am not stopping until it gets rooted out. Sometimes we are so amazed by His grace, that so freely offers us redemption and forgiveness—that we neglect His holiness that demands purity, obedience, and submission to His

will as Lord and Master.

The Divine, Corrective, and Sobering message God is sending for us to heed is, that:

Jesus Wants His New Temple, the Church To Be Pure and Holy

When Jesus started His ministry the Temple of God was a building, but as He began to teach He spoke of a temple not made with human hands. He taught about a time when the worship of God would not be confined to a building, but would become spiritual worship that was based on truth.

Then He sent His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to live within each of His children, baptizing them spiritually the instant of their salvation, into His Church.

They were taught that God expected them to gather regularly for worship and instruction as local assembled bodies of Christ where the Holy Word of God, the Scriptures would be read and explained.

Then His apostles recorded God's final words for mankind, as the New Testament was written down and completed.

As we read what Paul (I Corinthians 6:19-20), and Peter (I Peter 2:4-10) wrote, we find that we have become the new temples of God. Each individual believer is the dwelling place of God. We are the holy temple of the Holy God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

With that idea that we are the actual temples of God, a couple of scenes from the Gospels may help us understand this Revelation¹ portrait of Christ that almost seems puzzling to us. The two accounts we need to remember are what we call the two times we see Jesus cleansing of the Temple.

Please open there with me in your Bibles to John 2:13-22 this was how Jesus opened His ministry.

John 2:13-22 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Now in Matthew 21:12-13 look at a scene from about Tuesday in Christ's last week, just

before He went to the Cross on Friday (also captured in Mark 11:15-19; and in Luke 19:45-46).

Matthew 21:12-13 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' (Mark adds "for all nations") but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

What lessons can we learn from that scene from the opening and the closing of Christ's ministry? Jesus was very serious about worship. Worship was centered around the Temple.

Our Worship is Watched Closely by God

The Temple had to be kept clean, completely focused upon God's Word, with no worldly trappings of greed, materialism, or any other defiling sins.

That was the only way that the Temple of Jerusalem could perform the plan that God had for it to be a place for all the world (the "all nations" Mark captures in Christ's quote of Isaiah 56:7) to come face-to-face with the True and Living God. Here's the catch:

Our Bodies are Now His Living Temples

Remember what happened on this side of the Cross? We each as individual believers are now the living temples of the Living God, and even more, when we gather, Peter said that we are like living stones and we form an even greater form of that Temple of God as Christ's gathered Church. Turn onward to I Corinthians 6:19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Now even further back to I Peter 2:4-5, 9-12:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Jesus Wants His Church As a Pure & Consecrated Temple

Jesus has always had one desire for us His Church. Paul said it so clearly in Ephesians 5,

Christ wants to present us to His Father as a Holy Church, not have any spot or wrinkle, but as a chaste and pure Bride.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The One who gave Himself for us, washes us, and wants to loose us from all the chains of sin that so easily enslave us, is also our bridegroom who jealously (James 4:4-8; II Corinthians 11:2-4) longs for our purity for Him. James was the first writing pastor inspired to record God's Word, his message sounds so much like what Jesus was looking for:

James 4:4-8 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 11:2-4 with a picture we can all understand, the jealousy that a bridegroom has for his bride is what Christ has for each of us:

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

The first command that Christ gave to His Church was during His ministry in the Gospel by Matthew in chapter 18. That command was that His Church be kept pure. The sight Jesus reveals to us of Himself in this present age is what is captured in Revelation 1, and it is the same scene we saw from His earthly ministry.

With the picture of Jesus walking into the Jerusalem Temple and with a whip driving out anything that was not in keeping with God's holiness, think of the verses before us. On His walk through of the new temple of God in His Church Jesus found that believers had dragged into their lives and thus into His Temple, all sorts of bad stuff.

Christ's Report After Examining His Church

The saints in Ephesus had allowed other things in life to rob Jesus of first place in their hearts, in their schedules, in their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supree love of their lives.

The Pergamites had gotten comfortable with the world, and had blended right into the

activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world around them and were no longer distinctive.

The Thyatirans were tolerating sin, and allowed false doctrines to permeate Christ's Church. The Sardians were dead, they no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

And finally, the Laodiceans were so bad, so distracted by their materialistic pursuits of pleasure, had become so un-needing of Christ—that Jesus wanted to spit them out of His mouth, like a sickening taste, or a spoiled piece of food that could only be vomited out was where that church had come.

Now, as we open again to Revelation 1, and read this vivid, eye-witness description of Christ, isn't it clearer why Jesus has those flaming eyes, and those feet of brass, and sword coming out of His mouth?

Jesus is walking through His new temple made up of the bodies of all those redeemed saints He has bought with His own blood; and the new temple has gotten almost as bad as the old one. Jesus is headed to cleanse the temple of His Church in chapters 2-3, and we see how He looks as He is on the way to do so in these verses in chapter 1.

Seeing Christ Cleaning Out His Early Church

Stand with me, and as I read, notice the very precise specifics of what John saw about Jesus as He examines His church and finds 5 out of the 7 to be facing His great displeasure.

Revelation 1:9-20 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lamp stands: One like the Son of Man; clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven

churches, and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches.

For a moment watch those elements of Christ seen by John, spoken of by Jesus as He visits those seven churches.

What Does Jesus Expect From His Church

Today if I could ask each of you to hold onto just one concept from this entire message it would be this question:

Are you doing what God designed you to do?

You were made to be His temple priest, His bride, and His body.

Are you functioning as a healthy member of Christ's church this morning?

Remember that there are no less than twelve metaphors in God's Word for the Church¹². Each metaphor is a powerful way for us to see how God looks upon us who are Christ's church.

God uses these metaphors to help us understand our responsibilities as believers. He wants us to apply each of the truths revealed by these descriptions of the church into our daily lives. We often need to be reminded that as members of Christ's church:

We are His TEMPLE and Priests:

Knowing that God looks on Christ's church as God's new temple and priests—should increase our awareness of God's very presence dwelling in our midst as we meet; and see more clearly the delight God has in the sacrifices of praise and good deeds that we offer to Him.

I Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I am Christ's Temple. I should want to grow in my awareness of living in His Holy Presence. That is what happens as we read His Word if we bow first in adoration and whisper a prayer of seeking Him.

Have you personally sought your God, this week, in His Word?

Hebrews 13:15-16 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

I am part of Christ's Priesthood. I should want to delight in offering the sacrifices He desires. Have you thanked God for eyes to see with, ears to hear with, feet that walk, a mind that still functions? Offer Him the sacrifice of thanks for sins forever gone, of hope that it endless, of joy that never runs out. And then pick someone to “do good and to share” with.

We all need to be each doing a “good deed” for others each week. And then, each day,

¹² Adapted from Wayne Grudem; Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 858.

and then all day long.

We are His BODY:

Knowing that God looks on Christ's church as the body of Christ—*should increase our interdependence on one another and our appreciation of the diversity of gifts within the body.*

*I Corinthians 12:27 Now **you are the body of Christ**, and members individually.*

I am Christ's Body. I should want my body to do what His did. Jesus went around doing good. He had compassion for the confused, He helped the poor, healed the sick, loved the outcasts, and comforted the lonely. God has no Hands but yours. God wants us as a fully functioning part of His Body.

We are His BRIDE:

Knowing that God looks on Christ's church as the bride of Christ—*should stimulate us to personally strive for greater purity, deeper love for Christ, and swifter fuller obedience to Him.*

*II Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have **betrothed you to one husband**, that I may present you as **a chaste virgin** to Christ.*

I am Christ's Bride. I should want to strive to stay pure for Him. When I watch TV I am seeking His approval. When I dress it is for His adoring gaze. I think of Him as my beloved.

Jesus is Walking Around Today.

He is doing an onsite examination of us as His Church.

God wants us devoted to be being Christ's Bride. What happens when He finds that we aren't doing what He called us to do?

Next time we'll see the chastening work Christ is doing even today in His Church!

When Jesus Visits His Church and Finds Unrepentant Sins

Christ's Piercing Eyes and Chastening Feet
Revelation 1:14-15

John¹³ is flattened on Patmos when he sees Jesus. Those flaming eyes seemed so much like the ones John had seen when Jesus cleansed the Temple of Jerusalem. But this time its not the Temple of Jerusalem, Jesus is headed towards the local churches that make up His Body, His visible presence on Earth.

Jesus with piercing eyes of holiness and glowing feet of chastisement is headed to stomp out the sin that is dimisnishing His power in His Church.

John is staggered, the churches that received the letter Jesus sent them through John, were put on notice, and Church History records the results. Those churches that did not repent have gone extinct, Jesus removed their lamp from the stand, and He had to find others who would stay useful in His sight.

Why are we given such a seemingly negative message from the Lord, through John in Revelation 1-3? Why would Jesus discourage His Church just as they were entering the hardest time in their existence?

Because the Church is strongest when it is purest. Maybe also because most of the church through the ages needs a reminder about:

What Jesus Does When His Church Neglects It's Calling

As the Great Physician Jesus won't stand by and let us destroy our usefulness for Him. He has promised He will intervene if we persist in allowing sin to infect our lives. Sin growing unchecked in the lives of believers is deadly, destructive, and never tolerated for long by our Lord. Since we are called the Body of Jesus, sin is a deadly pathogen to the health of His Body.

Listen to this description that a Christian physician wrote that powerfully portrays our life as a part of Christ's body. His premise is that we must guard from allowing sin to multiply in our lives and destroy our fruitfulness and health as a church. Since the Scriptures often

¹³ 110320AM CLW-05 Physician.do

describe us as the Body of Christ, sin in Christ's Body is like cancer in our human bodies.

Sometimes a dreaded thing occurs in the body—mutiny, resulting in a tumor.

A tumor is called benign if its effect is fairly localized and it stays within membrane boundaries. But the most traumatizing condition in the body occurs when cancer cells defy inhibition. They multiply without any checks on growth, spreading a rapidly throughout the body, choking out normal cells.

White cells, armed against foreign invaders, will not attack the body's own mutinous cancer cells. Physicians fear no other malfunction more deeply than cancer. For still mysterious reasons, these cells—and they may be cells from the brain, liver, kidney, bone, blood, skin, or other tissues—grow wild, out of control. Each is a healthy, functioning cell, but disloyal, no longer acting in regard the rest of the body.

Even the white cells, the dependable palace guard, can destroy the body through rebellion. Sometimes they recklessly reproduce, clogging the bloodstream, overloading the lymph system, strangling the body's normal functions—such is leukemia.

In His warnings to the church, Jesus Christ showed no concern about the shocks and bruises His Body would meet from external forces. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church," He said flatly (Matthew 16:18). He moved easily, unthreatened, among sinners and criminals. But He cried out against the kind of danger that comes from within. Few doctrines are more important than the Church.

Because of the constant attack, we need to be good students of the subject. Because disease can diminish the effectiveness of the Body, we must maintain habits of health. Furthermore, a regular checkup by the Great Physician is a must. Not once a year but at least, once a week. And be prepared for the cost of that visit¹⁴.

Now with Bibles open to the record of the Great Physician visiting His Church in Revelation 1, look at Jesus described as He heads in to the ER. Emergency Treatment to restore health to five of His seven churches is imperative. As we open to Rev. 1:14, join me:

Seeing the Great Physician Looking for Cancer in His Church

Jesus is completely focused upon His task when John sees and describes Him. Stand with me, and as I read, notice the what John saw about Jesus.

Revelation 1:14-20 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The

¹⁴ Adapted and quoted from Brand and Yancey, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches.

Jesus stops to tell John what He found in each of the local churches. That is the message of the seven letters in chapters 2-3. We are allowed to read:

Christ's Diagnostic Report After Examining His Church

In chapters 2 and 3 Jesus isolates the areas that He had already seen in Revelation 1, that were under attack by the cancer of sin. Jesus sends back a medical treatment report that recommends the radiation of hearing His Voice in the Word and the surgery of personal repentance to get rid of the dangerous cancer of sin.

One by one, for each of the affected churches, Jesus lists the target that needs to be dealt with in each of those local churches.

If you look at the seven letters Christ wrote in Revelation 2-3 as if they were medical reports, here is how you would read about the five sick churches:

First, Christians Can Have Serious Spiritual Heart Problems

The saints in Ephesus had a serious heart conditions—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV) "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you**, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—**unless you repent**. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

Their hearts had experienced a gradual buildup of other things so that no longer was Jesus holding the position of first place in their hearts, in their schedules, in their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their hearts.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of consuming, digesting, and building up things that slowly constrict the flow of Christ flowing freely through your heart and

life.

Then we see Christ finds no dangerous sin spreading in persecuted Smyrna.

*Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 **Do not fear** any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.””*

Second, Christians Can Have Spiritual Immunity Problems

The saints in Pergamos had immunity problems—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 **But I have a few things against you**, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 **Repent, or else** I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.””*

They had gotten so comfortable being exposed to the deadly germs of worldliness that they had themselves come down with a bad cold. They seemed to now have the symptoms of friendship with the world, and had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike. *Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of friendship with the world and draw near to God.*

Third, Christians Can Have Spiritual Infection Problems

The saints in Thyatira had a serious infection sweeping their body—listen to what Christ said:

Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 “I know your

*works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. **And I will give to each one of you according to your works.** 24 “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘ He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

They were tolerating sinful teachers and teachings, and had allowed the infectious disease of false doctrines to permeate Christ's Body the Church. *Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of false teachers and their false teachings and start listening to Him instead.*

Fourth, Christians Can Become Spiritually Cardiac Arrested

The saints in Sardis were in full cardiac arrest—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “**I know your works**, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

They appeared dead at the moment, and no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of just going through the motions of acting like Christians and get His power at work within them. Then we see Christ finds no dangerous sin spreading in witnessing Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things

says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: 8 **“I know your works.** See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 **Because you have kept My command to persevere,** I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Finally, Christians Can Become Spiritually Blinded

The saints in Laodicea had materialism-induced blindness—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 **“I know your works,** that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 **Because you say,** ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 **I counsel you to buy from Me** gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””*

They had neglected for so long what they needed for their spiritual souls, because they were so distracted by their materialistic pursuits of pleasure, and had become so un-needing of Christ—that Jesus said they were blind, miserable and putrid. Jesus wanted to spit them out of His mouth, like a sickening taste, or a spoiled piece of food that could only be vomited out was where that church had come.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of their apathy for Him and start sacrificially giving whatever time it took to get their eyesight restored.

Visiting the Great Physician Today

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday when He visited the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-

3, today as He visits us, and forever.

He still longs for our submission and participation in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, using His Word in our lives. Why not pause and in your hearts look up into the loving but very firm eyes of our Savior, Redeemer, and Physician—and ponder His questions for them, and see how they apply to each of us.

Today, what are Christ's eyes seeing here in our midst today?

1. Do we need to repent of letting Jesus get crowded out of first place in our time and treasures like those in Ephesus?
2. Do we need to repent of getting on friendship terms with the world that God hates like those in Pergamos?
3. Is there false teaching and teachers we are tolerating that God's Word had already said are WRONG and we need to repent of our listening to and tolerating like those in Thyatira?
4. Are we just going through the motions of church, devotions, and ministry? Do we need to repent of powerless prayers and ministry like those in Sardis?
5. Do we need to repent of any apathy in our sacrificial seeking and serving of Christ like those in Laodicea?

Jesus is here and He is waiting for each of our responses today!

APPENDIX:

God Has Three Chastening Stages

Hebrews 12 has one of the clearest explanations of the methodology God uses in chastening. Note with me His three levels of dealing with us to encourage and produce repentance in us.

Open there with me to just introduce the theology of chastening that God's Word teaches us.

Hebrews 12:1-11 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*“ My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Chastening Proves Sonship

What exactly does the surgery and radiation treatments on the cells that make up the Body of Christ actually look like from a Biblical perspective? Does God ever give us an insight into how He does this type of work?

Stage 1: Rebuke – “My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him” (v.5). We hear God’s rebuke, even though we don’t always choose to respond. God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God’s Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)

Stage 2: Chasten – “For whom the Lord loves He chastens” (v. 5). In other places in the Bible, the word chastening is used interchangeably with discipline. But in our text we find a specific use that shows a more serious degree of discipline. Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn’t. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and “on the outs” with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can’t quite trace. If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don’t need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God’s best. If you don’t respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.

Stage 3: Scourge- “And scourges every son whom He receives” (v. 6). To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It’s the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture! In fact, for the word scourge you could substitute cause-excruciating pain. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges “every son.” That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.

Why Jesus Chastens His Church: He Wants us Fruitful & Pleasing God

Revelation 2-3

Most¹⁵ of us here today hold the most powerful device in the world; it is more jam packed with unbelievable features than the one-day-coming iPhone X+. It has the most ultimate guidance, communication, and efficiency apps ever possible to obtain, and it is called God's Word. God speaks through His Word, and we have His Voice on paper before each of us today.

As we open to Revelation we open to *the longest book* written specifically for Christ's Church, containing 22 chapters, and 404 verses: all with the unique target of being given by God to show Jesus Christ to the Church.

Three Amazing Facts

As we open to Revelation it is ***the only book personally addressed by Christ*** to His Church, all the Old Testamenters were written by Apostles, though inspired, not personally addressed by Christ.

As we open to Revelation it is ***the only book with a description*** of what Jesus Christ looks like right now (Isaiah 52:10-53:6 is at the Cross) in all of God's Word, that is surrounded by the largest concentration of titles, attributes, and the current activities that make up what Christ is living for (Hebrews 7:24-25) at this very moment.

As we open to Revelation it is ***the book that mentions the Church more*** than 63 of the 66 books of the Bible. In fact only 1st Corinthians (23x) and Acts (22x) mention the Church more than the 20x this book does. However, this book does hold the record for the most times that the Church is mentioned: this book that has Christ's Church mentioned 15x in just 2 of the 22 chapters.

The Final Word To Christ's Church

As we open to Revelation it is ***the only book that captures Christ's final message*** to His Church, last words are always to be help onto, treasured, and remembered.

As we open to Revelation it is ***the only book that comes with God's special promised***

¹⁵ 110327AM CLW-06 Chasten.doc

blessing to everyone who read or listens to the message and then “keep” that message.

The first word, of the last book in our Bible, is the word Revelation, which means to uncover and display, and, to reveal and show.

The next two words of the book are Jesus Christ. So this entire 22 chapter book is to display for us who are the servants of God, the Real Jesus Christ, as He is this moment is His Risen and Glorified state.

The target of the message of the first three chapters is in the word that is used more than any other major word in these chapters. It is the word: **church**.

Seven Lessons from Chapter One

A quick overview of Revelation 1 gives us some truths that we need to be reminded of. That is why God sent this picture of Christ to His Church. We so soon forget, so we need reminders like the ones that come in this book.

Christ is Revealed for His Church:

v. 1 The whole book of Revelation was sent to remind us about a way we need to understand Christ's present work, since He is risen and glorified. So this is how we are to understand Christ, understand His desires for us, and relate to what our Lord Jesus Christ desires to do in and through us today.

1. We are the bond-slaves of God:

v. 1 The whole book was written for God's servants [Greek *douloi*] and that word translated “servants” is the most enduring description of believers (the word “slave” is used to describe God’s children from the Old Testament to the New Testament; 127 x in all, and 15x just in Revelation). So that is how we are to see ourselves today, as slaves of God: no identity outside of our Master, no plans other than His, no possessions of our own—everything we have, including ourself, belongs to our Master.

Believers in the Church are God’s slaves: v. 4 God tells John that the way to reach His servants is to send this written letter to Christ's Church so that His servants who are in the Church will get the message. So servants are believers and believers are in the church so the Church is made up of God’s servants.

2. Responding to God brings blessing:

v. 3 There is an unusual blessing attached to those who read/listen to this message and DO or keep what God's Word says to His servants. So that is what we want to do each time we hear God’s Voice through His Word—listen and carefully guard what He asks us to do. The

word *tereo* (Strong's # 5083) translated as "**keep**" is most often used for guarding, keeping safely, watching out for. This is the word used for putting Paul (Acts 24-25) and the Apostles (Acts 4) into jail by the authorities to hold on to them and not let them slip away.

This word is a huge word in the NT to describe how believers watch over their choices to be sure they are focused upon what pleases God in their lives. This word was chosen by the Holy Spirit :

For the Great Commission of Matthew 28:20 "teaching them to **observe** all things which I have commanded you"

For Christ to describe how we are to keep His commands John 15:10 If you **keep** My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

For Paul to describe how we are all to guard the unity of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3 endeavoring to **keep** the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

For Paul to describe how he kept the Faith II Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

For Peter to assure us that our reservations in Heaven are sure I Peter 1:4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved** in heaven for you,

For Jude to remind us of our responsibility to keep ourselves in the Love of God Jude 1:21 (also v. 4) **keep** yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

For Christ to tell His Church they are to keep His words and repent of not keeping them in Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast** and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

3. Sunday is the Lord's Day:

v. 10 The servants of God who gather in His Church gather on the Lord's Day, or Sunday, when Christ rose from the dead: to remember His resurrection. Every day was the Lord's but Sundays were especially His, so they called it the Lord's DAY. So that is what should mark this day no matter what else we do: we worship the One who arose on the 1st day of the week because He died to purchase me out of the slave market of sin. Every Sunday I renew His ownership of my body and soul as I gather with all the others that He also purchased. Do I seek to magnify Him as His temple that when gather, we collectively become (I Peter 2)?

4. Revelation was for the Local Church:

v. 11 By using specific, local, geographic descriptions the emphasis is upon identifiable groups of believers that would actually receive and hear this letter read. This message is for

the local, visible church specifically. God wanted all of the members then and now in Christ's church, to hear this message. So I always want to be identified with a visible, local group of believers that are attentive and obedient to the Word from God in the Bible. Do I hear and respond to Christ's desires for me as a member of His Body?

5. Christ's attention is upon His Church:

v. 12 Jesus is shown to be at the center of the church. Jesus is seen completely focused upon His church, He is in the midst looking over His body of believers upon Earth. So I measure my life by how much of my life is tied to what is Christ's priority. Do I share His focus upon believers being encouraged, trained, strengthened and challenged?

6. Christ's priority is maintaining the health of His Church:

v. 13 The description of Christ emphasizes His work within His Church as He identifies and deals with anything that would hinder the message, fruitfulness, or effectiveness of His Church. Do I seek to get rid of anything in my life that displeases Him, and give up anything that hinders me from even more responding to His desires?

The Lord goes to each church with words of comfort and hope (to him that overcomes...) John has already described what that is. Overcomers are resisting the world, denying the flesh, and responding to the desires of the Lord for their lives.

7. True Believers Are Overcomers

To each church of the seven in chapters 2 and 3 Jesus says the ones who hear, who are really His are "overcomers". This expression comes from one of John's earlier books, the Epistle of First John. The summary of both places teaches us that genuine believers never stop believing, and have the power and grace of God in their lives.

Look at those overcomer passages:

1. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE ABUNDANT LIFE Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (NKJV)
2. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE AN INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE Revelation 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (NKJV)
3. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE AN INEXHAUSTIBLE SUPPLY Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows

except him who receives it.” (NKJV)

4. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE AN INEXPRESSIBLE FUTURE Revelation 2:26-29 *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘ He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NKJV)*
5. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE INCREDIBLE COVERAGE Revelation 3:5-6 *5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NKJV)* WE have Christ as our garment, Advocate and our relative:
6. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE AN INESCAPABLE DESTINATION Revelation 3:12-13 *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NKJV)*
7. AS TRUE BELIEVERS WE HAVE INTIMACY WITH GOD Revelation 3:21 *21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NKJV)*

Chastening Keeps Overcomers Spiritually Healthy

The Lord also goes to each church with words of challenge and chastening (repent or else). There is a focused desire the Lord has for us that we stay on track and live out what He designed us to do and to be.

This final word for Christ to His Church is so consistent with the constant message His apostles had already taught and written about in all the others books on the New Testament.

1. **As Overcomers we are:** CONSECRATED—ALL NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS ARE CONSECRATED TO THE LORD LIKE SAMSON WAS. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that **your body is the temple** (the Spirit is so specific, we are not the *hieron* ‘the whole temple building’ but *naos* the Holy of Holies) **of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.*
2. **As Overcomers we are:** ANSWERABLE—WE WILL ANSWER TO GOD FOR WHAT WE DID WITH OUR BODY. 1 Corinthians 9:27 *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should **become disqualified**.*
3. **As Overcomers we are:** WARNED about maintaining Holiness—GOD WILL NOT STAND BY AS WE PERSIST IN UNREPENTANT SIN. 1 Corinthians 11:30-31 *For this reason **many are weak and sick among***

you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

4. **As Overcomers we are: LOVED—CHASTENING PROVES GOD’S LOVE.** Hebrews 12:5-8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 **For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.**” 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, **then you are illegitimate and not sons.**
5. **As Overcomers we are: CONFRONTED—GOING TOO FAR TOO OFTEN WITH SIN WILL BE DEADLY FOR BELIEVERS.** 1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. **There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.** 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.
6. **As Overcomers we are: JUDGED—GOD KILLS BELIEVERS WHO WON’T REPENT IN THE SPACE HE GIVES THEM.** Revelation 2:22-23 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, **unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death,** and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

That is why this entire opening to Revelation is all about Christ desiring His Church to pay attention to our relationship with Him. We are to always be responding to His plans that we be walking in the Spirit and staying close to Him. Which is why He reveals to us:

God Only Chastens His Own Children

Hebrews 12 has one of the clearest explanations of the methodology God uses in chastening. Note with me His three levels of dealing with us to encourage and produce repentance in us.

Open there with me to just introduce the theology of chastening that God’s Word teaches us.

Hebrews 12:1-11 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,** and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, **lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.** ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*“ My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ **But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.** ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. **Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?** ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This passage reveals that:

God's Chastening Has Three Levels

What exactly does the surgery and radiation treatments on the cells that make up the Body of Christ actually look like from a Biblical perspective? Does God ever give us an insight into how He does this type of work?

Stage 1: Rebuke – “**My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him**” (v.5). We hear God's rebuke, even though we don't always choose to respond.

God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God's Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)

What do His rebukes for? To remind us we are slaves of God: no identity outside of our Master, no plans other than His, no possessions of our own—everything we have, including ourself, belongs to our Master.

To remind us we are to read/listen to God and keep what His Word says to His servants.

Stage 2: Chasten – “**For whom the Lord loves He chastens**” (v. 5). In other places in the Bible, the word **chastening** is used interchangeably with discipline. But in our text we find a specific use that shows a more serious degree of discipline.

Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn't. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and “on the outs” with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can't quite trace.

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don't need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God's best. If you don't respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.

Stage 3: Scourge- “**And scourges every son whom He receives**” (v. 6). To scourge is to whip, to inflict

punishment. It's the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture!

In fact, for the word **scourge** you could substitute **cause-excruciating pain**. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges "every son." That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.

- Today, are you seeking to magnify Him as His temple that when gather, we collectively become (1 Peter 2)?
- Today, are you measuring how much of my life is tied to what is Christ's priority. Do I share His focus upon believers being encouraged, trained, strengthened and challenged?
- Today, are you getting rid of anything in your life that displeases Him, and giving up anything that hinders you from even more responding to His desires?

Jesus desires us to please Him today!

Jesus is ALWAYS Encouraging The Fruitfulness of His Church: Is my life Fruitful & Pleasing to God?

Revelation 2-3

Have¹⁶ you ever noticed that when ever Jesus described us as His children in the Gospels, somewhere nearby He spoke of fruitfulness?

As we open to the Matthew 13 Parable of the Soils He said His born-again believers bear three levels of fruit: some 30, some 60, and others 100-fold. Look at v.8 and then at v. 23.

In the John 15 Vine and the Branches discourse He said that He is vitally interested in us bearing "more" fruit. In fact John 15 states more clearly than anywhere else in the Gospels

¹⁶ 110501AM CLW-07 Fruitfulness.do

what Christ's constant desire is for us as His children: glorifying God equals fruitful lives.

In a little bit we will be returning to Christ's Last Words to His Church in Revelation 1-3, and we'll see also that our fruitfulness is what dominates all the three chapters He wrote to us.

This morning, Jesus is here with His Church seeking that we offer more and more of the soil of our lives to come under His cultivation. He desires even more than we ever could, that our lives bear the crop of fruit that pleases God.

To be fruitfully bringing glory to God from our lives we need to be healthy.

How Healthy Do YOU want to Be?

The question that should consume our attention is: am I allowing the Lord access to prepare every part of my life to be productive for His purposes? Here are some foundational truths about our fruitfulness.

God is vitally concerned about YOUR DIET.

Jesus said don't just eat good food "bread alone" but He said be sure that you get fed by "every Word of God" as we see in Matthew 4:4.

Matthew 4:4 (NKJV) But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Be sure that verse marked some way in your Bible, it is a key to being fruitful for the Lord. The Bible keeps us from sin, and sin keeps us from the Bible. God wants our souls fed regularly on the healthy nourishment of His Word.

One of the clearest indicators of our health is found in where prayer and the Word show up in our daily schedule. Are they guarded, longed for, much needed and anticipated? Or are they neglected, forgotten, overlooked, and dreaded? You can tell how much you glorify God, and how spiritually healthy you are by the daily feeding your soul gets from Scriptures read, studied, and meditated upon; and from the prayers that flow from those truths.

Today as we head to the communion Table, are you going there with a heart saying to God: I will meet with you, and eat with you, and let you strengthen me on the inside. Why not renew that desire to stay faithful in His Word, before the Lord right now?

God is also so very concerned about YOUR EXERCISE.

He wants us to not merely listen to His Word proclaimed, but to become "doers" of

what He says (James 1:21-27).

James 1:21-27 (NKJV) Therefore **lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls. 22 **But be doers of the word, and not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 **Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

We aren't to live in a simulator, seeing imaginary images of what it may look like to do something. We are to be actually "exercising ourselves" in godly behavior (I Timothy 4:7). That is why nurturing discipleship is so vital (Titus 2).

The Great Commission states that each believer needs to be taught to "observe all things" commanded by Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). We all need a trainer who comes alongside and shows us how to work out in spiritual exercise in better and better ways.

God also is critically concerned about YOUR WEIGHT.

Then we are to also regularly examining our lifestyles and see if there are any sins that keep tripping us up (easily beset us) and when we identify those, we are to "lay" them aside (or literally) "strip" them off (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Just like a coat that catch fire can't be left on, or a blanket we pick up and wrap around us that is infested with spiders, ants, or wasps would be ditched as fast as we possibly could—so sin that separates us from being pleasing to God **MUST** be ditched, stripped off, and abandoned. We are to be constantly abstaining from any type of evil (I Th. 5:22).

So why not:

Start a Regular Three Part Workout

In summary, there are three areas of our spiritual lives we are to watch, so that we stay

healthy, and thus fruitful, and thus pleasing to God:

- **God is vitally concerned about your diet.** Get in the Word daily.
- **God is also so very concerned about your exercise.** Obey what God says.
- **God also is critically concerned about your weight.** Strip off anything that hinders.

By the way, if you want to tune up those skills, we are going to be doing a Word Clinic during the month of May on Wednesday nights. I will be covering the keys to unlocking life-long devotional truths from the Word by explaining the 12x12 methods each Wednesday night in May.

If you are serious about going to the next level, or jump starting your time with God plan to join us. All you need is your Bible, a pen, a notebook, and a willing heart.

Now to see how Jesus Himself applies these truths to churches just like ours, turn back with me to Revelation 2-3.

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus lists the areas that were keeping those believers and their local churches from being fruitful for Him in their daily lives. Remember that by the time Jesus was writing to these churches they had already heard the messages of the Apostles, they had Paul's Epistles, they had the Gospels, and of course Christ's Bible, the Old Testament.

The clear message Christ gives is that: each believer is responsible to obey God's Word

In other words, they had just about as much exposure to God's Word as we do, plus the fact that many of them had met and known the Apostles. So Jesus writes these seven letters in Revelation 2-3 holding the churches responsible to live what He had sent them in His Word.

We can say that these two chapters contain Christ's expectations for them, and for us.

So as we open to Rev. 2:1, we see Christ's first expectation of them and us is:

To Please God and be Fruitful:

(1) Love Jesus Most

The saints in Ephesus were not being obedient to the central truth of the Scriptures Old and New Testament: Love the Lord Your God MOST. That is what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV) "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Their lives were clogged with so many other things , so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives.

They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through Paul, Timothy, and John’s ministry of the Word to them?

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 22:37 (NKJV) Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

Jesus said: stop everything else from pushing me out, go back to your original settings. Love the Lord Your God with all you are.

We’ll skip over persecuted Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11 because Jesus finds no fault with them: they are fruitful and pleasing Him as they struggle along in their great persecutions.

Starting in Rev. 2:12 we find Christ’s second expectation of His Church:

To Please God and be Fruitful: (2) Separate From Sin

The saints in Pergamos were not being obedient to what had been taught them from God’s Word by their faithful pastors over the years —listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 **“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 **But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 **Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”*******

They had gotten so comfortable being exposed to the deadly germs of worldliness that they had themselves come down with a bad cold. They seemed to now have the symptoms of friendship with the world, and had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike.

They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them,

thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (NKJV) Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **"I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."** 17 Therefore **"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."** 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of friendship with the world and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Today, Jesus invites us to sit across the Communion Table from Him, and as we do so: to EXAMINE ourselves in these areas.

These are Christ's expectations of us, if Jesus is looking specifically for my response in these areas, then today at His Table is a perfect time to say: YES.

We Each Need to Start a Regular Workout

- **To Please God and be Fruitful I will watch my diet:** Get in the Word daily.
- **To Please God and be Fruitful I will watch my exercise:** Obey what God says.
- **To Please God and be Fruitful I will watch my weight:** Strip off anything that hinders.
- **To Please God and be Fruitful Christ expects us to Love Him Most:** I will love Him Most.
- **To Please God and be Fruitful Christ expects us to Separate From Sin:** I will separate from all know sin in my life.

How Does Jesus Cultivate Fruitfulness in the Lives of Believers?

Revelation 2-3

God¹⁷ is a Farmer, in His Word calls us His field (I Cor. 3:9), and our lives are searched by Him for fruit, that He can harvest from our lives. That is what we will see as we open to Revelation 2 this morning.

Much like the farmers all around us, and the many gardeners among us: if you want a good crop this year, the field needs to be prepared and worked.

Jesus desires from each member of His Body, a life that is plowed, planted, and watered: so that we produce a harvest of fruit that pleases Him.

Jesus sent us a description in Revelation 1-3 of how He prepares and cultivates the lives of those in His Church. Since the days of John the Apostle, who wrote down Christ's words: ***this is what the Lord in focused upon in each succeeding generation of His Church.***

As we have been seeing these past two months, Christ's Last Words to His Church in Revelation 1-3, are dominated by His desire to see us fruitful. That desire is explained and described these three chapters He wrote to us.

To be fruitfully bringing glory to God from our lives we need to be healthy. The Lord measures our health in four areas. Why not pause to do a spiritual health diagnostic?

Four Diagnostics to Reveal Our Spiritual Health & Fruitfulness

This morning we each need to do a self-checkup of our spiritual health and fruitfulness. Remember, the healthier we are the more fruit God can produce through our lives. Here are some diagnostic questions:

1. **WORSHIP DIAGNOSTIC:** To you feel excited to be here at church and close to the Lord, with a heart tuned and already filled with Spirit-prompted worship: or are you distant these days from all that, and you even feel kind of far away from God this morning?
2. **FELLOWSHIP DIAGNOSTIC:** Do you love to meet with other believers and share what God is doing in each other's lives: or can you hardly remember the last time your life was fruitful? Do you feel far from joy and peace, victory and blessing? In fact, do you secretly hope that no one gets too close this

¹⁷ 110515AM CLW-08 Cultivate.do

morning and asks you personal questions while you are here?

3. **DEVOTIONAL DIAGNOSTIC:** Can you hardly wait to get started in our study of God's Word this morning, and feel the same way each day of the week in your personal devotions: or does your Bible feel as heavy as lead when you pick it up?
4. **MINISTRY DIAGNOSTIC:** Are you a conscious investor in ministry, looking for more ways to use your time and spiritual gifts to serve the Lord: or do challenges for you to jump in to serve and speak up for Christ bother you a bit, and even push you away? Do you sometimes wonder if you'll get any reward in Heaven, and you just hope that you'll get there? Has the zeal you once knew dried up, and become a far off memory?

If these, or a myriad of other telltale signs of spiritual listlessness and barrenness, have cast their shadows across your path, then Christ's invitation to His spiritual heart cultivation clinic is for you.

Jesus even applies these truths to churches just like ours, and as we look at Revelation 2-3, we see that:

5 of the 7 Churches Lacked Key Area of Fruitfulness

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus lists the areas that were keeping those believers and their local churches from being fruitful for Him in their daily lives.

Remember that by the time Jesus was writing to these churches they had already heard the messages of the Apostles, they had Paul's Epistles, they had the Gospels, and of course Christ's Bible, the Old Testament.

In other words, they had just about as much exposure to God's Word as we do, plus the fact that many of them had met and known the Apostles. So Jesus writes these seven letters, holding the churches responsible to live what He had sent them in His Word.

The clear message Christ gives is that: each believer has a personal responsibility to know and obey what's in God's Word.

Fruitfulness for God is always tied to receiving and acting upon the Word.

If you are sporadic in the Word, you will be sporadic in fruit bearing for the Lord. The key is to live by a daily application time with the Lord through His Word.

The Word is a meeting point, it is the starting point. The Word is not the end, it is the start and the tool for closeness with the Lord.

So as we ask: How does Jesus Cultivate Fruitfulness in the lives of believers? We have focused upon our target this morning.

Jesus cultivates us by first clearly explaining His expectations for each of His churches.

We can say that these chapters contain Christ's expectations both for them, and for us.

To please God and be fruitful, each of us need to decide we really want:

- To Love Jesus Most (Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
- To Separate from Sin (Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
- To Un-Friend Worldliness (Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
- To Overflow with His Spirit (Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
- To Live Crucified (Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

We already started looking at these expectations that Jesus expressed; and we covered the first two as we started in Rev. 2:4. Open there with me again and trace what we found out about Christ's first expectation of them and us.

Have you jotted this in your Bible or notes yet? *Jesus said, **my first and greatest expectation of you***, is this:

To Please God and be Fruitful:

(1) Love Jesus Most

The saints in Ephesus were not being obedient to the central truth of the Scriptures Old and New Testament: Love the Lord Your God MOST. That is what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV) **Nevertheless I have this against you**, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—**unless you repent**.*

The Problem: Their lives were clogged with so many other things, so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives. They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through Paul, Timothy, and John's ministry of the Word to them?

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But **seek first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 22:37 (NKJV) Jesus said to him, " 'You **shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**' "

Action Needed: Jesus said: stop everything else from pushing me out, Go back to your original settings; and Love the Lord Your God with all you are.

Then we went to Rev. 2:12 and found ***Christ's second expectation of His Church***. Jesus

says:

To Please God and be Fruitful:

(2) Separate From Sin

The saints in Pergamos were not being obedient to what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

Revelation 2:14-16 (NKJV) But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The Problem: They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them to stay away from sin, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 (NKJV) And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **"I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."** 17 Therefore **"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."** 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Action Needed: Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Now, as we move on to Revelation 2:18 we find *Christ's third expectation:*

To Please God and be Fruitful: (3) Un-Friend Worldliness

The saints in Thyatira needed to stop their friendship with the world that led them to be displeasing to God—**please stand** with me.

As I read these words, listen like you are hearing Jesus talking to us, and as we hear that, we can all open our hearts and lives to what Christ said:

Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He

who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ' He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Problem: What had gotten into the field where God had them planted, that was choking their fruitfulness? The saints at Thyatira were tolerating sinful teachers and false teachings, and had allowed the infectious disease of false doctrines to spring up, grow, and slowly permeate Christ's Body the Church.

What Was the First NT Book the Early Churches Read?

Most likely, the very first Epistle that circulated the early churches was written by James. They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

Look at James 4, probably from the first book of the New Testament written and circulated among the churches.

James 4:4-10 (NKJV) Adulterers and adulteresses! **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "**God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.**" v. 7 **Therefore (1) submit to God. (2) Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 (3) Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (4) Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and (5) purify your hearts, you double-minded.** 9 (6) Lament and (7) mourn and (8) weep! Let your laughter be (9) turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. v. 10 (10) Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Remember that the Book of James was written by Christ's earthly brother, one of the children of Joseph and Mary. James became a strong believer after the Resurrection, and went on to be the pastor of the First Church of Jerusalem.

There are only 108 verses in the small epistle of James, but in those 108 verses there are 54 imperatives. In just verses 7, 8, 9, & 10 there are TEN commands from the Lord. Just let me list them for you as a direct request from Jesus to each of us this morning.

What James taught his congregation, and all others since was that authentic Christians separate from sin unto God (James 4:1–10). These authentic saints recognize that they have a choice to either pursue worldliness or godliness, so they choose to avoid "reptilian desires."

Many reptiles grow a little bigger every year of their life if fed and left unhindered. So too will our lustful desires grow: if we feed them and protect them from the Spirit of God mortifying and killing them. Left unhindered, our lustful desires can grow bigger than we could ever imagine that they could. So, here is what James prescribed to those authentic, first

generation believers:

Step 1 to Un-Friend Worldliness: Avoid Pleasure Dominated Living

Maturing saints avoid the consequences of a pleasure dominated life. If you are only living for pleasure, and pleasure dominates your decisions, then you are feeding the lusts of your flesh. Our world is constantly bombarding us with the desire for a pleasure dominated life.

In order to prepare himself for going to China, Hudson Taylor used to sleep on the floor with one sheet over him so that he would not always have a soft, pleasure seeking life.

Maturing saints know how to avoid infidelity to God. God equates friendship with this world with spiritual adultery.

Friendship with the world is anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

MY pride prevents My spiritual growth

Remember James said in v. 6a But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, NKJV . The word "opposes," or "resists," is *antitassetai*, a military term meaning "to battle against."

To be a friend of God is to seek: *His* pleasures, *His* friendship, and *His* humility. These areas of our lives will be in line with God.

What does a lifestyle look like that "Un-Friends" worldliness? James says it is made up of ten conscious choices in chapter 4 verses 7-10.

Note these ten imperatives crowded into such a short space. This is the character of the preaching, nurture, and discipleship that grew such Spirit-empowered servants of the Lord as we see in the Book of Acts.

- (1) **Submit to God** v. 7a = a constant daily choice to hear and submit to what God wants from His Word.
- (2) **Resist the Devil** v. 7b = a daily choice to say no to the world, my sin, my flesh, and the Devil who stirs them all up.
- (3) **Draw near to God** v. 8a = a personal choice to chase after God in prayer, thoughts, meditation and through His Word.
- (4) **Cleanse your hands** v. 8b = a conscious changing of our mind about any known sin, which leads to a change of behavior (this is repenting);
- (5) **Purify your hearts** v. 8c = as we seek the constant cleansing of Christ's blood;
- (6) **Lament** v. 9a = we begin to practice (*talaiporein*) is a word for an army without food and shelter exposed to the ravages of stormy weather. James uses it as a call for voluntary abstinence from the luxuries of life. Much like the concentration of study that makes a scholar; the rigorous training that produces the athlete; and **this is the chosen way of life under the Holy Spirit's fruit of self-**

discipline that produces the spiritual giants to live for Christ in a wicked world.

- (7) ***Mourn*** v. 9b = John Wesley saw the white streaks formed as tears coursed down the blackened faces of Kingswoods miners in the 18th century, so James says to his 1st century luxury living, unconcerned and unmoved church goers – let God rend your hearts until you mourn over your sins.
- (8) ***Weep*** v. 9c = These are the tears of sympathy that move us to action welling up from a compassion filled heart. No longer unmoved and uncaring, the heart mourning before a Holy God soon becomes filled with the compassion of Christ.
- (9) ***Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*** v. 9d = James tells them to sorrow as often over the gravity of their sinfulness as they were able to rejoice over the greatness of their pleasures and happiness.
- (10) ***Humble yourselves*** v. 10 = an internal awareness that all that matters is God, not me. Choosing to put on a humble mind about life.

Avoiding a pleasure dominated life style is avoiding anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

To please God and be fruitful, each of us need to decide we really want:

- To Love Jesus Most (Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
- To Separate from Sin (Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
- To Un-Friend Worldliness (Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
- To Overflow with His Spirit (Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
- To Live Crucified (Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

Christ's Five Expectations for His Church Declared in Revelation 2 & 3

The¹⁸ last book of the Bible seems to be the most fascinating, and revealing of all the books of the Bible for believers. No where outside of the first three chapters of Revelation is there such a concentration of church-related truth; and are the single most important source of understanding Christ's present focus and work: of any Book of God's Word.

In the **Four Gospels** we find a quadrophonic symphony of Christ's Earthly life and ministry; **Acts** shows what the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, can do through normal people; **Romans through Jude** record the doctrinal truths and foundations for everything in our new lives as believers, when we become a part of Christ's Church.

Finally—the **Revelation of Jesus Christ** shows Jesus working in His Church every day to

¹⁸ 110522AM CLW-09 Expect.do

get them living out all of His truths, taught in those Epistles, that He left us to do!

No Other Chapters of the Bible are Like Revelation 1-3

No other book of the Bible is anything like the first three chapters of Revelation. No where else do we see Jesus Christ, Lord of Heaven and Earth completely focused on the conduct and character of His people.

If you want to get ready to meet Jesus you need to master what it is He is revealing to us in these three chapters.

Once you see it, your life slowly changes, things that used to be important slowly drift away and things that used to seem so unimportant become the greatest attraction and focus of your life.

Revelation is all about how deeply Jesus Christ is involved in our sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and our consecration to God the Father.

The essence of Revelation 1 is seeing Christ as He is Today; the essence of chapters 2-3 is seeing Christ actively describing and encouraging His expectations for His Church.

To be exact, He reveals five clearly described expectations for each of us who know and love Him this morning.

5 of the 7 Churches Neglected Key Areas of Obedience

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus lists the areas that were keeping those believers and their local churches from pleasing God in their daily lives.

Remember that by the time Jesus was writing to these churches they had already heard the messages of the Apostles, they had Paul's Epistles, they had the Gospels, and of course Christ's Bible, the Old Testament.

So Jesus writes these seven letters, holding each of the churches personally responsible to live what He had sent them in His Word. Note that each time Jesus spoke to a church He said that what He desired was expected in ALL of the churches, not just that one.

Have you noticed that expansion to more than just that one local, geographic church? When you see that truth it means that what Jesus said then, applies to us here today. After 2,000 years of church history, it is still Christ's desire for us.

Note these repeated words in each of the seven letters:

Jesus Said Every Church Should Listen to Me

His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

His Message to Smyrna, Rev. 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says

to the churches.”

His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

His Message to Philadelphia, Rev. 3:13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The clear message Christ gives is that:

***Each believer has a personal responsibility
to hear God speak through His Word,
and obey what He has said in His Word.***

Pleasing God is always tied to receiving and acting upon the Word.

If you are sporadic in the Word, you will be sporadic in pleasing the Lord. The key is to live by a daily application time with the Lord through His Word.

The Word is the nourishment for closeness with the Lord that pleases Him.

Jesus is focused upon bringing our lifestyle into conformity with what pleases Him. In Revelation 2-3 we see Him clearly explaining His expectations for His churches, and thus for all of us who ever are a part of Christ's Church. We can say that these chapters contain the clearest and most concise description of Christ's expectations for us.

To please God, the experience His Hand most fully upon our lives, Jesus says each of us need to decide we will not neglect what God desires in our lives.

God Desires Each of us to Be

- **Loving Jesus Most** (His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
- **Separating from Sin** (His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
- **Un-Friending Worldliness** (His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
- **Overflowing with His Spirit** (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
- **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

We already started looking at these expectations that Jesus expressed; and we covered the first three as we started in Rev. 2:4. Open there with me again and trace what we found out about Christ's first expectation of them and us.

To Please God we are expected to be: (1) Loving Jesus Most

The saints in Ephesus were not being obedient to the central truth of the Scriptures Old

and New Testament: Love the Lord Your God MOST. That is what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:4 (NKJV) **Nevertheless I have this against you**, that you have left your first love.*

The Problem: Their lives were clogged with so many other things, so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives.

Loving Jesus Most. Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall **love the LORD** your God **with all** your heart, **with all** your soul, and **with all** your mind.’

Action Needed: Jesus said: stop everything else from pushing me out, Go back to your original settings; and Love the Lord Your God with all you are.

Revelation 2:12 records Christ's second expectation of His Church. Jesus says:

To Please God we are expected to be: (2) Separating From Sin

The saints in Pergamos were not being obedient to what had been taught them from God's Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:14-15 (NKJV) **But I have a few things against you**, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

The Problem: They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them to stay away from sin, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

Separating from Sin. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV) Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Action Needed: Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Now, as we move on to Revelation 2:18 we find *Christ's third expectation:*

To Please God we are expected to be: (3) Un-Friending Worldliness

The saints in Thyatira needed to stop their friendship with the world that led them to be displeasing to God.

*Revelation 2:19-20 (NKJV) “**I know your works**, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 **Nevertheless I have a few things against you**, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit*

sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

The Problem: The saints at Thyatira were tolerating pleasure dominated lives. If you are only living for pleasure, and pleasure dominates your decisions, then you are feeding the lusts of your flesh. Our world is constantly bombarding us with the desire for a pleasure dominated life.

Un-Friending Worldliness. James 4:4 Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Friendship with the world is anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

To Un-Friend Worldliness: Submit to God

What does a lifestyle look like that "Un-Friends" worldliness? James says it is made up of the ten conscious choices we looked at last week in James 4:7-10.

Avoiding a pleasure dominated life style is avoiding anything that distracts us from worship, ministry, and devotion! Whatever is pulling us away from devotion to God causes us to be God's enemy.

Remember James said in v. 6a But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, NKJV .

The word "opposes," or "resists," is ***antitassetai***, a military term meaning "to battle against."

To be a friend of God is to seek: ***His*** pleasures, ***His*** friendship, and ***His*** humility. These areas of our lives will be in line with God.

Next, as we move on to Revelation 3:1 we find Christ's fourth expectation:

To Please God we are expected to be: (4) Overflowing with His Spirit

The saints in Sardis needed to go back to the original plan that Christ designed for His individual believers. As we stand for the reading of Christ's letter to them and us—we all need to listen and hear with our hearts what Christ said:

Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the

Spirit says to the churches.”

They appeared dead at the moment, and no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor’s ministry of the Word to them?

Overflowing with His Spirit. John 7:37-39 (New King James Version) On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 **He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**” 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Overflowing with His Spirit. Romans 8:8-11 So then, those who are in the flesh **cannot please God.** ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit** who dwells in you.

Overflowing with His Spirit. Gal 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Jesus offers us overflowing Spirit filled lives. But to be filled we must first empty what is already there in our lives.

Jesus called them to be pleasing God by choosing to repent of just going through the motions of acting like Christians and get His power at work within them. This leads to the constant desire of God for these early believers, and us today:

To Overflow with His Spirit: Stop Loving the World

Another letter these churches would have received were the three short Epistlesw John wrote when he was pastoring the great Ephesian Church. As one who was characterized by his deep love for Christ, John especially warned about misplacing our love.

Especially misdirecting love for God and allowing that love to rest upon what God hates, the sinful system of the god of this world Satan. John calls the Devil’s system: “the world”.

Stop Loving the World. 1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) **Do not love** [present active imperative] the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides

forever.

The world operates by sending us temptations packaged as enticements from our lusts. God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

1. **We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures: this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* Whether for food, pleasure, or fun: our bodies are built to crave and God says don't allow your flesh to control your cravings. That is worldly and I am against that lust in any form in your lives.
2. **We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff: this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!
3. **We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptations.*
 - This can be selfishness because I'm most important.
 - This can be irritableness because life revolves around me.
 - This can be untruthfulness because I need to protect myself.
 - This can be laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition.
 - Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate. Lust means worldliness which offends God, it separates us from His blessing.

If you are sporadic in the Word, you will be sporadic in pleasing the Lord. The key is to live by a daily application time with the Lord through His Word.

Jesus is focused upon bringing our lifestyle into conformity with what pleases Him. In Revelation 2-3 we see Him clearly explaining His expectations for His churches, and thus for all of us who ever are a part of Christ's Church. We can say that these chapters contain the clearest and most concise description of Christ's expectations for us.

To please God, the experience His Hand most fully upon our lives, Jesus says each of us

need to decide we will not neglect what God desires in our lives.

God Desires Each of us to Be

- Loving Jesus Most (His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
- Separating from Sin (His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
- Un-Friending Worldliness (His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
- Overflowing with His Spirit (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6); and next time:
- **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

Pleasing God is always tied to receiving and acting upon the Word.

God's Desire for Christ's Church Is Crucified Living

Revelation 2 & 3

Today¹⁹, we are Christ's Church. We are part of the gathering on this the Lord's Day, of all His obedient children, for Jesus asked us and believers to keep gathering to worship Him until He comes. So today, there is perhaps no portion of Scripture is more vital for us as we live out our lives on Earth, than the last book of the Bible before us today.

In the final book of God's Word we find that:

Revelation is: The Culmination & Conclusion

This book comes last because it is not only the *Conclusion of God's Word*, it is also the *Culmination of God's Plan*. We see everything that started in Genesis: the Perfect Paradise of God, the Rebellion and Fall of the Universe into Sin, the Flood of Water Destroying the rebels, and the choosing and saving of the People of the Covenant—all in their final form in Revelation.

Revelation opens to us the return of the Paradise of God, the End of the Rebellion, the Final Destruction with Fire of the entire sin-cursed Universe, and the safe arrival home of all the People of the Covenant.

For a moment, do you remember the structure of the Book of the Revelation? The way this book is laid out by God is very instructive. What we can easily see is Christ depicted in three very different but very descriptive ways. First:

For the Church on Earth, Portrait 1: Christ is the Great High Priest of Revelation 1-3

In Revelation 1-3 we see Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest (especially described in Rev. 1:9-20), who ever lives to intercede for us. These chapters are addressed to, focused upon, and build around the Seven Churches.

For three chapters we see the Risen Christ dressed like a priest in His white robe, and with His burning eyes of purifying fire, as He constantly, and interceedingly walks through His Church. That is Jesus as He is Today; and that has been the focus of these past few weeks and

¹⁹ 110605 CLW-10 Crucified.do

will be for us again this morning.

The sight of Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest of His Church never shows up again in Revelation, this portrait as the Great High Priest is only in chapters 1-3, only for us in His Church, and Ends when we are all safely home in our Father's House. Next:

For the Church in Heaven, Portrait 2: Christ is the Worthy Lamb that was slain of Revelation 4-5, 21-22

Then in Revelation 4-5 we find that Jesus looks differently: as He relates to His glorified Church around the Throne in Heaven He is shown as the Worthy Lamb that was Slain (see Rev. 5:6). No longer is He depicted as the blazing-eyed, purity-seeking High Priest, inspecting the health of His Body the Church and performing corrective surgical pruning to keep us pleasing in His sight.

Instead Jesus is now portrayed as standing before the Throne as the One who was Slain as a perfect, spotless Lamb for ours sins. The choirs of Heavenly saints are singing, the angelic creatures are joining them in worship, and all of Heaven is focused upon the Lamb who is worthy.

That portrait is quite different from the portrait of Revelation 1 with the white robed, white-haired, blazing-eyed Lord of the Church. Jesus as the Lamb receives our worship, comforts His saints, welcomes His faithful-unto-death martyrs, and finally leads us all safely to the banquet in chapter 19, and finally in Revelation 21-22 when we all arrive safely to our place in our Heavenly Father's House.

Then we are introduced to the final image of Christ:

For the Rebels on Earth, Portrait 3: Christ is the Warring Lion of Judah of Revelation 6-20

As He relates to His Rebellious Creation, He is the Warring Lion of the Tribe of Judah who prevailed (Rev. 5:5). Jesus is seen quite differently again. He is not shown as a wounded to death, scarred, sacrificial substitute Lamb to the King of the Universe, the Heir to the Title Deed of Heaven and Earth, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

From the Throne, Jesus Christ, the Son of David directs the conquest of the rebellious earth-dwellers as He calls them in this final Book. First He sends the waves of disaster in Revelation 6, then He sends in His chosen Jewish evangelists in chapter 7, then He unfolds His wrath all the way through the end of chapter 20, when His Conquest is done.

This takes us back to the start of the Book of Revelation, to the part that most vitally concerns us.

Remember that Revelation 1-3 is different from all other New Testament books. Each Epistle in the New Testament was written to a specific local church, or group of churches, and

then is also applicable to us. But, Christ addressed each word of all three of these chapters to all churches.

Christ's Priority Today is Being High Priest To His Church

Revelation 1-3 it is *the book that mentions the Church more* in two chapters than any of the other books of the Bible. In fact only 1st Corinthians (23x) and Acts (22x) mention the Church more than the 20x this book does.

Jesus is shown in Revelation preparing His Church for presentation to His Father. We know that as God the Son, Jesus wants to present us as a pure Church.

Jesus wants us without spot or wrinkle, as He offers us to God the Father. That is what Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5.

Jesus Christ as the One who is charged with “presenting us faultless before” God’s Presence (Jude 1:24-25), is constantly interceding for us (Hebrews 7:24-25), and challenging us to walk “worthy” of our calling before God (I Thessalonians 2:12)

These, and many of the other lessons for the New Testament, point to this work of preparation of each individual member of Christ's Church. This process we know collectively as the doctrine of sanctification.

Sanctification is Crucified Living

Sanctification is unleashing the power of the Cross, into our daily choices.

Now look at our text this morning in Revelation 3:14-22. We are going to meet the fifth and final church that got a bad report in Christ's High Priestly visit to their gathering.

Please stand and listen to Christ's letter to them, and to each of us today.

The saints in Laodicea had become neutralized to the power of God through His Word and Spirit—listen to what Christ said:

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 **So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.** 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.** Therefore be zealous and repent. 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Remember, Jesus found cause to be displeased with 5 of the 7 churches. We have already seen the others. Each of the corrections Christ gave, and we have studied, pointed to a

change that God desired them to make in their lives individually, and in their churches collectively.

The best way to understand Revelation 2-3 is to say that:

God Desires Each of us to Be

1. Loving Jesus Most (His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
2. Separating from Sin (His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
3. Un-Friending Worldliness (His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
4. Overflowing with His Spirit (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
5. **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

The saints at Laodicea had neglected for way too long what they needed for their spiritual souls, because they were so distracted by their materialistic pursuits of pleasure.

They had become so un-needing of Christ—that Jesus said they were blind, miserable and putrid. Jesus wanted to spit them out of His mouth, like a sickening taste, or a spoiled piece of food that could only be vomited out.

That was where the church at Laodicea had come. How could any believer get that displeasing to God? Simply by neglecting the daily call to live a crucified life.

Jesus was crucified to save us and redeem us as His obedient, consecrated servants. He open the way for us to be crucified to the power of sin, the lusts of the world, and the bondage to self. In other words:

To Please God we are expected to:

(5) Live Crucified

The believers in Laodicea were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them? Turn back with me to Romans 12.

- **Crucified Living means Surrendered Living.** Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- **Crucified Living means Exchanged Living.** Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. **Crucified Living means never getting out of sight of the Cross.** Galatians 6:14 (NKJV) But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

No verse more clearly summarizes Crucified Living than Paul's testimony in Galatians

2:20. No verse more clearly frames what each of us should affirm for ourselves today.

Let's do a short lesson in the grammar of the Bible. To remember the cross of Christ we need to remember it not merely as a distant historical fact—no, we must see it as an event that we were a part of, personally and directly and powerfully.

So, when Paul says Christ was crucified, he says that Christ crucified him also. And if you understand the doctrine of our union with Christ from God's Word that means that every single one of us were also crucified that day with Jesus Christ.

Part One: “I have been Crucified with Christ”

The summary of the grammar of this verse would be: it is a perfect, passive, indicative.

The summary of the lesson is that Paul says: “What I am telling you is a fact, I have actually already been crucified by God with Jesus Christ; God crucified me and I didn't do it myself; it happened and was completed in the past, once and for all, and never needs repeating.” All my sins past, present, and future were placed upon Him back then two thousand years ago on the Cross of Calvary.

Now, note with me:

ONE WORD:

“I have been crucified with” is actually **one word** in the original text of the New Testament; and it is the verb around which this verse is built. This verb known by Greek scholars as word # 4957, and is **sustauroo** a verb found five times in the New Testament; and which literally means ‘to crucify alone with’. To better understand this verb we must notice it's three inspired grammatical parts. When you classify a Greek verb you state the tense, the voice, and the mood. *Sustauroo* translated “I have been crucified with” is a perfect tense, passive voice, indicative mood verb.

PERFECT TENSE:

The **perfect tense** in Greek describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. We all know one very famous usage of the perfect tense. Christ's last cry from the cross, TETELESTAI (“It is finished!”) is a good example of the perfect tense used in this sense, namely “It [the atonement] has been accomplished, completely, once and for all time.” So here in Galatians 2:20 Paul uses the perfect tense to first say, “*I have been crucified alone with Christ*”.

PASSIVE VOICE:

The **passive voice** represents the subject as being the recipient of the action. That adds

to the meaning as Paul using the passive voice says *“someone else crucified me, I didn’t do it myself”*.

INDICATIVE MOOD:

The **indicative mood** is a simple statement of fact. If an action really occurs or has occurred or will occur, it will be rendered in the indicative mood. Finally, Paul’s use of the indicative mood adds the meaning that *“this really happened to me, it is not hypothetical or fanciful thing—it is a fact”*.

POWERFUL TRUTH:

So if we use all the truth of the grammar taken together, Paul says:

*“What I am telling you is a fact (indicative mood),
I have actually already been crucified by God with Jesus Christ (perfect tense);
God crucified me and I didn’t do it myself; it happened and was completed in the past, once
and for all, and never needs repeating...(passive voice)”*

“Jesus died in my place and also I died with Him. So by Christ’s death and mine with Him I have died to sin. If a drunk dies, he can no longer be tempted by alcohol because his body is dead to all physical senses. He cannot see the alcohol, smell it, taste it, or desire it.

In Jesus Christ we have died to sin so that we no longer want to “continue in sin.” But we are not only dead to sin; we are also alive in Christ. We have been raised from the dead and now walk in the power of His resurrection. We walk in “newness of life” because we share His life”.²⁰

Part Two: “It is no longer I who live, But Christ lives in me”

THE EXCHANGED LIFE: Christ’s life is what I am to now live, not my own. Sin wants to be our master. It finds a foothold in our old nature, and through the old nature sin always seeks to control the members of our bodies. But in Jesus Christ, we died to sin; and the old nature was crucified so that the old life is rendered inoperative.

THE GRACE-ENERGIZED LIFE: Christ’s strength is what I now draw upon not my own. Paul was not describing an experience we should try to emulate or strive for; he was stating a fact. The practical experience comes as we yield to Christ’s control. It is a fact of history that Jesus Christ died on the cross. It is also a fact of history that the believer died with Him²¹.

Part Three: “And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by

²⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

²¹ Adapted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

faith in the Son of God”

THE FAITH-LIFE: What kind of life is this? It is a life of faith—saved by faith, live by faith, walk by faith. This is what it means to walk in the Spirit. *“Paul didn’t tell his readers to feel as if they were dead to sin, or even to understand it fully, but to act on God’s Word and claim it for themselves”*²².

THE RECKONED LIFE: “Reckoning is a matter of faith that issues in action. It is like endorsing a check: if we really believe that the money is in the checking account, we will sign our name and collect the money. Reckoning is not claiming a promise, but acting on a fact. God does not command us to become dead to sin. He tells us that we are dead to sin and alive unto God, and then commands us to act on it. Even if we do not act on it, the facts are still true”.²³

Part Four: “Who loved me, And gave himself for me”

Christ loved me, but He could not *love* me into heaven. He had to *give* Himself for me. We need to believe and grow by faith to understand that Christ's crucifixion was mine also!

In an incredible way that only God can accomplish and explain—each of us here tonight who are believers—***died at the same time as Jesus almost 2,000 years ago***. We have already died once in a real, spiritually powerful way in Christ on His Cross we celebrate tonight.

Though all of us may look quite alive, the truth is that on this day, 20 centuries ago, we were hanging on the Cross with Jesus Christ. ***When He died, we died***.

And after His death when two loving men took down His body and buried it in a borrowed Tomb, we were also buried with Christ. ***When He died—we died; when He was buried—we were buried***.

And when He walked out of that Tomb early Sunday morning—each of us also walked out with Him! ***When He died—we died; when He was buried—we were buried; and when He rose—we rose***.

That truth should course through the heart and mind of every believer in Christ.

We need to repeat, reaffirm, and remember over and over again that the past work of Christ's death on the cross saved me and keeps me.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ (past event--justification); it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (present event-sanctification); and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (present event-sanctification), who loved me and gave Himself for me (past event--

²² Wiersbe, Warren W., The Bible Exposition Commentary, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

²³ Wiersbe, Warren W., The Bible Exposition Commentary, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

justification). NKJV

God Desires Each of us to Be

1. Loving Jesus Most (His Message to Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7);
2. Separating from Sin (His Message to Pergamos, Rev. 2:12-17);
3. Un-Friending Worldliness (His Message to Thyatira, Rev. 2:18-29);
4. Overflowing with His Spirit (His Message to Sardis, Rev. 3:1-6);
5. **Living Crucified** (His Message to Laodicea, Rev. 3:14-22).

APPENDIX:

SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION
<i>Romans 3:21–5:21 & Galatians 1:4:</i> who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,	<i>Romans 6–8 & Galatians 2:20</i> “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
Substitution: He died for me	Identification: I died with Him
He died <i>for</i> my sins	He died <i>unto</i> sin
He paid sin’s penalty	He broke sin’s power
Justification: righteousness is imputed (put to my account)	Sanctification: righteousness is imparted (made a part of my life)
I WAS Saved by His death	I AM Saved by His life

Ephesus: Beware of Doing All the Right Things for the Wrong Reasons

Revelation 2:1-7

There²⁴ was a church in the New Testament world that was doing all the right things for the Lord; but there was one problem: they were doing all the right things for the wrong reasons. Jesus addresses that problem in His first letter to the Churches in Revelation 2.

Amazing Ephesus

If you were arriving into the harbor to visit that church of Revelation 2 in Ephesus this morning, there is only one sight that would catch your eyes. Not the bustling harbor teeming with boats, not the roads lined with the exotic spices and goods from the east. No: it would be the lustrous golden gleam of the Temple of Diana.

The largest building ever built in the ancient world, the size of a city block, 10 stories high and covered with gold. It was the center of the worship of Artemis (Greek), or Diana (Roman), whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. To this cosmopolitan, world renowned city, Jesus sent this letter. Stand with me as we hear His Voice:

Revelation 2:1-7 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 **“I know your works**, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you**, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—**unless you repent**. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Point #1: CHRIST Had A Powerful Testimony At EPHESUS

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH ASSEMBLY 2:1a: “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write”

The word “angel” literally means “messenger.” Although it can mean angel—and does throughout the book—it cannot refer to angels here because angels are never leaders in the church. Most likely, these messengers are the seven key elders representing each of those

²⁴ 110612AM CLW-11 Ephesus.d

churches.

Ephesus was an inland city 3 miles from the sea, but the broad mouth of the Cayster River allowed access and provided the greatest harbor in Asia Minor. Four great trade roads went through Ephesus; therefore, it became known as the gateway to Asia.

- **Powerful Founding:** The saints at Ephesus were heirs to the greatest days of Paul's earthly ministry; and the longest.
- **Godly Nurturing:** Paul sent Timothy who stayed until church history records a mob killed him for his strong preaching against sin. John the Apostle lived there until his exile in Patmos; and then returned from Patmos to continue in ministry there.
- **Tremendous History:** Paul ministered there for three years (Acts 20:31), and later met with the Ephesian elders on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20). Timothy, Tychicus, and the apostle John all served this church. John was in Ephesus when he was arrested by Domitian and exiled 50 miles southwest to Patmos. Mary the mother of our Lord lived and died there.

Point #2: Ephesus Was An Assembly In A Very Strategic Place

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH WITH AUTHORITY 2:1b 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands'

These seven stars are the messengers who represent the seven churches. Christ holds them in his hand, which means that he controls the church and its leaders. The sharp two-edged sword pictures the Roman, two-edged broad sword. It signifies judgment (cf. 2:16; 19:15) on those who defile His Temple, attack His people, or try to destroy His church.

Point #3: Jesus Approved Their Purity In The Midst Of A WICKED Culture

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH WITH AN APPROVAL 2:2-3, 6: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

There are 10 specific commendations from Christ, more than for any other church. In v. 2 Christ points out these elements of obedience in the Church at Ephesus:

(1) "I know your works";

(2) "your labor": beyond work *kopos* to exhaustion;

(3) "your patience" = Not passive 'remain under' but active, with great weight lifting and

bearing;

(4) “you cannot bear those who are evil”: living in purity in the shadow of the magnificent palace to gross immorality, the temple of Diana;

(5) “And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars”: means they were orthodox and strong, and exercised spiritual discernment.

In v. 3 He continues pointing out their commendable spiritual qualities as a church:

(6) “and you have persevered”;

(7) “and have patience”;

(8) “and have labored for My name’s sake”;

(9) “and have not become weary”: For over 40 years, since its founding, this church had remained faithful to the word and the Lord. Through difficulty and persecution, the members had endured, always driven by the right motive.

(10) Finally in v. 6 Jesus gives them another high honor: “you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate”. A problem in Pergamum also (vv. 12–15), this heresy was similar to the teaching of Balaam (vv. 14–15).

Nicolas means “one who conquers the people.” Irenaeus (c. 130-202) writes that Nicolas, who was made a deacon in Acts 6, was a false believer who later became apostate; like Balaam, he led the people into immorality and wickedness.²⁵ Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

What a great church: planted by Paul, nurtured by Priscilla, Aquilla, Apollos, Timothy, Mary, and John. The Bible devotes one of the most amazing chapters in the New Testament as a biographical explanation of why this church got such high marks, the highest of any of the seven churches. Now turn with me to:

The Acts 19 Biography of The Church at Ephesus

Acts 19 is the biography of the saints at Ephesus, a phenomenal grace-energized church, and in that account we find ***the timeless keys to a church God can use greatly.***

God's Word explains to us what makes Christ's church powerful in any culture. It is when:

- ***God's Son is magnified, and***
- ***God's People are consecrated, then***
- ***God's Word prevailed.***

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. The saints of Ephesus overcame the same pressures facing us as believers today: a pleasure-seeking culture, a mind-assaulting media, and a materialism-dominated way of life.

God's Word always has an answer for how to walk in the Spirit, abide in Christ, and see Christ's church prevail in an ever-darkening world. The struggle is always against our flesh and

²⁵ They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.

the Devil; and resisting²⁶ both is what we are charged with as an imperative from God's Word.

When God's Word Prevailed in Dark Ephesus

Acts 19 records one of the greatest revivals in Biblical history. Paul went to the godless heart of the Eastern Roman Empire called Ephesus. There he confronted the evils of culture that godlessness begets: materialism, pride, occultism, and sensuality—each of which is still a constant enemy of our walk with Christ.

The kingdom of darkness was left shaken to the core, confused and fighting against itself. Then, God called out a group of believers that would form one of the greatest churches of the New Testament era. By their zenith they numbered as many as 50,000 and were the home church of Paul, Mary, John, and Timothy.

Before we study through Acts 19 for a look at this incredible revival that swept through the church at Ephesus, remember the facts about this place.

Ephesus was a coastal seaport along the commercial trade route linking east to west. For hundreds of years the worship of Diana (or Artemis) had made Ephesus a thriving, and safe commercial center. The Temple was dedicated to Artemis a sex goddess, worshipped by unbridled immorality was at the center of everything done in that city.

Hundreds of prostitutes were always on the grounds to promote this unrestrained indulgence of the flesh. Ephesus was a magnet for not just the sexually enslaved; it was also the center of the promotion of the black arts, witchcraft, superstition, and all the powers of Satan. That helps us understand why Paul would tell these Ephesians that there was so much more than the physical world to contend with these words in Ephesians 6:12:

*For we do not wrestle²⁷ against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, **against the rulers of the darkness of this age**, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

So in this very dark, very worldly, very alluring place of sin—Christ's church was born. And Acts 19:8-20 records that amazing birth. Please turn with me and listen to what God can do when His Son is magnified, His Word unleashed, and His children are consecrated for His Glory.

Facing the Darkness Acts 19:8-10

In Acts 19:8-10 we find the plan God laid on Paul's heart for reaching a society so much

²⁶ A few months back we studied our spiritual immune system that is laid out in Scripture as having three factors: spiritual health (eating God's Word in Hebrews 5:13-14, Matthew 4:4; plus exercising each day by walking in the Spirit in Galatians 5:16); spiritual armor (understanding and uses the armor Paul commands us to use in Ephesians 6:10-18); and spiritual warfare (resisting the devil and his demons in James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-9). If you neglect any part of your spiritual immune system—Satan and his army have a point to step up their campaign.

²⁷ The word "wrestle" refers to hand-to-hand combat with trickery and deception. That is Paul's description of how Satan and his hosts try to attack. Paul then lists four different designations of the spiritual world in opposition to God. Each of these words describe a different layer or rank of demons in the evil spiritual empire they serve. Satan's forces of darkness are highly structured for the most destructive purposes. Paul and Peter both name these same levels of demons (Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22).

like ours. Paul faced off against the powers of darkness in Ephesus by one of the longest recorded times he ever got to spend teaching God's Word in a synagogue. Paul spent three months in intense Bible teaching right there in the shadow of Diana's Temple of Darkness.

Look how Luke describes that time in Acts 19:8-10.

*Acts 19:8-10 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning²⁸ and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.** 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

Paul rented a lecture hall from a "Tyrannus" and using the customary lunch and siesta time observed each day in the Roman Empire²⁹.

Paul didn't want to just be another religious peddler, living off the hardworking people of Ephesus. He wanted nothing to stand in the way of his message so he labored night and day with his own hands, and taught any and all who would come on the afternoon break time.

Look at v. 10: Paul did this daily for two years. That means Paul invested as much as five hours a day for 24 months. With the Sabbath days, that means Paul invested over three thousand hours in teaching into the church at Ephesus. That is equivalent to thirty-years of morning and evening sermons at this church all packed into two years. Paul gave them a lifetime of learning in a very short time.

Listen to the results of this extensive and focused teaching time shedding Christ's light in that sin-darkened culture. I like to describe this as—

Penetrating the Darkness Acts 19:11-12

Acts 19:11-12 Now God worked unusual miracles³⁰ by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

We already saw in v. 10 that Luke said that "all" who dwelt in the Roman province of Asia (which is roughly modern day Turkey) were exposed to God's Word. In the area surrounding Ephesus there are the famous seven churches that Jesus wrote to in Revelation. It is very possible that each of them were a by-product of this extensive and intensive

²⁸ The word "reasoning" (NKJV) is the Greek word 'dialoguing'. Paul did questions and answer times, he reasoned back and forth taking the Jews from where they were, into God's Word and back to an application for their life in Ephesus. After three months of this, when the unbelievers became "hardened" and started to attack those who had believed, Paul makes a strategic shift in his methods.

²⁹ Usual work days went from 7 to 11 AM, then lunch and rest from 11AM-4 PM, and back to work from 4-9 PM. The Western Text actually says in the Greek text at this place 'from the fifth hour to the tenth'. From Paul's other writing we can assume that he worked at his tent-making business each morning, dialogued each day during the time off people had, and then returned to the shop to work from 4-9PM. If you look over at Acts 20:34 note what Paul reminded the church about his work ethic: Acts 20:34 "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

³⁰ Next, Luke records that "unusual miracles" took place. That is interesting because miracles in and of themselves are unusual, but these were extraordinary attestations by God of His Kingdom overcoming the reign of darkness in that whole area. Two types are noted—the hands of personal work of Paul and the power of God displayed through objects taken from Paul to the sick. Therein lies a bit of insight into the 'unusual' power displayed.

proclamation of God's Word.

The word “handkerchiefs” is actual the word for the sweat rags of the workshop³¹. The word “aprons” is the word for the leather workers apron. There in the hot and humid seaside tent-makers quarters, the rags that Paul used to wipe his face as he labored to work to pay his way and the way of those who were with him—when taken from that shop by those who wanted him to help their loved ones, healed them. That is unusual. God honored Paul’s message, his hard work, and most of all his assault on the realm of Satan’s hold over these enslaved and sin-darkened people.

LESSON: God looks for men and women to use who are willing to work unhindered by the sacrifice, laboring with an undivided heart, proclaiming an undiluted message, investing even in a humble occupation—all to make the Gospel of Christ known. This level of commitment was not new to Paul.³²

Paul sewed tents in the morning, taught the Bible all afternoon, disciplined fellow tent makers into the evening, went on visitation, prayed through sleepless nights and wrestled with the Devil. All that to get the Gospel out, and see a church born in the center of Satan’s lands of darkness. What a wonderful, inspiring servant of the Lord Paul must have been.

And as always happens: light attracts bugs. The powerful work of God was so amazing that Satan sent some bugs to hinder that work in Acts 19, they began:

Faking the Light Acts 19:13-16

In the midst of these “unusual” miracles a clever group opportunists wanted to get in on the action and started ‘selling’ the power of God. But God powerfully silenced their mockery.³³

This event and the powerful outpouring of God’s power deeply penetrated the hearts of the believers. They saw clearly that God was Living and True and that they as His children must be:

Renouncing the Darkness Acts 19:17-20

This was the turning point. The power of darkness was broken. Satan’s house was

³¹ Those handkerchiefs and aprons were as one commentator puts it, were: “symbols which God chose to employ in order to underscore the characteristic of the apostle which made him a channel of the power of God. In the same way, Moses’ rod was a symbol. Cast on the ground, the rod became a serpent; lifted over the waters, it rolled them back. There was nothing magic about the rod itself; it was the symbol of something about Moses which God honored. So these sweatbands and trade aprons were symbols of the honest, dignified humility of heart, the servant-character which manifested and released the power of God.” ~ Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

³² In his first epistle to the Thessalonians he said: 1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

³³ In the ancient world there were professional exorcists. They were magicians who had the reputation of knowing the individual names of the most powerful spirit beings. Among them were also even a group of Jewish priests who claimed to have knowledge of how to pronounce secret names of God, and thus they held special powers over the spiritual world. “So it was very natural for renegade Jewish exorcists to add Jesus’ name to their incantations. But the situation was intolerable, and the Lord decided to purge the bandwagon by providing an unforgettable example. The seven sons of Sceva thought they would have another quick exorcism and an easy buck—until they intoned the name Jesus. Then the demoniac rolled his frenzied eyes and said, “I know who Jesus is, and I know who Paul is, but who do you think you are?” After that, all they remembered were some rights and lefts, the door opening, and streaking madly for cover! Oh, how the church probably loved to tell that story!” Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

divided. Christ triumphantly opened the door to great ministry through this church.

*Acts 19:17-18 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.***

The most remarkable facet of Paul's ministry to this church is that when Paul taught the Ephesian believers about the strategies of Satan, they collected and burned all of the objects associated with demonic and satanic contact.

LESSON: The level of their desire to repent and follow the Lord was seen in this costly choice to rid their lives of anything that displeased Him. Their example recorded by God in His Word should stir us to ask, "Have we likewise carefully purged out of our lives anything that displeases the Lord?"

As you look back at v. 19, doesn't that verse amaze you? What did God lead Paul to do to prompt such a huge response in public with such great sacrifice involved?

God's Word records exactly what Paul told them that made them respond so dramatically to the evil around them. What Paul taught made them go home, search out, gather and BURN all of their expensive media.

The Power of Consecration

One final point that is perhaps the most important one of all for each of us: when the church cleans house, when believers renounce hidden sins, when there is a banishment of all hypocrisy and pretense, and genuine holiness begins to permeate Christ's church—*unbelievers become attracted to this new way of life.*

The power of the early church was simply genuine holiness. Energized by grace they magnified Christ, God's Word prevailed in them, and they lived consecrated lives. The Spirit of God moved unhindered, flowed unquenched and God got all the glory. No one competed for the credit, no one sought to be in control. God reigned, the Spirit moved, and Christ was magnified. They had caught the message of Ephesians 4:22-24. They put off, renewed, and put on the new—just as God told them to do. The choice is still ours.

We must daily strip off any return of the rotting garments of the old life.

We must personally reject any hint of sensuality, selfishness, pride, materialism, and bitterness in our lives.

We must eat God's Word and ask for renewed minds by His Spirit.

We must work out our own salvation by choosing to do the disciplines that will develop a Biblical mind.

We must put on and wear our new, shining garments of light each day, and live the new

us we became in Christ.

The Secret of Consecrated Living

God's Word explains that Christ's church powerful in any culture when:

- ***God's Son is magnified;***
- ***God's People are consecrated;***
- ***God's Word prevails.***

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. That powerful ministry was the result of a purged and obedient local church. One dear pastor wrote these words:

“What would be burned today if the Spirit’s conviction swept this church? I think some DVD’s, magazines, and videos would be quietly removed from out-of-the-way desk drawers or certain novels from the family bookshelves.

Perhaps some television shows, movies, web sites, radio stations, and video games would be boycotted. Some people would ask others to pray that they would be set free from whatever is dragging them down. And many would come to Christ for forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the eternal wrath of God³⁴”.

Is that what Jesus sees here among us today?

³⁴ Hughes, R. Kent, Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

Ephesus: First Love Then and Now

Revelation 2:1-7

As³⁵ we open to Rev. 2:1-7 we are reading the personal message in Christ's last words to His Church. These verses are part of a warning about what tripped up the earliest generations of believers. Jesus wanted them, and us, to stay on the right path.

These churches were real gatherings of people 2,000 years ago. That means that Jesus saw seven different types of believers gathering at that moment in the history of His church. Have you ever thought about that?

Every believer back then was like one of these seven types of believers addressed by these seven letters we are studying. In some part of the end of the First Century AD there were Ephesian types of believers (2:1-7); Smyrna types of believers (2:8-11); Pergamos types of believers (2:12-17); Thyatira types of believers (2:18-29); Sardis types of believers (3:1-6); Philadelphia types of believers (3:7-13); and Laodicea types of believers (3:14-22).

But even more than just back then, these letters were written in God's Word to instruct all of us down through the ages that even to our time, more than likely, the Son of God has walked among us and has found here:

Believers Had Spiritual Heart Problems

The believers in Ephesus: had declined from that first love we had for Jesus.

Their hearts had experienced a gradual buildup of other things so that no longer was Jesus holding the position of first place in their hearts, in their schedules, in their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their hearts.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Love Me most; Come back to Me.*

The saints in Ephesus had a serious heart conditions—listen as we stand to hear what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV) "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5***

³⁵ 110710AM CLW-12 Left.do

*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

Point #1: Jesus Addresses Them Personally (2:1a)

Rev. 2:1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

Although these seven churches were actual, historical churches in Asia Minor, they represent the types of churches that perennially exist throughout the church age. What Christ says to these churches is relevant in all times.

Jesus address Ephesus first, possibly for several reasons:

- Ephesus was the number two city in the entire Roman Empire.
- Ephesus was first in the list of churches Christ addresses.
- Ephesus had Paul longest ministry of 3 years.
- Ephesus was the largest of the ancient churches according to Eusebius.
-

Point #2: Jesus Addresses Them With Authority (2:1b)

Rev. 2:1b ‘these things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

These seven stars are the messengers who represent the seven churches. Christ holds them in his hand, which means that he controls the church and its leaders.

So the church in Ephesus is addressed first of the seven (Rev. 2:1-7), as being the most important church in the *de facto* capital, and as being the landing-place for a messenger from Patmos and standing at the head of a circular road joining the seven cities in order.

Point #3: Jesus Addresses Ephesus With An Approval (2:2-3, 6)

Rev. 2:2-3, 6 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;3 “and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 6 “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate

There are 10 specific commendations from Christ in v. 2-3, more than for any other church.

Last time we studied the founding of this church recorded in Acts 19. We saw that they also had the simple power that characterized the early church which flowed from genuine holiness. Energized by grace they magnified Christ, God's Word prevailed in them, and they lived consecrated lives. The Spirit of God moved unhindered, flowed unquenched and God got

all the glory. No one competed for the credit, no one sought to be in control. God reigned, the Spirit moved, and Christ was magnified.

Turn with me to Ephesians 4:22-24, and remember again that we are called to—

Three Powerful Habits

The heart of the message Paul taught in Ephesus, that prompted Acts 18, is captured in the words of Ephesians 4:22-24. That same message of Christ's Lordship must fill our lives, leading to the removal of any part of our lives that displeases God. There are three clear choices we must make!

Look again with me at Ephesians 4:22-24:

*that you **put off**, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and **be renewed** in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you **put on** the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

Start the Habit of Grace-prompted Shedding Ephesians 4:22

First, Paul is asking believers to **start a habit of grace-prompted shedding**. This is “putting off” old habits like old clothes are so comfortable and fit us so well, that we often forget that we even have them on again—until the Spirit of God convicts us. Paul is reminding us that those who will live a life holy to the Lord must repeatedly put off the old ways.

If we struggle with anger, anger must be shed daily; and if we struggle with pride, pride must daily be shed. This is also the choice we must make for lust, greed, fear and any other byproducts of our flesh. Often believers fail to grow in their spiritual lives because they don't understand the life-long need to shed or “put off” our old sins on a daily basis.

Start the Habit of Grace-prompted Thinking Ephesians 4:23

Second, in v. 23 Paul is asking them to **start a habit of grace-prompted thinking**. Choices to put off old ways flow from our renewed minds. Just as Romans 12:2 says we are “transformed by the renewing of our minds”. When we think godly, we behave godly; or when we believe right, we behave right.

God's plan for our minds always starts with us personally reading and studying His Word. Then from that flows our personal request to God's Spirit, asking Him to renew our minds. As we prayerfully read we have in our minds God's thoughts. As we submit to God's desires through His Word—He infuses His mind into ours. Paul said that we can have the mind of Christ by this constant renewal process. A grace-energized mind comes as believers regularly, hopefully daily get God's Word into their hearts and minds.

A simple goal would be to listen to God's voice all the way through His Word once each year. This in an

imperative for us, reading the Bible expectantly and asking God to speak to us by His Spirit each day in His Word.

Start the Habit of Grace-prompted Wearing Ephesians 4:24

Lastly, in v. 24 Paul is asking them *to start a habit of grace-prompted wearing*. This is the putting on: “... and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (v. 24).

God makes it clear that it is not enough to merely put off old fleshly habits, they must be replaced with the newness of Christ in wearing His love, wearing His peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22). If I lose my temper with my wife or children, and repent and put it off—that is not enough unless I also put on Christ's love and patience also!³⁶

God is at work in us His children, and energized by His grace we must work at living out this new life (Phil. 2:12-13). Our daily task is getting dressed in our divine clothes—spiritually speaking clothes do make the man, and the woman.

Point #4 : Jesus Gives Them An Admonition (2:4)

Rev. 2:4 “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love

The saints in Ephesus were not being obedient to the central truth of the Scriptures Old and New Testament: Love the Lord Your God MOST. That is what had been taught them from God’s Word by their faithful pastors over the years—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV) **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.***

Jesus States His Desire

In one word Jesus describes what He wanted, what they had, and what they had allowed to drift away from their lives. The requirement of the Lord is that we love Him FIRST.

The word in verse 4 translated into English as “first” is the Greek word **protos** (4413) **Protos** is a contracted superlative from the Greek preposition pros (4253) which has the meaning ‘in front of, above, before’.

So this word that God’s Spirit chooses to record in Christ’s message is a word that means that something is to always be “foremost”. Thus we can read foremost into the words

³⁶ All of this is through God’s grace. Works have no place in obtaining salvation or in gaining merit in the Christian life. The Christian life is sola gratia, grace alone. Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul said, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12b, 13). Hughes, R. Kent, Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

of the dictionary definition of this word:

1. "Foremost in" time,
2. "Foremost in" place,
3. "Foremost in" order of importance, and is before others things,
4. "Foremost is being" at the beginning of any list,
5. "Foremost is being" the best and chiefest;
6. "Foremost is being" simply first of all.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through Paul, Timothy, and John's ministry of the Word to them?

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But **seek first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 22:37 (NKJV) Jesus said to him, " 'You **shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**' "

This morning, pause and hear this letter with the same ears as they had in the First Century. Jesus uses a word they all understood. It is a word He wants us to understand.

Jesus says to them and us, I DESIRE to be:

1. "Foremost in" time,
2. "Foremost in" place,
3. "Foremost in" order of importance, and is before others things,
4. "Foremost is being" at the beginning of any list,
5. "Foremost is being" the best and chiefest;
6. "Foremost is being" simply first of all.

So that is Christ's desire. Next:

Jesus States Their Problem

Their lives were clogged with so many other things, so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives. They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him.

The word just before first love is fascination, it is the word "left". This word is the huge New Testament word for forgiveness which is the word *aphiami* (863) and describes forgiveness as an action that means: to lay aside, send away or release (as in scapegoat); omit, put away or yield. [This word we know well from the pages of the Scriptures, and it is most often translated "forgive". But the same word is also in I Corinthians 7:11, 12, 13 for a marriage partner being "put away" or "departing" from the marriage.]

Basically forgiveness is when an offense that has been committed and is lodged in a person's life gets released or sent away.

Action Needed: Jesus said: stop everything else from pushing me out, Go back to your

original settings; and Love the Lord Your God with all you are.

In Luke 15:22 this word is translated the “best robe”; and in Mark 10:44 it describes the chiefest of swats.

First love means loving Christ so much that you are willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to have Christ foremost in your life.

Beware Of Drifting Away From Foremost Love

At the end of an incredible life, John the Apostle wrote some arresting words. He had met and followed Jesus as a very young man. After those climactic days of the Crucifixion, resurrection and birth of the church -- John had outlived them all. As the final Apostle he closes his message with this warning:

In First John, the last words of John to believers are a warning against idols. The Spirit of God moved John to write a stern warning at the end of the Apostolic Age to the vibrant New Testament Church that they needed to be very careful to guard against idols.

1 John 5:21 Dear children, keep [aorist middle imperative] yourselves from idols. (NIV)

What some modern day idols? Look at some old ones the Lord condemns, and we can see the new.

- **BEWARE OF THE IDOL OF MONEY: Job 31:24-28** "If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high. (NIV)
- **BEWARE OF THE IDOL OF CAREER OR TECHNOLOGY: Habakkuk 1:15-16** The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. (NIV)
- **BEWARE OF THE IDOL OF APPETITES OR DESIRES: Philippians 3:19** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. (NIV)
- **BEWARE OF THE IDOL OF DISTRACTIONS: James 4:1-6** Jesus is so jealous He doesn't even want you to have friendship with the world. What is this? worldliness is forgetting God, friendship/idol is on mind

all time, willing to sacrifice for, blocks out other things;

Jesus says to them and us, I DESIRE to be:

1. *"Foremost in"* time,
2. *"Foremost in"* place,
3. *"Foremost in"* order of importance, and is before others things,
4. *"Foremost is being"* at the beginning of any list,
5. *"Foremost is being"* the best and chiefest;
6. *"Foremost is being"* simply first of all.

Their lives were clogged with so many other things, so Jesus was no longer first in their hearts, in their schedules, or their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their lives. They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him.

APPENDIX

What is worship? Think of a stone-age savage in a rain forest jungle valley of Irian Jaya. With his feather headdress and a bone accented nose heading to worship his god of the hills.

The pagan devotee has a location that he resorts to alone or with others that is devoted to his god. He arrives focused his mind prepared. He often acts very distracted from other events in life because of the intense attraction his god has upon him.

He starts by placing himself in front of his god which has drawn him. Often he has invested in articles of worship, many of which were costly and involved personal sacrifice to obtain. They are devoted to the object of worship.

The actual worship experience is usually accompanied by great enthusiastic emotional and physical response. There is often great pleasure derived from this worship and even the important duties of life are neglected to give complete focus upon the god. In fact, if the elements of primitive worship were to be listed in brief they would be localized devotion to an event that superseded all other events, with total focus and involvement even to the point of distraction with a group of other worshipers...

As true worshipers of the True God we have the same elements of worship only they are to be directed toward the one true God. We come into His presence sometimes alone but other times as a group because God wants us to gather to magnify Him as His family. It costs us time, we invest our resources, He draws us so much that at times the things of earth can grow strangely dim. we are very involved, receive joy unspeakable and full of glory...

Where can we see this love in the Scriptures? Here are some first lovers from those sacred pages:

Like the little daughter of Jairus Jesus raised from the dead. First Love is LIFE GIVING LOVE [Mark 5:35-41] All she could remember is her mothers tears. She had been so sick, the headache and fever were like fire. Then one moment as she felt herself slipping away she stared up at that face and saw the tears of hopelessness streaming down her mother's cheeks.

But now what? A loud cheer, radiant faces surrounding her as she is lifted from the bed in the arms of her father. No fever burning her, no head throbbing. Just such and amazingly clear sense of strength surging through her body. But wait. Who is that man over in the corner? He is so serene, His eyes are beaming and bright. As He gazes lovingly her way, father whispers "Its Jesus. You died. We despaired. He spoke to you. Instantly your cold, lifeless body burst into life. Your pale face glowed with health and you sat up. He told us just to believe. We do, oh we do!" This is Life Giving Love, the love that wells up in your heart when you realize you were dead and now are alive. Our Giver of life loved so deeply. This is first love

First Love is LONGING LOVE [Psalm 42] Like the Sons of Korah perhaps capturing a moment from the life of David. A life that seeks God and loves Christ even in the desert times of life. It is like the caravan across trackless wastes of sand that run out of water so a captive passenger, the hart is untied and let go. Lifting its nose to the winds it zeros in on the desire of its heart and heads straight to the oasis only it can smell. Soon the following caravan enjoys the fresh, cool springs of water. Do you seek out the Lord Jesus Christ as this desert creature. Do you love to find cool refreshing springs from His presence? That is what kept David going through the oft reoccurring desert dry times of life. This is first love - LONGING LOVE.

First Love is SURRENDERING LOVE [Daniel 4:1]. Like King Nebuchadnezzar when he walked for the first time instead of crawling. His seasons of roaming as a beast were past and now his mind could only say over and over, the most high reigns. As Nebuchadnezzar looked over the sprawling city glistening with gold, past the hanging garden that looked like the very Garden of Eden, around at the blue splendor of his tiled halls of Babylon -- this time he said it right. It is all God's not mine. When God takes it all away and then lets you have it back, you know He owns it all. He reigns and rules over all.

First Love is LIBERATING LOVE Like the woman taken in adultery [John 8]. The woman at His feet looking up in wonder. The mob had dropped their stones one by one and slunk away. From the oldest and most revered to the youngest and most zealous, the eyes of Jesus looking into their hearts had pierced them through. As He wrote on the sand all the secret sins of their lives no one was left but her. And then He looked into her soul and said "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more." The joy of that moment was Liberating Love. He had set her free from the shackles of guilt and shame. When Jesus wipes you clean and you feel fresh as the new fallen snow you can know that first love that is LIBERATING LOVE. Have you come into contact with His liberating love?

First Love is INVESTING LOVE Like the woman of the streets [Luke 7:36-50]. The alabaster flask lay shattered in her hands. The fragrance of the dripping ointment swiftly filling the room. There was no turning back now. Broken and poured out, her life's savings were now dripping on the feet of Jesus. Those dusty feet fresh from the bathing she had given them with her tears. Dried with the hairs of her very own head. Now drenched in the most costly, exquisite imported perfume money could buy. He was the one who had forgiven her. He was

worth all that life could ever bring. This was the inexpressible surge of Forgiving Love.

First Love is FOCUSED LOVE like Mary [Luke 10:38-42]. That sits at the feet of Christ and finds the good part of life. Leaving behind the swirl of life in the fast and busy lane. That is the love that welled up in Mary's heart because First Love is FOCUSED LOVE. Even when life is swirling and grinding and racing by us furiously, we focus on Him! We worship Him before we serve Him!

First Love is GRATEFUL LOVE like the Tenth Leper [Luke 17:12-19]. He had been with this gang every since he was cast out of his family. Leprosy does that you know. first they were so sympathetic with his bruise that wouldn't heal. then as it oozed and turned foul smelling he could see the fear in their eyes -- Leprosy Out! So here he was with fellow smelling, oozing lepers. Most people screamed and ran away when they saw us but that day He just stood there and waited as we approached. When He said go show yourself to the priest we thought why not. And then it happened. Like an old heavy coat I felt it slip from my frame. Looking down it was true, my fetid sores, oozing wounds and dying limbs were fresh as a newborns skin. Oh how my heart was filled with love and thanks and praise for Him. I fell at His feet and cried glory, glory, glory. I fell at His feet and worshiped and thanked Jesus! This is the GRATEFUL LOVE of First love. When is the last time you fell at His feet and cried glory, I am healed of my leprosy of sin. I am forgiven. I am cleansed! Oh don't wait, tell Him today, this moment that you are GRATEFUL!

So what can we do to rekindle our first love? Remember where we left the path and go back to:

First Love is LONGING LOVE [Psalm 42]

Like King Nebuchadnezzar First Love is SURRENDERING LOVE [Daniel 4:1]

Like the little daughter of Jairus Jesus raised from the dead First Love is RESURRECTING LOVE [Mark 5:35-41]

Like the woman taken in adultery First Love is LIBERATING LOVE [John 8]

Like the woman of the streets First Love is INVESTING LOVE [Luke 7:36-50]

Like Mary First Love is FOCUSED LOVE [Luke 10:38-42]

Like the Tenth Leper First Love is GRATEFUL LOVE. [Luke 17:12-19]

There was in Ephesus: STRONG IMMORALITY.

YOU CAN STAY PURE FOR CHRIST IN ANY CULTURE, ANY TIME, ANY SETTING. All day long in the confines of this glittering structure, thousands of prostitutes, male and female, gave themselves in the sordid worship of the pagan fertility deities. At dusk, they would go into the city to earn a living in the bustling atmosphere of travelers from both land and sea. We can learn the secret of how to resist an impure world and stay pure and holy for Jesus. Here is what Paul taught them 40 years earlier. You can stay pure by –

REPENTING OF YOUR PAST: Ephesians 2:3 Among whom also we all had our

conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

SEEING YOUR CALLING: Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

LEARNING THE SPIRITUAL SECRET OF PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON: Ephesians 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts

SEEKING CHRIST TO DEEPLY PENETRATE YOUR LIFE: Ephesians 5:3-5 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

RENOUNCING ALL TOUCH WITH YOUR OLD WAYS: Ephesians 5:12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. (KJV)

There was in Ephesus: STRONG EVIL INFLUENCES.

YOU CAN STAY TRUE TO CHRIST IN ANY CULTURE, ANY TIME, ANY SETTING.

Because this Temple was the most revered site in the ancient world to literally millions of worshipers, a custom had arisen that anyone was free within a 200-yard security zone. Thus, criminals came from far and wide to find a haven. And, their presence only permeated the city with evil. So how did Paul train them to stay good in that evil setting?

COMMIT TO TRUTHFULNESS: Ephesians 4:25-32 wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.

FLEE ANYTHING THAT GRIEVES GOD: Ephesians 4:26 be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 neither give place to the devil. 28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with [his] hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. 29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (KJV)

There was in Ephesus: STRONG MATERIALISM.

YOU CAN LIVE FOR CHRIST IN ANY CULTURE, ANY TIME, ANY SETTING.

Because of the nearly universal worship of Diana, no one would dare to rob her, thus behind the altar was a world bank, for the safe keeping of currency and treasures.

KNOW YOU GOT IT. Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance,

being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

KNOW YOU ARE SECURE. Ephesians 1:14 which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE. Ephesians 1:18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

KNOW YOU GOT MORE THAN CAN BE COUNTED. Ephesians 2:7 That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

KNOW YOU GOT MORE THAN YOU CAN DREAM OF. Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; (KJV)

The Church at SMYRNA: How to Serve Christ Through Affliction

Revelation 2:8-11

As³⁷ we open to Revelation 2:8-11 we are opening to the second of Christ's seven personal letters to individual churches of the late 1st Century. We looked at them as a group, but now we are taking a look at each individual church.

As we read these words, the historical context is that the Church at Smyrna was going through the second wave of persecutions that the early church had to endure.

A Short History of Early Church Persecution

Someone told me this week they could save the first half hour of my messages by just “Google-ing” what I talk about, and implied they wanted me to just stick to reading the text of the Scripture. But for the rest of you that are willing, if you will bear with me, I’d like to give you a sanctified mind’s analysis of Church History: something that they could never get on

³⁷ 110717AM CLW-13 Smyrna.do

Google.

The reason I share with you the background details of each passage we study is to show it to you through the lens of Scripture, and with my own lifetime analysis of these facts, what is vital to increase our understanding. That is actually one of the elements of expository preaching, which is my lifelong pursuit.

Church History records three notable waves of persecution from the Roman Emperors:

- **Wave #1: Emperor Nero (54-68 AD)** This persecution was sporadic and limited mainly to Rome, sweeping up Paul and Peter to execution³⁸.
- **Wave #2: Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD)** This persecution was wider than Nero's, across some of the Roman Empire's provinces, and hitting both the church at Smyrna and exiling John to Patmos.
- **Wave #3: Emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD)** This persecution was the greatest of any Roman Emperor against Christ's Church. Diocletian, who was one of the most administrative of all Rome's rulers, began a systematic purge of Christianity, through an Empire-wide eradication of the Church, and he almost succeeded.

For the final nearly 10 years of Diocletian's reign he systematically decimated Christ's church. The main reason that there is not one single complete manuscript of the Bible today, and all we have are 20,000+ fragments and partial manuscripts is because of this one very powerful man.

Under Diocletian's wave of persecution: ***every church meeting place*** that could be identified was pulled down; ***every pastor*** that could be found was killed; and ***every copy of God's Word*** that could be discovered, was destroyed.

The church came closest to extinction in those years.

Why are they called the Roman Catholic Church?

Have you ever wondered why the Catholic Church is called the Roman, Catholic Church? The answer comes right here in this third and final wave of persecution.

The result of this Empire-wide extermination of Christianity era was the rise to power of Constantine, who legalized Christianity. When the Roman Emperor Constantine designated Christianity as the State Church, he also merged all of Rome's pagan worship establishment into this State Church. This blending or syncretism of truth (the early church) and error (the pagan religions of Rome), are what actually prompted the birth of what we call Roman

³⁸ The villain of the first wave of persecution was Nero, who was just three years old when his father died. It was little loss to Nero, for his father had been a killer, a bully and a cheat. His mother took over the family trade and continued his education. She murdered his stepfather with a dish of poisoned mushrooms. Nero was reared in squalor and proved a notable son to his parents. While still young, he committed his first murder, killing a teenage boy who stood in his way, and watching him die with callous indifference. He married at fifteen but soon had his wife killed. He married again, and slew his second wife, too. In order to marry a third time, he murdered the husband of the woman he wanted. Nero's mother annoyed him; so he arranged her murder, first by guile, but when that was unsuccessful, without pretense. He was an ugly man with a bull neck, beetle brows, a flat nose, and a tough mouth. He had a potbelly, spindly legs, bad skin and offensive odor. At the age of thirty-one, he was sentenced to death by flogging. He fled to a dingy basement and, in the house of a slave, cut his own throat. He gave the infant church it's first taste of things to come. His name was Nero. He was the first of the persecuting Caesars of Rome.

Catholicism today.

The Roman part of the Catholic church was the merging of traditions, vestments, orders, practices, buildings, superstitions, and priests from paganism into the early New Testament church.

Now open with me to Christ's letter to this church under this next wave of persecution, and listen with me to His Voice speaking to them through these words:

Revelation 2:8-11 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 "I know your works, **tribulation**, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to **suffer**. Indeed, the devil is about to **throw some of you into prison**, that you may be **tested**, and you will have **tribulation** ten days. **Be faithful until death**, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

Smyrna Was Under A Wave Of Persecution

This second wave of persecution that broke over Smyrna had its start way back during the Life of Christ. The Emperor in Christ's last years was named Tiberius and in 26 AD an altar to Emperor Tiberius was built there in Smyrna (just 40 miles north of Ephesus). This was the official start in that city of Emperor Worship.

To stay a happy part of the Empire one had only to stop by the Temple and scoop a pinch of incense and put it on the fire. Then a certificate was given, like our auto license renewal stickers. That event and paper called a libelli, verified that you had passed. It was an annual homage to the Emperor that became the one action that unified the masses of people in the Roman Empire.

This morning we see the shadow of intense, falling across the church at Smyrna. In about 94 AD Domitian says, get the Christians to go with the flow or pay the price. Can you imagine the pressure?

The whole city is lined up, one by one they come through the archway leading into the Forum area. Soldiers stand guard, the city clerk sits with the registry of names, his pen, and a bowl of incense in front of him.

The stream of citizens walk by, take a pinch of the power, drop it onto the coal fire burning in the censor and taking their certificate—walk out into another year of peace and security.

There you are in line, if you just go with the flow, your children, wife, husband, friends, job, home—all are secure.

But if you refuse, if you believe that only Jesus is Lord, if you say that Caesar is not God, Jesus Christ is the Lord, then the slow grind of that efficient machine called Rome will begin to

hunt you down and either force you to recant, or take your life.

So with that historical backdrop:

The Believers At Smyrna Learned How To Suffer And Die

The most important decision you will ever make in life is how you want to die!

The saints at Smyrna wanted to die in Jesus. They learned the lesson well because, after the letter arrived from Jesus in Revelation 2, their pastor went on to die a martyr's death.

Let me give the last moments of this pastor at Smyrna, who was the last living person from this period that had known the apostle John personally and face-to-face.

The Jews in Smyrna were violently opposed to Christ's Church and were blaspheming and persecuting the Christians. This event is not mere speculation because history has left us with an account of the death of Polycarp, the pastor of the church in Smyrna.³⁹ Here is the record of his death:

"It was during the time of the public games; the city was crowded; and the crowds were excited. Suddenly the shout went up: Away with the atheist; let Polycarp be searched for. They came to arrest him, but not even the police captain wished to see Polycarp die.

On the brief journey to the forum the officer pled with the old man: What harm is it to say, "Caesar is Lord" and to offer sacrifice to be saved?

But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord. When he entered the arena [the] proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death.

"Eighty and six years have I served Him," said Polycarp, "and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

So the crowds came flocking with burning coals from the workshops and from the baths, and the Jews, even though they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were foremost in bringing wood for the fire.

The soldiers were going to bind Polycarp to the stake, but he said, "Leave me as I am, for He who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails."

So they left him loosely bound in the flames. Pastor Polycarp faithfully died for Christ.

That was just one incident in the life of the church at Smyrna as they endured the second great wave of persecution.⁴⁰

There is a clear lesson for each of us whether we face such direct persecution, or lesser,

³⁹MacArthur, Church In Prophetic Perspective

⁴⁰William Barclay, The Revelation of John, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1976] pp. 76-77

but equally persistent trails:

Hope In Jesus When Life Is Painful

The message Christ gives is so simple in verse 10:

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The entire message to this church is: fear not.

The most important lesson for each of us from this church is: fear not.

No matter what lies ahead in our daily lives, health lives, career, finances, or anything else, the message is simply fear not.

God does not give us a spirit of fear, the world, our flesh, and the Devil do, but God does not.

Fear not, instead in v. 10 Christ says: be faithful, trust Me! Why?

Because look back at:

v. 8 Jesus was crushed for our sins

Look again at v. 8 and the very name of this church is written as: “Smyrna”. This word is not only the name of this assembly, Smyrna is also the Greek word translated “myrrh”.

It is a substance taken from a thorny tree and was the chief product of this city, the seaport of Myrrh. Myrrh is always associated with suffering and death, because it is produced by injuring the bark of the tree, each cut made by knife or machete is healed with the resin from which is refined myrrh.

Think of the symbolic message of this spice and the life of Christ:

At Christ’s Birth while coming in the form of a servant He endured being born into poverty for us, according to Matthew 2:11, wise men came from the East and brought Christ gold, frankincense and myrrh.

At Christ’s Crucifixion as He suffered the weight of sin, and separation from God for us, according to Mark 15:23, He was offered wine mixed with myrrh. It served as an anesthetic. His crucifiers were trying to dull His senses so the pain wouldn’t be so bad.

At Christ’s Burial He was placed in a tomb wrapped in myrrh after suffering the wrath of God for our salvation, according to John 19:39: a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight, was used to prepare the body of Jesus Christ for burial in a borrowed tomb.

At Christ’s Return in Glory He shall be presented with gold, frankincense but, not myrrh according to Isaiah 60:6. Jesus came only the first time as a suffering servant, His Second Coming is as King of the Universe! Isaiah 60:6 The multitude of camels shall cover your

land. The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.

Then He will appear as the mighty Sovereign Lord, not the Sufferer. Myrrh is only associated with the suffering present at Christ's birth, death and burial. So, from the very name of this city, and their suffering, we can learn:

How To Die Triumphantly

And unless Christ returns soon, all of us face the inevitability of death. Are you ready?

Have you planned for the spiritual aspects of your death? So many only get the funeral arrangements and life insurance in order. There is so much more to plan and prepare for as a Christian.

The Bible teaches us much about Dying Right! In the Scriptures we find some good ways to die, as modeled by saints who have gone before us:

JACOB DIES TRUSTING THE PROMISES OF GOD Genesis 47:29; 48:15-16

HE LOOKED FOR THE LAND OF PROMISE TO THE END! Genesis 47:29 And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: (KJV)

HE FOLLOWED HIS SHEPHERD ALL THE WAY! Genesis 48:15-16 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (NKJV)

Joseph Dies Pointing To The Faithfulness Of God Genesis 50:24

Genesis 50:24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "**I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised** on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (NIV)

David Dies Exhorting His Family To Follow God 1 Kings 2:1-4

1 Kings 2:1-4 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, and **observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the LORD may keep his promise to me:** 'If your descendants watch how they live,

and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' (NIV)

Stephen Dies Praising God Acts 7:59-60

Acts 7:59-60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (NIV)

Paul Dies Finishing The Plan God Gave Him 2 Timothy 4:6-8

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day -- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (NIV)

Peter Dies Reminding The Saints About The Word Of God 2 Peter 1:12-15

2 Peter 1:12-15 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (NIV)

Christ Dies Pointing The Way For Another To Come To God Luke 23:43

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJV)

Smyrna was in great persecution and stood fast through it; true believers discover Jesus is all I have, and need. By faith they remain faithful to Him, no matter what the price they have to pay.

We like them can be purified by persecution, and be faithful to the Lord. Christ's message for them and to us today is: Trust Me to the end; Stay true to the end; Suffer for Me.

APPENDIX: A True Test

"A person⁴¹ who claims to be a Christian and who does not give up his faith in the midst of trials and difficulties is a true Christian. His very perseverance proves the reality of his

⁴¹ Gene Getz, *Believing God when you are tempted to doubt*, p. 58-59.

relationship with Jesus Christ. Pliny, Roman governor in Asia Minor in the early second century, was so puzzled about the Christians who were brought before him for trial that he wrote his famous letter to the Emperor Trajan asking for his advice. This was the kind of thing he found himself up against:

A certain unknown Christian was brought before him, and Pliny, finding little fault in him, proceeded to threaten him.

"I will banish thee," he said.

"Thou canst not," was the reply. "For all the world is my Father's house."

"Then I will slay thee," said the governor.

"Thou canst not," answered the Christian, "for my life is hid with Christ in God."

"I will take away thy possessions," continued Pliny.

"Thou canst not, for my treasure is in Heaven."

"I will drive thee away from man and thou shalt have no friend left," was the final threat.

And the calm reply once more was, "Thou canst not, for I have an unseen Friend, from whom thou art not able to separate me."

What was a poor, harassed Roman governor, with all the powers of life and death, torture and the stake at his disposal, to do with people like that?

Ending Well: David Livingstone

The shadow of a sixty-year-old man was silhouetted against the canvas of the tent. The flickering candle cast a golden aura inside as he knelt beside a small wood and canvas cot. Rhythmic tropical rain lightly pelted the tent as he prayed beside his bed. The prayer was one he had written out many years before. If you were able to hear that night what God heard it would have sounded much like this:

*O Lord since Thou hast died,
To give Thyself for me,
No sacrifice would seem to great,
For me to make for Thee.*

Outside the native porters, guides and cooks who had followed this man for nearly 20 years through the jungle heard the low sound of his voice communing with God as he always had done before bed. Then the candle flickered out and they also retired to sleep through the rainy night.

The next morning the cold and stiff body of David Livingstone was still kneeling beside the cot when his beloved native brothers found him. He was so thin from the countless bouts with malaria, his skin darkened by the years of Equatorial African sun was loosely draped over the bones of his earthly tent now vacant. His spirit had soared immortal, making its flight from the darkness of a disease ridden, weak and failing body to the realm of light and life in the

presence of Jesus his King to whom he had consecrated his life.

Who Was David Livingstone? (1813-1873)

David Livingstone^[1] was born in the Scottish city of Blantyre in 1813.

At age ten he began working fourteen-hour days in the cotton mill to help support his impoverished family. There he learned by snatching sentences from a book on his spinning jenny, followed by two hours of night school. These disciplines kept him from being totally uneducated.

He was converted at twelve, and had a profound spiritual awakening at twenty and resolved to be a medical missionary in China. From that point onward Livingstone studied Greek, theology, and medicine at Glasgow, returning to the mill during vacations to help pay expenses.

Qualified in medicine, he was sent by the London Missionary Society in 1840 to South Africa, since the Opium War had closed China. Livingstone's heart had been fired by missionary Robert Moffat's words about having seen "the smoke of a thousand villages" where no missionary had ever been.

Livingstone and his wife, Mary, Moffat's daughter, stayed in three homes in three years, ever moving further up-country. He was evangelist, doctor, teacher, builder, gardener, shoemaker, and carpenter. But all the time his eyes were on the "unknown north" beyond the fearsome Kalahari Desert.

In 1852 Livingstone sent his wife and children home before he embarked on a four-year, six-thousand-mile journey that took him to Angola's Atlantic coast, then east to the Indian Ocean at Mozambique. During long weary journeys, debilitating illnesses, danger from wild animals and hostile tribes, he never relaxed his self-imposed discipline, but made observations, studied languages, kept his famous *Diaries*, and prepared scientific reports that brought him fame. He retained his humility, writing in 1853: "I will place no value on anything I have ... except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ."

When Livingstone's wife died in 1861, he threw himself fiercely into his work. He disappeared from sight for ten years; and when found by Henry Morton Stanley of the *New York Herald* in 1871, Livingstone refused to go home. Two days later he wrote in his diary: "March 19, my birthday. My Jesus, my King, my Life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to Thee. Accept me, and grant, O gracious Father, that ere the year is gone I may finish my work. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen." A year later his servants found him on his knees in his tent -- dead.

David Livingstone, the renowned and noble missionary to Africa, wrote^[2] in his journal, People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called sacrifice, which is simply paid back as a small part of the great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? . . . Away with such a word, such a view, and such a thought! It is

emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory, which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not talk when we remember the great sacrifice, which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us.

At his death in 1873, such was their love for him that his native assistants bore his body fifteen hundred miles to the coast. One of them was among the huge crowd at the funeral in Westminster Abbey. Some words on Livingstone's tombstone there summarize his achievements: "For thirty years his life was spent in an unwearied effort to evangelize the native races, to explore the undiscovered secrets, to abolish the desolating slave trade of Central Africa."

With that background listen again through the tent as you can dimly see in the dark jungles of Africa the shadow of a sixty-year-old man silhouetted against the canvas of the tent. The flickering candle cast a golden aura inside as he knelt beside a small wood and canvas cot. Rhythmic tropical rain lightly pelted the tent as he prayed beside his bed. The prayer was one he had written out many years before. If you were able to hear that night what God heard it would have sounded much like this:

*O Lord since Thou hast died, To give Thyself for me,
No sacrifice would seem to great, For me to make for Thee.
Lord send me anywhere, Only go with me;
Lay any burden on me, Only sustain me.
Sever any tie, Save the tie that binds me to Thy heart.
Lord Jesus my King, I consecrate my life Lord to Thee!
I only have one life, and that will soon be past;
I want my life to count for Christ, What's done for Him will last.
I follow Thee my Lord, And glory in Thy Cross;
I gladly leave the world behind, And count all gain as loss.
Lord send me anywhere, Only go with me;
Lay any burden on me, Only sustain me.
Sever any tie, Save the tie that binds me to Thy heart.
Lord Jesus my King, I consecrate my life Lord to Thee!*

We aren't ready to live until we are prepared to die. And we live best when we know what counts when we die. Along that line I have enjoyed the systematic repetitive reading of God's Word for many years. In fact for the past twenty-eight years I have read the Bible through at a rate of twice through the Old Testament and three times through the New Testament each year. In these repetitive readings I have always looked for something. One of the areas that has fascinated me over the years as I have read and reread God's Word is the way the Lord records the end of the earthly lives of His beloved saints. I searched each page of God's Word for the closing scene and the recorded words of God's saints. What a study.

In the context of Smyrna we need to learn about Ending Well: How to suffer and die

Triumphantly.

A Biblical Perspective On Persecution Of Believers

First, Persecution is inevitable for Christians:

- Matthew 5:11-12 *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- Mark 10:29-30 *So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s,³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 *and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.¹ Peter 4:12,*
- 2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
- 1 Peter 4:12 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*

Second, we are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ:

- Acts 5:41 *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*
- Philippians 1:29 *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*
- Philippians 3:10-11 *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*
- 1 Peter 2:20-23 *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:²² “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*
- 1 Peter 4:12-16 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters.¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not*

be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter

Third, God's Word promises wonderful treasures for those who face persecution:

- **DEATH WILL BRING PEACE AND REST.** - Isaiah 57:1-2 The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil. 2 He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, Each one walking in his uprightness.
- **GOD WILL BRING JUSTICE WHEN JESUS RETURNS.** - 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (NIV)
- **LEADS TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY.** - James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION EARNS US HEAVENLY REWARDS** - James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (NIV)

Fourth, God uses persecution for His purposes:

- **PERSECUTION OFTEN SPREADS THE GOSPEL TO OTHER PLACES.** - Acts 8:1,4 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION IS TO REVEAL JESUS IN US.** - 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO BE MORE COURAGEOUS IN THEIR TESTIMONY.** - Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (NIV)

PERSECUTION OF SAINTS ALWAYS GLORIFIES CHRIST. - 1 Peter 1:7 These [all kinds of trials] have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus

Christ is revealed. (NIV)

Fifth, what are proper responses in the face of persecution:

- **LOVE AND PRAY FOR THE ONES WHO ARE PERSECUTING BELIEVERS.** - Matthew 5:44-45 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (NIV) 1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (NIV)
- **CALL YOUR CHURCH TO PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED.** - Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
- **SHOW AS MUCH CONCERN FOR THE PERSECUTED AS FOR THOSE IN YOUR OWN LOCAL CHURCH.** - 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (NIV)
- **AS YOU PRAY, REMEMBER WHO THE TRUE ENEMY IS.** Ephesians 6:12-13, 18 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (NIV)
- **REJOICE OVER THEIR STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD.** - 1 Thessalonians 3:7-9 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? (NIV)
- **EXHORT OTHER CHRISTIANS BY THE FAITH AND EXAMPLE OF THE PERSECUTED BELIEVERS.** - 2 Thessalonians 1:4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.
- **STAND SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE PERSECUTED BELIEVERS. ACCEPT PERSONAL LOSS IN ORDER TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THEM.** - Hebrews 10:32-34 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.
- **REMEMBER THE PERSECUTED AS IF YOU YOURSELVES WERE SUFFERING.** - Hebrews 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. (NIV)

PERGAMUM: When Believers Compromise Christ's Call to Personal Holiness

Revelation 2:12-17

As⁴² we open to Revelation 2:12-17 this morning, remember that Revelation 1-3 is all about:

Slide-1: Seeing Jesus Gathering With His Local Churches

Jesus wants us to know He is walking among us and watching our lives.

The simple message Jesus Christ gives us is that His Highest Priority right now is gathering with His local church. Remember where John first saw Jesus in Revelation 1:12? He was walking around His local churches (that is what v. 20 says that those lampstands represent: Christ's local churches).

That means that He is right now watching us. He is walking around His gathered Church looking to see if we are being and doing what He left for us to be and do.

Notice that Christ walks about His Local Churches, places when people gathered in a recognizable community. Christ's Church is His priority, it is where He is spending His time. The first message of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is that the local Church is His PRIORITY, it is where He goes, what He does, and where He is at work in the world today.

When Jesus toured His local churches He names seven of them, using seven local, geographic gatherings of believers. He describes each assembly and uses His assessment of these local churches to challenge all of the churches. This morning we are going to learn about:

Slide-2: When Jesus Visits His Church #3 at Pergamum

*Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 **But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a***

⁴² 110724AM CLW-14 Pergamum.do

stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

The letters Christ wrote to the seven churches are for us lessons in living for Him at the end of days. What is the lesson Christ teaches us from this church at Pergamum? It is simply:

Slide-3: The Danger of The Compromised Christian

The lesson for all of us living at the end of days is that there is a danger of becoming a compromised Christian. What exactly is a compromised Christian?

God's Word teaches us that believers are compromised when they are no longer distinctively Christ-like.

Believers in Pergamum had gotten so comfortable around the deadly germs of worldliness that they began to exhibit the symptoms of friendship with the world. They were no longer distinctively Christ-like.

Believers at Pergamum had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world that displeased God. They lived just like all the pagans around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of friendship with the world and draw near to God.

We find here in Rev. 2:12-17 *Christ's second expectation of His Church*. Jesus says to this church that to please God as His Children they must separate from sin.

Do you remember the common theme we see in five of the seven churches? They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them to stay away from sin, thus they were not pleasing Him.

Slide-4: Pergamum's Lesson: To Please God Separate From Sin

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them? Remember, God's Word is God speaking to us.

When we read the Word or hear it preached, taught, expounded upon and explained it is hearing God declare what His desires are for us as His people. This leads us to Paul's very clear teachings about:

Slide-5: The Disobedience of the Compromised Christian

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 (NKJV) And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their**

God, and they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore **“Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”** 18 “ I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

First note that Paul reminds us of six powerful truths about who we really are in Christ.

These are the reasons why we have such a high level of expectation placed upon us by the Lord. First, as we look at v. 16 we can watch as Paul reminds them that: 1). We are the *“Temple of God”*; and not just any God, but Paul reminds us that 2). We are the *“Temple of the Living God”*.

Then Paul begins quoting rapid-fire and merging three separate verses [Lev. 26:12 + Jeremiah 32:38 + Ezekiel 37:27] into one verse (v. 17); and in that amazing verse reminds us that we are 3). *God’s dwelling place*; and that 4). *He walks among us*; and 5). *He is our God*; and finally that 6). *We are His people*.

Then comes His high calling and very life-transforming desire for each of us in v. 17 onward. Listen again to those words again, only this time in light of who Paul has reminded us that we are:

v. 17 Therefore **“Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”** 18 “ I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Paul reminds us that God always desires that we constantly repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to God. The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

But now comes the most amazing truth, one that jumps from the pages of Scripture when we remind ourselves of the address of this letter.

Where was Christ’s letter sent? To the city of: Pergamum. What is the lesson we are to understand from that fact? Here is the powerful truth:

Slide-6: God Can Grow a Church Anywhere

This letter was targeted to one group of people. They lived in a specific historic, geographic, and cultural area.

Here is what a study Bible would tell you about Pergamum:

“Pergamum (modern Bergama) was built on a 1,000-foot hill in a broad, fertile plain about 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It had served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor for over 250 years.

It was an important religious center for the pagan cults of Athena, Asklepios, Dionysius (or Bacchus, the god of drunkenness), and Zeus. It was the first city in Asia to build a temple to

Caesar (29 b.c.) and became the capital of the cult of Caesar worship.”⁴³

That short entry wouldn't really get our attention until we unpack just exactly what it means.

There are three items in that description:

Slide-7: Geography, History, Culture

Slide-8: Geography: Beautiful

It's Geography: Pergamum was a beautifully built city, about 80 miles north of Smyrna, about 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, and built on a hill 1000 feet above the lush green and very fertile valleys of Asia Minor.

Slide-9: History: Ancient

It's History: Pergamum was an ancient city. In 95 AD as John wrote it was an old city, it had been the capital of Asia Minor for almost 300 years.

Slide-10: Culture: Academic

It's Culture: Pergamum was a university town (with the largest library in the ancient world rivaling with Alexandria), with about 200,000 volumes. In fact, Pergamum was noted for the production and use of parchment (boiled animal skins) that books were written on.

Slide-11: WHAT AN AWFUL PLACE TO LIVE FOR JESUS

Why was Pergamum such a difficult place to live for Christ? Because it was much like most college towns—a place of very powerful temptations.

Satan always wants to neutralize and derail believers from walking in the light and living out Christ's truth!

Slide-12: Reputation: exciting city

Pergamum was both an exciting place to live and an exciting place to visit-- it was a very sacred city to pagans city. This city was noted for the worship of three gods of the pagan

⁴³ MacArthur Study Bible, in loc.

pantheon of gods. These were:

Slide-13: Dionysus: God of Drunken Orgies

Dionysus (Bacchus) was the worship of the god of orgies, wine and debauchery.

Slide-14: Zeus: King of the Gods

Zeus worship (King of Greek/Roman Gods) Largest and most famous wonders of ancient world the altar of Zeus was extending 40' over cliff.

Slide-15: Asclepius: God of Healers

Asclepius worship (God of healers) - snakes that slithered over people on dark and wet floors to cure them.

Slide-16: Satan's Throne

It is also possible that Satan was actually running his global operation out of this city. Remember how Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that there are hierarchies in Satan's realm: thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

Note how twice in verse 13 Jesus says that Satan was very active in this place.

Slide-17: Result Alluring Immorality Center

All of these gods and the God of this world being concentrated at this time, in this place made Pergamum very alluring. It was known as an IMMORALITY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD. Bacchus/Dionysus

Slide-18: Intimidating Idolatry Center

The IDOLATRY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD to the king of the gods of the pagan Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus or Jupiter.

Slide-19: Confusing False Healing Center

The FALSE HEALING CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD with drug induced stupors, snakes

and the false god of healing: Asclepius

Slide-20: Deadening Satanic Power Center

Finally, SATANIC CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, the Devil himself had a personal throne there for the time as headquarters for his global rebellion.

And in that place was a church... the assembly at Pergamum. Lesson One, Christ can save! The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment, from Jesus, a pardon receives.

So this assembly was right in the middle of:

The IMMORALITY CENTER of the ancient world. Bacchus/Dionysus

The IDOLATRY CENTER of the ancient world to the king of the gods of the pagan Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus or Jupiter.

The FALSE HEALING CENTER of the ancient world with drug induced stupor's, snakes, and the false god of healing: Asclepius

Finally, SATANIC CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, the Devil himself had a personal throne there for the time as headquarters for his global rebellion.

And in that place was a church... the assembly at Pergamum.

The incredible testimony of God from Pergamum is that Christ can save! The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment, from Jesus, a pardon receives.

Slide-21: THE APPROVAL v. 13

--they were saved in spite of all that...

--they claimed the true name...

--they didn't deny Christ in fierce trials...

--so, they were to be commended

Antipas was most likely the pastor of the church. Tradition says Antipas was burned to death by being thrown inside a brass bull that was heated by a fire set beneath it.

Slide-22: The Danger of Believers Compromising Their Christ-likeness

First look at v. 14-15 and note what Christ said "I have few things against you!"

First, you have Balaam's doctrine = what is that? "Balaam tried unsuccessfully to prostitute his prophetic gift and curse Israel for money offered him by Balak, king of Moab. So he devised a plot to have Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage. The result was the blasphemous union of Israel with fornication and idolatrous feasts (for the story of

Balaam, see Num. 22–25).”⁴⁴

“Put stumbling block...” Numbers 22-25 records how Moabites contacted Balaam a prophet for hire, he prophesied 4x promising Israel’s conquest of Moab and Christ’s coming, they angrily fired him and God killed 24,000 of Israel with a plague.

What? God killed 24,000 of Israel? Yes, that’s the doctrine of Balaam, “If you can’t defeat it, join it and defile it and God will judge it”. Balaam said get them involved in sexual sin and God will judge them and did...

Balaam’s doctrine is still here -- people actually say they are Christians and live in sexual sin. And today if you are living in such sin and drawing in others, to you Christ says “I am coming to war against you”.

Second, Nicolaitans, what’s that? Nicolas supposedly started a cult but no record in church history. Many pastors through the centuries take this to be Nike-laios - conquered people.

Yes, self-made prophets ruling with rods of iron, building ecclesiastical kingdoms of wealth and power---still with us today, sadly.

Just quickly a side note- How did it happen? How did the pure, simple gospel get in purple robes with gold rings and set in paganism, idols and false “work your way to heaven” doctrines?

In short, it happened in 313 AD, 2 generals were fighting to take Diocletian’s (persecutor of last week) kingdom. The place : Maxentius in East, Constantine in West.

One made a deal with some supernatural being and said if you help me win at a bridge over a river called Milvian, I’ll make the empire Christian...he won and overnight the priests of pagan, Godless roman temples were part of the New Roman Catholic Church. The soldiers baptized, the old rituals renamed and everything was confused.

Balaam joined and defiled the Church and Nicolaitans were lording over.....

Watch out, Satan can’t conquer you, but he can get you to slip into filth.

SLIDE-23: SEVEN CHURCHES: Christ's & Paul's

SLIDE-24: SEVEN AGES

There was the Ephesian period--30-60 AD a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.

Then came the Smyrna period--60 -300 AD the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection

⁴⁴ MacArthur Study Bible, in loc.

in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.

Then followed the Pergamite period, 300-500 AD in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into system, and the church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.

Then came the Thyatiran period-- 500-1500 AD the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness of truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the church usurped the place of Christ, and the witness of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation.

Then came the Sardian period--1500-1800 AD the age of separation and return of the rule of Christ; an age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness within, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years.

Next was the Philadelphian period 1800-1950 AD is a time of great missionary fervor, evangelistic outreach and devotional godliness. In this time the world was penetrated with the gospel like no time since Pentecost.

Which brings us to the Laodicean period, 1950 AD - present there is lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.

SLIDE-25: SEVEN TYPES

Some Ephesian Christians, with a great start but a lack of that initial consuming love.

Some Smyrnan Christians purified by persecution, faithful at all costs to the Lord.

Some Pergamite Christians, wed to the world, a country club Christian with no standards, with a focus and grip on money, car and job, only doing what is socially acceptable, compromising Scriptures absolutely, more concerned with fashion than with Holiness.

Some Thyatiran Christians believing and following false doctrine, with a social gospel not a divine call to the new birth.

Some Sardian Christians, dead as last weeks cut flowers, cold and lifeless, in a spiritual stupor.

Some Philadelphian Christians, sound in doctrine, zealous in ministry, outreaching the world and deeply in love with the Lord Jesus Christ!

Some Laodicean, apostate, counterfeit and sickening to Christ. A member of the Christless church that will thrive in the tribulation under Satan's leadership.

Slide-26: THE APPEAL V. 16

So what's the ultimate lesson? Well, the church at Pergamum had a problem...some

had lost THEIR PURITY, THEIR INTIMACY and THEIR NOURISHMENT. How? Because, they got too close to the world by mixing with them, or marrying them, or loving the system.

v. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

So Jesus lovingly offers a solution to theirs and sometimes our woeful problems.

If you have lost your purity - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my white stone. Do you want Christ's purity? Let Him wash and cleanse you and make you pure, as white as snow.

If you have lost your intimacy - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my new name. Do you want Christ's intimacy? Let Him start drawing you to spend time alone with Him, He's waiting for you.

If you have lost your nourishment - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my hidden manna. Do you want Christ Jesus to help you grow? Let Him start feeding you in His word.

If you have lost your focus - Christ says, Come back and I'll give you my new ears, listen. Do you want Christ's focus? Then go back to listening to Christ speaking to you in the word.

SLIDE-27: Hold Fast

God always desires that we constantly repent of contamination by the world; and draw near to Him.

The only way to be fruitful in our lives is to please God by separating from personal sins that defile our hearts, minds, and spirits.

The PERGAMUM Connection: Babylon, Balaam, the Beast, & the Final World Religion

Revelation 2, 13, 17 & 18

Christ's⁴⁵ words in Revelation 2:12-17, addressed to the locally assembled church in the geographic place called Pergamum: a place of Satan's seat. There we have heard Christ's words, which contain a warning about idolatry, Satan's plan of false worship.

From those early days after Creation, when Adam sinned and all of mankind to follow also fell into sin: God made a way for mankind to come back. The way back was to worship Him by a substitutionary, sacrificial, blood-sprinkled, way.

The key to understanding all of world history since the Fall of Humanity into sin comes from God's Word. Always remember that the only absolutely trustworthy and accurate account of the earliest days of both the Universe and the human race is found in the inspired words from God in Genesis.

As we turn back to Genesis 4 we are seeing the very first description of the deadliest evil humanity has ever faced. It is called: Religion.

Religion is mankind offering any kind of worship to God, other than what God's Word has commanded. Religion is the self-styled offering of a humanly designed worship, rather than the Spirit-prompted offering of strict obedience to God's Word.

That means that there are only two choices in the Universe, for offering true and acceptable worship: God's revelation of what He wants in His Word, and everything else. Here is point number one:

Satan Always Counterfeits God's Plan

When Satan as the Serpent in the Garden tempted Eve, he made her question whether God's plan was best. Satan always offers his own plan, a counterfeit that is meant to derail

⁴⁵ 110731AM CLW-15 Pergamos.doc

humans from what has been revealed in the Word of God.

In the account of Cain & Abel we find the first appearance of Satan's plan to destroy the true worship of God after the Fall. It is so clearly seen in the contrast between Cain's response to God's command for worship and Abel's response. Satan started a plan to counter God's true worship, and Cain was his first convert.

Genesis 4:8 is what we could call the start of religion: Mankind trying to make his own way to worship God by self-effort. Cain decided to give God what Cain felt like offering, not what God wanted. In fact the inspired commentary from God about Cain's life says:

1 John 3:12 (NKJV) not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Also the next book after John's Epistles, called Jude, also has similar warnings:

Jude 1:11 (NKJV) Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Cain's life is forever tied to one of the most dramatic moments in sacred history.

Genesis 4:1-8, please listen to God speak:

Genesis 4:1-8 (NKJV) Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." 2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." 8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Cain and Abel portray the eternal truth that there are:

Only Two Choices, Only Two Destinations

Two lines run through the history of mankind: the line of Christ and the line of Antichrist, the line of the Woman's seed and that of the serpent.

So, there are only two groups of people always on Earth, and they are heading to very different destinies:

1. **The Way of God-Followers:** like Abel example, they kneel before a substitutionary, blood sacrifice pointing at Golgotha, and justified by faith, they go to Heaven.
2. **The Way of Satan-Followers:** like Cain, they kneel at the altar of their good works pointing at Babel, and condemned by their own sins they go to the Lake of Fire.

There are only two families that everyone is a part of: (God's or Satan's); there are only

two destinies that are ahead of every human that has ever lived: (Heaven or Hell); and life is really reduced to only one or the two choices: (repent or reject). Each of us today belongs to one family or the other. You are choosing your own future.

Here in Genesis 4 we see that Cain and Abel are not only two actual people who lived and walked on earth a few thousand years ago. They also represent the two roads that head out from the Garden of Eden. Everyone who has ever lived has chosen one of those two paths. Each of us, this morning, are on one path, or the other.

Watch the choices made by Cain and Abel. Both were born outside of Eden. Both were sinners and fallen. Both were lost and guilty of each sin they had committed. Neither were innocent, but only Abel would confess that! That is what:

Genesis 4 Contrasts:

Satan's Followers (Cain) vs. God's Followers (Abel)

To help us understand the magnitude of this doctrinal lesson that Cain and Abel portray, we need to look at their lives, and the lessons from those lives, one at a time.

First we can see:

Satan's religion:

The Wicked Way of Cain

- **Cain neglected God's example of a bloody substitute** for covering sinners; and got angry when God corrects him.
- **Cain portrays a salvation based on human merits**—the natural, self-righteous, self-sufficient, and lost person; the formal, external-only professors, who are trusting their works.
- **Cain was rejected and cursed by God**; denied his lost ruined condition; refused the Divine remedy; and became a merely religious, but lost person.
- **Cain looked for help from within himself to please God**; he makes an un-bloody offering; and ignores the curse removing, substitutionary, blood sacrifice offered by Abel.
- **Cain was the father of all those who seek earthly security**; and those that God calls "Earth-Dwellers".
- **Cain turned from the true altar of worship to God**, ignored the message and founded the first earthly city (Genesis 4:17).

God's Revelation:

The Righteous Faith Of Abel

- **Abel followed God's example and offered a bloody substitute as an offering for sinners**; humbly gave God what He asked for:
- **Abel portrays a salvation only by Divine grace**—the Spiritual Person, who is broken-spirited, taking God's side against themselves; the saved, genuine believer and possessor of faith in Christ's finished

work alone.

- **Abel was accepted and blessed by God**; he acknowledged his personal sins; he believed God's testimony, placing faith in the substitute and was accounted righteous; and was a genuinely saved person
- **Abel looks for help from outside himself to please God**; he makes a bloody offering; and trusts the curse removing, substitutionary blood sacrifice he offered
- **Abel was the father of all those who seek God** as their refuge; and those that God calls Citizens of Heaven
- **Abel came to the true altar of worship to God**, heeded God's message, and founded a grave stained with blood, on his way to the heavenly city.

The ways of Cain and the faith of Abel go on until the time of the Global Flood of Noah.

But notice that there is no mention of any idolatry in these early chapters of human history, until after the Flood. Sin was so bad, humanity was so corrupted, and the demons had made such complete inroads in humanity: God said, that's it.

Turn with me in your Bibles past those days recorded in Genesis 5-8, where God wipes out everyone but the eight in Noah's family. But as we do so, remember:

God Destroyed the Whole Earth in the Flood Genesis 7:21-23

Pause with me in Genesis 7:21-23, note that God's Word says that every human and air-breathing animal not on the Ark was killed in the Flood. That was not a local flood as some try to make it. You may want to mark some of these words in your Bibles as you follow along.

Genesis 7:21-23 (NKJV) And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. 22 All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. 23 So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.

Moving on to God gives mankind a fresh start in learning how to seek Him correctly in Genesis 8:20, there God is worshipped in the true and proper way by the substitutionary, blood sacrifice upon an altar. Note the re-affirmation with the family that would restart humanity upon the Earth. God says to Noah:

Worship God First, Worship His Way Genesis 8:18-22

The very first thing as soon as they landed, the ground dried, and the ark was emptied: was a bloody, substitutionary sacrifice on an altar, the way God asked for it to be done. Follow along with the words God gives us:

Genesis 8:18-22 (NKJV) So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark. 20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and

took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

*22 "While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease."*

Just a side note: The Ark pictures salvation in many ways: God invited them in; only one door; those inside were saved by an atoning covering of pitch on the outside of the wooden ark (kaphar = atone); and all inside made it safely to the end.

The Ark Portrays Eternal Security Genesis 7:16 & 8:19

Look at Genesis 7:15-17.

Genesis 7:15-17 (NKJV) And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life. 16 So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in. 17 Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.

Now look again what we just read in Genesis 8:18-19

Genesis 8:18-22 (NKJV) So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

The Ark is a picture that all who come Christ's way of salvation (the one door) are kept safely to the end, and arrive safely home!

But skip over chapter 9, the rules for humanity (end of vegetarianism, start of capital punishment by government); and the covenant in the rainbow as a sign of God's mercy. Go with me to:

Genesis 10:

The Mighty Nimrod, Founder of Babel

Genesis 10:8-12 introduces us to one of the most influential figures in the new world after the Flood of Noah.

Genesis 10:8-12 (NKJV) Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, 12 and

Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).

Satan had already begun in Genesis 10 to counterfeit what God would do. What we can see as we study this passage is that Nimrod was the human mind behind the first system of false religion. Nimrod founded a city called Babel/Babylon and it was the home of the beginnings of idolatry.

Nimrod was a grandson of Ham, which makes him a great grandson of Noah. He was the apostate of the patriarchal age. Idolatry began in Babel, according to God's Word. Mankind built the first object to be worshipped in place of God, which was the Tower of Babel. He established false worship.

The following details are what you can read in the commentaries of the following great Bible teachers: James Boice of 10th Presbyterian of Philadelphia; Harry Ironsides of Moody Church; John MacArthur of Grace Church; Harold Wilmington of Liberty University; John Wesley, founder of Methodism; and J. Dwight Pentecost of Dallas Seminary to name just a few.

Secular history and tradition tell us that Nimrod married a woman who was as evil and demonic as he was. Her name was Semerimis. Knowing God's promise of a future Savior (Gen. 3:15), Semerimis brazenly claimed that Tammuz, her first son, fulfilled this prophecy⁴⁶.

Building on the primeval promise of the woman's Seed who was to come, Semiramis bore a son whom she declared was miraculously conceived, and when she presented him to the people, he was hailed as the promised deliverer. This son was Tammuz, whose worship centuries later, Ezekiel protested against in the 6th Century BC days of the captivity.

Thus was introduced the mystery of the mother and the child, a form of idolatry that is older than any other known to man. The rites of this worship were secret. Only the initiated were permitted to know its mysteries.

It was Satan's effort to delude mankind with an imitation so like the truth of God that they would not know the true Seed of the woman when He came in the fullness of time. To this scholars as early as the 2nd Century Justin Martyr bear definite witness.⁴⁷

Move on to the next chapter where we find:

Genesis 11:

Babel's Tower, Babylon's Mysteries & Organized Religion

Satan's plan began to be exported globally at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 which was the advent of what we would call *Organized Religion*. This was over 24 centuries before Christ, and nearly 4,500 years ago.

The Tower was the first idol and it became the object of men's worship, the point of

⁴⁶ Adapted from Wilmington's Guide to the Bible, in loc.

⁴⁷ Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside (October 14, 1876-January 15, 1951) was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author. Found also on Lambert Dolphin's site at: <http://ldolphin.org/semir.html> This article copied from:

<http://www.biblelineministries.org/articles/basearch.php3?action=full&mainkey=BABYLONIAN+RELIGION+%28By+Harry+A.+Ironsides%29>

their pride. It spawned a complex of weird, strange, mysterious religions that are still going on in our world today.

*Genesis 11:1-9 (NKJV) Now the **whole earth had one language and one speech.** 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, **let us build ourselves a city, and a tower** whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.*

Remember that Satan want to counterfeit, confuse, and mess up God's plan. So the one-world plans Satan had at Babel, God confounds, but Satan just sends out the great invasion of false worship, mystery religions, and idolatry from Babel to the ends of the earth.

Pagan Religions Originate from Babylon

The Gospel of Satan is religion, and he has made sure that it has gotten to every corner of the Earth. At the Tower of Babel's worship ziggurat, the Babylonian Mystery Religions fill the pages of ancient history. They're all over everywhere and they're still with us today all in different forms.⁴⁸

There, on the fertile plain of Shinar, probably not far from the original Garden of Eden, the first spade of dirt was turned for the purpose of organizing humans into Creator-rejection and Devil-worship.

Alexander Hislop⁴⁹, the great 19th century Scottish theologian and historian traced the concept of false religions under the idea of Babylonianism. After God destroyed the tower, He scattered mankind into multiplied language groups. Semaramis was worshiped as a goddess under many different names.

She became Ishtar of Syria, Ashtaroth of Phoenicia, Isis of Egypt, Aphrodite of Greece, and Venus of Rome—in each case the deity of sexual love and fertility. According to the cult of Ishtar, Tammuz was conceived by a sunbeam, a counterfeit version of Jesus' virgin birth.

Tammuz corresponded to Baal in Phoenicia, Horus in Egypt, Eros in Greece, and Cupid in Rome. In every case, the worship of those gods and goddesses was associated with sexual immorality. The celebration of Lent has no basis in Scripture, but rather developed from the

⁴⁸ John MacArthur preached this in a Mother's Day message on 5/14/72

⁴⁹ Adapted from Two Babylons quoted by MacArthur in Acts and I Corinthians. (For a discussion of the relationship of the pagan mother-child cults to Roman Catholic teachings about Mary, see Alexander Hislop, The Two Babylons [Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1959].)

pagan celebration of Semiramis’s mourning for forty days over the death of Tammuz (cf. Ezek. 8:14) before his alleged resurrection—another of Satan’s mythical counterfeits.

Now, that means that Babel, became the fountainhead of all false religion. That's why when false religion reaches its climax in the end times, God's Word calls false religion by the name of Babylon again in Revelation 17-18.

But that’s for next week, Lord willing. Let’s pray.

Genesis Contrasts: Satan’s Followers (Cain) vs. God’s Followers (Abel)

SATAN’S RELIGION: THE WICKED WAY OF CAIN	GOD’S REVELATION: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WAY OF ABEL
Neglected God’s example of a bloody substitute for covering sinners	Followed God’s example and offered a bloody substitute as an offering for sinners
Got angry when God corrects him: and Portrays—	Humbly gave God what He asked for: and Portrays—
The natural person	The Spiritual Person
The self-righteous	The Broken spirited
The self-sufficient	Those taking God's side against themselves
The lost	The saved
The formal, external-only professor	The genuine believer and possessor
Those trusting their works	Those possessing Christ's finished work
Salvation: Based on Human merits	Salvation: Only by Divine grace
Cain: Rejected and cursed by God; Denied his lost ruined condition; Refused the Divine remedy; and was a Religious but lost person	Abel: Accepted and blessed by God; Acknowledged his personal sins; Believed God's testimony, placing faith in the substitute and was accounted righteous; and was a Genuinely saved person
Looks for help from within himself to please God by: Un-bloody offering	Looks for help from outside himself to please God by: Bloody offering
No curse removing, substitutionary, blood sacrifice offered	Curse removing, substitutionary blood sacrifice offered
Seeks earthly security	Seeks God as his refuge
Earth-Dweller	Citizen of Heaven
Cain founded an earthly city	Abel found a grave stained with blood, on his way to the heavenly city

Satan's Religions, Paganism & the End of the World

Revelation 17 & 18

As⁵⁰ we open Revelation 1:1, stop for a moment and remember how God starts this final book. We read that:

God Wants His Servants to Understand The Future

God opens the Book of Revelation by telling us that He wrote this book “to show His servants” (Rev. 1:1) things that we need to know about the future. Only followers of God and servants of Christ have the incredible insight for living that comes from knowing for sure, what will happen in the days, months, and years ahead.

If you stop and consider what God just said, it is amazing. God Himself wants us to know the future. He has written down and sent us these 22 chapters filled with everything we need: to understand the rest of history, both for the Church and for this world. We are in the midst of the study of the letters to the seven churches, and as we pause we notice that:

The Seven Churches Portray Seven Stages

For just a moment, let me give you a perspective. Revelation 2-3 contain seven specific letters to historic churches. But these letters also portray patterns, problems, and directions that also portray a prophetic perspective on the future of the church: from Christ's ascension in Century One, to His coming back to Rapture His Church⁵¹. Let me show you what many Bible teachers have taught over the years. The seven historic stages of Christ's Church:

1. There was the **Ephesian period (30-60 AD)**: this was a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began just as Christ warned—by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.
2. Then came the **Smyrna period (60-300 AD)**: this was the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of the departure from the

⁵⁰ 110806AM CLW-16 Paganism.do

⁵¹ This material drawn from J.A. Seiss, The Apocalypse, in loc.

true simplicities of the Gospel.

3. Then followed the **Pergamite period (300-500 AD)**: this was when true faith began to fade, and spirituality gradually formed itself into a system, and the church united with the world, and finally the mystery rites of Babylon began to permeate Christ's Church.
4. Then came the **Thyatiran period (500-1500 AD)**: this became the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of the darkness of truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were give to the dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of false prophetess, reaching up to the days of Luther and the Reformation.
5. Then came the **Sardian period (1500-1800 AD)**: this was seen as the age of separation and return of the rule of Christ; an age of many worthy names, but marked with the deadness of institutionalizing Christ through the denominations; it was an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the coming of the great evangelical movements of the last two hundred years.
6. Next was the **Philadelphian period (1800-1950 AD)**: this was a return to the zeal for missions of the early church, a time of great evangelistic outreach and devotional godliness. In this time nearly every corner of the world was penetrated with the Gospel like no time since Pentecost.
7. Which brings us to the **Laodicean period (1950 AD–present)**: the Church of the West has become so self-sufficient, comfortable, and untested that lukewarmness, materialism, empty profession, and false peace have become accepted. Jesus warned of this day in which He finds an unthinking multitude, who suppose they are Christians, and are not.

Christ's Call is to Hear His Voice And Follow Him

God wants those who are His servants to understand what is going on around them. He wants us to have insider knowledge about the timing, severity, and events that will surround the coming global economic and religious collapse, just before Christ's Second Coming.

As we turn back now to Revelation 17-18, we can see God describing the coming global financial and religious collapse coming upon this world at the end. Note the frequency of one word in both chapters: Babylon⁵².

Have you ever noticed how much⁵³ the word Babylon shows up in the prophecies from God about the end of the world? Just here in Revelation we find the word Babylon five times (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Outside the book of Revelation Babylon is frequently cited in the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, in ways that transcend just the physical city and kingdom of human rulers.

Babylon in God's sight is often a picture of Satan's rebellion. That is what we need to

⁵² Babylon occurs 265 x in the KJV Bible in 17 of the books; most notably Jeremiah has 150x, II Kings 28x, Ezekiel 18x, Isaiah and Daniel each 15x, and II Chronicles 13x; Babel is 2x in Genesis 10-11).

⁵³ Abraham is only mentioned 230 x; Paul 159 x; and Peter 156 x; but Israel 2,318 x; Jesus 942 x; and Christ 537 x. Satan is 49 x; Devil 106 x.

keep in mind:

Satan is Leading a Global Rebellion Against God

The only key to correctly understanding history comes from God's Word. God's Word explains to us the struggle going on behind the pages of history is that: Satan is a rebel.

First, as Lucifer, the greatest and most powerful creature God ever made, Satan rebelled against God and lost his position as the anointed cherub (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28) and became Satan, the adversary of God.

Next, Satan led a third of the angels of God in rebellion against God (Rev. 12:4), and they become Satan's demon warriors, following with him in his ongoing rebellion against God.

Then, Satan goes on to enlist humanity in his rebellion against God by tempting Eve (Genesis 3), and leading Adam into sin.

Finally, at the Tower of Babel, Satan devises a global spread of his rebellion through false religion and materialism.

God had made a way for mankind to be redeemed, by a substitutionary, sacrificial, blood-sprinkled, way. But Satan wanted at all costs, to obscure and confuse God's Way. To do so Satan devised snares to catch humans up in his rebellion.

When God describes the world's end at the close of the Tribulation, He devotes two entire chapters of Revelation to detail the end of Satan's twin pathways of rebellion.

Revelation 17 & 18:

God Judges the Rebellion of Religion & Materialism

Since the temptation and fall of humanity in Genesis 3, Satan has most often ensnared the world into his rebellion through one or the other of these two systems. First in Revelation 17:5, God describes the false system of Satan's religion, by which he deceived humanity and led them away from God. Note: Mystery, Babylon the Great.

*Revelation 17:5 (NKJV) And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.***

Then in Revelation 18:2, God explains the end of the other way Satan has enslaved humanity through the false worship of materialism. Note: Babylon the Great.

Revelation 18:2 (NKJV) And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!"

The Harlot of Revelation 17 represents the spiritual adultery, drawing people away from God and to false gods, of Babylon's Mystery Religions. Our study of the church at Pergamum, and the connection that Pergamum has to Satan's Seat through pagan religions, is where we

are today.

Religion is mankind seeking the wrong gods, neglecting the True Creator, and offering any kind of worship, other than what God's Word has commanded.

Religion is the self-styled offering of a humanly designed worship, rather than the Spirit-prompted offering of strict obedience to God's Word. Now, turn back with me to:

Genesis 11: Babel's Idolatrous Tower, Babylon's Mysteries & Organized Religion

Remember that Satan's plans of false worship began to be exported globally at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 which was the advent of what we would call *Organized Religion*. This was over 24 centuries before Christ, and nearly 4,500 years ago.

The Tower was the first idol and it became the object of men's worship, the point of their pride. It spawned a complex of weird, strange, mysterious religions that are still going on in our world today.

Genesis 11:1-4, 9 (NKJV) Now the **whole earth had one language and one speech**. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and **a tower whose top is in the heavens**; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Satan desires to counterfeit, confuse, and mess up God's plan. So the one-world plans Satan had at Babel, God confounds; but the scattered humans took with them Babel's false worship, mystery religions, and idolatry to the ends of the earth.

The rebellion of Satan promotes human-invented religion, and it has spread to every corner of the Earth. From the Tower of Babel's worship ziggurat, the Babylonian Mystery Religions fill the pages of ancient history. They're all over everywhere and they're still with us today all in different forms.

In Genesis 11, on the plains of Shinar, probably not far from the original Garden of Eden, Satan's rebellion grows as Nimrod organized humans into Creator-rejection and false worship. From history we can see that:

Idolatrous Religions Originate from Babylon

There is no record of any pre-flood idolatry among humans, they were just totally corrupted. Even the unsaved historians chronicle the spread of Babel's religion. Listen to the conclusions of the late Joseph J. Campbell (1904-1987), a New Age guru and media

personality, who wrote in his classic treatment of mythology called *The Masks of God*⁵⁴:

"the dead and resurrected god Tammuz (Sumerian Dumuzi), prototype of the Classical Adonis, who was the consort as well as son by virgin birth, of the goddess-mother of many names: Inanna, Ninhursag, Ishtar, Astarte, Artemis, Demeter, Aphrodite, Venus".

Unlike the unbelieving mythologist Campbell just quoted, the godly Alexander Hislop⁵⁵, a great 19th century Scottish theologian and historian, traced the concept of false religions under the idea that Babel's idolatry spread as Babylon's mystery religions. Both Campbell and Hislop saw the same pattern.

After God destroyed the tower, He scattered mankind into multiplied language groups. According to the cult of Ishtar, Tammuz was conceived by a sunbeam, a counterfeit version of Jesus' virgin birth.

Semiramis & Tammuz of Babel were worshiped as a divine mother and son under many different names. They became:

Ishtar & Tammuz of Assyria

Ashtaroth & Baal of Phoenicia

Isis & Horus of Egypt

Aphrodite & Eros of Greece

Venus & Cupid of Rome

In every case, the worship of those gods and goddesses was associated with sexual immorality.

History shows that Babel, became the fountainhead of all false religion. That's why when false religion reaches its climax in the end times, God's Word calls Satan's rebellion by the name of Babylon again, in Revelation 17-18.

The mystery religions of Babylon also propagated the idea of baptismal regeneration, (being born again merely through the rite of water baptism), and the practice of mutilation and flagellation to atone for sins or gain spiritual favor.

Nimrod's wife Semiramis, along with her son Tammuz, formed the basis for the many counterfeit mother-child cults of antiquity. Satan deceived humans into a religious system, which made both the mother and her son the objects of divine worship. That is why:

Rebellion Against The Creator is The Common Denominator of World Religions

Always remember that behind every idol is a demon warrior that is part of Satan's rebellion. At the crescendo of the Tribulation, when demons are wreaking havoc, and hundreds of millions of people are dying, God makes this sobering declaration in Revelation 9.

⁵⁴ Oriental Mythology: The Masks of God, pp 39-40.

⁵⁵ Adapted from Two Babylons quoted by MacArthur in Acts and I Corinthians. (For a discussion of the relationship of the pagan mother-child cults to Roman Catholic teachings about Mary, see Alexander Hislop, The Two Babylons [Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1959].)

Turn there again with me:

*Revelation 9:15-16, 20-21 (NKJV) So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.** 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

Demons promoting Satan's rebellion through idols, is also what Paul dealt with in the Church of the Corinthians. Those early saints had to face the influence over their city of Babel's mother/son religion portrayed in the temples of Aphrodite and Eros, at the midpoint of the 1st Century. Turn back to:

*1 Corinthians 10:19-21 (NKJV) What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to **idols** is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice **to demons and not to God**, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the **table of demons**.*

God's people have always had to resist Satan's idolatry. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "I visited an archeological museum in Mexico City. A find had been put on display, which Mexican archeologists had authenticated as belonging to the period about 200 years before Christ. The object was the center of religious worship among some of the early Indians in Mexico. To my amazement, it was an image of a mother with a child in her arms. This Babylonian religion spread abroad to become the religion of the world⁵⁶."

What was the central teaching of Semiramis' idolatrous worship? That Semiramis herself was the way to God. She actually adopted the title "Queen of Heaven."

About 2000 B.C. God called Abraham away from all this idolatrous worship from Babel (see Joshua 24:2-3) and led him into the Promised Land.

But by the ninth century B. C. Israel had returned to this false worship of Babel's idols under the influence of wicked Jezebel (see 1 Kings 16:30-33). At this time the cult was worshiped under the name of Ashtoreth (the mother) and Baal (her son). Israel had been snared repeatedly, but by the time of Jeremiah, Baal (Tammuz) and Semiramis (Queen of Heaven) had moved into the Temple at Jerusalem. The words "Queen of Heaven" are found in

⁵⁶J. Dwight Pentecost, Prophecy for Today, p. 133.

five verses in the Bible (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19, 25).

Now open with me to:

Jeremiah 44:

The Queen of Heaven's False Religion

In Jeremiah, we are introduced to this whole idolatrous form of worship.

Jeremiah 44:17-19 (NKJV) But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to **the queen of heaven** ...18 But since we stopped burning incense to **the queen of heaven** ...19 The women also said, "And when we burned incense to **the queen of heaven** and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' permission?"

Do you know where the title of the "Queen of Heaven" came from? It came right out of Egyptian idolatry, Isis and Osiris. It has nothing to do with the New Testament at all.

And if you have ever heard that the Queen of Heaven is Mary, and wondered where that came from—look at these words in Ezekiel 8:12-16.

The prophet Ezekiel is taken by God into the temple, and there he sees idols. God is very unhappy. To see what is offending God so greatly, he's shown this scene:

Ezekiel 8:13-14, 16 (NKJV) And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see **greater abominations** that they are doing." 14 So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD's house; and to my dismay, **women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz**. 16 So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with **their backs toward the temple of the LORD** and their faces toward the east, and **they were worshipping the sun** toward the east.

There it is, the idolatry of Babel exported to Israel: the worship of the virgin goddess in Jeremiah 44 called the Queen of Heaven; and the worship of her son Tammuz, as they wept the 40 days awaiting his resurrection in Ezekiel 8. Here we find in God's Word:

Semiramis & Tammuz:

Lent & Romanism

Let me just give you some interesting details from a book entitled, "*The Two Babylons*" by Alexander Hislop. The worship of Semiramis throughout history has often had these elements:

Semiramis was called the Queen of Heaven;

Semiramis was worshipped by the offering of a wafer, or cake;

Semiramis began the practice of 40 days of weeping over Tammuz before the feast of

celebrating his resurrection.

The mystery cults around Semiramis also taught of a place of purgatory.⁵⁷

The worship of Mary as the Queen of Heaven and the 40 days of Lent for her Son, has no basis in Scripture, but rather developed from the pagan celebration of Semiramis' mourning forty days over the death of Tammuz before his alleged resurrection—another of Satan's mythical counterfeits.

There are some people in the Catholic Church who have met Jesus Christ and I praise God for that, but they had to do it circumventing their own theology, if they even knew their own theology.

So how did they get all that into the Church? We'll find out next time.

Christ's message for them and to us today is: Stay separated from false doctrine and evil practices.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (NKJV) Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **“I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.”** 17 Therefore **“Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”** 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Pergamum, Balaam & How Romanism Entered the Church

Rev. 2:12-17

As⁵⁸ we open to Revelation 2:14-15, and see the next section of Christ's message to the saints at Pergamum, the story behind these words actually starts way back in the book of Genesis with the life of Abraham. Follow along in your Bibles:

*Revelation 2:14-15 (NKJV) **But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat***

⁵⁷ John MacArthur preached this in a Mother's Day message on 5/14/72

⁵⁸ 110821AM CLW-17 Paganism.doc

things **sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.** 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The saints at Pergamum had gotten too close to the wickedness of the idol worship around them. They had slowly gotten comfortable going back to the old haunts of those idols they had been saved out of and away from. Then, overcome by the temptations and lusts of the flesh, they gave in to sinful practices. Idolatry is very hard to resist.

Beware of Idols

Turn back a few pages with me to the last chapter of I John. Always remember that the very last warning the Apostle John gave to the Church was in v. 21:

1 John 5:21 (NKJV) Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Abraham was Saved from Idolatry

About 2000 B.C. God called Abraham away from all the idolatry of Babylon. Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Babylon was also known as the realm of the Chaldeans. Abram was an idolator, he worshipped the images of the gods of his land. God saved him out of that idol worship. Listen to Joshua:

Joshua 24:2-3 (NKJV) And Joshua Said To All The People, "Thus Says The Lord God Of Israel: 'Your Fathers, *Including* Terah, The Father Of Abraham And The Father Of Nahor, Dwelt On The Other Side Of The River In Old Times; **And They Served Other Gods.** ³ Then I Took Your Father Abraham From The Other Side Of The River, Led Him Throughout All The Land Of Canaan, And Multiplied His Descendants And Gave Him Isaac.

When God saved Abram from idols, and then God led him into the Promised Land, and gave him the nation of Israel as his descendents. But a thousand years later, in the ninth century B. C., Israel had returned to the same idol worship Abraham had been saved from, under the influence of wicked Jezebel (see 1 Kings 16:30-33). At this time the cult was worshiped under the name of Baal.

By the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the idolatrous worship of Babylon's religion, Abraham was saved from, permeated the nation of Israel. Please turn with me to Jeremiah 44.

Jeremiah 44: The Queen of Heaven's Idolatous Religion

The words "Queen of Heaven" are found in five verses in the Bible (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19, 25).

In Jeremiah, we are introduced to this whole idolatrous form of worship.

Jeremiah 44:17-25 (NKJV) But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to **the queen of heaven** and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we

had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. 18 But since we stopped burning incense to **the queen of heaven** and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.”¹⁹ The women also said, “And when we burned incense to **the queen of heaven** and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands’ permission?”

22 So the LORD could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day.

Do you know where the queen of Heaven came from? It came right out of Egyptian idolatry, Isis and Osiris. It has nothing to do with the New Testament at all. And if you have ever heard that Roman Catholics say the Queen of Heaven is Mary, and wondered where that came from—look at these words in Ezekiel 8:12-16.

The prophet Ezekiel is taken by God into the temple, the house of God; and he sees that there are idols there and God is very unhappy. And just to see what is offending God so greatly, he’s shown this scene:

Ezekiel 8:13-14, 16 (NKJV) And He said to me, “Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing.” 14 So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD’s house; and to my dismay, **women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz**. 16 So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with **their backs toward the temple of the LORD** and their faces toward the east, and **they were worshiping the sun** toward the east.

There it is, the idolatry of Babel exported to Israel: the worship of the virgin goddess in Jeremiah 44, the worship of her son as they were weeping the 40 days awaiting his resurrection in Exekiel 8.

Semiramis, Lent & Romanism

Let me just give you some interesting details from a book entitled, “The Two Babylons” by Alexander Hislop. The worship of Semiramis throughout history has often had these elements:

Semiramis was called the Queen of Heaven;

Semiramis was worshipped by the offering of a wafer, or cake;

Semiramis began the practice of 40 days of weeping over Tammuz before the feast of celebrating his resurrection.

These mystery cults around Semiramis also had purgatory, which they taught and believed and adhered to.⁵⁹

The worship of Mary as the Queen of Heaven and the 40 days of Lent for her Son, has no basis in Scripture, but rather developed from the pagan celebration of Semiramis’s mourning for forty days over the death of Tammuz before his alleged resurrection—another of

⁵⁹ John MacArthur preached this in a Mother’s Day message on 5/14/72

Satan's mythical counterfeits.

The majority of those who call themselves Christians in our world today follow a way of worship that would have offended the apostles and early saints. What do I mean?

The statues of Mary, calling her the Queen of Heaven, the images of Christ and saints; and all of them being revered with candles and incense burning before them are idolatrous. God through His Word calls each of us to always be on guard and to:

BEWARE OF THE NEW PAGANISM IN THE CHURCH

What are some of the pagan rites that have crept into the Church? To name a few would be:

The incense burning before images, the orders of priests and monks that are so contradictory to Christ-like humility, the calendar of observances that each originate with pagan events that have only been renamed with Christian events, the titles of pagan priests like: Pontifex Maximus, pontiff, vicar, and most excellent.

Then there are also all the pagan originated and never recorded in the Bible practices like: holy water, purgatory, prayers for the dead, indulgences, and so much more.

All of these names, observances, and practices came directly from the pagans; the very pagans that the early saints tried to convert! Now look back at our text in Revelation 2:12-17 where we find:

Christ's ADMONITION v. 14-15

Revelation 2:14-15 (NKJV) But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The saints at Pergamum had gotten too close to the wickedness around them. They had slowly gotten comfortable going back to the old haunts they had been saved out of and away from. Then, overcome by the lusts of the flesh, they gave in to sinful practices.

They were not being obedient to the clear commands Christ had already given them, thus they were not pleasing Him. What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the Word to them?

2 Corinthians 6:16-17 (NKJV) **And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?** For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **"I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."** 17 Therefore **"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."**

Christ said you are in sin "I have few things against you!"

1. First, you have **Balaam's doctrine** = what is that?

"Put stumbling block..." Numbers 22-25 records how Moabites contacted Balaam a

prophet for hire, he prophesied 4x promising Israel's conquest of Moab and Christ's coming, they angrily fired him and God killed 24,000 of Israel with a plague.

What? 24,000 Israelites killed by God? Yes, that's the doctrine of Balaam, "If you can't defeat it, join it and defile it and God will judge it". Balaam said get them involved in sexual sin and God will judge them and did...

Balaam's doctrine is still here, such as people who actually say they are Christians and yet continue to live in sexual sin. Others say they belong to Christ yet support false doctrine that is completely opposed to Christ.

Today if you are living in such sin and drawing in others, to you Christ says, "I am coming to war against you".

2. Second, **Nicolaitans**, what's that? Nicolas supposedly started a cult but any record in church history is sketchy. Many Bible teachers through the centuries take this to be *nike-laios*, which translated means one who "conquered people". How can that be seen in the history of the Church?

This would cover the many who over the centuries have arisen as, self-made prophets ruling with rods of iron, building ecclesiastical kingdoms of wealth and power. This type of disobedience is still with us today, sadly.

Just quickly a side note- How did it happen? How did the pure, simple gospel get in purple robes with gold rings and set in paganism, idols and adopt false "work your way to heaven" doctrines?

Balaam's doctrine is when sinful and false practices are brought into the Church and the Nicolaitans are those who lord over Christ's Church instead of humbly leading and serving it.

So how did the Church inherit this wickedness? Hold on to your seats, here is an overview of world history in 3 minutes:

The Pagan Origins of Romanism

By the time of Christ, this cult had so influenced Roman life that the Caesars were not only crowned as emperors of Rome but also bore the title Pontifex Maximus, meaning, "high priest." They were high priests of the Babylonian idol worship.

When Christ came into this world the mystery of iniquity was everywhere holding sway, save where the truth of God as revealed in the Old Testament was known. Thus, when the early Christians set out upon the great task of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth, they found themselves everywhere confronted by this system, in one form or another; for

though Babylon as a city had long been but a mystery, her mysteries had not died with her. ⁶⁰

Babylon to Pergamos

When Medes and Persians moved in and took the city and temples of Babylon in 539 BC, the high-priest fled with a company of initiates and their sacred vessels and images to Pergamos, where the Symbol of the serpent was set up as the emblem of the hidden wisdom.

The chief priests wore mitres shaped like the head of a fish, in honor of Dagon, the fish-god, the Lord of life-another form of the Tammuz mystery, as developed among Israel's old enemies, the Philistines. The chief priest took the title Pontifex Maximus, and this was imprinted in on his mitre. ⁶¹

Pergamos to Rome

Three hundred years later, Rome moved into power, Julius Caesar had all the priestesses and priests of Semiramis moved from Pergamos to Rome. That's history. You can read that yourself. Julius Caesar had a great idea about having more power if he could combine a false religion with his system. You see, he knew what every good conqueror knows; you've got to get the people religiously.

When the worship of Semiramis arrived in Rome, the chief priest of the Mystery Religions in Rome took the title Pontifex Maximus and it was imprinted on his miter. The title had to do with the worship of a god called Dagon the Fish-god. From then on, every emperor in Rome wore the title Pontifex Maximus. It had nothing to do with Christianity; it meant you were the chief priest of the worship of Semiramis. ⁶²

Constantine & Christianity

During the year A. D. 306 a Roman emperor named Constantine was threatened by a very powerful enemy army. Realizing that his uneasy troops needed confidence, Constantine claimed to have seen a vision on the eve of the battle. He saw a large blue flag with a red cross on it and heard a mighty voice that said *In hoc signo vinces* -- "in this sign conquer."

He thereupon marched his troops into a shallow river, claimed them to be officially baptized, and ordered the sign of the cross painted on all his weapons. Thus inspired, he led his troops to victory and subsequently made Christianity the state religion of Rome.

Thus, for nearly 300 years the Devil had desperately attempted to destroy the church

⁶⁰ Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside (October 14, 1876-January 15, 1951) was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author. Found also on Lambert Dolphin's site at: <http://ldolphin.org/semir.html> This article copied from:

<http://www.biblelineministries.org/articles/basearch.php3?action=full&mainkey=BABYLONIAN+RELIGION+%28By+Harry+A.+Ironside%29>

⁶¹ Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside (October 14, 1876-January 15, 1951) was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author. Found also on Lambert Dolphin's site at: <http://ldolphin.org/semir.html> This article copied from:

<http://www.biblelineministries.org/articles/basearch.php3?action=full&mainkey=BABYLONIAN+RELIGION+%28By+Harry+A.+Ironside%29>

⁶² John MacArthur speaking at a Q&A 10/7/1973 said these things. http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/1332_The-Destruction-of-the-Nations-Part-3?q=lent

from outside by his terrible persecutions. But with the advent of Constantine he changed his tactics, walking the aisle, applying for membership, and joining the church!

The Roman Empire's official priests of Tammuz soon discovered that they could easily make the transition into Christianity (with certain changes) and thereupon carried their traditions forward without interruption by promoting the Mother-Child worship concept, the holy-water sacrament, and many other practices imported from the pagan mystery religions.

Up until the Roman emperor Constantine Christianity in the early 4th century A.D., were both head of the Roman empire and also Pontifex Maximus--head of the pagan church. Constantine's proclamation of Christianity led to the merger of Christianity and paganism in the Roman empire. As head of the pagan church, Constantine wore the garb and paraphernalia of Babylon's idolatry which had been passed down through the Babylonian empire, preserved in Pergamum, willed to Rome, and was worn by Julius Caesar and the subsequent Roman emperors. The Roman emperor Constantine had the fish hat, the crosier, and the keys of Janus and Cybele.⁶³

Babylonianism to The Church

In 381 A.D., the Roman emperor Gratian refused to wear the paraphernalia of Babylonianism, but he passed it to the Roman Pope Damasus. Since Damasus, every Pope of Rome has worn the garb of Babylon--the fish hat, the crosier, and the keys of Janus and Cybele. In our days, Pope John Paul II and his most recent successor, Pope Benedict XVI, wears the garb of Babylonian idolatry. As the pagans had worshipped their gods (icons of their deceased pontiffs) in their pantheons and temples, they now worshipped their patron saints and their Icons in cathedrals and churches.⁶⁴

Semiramis: who was Ashtoreth in Canaan, Aphrodite in Greece, Venus in Rome, known also as Astarte, Ishtar, Aurora, Diana, Rhea, Urania, and Isis: was worshipped now as Jesus' mother Mary.⁶⁵

Historian Will Durant⁶⁶ states that paganism conquered Christianity, saying that paganism continued "in the form of ancient rites and customs condoned or accepted and transformed by an often indulgent Church."

Durant goes on to explain: "An intimate and trustful worship of saints replaced the cult of the pagan gods, and satisfied the polytheism of simple or poetic minds. Statues of Isis and Horus were renamed Mary and Jesus."

Many years ago as a professor of Church History at the Masters Seminary and College, I used to give a lecture series for 14 hours, from Church History and the History of Doctrine

⁶³ Hislop, The Two Babylon's, page 241.<http://philologos.org/eb-ttb/default.htm>

⁶⁴ Hislop, The Two Babylon's, page 241.<http://philologos.org/eb-ttb/default.htm>

⁶⁵ Hislop, The Two Babylon's, page 241.<http://philologos.org/eb-ttb/default.htm>

⁶⁶ William James Durant (November 5, 1885 – November 7, 1981) was a prolific American writer, historian, and philosopher. He is best known for The Story of Civilization, 11 volumes written in collaboration with his wife Ariel Durant and published between 1935 and 1975. The Story of Civilization, Vol. IV, page 73.

called:

Seven Reasons I am not a Roman Catholic

- (1) The first reason why the Roman Catholic church is wrong is because of the doctrine of Christ's being offered over and over in the Mass.
- (2) The second reason is because of the inordinate place that Mary has been given.
- (3) Thirdly, because they have elevated tradition over the Scripture. Mass, with their doctrine of Mary. They put it, their teachings which have become traditions, over the holy scriptures.
- (4) Fourthly, because of the veneration or worship of images. The scriptures tell us that God is not to be reduced into a physical form. He is not to be worshipped by anything we can make with our hands.
- (5) Because of the false teachings about the sacraments. The Roman church, teaches that grace is infused through the operation of these sacraments; and that grace can be earned instead of being imputed by God.
- (6) Sixthly, the teaching of the Roman Catholic church about purgatory is a falsehood.
- (7) Finally, many practices of Roman Catholicism are tied to ancient paganism's rites.

There are some people in the Catholic Church who have met Jesus Christ and I praise God for that, but they had to do it circumventing their own theology, if they even knew their own theology. Christ's message for them and to us today is: Stay separated from false doctrine and evil practices.

Thyatira: Jesus Searches Our Hearts & Minds

Revelation 2:18-29

As⁶⁷ we open to Revelation 2:18-29, we come to the letter to the Church at Thyatira. That term Thyatira is usually a bit foreign to us outside of this chapter. To get our bearings we could also say, we are opening to the geographic area that received more of the books (epistles) of the New Testament than any other geographic area of the ancient world. Have you ever thought about where these letters we hold were first sent?

God Sent More New Testament Letters Here than Anywhere Else

Here's the lineup if you haven't stopped to do the math.

Revelation [1] opens with Christ's epistles to the Seven Churches addressed to people living in Roman Asia, which is this western area of modern Turkey.

Peter's epistles [2-3] were to the northern part of this same geographic area.

Paul's letters [4-6] to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians were to churches in the central highlands of this same area, as well as his letters to Timothy [7-8] sent to the same western area as Christ's epistles.

John's three epistles [9-11] were to individuals and churches in this same area.

Finally, most likely James [12] was also written to this area.

All told there were 12 of the books of the New Testament specifically addressed⁶⁸ to this area. Nowhere else comes even close to this number. The believers in the seven church area, were surrounded by God's Word written to them.

In the time of the Apostle John, this area was incredibly Roman.

There are more Greek temples in Turkey than in Greece, and there are more Roman cities in Turkey than there are in all of Italy. This was the epicenter of Roman life in the first and second centuries.

Now step back and remember, this is the fourth church of seven, named Thyatira. This is the central letter of the seven, it is the longest, and it is very pointedly exposing sins that had

⁶⁷ 110828AM CLW-18 Thyatira

⁶⁸ The New Testament books addressed to this geographic area are: Revelation, I/II Peter, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, I/II Timothy, I/II/III John, which totals up to 11; most likely James' audience ("twelve tribes scattered abroad") included this area. Second in geographic concentration would be Greece with 5 books addressed there: (I/II Corinthians, Philippians, I/II Thessalonians).

crept into this church.

The saints in Thyatira had a serious sin infection sweeping their body—listen to what Christ said as we stand to hear Him speak:

Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 24 “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘ He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

This church, called from darkness to light at salvation, saved from the power of Satan and transformed into saints of God was slipping. The Lord on His inspection trip had seen something ominous. The believers at Thyatira were tolerating sinful teachers and teachings, and had allowed the infectious diseases of false doctrine, and sinful conduct, to permeate Christ's Body the Church.

Jesus calls them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. This letter is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed on a daily basis: repent of listening to false teachers and their false teachings, and start listening to Him instead.

Daily Choices: Serve Christ or Not

Thyatira was being seduced by the false teacher Jezebel; and true believers in that church were called upon by Christ to resist all such evil teaching and lifestyles. Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Stay pure; live for Me.*

Every day we face this choice: serve Christ or the world. The letters in Revelation have a timely application for our lives. They each emphasize why and how we must obey our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Ephesus (2:1–7): Remember that Jesus is jealous of your love, so lay hold of your first love for Christ.

Smyrna (2:8–11): Hope in Jesus through life until the end and trust Christ through your

suffering.

Pergamos (2:12–17): Rest in the security that comes from clinging only to Jesus; and conform to Christ, not the world.

Thyatira (2:18–29): Fear the chastening love of Jesus so He will not have to discipline sin in the church.

As it was in Thyatira, so it is in your life today. Daily you have opportunities to either please God or please self. But for a devoted believer, there is only one right choice: honor the holiness of Jesus by purposing in your heart to respond in obedience to Him regardless of the cost.

Part One: Meet The Assembly Living In Hard Times V. 18a

We now look at the longest of the seven letters Christ wrote to His church. We will consider today the least known of all the churches. In fact, the only thing we know is the first Christian named, from this city called Thyatira.

Take a moment with me to look there, it is in Acts 16:14-15, where we meet Paul's first European convert, who was a merchant from Thyatira named Lydia. This is the account of Paul's second journey, as he stops in Philippi, he leads a seeking woman to Jesus (v. 14) a "seller of purple (scarlet) fabrics.

Acts 16:14-15 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

That is where the Scriptural account ends. It could be she moved back to Thyatira and became part of the nucleus of that church, or most likely, she immediately shared Christ with her relatives and close friends and they possibly were the start of this church. However the Lord worked, a church started in Lydia's home town that we read about in Revelation 2.

As we have considered already, each church is not only a local church, it also portrays the ongoing struggles that the church has gone through over the centuries.

As Ephesus portrayed the apostolic church and Smyrna the church persecuted AD 60-313, and Pergamum the church wed to Rome 300-600.

So Thyatira is the church of the dark ages from AD 600-1500 from the first Pope Gregory the Great to the Reformation.

Lesson #1: As in Thyatira, then so in your life today, it is a choice each day: To follow either Christ or the world. It was compromise and prosperity or Christ and poverty. No one can serve two masters Christ said.

Part Two: Meet the Author of Each Letter to Each Church—Jesus

Christ the Judge v. 18b

JESUS IS GOD THE SON: “Son of God” this is not the Revelation 1:13 “Son of man”, this is the Risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, as the fullness of divine power, why? Believe they were compromising--tolerating evil!

JESUS IS ALL SEEING, ALL KNOWING ALWAYS PRESENT: “Who has eyes like flames of fire” - v. 23 Wow - penetrating and discerning, seeing and assessing.

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

JESUS IS THE JUDGE OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE: “His feet burnished bronze.” Bronze always picture of judgment.

John 5:22-29 “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 “and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 “and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

So the author is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ with fullness of divine power searching eyes/heart- knower, meeting out judgment.

Lesson #2: Jesus Christ knows our heart perfectly well today and is ready to judge us in any way that is necessary to keep us pleasing to Him in our daily lives!

The Mindset of Worldliness Experienced in Thyatira

The saints in Thyatira needed to stop their friendship with the world that led them to be displeasing to God. You may ask, in what way was the mindset of worldliness felt or seen in Thyatira?

To answer that, we need to go back for a brief history lesson. Let me describe daily life in this 1st Century Roman city, named here in Revelation.

Thyatira was renowned for manufacturing and industry. Most workers in Thyatira were members of guilds that operated much like our labor unions of today. The guilds encouraged their members by setting prices for their labor, and for the prices of the goods they sold.

That meant that all of the various trades: potters, dyers, tanners, bakers, metal workers,

textile makers, bronze smiths, slave-dealers, leather-workers, and the rest had their guilds in this town. History of this period notes three things.

Trade guilds were compulsory: to be employed in a trade was only via the guild. We would say that this area had what is sometimes called a closed shop.

Trade guilds were pagan: every guild in Thyatira had a patron god or goddess. Thus, every guild function began with paying homage to that deity by offering--this was the obligatory opening to all meetings which were required to be an artisan/craftsman.

Trade guilds were pleasure-dominated: business followed the invocation to the patron deity, and then came the customary banquets that each guild sponsored, that were known for their sexual freedom. The cost for the Christian was unmistakable.

Sin was Everywhere Present and Powerfully Alluring

William Ramsay, the famed 19th century archaeologist, writes: “revelry, license and intoxication marked these pagan religious societies (trade guilds) lounging on dining couches, surrounded by troupes of unclothed, dancing and singing slaves, would be fatal to all self-restraining spirits”.

In short, a guild was no place for Christians; and yet quitting the union was economic suicide.

- **Their Flesh was Tempted at Work:** Believers found that their battle with the flesh raged every day in the daily work schedules of Thyatira and all the other towns of Roman Asia.
- **Their Flesh was Tempted after Work:** Add to this the personal necessity for daily trips to public bath houses in every city, where prostitution was normal and considered healthy.
- **Their Flesh was Tempted at Sports:** Then compound the picture with the fact that any involvement in sports meant trips to the athletic facilities where such emphasis was placed on the human body that many sports were practiced and competed in total nudity.

All of those forces meant that these saints were vexed with the flesh, temptation, and sin. We could say that they were:

Living in a Cesspool of Sin

What immense pressures the world placed upon every marriage in the early church. Wives knew that each month their husband was going off to a guild meeting: knowing that he was served all the alcohol he could ever drink, followed by a pornographic, strip show.

What immense pressures the world placed upon families. Godly parents knew that to allow participation in sports, their sons and daughters would be required to take all of their clothes off, and practice and compete with other young people all in complete nudity.

Daily life was filled with temptations, allurements, and blatant sensuality in Thyatira and

nearly every other town and city of the Roman Empire. That was the world into which the early church was born, and with it the call of Jesus Christ to live out a pure and holy lifestyle.

Christ's Call to Holiness Has Never Changed

Probably the most succinct statement to these people came in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. Galatia was about as close to Thyatira as Chicago is to us. The road between these two urban areas was safe, clear, and heavily traveled.

By the time of Christ's letter to this church, Paul's Epistle to the Galatians was known, read, taught, and most likely, this portion memorized.

Paul always taught that the battle was already won by Christ: the world, my flesh and the Devil were all defeated at the cross. We just need to believe and act upon that truth! How do we do that more regularly?

Now listen to Paul's words to believers, marriages, and families who had to live in this most intoxicating time of sin in all of history up until our day. He confessed to them the only way to survive, in Galatians 2:20.

We need to repeat, reaffirm, and remember over and over again that, the past work of Christ's death on the cross: saved me, and keeps me. Listen to Paul in Galatians 2 as he sets forth the attitude we are to have.

*Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ (**past event--justification**); it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (**present event-sanctification**); and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (**present event-sanctification**), who loved me and gave Himself for me (**past event--justification**). NKJV*

Notice the sandwich type presentation. The past work of Christ on the cross secured my salvation in the present and offers my sanctification in the present, based on the past work of Christ's cross.

Living in the Present Based upon the Past

How did I get saved? By trusting, believing, clinging to the truth that Jesus Christ took my sins, and stood in my place and bore the punishment of God's wrath I deserved. The guiltless One took my guilt; the sinless One took my sin; the holy One took my wretchedness, and on and on we could go.

But did I see Him there personally? No, it was by what? Yes, faith.

I believed the truth of God's Word and God changed me forever. The same way we were saved is the same way we live the rest of our lives.

So apply that faith that you and I have for the work of Christ on the cross in our place and apply it now to the rest of our walk.

Flesh can't defeat flesh. Resolves, promises, fighting and striving in our own power only leads to further defeats--it is only by yielding to the power of the cross. And what is the power

of the cross? It is the defeat of death, sin, and Satan that Jesus accomplished once for all time, when He died on the cross.

Now, in simple faith that saved you repeat that to yourself. (Just like my old pastor John MacArthur always used to tell us ‘preach the Gospel to yourself!’) Say something like this:

Even if I do not feel it, understand it, or even at times want it I WILL by faith, believing YOU, consider myself dead to sin.

Or in times of need, “Lord I operate on what I know is true, you have made me dead to sin.”

When I truly prayed, asking in simple faith for Christ to save me—whether I felt a strong emotional feeling or not, God began His work within me. I started changing from the inside out. The same is true with these imperatives.

Jesus lived—that’s *history*.

Jesus died—that’s *theology*.

Jesus died for me and took my sins upon Himself on the Cross—that’s *salvation*.

Jesus died for me to live through Him—that’s *sanctification*.

And Christ's work on Calvary forever gave us the power and authority so we can stop anything that enslaves us and so that we can start anything He asks us to do!

Just as there is nothing we can do before our salvation to make us accepted by God; there is also nothing we can do after our salvation that makes us acceptable to God.

As we were saved only by the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—so we live each day ‘by faith’ (the same faith by which we were saved). We are always dependent upon Christ's gracious death upon the cross that saves and keeps us!

Part Three: Seek Christ's Approval v. 19

Your deeds word: *erga*

Your love word: *agapen* (only church w/love)

Your faith. Greek word: *pistos* = faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity

Your service. Greek word: *diakonian* = yes, deacon ministry as a servant.

Your perseverance. Greek word: *hupomone* = to abide under, steadfast endurance.

Your deeds of late greater = wow!

Lesson #3: The Christian life is a life of growth, deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance and growth. If it’s alive, there’s growth or you’re sick.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

This church, called from darkness to light at salvation, saved from the power of Satan and transformed into saints of God was slipping.

Jesus calls them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. This letter is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed:

repent of listening to false teachers and their false teachings, and start listening to Him instead.

Samson: A Study in the Impact of Chastening Upon a Compromised, Worldly (Thyatiran) Believer's Life

Revelation 2:18-29/Hebrews 12:1-11/Judges 13-16

All⁶⁹ of us in Christ's Church are *called* from darkness to light at salvation; and we are *saved* from the power of Satan; and we are being *transformed* into saints of God. That process is called *consecration*. Last week as we looked at the Church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29), we saw that their consecrated lives were slipping because of compromise with sin and false doctrine.

Jesus called them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. The letter to Thyatira is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed: *repent of compromising their lives of sanctification*.

Paul describes the deadly result of a compromised life. Please open to I Corinthians 3:15 where Paul warns all believers about the danger of getting to Heaven empty-handed, and what it means to suffer loss. In other words:

Don't Get to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss 1 Corinthians 3:15

Please listen to this one verse, from God, through Paul, to each of us who will listen.

1 Corinthians 3:15 (NKJV) If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

This morning, God's Word uses a well know person from the Bible to portray this description of being saved, yet so as by fire. This person is Samson, and he powerfully illustrates Christ's warning to Thyatira. The Scriptural biography of Samson teaches believers about suffering the loss that comes from a compromised life,

First, ***Samson is a believer***, a servant of God, but one that was saved by fire, suffering loss. We know Samson is a believer because the New Testament tells us so in Hebrews 11:32.

Next, we can classify the struggles ***Samson faced: chastening***; because the Lord always

⁶⁹ 110904AM CLW-19 Samson

chastens those who are really His, as Hebrews 12:1-11 clearly teaches.

Finally, we know ***Samson suffered loss*** because that is what Paul says happens to anyone who lives a compromised life like Samson, as I Corinthians 3:15 so hauntingly warns us.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling, and neglected his consecration: the Lord never let go of him.

His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time. But the warning from the Scriptures is:

Samson Shows Us How He Got to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss

Samson was one of the most amazing Old Testament personages. So many details God captured about his life are unique and profound in their meaning. Here are just a few truths about Samson's life:

God's Angels Announce His Birth: He was one of only a handful of people whose births were announced by angels. Isaac, John the Baptist, and Jesus are the others. So he is in the top 1/10 of 1% of all the 3,000 people named in the Bible.

His Parents Sought God's Help to Raise Him: His parents rank up there again with the fewest of the few. Only Joseph & Mary, Job, Abraham, Hannah, and Samson's dad Manoah are recorded as seeking and receive wisdom recorded in God's Word in how to raise their children.

He is Consecrated to God from Birth: Now we are in special territory again. God picked from birth Jeremiah, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Paul. The calling that God placed upon Samson was to be a Nazarite: a person completely given to God for life. The inward response to this calling of obedience was to be a chosen life of pointing to the Lord by obedience. God gave Samson special supernatural strength.

The life of Samson is recorded in God's Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin, and the restoring power of grace. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life.

The dangers of compromise, the consequences of wandering from consecrated living, and the wonders of God's grace: are all seen in the incredible life of Samson.

Experiencing great blessing and strength in one area of our lives does not make up for neglect and weakness in another area of our lives.

Knowing the presence of God does not automatically overwhelm our will, we must choose to obey or we will disobey!

Few accounts in the Bible are as tragic as this one. Here is a man to whom God gave twenty years' time to begin to overcome the enemy, yet in the end, he himself was overcome

by the enemy.

Samson's history is an illustration of Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 9:27, for Samson was a castaway. Hebrews 11:32 cites him for his faith in God's Word, but apart from this, very little can be said on his behalf. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV).

As we open to the book of Judges, God's Word traces the dangerous path that Samson chose, that led him away from blessing and into suffering loss because of his compromises with sin. Note the steps that led to Samson's sin and tragic end.

The First Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Wandered from His Godly Heritage (Judges 13:1-25)

Just think for a moment what God has done, and who you are today as a believer and follower of Christ. We are each a special, unique creation with a purpose from God.

God made each of us exactly as we were born; and there were no mistakes in our manufacturing. Then the Lord delivered each of us to exactly the right home with the right parent(s). That is also what Samson had:

1. **A Godly Home:** Samson was born into a godly home, to parents who believed in God and practiced prayer. Samson was God's special gift to them and a tool God wanted to use in Israel. Samson's father prayed, "Teach us what we shall do unto the child" (v. 8, 12). Samson's folks loved God and tried to instill this same love in their son.
2. **A Godly Giftedness:** God gave to Samson a special endowment of the Holy Spirit that made him a tool in the Hands of the Lord to accomplish His purposes as a Judge in Israel.
3. **A Godly Calling:** God told Samson's parents that their son was called by God to be a Nazarite (lit. a "separated one"), who was to be instructed in how to be completely surrendered to the Lord. Samson's parents were to teach him Numbers 6, where he would learn a Nazarite was never to drink alcohol; never touch anything dead; and to maintain the mark of his dedication by uncut hair.

But, despite this path God chose for him, Samson began to despise his wonderful heritage as he grew up. Instead of surrendering himself to accomplish God's plan, Samson chose to live his own plan.

How tragic it is when God gives us a wonderful heritage and His great plan, and we treat it lightly. We now find the next step towards spiritual loss in Samson's life.

The Second Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Disobeyed His Parents (Judges 14:1-4)

One of the first signs of spiritual decline can often be seen in the way a young person responds to their God-given parents. Samson clearly demonstrates his rebellion.

1. **Samson decided to go away from the Lord.** Note in Judges 14 that "Samson went down..." (14:1), this statement is true both spiritually and geographically. Instead of staying inside the borders God had

given for finding a life's partner, Samson went down into enemy territory looking for a wife; and disobeying both God's Word and his calling: Samson fell in love with a heathen woman.

2. **Samson decided to ignore God's rules.** Because Samson's parents specifically asked the Lord how to raise him, Samson would have known the laws of separation God had given in the Pentateuch. But Samson chose to ignore God's Words in Genesis 24:1–4 (don't take a pagan wife); in Exodus 34:16 (beware of pagan wives); in Deuteronomy 7:3 (don't marry pagans); and never forget that the same command from God is restated for us in the New Testament in II Corinthians 6:14–18.
3. **Samson decided he was his own authority.** Note that God's Word captures that he **told** his parents; note that Samson was not honoring them by **asking** them. Even worse, when they reminded Samson about God's Word they had taught him, he defied them as he said: "Get her for me, for she pleases me well!" Samson was not restrained by the fact his choice displeased his godly parents. God does use Samson sin to strike the Philistines (v. 4). But, a godly person will not intentionally disregard a true Scriptural admonition from their godly parents who obey God's Word.

The Third Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Compromised His Life (Judges 14:5–20)

In that culture, the parents arranged the marriage, and there was often a year between the engagement and the wedding. Samson met a lion, and God gave him the power to overcome it even though Samson was disobeying God's Word. After months of waiting, when Samson went to get married, he found that bees had built a honeycomb in the skeleton of the lion.

Though Samson had been taught that in Numbers 6:6–9 God said that a Nazarite was never to touch a dead body, Samson deliberately defiled himself for the sake of the honey!

"How many Christians today defile themselves just to enjoy a little honey in the carcass of a lion"⁷⁰—perhaps it is the honey we desire of:

- Compromising or defiling lyrics of a popular musician; or the
- God-dishonoring message of a video game; or the
- Spirit-grieving scenes in a movie; or the
- Disobedient-direction of an ungodly friendship.

As a Nazarite, and a leader of God's People, Samson had no right to be sharing in the paganism of a worldly Philistine wedding.

As Spirit-indwelt, consecrated servants of God: neither do we have any right to defile the Temple of the Living God that we are to be for the Lord. God's Word clearly tells us:

Believers are not to marry Unsaved Partners: 2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Believers are not to make their closest friendships in life with unsaved people: James 4:4-8 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with

⁷⁰ Warren Wiersbe, Expository Outlines: Judge, in loc.

God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Believers are not to be captivated by the love worldly things: 1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Church History records an event that illustrates how deeply the Apostles believed what they wrote down for God. One day while the aged apostle John was bathing in the public baths of Ephesus, a believer from the church told him that the gnostic, apostate, false teacher Celsius, who was constantly attacking the deity of Christ, had just gotten into the same pool that John was in.

The Apostle John jumped from the pool, wrapped a towel around himself, and ran from the Roman Bath. He did not want to even share a bath with someone who hated Christ.

Finally, Samson's Compromises Led to Disaster (16:21-31)

First, ***Samson was Dominated by Lust***. That un-mortified passion led Samson to intensely desire a pagan Philistine woman as a wife, which was strictly forbidden by God's Law. In addition, that passion led him to fornication with prostitutes, like his time spent with Delilah, who betrayed him for money.

Second, ***Samson was Driven by Pride and Revenge***. He was more moved by anger at personal affronts to strike out at the Philistines than he was moved by the suffering of the people he was supposed to lead (cf. 14:19–20; 15:7–8; 16:28).

Third, ***Samson was Defeated by himself***. We can hardly imagine what Samson, with his great strength and his godly heritage, might have been for the Lord. If only he had lived out on a daily basis, the formal commitment to God, expressed in that Nazarite vow⁷¹.

The rest of the story of Samson's life shows the tragic end of any believer who will not let God have his way with their life. From Judges 16:20 onward, Samson does nothing but suffer loss. His life is a fitting portrait of God's warning that: God is not mocked, what ever we sow, we reap!

Samson loses his hair, the symbol of his Nazarite dedication; for that dedication had long since been abandoned.

Samson loses his strength, but doesn't even know it until he is overpowered. Note the sad commentary in Judges 16:20: And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

Samson loses his sight, as the Philistines put out his eyes.

Samson loses his freedom, for they bind him with fetters of brass.

Samson loses his usefulness to the Lord, for he ends up grinding corn instead of fighting God's battles. What a picture of sin. First sin blinds, then sin binds, and finally sin grinds. Ask

⁷¹ These three points drawn from Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

any person who has lived a life of alcohol, a life of immorality, a life of drugs: they will tell you no matter how alluring any sin looks, it eventually grinds.

Samson loses his testimony, for he was the laughingstock of the Philistines. Their fish-god Dagon, and not the God of Israel, was given all the glory.

Samson loses his life. Samson was a castaway; he had committed sin unto death, and God had to take him off the scene⁷². His loved ones claimed his body and buried him “between Zorah and Eshtaol”—the very place where he had started his ministry (13:25). That prayer of repentance, and Christ's coming sacrifice, would erase the penalty and record of his sin, but not the loss that it would bring to Samson's rewards in Heaven.

The Message from Samson's Life: How to Get to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss

What happened to Samson in New Testament terms? To answer that, and as a warning to every one of us called to life-long consecration to the Lord: here is a series of verses that explain to us that there are choices we make as believers that can cause us to one day, suffer loss. Remember:

We are CONSECATED:

All New Testament Believers are Consecrated to the Lord Like Samson Was.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple⁷³ of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

We are ANSWERABLE:

We Will Each Answer To God For What We Did With Our Body.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have

⁷² What about Samson's death? Was it suicide, and was it wrong? No, he died in faith the book of Hebrews tells us. Some Philistine temples had roofs overlooking a courtyard, above wooden columns planted on stone foundations. The central pillars were set close to furnish extra support for the roof. Here the victory celebration and taunts flung at the prisoner below drew a big crowd. The full strength of Samson, renewed by God, enabled him to buckle the columns. As a result, the roof collapsed and the victory was Israel's, not Philistia's. He died for the cause of his country and his God. He was not committing suicide, but rather bringing God's judgment on His enemies and willing to leave his own life or death to God. He was the greatest champion of all Israel, yet a man of passion capable of severe sin. Still, he is in the list of the faithful (cf. Heb. 11:32). Judges 16 in the John F. MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur Study Bible, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

⁷³ The Holy Spirit is so specific, we are not the Greek word: hieron 'the whole temple building', but the Greek word: naos, the Holy of Holies.

preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

God Is Involved:

God Will Not Stand By As We Sin.

1 Corinthians 11:30-31 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

God Gives WARNINGS:

Chastening Proves God's Love.

Hebrews 12:5-6, 8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

We can go TOO FAR:

Going Too Far Too Often With Sin Will Be Deadly For Believers.

1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

Some are DEAD:

God Kills Believers Who Won't Repent In Time.

Revelation 2:22-23 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Our God of the Grace of New Beginnings

Apparently during the grinding at the mill, Samson repented of his sin. God offered him one more chance to act by faith.

His hair had begun to grow and Samson remembered his calling. He asked God for strength to win one more victory over the enemy. God answered his prayer, but in defeating others, Samson lost his own life.

Samson will always stand out in Scriptures as an illustration of people who have power

to conquer others, but who cannot conquer themselves.

He could set the Philistine fields on fire, but could not control the fires of his own lust.

He could kill an attacking lion, but would not put to death the passions of his own flesh.

He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, but the shackles of his own sin gradually grew stronger on his soul.

He could have led the nation, but he preferred to work independently, and as a result, left no permanent victory behind.

He could have been remembered for what he built up, but instead everyone but God only remembers what he destroyed: lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women's purity, and his own life and ministry.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time.

Today, if you are headed away from God, down the road of compromise with sin, why not repent this moment.

Right there where you sit cry out to God and say, I don't want to waste my life, and arrive in Heaven only to see my life burned up and I am empty handed before your Judgment Seat.

Our God offers the grace of New Beginnings. Reach out and surrender to Him Today.

Appendix:

To have grown up with Samson must have been amazing. His neighborhood pals must have stood in wonder at his immense strength. His enemies must have fled quickly. It was like having a one-man army.

As a young man probably in his teens, we get the first indicator that Samson was not going the direction the Lord had pointed him. He begins to live by his desires and not God's. He begins to serve his own lusts and not God's Words. A string of women begin to parade through his life. In fact seven times Samson was guided by the lust of his eyes when he "saw a woman that pleased him". Each instance was a dangerous choice.

The final, and deadliest woman is Delilah. Her name has become synonymous with lust, deceit, betrayal and ruin. She tries to find the secret of his strength for an enormous bribe. Samson knows it is his hair; and in a series of three lies he slowly gives clues.

Spurgeon's summary says it all:

At last⁷⁴ he falls into the hands of Delilah. She is bribed with an enormous sum, and she endeavors to get from him the secret of his strength. He foolishly plays with his own destruction. At last he lets out the secret, his strength lay in his locks. Not that his hair made him strong; but

⁷⁴ Delivered on Sabbath Morning, November 21st, 1858, by the REV. C. H. SPURGEON at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens. Sermon # 224.
<http://thebiblerevival.com/teachings/books/0008/0224.htm>

that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him.

While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him. His hair is cut away; the Philistines begin to oppress him, and his eyes are burned out with hot iron. How are the mighty fallen!

And now he comes to the very city out of which he had walked in all his pride with the gates and bolts upon his shoulders; and the little children come out, the lower orders of the people come round about him, and point at him - "Samson, the great hero, hath fallen! Let us make sport of him!" What a spectacle!

Why, he must be the sport and jest of every passer by, and of every fool who shall step in to see this great wonder - the destroyer of the Philistines made to toil at the mill. That he should have lost his eyes was terrible; that he should have lost his strength was worse; but that he should have lost the favor of God for a while; that he should become the sport of God's enemies, was the worst of all.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time. As John MacArthur so eloquently describes:

The greatness⁷⁵ of God's grace is seen in His choosing the undeserving to be His people and the unqualified to do His work. It should be a marvelous encouragement to every believer to know that, just as Elijah (James 5:17), the apostles had a nature like ours. Because there was no other way, God chose to bestow sanctifying grace on those who believe in His Son and by His own power to transform them into men and women of great usefulness.

We are tempted to become discouraged and disheartened when our spiritual life and witness suffer because of our sins and failures. But God picks normal people and pours His grace on them. Satan wants our sins and failures to convince us to give up. But one look at the people of the Bible should defeat that temptation. The work of God is performed by weak individuals like us, surrendered to the God whose power is perfected in man's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). God has always had only weak and sinful humans to work with.

Apart from the brief ministry of His own Son, the history of God's work on earth is the history of His using the unqualified. The twelve disciples who became apostles were no exception. Even from the human standpoint they had few characteristics or abilities that qualified them for leadership and service. Yet God used those men, just as He did Noah, Abraham, and the others,

⁷⁵ From Matthew 10 in MacArthur, John F., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

in marvelous ways to do His work.

Fourth, Samson Ignored God's Warnings (15:1-20)

This chapter records several victories, but each has a cause for Samson to think, almost a subtle reminder from God that he was headed the wrong way. The chapter finally ends with Samson weakened, dangerously thirsty, and exhausted.

Samson burned the fields of the Philistines, but they turned around and burned the woman he had loved (15:6 with 14:15).

Samson avenged the death of his wife, but then his own people turned against him and delivered him to the Philistines (vv. 11–13).

God delivered him, but then God warned him by showing him how weak he was.

The Scriptures only record Samson praying twice: here at the end of chapter 15 for water (vv. 18–20), and at the end of his life in 16:28, for strength to destroy the Philistines.

Samson's parents were marked by their prayers for God's help, but Samson seems to have mostly ignored their example. God warned Samson in this chapter, by these events, but he would not heed the warning.

Fifth, Samson Played With Sin (16:1-20)

Samson had already gotten into trouble with one woman, but now he tried again, this time going deep into enemy territory to Gaza.

Again, God warned him by allowing the enemy to almost catch him, but Samson still refused to repent. It was then that Delilah came into his life and led him to his doom.

The Valley of Sorek was close his hometown, but Samson's heart was already far from God. It should shocks us to read of this consecrated servant of God, called to be a Nazarite, sleeping on the lap of a wicked woman. But that is where compromise always takes us, away from God. Samson, like others who follow his way of disobedience chose to go his own way.

Three times Delilah enticed Samson, and three times he lied to her. Each time, the Philistines came rushing in. Samson should have realized he was in a dangerous trap. But as God tells us in Proverbs 7:21–27, the seducing woman holds great power over the listening man. Samson yielded because he slept when he should have fled.

We all need to heed Christ's warning in Matthew 26:40–41 to watch and pray "lest we enter into temptation". It is always deadly to our spiritual lives when we play with sin.

Sardis: Where the Great Physician Felt their Pulse and Declared Them Dead

Revelation 3:1-6

Today⁷⁶ Revelation 3 begins with the second shortest letter⁷⁷ of Christ's Seven, written to Sardis, hometown of Aesop's Fables and Midas' Touch.

When we read these words we are not only hearing the report Jesus Christ gives after visiting the fifth of the seven churches, we also get the worst reported condition of any of the seven churches. The other churches were either given a perfect bill of health, or had some struggles with compromise, sin, and disobedience. But Sardis is different. Here:

The Great Physician Felt their Pulse & Declared Them Dead

The condition of Christ's Church at Sardis was critical. Jesus, the Great Physician, slipped into this church, knelt down and felt their pulse. Then, after He looked for vital signs, He notes in His report that this church is dead: *it is no longer alive as a functioning body*.

In just two generations since Pentecost: the Gospel across the world, this church was founded, flourished, and now has died. As we listen to Christ's words in Revelation 3:1-6, remember that the first rule of proper Biblical study and interpretation is to heed the context of any verse.

What is the context here? Jesus is reporting to John on Patmos the results of His tour of the churches. Jesus asks (actually commands in the imperative mode), for John to write these words down for Him. Jesus wants each church as well as all the churches to know what He found and what He expects. What did Jesus find in Sardis?

From Alive in Christ To Dead as His Church

Christ's report contains a tragic finding: the Body of Christ, the Church at Sardis, appeared dead at the moment. They no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer fixed on Christ. They were walking corpses: acting, thinking, and responding just like all those

⁷⁶ 110911AM CLW-20 Sardis.doc

⁷⁷ Number of words in each letter: Ephesus (192); Smyrna (137); Pergamos (203); Thyatira (294); Sardis (185); Philadelphia (249); Laodicea (235).

who were dead in trespasses and sin around them.

Jesus demands that these “church-attenders” repent of just going through the motions of acting like Christians, and get His power at work within them. Sardis had a big name but no life; they were dead as last week’s cut flowers, cold and lifeless.

As we stand for the reading of Christ’s letter to them—we all need to listen and hear with our hearts what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, **but you are dead**. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments**; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””*

The saints at Sardis had gone ‘from holiness to phoniness’; they had “a name” as Jesus said, but it was only talk, there was no life that backed up the claim.

Jesus spent most of His public ministry bumping up against lifeless religion. Jesus warned those closest to the things of God (the Temple serving priests and Bible teaching Pharisees) that they were going to be cast out into outer darkness.

Note that Christ reports in v. 4 that there are a “few” that are still alive as His born-again children, but they are living in a morgue. Like an old campfire that is cold and gray, when Jesus stirred around in the ashes He found a few that still glowed with life; but the rest were dead, cold, and lifeless.

There are two lines of interpretation that have been taught from this passage. The first is represented by the MacArthur Study Bible, and others who say the church at Sardis was filled with lost, un-regenerated, unsaved people; and Christ is addressing the few believers in their midst⁷⁸.

The other view is clearly expressed by the editors of the ESV study Bible who say that the church was filled with real but sick believers in a coma, near death, but capable of hearing and responding to Christ's call⁷⁹.

Actually, both interpretations are reflected in this passage. When believers sin they act like unsaved people; and do get so weak and sick they are in a coma. But as Jesus said, only His sheep can hear His voice and follow Him. So, Jesus was saying to anyone who would and could hear: follow Me and turn from your sin. But, the few were the believers, and the many were either lost, or so steeped in their sins they acted lost, and looked dead. The sobering lesson

⁷⁸ MacArthur Study Bible, in loc.: “The church in Sardis was dead; that is, basically populated by unredeemed, unregenerate people.”

⁷⁹ ESV Study Bible, in loc.: “The church in Sardis is in a deep spiritual coma, approaching death but not beyond Christ's summons to wake up, to strengthen what is about to die, to remember and keep the message of grace that the church had received and heard, and to pursue the holiness that flows from grace.”

from Christ is to beware of:

The Pathway that Leads to Death: Only Professing Jesus, Not Possessing Him

What would lead a church to be declared “dead” by Christ? How did they get so far from Him, His life that is abundant, and His Spirit that is to overflow our lives? The answers to those questions are perhaps some of the most sobering lessons we will come to in our walk through these seven churches.

God wants us to know the difference between appearance and reality! In every generation He has had to pronounce against certain ones: “This people *draw near Me with their mouth*, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me” (Isaiah 29:13).

That pronouncement came from Christ to His own generation as He ministered. As we open to Matthew 5, we start the longest recorded messages Jesus ever gave (known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7) is filled with four different warnings about the dangers of false professions. These three chapters end with the four most chilling words any religious person ever could hear: “*I never knew you*”.

Jesus spared no words to convey His utter contempt for religious charlatans with the false fruits of self-righteousness. He gave the greatest warnings to those who only appeared to be righteous. Perhaps the strongest warnings ever uttered, came from our loving Savior whenever He came across phonies. Some of His most graphic illustrations were about these Christian look-a-likes. Here are Christ's seven most well known warnings. Starting in Matthew 7 note that Jesus warned:

Beware of Ever Being Like This

A Ravenous Wolf Dressed in Sheep's Clothing: Matthew 7:15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

A Fruitless Tree, Waiting to be Cut Down and Burned in the Fire: Matthew 7:19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

A Shocked Church Worker, Who Never Really Knew Jesus: Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

A House Built on Sand, Only to be Swept Away to Destruction: Matthew 7:26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man

who built his house on the sand: 27 “and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

A Weed Gathered From Grain Fields, Only to be Cast into Bonfires: Matthew 13:30 ‘Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’

An Outwardly Fancy Cup, But Fouled with Filth on the Inside: Matthew 23:25-26 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Whitewashed on the Outside, but Still a Tomb Full of Rotting Corpses: Matthew 23:27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.

Professing the truth without possessing Him is what Christ was warning us about. What will be the end of all who profess Christ, but don’t possess Him personally? Back in Matthew 3 we see these words:

Matthew 3:12 “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Some Horrible Biographies

Other Scripture writers record horror stories, of false believers who are really: dogs, pigs, wolves, thistles, fire, rotten fruit; and all destined for destruction. These are the spiritual phonies that live across the pages of Scriptures:

THOSE LIKE CAIN (Genesis 3-4): who grow up nearly in Paradise, hearing from faithful parents about knowing the true God but depart and never look back at Him.

THOSE LIKE ESAU (Genesis 25-33): who will sell an eternally valuable spiritual inheritance for a moment of fleshly desire--and find no place of repentance and miss the heavenly city.

THOSE LIKE BALAAM (Numbers 25-27): who want to die the death of the righteous, but lived the life of rebellious and went to hell.

THOSE LIKE THE PHARISEES (Matthew 23): who lived hygienically sterile exterior holiness and are rotting with corrupted hearts inside and faced damnation.

THOSE LIKE JUDAS (John 13:18-30): who lived around Jesus for years, heard and saw Him daily but inside only grew colder and harder by the year!

THOSE LIKE MODERN LIBERAL CHURCHES: where the gospel is in a coffin for so many dead, liberal, cold and lifeless churches today. These churches have a name, like the first church, or the reorganized church, or the saint someone’s church, they have gorgeous

facilities; but as the Great Physician kneels to feel their pulse, He pronounces them dead.

But, when Christ visits here, at His Church that meets here, could there be any of those phonies here at at this place?

Is it possible amongst us, in this great host, that your heart is filled with coldness, darkness and emptiness?

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asks a vital question:

Luke 6:46 (NKJV) "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"

Why Call Me Lord And Obey Me Not?

These words form the basis for an engraving from the Middle Ages, present today in the Lutheran cathedral of Lubeck, Germany. The poem is entitled: "The Lament of Jesus Christ Against the Ungrateful World," which beautifully reflect our Lord's teaching in Luke 6:46 about people who said Lord, but didn't do what Jesus asked them to do:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us,
You call Me master and **obey Me not**,
You call Me light and **see Me not**,
You call Me the way and **walk Me not**,
You call Me life and **live Me not**,
You call Me wise and **follow Me not**,
You call Me fair and **love Me not**,
You call Me rich and **ask Me not**,
You call Me eternal and **seek Me not**,
If I condemn thee, blame Me not.

Conclusion: Be SURE You Know Him

God wants us to know the difference between appearance and reality! In every generation He has had to pronounce against certain ones: "This people *draw near Me with their mouth*, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me" (Isaiah 29:13).

That pronouncement came from Christ to His own generation as He ministered. As we open to Matthew 5, we start the longest recorded messages Jesus ever gave (known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7) is filled with four different warnings about the dangers of false professions. These three chapters end with the four most chilling words any religious person ever could hear: "*I never knew you*".

Sardis & Christ's Call to Every Believer: Stay Awake

Revelation 3:1-6

As⁸⁰ we open to Revelation 3:1-6 we are opening to the worst report Christ has given to any of His churches. As we saw last time, this is the only time that Jesus declares that a local church is dead, non-responsive to His plans, and non-functional for His purposes.

Look back over the text of the letter Christ wrote to them, which we read last time. In those words we find in an event from Sardis' past, a key that unlocks the message Jesus gave to the saints that were alive in Christ, and listening.

Follow along in v. 1-6, and I will emphasize the words that they would have clearly understood. Christ says them twice.

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "**I know your works**, that you have a name that you are alive, **but you are dead**. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments**; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Overconfident Watchlessness

Many of the seven letters from Christ, mention local events that those who lived in that city, and attended that fellowship, would understand. Here in Sardis it is the "watchfulness" allusion that would ring in their minds. They all knew that twice this city fell to the invading and occupying armies of their enemies: because their soldiers who guarded them, had slept on the job.

Sardis was built upon a thousand foot high cliff, overlooking a fertile valley. This mountaintop location provided such an apparently unscalable wall of protection, in the natural rock formations, that it seemed to be impregnable to any attack other than through the

⁸⁰ 110918AM CLW-21 Sardis.do

heavily fortified entrance gates.

Yet Sardis was captured twice in history, before this letter from Jesus arrived; and all the inhabitants knew why. Both Cyrus the Persian (in 549 BC) and Antiochus the Greek (in 218 BC), were able to take the city almost without a fight: both times because of its slackness.

Each time Sardis fell, enemy troops had watched the guards on the cliff top, saw the hidden paths they used to get down to the valley, and used those same paths to creep up at night and take the city. In each conquest, when the troops scaled the precipice by night, they found that the over-confident inhabitants of Sardis had either set no guard, or they were sleeping in the guardhouse.

Sleeping on the job was a physical sign of overconfidence for any soldier tasked with guarding the city.

Sleeping spiritually, by not guarding against the wiles of the Devil, is a sign of overconfidence for any believer.

Beware of Spiritual Overconfidence

There was a clear parallel that the believers in Sardis would have caught, and that all of us in the following generations of Christ's church, should heed. Thus we have the key that unlocks the meaning of Christ's words to Sardis.

Jesus points directly at their need for watchfulness, and ours. Jesus often used this metaphor of watching, staying awake, and sleeping in His teaching. He used it in His parables contrasting the good and bad servants, as well as the wise and foolish virgins.

Christ's Lesson 1:

Believers are to stay vigilant so that nothing keeps them from living for Christ's coming. Matthew 24:36-44 (NKJV)

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 **Watch**⁸¹ therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have **watched**⁸² and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the*

⁸¹ Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

⁸² Greek word # 1127 egregoresen.

Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Christ's Lesson 2:

Salvation is personal⁸³ and non-transferable; and believers are those always prepared for Christ's coming. **Matthew 25:1-13 (NKJV)**

*“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. 6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. 11 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ 12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 “**Watch**⁸⁴ therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

The Interpretation Of This Parable:

Parables are not to be dissected, and have every point in them allegorized into some spiritual application. Each parable has a central message and purpose that illustrates the truths Jesus was communicating.

Many parables are very hard to understand, and need careful interpretation. This parable is a wedding scene everyone in Christ's audience would have understood. So the time, the number, the term virgins, and the sleeping details were all understood.

The lesson is that in this very common and well known scene, some had made the preparation for the wedding, and some had not. In this parable the bridesmaids all looked alike, only their preparation differed. Jesus was simply making the point that *salvation not transferable, it is only personal*. Those who had oil were saved, and those without were not. A time came when it was too late to get saved, and they missed out forever.

Christ's Lesson 3:

Believers should go through life: always awaiting their Master's return; and always doing what He left them to do. **Mark 13:32-36 (NKJV)**

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only

⁸³ Salvation is always personal, and must be examined for genuineness. Christ's other parables also emphasize this, like the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:28-29); the man with no wedding garment (Matthew 22); salvation costs everything in the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46/Isaiah 55:1).

⁸⁴ Greek word # 991 blepete (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

the Father. 33 Take heed⁸⁵, **watch**⁸⁶ and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch⁸⁷ therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

Christ's Lesson 4:

Believers either watch out for the Devil's temptations, or get devoured by yielding to them. **Mark 14:34-38 (NKJV)**

*Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and **watch**⁸⁸." 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." 37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not **watch**⁸⁹ one hour? 38 **Watch**⁹⁰ and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Now as we turn back to Revelation 3, do you remember how similar we are this morning to that church 2,000 years ago?

We Are Exactly in the Same Place as Sardis

The believers, who met in Sardis, and at each of the other six of the seven churches, were no longer taught and led by Apostles. The churches no longer had that direct, personal touch with those who had known, seen, loved, touched, and heard Jesus Christ.

All of the seven churches were led and taught by second generation believer-leaders.

There were no primary, apostolic witness pastor-teachers left that still led the churches. The last Apostle-Pastor-Teacher was John, and he was imprisoned on a maximum security prison camp, isolated from the world on an island 54 miles off from the coastal city of Ephesus.

The only way that all the second-generation churches of the 1st Century, and every generation since, heard from God was through His written Word. There is the most striking truth from these seven letters. Jesus Christ is showing how He communicated with us who are His children, and it is through His Word, written down.

Today, just like the day this letter arrived at Sardis, we are to hear the words that are read, and respond to them, just like it was Jesus Christ Himself, or one of His Apostles standing

⁸⁵ Greek word # 69 agrupneite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

⁸⁶ Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

⁸⁷ Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

⁸⁸ Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

⁸⁹ Greek word # 1127 gregoresei.

⁹⁰ Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

there and addressing His Church. So, back to this letter in Revelation 3, think of:

Lessons that They And Us Need to Heed

Note that it was in v. 1a “And to the angel of the *church in Sardis* write”. The saints in this local church needed to listen as their angel, their messenger that shared with them God’s Word, their teaching-pastor. As he read this letter to them, they were being told by Christ that they had not been obedient to the clear commands God had already given them. They had not responded to the teaching of the Apostles from the NT books and epistles, thus they were not pleasing Christ in their day-to-day behavior.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor’s ministry of the written and taught Word to them?

They knew that Jesus described true believers as those who are: Overflowing with the Holy Spirit of God.

John 7:37-39 (New King James Version) On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 **He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**” 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

They knew that Paul described true believers as those who are: Energized by the Holy Spirit of God.

Romans 8:8-11 So then, those who are in the flesh **cannot please God.** ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit** who dwells in you.

They knew that Paul described true believers as those who are: Living Life in the power of His Spirit.

Gal 5:16 I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Jesus offers us overflowing Spirit filled lives. But to be filled we must first empty what is already there in our lives.

Jesus called the saints at Sardis to please God, by choosing to repent and get His power at work within them. This leads to the constant desire of God, for these early believers, and for

us today:

The Necessity of Spiritual Watchfulness

One of the more frequent calls to believers in the NT is to live the un-intoxicated life. Not getting heavy-eyed and sleepy in a spiritual sense.

- Romans 13:11-14 (NKJV) And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to **awake**⁹¹ **out of sleep**; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.
- 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 (NKJV) Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” 34 **Awake**⁹² to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.
- 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NKJV) Paul closes 1st Corinthians with these Final Exhortations 13 **Watch**⁹³, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done with love.
- Ephesians 5:8-14 (NKJV) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: “**Awake**⁹⁴, you who sleep, Arise⁹⁵ from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”
- Colossians 4:2 (NKJV) Continue earnestly in prayer, being **vigilant**⁹⁶ in it with thanksgiving;
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NKJV) But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but **let us watch**⁹⁷ and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort

⁹¹ Greek word # 1453 egeiro (141 x in NT).

⁹² Greek word # 1594 eknepho Imperative; (31 x nepho “be sober” in NT).

⁹³ Greek word # 1127 gregoreo Imperative.

⁹⁴ Greek word # 1453 egeiro Imperative; (141 x in NT).

⁹⁵ Greek word # 450 anistemi (Imperative); from ana “again, anew” and histemi “to stand” # 2476.

⁹⁶ Greek word # 1127 gregoreo.

⁹⁷ Greek word # 1127 gregoreo.

each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

- 1 Peter 5:8-11 (NKJV) Be sober⁹⁸, be **vigilant**⁹⁹; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist¹⁰⁰ him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- Revelation 3:3 (NKJV) Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will **not watch**, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

To Overflow with His Spirit: Stop Loving the World

Another letter these churches would have received were the three short Epistles, John wrote when he was pastoring the great Ephesian Church. As one who was characterized by his deep love for Christ, John especially warned about misplacing our love.

Especially misdirecting love for God and allowing that love to rest upon what God hates, the sinful system of the god of this world Satan. John calls the Devil's system: "the world".

Stop Loving the World.

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) Do not love [present active imperative] the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The world operates by sending us temptations packaged as enticements from our lusts.

God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures: this equals the cravings of the body. *These are all of the sensual temptations.* Whether for food, pleasure, or fun: our bodies are built to crave and God says don't allow your flesh to control your cravings. That is worldly and I am against that lust in any form in your lives.

We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff: this equals the lusting of the eyes. *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol

⁹⁸ Greek word # 3525 nepho Imperative.

⁹⁹ Greek word # 1127 gregoreo Imperative.

¹⁰⁰ Greek word # 436 antihistemi (#473 + 2476) Imperative.

worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!

We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth. *These are all of the personal temptations.*

This can be selfishness because I'm most important.

This can be irritableness because life revolves around me.

This can be untruthfulness because I need to protect myself.

This can be laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition.

Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate. Lust means worldliness which offends God, it separates us from His blessing.

Respond to Christ's Appeal

Revelation 3:2-3 (NKJV) "**Be watchful**, and **strengthen** the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 **Remember** therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast** and **repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."

Christ gives the believers of Sardis, five 2nd person singular (as in individual responses requested) imperatives as the Lord of the Church.

YOU Watch: This word (Gr. Word # 1127 *gregoreo*) expresses the idea of being wakefulness, sleepless, or watchfulness. No commandment (9x) appears more frequently for believers in the N.T. than this watchfulness for Christ's coming.

YOU Strengthen: This word (Gr. Word # 4741 *streidzo*) is our old friend from Paul's writings, and describes a buttress, building a strong support, getting grounded.

YOU Remember: This word (Gr. Word # 3421 *mnemoneuo*) keep on remembering.

YOU Hold fast: This word (Gr. Word # 5083 *tereo*) guard, or watch.

YOU Repent This word (Gr. Word # 3340 *metanoeo*) change of mind that leads to a change in behavior towards God.

Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. This attitude is the key to:

How WE CAN Defeat The Devil Every Day

Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. "It is full time" says Paul, "to wake from sleep" (Romans 13:11). "Be watchful, stand firm in your faith," he urges (I Cor. 16:13). It has been said for a nation that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"; and for

a believer that eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.

Watch Out for Christ's Unexpected Coming (Mt. 24:42-43):

Believers are repeatedly told by the Lord to be on the watch for Christ's coming. “Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. What I say to you, I say to all: watch.” (Matthew 24:42-43). Believers are asked to live every day as if it were our last.

Watch Out for the Crouching Monster of Sin (Mt. 26:41):

Believers are repeatedly told by the Lord to be on the watch against temptation. “Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). Temptation waits for our unguarded moments and then attacks. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance against it.

Watch out for the permeating evil of false doctrine (Acts 20:29-31):

Believers are repeatedly told by the Lord to be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul's last address to the elders of Ephesus he warns them that grievous wolves will invade the flock from outside and from inside men will arise to speak perverse things. “Therefore”, he says, “Watch!” (Acts 20:29-31).

Watch Out For The Prowling Lion Satan (I Pet. 5:8):

The Christian must be on the watch against the wiles of the devil. The Christian is under a continuous spiritual attack that is subtle. We must ever be on the watch.

REST IN His ASSURANCE v. 4-6

Revelation 3:4-6 “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 “He who overcomes **shall be clothed in white garments**, and **I will not blot** out his name from the Book of Life; but **I will confess** his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Have you thought about these three assurances? First, salvation means we get clothed, and Christ is our garment! Romans 13:14 (NKJV): “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

Second, salvation means we are kept in the book, we are forever saved. Can we lose our salvation? No, God clearly says so! In Sardis the King could blot you out if he did not like

you; but not in the Kingdom of God.

Third, salvation means we are confessed: Think of it! To be taken by the hand by the Lord Jesus, to be led up to the throne of God Himself and to hear the Lord Jesus call you by your name and present you in person as His well beloved son or daughter!

That is what they needed to do in Sardis, and that is what we need to do today.

An ancient hymn, written by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf says it well:

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are my glorious dress:
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in thy great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am--
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame

What's the right response to Christ's message?

God hates profession without possession. Beware of pretenders. Are you pretending? God doesn't approve of just maintenance. It's life and growth and fruit or nothing! Are you growing?

God wants to see you: Watching out-Washed in white-written in eternity-waiting to have him call your name.

Does He know your name? Are you robed in White? WAKE UP TODAY!!!

A true believer does not practice sin; a counterfeit believer cannot help but practice sin, because he does not have God's new nature within him. But these words were not written so that you and I might check on other people. They were inspired so that we may examine ourselves. Each of us must answer honestly before God:

Do I have the divine nature within me or am I merely pretending to be a Christian?

Do I cultivate this divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?

Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?

Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me? When temptation comes, do I "play with it" or do I flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the divine nature within me?

Philadelphia: How to Build a Quake-Proof Life

Revelation 3:7-13

Today¹⁰¹ we look at what should become the model for us at Calvary. This morning Revelation 3 introduces us to the church that pleased Jesus Christ, and thus had a His blessings poured upon all that they did for Him.

Of all the seven churches, Philadelphia, the sixth church can be described as the Faithful Church, and stands out as the model. This morning my prayer would be that we as a church here at Calvary would be seen by our Lord as a church filled with Philadelphia-like saints, who gather and live out Christ in this faithful way.

The promises Christ gave them, the insights He shares with them, and the lessons He offers to us who listen: are unparalleled in any of the other letters. First we can call:

Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

If you don't yet have a favorite Epistle that Jesus Christ wrote, this one may be a good candidate. Their example as faithful, obedient, serving, and worshipping saints is so powerful. They were not perfect, just forgiven. They were not superior in any way, just responsive to God's desires for them individually and as a church.

Each of these seven letters is a model, example, and symbol of the types of churches and believers that will exist, side-by-side, throughout all the generations of Christ's Church: from Pentecost to the Rapture.

In a world that is so needy Christ has left His Church as a light; but some are distracted like Ephesus; and some are deeply persecuted and barely holding on like Smyrna; and others are compromised like Pergamos; and others are harboring secret sins like Thyatira, or dead like Sardis. But one church is vibrant, alive, faithful, evangelizing, worshipping, and doing just what Jesus Christ left them to do. May we all ask the Lord to enable us to choose to live as they lived. Next remember that:

Philadelphia: The Quake Prone City

The one geographic feature that you wouldn't know about this church without a study

¹⁰¹ 110925AM CLW-22 Philadelphia.doc

Bible, commentary, or a trip to the modern city of Alasehir in Turkey, built around the ruins of Biblical Philadelphia is: this was an active fault zone, with ongoing seismic activity.

The rich agricultural valleys with volcanic soil experience regular tremors. The cities around Philadelphia had all been destroyed by massive quakes in the century around the writing of this letter. Philadelphia was flattened in AD 17 as was Sardis, and was given tax reprieve by Emperor Tiberius, and aid for rebuilding.

So, to these people knew what it was like to be shaken out of bed, to be startled by the swaying of the ground, and to be amazed at the way everything that seems so stable and firm was so fragile and prone to destruction.

Philadelphians had grown up learning to flee their homes when the tremors came for fear of being crushed. For those of this church, to hear Christ's offer of security, stability, freedom from fearful flight must have been so powerful.

Only Christ Offers Quake Proof Living

Jesus explained to them that though they would always live in an area with quakes and tremors that could destroy all their physical possessions: following Him offered them treasures that could never be lost, and lives that would never be hopeless.

In a world of uncertainties, lurking disasters, constant unknowns, and endless potential dangers—Jesus Christ said: here is the way to quake-proof your life. Keep on trusting, following, serving, and investing in my church. Only Christ's Church offers and investment that is never lost, depreciated, stolen, or destroyed.

Now, join me as we listen to Christ's most encouraging, and most comfort-filled epistle of all seven in Revelation 2-3. Please stand as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:7-13:

*Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": 8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.** 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 I will write on him My new name. 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

As we turn our attention towards these words we just read from Christ, the first thing we need to notice is that Jesus has done something differently in His address to Philadelphia. In the first 5 letters Christ's introduction of Himself comes from the titles He gave in chapter 1. He just repeats, regroups, or combines the prior terms, but always follows the previously

referenced descriptions.

Jesus never introduces Himself to these churches just by His Name, He always adds a definition of His Character, and a description of Himself. But, up until this sixth church, those descriptions and definitions parallel what was already stated in Revelation 1.

But not to this faithful church at Philadelphia, to them Jesus reaches back across the pages of the Old Testament, and pulls together some of the most powerful descriptions of our Almighty, Covenant keeping, God of Heaven. The congregation must have grown very silent as these words were read¹⁰².

Here in the Epistle to the Philadelphians (3:7-13), Jesus Christ introduces Himself by using a string of four Hebrew descriptions of God that if we meditate upon what they reveal, they are powerful, comforting, challenging, and inspiring. First note them with me in v.7:

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). “He who **has the key of David**; 4). He who **opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**”:

For a moment we need to pause our look at all the rest of this letter, and focus upon just these four descriptive titles Christ Jesus takes, and see the implications of each. First:

Jesus Christ is The Holy God

Jesus introduces Himself again to them. They knew who He was. They were saved, but they needed this reminder, as do each of us today. Jesus Christ describes Himself as Holy. That is Christ taking for Himself the description of the Absolutely Holy God of the Bible¹⁰³. That means He is the only source of un-polluted, un-fallen, un-cursed, un-blighted existence. God alone is Holy. He alone possesses such purity, all else is subject to sin, corruption, and decay.

Look ahead to Rev. 4:8 where we see this description around the Throne scene of Heaven’s atmosphere of worship:

Revelation 4:8 (NKJV) The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “**Holy, holy, holy**, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”

As we look back at Rev. 3:7, Jesus is saying that He is separate from sin. Holy means separate from sin, so to say He is holy means He is separate from sin. Jesus is totally unlike us in this sense. He is holy by nature of who He is, and we are not. This was how Jesus kept being seen when He was revealed as the Messiah of God in the Gospels. Turn back there with me to

¹⁰² For a moment think about how these letters arrived. I personally agree with what my pastor taught on this passage, as I was studying in seminary. He said that angel literally means messenger. John called for seven men to assemble, receive copies of the entire book of Revelation, and take the entire book, and specifically the letter or Epistle to each of the churches, to that church. In the New Testament, the Greek word for angels (aggelos) is also sometimes used for human messengers (Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27, Luke 9:52, James 2:25). If these messengers traveled from Patmos to Miletus and up to Ephesus, they would have gone roughly 50 miles north to Smyrna, then another 50 miles north to Pergamos; then east to Thyatira; then south to Sardis; then southeast to Philadelphia; and further southeast to Laodicea; ending up nearly due east of Ephesus where they started.

¹⁰³ In the Old Testament this is constantly declared Lev. 19:2; Isaiah 40:25; 43:15; Psalm 16:10; Hab. 3:3 to name a few.

Mark 1.

Mark 1:21-24 (NKJV) Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? ***I know who You are—the Holy One of God!***"

Look at Luke 1:35 next. So fallen angels, or demons when they saw Jesus the Messiah cried out their confession that He was the Holy One of God. Now in Luke 1, note what the holy angels say to Mary:

Luke 1:35 (NKJV) And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, ***that Holy One who is to be born*** will be called the Son of God.

Next, as we turn to John 6, look at what the disciples confess as they got to know Jesus Christ the Messiah. The ESV brings this translation out clearly in v. 68-69:

John 6:68-69 (ESV) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are ***the Holy One of God.***"

Now, watch Peter's sermon in Acts 3, as he declares to everyone gathered after the miraculous healing of the lame man, who this Messiah they had crucified truly was:

Acts 3:14 (NKJV) But you ***denied the Holy One and the Just***, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,

Peter reminds the unbelievers who heard him, that they took Barabbas the murderer, instead of Jesus the Life-Giver. Jesus is the One with hair as white as snow, the Holy Son of the Infinite, Absolutely Pure and Holy Ancient of Days.

So when He said I am Holy, Jesus was identifying Himself to the saints at Philadelphia as the One from the Old Testament that is the Holy and Pure One. As this Holy and Just One, He can't tolerate sin.

Jesus Christ Expects Holy Living

Jesus Christ as the Messiah of God shares the very nature of God and is holy, harmless, undefiled and made separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). That means something very clearly to us as Peter goes on to say in his letter:

1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV) but as ***He who called you is holy***, you also be holy in all your conduct,

Jesus Christ is the Holy One. Jesus demands holiness in those who are His. He won't tolerate sin. He says that His expectations go all the way to our "conduct", a Greek¹⁰⁴ word that is translated: behavior (6x), conduct (4x), manner of life (2x), way of life (1x); and means: "dealing with other people, behavior".

Now this is what is fascinating: this Holy God the Son, the Messiah who is Just and Pure,

¹⁰⁴ Anastrophe, Greek word number 391.

the All-seeing God of the Universe who knows us completely, named Jesus Christ—affirms this attribute of holiness: and then *does not condemn the believers in Philadelphia for anything!*

Look back at the text in v. 8. Jesus Christ who is Omniscient, remember His eyes of blazing fire (Rev. 1:14) that can penetrate anything, seeing clearly everything says these words, “I know your works”.

He has just affirmed that He is the Holy, Just, Pure Almighty God, yet in the following verse of knowing their lives He has nothing to condemn them for. They were just saved and forgiven sinners like all the other churches; but Christ does not find anything to condemn them for, like He did with Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and soon Laodicea.

When Christ's inspection of their fellowship produces *no* rebukes, *no* warnings, and *no* condemnation: they become a very compelling model for us, given by Jesus Christ Himself to us, *of what it takes to please God as a local church.*

Now back to the second descriptive title in v. 7. Jesus writes: ‘These things says: 1). He who is holy; 2). He who is true:

Jesus Christ Is Truth

God is often described as holy and true, so Jesus Christ takes this reflection of God’s eternal character and introduces Himself to the saints as Philadelphia. He says the Holy and True One is speaking to you. The word is *alethinos* which speaks of being real, genuine, as opposed to being fake or counterfeit.

The combination of God as holy/righteous and true in v. 7 is a pattern we see throughout Revelation.

Revelation 6:10 (NKJV) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, **holy and true**, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Revelation 15:3 (NKJV) They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! **Just and true are Your ways**, O King of the saints!

Revelation 16:7 (NKJV) And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, **true and righteous** are Your judgments.”

Revelation 19:2 (NKJV) For **true and righteous** are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.”

Again, look back at our text in Rev. 3:7. The Holy One is speaking, and He is also the True One. This Holy and True One who speaks the truth, and sees everything, and demands holiness and separation from sin has visited them, watched them, analyzed them, and presents His

findings in v. 8, and has nothing to rebuke them for.

What an Incredible Church

What an incredible church. They were not perfect, they were not sinless, they were not given something different than every other church: *they were just faithful to that Word that had received*. They obeyed what the Lord told them: Confess and forsake sin when it comes, no matter how often.

The God of Truth, who is truth, Who speaks truth, Who demands truth on the inward parts has visited and gives His true report: *there is nothing to condemn in the lives of my saints when they are faithfully dealing with sin*.

Before we move on to the third description Christ uses, pause and let what we just saw in this letter, sink in. That is how to build a stable, hope-filled life today, and be ready for the future. Jesus offers a quake-proof life: a life that won't suffer loss at the Bema Seat of Christ.

The God of Holiness and the God of Truth, who sees all, hears all, and knows all, visits this assembly, and like He found at Smyrna, again He finds here nothing to correct. It must have so incredibly encouraged these saints.

To the Smyrna saints (Rev. 2:8-11), as they faced fiery persecutions, Jesus Christ said I am the One who was "dead and came to life"; so He knew all about what they went through, and would go with them through even the martyrdom some would face.

To the Philadelphian saints He said, I see all as the Holy and True God and conclude that there is nothing I need to change. That offers the amazing truth for us that it is possible, within the Scriptural truths we have been given, to please God in our daily lives to this extent: *that there is nothing He needs to rebuke or condemn us for*.

Though all of us are weak, frail, and very aware of our fallen humanity, yet Jesus shows us that we can live this pleasing life in His Holy sight.

As we go through life the way the Scriptures tell us: we sin, we repent, we seek His cleansing and experience His forgiveness. In all of that, faithfully living and walking the pathway He left for us, Jesus Christ the God of Truth and Holiness finds lives He can commend.

That is amazing. That is thrilling. That is what the saints at Philadelphia heard. That is what each of us should desire to be by His grace each day.

Now look back at v. 7 for the third description Jesus Christ speaks by way of introducing Himself. He says 'These things says: 1). He who is holy; 2). He who is true; 3). "He who has the key of David.

It is possible that, to many of us, this Old Testament description of a "key of David" from Isaiah 22:22 seems remote. It seems mysterious, or even makes us wonder why that would even be important. But it held a vast trove of truth to them.

The Isaiah passage uses the phrase "key of David" in the context of Shebna, who was the steward of the king of Judah. This position described the one who served the king as one

who: dispensed the king's wealth, who allowed entrance to the king's presence, and who was often second in power to the king, much like a prime minister.

In God's Word, David is much more than just the shepherd-boy, giant-killer, and Psalm-writer as we see him across the pages of Scripture. In those 141 chapters of the Bible that contain inspired insights about David we find that David also symbolized the office of the Messiah.

Jesus the Messiah Opens the Power, Riches, & Presence of God

The Anointed One of God, the Messiah was promised to come as a descendent of David, who (listen to this similar description) would dispense God's treasures, who would open God's Presence, and who was the second person of the Trinity.

The steward of the king held the key to the dispensing of the king's wealth and power: and that is what the promised, anointed, Messiah the Christ was coming to do for God the Father.

Look over to Revelation 5. Here in the scene of the Throne Room of the Universe, in the midst of the endless waves of worship rising before the Almighty, look at v. 5. Here is something we sometimes could miss.

Revelation 5:5 (NKJV) But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, **the Root of David**, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Now, turn onward to the ending chapter, Revelation 22:

Revelation 22:16 (NKJV) "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. **I am the Root and the Offspring of David**, the Bright and Morning Star."

The Bible ends with Jesus Christ our Messiah saying that He is the Root (the source of David's very existence as Creator), and the Offspring of David (as the virgin born, son of David born to be God in human flesh). The plan God designed for salvation is amazing, consistent, and powerful.

Jesus Christ: The Key to All Blessings

Back to our text in Rev. 3:7, where Jesus says I have the "key of David". In God's Word whenever we see key we see a symbol of authority. Another way to say "authority" is to call it "control". The key is the authority or control over something.

As Messiah Jesus Christ is the One who can dispense the treasures or riches of God. This is Jesus telling this dear church that pleased Him so that He had the keys to access the treasures of God, and the authority to dispense them upon their life and their church.

Later in the letter we'll see that authority to bless them led to fantastic results in their community evangelism. A sign of God's favor and blessing is when we see Him opening great doors to evangelism, and see former enemies of Christ bowing at His feet. This was part of the

promise given to this church.

Jesus Christ: The Only Door to Life Eternal

Another facet of this key is that Jesus Christ alone can grant access to God. He holds the keys to Hell and Death (Rev. 1:18) and here in 3:7 the keys to Life and Heaven.

He alone is the way to eternal life. No one can come to the Father except through Him, and He alone can draw them (John 6). His sovereignty is seen in these keys.

In John 10 Jesus Christ is the Door; in John 11 He is Resurrection and Life; and in John 14 He is the Way.

Jesus said that He came to open the door of life that is abundant, He announced that treasure to the Jews, and most of them rejected Him. Here in Rev. 3:9 are some antagonistic Jews, who are still rejecting Christ's authority to open eternal life and forgiveness, but they were wrong.

Jesus is Holy God, Jesus is the Truth, and Jesus has the Key to life the way God designed it to be. Only Jesus Christ can open life abundant. The faithful church at Philadelphia experienced the treasures of God, poured out through Christ.

He came to them and said I have the key, I can open God's riches to you, I can open God's Presence to you. I can give you an overflowing and abundant life.

What promises, what blessings, what truths: and they are all ours today.

May we like those in Philadelphia, live a life that survives the quakes of life by faithfully living for the Holy and True Son of God.

He has the Key of David. He unlocks life abundant. Follow Him and even loss we suffer becomes eternal gain.

That is the way to Quake Proof your life each day.

Philadelphia: Meet the True One, the Key of David Possessor, & the One Who Opens Doors

Revelation 3:7-13

When¹⁰⁵ Jesus Christ introduces Himself in Revelation 3:7 to those precious and faithful saints, He makes one of the greatest promises ever made. They, like us, lived in an uncertain world, and more than to any other church, Jesus explains His power in a way we all can grasp and hold onto today.

We each need to hear, and understand, and hold onto by faith:

The Most Amazing Promise

In a world of uncertainties, lurking disasters, constant unknowns, and endless potential dangers—Jesus Christ told these believers so much like us: here is truth you can hold tightly.

Jesus re-introduces Himself, and the promise was in His identity as The Christ. It's holding on by faith, to who Jesus really is, that changes everything. They needed a reminder of just Who they were listening to. Jesus Christ tells them that He holds the key to everything.

Nothing that *Jesus Christ opens* can be closed; and when *He shuts* the door to anything—that door can never be opened.

That concept is powerful to think about, depending on which side of the door you are on. Christ's words are either *amazingly encouraging*: that the door of blessing, ministry, or hope will never be shut; or very *soberingly horrible*, that the door of life, forgiveness, security, and hope can slam shut to you, and it can never be re-opened.

Now, join me as we listen to Christ's His voice in Rev. 3:7-13:

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": 8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have,

that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name. 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Getting to Know The Real Jesus Christ

Jesus never introduces Himself to these seven churches just by His Name, He always adds a definition of His Character, and a description of Himself. But, up until this sixth church, those descriptions and definitions parallel what was already stated in Revelation 1.

But not to this faithful church at Philadelphia, Jesus Christ introduces Himself by using a string of four Hebrew descriptions of God. These words define the real Jesus Christ. These truths are what the believers of this church were to grasp onto, and hold tightly by faith.

Jesus said in His earthly ministry that the truth makes us free. If we meditate upon what Christ revealed of His True Identity, our lives can be forever changed. Note these four again with me in v.7:

Revelation 3:7 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). "He who **has the key of David**; 4). He who **opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**":

For a moment we need to focus upon each of these four descriptive titles Christ Jesus takes, and see the implications of each. First:

Jesus Christ is The Holy God

When He said I am Holy, Jesus was identifying Himself to the saints at Philadelphia as the Holy and Just One, that can't tolerate sin.

Look on to v. 8. Jesus Christ who is Omniscient, remember His eyes of blazing fire (Rev. 1:14) that can penetrate anything, seeing clearly everything says these words, "I know your works".

Yet, when Christ's inspection of their fellowship is completed and written up in this report, His inspection produces *no* rebukes, *no* warnings, and *no* condemnation: they become a very compelling model for us, given by Jesus Christ Himself to us, *of what it takes to please God as a local church*.

Now back to the second descriptive title in v. 7. Jesus writes: 'These things says: 1). He who is holy; 2). He who is true:

Jesus Christ Is Truth

God is often described as holy and true, so Jesus Christ takes this reflection of God's eternal character and introduces Himself to the saints as Philadelphia. He says the Holy and

True One is speaking to you. The word is *alethinos* which speaks of being real, genuine, as opposed to being fake or counterfeit.

The combination of God as holy/righteous and true in v. 7 is a pattern we see throughout Revelation.

Revelation 6:10 (NKJV) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, **holy and true**, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Revelation 15:3 (NKJV) They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! **Just and true are Your ways**, O King of the saints!

Revelation 16:7 (NKJV) And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, **true and righteous** are Your judgments."

Revelation 19:2 (NKJV) For **true and righteous** are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."

Again, look back at our text in Rev. 3:7. The Holy One is speaking, and He is also the True One. This Holy and True One who speaks the truth, and sees everything, and demands holiness and separation from sin has visited them, watched them, analyzed them, and presents His findings in v. 8, and has nothing to rebuke them for.

What an Incredible Church

They were not perfect, they were not sinless, they were not given something different than every other church: *they were just faithful to that Word that had received*. They obeyed what the Lord told them: Confess and forsake sin when it comes, no matter how often.

To the Philadelphian saints He said, I see all as the Holy and True God and conclude that there is nothing I need to rebuke. That offers the amazing truth for us that it is possible, within the Scriptural truths we have been given, to please God in our daily lives to this extent: *that there is nothing He needs to rebuke or condemn us for.*

Though all of us are weak, frail, and very aware of our fallen humanity, yet Jesus shows us that we can live this pleasing life in His Holy sight.

As we go through life the way the Scriptures tell us: we sin, we repent, we seek His cleansing and experience His forgiveness. In all of that, faithfully living and walking the pathway He left for us, Jesus Christ the God of Truth and Holiness finds lives He can commend.

That is amazing. That is thrilling. That is what the saints at Philadelphia heard. That is what each of us should desire to be by His grace each day.

Now look back at v. 7 for the third description Jesus Christ speaks by way of introducing Himself. He says 'These things says: 1). He who is holy; 2). He who is true; 3). "He who has the

key of David.

Jesus Christ Is Holding the Key

It is possible that, to many of us, this Old Testament description of a “key of David” from Isaiah 22:22 seems remote. It seems mysterious, or even makes us wonder why that would even be important. But it held a vast trove of truth to them.

The Isaiah passage Jesus is quoting from, uses the phrase “key of David” in the context of Shebna, who was the steward of the king of Judah. This position of steward, was one who served the king as one: who *dispensed the king’s wealth*, who *allowed entrance to the king’s presence*, and who *displayed the king’s power*. The steward was often second in power to the king, much like a prime minister.

The steward of the king held the key to the dispensing of the king’s wealth, presence, and power: and that is what the promised, anointed, Messiah the Christ was coming to do for God the Father.

In God’s Word, David is much more than just the shepherd-boy, giant-killer, and Psalm-writer as we see him across the pages of Scripture. In those 141 chapters of the Bible that contain inspired insights about David we find that David also symbolized the office of the coming Messiah.

So the key of David signified the stewardship of the coming Messiah, who would not be like merely earthly kings, but would dispense the treasures, power, and presence of the King of the Universe.

Jesus the Messiah Opens the Power, Riches, & Presence of God

The Anointed One of God, the Messiah was promised to come as a descendent of David, who holding the rights and power of the Messiah in that key of David (listen to this similar description): would *dispense God’s treasures*, who would *open God’s Presence*, and who would *display God’s power* as the second person of the Trinity.

When Jesus opens a door of blessing it can’t be shut. When Jesus opens a door of ministry, it can’t be shut. Jesus Christ is the One to stay in touch with if you want to see things happen.

This key opens the door to salvation; this key gives entrance to God’s Kingdom; and only Jesus Christ has this key, and He alone can open God’s Treasures to us.

Look over to Revelation 5. Here in the scene of the Throne Room of the Universe, in the midst of the endless waves of worship rising before the Almighty, look at v. 5. Here is something we sometimes could miss.

Revelation 5:5 (NKJV) But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of

Judah, ***the Root of David***, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”

Now, turn onward to the ending chapter, Revelation 22:

Revelation 22:16 (NKJV) “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. ***I am the Root and the Offspring of David***, the Bright and Morning Star.”

The Bible ends with Jesus Christ our Messiah saying that He is the Root (the source of David’s very existence as Creator), and the Offspring of David (as the virgin born, son of David born to be God in human flesh).

The plan God designed for salvation is amazing, consistent, and powerful. Jesus Christ has the key to: endless and eternal salvation, rich blessings from God’s treasure house, and to unstoppable ministry.

Part of the incredible sweep that the Gospel made across the Roman World may be tied to their acute awareness that what Jesus Christ opened could not be closed, and that His key opened the longed for abundant life that never ends. So we see that:

Jesus Christ: The Only Door to Life Eternal

Back to our text in Rev. 3:7, where Jesus says I have the “key of David”. In God's Word whenever we see key we see a symbol of authority. Another way to say “authority” is to call it “control”. The key is the authority or control over something.

As Messiah Jesus Christ is the only One who can dispense the treasures or riches of God. This is Jesus telling this dear church, that pleased Him so, that He had the keys to access the treasures of God, and the authority to dispense them into their life and their church.

Another facet of this key is that Jesus Christ alone can grant access to God. He holds the keys to Hell and Death (Rev. 1:18) and here in 3:7 the keys to Life and Heaven.

For a moment look back at John 10, as 60 years before, the Apostle John had heard Jesus actually using this key, offering this greatest of treasures in John 10.

John 10:7-10 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

He alone is the way to eternal life. No one can come to the Father except through Him, and He alone can draw them (John 6). His sovereignty is seen in this key of David He holds.

In John 10 Jesus Christ is the Door; in John 11 He is Resurrection and Life; and in John 14 He is the Way.

Jesus is Holy God, Jesus is the Truth, and Jesus has the Key to life the way God designed it to be. Only Jesus Christ unlocks life that is abundant. Follow Him and even loss we suffer becomes eternal gain.

Now, look back one more time to v. 7 as we see the fourth and final element: Revelation

3:7 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says: 1). He who is holy; 2). He who is true; 3). “He who has the key of David; 4). He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:

Jesus Christ Is Unstoppable

Here is an amazing expression. What Jesus Christ opens can't be shut; and what Jesus Christ shuts, can't be opened. To say it in our world it would be that: *when Jesus does something that's it*. It can't be stopped, thwarted, overturned, ruined, destroyed, or ended.

Jesus told Peter that as Christ's Church goes forward into the world of darkness, that even the gates of Hell (Matthew 16:18) would not be able to hold back the forward push of His Church. Christ's Gospel is unstoppable, where ever God opens the doors.

This open and no one close concept shows up all the way through Christ's words in the Gospel by John when he captures the “nevers” of Jesus Christ.

If you have never marked these in your Bible, today would be a great time to do so. They are like a string of priceless pearls that we treasure more the older we get. This is the message that Christ's church is to proclaim, and watch Him use unstoppably for His glory. Turn back with me to the first one in the string of Christ's “nevers”, John chapter 4.

1. **Never Thirst:** John 4:14 (NKJV) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him **will never thirst**. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”
2. **Never Hunger:** John 6:35 (NKJV) And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me **shall never hunger**, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.
3. **Never Walk in Darkness:** John 8:12 (NKJV) Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall **not walk in darkness**, but have the light of life.”
4. **Never See Death:** John 8:51 (NKJV) Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall **never see death**.”
5. **Never Taste Death:** John 8:52 (NKJV) Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall **never taste death**.’
6. **Never Perish:** John 10:28 (NKJV) And I give them eternal life, and they **shall never perish**; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.
7. **Never Die:** John 11:26 (NKJV) And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

So finally, Jesus Christ is Unstoppable. What did this four-part introduction mean to

them? That is the issue, because that is where we can get the application for our lives today.

Hold Onto the True Jesus Christ Today

Hold onto the Truth that Jesus Christ is Holy:

He was separate from sin, He came to destroy the power of sin, and with His all-seeing eyes He was looking for un-confessed, un-forsaken, held-onto, secret sin. The application to them: *Jesus Christ expects His born-again children to confess and forsake sin.* Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV) He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Hold onto the Truth that Jesus Christ is True:

Jesus Christ sees, knows, and speaks truth. He always tells the truth. So when He speaks it is to be believed and held onto. Jesus Christ says, I know your works, and truthfully say: there is nothing to condemn. Like the woman taken in adultery in John 8, when Jesus forgives all who repent, he says I do not condemn you. The application to them: *Jesus Christ found that they lived lives individually and as a church that pleased Him.*

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NKJV) Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV) that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Hebrews 13:21 (NKJV) make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 John 3:22 (NKJV) And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Hold onto the Truth that Jesus Christ is Un-stoppable, He has the Key of David, what He opens stays open, what He shuts stays shut.

Jesus opens life, real life, eternal life, fully-satisfied life, and when He opens that life to you, nothing can separate that life from you or me.

What a Savior, what a Promise, and what a Church.

May we see, know, hold onto, and follow this Holy, True, Key-Holding, Opener of Abundant Life Today!

Philadelphia: The Rapture According to Jesus

Revelation 3:7-13

Jesus¹⁰⁶ taught such a comforting, hope-filled message of His return to rescue His Church before the Tribulation, that His disciples went everywhere teaching this same truth. When Paul had only a month in a pagan city where he planted a church, the Rapture was central to their doctrine.

The Rapture was First Taught by Jesus

The Rapture is a doctrine started and taught by Jesus, continued and spread by His disciples, and believed and passionately lived out by His Church. The early church heard and understood this doctrine of Christ's any moment return, and radiantly lived, looking for ways to please Him when He came to rescue them.

James in the first NT letter said that Christ was standing at the door (5:7). The second NT book was I Thessalonians and every chapter shines with Rapture-induced hope-filled expectancy (1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Paul's epistles start to finish, are seasoned with the flavor of a focused life awaiting Christ as in Philippians 3:20 where we as citizens of Heaven await Jesus eagerly, as Paul confesses in his last words of II Timothy 4 where he talks about His crown "at that day" when Jesus comes.

Peter says the same, going so far as asking what kind of lives should we live because we know the future (II Peter 3:11). John's Epistles are the same, in I John 3:2-3 he says that this "hope" causes us to purify our daily life looking for Christ's coming.

In Revelation 3:7, Jesus Christ identifies Himself to the Church at Philadelphia as the One who is True, Holy, and has the unstoppable Messianic Key of David. When Jesus speaks He tells the Truth. When we listen to Him and hear what He says we can have confident assurance that He knows what He is talking about.

Jesus Christ taught repeatedly (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) that His 2nd Coming is to Judge the ungodly. That was the content of every sermon on the future that He ever preached. Each sermon was taught in the context of Israel, was focused upon the Jews, and involved the

¹⁰⁶ 111009AM CLW-24 Rapture.do

city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel.

The Rapture is Not The 2nd Coming

But, when Jesus spoke to believers His emphasis was different. Jesus taught His own born-again children of the faith, three bedrock truths about the Rapture or His coming for His Church.

These truths are that: the Rapture will be a source of comfort; the Rapture will be similar to the Ascension; and that the Rapture will be an intentional rescue.

Those truths, taught by Jesus Christ Himself, constitute the Biblical, doctrinal basis for all that the early church was later taught by the Apostles and which extends to us throughout all the centuries since Christ's ministry.

Three Foundational Truths: The Rapture Taught by Christ

Now, look in your Bibles with me at these three foundational truths that Jesus Himself taught, and that we are to hold in His Church today:

#1:

Jesus said the Rapture will be a source of Comfort.

In John 14 Jesus promises that He is coming for us, and that coming is to take us to our place in His Father's House, that He has personally prepared for us.

John 14:1-3 (NKJV) "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And 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.

Jesus here makes the first and most powerful declaration of the blessed hope of every believer, across every century, in His Church.

#2:

Jesus said the Rapture will be similar to His Ascension.

In Acts 1, Jesus tells us that He is coming back for us in the same way that He left His disciples as recorded in Luke 24: secretly, comfortingly, and raining blessings down upon us.

*Luke 24:50-51 (NKJV) And He led them out as far as Bethany, and **He lifted up His hands and blessed them.** 51 Now it came to pass, **while He blessed them, that He was parted from them***

and carried up into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV) Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, **He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? **This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**"

How did He go? Jesus ascended with outstretched and uplifted hands, blessing them as He rose out of sight. That is the same way He will return for His Church.

#3:

Jesus said the Rapture will be an Intentional Rescue.

In Revelation 3, Jesus promises as the true One that He is coming back before the end of the world to keep us from the Tribulation.

When Jesus Christ introduces Himself in Revelation 3:7, He was explaining how He could offer us the blessed hope, one of the greatest, and most amazing promises ever made, to those precious and faithful saints. They, like us, lived in an uncertain world, and more than to any other church, Jesus explains His power in a way we all can grasp today. Hearing from Jesus:

The Blessed Hope Jesus Promised to His Own

The context of the Rapture according to Jesus comes after a series of titles we started looking at these past two weeks. Now look at the promised Rapture given to His Church by Jesus Christ the Truth, the Holy, the One who holds the key of David, who is unstoppable. Please stand as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:10-13:

*Revelation 3:10-13 (NKJV) Because you have kept My command to persevere, **I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.** 11 Behold, **I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.** 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Remember Who Promised the Rapture

The last time Jesus introduces the Rapture, He does so in our text this morning. Always remember that Jesus never introduces Himself to these seven churches just by His Name, He always adds a definition of His Character, and a description of Himself.

Here in the Epistle to the Philadelphians (3:7-13), Jesus Christ introduces Himself by

using a string of four Hebrew descriptions of God that if we meditate upon what they reveal, they are powerful, comforting, challenging, and inspiring. First note them with me in v.7:

Revelation 3:7 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). “He who **has the key of David**; 4). He who **opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**”:

For a moment we need to pause our look at all the rest of this letter, and focus upon just these four descriptive titles Christ Jesus takes, and see the implications of each. First:

Jesus Christ is The Holy God

Jesus Christ Is Truth

Jesus Christ Is Holding the Key

Jesus Christ Is Unstoppable

Here is an amazing expression. What Jesus Christ opens can't be shut; and what Jesus Christ shuts, can't be opened. To say it in our world it would be that when Jesus does something: that's it. It can't be stopped, thwarted, overturned, ruined, destroyed, or ended.

Jesus Christ told them that He had the Key of David, what He opens stays open, what he shuts stays shut. Jesus opens life, real life, eternal life, fully-satisfied life, and when He opens that life to you, nothing can separate that life from you or me. But there is another truth here:

Jesus Has The Key to The Blessed Hope

The promise Jesus Christ made as the unstoppable holder of the key is not just to that tiny church called Philadelphia. Across all the pages, of all the history, of all the true believers or Philadelphian-type saints, of all the churches from Pentecost to the last moment that Christ's Church is on this Earth: Jesus has made an un-stoppable promise.

Jesus summarizes and strengthens the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1 by adding this powerful truth: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

Jesus gives every believer a blessed hope, that either He will come personally for them and escort them safely home at death; or that He will come to the sky above the Earth and call them to Himself, meeting them in the air and taking them to the room in His Father's House that He prepared for them.

Every true believer since the Upper Room has been given this blessed hope. It was not merely that Jesus Christ would keep tiny Philadelphia through the next quake, volcano, or disaster: this promise towers over far above just the AD 90's and casts its bright light all the way to the end of God's appointed time for Christ's church.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, True, Invincible, the Unstoppable, the All-Powerful, I will keep you from the Great Tribulation Hour that will come upon all the Earth. You will not

have to endure the Tribulation.

How Does Jesus Describe the Tribulation He is Rescuing Us From?

As the end of the world approaches, so does earth's darkest hour.

Hell will open and the pit will vomit out its demon hordes to run wildly throughout humanity. Other beasts from the abyss will wreak death and destruction globally. And Satan himself invades the earth and conquers it all at last.

At the helm, the visible leader of the world will be the long promised man of sin, the lawless one, the beast, the Coming World Leader - commonly known as the Antichrist – who has 33 titles in the Old Testament and 13 in the New Testament. But behind him, the real power will be the god of this world, the dragon, old Lucifer, the lying serpent of Eden. Paul explains:

*2 Thessalonians 2:9 The coming of the lawless one is according to **the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,***

During the Tribulation there are powerful, pervasive, and universal lies backed by the most believable signs and wonders ever witnessed on planet earth.

When Jesus came to earth He was God in human flesh. As the Christ He was the expression of all the promises of God. And to think that the Christ in all His grace and beauty came to earth, stayed for 30 plus years, was rejected as false and fake, and *almost no one followed Him*, is bad enough.

But to know that Satan is going to send to earth the expression of all of mankind's desires in the person of the antichrist, and in a very short time *almost all of the earth* will follow him!

Is Christ's Promised 2nd Coming Literally True?

Jesus Christ will come again as Judge. He will set up His Kingdom as He promised. He will reign in this world. This is not a minor theme, a side show in the Scriptures: this is God's Plan at its greatest moment. This is Christ's high hour.

Beware of anyone telling you that the prophecies of God's Word aren't going to be literally fulfilled that are laid out. Remember that every Old Testament prophecy related to Jesus Christ's first coming was fulfilled literally.

The Old Testament said He would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7. He was.

The Old Testament says He will be born in Bethlehem, Micah. He was.

The Old Testament said again and again He would be a Son of David. He was and the genealogies are laid out in Matthew and Luke to prove it.

The Old Testament said He would ride a donkey's colt to His mock coronation. And He

did.

The Old Testament said He'd be betrayed by a friend.

The Old Testament said He would be stricken and His followers would be scattered.

The Old Testament said He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, and He was.

The Old Testament even laid out the details of His crucifixion in Psalm 22. Everything.

The Old Testament said that God would not allow His holy One to see corruption, He would come out of the grave, He would show Him the path of life, there would be a resurrection. Those were fulfilled with absolute precision historic accuracy.

So why would anyone ever think that prophecies related to the Second Coming are just some kind of mystery talk with no literal real fulfillment? When we read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John in the gospels, we read occasionally this statement, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Jesus Keeps His Word

Jesus gave a sketch of history from AD30 to the Rapture in Mark 13.

Mark 13:5-13 basically says that all of history from Christ's time to the Final generation will be characterized by great difficulties, and larger and larger global problems. Throughout all the centuries there will be religious deception. There will be the disasters that are always brought about by nations fighting wars against each other. All through the centuries natural disasters will be always taking countless lives. Since Christ's day warfare alone has ended millions upon millions of lives. One other truth Christ reminds us about is that there will always be varying degrees of persecution against true believers through all of this period of history, until the Lord returns.

But Jesus clearly changes gears from what will always be, into what will never have ever been before or after. That period is called the Great Tribulation. Jesus goes on to describe in Mark 13:14-23 the last seven years of history.

Basically Jesus explains that everything that characterized the previous years, the war, the devastation, the disasters, the false religion and the persecution reaches never before or after seen: levels. Mark 13:19 clearly says, a time of Tribulation like the world has never seen before and never will again.

Jesus outlines all of human history from AD 30 to the end. He authoritatively declares that human history ends in a seven-year period called the Tribulation, the last half of it called the Great Tribulation. After that, verse 24 says, "The sun is darkened, the moon doesn't light because it draws its light from the sun. The stars fall out of heaven. The bodies in orbit are shaken out of their normal orbit. The universe goes black and then comes the Son of Man in

power and great glory in the clouds.” That is the Second Coming. But it is natural to ask:

Where is the Rapture in Revelation?

The Book of Revelation was given by Christ to His Church, they were the recipients, each of the seven got a copy. In this book we find Christ's overview of history from AD 90 to the end.

A simple reading reveals that you have the church on earth in chapters 1, 2 and 3. You have the church in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 gathered around the throne.

How did the church get to heaven? The promised Rapture. In chapter 6 we see what happens next: on Earth all hell breaks loose in a series of seven sealed judgments. As each seal is broken, out comes a successive judgment.

Out of the seventh seal, toward the end of the seven-year period comes seven trumpet blasts, further judgments, more intense. Out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowl judgments, dumped on the earth, rapid fire at the very end. From Revelation 6-19 all those judgments being poured out, then in chapter 19:11, Christ comes out of heaven.

In Revelation 20, Christ sets up His Kingdom for a thousand years, after which He puts down the rebellion by Satan and those born in the Kingdom who rejected Him, destroys the whole universe and creates the new heaven and the new earth. Jesus has laid out the Chronology simple, straightforward and with great authority.¹⁰⁷

The Rapture According to Jesus is Quite Different from the 2nd Coming

At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the Second Coming, Christ returns to earth with the church.

At the Rapture, Mount of Olives is untouched. At the Second Coming, it is split.

At the Rapture, the earth remains the same. At the Second Coming, the earth is transformed.

At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the Second Coming, no saints are translated. They're simply taken into the Kingdom alive in their human form.

At the Rapture, the world is not judged and sin gets worse. At the Second Coming, sin is judged and the world is far better.

At the Rapture, the reign of Antichrist is triggered. At the Second Coming, the reign of

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/42-223#.To-d9XGazZk>

Christ is triggered.

At the Rapture, the body goes to heaven. At the Second Coming, it comes to earth.

The Rapture is imminent, sign less. The Second Coming has distinct signs.

The Rapture concerns only the saved. The Second Coming, the saved and the unsaved.

Jesus Has The Key to The Blessed Hope

The promise Jesus Christ made as the unstoppable holder of the key is not just to that tiny church called Philadelphia. Across all the pages, of all the history, of all the true believers or Philadelphian-type saints, of all the churches from Pentecost to the last moment that Christ's Church is on this Earth: Jesus wrote a promise.

Jesus again repeats the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

Jesus gives every believer a blessed hope, that either He will come personally for them and escort them safely home at death; or that He will come to the sky above the Earth and call them to Himself, meeting them in the air and taking them to the room in His Father's House that He prepared for them.

Every true believer since the Upper Room has been given this blessed hope. It was not merely that Jesus Christ would keep tiny Philadelphia through the next quake, volcano, or disaster: this promise towers over far above just the AD 90's and casts its bright light all the way to the end of God's appointed time for Christ's church.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, True, Invincible, the Unstoppable, the All-Powerful, I will keep you from the Great Tribulation Hour that will come upon all the Earth. You will not have to endure the Tribulation.

And every time we celebrate Communion we are reminded that Jesus said, I am not drinking of this cup again until I get all of you safely home. The Rapture according to Jesus, remembered at each Lord's Supper.

Philadelphia: The Rapture is Christ's Intentional Rescue of His Church. From What?

Revelation 3:7-13

Today¹⁰⁸ we all need a good dose of old-fashioned “living hope”, the kind that the teaching of Christ & His Apostles caused to overflow through the hearts, minds, and lives of early New Testament believers.

When Peter addressed the most heavily persecuted saints of the 1st Century, living all around the area of the seven churches we are studying in Revelation: he told them a foundational truth. He told them that salvation opens to us life-long lives of hope. Look with me at I Peter 1:3 as we begin this morning.

1 Peter 1:3 (NKJV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again **to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

First Century Believers Looked for Christ Daily

The common denominator we find across the pages of the New Testament is a group of saints looking for Christ's Return. They were trained, taught, and modeled this life of waiting. Waiting for Jesus to return was explained to be their cause for hope. His intentional rescue was promised to keep them from the wrath to be poured out as Christ's 2nd Coming. Note how Paul taught them these were two separate events in his letters to the Thessalonians. Turn with me to I Thessalonians 1.

Note Paul's clear outline of Christ's return as taught to these new believers.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (NKJV) For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus **who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NKJV) For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you **in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?** 20 For you are our glory and joy.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 (NKJV) so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God

¹⁰⁸ 111016AM CLW-25 Rapture.doc

and Father ***at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.***

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NKJV) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then ***we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*** And thus ***we shall always be with the Lord.*** 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at ***the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

So, Paul from the very start of his church-planting ministry, as reflected in this first letter he wrote in AD 50-51, back to a church he planted: taught the hope of Christ's return.

Paul Consistently Taught Christ's Any-Moment Return

Now, later at the other end of his ministry Paul writes to Titus about AD 62-64, just after getting out of his first Roman imprisonment. Paul would be free about 2 years before his final imprisonment and death AD 66-67. So, near the end of his ministry note that he is saying the same thing he said at the start. Look with me at Titus 2:11-13, one of my all time favorite passages of the New Testament.

Titus 2:11-13 (NKJV) For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 ***looking for the blessed hope*** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

What exactly is this “blessed hope” that all of us are to be looking for? Since Paul consistently taught God's Word and wrote under the inspiration-power of the Spirit, this truth should be explained, and it is.

The teaching that the new believers in the early church received from Paul caused them to operate in every dimension of daily life, like Christ could come at any moment.

They lived in a decaying society, yet were filled with the hope of their Heavenly home.

They faced constant threats of persecution because they were looking for a Heavenly City (Hebrews 11), and awaited Christ's coming to take them there: instead of living for a secure and lasting home in this world.

What is The Blessed Hope

So back to this “blessed hope”. What was it? How does God's Word define it, and what exactly did Paul teach that Christ's intentional rescue of the Rapture was saving us from.

To understand that, go back to I Thessalonians 4, the most explicit teaching by Paul on the Rapture, and note what follows. This would be a good place to pull out your pen and mark this in your Bible as we look at what Paul taught from start to finish in his ministry to local

churches just like ours. Please stand with me as we read these words:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10 (NKJV) But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow **as others who have no hope**. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. **And they shall not escape**. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet **the hope** of salvation. 9 For **God did not appoint us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

Paul Taught the Rapture

What did Paul teach them in I Thessalonians 4:18? The coming of Christ was a comforting hope. What did Paul define that blessed hope as? Paul said the blessed hope was that believers would be saved from the wrath of God.

Now as we turn to Revelation 3, we find the capstone of this teaching, started by Jesus, expanded and widely taught by the Apostles, now comes back for a final word on the subject by Jesus Himself.

Jesus Promised Believers They Would Be Rescued From the Whole-World Holocaust

The fact is that Jesus promised His Church in Revelation 3, they would miss something horrible, planned for the entire world. The amazing record of Paul's teaching records that He taught this same truth across the cities of his early church-planting ministry. These two truths should awaken us to the foundational nature of the blessed hope.

Jesus comforts His own about His coming.

Jesus said the Rapture will be a Comfort. In John 14 Jesus promises that when He comes it is to take us to our place He has prepared for us.

Jesus said the Rapture will be Private. In Acts 1, Jesus tells us that He is coming back for us in the same way that He left: secretly, comfortingly, and raining blessings down upon us.

Jesus said the Rapture will be a Rescue. In Revelation 3, Jesus promises as the true One

that He is coming back before the end of the world to keep us from the Tribulation.

The context of the Rapture according to Jesus comes after a series of titles we started looking at these past two weeks. Now look at the promised Rapture given to His Church by Jesus Christ the Truth, the Holy, the One who holds the key of David, who is unstoppable.

Please stand as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:10:

Revelation 3:10 (NKJV) Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

A Whole World Holocaust is Coming

Do you remember that the promises and prophecies Jesus gives in Matthew 24, He enlarges upon when He revealed Himself to the Apostle John on Patmos? If Matthew 24 sounds ominous; but it is only a brief introduction, the full report is overwhelming.

Walk with me through the pages of Revelation chapters six, eight, nine, and sixteen. Briefly, may I describe the living hell you can avoid if you are a part of the Rapture. Here are only a few of the dreadful disasters that take place during the Tribulation:

When the Whole World becomes a: GRAVEYARD (Rev. 6:8)

Jesus described a time coming when one out of every four people will die (see Rev. 6:8), some through the ravages of war, others by starvation, and amazingly many others by the 'beasts of the earth'. So, whether by death that come instantly and thus less dreaded or a slow and painful death that is lingering and agonizing-25 percent of all people will die. As of this week, the world's population was 6,775,235,000 (or as Wired Magazine succinctly stated it, "6.7 Giga-Bods"); and growing at 7.4 million per month. That means that if the Tribulation started this week (though it can't without the Church being pulled out) so that means at least 1.69 Billion humans will die. That amounts to just less than 6 times the current population of the United States. With a billion new souls added every 11 years you can see that this picture Christ gave us is getting more astounding every day.

When the Whole World becomes a: Battlefield (Rev. 6:8; 14:20)

Jesus described a time coming when there will be a world war involving much of the armies of much of the world, that is so bloody that He describes the blood of those killed in battle as flowing for two hundred miles, splashing up to the bridle of a horse in the valley of

Jezreel. This will be the Battle of Armageddon.

When the Whole World Faces: STARVATION (Rev. 6:8; 18:8)

Jesus described a time coming when there will be worldwide famine unlike anything the world has ever seen.

When the Whole World becomes a: GRASSFIRE (Rev. 8:7)

Jesus described a time coming when one third of all vegetation will be burned up. All grass, every tree, everything green will be destroyed.

When the Whole World Faces a: NUCLEAR WINTER (Rev. 8:12)

Jesus described a time coming when the sun and the moon will be darkened as nature goes into revolt.

When the Whole World becomes a: HORROR SHOW (Rev. 9:3-6)

Jesus described a time coming when the gates of hell will open and hordes of locusts, the size of horses, will come upon the earth. Those locusts will be allowed to sting men like scorpions and the pain will last for five months. The Bible says men will beg God to let them die but they will not die.

When the Whole World becomes a: NIGHTMARE (see Rev. 6-19)

All told, during the Great Tribulation, as many as half of all the people on the earth will be killed. That is why God uses Paul to describe the Rapture as a 'blessed hope', because the Tribulation after the Rapture is so horrible!

So all of that translates again into a period, on the horizon that defies our attempt to

describe it beyond what God's Word has already stated.

The Church and Israel have Distinct roles in God's plan

Jesus Christ is the One who first explained that He had distinct and separate plans for His Chosen People of Promise (the Jews of Israel) and His Church (all of the believers). The Church and Israel, were never merged by Christ, nor by those who listened to Him, the Apostles.

Jesus Christ identifies Himself to the Church at Philadelphia as the One who is True, Holy, and has the unstoppable Messianic Key of David. When Jesus speaks He tells the Truth. When we listen to Him and hear what He says we can have confident assurance that He knows what He is talking about.

Is the 2nd Coming Literally True?

Jesus will come. He will set up His Kingdom. He will reign in this world. This is not a minor theme, this is the story at its greatest moment. This is Christ's high hour.

Unless you think those things aren't going to be literally fulfilled that are laid out, remind yourself of this...every Old Testament prophecy related to Jesus Christ was fulfilled...that was fulfilled in His first coming was fulfilled literally.

The Old Testament said He would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7. He was.

The Old Testament says He will be born in Bethlehem, Micah. He was.

The Old Testament said again and again He would be a Son of David. He was and the genealogies are laid out in Matthew and Luke to prove it.

The Old Testament said He would ride a donkey's colt to His mock coronation. And He did.

The Old Testament said He'd be betrayed by a friend.

The Old Testament said He would be stricken and His followers would be scattered.

The Old Testament said He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, and He was.

The Old Testament even laid out the details of His crucifixion in Psalm 22. Everything.

The Old Testament said that God would not allow His holy One to see corruption, He would come out of the grave, He would show Him the path of life, there would be a resurrection. Those were fulfilled with absolute precision historic accuracy.

So why would we think that prophecies related to the Second Coming are just some kind of mystery talk with no literal real fulfillment? When you read your New Testament, you read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John in the gospels, you're going to read occasionally this statement, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled...that the Scripture might be

fulfilled....that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Where is the Rapture in Revelation?

If you take just the book of Revelation, you have the church on earth in chapters 1, 2 and 3.

You have the church in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 gathered around the throne. How did the church get to heaven? Rapture.

In chapters 6-19 you come back down to earth and what happens? All hell breaks loose in a series of judgments...seven sealed judgments. Seals are broken and out of them comes seven judgments.

Out of the seventh seal, toward the end of the seven-year period comes seven trumpet blasts, further judgments, more intense. Out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowl judgments, slosh bowls, they're just dumped on the earth, rapid fire at the very end. And that's the horrors of the pre-cursor judgments to the great day of the Lord. And then in chapter 19 verse 11, Christ comes out of heaven.

And then in chapter 20, sets up His Kingdom. His Kingdom is for a thousand years after which He puts down the rebellion by Satan and those born in the Kingdom who rejected Him, destroys the whole universe and creates the new heaven and the new earth. Chronology is laid out, simple, straightforward.¹⁰⁹

The Rapture is Not Christ's Second Coming

At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the Second Coming, Christ returns to earth with the church.

At the Rapture, Mount of Olives is untouched. At the Second Coming, it is split.

At the Rapture, the earth remains the same. At the Second Coming, the earth is transformed.

At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the Second Coming, no saints are translated. They're simply taken into the Kingdom alive in their human form.

At the Rapture, the world is not judged and sin gets worse. At the Second Coming, sin is judged and the world is far better.

At the Rapture, the reign of Antichrist is triggered. At the Second Coming, the reign of

¹⁰⁹ Quoted and adapted from a transcript of John MacArthur: <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/42-223#.To-d9XGazZk>

Christ is triggered.

At the Rapture, the body goes to heaven. At the Second Coming, it comes to earth.

The Rapture is imminent, sign less. The Second Coming has distinct signs.

The Rapture concerns only the saved. The Second Coming, the saved and the unsaved.

Jesus Always Describes His Second Coming Around Israel and not the Church

In Mark 13:14-23, Jesus describes the last seven years of history. And that's when everything that characterized the previous years, the war, the devastation, the disasters, the false religion and the persecution reaches epic levels, never before seen. That's what verse 19 says, a time of Tribulation like the world has never seen and never will.

So there's a description of human history that ends in a seven-year period that we've been talking about called the Tribulation, the last half of it called the Great Tribulation. After that, verse 24 says, "The sun is darkened, the moon doesn't light because it draws its light from the sun. The stars fall out of heaven. The bodies in orbit are shaken out of their normal orbit. The universe goes black and then comes the Son of Man in power and great glory in the clouds." That is the Second Coming.

Jesus Has The Key to The Blessed Hope

The promise Jesus Christ made as the unstoppable holder of the key is not just to that tiny church called Philadelphia. Across all the pages, of all the history, of all the true believers or Philadelphian-type saints, of all the churches from Pentecost to the last moment that Christ's Church is on this Earth: Jesus wrote a promise.

Jesus again repeats the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

Jesus gives every believer a blessed hope, that either He will come personally for them and escort them safely home at death; or that He will come to the sky above the Earth and call them to Himself, meeting them in the air and taking them to the room in His Father's House that He prepared for them.

Every true believer since the Upper Room has been given this blessed hope. It was not merely that Jesus Christ would keep tiny Philadelphia through the next quake, volcano, or disaster: this promise towers over far above just the AD 90's and casts its bright light all the way to the end of God's appointed time for Christ's church.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, True, Invincible, the Unstoppable, the All-Powerful, I will keep you from the Great Tribulation Hour that will come upon all the Earth. You will not

have to endure the Tribulation.

Amen. That is the Blessed Hope!

Laodicea: Seven Bad Habits of Believers that Sicken Christ and Make Him Vomit

Revelation 3:14-22

Perhaps¹¹⁰ the most unlikely words to be uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ are in our Bibles this morning. Jesus says in modern terms of the church in Laodicea, “You make me sick!”

As we open to Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus writes a letter that all scholars conclude is the most piercing, stinging, and scathing letter He ever wrote to any church. That means:

Laodicean is the Worst Church

Jesus Christ, Lord and Purchaser with His own blood of His Church: is very troubled.

For the first time, after six other letters to churches: Jesus has NOTHING good to say about this church. The other six each has something Jesus could commend, but not here. He has nothing good to say about this church.

Jesus graphically expresses His outrage and dismay at their state with an allusion to spewing them away from Him like vomit. That is a very clear indication of how greatly their conduct offended His holy expectations of their life in Him. Before we read v. 14-22, always remember:

These Seven Letters Are a Matched Set

The Book of Revelation is built around groups of seven. The letters to the churches are seven in number to represent all churches then, and all churches throughout the ages, and all churches now.

We must always begin with the fact that this letter is part of a set of seven letters to the

¹¹⁰ 111030AM CLW-26 Laodicea.doc

churches; and each letter has a similar seven-part structure:

1. Assembly—seven separate and distinct churches (Laodicea, is the seventh).
2. Author—Jesus Christ, who identified himself in a unique way through His names.
3. Approval—what the assembly was doing right (except for Laodicea).
4. Admonition—what they were doing wrong (except for Smyrna & Philadelphia).
5. Appeal—to follow Christ faithfully.
6. Assurance—only enjoyed if they responded rightly to Christ.
7. Application—each letter is written to all the “churches”: past, present, and future.

Please stand as we hear the letter to them, that is also applied by Jesus to each of us to hear and respond to this morning.

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Revelation 2-3 reveals what Christ said to the seven churches, a select group representing all early believers. His message to them speaks across the centuries to us today.

Seven Messages, Seven Applications: But Only One Acceptable Response

Each church has a distinct message that resonated with those who first heard these words, and with us today.

Ephesus, the careless church, left their first love. Christ said to them and us, “Come back to Me!”

Smyrna, the crowned church, suffered persecution. Christ said to them and us, “Be faithful to the end!”

Pergamos, the compromising church, tolerated evil. Christ said to them and us, “Separate yourselves!”

Thyatira, the corrupted church, joined the world. Christ said to them and us, “Un-Friend the world!”

Sardis, the feeble church, wasn’t on guard. Christ said to them and us, “Wake up before

it is too late!”

Philadelphia, the faithful church, was pleasing to God. Christ said to them and us, “Keep on keeping on!”

Laodicea, the foolish church, needed nothing. Christ said to them and us, “Watch out, you’re making me sick; and I will vomit you out of my mouth unless you repent and see that you need Me!”

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of their apathy in seeking Him; and start whatever it took to get restored.

What exactly is Jesus pointing at in their lives when He issues this “Vomit Alert” to them? If we unpack this passage word-by-word, we can conclude that there are:

Seven Bad Habits of Believers That Sicken Christ

v. 14 “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works” Jesus said.

They had cultivated some very bad habits. Habits that made them unacceptable to Christ, and even worse, sickening to Him. What patterns in the life of a believer sickens Christ to the point of vomiting? Here are the seven Jesus notes:

1. Spiritual Neutrality:

v. 15 “I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we stop aggressively resisting the world. Living the Christian life is resisting the pressure of the world. The world is everything that is not focused upon glorifying God. Anything that is not glorifying Him is pushing us away from His Glory.

2. Spiritual Self-Sufficiency:

v. 17a Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—
Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we think we are making it on our own, and don’t need the Lord’s power, guidance, and presence. We stop “seeking first” the Kingdom of God in our lives and thus began to slowly drift from His righteousness in our lives.

3. Spiritual Insensitivity:

v. 17b and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—
Spiritual Insensitivity is when we lose our spiritual sight, and no longer see ourselves as

God's Word explains we are.

4. Spiritual Wastefulness:

v. 18a I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich;

Spiritual Wastefulness is when we abandon Christ as our investment counselor and start investing our time and money in "get rich quick for earth" schemes, and stop investing in Heaven.

5. Spiritual Neglect:

v. 18b and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Spiritual Neglect is when we drop out of God's work force, and begin to not get dressed for work any more. Jesus often told us to dress ourselves with His character, His power, and His armor.

6. Spiritual Blindness:

v. 18c and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Spiritual Blindness is just that: blindness to things of God. We no longer see Him in His Word. We stop noticing His Hand in our lives, and don't reach up and grasp that Hand extended to us, to hold onto, and follow Him through life. We begin to stumble along, acting more and more like lost people who do not know, can not see, and do not follow the Lord.

7. Spiritual Laxity:

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Spiritual Laxity is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives. We forget how horrible sin always is to Jesus. Our sin cost Christ His very life, His intimate fellowship with the Father, and made Him feel the wrath of God in our place. Get rid of sin, don't sweep it under the rug.

So the bad habits we must avoid because they sicken Christ, our very dearest and most precious friend in the Universe are: neutrality, self-sufficiency, insensitivity, wastefulness,

neglect, blindness, and laxity. The Laodiceans needed to listen to this admonition of:

Understanding What Jesus Loves & Hates

Now let's go back through and examine these bad habits pointed out by Christ.

Spiritual Neutrality:

v. 15 "I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we stop aggressively resisting the world. We are not cold and refreshing like the springs of water that were enjoyed in Colosse; nor hot and therapeutic like the thermal springs of Hieropolis. Living the Christian life is resisting the pressure of the world to just go along with things, not make waves, and please myself. The world is everything that is not focused upon glorifying God. Anything that is not glorifying Him is pushing us away from His Glory. That is the world.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we stop glorifying God in the small things, and then in the big things. Whether we eat or drink, work or play, we are called by God to do everything for His Glory. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:31 is our goal in life:

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NKJV) Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we say that it no longer matters that every part of our life come under Christ's control. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Therefore is an explanatory summation particle, that means it stands as a gateway to look back to see why something is necessary.

Paul says our bodies are reserved. We are owned by God, inhabited by the Spirit, and no longer solely ours. THEREFORE: because of the purchase of God, the moving in of the Spirit, and His declaration of taking possession, comes the message of the next verse. The word in v. 20 translated "glorify" is an imperative mode of the verb that means "valuing God for who He really is."

Spiritual Neutrality or failing to glorify God for Who He is, is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency:

v. 17a Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we think we are making it on our own, and don't need

the Lord's power, guidance, and presence. We stop "seeking first the Kingdom of God" in our lives (Mt. 6:33) and thus began to slowly drift from His righteousness in our lives.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we forget that we are just a branch, and everything that is important can only come to us through the Vine. Abiding is saying I need Jesus, I want His way for my life. I will believe Him enough to listen and respond each day to His Voice in His Word.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we stop needing to stay in close contact with the Lord. It is when we drift away, and start making it on our own.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Insensitivity:

v. 17b and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Spiritual Insensitivity is when we lose our spiritual sight, and no longer see ourselves as God's Word explains we are. We lose touch with the mirror of the Word that shows us what needs changing each day as we wait before the Lord.

Spiritual Insensitivity is becoming what James calls a "forgetful hearer" Look again at James 1:22-25 (NKJV)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Spiritual Insensitivity is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Wastefulness:

v. 18a I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich;

Spiritual Wastefulness is when we abandon Christ as our investment counselor and start investing our time and money in get rich quick for earth and not Heaven schemes. We begin to measure things by their earthly and not eternal worth. Slowly we begin to trade the precious time we have for objects that will only rust, burn, rot, get stolen, and weigh us down in life. The Bank of Heaven gets neglected and the treasures we lay up are buried here on Earth.

Spiritual Wastefulness is when we ignore Christ's words in Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV)

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Spiritual Wastefulness is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Neglect:

v. 18b and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Spiritual Neglect is when we drop out of the work force and begin to not get dressed for work any more. Jesus often told us to dress ourselves with His character, His power, and that armor wearing, clothing ourselves with Christ gets neglected and finally forgotten.

Spiritual Neglect is when we become more concerned with what we look like to men rather than to God. We impress people outwardly rather than pleasing God inwardly. Paul explains the necessity of daily clothing ourselves with Christ in Romans 13:12-14 (NKJV):

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Spiritual Neglect is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Blindness:

v. 18c and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Spiritual Blindness is just that: blindness to things of God. We no longer see Him in His Word.

Spiritual Blindness is when we stop noticing His Hand in our lives, extended to us to hold onto and follow Him through life.

Spiritual Blindness is when we begin to stumble along, acting more and more like lost people who do not know, can not see, and do not follow the Lord. Acts 26:18 says that Christ opened our eyes at salvation, and now we can see. To allow neglected spiritual hygiene to slowly darken our spiritual sight is horrible.

Spiritual Blindness is sickening to Christ.

Spiritual Laxity:

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Spiritual Laxity is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives.

Spiritual Laxity is when we forget how horrible sin always is to Jesus. Our sin cost Christ His very life, His intimate fellowship with the Father, and made Him feel the wrath of God in our place. Get rid of sin, don't sweep it under the rug.

Spiritual Laxity is when we forget He wants us walking in the light, seeing our sin as He

does and immediately seeking His cleansing as we repent and forsake all sin. Jesus hates it when we hide and cover for our sins, instead of confessing and forsaking them. Listen to Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Spiritual Laxity is sickening to Christ.

Avoid These Bad Habits

So the bad habits we must avoid because they sicken Christ are: neutrality, self-sufficiency, insensitivity, wastefulness, neglect, blindness, and laxity.

There are some powerful insights we can draw from this ancient city. When you step back and look at where the church of Laodicea was spiritually, it sounds ominously like American life in the twenty-first century.

As we bow to prepare for communion with Christ this morning, what does He ask that we repent of for Him? Right now, confess any of these bad habits, forsake them by the power of the Cross, and with His cleansing begin anew walking with Him.

Laodicea: The Seven Habits of Sanctified Believers

Revelation 3:14-22

Today¹¹¹, and every day of our lives, the Cross of Christ is the source of our power to live in this world of sin.

Living a life that glorifies God is called sanctified living.

Sanctification means that God is leading and controlling our lives.

As we return to Christ's Last Words to His Church, we find that His Church at:

Laodicea was not Living in Shadow of Christ's Cross

For two generations, all the local churches around Laodicea had savored the truths about the Cross of Christ. Today, as we gather as Christ's Church, we gather to hear again for our generation, His warning to: Never stop living in the shadow of the Cross.

Perhaps the two best descriptions of what we have in Christ are in the epistle or letter to the church scattered through the area of the neighbors of Laodicea. They were the Galatians. Look with me at the best known verse on the cross in Galatian 2:20, where Paul shares his own personal salvation testimony:

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 is our Purpose statement for Living

Salvation begins and ends at the Cross.

Jesus Christ on the Cross was both the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Life for the believer is always lived in the shadow of Christ's Cross. To the degree that is understood, is to the degree that our lives are lived pleasing to God and fruitful for His purposes. That is the essence of Galatians 2:20.

But the "How to" portion is declared a few chapters later in the same book. Turn onward with me to Galatians 6. Paul has explained, in chapters 3-5: the Spirit-led, Spirit-filled,

¹¹¹ 111113AM CLW-27.doc

Spirit-fruited, Spirit-liberated life of salvation we all in Christ, have been given.

Now as we arrive at chapter 6, we find:

Galatians 6:14 is our Emancipation proclamation for Life

The Cross of Christ is the emancipation method God uses to keep us set free from the chains of sin; and all believers have been set free.

This is the power of the sanctification that God uses to bring the Cross into our moment-by-moment existence, traveling through life on Earth. Open with me and stand for the reading of God's Word.

Listen to these life-transforming words, and in the public reading of Scripture, hear the very voice of God from His Word, speaking into our lives His unchanging, eternal truth:

Galatians 6:14 (NKJV) But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom [Christ: KJV, NKJV] / by which [Christ's Cross: ESV, NAS, NIV] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Note the two applications of the Cross applied to our lives:

The Cross Saves us from The 'Hold-Of' & 'Hunger-For' Sin

As we look at this verse we see that the personal sanctification that God desires to take place in us, and that we long to promote each day in our lives: *has two distinct parts.*

God has saved us from the outward HOLD of sin, that used to enslave our lives.

God has saved us from the inward HUNGER of sin, that used to control our lives.

Note these deep truths that can so help us live out all Christ has called us to be and to do. First, Paul teaches that:

The world has been crucified to me.

This means that the HOLD of sin on my life has been broken.

The Cross of Christ to a believer means: the chains of sin have been cut.

The prison door has been unlocked and swung open.

The handcuffs taken off.

I have been set free from being powerless to get away.

The Cross of Christ means: I am no longer under the HOLD of sin.

The second phrase has equal depth in meaning; and is tied by God to the first phrase.

Paul says next:

I have been crucified to the world.

This means that the HUNGER for sin has been broken.

This means the appetite of my heart has been changed.

Sin used to feed me, now it makes me sick.

I used to live for the junk diet of lust and sin, now I am getting more and more allergic each day to all that: because of sanctification through the Word.

My new life in Christ feeds on the pure food of God's Word.

My new life in Christ hungers and thirsts for Christ and His Word.

The Cross of Christ means: I am no longer under the constant HUNGER for sin.

The essence of daily life boils down to the Cross of Christ, and whether or not I will ALLOW Christ to crucify the world to me, and me to the world. Only the Cross deals with both the "Hold" of sin on our lives (habits, besetting sins, addictions, enslavements to sin, persistent areas of defeat, and so on); and the "Hunger" for sin our flesh constantly maintains (distractions, trifles, wasted time, deadening behavior, lost spiritual appetites, unfocused living, and so on).

Unsanctified Living: the Sickening Condition of Laodicea

The church at Laodicea had all but stopped glorying in the power and sanctifying effects of the Cross.

Thus they had slowly drifted away from Christ's control over their lives.

They then cultivated, drifted into, and began to live out some very bad habits. These habits were so serious that Jesus Christ tells them they are sickening to Him. The bad habits that form around an uncrucified life will always sicken Christ. He is the same as He was in Revelation 3, sickened whenever one of His own pick up these bad habits.

Those bad habits we must avoid for Christ's sake are spiritual: -neutrality, -self-sufficiency, -insensitivity, -wastefulness, -neglect, -blindness, and -laxity.

They had cultivated some very bad habits. Habits that made them unacceptable to Christ, and even worse, sickening to Him. Remember that each of these areas that Christ rebukes were areas of sanctified living they had already been taught, but had slowly started to neglect.

As we open to Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus writes a letter that asks them, and us today to

repent as often as needed until we are personally pursuing:

The Seven Habits of Sanctified Believers

As we start in v. 15, note the first of these seven habits of sanctification Christ desires in their lives, and ours.

Habit One:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Neutrality*

v. 15 “**I know your works** that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth.**”

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we stop aggressively resisting the world. We are not cold and refreshing like the springs of water that were enjoyed in Colosse; nor hot and therapeutic like the thermal springs of Hieropolis. Living the Christian life is resisting the pressure of the world that is constantly squeezing us into just going along with things, not disciplining ourselves for godliness, and instead: just pleasing oneself. The world is everything that is not focused upon glorifying God. Anything that is not glorifying Him is pushing us away from His Glory. That is the world.

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we say that it no longer matters that every part of our life come under Christ’s control. Turn with me to I Corinthians 6:19-20:

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; **therefore glorify God** in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

“Therefore” is an explanatory summation particle, that means it stands as a gateway to look back to see why something is necessary.

Paul says our bodies are reserved. We are owned by God, inhabited by the Spirit, and no longer solely ours.

THEREFORE: because of the purchase of God, the moving in of the Spirit, and His declaration of taking possession, comes the message of the next verse.

The word in v. 20 translated “glorify” is an imperative mode of the verb that means “valuing God for who He really is”, or as we heard recently: Giving God the Credit for what belongs to Him.

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we stop glorifying God in the small things, and then in the big things. Whether we eat or drink, work or play, we are called by God to do everything for His Glory. Remember I Corinthians 10:31 is our goal in life:

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NKJV) Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all** to

the glory of God.

Spiritual *Neutrality* or failing to glorify God for Who He is: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Neutrality*.

Habit Two:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency*

v. 17a Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and **have need of nothing**'—

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we think we are making it on our own, and don't need the Lord's power, guidance, and presence. We stop "seeking first the Kingdom of God" in our lives (Mt. 6:33) and thus began to slowly drift from His righteousness in our lives.

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we forget that we are just a branch, and everything that is important can only come to us through the Vine. In John 15 Jesus explains that abiding means I am confessing that I need Jesus, I want His way for my life. I will believe Him enough to listen and respond each day to His Voice in His Word.

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we stop needing to stay in close contact with the Lord. It is when we drift away, and start making it on our own.

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* or making it on our own: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency*.

Habit Three:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Insensitivity*

v. 17b and **do not know that you are** wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Spiritual *Insensitivity* is when we lose our spiritual sight, and no longer see ourselves as God's Word explains we are. We lose touch with the mirror of the Word that shows us what needs changing each day as we wait before the Lord.

Spiritual *Insensitivity* is becoming what James calls a "forgetful hearer" Look again at James 1:22-25 (NKJV):

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Spiritual *Insensitivity* or no longer seeing ourselves reflected in the mirror God's Word: is

sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Insensitivity*.

Habit Four:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Wastefulness*

v. 18a I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, **that you may be rich**;

Spiritual *Wastefulness* is when we abandon Christ as our investment counselor and start investing our time and money in get rich quick for earth and not Heaven schemes. We begin to measure things by their earthly and not eternal worth. Slowly we begin to trade the precious time we have for objects that will only rust, burn, rot, get stolen, and weigh us down in life. The Bank of Heaven gets neglected and the treasures we lay up are buried here on Earth.

Spiritual *Wastefulness* is when we ignore Christ's words in Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV)

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Spiritual *Wastefulness* or laying up our treasures on Earth instead of Heaven: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Wastefulness*.

Habit Five:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Neglect*

v. 18b and white garments, **that you may be clothed**, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Spiritual *Neglect* is when we drop out of the work force and begin to not get dressed for work any more. Jesus often told us to dress ourselves with His character, His power, and that armor wearing, clothing ourselves with Christ gets neglected and finally forgotten.

Spiritual *Neglect* is when we become more concerned with what we look like to men rather than to God. We impress people outwardly rather than pleasing God inwardly. Paul explains the necessity of daily clothing ourselves with Christ in Romans 13:12-14 (NKJV):

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us *put on the armor of light*. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Spiritual *Neglect* or not putting on our spiritual armor: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus

Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Neglect*.

Habit Six:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Blindness*

v. 18c and anoint your eyes with eye salve, **that you may see**.

Spiritual *Blindness* is just that: blindness to things of God. We no longer see Him in His Word.

Spiritual *Blindness* is when we stop noticing His Hand in our lives, extended to us to hold onto and follow Him through life.

Spiritual *Blindness* is when we begin to stumble along, acting more and more like lost people who do not know, can not see, and do not follow the Lord. Acts 26:18 says that Christ opened our eyes at salvation, and now we can see. To allow neglected spiritual hygiene to slowly darken our spiritual sight is horrible.

Spiritual *Blindness* or not reading God's truth in His Word: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Blindness*.

Habit Seven:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Laxity*

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and **repent**.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we forget how horrible sin always is to Jesus. Our sin cost Christ His very life, His intimate fellowship with the Father, and made Him feel the wrath of God in our place. Get rid of sin, don't sweep it under the rug.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we forget He wants us walking in the light, seeing our sin as He does and immediately seeking His cleansing as we repent and forsake all sin. Jesus hates it when we hide and cover for our sins, instead of confessing and forsaking them. Listen to Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Spiritual *Laxity* or not regularly confessing and forsaking our sin: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Laxity*.

Living a life that glorifies God is called sanctified living, and these are the habits of

sanctified believers.

Sanctification means that God is leading and controlling our lives.

Sanctification begins and ends at the Cross.

Jesus Christ on the Cross was both the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Life for the believer is always lived in the shadow of Christ's Cross.

To the degree that is understood, is to the degree that our lives are lived pleasing to God and fruitful for His purposes.

Laodicea: Living in the Shadow of Christ's Cross

Revelation 3:14-22

As¹¹² we turn to Romans, think of this: Christ's death on the Cross is the heart of our salvation. His substitutionary death paid the penalty of our sin, removed the record of our transgressions, and purchased our eternal salvation.

Christ's life now lived in and for us opens to us His sanctifying power to save us from sin's destructive power, and keep us useful for his glory.

As Savior and Lord of His Church, Jesus Christ went to visit one of His local churches in the city of Laodicea. He went looking to see if they were living out what He had died to make possible for them.

The sad news is that He found them neglecting what He bought them to be, and their lifestyles sickened Him. Jesus wanted them to live a life that was always over-shadowed by His work on the Cross. That lifestyle is what still pleases Christ, and any lack of that crucified lifestyle strongly displeases Him.

Today, we need to do a study on our way to Laodicea. I call it: finding the first command, or imperative from Christ to each of us in Christ, from the MOST important book of

¹¹² 111120AM CLW-28 Shadow.doc

the Bible.

The First Command in The Book of Romans

For many of us, we have a favorite verse, chapter, and even book; and we most prefer the NT over the OT. But, what is the most important book of the Bible? Most theologians would say it is the book of _____ (Romans), right. The book of Romans is usually seen as the key to fully understanding the Gospel of Christ, His salvation, and our security in Him.

So open with me to Romans this morning and starting at chapter one, turn the pages until we get to chapter 6 where we will read a very powerful passage.

The Book of Romans defines the heart of the Gospel. This is the content of what Christ Jesus had delivered and taught to all the true, Bible-believing churches of the First Century. If they were a part of Christ's Body, this is the truth they knew because they heard it taught or read it for themselves.

A Short Survey of Romans 1-6

Now remember, the Church at Laodicea was a literal church at the end of the First Century. They represent all churches then and to this day. They knew the Gospel. Romans is the declaration of the Gospel. Here is what we see.

Romans 1: The Justified or Righteous live by faith (v. 1-17); and God's Wrath is forever against Unrighteousness (rest of the chapter).

Romans 2: God is just, and an impartial Judge, with or without the Law.

Romans 3: Everyone is a guilty convict to sin; and only justification can save me.

Romans 4: Abraham was justified by believing, not law-keeping.

Romans 5: The glorious by-products of Christ's Justify death for me.

Romans 6: The justifying death of Christ opens to me the sanctifying life of Christ.

Now as we come to look at chapter 6, we find the VERY first imperative in the entire book of Romans. So the first imperative in the most important book in the Bible is quite a vital truth to behold.

What would God want us to know that He would use this first usage of an imperative command to reveal? After 5 solid chapters of so many major doctrines, what response does God want for us?

God's first command to each of us in the book of Romans comes in Romans 6:11, and it is the command to Live in the Shadow of the Cross, all of our days.

The Command to Live Daily A Crucified Life

Please stand with me as we hear the first command from God, an imperative, in the

most important book of the Bible.

Romans 6:1-11 (NKJV) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remember again the context of these verses.

Romans 1-6 is what Christ expects from born-again believers (and Romans 7-16 also for that matter).

Romans 6 living in the shadow of the Cross means: that the justifying death of Christ for me, opens the sanctifying life of Christ in me. If I am neglecting the sanctification Jesus Christ purchased, then the Savior who justified me is nauseated at my choices.

Jesus gets sick of my living an unsanctified life.

The Power of the Sanctifying Life of Christ

But before we study more of that in Revelation, look at the six incredible truths of Romans 6, given to us by Paul:

Point One is in v.1-2: Christ's death on the Cross has once and for all freed me from sin's hold upon my life. I am "dead" to sin every moment of life that I choose to be by faith.

Point Two is in v. 3: When I was obediently baptized in the Name of Jesus as a believer, I made a public declaration that I have been justified. I am going to be forever impacted by Christ's death in my place.

Point Three is in v. 4: I "should" walk in sanctification because Christ justified me.

Point Four is in v. 5: Christ's death means my justification; His life means my sanctification.

Point Five is in v. 6-10: The justifying death of Christ opens to me the sanctifying life of Christ.

Point Six is in v. 11: We must know what Christ has done, before we know what we must do.

The key to this chapter is understanding that Paul teaches all that doctrine so that each

of us as believers can start:

Operating Upon What we Know to be True

The heart of Romans 6:11 is the word that is in the command form (an imperative). That word is the word “reckon” in the NKJV/KJV, or “count/consider” in the NIV/NAS/ESV.

That word breathed out by God is the Greek word *logidzomai*. That word chosen by God unlocks the power of the Cross into our daily lives. The word is an accounting term that speaks of the usable balance that is clear of any debts or holds. It is the available, usable balance. Here is the simple definition of that Greek word *logidzomai*: “operate on what you know to be true”.

On the Cross Jesus paid the penalty of sin, broke the hold of sin, and released His power into our lives to make each of us able to resist even the most powerful temptations, and say no to sin.

All we have to do is draw upon that balance in our account. All we have to do is operate on the truth that we have all the strength and power we need already deposited and ready to be used by faith.

Today, and every day of our lives, the Cross of Christ is the source of our power to live in this world of sin.

Living a life that glorifies God is called sanctified living.

Sanctification means that God is leading and controlling our lives.

As we return to Christ’s Last Words to His Church, we find that His Church at:

Laodicea was not Operating In the Truth of Christ’s Cross

For two generations, all the local churches around Laodicea had savored the truths about the Cross of Christ. Today, as we gather as Christ’s Church, we gather to hear again for our generation, His warning to: Never stop living the crucified life.

The essence of daily life boils down to the Cross of Christ, and whether or not I will ALLOW Christ to crucify the world to me, and me to the world.

Only the Cross deals with both the “Hold” of sin on our lives (habits, besetting sins, addictions, enslavements to sin, persistent areas of defeat, and so on); and the “Hunger” for sin our flesh constantly maintains (distractions, trifles, wasted time, deadening behavior, lost spiritual appetites, unfocused living, and so on).

Unsanctified Living: the Sickening Condition of Laodicea

The church at Laodicea had all but stopped glorying in the power and sanctifying effects of the Cross.

Thus they had slowly drifted away from Christ’s control over their lives.

They then cultivated, drifted into, and began to live out some very bad habits. These

habits were so serious that Jesus Christ tells them they are sickening to Him.

The bad habits that form around an uncrucified life will always sicken Christ. He is the same as He was in Revelation 3, sickened whenever one of His own pick up these bad habits.

As we open to Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus writes a letter that asks them, and us today to repent as often as needed until we are personally pursuing:

The Seven Habits of Sanctified Believers

As we start in v. 15, note the first of these seven habits of sanctification Christ desires in their lives, and ours.

Habit One:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Neutrality

v. 15 “I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we stop aggressively resisting sin in our lives. Instead of paddling upstream against the current of the world we just drift along with the world which is moving faster and faster: away from Christ.

Spiritual Neutrality is when we drift away from the daily focus upon Jesus who died to pay the penalty for all my sins, taking my place He suffered for me, erased the record of my sin and now offers me to live each day in His sanctifying power.

Spiritual Neutrality is failing to glorify God for the Holy God that He is, by saying NO to sin: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual Neutrality.

Habit Two:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Self-Sufficiency

v. 17a Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ —

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we think we are making it on our own, and don’t need the Lord’s power, guidance, and presence. Remember Psalm 16:11? Please open there with me.

God wants to walk in front of our life, leading us. As you look at these words ask yourself: am I walking through life self-sufficiently, out in front of God who wants to guide me, finding my own way; or am I choosing to stay obediently behind Christ and follow Him as my Guide?

Psalm 16:11 (NKJV) You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Jesus wants me to repent of all spiritual self-sufficiency that shows up when I revert to my old self-guidance system, instead of turning to Christ as my Guide. Jesus wants me to surrender to Him daily as the One who is leading, guiding, and controlling my life.

Is there some form of “going your own way” that you need to just bow in your heart right now and repent of?

Another form of Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we stop seeking God’s will before our own in all the decisions of our lives. Remember Matthew 6:33? Turn there and ask yourself: am I living my life self-sufficiently or with Jesus as FIRST.

The Simplicity of Christ

Jesus simplifies our obedience in life down to whether or not we are seeking Him first before all else: He is to be first in our time. Christ is to be first in priority. Jesus is to be the greatest influence upon us.

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Jesus wants me to repent of all spiritual self-sufficiency that shows up when we have time for every other influence upon our life but Him, and thus begin to slowly drift from His righteousness in our lives. Jesus says I am self-sufficient if I try to make it through one day with the food for my soul that ONLY comes from His Word.

Is anything more important than God’s Word, in your daily schedule? Do you need to repent of going straight to FaceBook before God’s Word; or repent of going first to read email before God’s Word; or repent of longing for financial news before God’s Word, or sports, or even of choosing to listen to the voice of the weatherman each day instead of hearing the voice of God?

Please pause for a moment and look at the hymn “I Surrender all”. Every time we gather we all have a choice: just hear the truth, or hear and do the truth. To do what we are called to do takes regular SURRENDER.

All to Jesus, I surrender;
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency is when we stop needing to stay in close contact with the Lord.

It is when we drift away, and start making it on our own.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency or making it on our own: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual Self-Sufficiency.

Back to where we started to cement these truths in our lives before we go.

Turn back to Romans 6 and review the doctrine of the Cross, that is to be the foundation for every day of our lives:

The Power of the Sanctifying Life of Christ

- Point One is in v.1-2: Christ's death on the Cross has once and for all freed me from sin's hold upon my life. I am "dead" to sin every moment of life that I choose to be by faith.
- Point Two is in v. 3: When I was obediently baptized in the Name of Jesus as a believer, I made a public declaration that I have been justified. I am going to to be forever impacted by Christ's death in my place.
- Point Three is in v. 4: I "should" walk in sanctification because Christ justified me.
- Point Four is in v. 5: Christ's death means my justification; His life means my sanctification.
- Point Five is in v. 6-10: The justifying death of Christ opens to me the sanctifying life of Christ.
- Point Six is in v. 11: We must know what Christ has done, before we know what we must do.

Now, to help deepen these truths, why not take a moment and:

Explain This Truth to Someone

Now to apply these truths, look around for one person you know that is standing close enough for you to talk to. It may be a friend, your husband or wife, or just someone that looks safe at this moment.

Take one minute to explain to them what you just heard, and then have them explain what they just heard.

Then one of you close in prayer asking God to make you doers of this truth, and not

forgetful hearers.

Laodicea: Listening to Jesus

The Amen of God

Revelation 3:14-22

Life¹¹³ for us as followers of Christ is all about Listening to Jesus. Jesus said that as His sheep we need to hear Him and follow Him.

Listening to Jesus

Jesus came on an unannounced visit to a church in central Asia Minor, two thousand years ago, and then wrote back a startling letter to them about their deteriorating spiritual health. They really should have listened to Him.

In that letter Jesus Christ starts with His credentials. The opening words introducing Christ in Revelation 3:14 are like getting an official, hand-delivered letter: with medical diagnosis from the leading doctors of the Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins, or another a world-renowned group doctors.

The medical advice of someone at work or school is nice and possibly helpful.

The medical advice of a trusted family member is nicer and even more helpful.

But the medical advice, diagnosis, and prognosis from a trained, skilled, qualified, and almost universally trusted medical expert, renowned in their field: *is almost beyond foolishness to resist, and dismiss lightly.*

The diagnosis and treatment regimen from the highest authority on spiritual wellness in the Universe, is what is contained in Revelation 3 today. Jesus Christ introduces Himself as the One who can be supremely trusted. He is truth incarnate, the Amen. Then He goes on to say that He has a perspective no one else can have: the is a witness, He alone has seen all, knows

¹¹³ 111130AM CLW-29 Amen.doc

all, and can testify by personal experience a reliable report. Finally, He speaks as the One who:
as Creator, designed us;
as Redeemer, bought and owns us; and
as Judge has the final say over what goes on in our lives. Jesus Christ
These three titles are a unique combination and all stand together to declare that what
Jesus says will happen. Jesus is introducing Himself as:

The God We Can Trust

He can be trusted, He is reliable, and there is no one else like Him. Jesus is the Amen of God, the One who is in perfect agreement and able to make His promises come true.

First Jesus calls Himself the Amen, then the Faithful and True Witness, and finally the Beginning of the creation of God. Each of these titles are unique, each are powerful, and all reflect the truth that Jesus is the One to listen to. What He says will happen, and when He speaks it is Ultimate Truth.

Please stand as we hear the letter to them, that is also applied by Jesus to each of us. We really need to hear and respond to Christ's words this morning.

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things **says** the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

[v.15-19 lists their seven habits.]

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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 "**He who has an ear, let him hear** what the Spirit **says** to the churches.""

Listen to Jesus Christ: The Amen

Amen means: Jesus is the yes to all of God's promises. This title is only used of Christ here, in the whole Bible. In the Old Testament it is a name for God, so Christ is here taking the title of God from the Old Testament.

Note these words with me in Isaiah 65:16. Here Jesus is claiming to be the truth, the affirmation, the firm, fixed certainty of God.

Isaiah 65:16 (NKJV) So that he who blesses himself in the earth, shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from my eyes.

The Hebrew word Truth is AMEN in Hebrew, that is how it sounds, exactly the same. It is transliterated from Hebrew into English. So if you heard Isaiah quote this aloud as he wrote it down, you would hear Amen.

Jesus Amen's the promises of God. He is the declaration that all that God has promised

will happen.

Next, we see Paul saying the same thing, but not applying this title to Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NKJV) For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

All of God's promises are attached to and come through Jesus Christ. Like the Amen at the end of a prayer hits the "send" key, so Jesus is the connection to all that God has promised.

Listen to Jesus Christ: The Faith & True Witness

Faithful and True Witness means that all Jesus says is true, perfectly accurate, completely trustworthy, and his testimony is reliable.

There is so much we have to take on faith, so Jesus says, what you have not yet seen, I have. I verify it, you can trust Me.

I am the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness to all that God has said.

Listen to Jesus Christ: The Beginning

Beginning of the Creation of God is not the first creation of God. The word is *arche*, it means the Beginning: Jesus is the origin and source of all creation. He is the Creator.

John 1:3 (NKJV) All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made

Hebrews 1:3 (NKJV) who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Turn back to Colossians 1:15-17:

Colossians 1:15-17 (NKJV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

When Paul calls Christ the *prototokos* in Colossians 1:15-17, he is not saying Jesus was the first born, but is the First or Supreme One over all creation as the Creator.

So the Verifier, the Witness, and the Beginning speaks. What He says is truth, what no one else can know He verifies, and as Creator, Beginner, He is Ruler. Jesus Christ asked them through His Word the same thing He asks us through His Word: Listen to Me!

Listen to the Diagnosis Christ Gave Them

Jesus was speaking to the wealthiest church of this whole region. There was not a more financially prosperous group of people in all of Asia Minor than Laodicea; and there was not a

more spiritually defective group of saints than those in the church at Laodicea.

Jesus said it all in Revelation 3:17 (NKJV):

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

By all appearances, it was their wealth that was holding them back from pleasing God.

Sanctification means that God is leading and controlling our lives. Often, the more financial resources we have, the harder it is to surrender control of our lives to God.

So in their state of being rich, wealthy, and having everything: Jesus diagnosed the church at Laodicea as having all but stopped living in the power and sanctifying effects of the Cross. They had slowly drifted away from Christ's control over their lives.

They had cultivated some very bad habits. Habits that made them unacceptable to Christ, and even worse, sickening to Him. In these verses Jesus writes a letter that asks them, and us today, to repent as often as needed until we are personally pursuing:

Listen to the Seven Habits Christ Desires

Habit One: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Neutrality*

v. 15 **"I know your works** that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we stop aggressively resisting sin in our lives.

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we say that it no longer matters that every part of our life come under Christ's control. Remember I Corinthians 6:19-20:

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; **therefore glorify God** in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Spiritual *Neutrality* or failing to glorify God for Who He is: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Neutrality*.

Jesus died to pay the penalty for all my sins, taking my place He suffered for me, erased the record of my sin and now offers me to live each day in His sanctifying power. Spiritual neutrality is failing to say no to sin.

Habit Two:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency*

v. 17a Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we think we are making it on our own, and don't need the Lord's power, guidance, and presence.

Psalms 16:11 (NKJV) You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your

right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Another form of Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we stop seeking God's will before our own in all the decisions of our lives. Christ is to be first in priority. Jesus is to be the greatest influence upon us.

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we stop needing to stay in close contact with the Lord. It is when we drift away, and start making it on our own.

Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* or making it on our own: is sickening to Christ. So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency*.

Habit Three:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Insensitivity*

v. 17b and **do not know that you are** wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Spiritual Insensitivity is when we lose our spiritual sight, and no longer see ourselves as God's Word explains we are. We lose touch with the mirror of the Word that shows us what needs changing each day as we wait before the Lord.

Spiritual Insensitivity is becoming what James calls a "forgetful hearer" Look again at James 1:22-25 (NKJV):

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Anything Un-Surrendered Displeases God

For a moment, go back with me to the very first imperative in Romans 6:11. That first imperative, for a response expected by God, is followed quickly by five more. Let me show them to you. They are the pathway to being sensitive to what pleases God.

To repent of insensitivity starts with dedication or presenting ourselves back to God just as Paul explains here in Romans 6.

Romans 6:11-19 (NKJV) has six straight in a row commands from God about seeing how much we need to get willingly under His control.

Likewise you also,

Say NO to sin. Because sin is defeated, we must treat it that way. Say no, turn away in

the power of the spirit, and be amazed at God's power.

v. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin,

Break the old patterns by refusing to follow them. Sinful patterns are like ruts, you anticipate them and hold tightly to the wheel and stay out of the ruts; and if you slide in, get right back out by the grace of God. Break the old pattern and don't stay a moment longer in any rut than needed, and soon you'll learn to steer clear of those ruts.

but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

Start following God as a choice, a part of each day's plan. Jesus reduced all that He wanted from His first disciples to just those two words: Follow Me. I am to be an instrument in His Hands that promotes righteousness.

It is always easy to ask: would Jesus go there? Would He do this? Is this what pleases Him? Am I following Him by hearing His voice and responding to His Word?

v. 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Enlist yourself each day as a slave of Christ. Go to Him and say I want You to be my Master, and I willingly again present myself back into your Hands. Remember, that was the content of the prayer Jesus commanded us to use a life-long pattern in Matthew 6.

Focus me back upon who you are as God; Control me as my Master; Lead me in doing what pleases You; Supply me with whatever I need to do Your will; Cleanse me from anything that displeases You; and Empty me so You get all of the credit from my life.

v. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Get enslaved by a passion for holiness. Seek to be holy even as God is holy. That is what He is asking for. This is impossible by any human strength or power, but we are called and empowered by Christ to be enslaved by His righteousness unto holiness.

As Paul said in II Corinthians 5, the love of Christ constrains us. We want to be like Him and follow Him in His path which is holiness.

Are You Listening to Jesus?

Spiritual *Insensitivity* or no longer seeing ourselves reflected in the mirror God's Word: is

sickening to Christ.

So Jesus Christ the most respected authority on spiritual health in the Universe calls each of us to repent today of any Spiritual *Insensitivity* by these simple Romans

1. Start operating on truth,
2. Start saying no to sin,
3. Start breaking the old patterns,
4. Start following God daily as a choice,
5. Start presenting yourself as His slaves, and
6. Start pursuing a passion for holy living.

Jesus said, "My sheep, hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

Hearing and Following Jesus is the essence of all that we are as born-again believers today!

Laodicea: Jesus Warns of The Danger of Having Too Much Stuff

Revelation 3:14-22

As¹¹⁴ we open to Revelation 3:17, we are opening to Jesus the Christ of Christmas, talking about something so timely to Christmas, so relevant to our choices this season, and so right where we are today: that it is uncanny.

Jesus is addressing the condition that the believers at Laodicea had gotten themselves into. They were simply described by Christ as: *loaded down with stuff*.

They could afford all that stuff, they bought all those items with their hard-earned money. They stored their possessions carefully, and used them regularly. But, what the Laodiceans are confronted with by Christ is not that they had so much, but the danger that comes when we have too much stuff.

The fact is that in all their careful earning and buying, they had in the process, lost sight

¹¹⁴ 111204AM CLW-30 Stuff.do

of Christ, literally. Jesus Christ warns them, and us, of:

The Danger of Having Too Much Stuff

We all have witnessed two amazing, global events in the past week: they both involve buying stuff. The whole world has watched Americans again take first place on Earth as “biggest consumers”.

There is no one nation, in all of recorded history, that has consumed more stuff of every kind, than we are currently consuming.

Remember the events? First, on the day after Thanksgiving Americans spent more money buying stuff on that “Black Friday” event, than any other day in our national history.

That was followed three days later, by the “Cyber Monday” event that saw another record for the world: more stuff was purchased that day than any other day of online purchasing in the history of the world.

Beware Says Jesus

Jesus said it all in Revelation 3:17. The heart of our study today is that second phrase in v. 17. I will emphasize the words from all five of the major Bible translations.

Please listen to this verse spoken by Jesus Christ, two-thousand years ago, and every day since, to anyone who knows and loves Him:

Because you say, ‘I am rich, [second phrase in NKJV: have become wealthy; NAS: and have become wealthy; NIV: I have acquired wealth; ESV: I have prospered; KJV: and increased with goods (that is the one that hits me hardest)] and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Christ's warnings were not new, they were just another in a long line of words that God has sent to His people throughout the ages. Listen to these words from the Old Testament's wisest man who warns about the:

Eight Dangers of Having Too Much Stuff

God has spoken often, and very clearly about why the more we have, the more dangerous our lives become.

Most of us always think those verses are warnings to people that have MORE than us. In life there are always people with more, and people with less. So we are okay because that means the words God spoke must be for them and not us.

Solomon, the man with the most stuff in the Bible, was inspired by God to explain the dangers that God is talking about. Listen to his wisdom as we turn to Ecclesiastes 5.

Starting in v. 10 we have these very clear warnings. Instead of thinking they are pointing

elsewhere, just ask the Lord, as we read these verses, to speak to your heart. Ask Him if there is any message from Him to you from these six verses. Open to the middle of the Bible, hit the book of Psalms. Head to the right past Proverbs, and the next book is Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-15 (NKJV) He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. 11 When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? 12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. 13 There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. 14 But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. 15 As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand.

Divine Lessons on the Stuff of Life

Here are the Divinely inspired lessons on the stuff of life:

Lesson-1: The more stuff we accumulate, the more stuff we will want.

"He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver;" (v. 10a).

Lesson-2: The more stuff we grasp on to, the less satisfied we become.

"Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity." (v. 10b).

Lesson-3: The more stuff we own, the more stuff everyone tries to get from us.

"When goods increase, They increase who eat them;" (v.11a).

Lesson-4: The more stuff we pile up, the less of it we can really use.

"So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes?" (v. 11b).

Lesson-5: The more stuff we build up, the more we worry about our stuff.

"The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." (v. 12).

Lesson-6: The more stuff we hold tightly, the more we get injured from holding onto it.

"There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt." (v. 13).

Lesson-7: The more stuff we keep, the more stuff we can lose.

"But those riches perish through misfortune;" (v.14a).

Lesson-8: The more stuff we clutch, the more stuff we must leave behind.

"When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand." (v.15).

When Jesus was speaking to the wealthiest church in Revelation 2 & 3, He was speaking the same truths He shared in the Gospels. In Rev. 3 Christ implies that it was their wealth that

was holding them back from pleasing God.

Christ Constantly Exposed The Dangers of Wealth

Jesus spoke so much about money, wealthy, and possessions during His earthly teaching ministry. There are 89 chapters and nearly 2,800 verses in the Four Gospels. These record that no less than one in seven, or 15% of all the words Christ spoke: are about money and possessions, or stuff. And, almost half of Christ's 38 parables are lessons on finances.

Starting in Matthew, let me just share a few of His clear commands about the place stuff is to have in our lives, the dangers of too much stuff, and what pleases Him.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon.** (NKJV)

Matthew 6:28-30 "And **why do you worry about clothes?** See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (NIV)

Matthew 13:22 "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the **cares of this world** and the **deceitfulness of riches** choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. (NKJV) [These same words are also recorded in Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14]

Matthew 19:23-24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is **hard for a rich man to enter** the kingdom of heaven. 24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (NKJV) [These same words are also recorded in Mk. 10:23-25; Lk. 18:24-25]

Why would it be hard for rich people to get to Heaven? Because we tend to hold on tightly to our possessions, and Christ warned that holding onto (or loving) the things of this earth spells eternal disaster.

Riches Make it Hard to Get to Heaven

We have more 'things per person ' than any other nation in history. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can't fit into garages.

We live in a society where our possessions first imprison us by debt, then our possessions take over our houses; and finally stuff begins to occupy our time. We have been conquered by our possessions. Everything I own, owns me. Why would I want more? Jesus said that the care of things can make our hearts grow cold.

Luke 12:15-21 (NKJV) And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, **for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.**" 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my

barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, **you have many goods laid up for many years**; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 **“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”**

1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17-19 But **those who desire to be rich** fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 17 **Command those who are rich in this present age** not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, **that they may lay hold on eternal life.** (NKJV)

So in their state of being rich, wealthy, and having everything: Jesus diagnosed the church at Laodicea as having all but stopped living in the power and sanctifying effects of the Cross. They had slowly drifted away from Christ’s control over their lives.

They had cultivated some very bad habits. Habits that made them unacceptable to Christ, and even worse, sickening to Him. In these verses Jesus writes a letter that asks them, and us today, to repent as often as needed until we are personally pursuing:

The Fourth Habit Christ Desires

We’ve already seen the first three habits.

Habit One: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Neutrality* v. 15 “I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. *Spiritual Neutrality* is when we stop aggressively resisting sin in our lives.

Habit Two: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency*. v. 17a Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — *Spiritual Self-Sufficiency* is when we think we are making it on our own, and don’t need the Lord’s power, guidance, and presence.

Habit Three: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Insensitivity*. v. 17b and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— *Spiritual Insensitivity* is when we lose our spiritual sight, and no longer see ourselves as God’s Word explains we are. We lose touch with the mirror of the Word that shows us what needs changing each day as we

wait before the Lord.

Today, we see:

Habit Four:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Wastefulness

v. 18a I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich;

Spiritual Wastefulness is when we abandon Christ as our investment counselor and start investing our time and money for earth and not Heaven. We begin to measure things by their earthly and not eternal worth.

Slowly we begin to trade the precious time we have for objects that will only rust, burn, rot, get stolen, and weigh us down in life. The Bank of Heaven gets neglected and the treasures we lay up are here on Earth.

Spiritual Wastefulness is when we ignore Christ's words in Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV)

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Eternal Dangers of Stuff

If we primarily store our treasures here on Earth, we will live our lives leaving behind what is most important to us.

Jesus said that if we give to Him what is most important to us, then we go through life heading towards our treasures, rather than away from them. Since Paul invested in Heaven, death was gain. For those who never invest in Heaven, death is always loss.

Jesus told us that our view of stuff is the reference point for all of life. If we view stuff as only in our care, and belonging to Another, everything changes. We aren't always worried about it, wanting more, and lamenting any loss. Rather we are consulting the Owner about His desires, and trusting His care for all that we watch on His behalf.

There is a profound lesson in missionary martyr Jim Elliot's famous words, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." The pathway to usefulness for God began: when Jim Elliott realized everything belonged to God and was no longer his!

Today, as we celebrate Communion, take some time to surrender the ownership of your stuff to God.

Ask Him to change your heart's desires to only wanting stuff that will reflect His ownership.

Decide now to be primarily an investor in Heaven, with Christ as your investment counselor.

Spiritual *Wastefulness* or laying up our treasures on Earth instead of Heaven: is

sickening to Christ.

Because you say, 'I am rich, and **increased with goods** and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any *Spiritual Wastefulness*.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

APPENDIX:

The Mark of a Christian:

Writing in about A. D. 125, a Christian philosopher by the name of Aristides looked at Christianity and said this: “They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that hath, distributeth liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as it were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”

Getting Clothed for Christ's Sake Daily

Revelation 3:18

There's¹¹⁵ only one portion of God's Word, specifically written to the Church, by Jesus Christ: Rev. 2 & 3. Join me there as we continue systematically examining Christ's challenges to

¹¹⁵ 111211AM CLW-31 Clothed.doc

this, the seventh and final of the churches.

If you had traveled to visited friends or family in Laodicea, three things would have stood out to you in the First Century. These three unique features to this city, are the framework of Christ's words we are examining today in Revelation 3:18. These could be called:

Laodicea's Three Key Industries

First, you would have noticed gold in Laodicea. As you walked around the city it would have had the feel of a wealthy, financial district type of city like London, New York City, or Shanghai, where wealth was evident, banking was concentrated, and gold was readily seen, worn, used, and available.

Secondly, **you would have noticed Laodicean people were wearing**, and shops were selling, exquisite clothing made from a rich black wool fabric that was darker than any black wool you'd ever seen. This wool looked and felt so silky smooth, you would have asked the person where they got such soft, luxurious wool. Of course they would have said from right here, because that was the world famous wool that was sheared and processed right from Laodicea's own special flocks of sheep.

Finally, **you would have noticed the sprawling Laodicean campus of the famous medical school and hospital**, that specialized in eye care. The locally compounded eye-salve that was so effective that people of means, from across the ancient world, would travel here to get their ophthalmic eye-salve and treatments.

Laodicea: a wealthy, gold-brokering and banking center; and a world-class woolen garment center; and a world-renowned medical center specializing in ophthalmic eye-care. Those would be what you would have noticed if you visited, and what you would have known if you would have been native to the city. Knowing that makes us realize:

Christ's Pointed References to Their City's Claim to Fame

Look down at Christ's words in Rev. 3:18, He notes those exact three key industries.

Jesus Christ told the church at Laodicea that they needed to make three specific purchases from Him. As we read this passage and focus especially on the three items that Jesus specifically pointed out as vital to their spiritual lives.

Please read these words in Revelation 3:14-18

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me **gold refined in the fire**, that you may be rich; and **white garments**, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and **anoint your eyes**

with eye salve, that you may see. (NKJV)

These verses should cause each of us to ask ourselves : “Is Jesus asking the same of me today? And if He is still asking this, are we listening to Him with our hearts?

Focus with me upon each of the four phrases of v. 18:

First, “I counsel you to buy from Me”.

The word “counsel” is a very serious word that speaks of quite deliberate, thought-out, pre-meditated action. Almost every other time this word is used its translated “plotted”. Jesus is asking this church:

Get Completely Focused On Doing What I Ask

When a person plots about doing something, it begins to dominate their thoughts and actions. That is how serious Christ calls us to get this morning.

This word is used four other times in the New Testament and always describing the deep seated desire at all costs to find a way to do something. Look with me at the other uses to get the feel of how seriously Jesus is speaking to this church.

1. Matthew 26:3-4 (NKJV) Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4 and **plotted** to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.
2. John 11:49-53 (NKJV) And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” 51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. 53 Then, from that day on, they **plotted** to put Him to death.
3. John 18:14 (NKJV) Now it was Caiaphas who **advised** the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.
4. Acts 9:22-23 (NKJV) But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. 23 Now after many days were past, the Jews **plotted** to kill him.

So Jesus gives the level of focus we need to obey Him in this matter. It needs to be what we plot about. This is something that becomes our plan so meditated upon that we are very serious, and take a planned course of action. But what is the action? He wants us to “buy” something from Him. The word is agouradzo and means something purchased from the “marketplace”

Now look closely at the next three phrases in v.18, and let me put them in context for you. Using what we know about the first phrase, Jesus is saying I am constantly asking you to very seriously plan how to get these three items from Me.

Jesus offers us gold, white garments, and eye salve. Remember, those were all items

familiar to Laodiceans, they were the key industries of their town.

Decide to Come to Me To Obtain These Items

“Gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich”; we studied this last time as Habit # 4: Repent of Spiritual Wastefulness. Remember the points?

Jesus wants each of us to repent of using our short lives to only gain what can be lost, rather than choosing what can never be lost.

Jesus wanted them to have true wealth, and turn away from the intoxicating chase after materialism’s stuff.

Jesus wants them to use the account He already set up for each of us His children to make deposits in the Bank of Heaven.

Jesus wanted them to be sure they were investing into their eternal IRA.

The third phrase is what we need to consider today. Here are the details:

“And white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed”; This is Habit # 5: Repent of Spiritual Neglect.

We are asked by Christ pointedly to get dressed every day, all day long in a series of outfits He designed for us.

Each day we have a choice to obey or disobey. That spiritual concept is what we will be coming back to in just a bit.

The final phrase is for next time. Jesus says:

“And anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see”. This is Habit # 6: Repent of any Spiritual Blindness. Jesus wants us to protect our eyes. Spiritual blindness is preventable and treatable, it does not have to persist.

So living in Laodicea, and being familiar with its gold, its black wool garments, and its eye-salve, this letter would have been so impactful. They understood the message. Jesus was rebuking them for getting distracted from why they had been saved. But the saints in Laodicea needed to:

Learn How to Apply God's Word

They had neglected the eternal for the temporal.

They had swapped the celestial for the mundane.

They were spending their lives on trinkets and trash instead of priceless treasures.

That is why Jesus pleads with them to listen and respond. Just as He is still doing with us.

Now, focus on that second phrase:

v. 18b and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Jesus pointed out that they had started neglecting a vital part of their spiritual lives.

They were not clothing themselves as they had been taught to do. Spiritual *Neglect* is when we become more concerned with what we look like to men rather than to God. We impress people outwardly rather than pleasing God inwardly.

What clothing does God's Word describes for us, and command us to wear? Turn back to Romans 13 where we see the two main types of clothing believers wear every day.

Paul explains the necessity of daily clothing ourselves with Christ in Romans 13:12-14 (NKJV):

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us **put on the armor of light**. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Note in this verse that getting clothed for Christ has two areas Paul tells us we need: the first is the armor of light, the second is putting on Christ. So with that command before us, we need to ask:

Are We Getting Dressed For Christ Each Day

From American history we read of the guests of newspaper baron, William Randolph Hearst, at his famous castle in on the coast of California. After the overwhelming ride up the switchback road to the summit, and the breath-taking view of the Pacific and the immensity of the castle, guests were taken to their rooms.

After they were fed and entertained they would return to their rooms to find that clothing, exactly their size had been provided; and they were expected to wear those clothes the next day as they met and dined with Hearst.

Few would ever dare to offend their host by not going along with his unusual habit of choosing the outfits his guests would wear while staying at his castle. On a far higher level, the King of the Universe has provided us with some of the most useful articles of clothing we could ever imagine, dare we offend Him?

What are the clothes that our Great God has for us?

The armor of light Paul talks about in Romans 13, is fully expanded in Ephesians 6. Turn there with me to see six clear articles we are actually commanded to wear.

Ephesians 6:10-17 (NKJV) Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of

salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Paul describes:

The Armor of Light We Wear

The Belt of Truth (v.14a)

Vital to every soldier was this belt from which all tools of battle hung. This belt also held the soldier's robe together. To the Christian soldier a belt of truth means that we are surrounded by "honesty," "truthfulness," "integrity," and "sincerity" that every part of our life is governed by truth. Dishonesty brings defeat! If we are not belted, if our life is not held in by truth, any type of dishonesty will bring defeat to our lives.

The Breastplate of Righteousness (v.14b)

The soldier's breastplate was a heavy piece of armor that completely surrounded the body. To the Christian soldier this means a pursuit of personal, daily righteousness. We learn confession and repentance of sin can only maintain this. Impurity will bring defeat, so say no to sin daily.

The Shoes of Peace (v.15).

The sandal soles of the soldier were impregnated with heavy, spike-like hobnails, which gave him a good footing, and also kept him safe from stepping on sharp objects. If you injure a soldier's feet he's out of commission. To the Christian soldier this piece of armor is a call to both "readiness" and "peace of mind." If our hearts are not kept in peace by Christ, then anxiety will bring us defeat!

The Shield of Faith (v.16).

To a Roman soldier, his shield was a portable metal-banded wall, which he hid behind in battle. It was 5 feet high, 3 feet wide and served as the deflector from the flaming darts of the enemy. Our Shield of faith extinguishes all the flaming missiles of the evil one. But doubt will bring defeat!

Helmet of Salvation (v.17a).

A soldier never was far from his helmet. Nearly any object on the battlefield could immobilize a soldier if his head was unprotected. So to the Christian soldier the meaning of the helmet is assurance of salvation. A Christian who is not assured that he has salvation is just

totally immobilized because he's unsure about everything. He's unsure about God's promises, His Word, His protection. He's unsure about his destiny, his purpose in life. Lack of assurance brings defeat!

The SWORD OF THE SPIRIT (v.17b).

Quick and deadly was the sword of a soldier. Vital to any victory was the hand-to-hand combat, which ended in the defeat of the enemy. To the Christian soldier this victorious sword comes only through a personal command of the Scriptures. This is essential to effectiveness in battle. Neglecting the Word breeds weakness and will bring defeat in our lives

The second half of Romans 13 says to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the clearest ways to do that was described by Paul in Galatians 5. Turn there with me to survey what it means to wear Christ around through life.

Wearing Christ Each Day

Galatians 5:19-25 (NKJV) Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

There are 15 manifestations of the flesh in verses 19-21. Of these 8 are dealing with interpersonal problems. It is not enough to say that we have always struggled in these areas. Christ offers us a new pathway, the way of the Spirit and not of the flesh.

The Personality Changes Christ Can Bring

When we are dominated by the Spirit of God, Christ is reflected in these 9 ways, from our lives.

1. LOVE is the absence of selfishness. It is the product of the Holy Spirit present in our lives. Can others trace my progress in expressing God's love? Am I less selfish and self-seeking than I was last month?
2. JOY is the spiritual quality that releases us from circumstances. Do those that know me and watch my life see me as a joyful person?
3. PEACE is the internal serenity that only God can give. Troubles are not absent. Rather, God is present! Has peace become more and more a way of life for you this year?
4. LONGSUFFERING is the absence of personal irritation at the actions of others. It is

that bearing long with people that Paul spoke of in I Corinthians 13. Patience is also one of the Supreme attributes of God. Ask yourself, am I more patient than I was three months ago? Or less? If we are not increasing in patience it is only that we are not yielding and submitting to the Holy Spirit.

5. KINDNESS is a beautiful reflection of God in our lives. It is the absence of an abrasive manner in my dealings with people. It is a chosen reflection of Ephesians 2:8 and 4:32 in my life. Christ's kindness in me will soften any word or act that might hurt another. Is my character showing an increasing tendency toward personal kindness in my way with others?
6. GOODNESS is being Godlike! It is the opposite of fallen humanity. Am I a visibly better person than last year? Do people see me doing good to all those around me?
7. FAITHFULNESS is a trustworthy and dependable life. The kind of person that keeps their own life in order so that you can count on them. Am I making strides in reliability and dependability?
8. GENTLENESS is the opposite of asserting yourself. Those who are Servants of the Lord must not strive II Timothy 2:24. They resist selfish ambition [James 3:16] because it is a reflection of Satan not God. Remember Jesus described Himself as 'Meek and Lowly' [Mt 11:29]. What shape is my personal agenda in? Is it intact and my rights being defended? Or, is it in hopeless shape, crucified with Christ and fading?
9. SELF-CONTROL is defined by the Greek Dictionary as "a virtue, which consists in mastery of the appetites and passions, especially the sensual ones." The only force that can control or flesh is the Holy Spirit. When yielded to Him we become vessels that are worshipful sacrifices to Him and no longer to self. Do others see me as graciously under the control of God's Spirit?

Back to where we started. In Rev. 3:18 the saints in Laodicea needed to:

Learn How to Apply God's Word

They had neglected the eternal for the temporal.

They had swapped the celestial for the mundane.

They were spending their lives on trinkets and trash instead of priceless treasures.

That is why Jesus pleads with them to listen and respond. Just as He is still doing with us.

Now, focus on that second phrase:

v. 18b and white garments, **that you may be clothed**, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Jesus pointed out that they had started neglecting a vital part of their spiritual lives.

They were not clothing themselves as they had been taught to do.

Spiritual *Neglect* is when we become more concerned with what we look like to men rather than to God.

We impress people outwardly rather than pleasing God inwardly.

Are we wearing our armor by choice each day?

Are we clothing ourselves with Christ by walking in the control of His Spirit.

Beware of Self-Induced Spiritual Blindness

Revelation 3:18

One¹¹⁶ of the greatest works of God in salvation was opening our blind eyes to see.

Protecting spiritual sight is the final of the three elements we are to deliberately pursue, according to Christ's Last Words. Jesus counsels His Church in life-long, spiritual vision-care, promoting healthy eyes.

Christ Desires Us To See Clearly

Please open with me to Rev. 3, and listen again to Jesus, telling the church at Laodicea what they needed to have lives that pleased Him. Please give attention to the reading of Scripture.

Revelation 3:14-20 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, **blind**, and naked— 18 **I counsel you to buy from Me** gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and **anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.** 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

When Christ's birth was announced, He was comin as the One who would save sinners

¹¹⁶ 111218AM CLW-32 Blind.do

from their sins, and be God with us. That is the message of Christ's Birth.

Salvation Reaches: Blind Sinners in Darkness

We were each born sitting in the darkness, heading towards the precipice of sin; but we didn't even know it because we were blind. That's how we each were found by Jesus Christ, when He saved us.

So at the moment of salvation, we are given spiritual sight as a gift from God. The Christmas story gives the clearest picture of how all humans appear in their unsaved state, from God's perspective.

The Gospel is when Jesus Christ shines into our sin-darkened night life with a Sunrise of forgiven Life & saving Light. Listen anew to the wonder of what we celebrate this Christmas Season from the last few verses of Luke 1:

Luke 1:76-79 (NKJV) " And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which **the Dayspring** from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to **those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death**, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

When we were saved we were given the gift of spiritual sight. We can hear God's Voice, and see Him in His Word, and His Creation. We can feel His Spirit at work within us.

In fact, when Jesus explained salvation to Paul at his conversion, Jesus told Paul that He had "opened" Paul's eyes. That was the very first element of the miracle of salvation, in a list with seven miraculous elements. That means:

Salvation Brings: The Gift of Spiritual Sight

As we turn now to Acts 26:15-18, which captures Christ's explanation of salvation to Paul, and defines the very first step of salvation being "opened eyes". We see that from God's perspective, salvation is all about going from being spiritually blinded in sin, to opened eyes and forgive.

Acts 26:15-18 (NKJV) So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to **open their eyes**, in order to **turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are

sanctified by faith in Me.’

So that means that:

Lost People Are Still Spiritually Blind

When Jesus spoke to people who rejected His Gospel message He told them plainly that they were spiritually “blind”. Turn back to Matthew 15 to see just one of these incidents¹¹⁷.

Matthew 15:12-14 (NKJV) Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” 13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are **blind** leaders of the **blind**. And if the **blind** leads the **blind**, both will fall into a ditch.”

So everyone was born sitting in the darkness, heading towards the precipice of sin; but they don’t even know it because they are blind. Only the Light of the Gospel and the power of salvation can open spiritual eyes.

But opened eyes is just the beginning. Jesus goes on to describe what happens when we use and maintain our newfound spiritual sight.

Turn back to Matthew 5. Jesus started His longest sermon, called the Sermon on the Mount, with a startling statement that only the pure in heart can see God.

Matthew 5:8 (NKJV) Blessed are the pure in heart, For **they shall see God**.

This verse in the Beatitudes is a profound truth. The depth of this single verse and simple declaration by Christ is far beyond what we can even begin to comprehend, it speaks of eternity invested in the wonder of seeing and knowing God. But on a practical daily level, here is what Jesus said to them that day, and to us today.

Spiritual Purity Opens Spiritual Sight

The word “pure” in Matthew 5:8, is the translation of the Greek word: katharos, which means “to make pure by cleansing from dirt, filth, and contamination”.

This word was used often in the world of the Bible describing metals that were refined until they were “unmixed, unalloyed, unadulterated”. When we apply this word from daily life back then, to our spiritual lives, we see that Jesus is calling for us to have pure motives, to keep single-minded for Him, to offer Him undivided devotion, and to live in spiritual integrity.

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 6:24 that we can’t serve two masters. The first New Testament book after Christ’s ascension was by His earthly brother James, who taught about the dangers of an un-surrendered life, and says: double-minded people are unstable in every part of life; and that double-mindedness can only be cleansed away by the Lord (James 4:8).

Spiritual purity, as described here in Matthew 5:8, needs to be defined. First God is part of the very nature of God. So, when God created the universe, angels and mankind: all three

¹¹⁷ John 9 and the healing of the blind man at the Pool of Siloam was the climax of the confrontations over spiritual blindness.

were pure from His Hands; but as we know, all of humanity fell into sinful impurity, a third of the angels, and all of the universe has also been tainted and groans (Romans 8).

God offers all who come in faith to Christ, positional purity, which is imputed to each of us so that God sees Christ's righteous life credited to our account (Romans 4:5; II Cor. 5:21). We are a new creation, sanctified at our new birth (II Cor. 5:17). Then, all who are saved will someday see Jesus face to face and be glorified, perfect, and sinless forever (I John 3:2).

So at the instant of salvation we are pure, seeing God, awaiting glorification.

Practical Purity Preserves Spiritual Sight

The problem is, we don't immediately get glorified. There is one last form of purity in the Bible, and that is the one that makes up the vast majority of the pages of the Epistles and that is practical purity or progressive sanctification. Here is a simple explanation of the practical purity that God seeks in our lives:

"Practical purity, is the hard part, the part that does require our supreme effort... Practical purity, though it too comes from God, demands our participation in a way that the other kinds of purity do not. That is why Paul implores, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

It is why Peter pleads, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but 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' " (1 Pet. 1:14–16).

We are not saved just for future heavenly purity but also for present earthly purity. At best it will be gold mixed with iron and clay, a white garment with some black threads. But God wants us now to be as pure as we can be. If purity does not characterize our living, we either do not belong to Christ, or we are disobedient to Him. We will have temptations, but God will always provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). We will fall into sin, but "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).¹¹⁸

The Blessings of Purity: Seeing God Clearly

Look back one more time at Matthew 5:8.

As I said this is one of the deepest and most profoundly impacting verses in God's Word.

God promises a special blessing to those who, by His grace, maintain their practical, daily purity. What is the blessing? Jesus says that: "they shall see God"!

The Greek text records the words for "see God" in the future, indicative tense, and the middle voice. Also the word "they" is in the emphatic form. That means that only they (autos

¹¹⁸ MacArthur, J. (1989). Matthew (207–208). Chicago: Moody Press.

in Greek), get the blessings of seeing God clearly.

To render this verse literally it would be: "Blessed are the ones with hearts kept unpolluted, for only they shall be continuously seeing God for themselves."

Jesus here declares simply that an intimate relationship of knowing God in a close, intimate way, on a daily basis, is reserved only for those who are pure (those without double-mindedness).

Salvation opens to us the daily joys of a purified heart. We like Moses (in Ex. 33:18) long to see more and more of God. Like David (in Psalm 42:1) we pant, longingly after more and more of God's beauty that satisfies our souls. Like Job (in Job 42:5) we go from just hearing things about God, to actually seeing Him each day.

Practical purity keeps us through life with healthy eyes so that we can see God clearly.

The Captivating Beauty of Our Great God

Jesus goes on in the Sermon to say that our spiritual sight if maintained properly, will flood our life with God's light.

Matthew 6:22 (ESV) "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,

Jesus often used the Old Testament Scriptures as His source to illustrate truths He was teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus may be pointing back to the monumental passage in Isaiah 33:14-18 about the necessity of a life of obedience in order to see Christ clearly in His beauty.

This passage has three wonderful truths:

1. The offer of seeing God continuously;
2. The description of pollutants that can blind us;
3. The indescribable joys of seeing God.

Note those three as we walk through these verses together. First here is:

The Offer to Experience God Continuously

*Isaiah 33:14 (NKJV) The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: " Who among us shall **dwell** with the devouring fire? Who among us shall **dwell** with everlasting*

burnings?”

We can dwell in the Presence of God, seeing and hearing Him in His Word. Next, we see:

The Description of Six Choices to Preserve Healthy Spiritual Sight

Isaiah 33:15 (NKJV)

1. He who walks righteously [*Lifestyle of practical purity*]
2. and speaks uprightly, [*Speech under control*]
3. He who despises the gain of oppressions, [*Compassion*]
4. Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, [*Honesty*]
5. Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, [*Pure audio*]
6. And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: [*Pure video*]

The Six Indescribable Joys of Seeing God

Isaiah 33:16-17 (NKJV)

1. He will dwell on high; [*Endless delights*]
2. His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; [*True security*]
3. Bread will be given him, [*Satisfied longings*]
4. His water will be sure. [*Never-ending refreshment*]
5. v. 17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; [*The Greatest Attraction*]
6. They will see the land that is very far off. [*Heavenward gaze*]

Seeing God is the way that all the great men and women of the Old Testament lived such lives by God’s grace. They kept seeking to see and follow Him. That is the clear teaching of the book of Hebrews.

This is the “pilgrim and stranger” mentality of Hebrews 11. This is what the Old Testament saints experienced, that kept them going through endless trials. This is what some of the greatest missionaries and martyrs have known.

We wonder how they were able to make it; but God has already explained what is available if we will just seek Him.

Now what do we know about this way of life seeing God? A good place to start is with:

The Heroes of the Old Testament Faith

Hebrews is an inspired guide to help us interpret the lives of the Old Testament saints. What we find is that they did not all have the New Covenant, indwelling presence of God. Some of them had this blessing at times, but not all of them, all the time like we do. That is an ominous reminder that to us, to whom the unbroken presence of God in our lives has been given, we have much we will be held accountable for.

The patriarchs lived and died in a far away land, enduring many hardships because they

saw far off the city of God.

Hebrews 11:13 (NKJV) These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but **having seen them afar off** were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The way that Moses made it in dark Egypt labyrinth of sin was by spiritual sight, seeing the invisible God by faith.

Hebrews 11:24-27 (NKJV) By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he **endured as seeing Him who is invisible**

Spiritual sight is fundamental to the life of a believer. Just like physical sight, our spiritual eyes must be guarded at all times to protect them and preserve our ability to see.

Beware of Self-Induced Spiritual Blindness

Peter goes on to describe a condition of those who are Christ's followers of becoming blinded because of not walking in the sanctifying power of Christ.

2 Peter 1:8-9 (NKJV) For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is **shortsighted, even to blindness**, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Back to Revelation 3 and v. 18, remember the three sections? I counsel you to buy from Me:

- gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; **[spiritual wealth]**
- and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; **[spiritual clothing]**
- and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. **[spiritual sight]**

We are on the third and final longed for commodity. We should plot, plan, and with full attention seek to keep our eyes healthy at all costs.

Habit Six:

Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual *Blindness*

v. 18c and anoint your eyes with eye salve, **that you may see.**

There is a play on words here. Anoint comes from the same word as Christ. Christ is the Anointed One, so we are to seek that the Lord put Christ upon our sight. We want Him to give us sight, make us see, and keep our sight working and healthy.

First, **practical purity** is possible. Whatever God desires from us, He provides the way for

us to obey. The key to practical purity is confessing we have no power on our own to make it even for a moment. John 15: reminds us that apart from Him we can do nothing.

Second, **spiritual blindness** is just that: blindness to things of God. We no longer see Him in His Word. The salve He offers is in a prayer for Christ to open our eyes each day:

Psalm 119:18 (NKJV) Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.

Luke 24:45 (NKJV) And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Thirdly, **spiritual blindness** is when we stop noticing His Hand in our lives, extended to us to hold onto and follow Him through life. The salve Christ offers is to surrender daily to walking in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 (NKJV) I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Fourthly, **spiritual blindness** is when we begin to stumble along, acting more and more like lost people who do not know, can not see, and do not follow the Lord. To allow neglected spiritual hygiene to slowly darken our spiritual sight is horrible. The only solution is the daily application of the sanctifying salve of the Word of God.

John 17:17 (NKJV) Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

One of the greatest works of God in salvation was opening our blind eyes to see.

Protecting spiritual sight is the final of the three elements we are to deliberately pursue, according to Christ's Last Words.

Jesus counsels His Church in life-long, spiritual vision-care, promoting healthy eyes.

Spiritual Blindness is neglecting practical purity, avoiding the daily surrender to the Spirit, and skipping the sanctifying salve of listening to God's truth in His Word. **Spiritual Blindness** is sickening to Christ.

So Jesus Christ calls each of us to repent today of any **Spiritual Blindness**.

Jesus Wants us Constantly Repenting of Any Spiritual Laxity

Revelation 3:19

As¹¹⁹ we open to Christ's last words, we have come to the last church He addresses in Revelation 3:19. Here in the last words to the last church we find a grand summary of the entire life of the believer, reflecting the theme of most of the New Testament epistles.

In other words, Jesus ends His words to His church asking us to live a life of constant repentance, we are to avoid getting lax about sin. This v. 19 brings us to:

Challenge Seven: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Laxity

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives. We are to be constantly finding any sin that has crept into our lives, and turn from it. That process is called confession (agreeing with God about what we have done that displeases Him) and repentance (changing our mind about that sin, declaring that we are against anything that displeases God).

The result is sanctification (God drawing us closer to Him). This process makes up the bulk of the Epistles and of our spiritual lives. Confessing, repenting, forsaking and renewing are the daily components of the normal Christian life that Paul describes in the Epistles.

Most of us have heard of Luther, the Reformation, and how his 95 Theses launched what we know today as Protestantism, which we are a part. But do you know what the first thesis says? Let me give you a clue, it is a call to life long repentance. Let me read Luther's words of 1517:

When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Now look down at your Bibles, in Rev. 3:19 we find Jesus clearly asking His Church to

¹¹⁹ 120108AM CLW-33 Repent.do

be zealous and repent. Please stand:

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Christian Living is like Keeping the Car on the Road

One of the mental pictures that helps me apply God's Word in my life is the comparison I see to driving a car. That idea has been on my mind a lot from Christmas to New Years. Our family car logged 3,447 miles over the holidays. Think about what driving a car is like.

If we were to play charades and I was trying to give you a non-verbal description of driving I would go like this: acting like I had a steering wheel in my hand, and like I was making those constant adjustments to keep the car on the road.

Now apply that “constant-minor-adjustments-to-the-wheel” picture to our spiritual lives.

In a parabolic illustration of the Christian life, the steering wheel is my will making choices. The car is my body and the years of life are the scenes flashing by, often in a blur, outside the windows.

The route that we are following is the Word of God applied to our life. The constant movement of the steering wheel is me repenting and returning from going off the route, getting off track, outside of God's desires and plans for my life: and then turning the direction of my life back onto His way.

The Apostle John earlier described this way of life, constantly steering our lives back onto the Way of God by these words we all know so well:

1 John 1:9 (NKJV) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Each time we choose to agree with God that we have drifted off His road, and make a choice to turn our hearts back to His way: we have confessed, repented, and been cleansed of that sin.

The Christian life is not one big jerk of the wheel, it is just like driving a car: a constant succession of small adjustments to stay on the road.

Sometimes there are some bigger swerves when we start hearing the rumble strips, and now and then, a hasty call to the towing company to get us pulled out of the ditch.

We have accidents, need constant refueling and repairs, and have a definite destination in mind that we are headed to, but so often get sleepy, distracted, blown off course by strong winds, slide in icy weather, and have blowouts when we run over objects God warns us will always stop our progress as His pilgrims. The Bible often reminds us that:

We are Pilgrims Progressing Towards Heaven

Those last words I just said were the words, that John Bunyan used to title the best

selling book in the world, next to the Bible, for over 200 years called: Pilgrim's Progress.

Bunyan realized, as a pastor of a local church in England in the 17th Century, that his flock needed to understand that life is a journey from our very own "City of Destruction" where each of us were born, to the "Celestial City" where each of us are headed.

Along the road are people that both help and hinder us, and places or situations that we enter, that do the same.

The colorful and descriptive concepts of Pilgrim's Progress have changed little in the past 300 years. There are still Swamps of Despair we slowly wade through; and Castles of Doubt imprison us from time to time; and enemies of Christ that try to distract us and lead us astray throughout all the days of our lives.

We are surrounded by the very same cast of characters that Bunyan portrayed in 1678, that still encourage or discourage our progress to Heaven. Pilgrim's Progress is still a must-read for the serious follower of Christ in 2012.

Our lives as believers are described by God through His Word by several synonymous terms. Each of these are Divine word pictures that illustrate for us how to live our lives on Earth, for God. The first of these word pictures is that:

We are Followers of the "Way" to Heaven

The most frequent of the descriptions for the early church was that they were followers of the "Way", mentioned seven times in Acts (9:2; 16:17; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Please turn there next with me.

God portrays salvation in Acts, not as a decision in the past that had no impact on my present, but rather that the response of faith to Christ began a life-long journey of following Christ.

Listen to how the Holy Spirit guided Luke to describe the original believers, starting in Acts 9:

The religious leaders of Jerusalem's Temple called the followers of Christ, followers of the "Way": Acts 9:2 (NKJV) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

A demonized fortune-telling girl in Philippi calls salvation a "Way": Acts 16:17 (NKJV) This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Paul's longest recorded ministry was at Ephesus where salvation is described as the "Way": Acts 19:9, 23 (NKJV) But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 23 And about that time there arose a great

commotion about the Way.

When Paul explained his pre-conversion life of persecuting the Church he called salvation the “Way”: Acts 22:4 (NKJV) I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women

When Paul makes a public defense of his faith before the Roman Governor Felix and the Sandhedrin from Jerusalem, he calls salvation the Way and does does Felix: Acts 24:14-22 (NKJV) But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.”

So, as believers, we are on the “Way” to Heaven, following the “Way” of Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. Next we see that:

The “Way” Reflects our Citizenship in Heaven

Thus for each of us, God wants us to see that being born-again, saved, becoming a believer, or a Christian: starts a life-long journey, following the Way of Christ, traveling through life following Christ.

This ties together all the metaphors of the Christian life that Paul writes about: walking in step with the Spirit, following the map of the Word, entering a very challenging disciplined athletic contest that involves running a race, fighting a fight, and all to finish the course. Listen to Paul:

When we follow the Way of Christ, we are called to increasing levels of surrender, like Paul describes in: Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul said that “we” the true believers who follow the course called the “Way” of Christ, are in a life-long race as he describes in: 1 Corinthians 9:24, 26-27 (NKJV) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul sums up life on Earth using the concept of the Roman Empire’s very specific citizenship. We are to know our rights and responsibilities as citizen of Heaven: Philippians 3:20 (NKJV) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the

Lord Jesus Christ,

So, we are followers of Christ, heading to Heaven, where we hold citizenship. Next we see that:

The “Way” Requires Personal Discipline

Paul adds to the idea of our keeping on the Way through life, with descriptions of how we stay on target along the way, when we see ourselves as workmen, soldiers, farmers, and brothers & sisters. Listen to Paul as He writes to Timothy:

Paul considers New Testament believers to be disciplined like soldiers, athletes, and farmers: 2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NKJV) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Paul summed up his life as finishing a tour of duty, where he had been camping in a tent. His deployment was finished, and he was headed home at last, awaiting the crowning by his Commander-in-Chief for doing what he was enlisted to do: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NKJV) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

So, we are followers of Christ, citizens of Heaven, who discipline ourselves to stay on task, using God’s Word to clearly see Christ so that we are filled with His truth and stay on His path, or road for our lives. Next we see that:

Followers of the “Way” are Pilgrims & Strangers

In Hebrews 11:13 the Old Testament saints are described as “Pilgrims”. These pilgrim-saints are described as those who saw a far-away “city” (Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14), and made it as they kept refocusing on that place far off and kept walking in that direction through life. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

The writer of Hebrews explains that Old Testament saints kept on the pathway of God’s plan was looking at the final destination: Hebrews 11:10, 13, 16 (NKJV) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their

God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Life is simply running the race, staying in our lane, following Jesus who ran and finished the race just ahead of us, and awaits just across the finish line:

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Peter picks up on that vivid picture and says that we are “pilgrims and strangers” (1 Peter 2:11). Then he adds that when we pick up various inhibitors to our walk through life (he calls them fleshly lusts), we must keep repenting of them (which he calls abstaining from) in order to live out our pilgrim status.

1 Peter 2:11 (NKJV) Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

So, we are followers of Christ, citizens of Heaven, disciplined to stay on task, and living as strangers to this world and pilgrims headed to our real home. Next we see that:

Christ's Last Words Continue this New Testament Message

Christ's final words to us in His church, in the final letter to the final church has a final challenge to us. Of all these seven challenges, this is the most amazing.

Jesus explains how we stay on the pathway, keep on the road, and stay in the race. What Jesus reveals is that He is neither idle nor detached. Rather Jesus Himself is actively at work to help us fulfill our calling.

This is Christ's final challenge to us: He wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Laxity

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

What is Jesus saying here? There are four clear elements in Christ's final challenge to these saints.

First, He is reminding us that He is always prompted by love in His actions toward us:

“As many as I love”.

Jesus loves us, no matter what we do. The word I is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. Nothing can make Him love us more or less.

The word Christ chose for love is *phileo*, always a chosen love, not the word for love commanded which is *agape* love. Jesus says, because I have chosen to love you, I am doing all

of this.

Next, He reminds us the He is a good parent, actively communicating with us as His children, so that we know exactly what He expects:

“As many as I love, *I rebuke and chasten*. Therefore be zealous and repent”.

“*I rebuke and chasten*” is very much like that of Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:6. The first verb “rebuke” occurs in Revelation only here; it means “to rebuke,” “to reprimand,” “to scold,” or “to censure.” It means to tell someone what they have done wrong.¹²⁰

Jesus doesn’t just tell us what He wants, He also stays engaged in our lives as His children:

“As many as I love, *I rebuke and chasten*. Therefore be zealous and repent”.

“Chasten” is the second verb, and can have the milder sense of “to train” (NJB), or else “to discipline,” “to correct”; it can also have the stronger meaning “to punish,” “to chastise physically” (as in Luke 23:16, 22; 2 Cor 6:9). One cannot be dogmatic about which is the preferable meaning here, but on the whole it seems that “to punish” fits the context best.

Finally, Jesus calls for us to respond, to turn the wheel of our life back onto His Way. He asks us to do this as often as necessary to stay on course:

“As many as I love, *I rebuke and chasten*. *Therefore be zealous and repent*”.

In the phrase “therefore be zealous and repent”, the conjunction “therefore” connects this clause to the reason why the Christians of Laodicea must be zealous and repent, and that is to avoid the punishment they will otherwise suffer. The verb be zealous (only here in Revelation) is the opposite of lukewarmness (described in 3:16); it denotes enthusiasm, eagerness.

The Greek verb is in the present tense, indicating a continuing attitude; the following repent is in the aorist tense, denoting a once-for-all change of mind (see verse 2:5).

Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and

¹²⁰ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993). A handbook on the Revelation to John. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (44–45). New York: United Bible Societies. Also used in points 3 and 4.

that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 2:248)

As Trench has it: “The great Master-builder squares and polishes with many strokes of the chisel and hammer the stones which shall find a place at last in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem.” There is no surer way of allowing a child to end in ruin than to allow him to do as he likes. It is a fact of life that the best athlete and the finest scholar receive the most demanding training. The discipline of God is not something which we should resent, but something for which we should be devoutly thankful.¹²¹

Are we Repenting of All Spiritual Laxity?

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we forget how horrible sin always is to Jesus. Our sin cost Christ His very life, His intimate fellowship with the Father, and made Him feel the wrath of God in our place. Get rid of sin, don't sweep it under the rug.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we forget He wants us walking in the light, seeing our sin as He does and immediately seeking His cleansing as we repent and forsake all sin. Jesus hates it when we hide and cover for our sins, instead of confessing and forsaking them.

Listen to Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Spiritual *Laxity* or not regularly confessing and forsaking our sin: is sickening to Christ.

So Jesus Christ calls each of us to walk in His Way, and every time we stray in any way: repent, seek His cleansing, and renew our desire to follow Him each day walking His WAY!

¹²¹ The Revelation of John : Volume 1. 2000 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Getting Ready for the Best Part of the Day: Dining with Jesus

Revelation 3:20

Jesus¹²² changes His the tone of His Voice as we open to Revelation 3:20. After seven rebukes to the most disobedient church of the seven, Laodicea is hearing something amazing. Jesus makes them an offer that is unbelievable. Jesus invites anyone who wants to spend time with Him, face-to-face, and one-on-one, to join Him for the most refreshing meal of the day: the unhurried evening meal that every laboring person longed for after a hard day's work; and every rich person looked forward to as the best time of the day.

Jesus inserts Himself into what those living in the 1st Century would consider the best time of their day; and in that time, Jesus Christ offers Himself.

This is one of the truly great invitations from God, in all of God's Word. Jesus here invites anyone who will respond to the incredible event of time with Him. But first, as we consider this invitation, we need to remember some of:

The Great Invitations Of God's Word

The invitations of God's Word are all amazing. Many of them are enough to take a lifetime of exploration. Listen to just a few:

The great Gospel call of Isaiah 55:1 (NKJV) ***"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.***

The verse that Charles Haddon Spurgeon heard and responded to in the invitation, the day he was saved in Isaiah 45:22 (NKJV) ***" Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.***

The great promise of so many in the modern missions movement, from Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV) ***'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'***

Perhaps Christ's greatest Gospel call in Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV) ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

Jesus makes an offer to anyone searching for truth in John 7:17 (NKJV) ***If anyone wills to do His will, he***

¹²² 120115AM CLW-34 Dine.do

shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.

Jesus defines the work of salvation in John 7:37-38 (NKJV) On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”***

Those six are amazing invitations, but as we take the time to unpack the one in our verse today, we will see that it is the greatest of them all. Here in Revelation 3:20 Jesus makes the very greatest of all invitations for us as believers.

Please listen to Him speak.

Revelation 3:20 (NKJV) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. ***If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.***

As we look at this invitation, we need to put Revelation 3:20 in context: this verse comes almost at the end of three of the greatest chapters about Jesus Christ in the whole Bible.

If you think for a moment, we have just walked for months through Revelation chapters 1-3. We have found that there are more Names of Christ, more Titles of Christ, and more attributions or ascriptions of glory to Christ in Revelation, than any book in the Bible except the Psalms. Pause and remember with me:

Who this Invitation Is From

The invitation for dinner in Revelation 3:20 comes from the Highest One who could ever be imagined. In our lifetimes we may meet some very amazing people.

But the rich, the famous, and the human rulers of this world do not compare to the One who speaks to us today. Listen as we just skim through some of the dozens of Names of our God, revealed in this Book of Revelation.

For those of you who love to study and get details, all of these Names are in the notes

that are uploaded each week with the audio and video copy of this message.

Our Great God's Great & Mighty Names

In Revelation our Lord is revealed through no less than 56 unique and varied Names as:

1. The One Who is, Who was, and Who is to Come 1:4, 8; 11:17; 16:5
2. Jesus Christ Faithful Witness 1:5
3. The First Born from the Dead 1:5
4. The Prince of the Kings of Earth 1:5
5. The Alpha & Omega 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13
6. The Beginning & End: 1:8; 21:6; 22:13
7. The Almighty 1:8
8. The First & Last: 1:11,17; 2:8; 22:13
9. I am He who lives, was dead 1:18
10. I am Alive Forevermore 1:18
11. He who holds the seven stars (messengers 1:20) in His Right Hand 2:1
12. He who walks in the midst of the seven lamp stands (churches 1:20) 2:1
13. The First & Last who was dead and came to life 2:2
14. He who has the sharp two edged sword (Word of God) 2:12
15. The Son of God with Eyes like a Flame of Fire 2:18
16. The Son of God with Feet like Fine Brass 2:18
17. He who has the Seven Spirits of God (1:4) 3:1
18. He who Has the Seven Stars (messengers 1:20) 3:1
19. The One who can Blot Names from the Book of Life 3:5
20. The One who can Confess names before the Father & His Angels 3:5
21. He who is Holy 3:7
22. He who is True 3:7
23. He who has the Key of David 3:7
24. He who Opens, and no one shuts & shuts, and no one opens 3:7
25. The One who can make us pillars in the Temple of God 3:12
26. The One who can write on us the Name of God & the Name of the "City of My

- God” New Jerusalem 3:12
27. The One who can write on us “My New Name” 3:12
 28. The Amen 3:14
 29. The Faithful & True Witness 3:14
 30. The Beginning of Creation Of God 3:14
 31. The Lord God Almighty 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22,23
 32. The Lion Of Tribe Judah 5:5
 33. The Root Of David 5:5
 34. The Slain Lamb 5:6
 35. The Lamb 5:8; 21:22; 22:3
 36. The Lord Holy & True 6:10
 37. The Living God 7:2
 38. The God of The Earth 11:4
 39. The God of Heaven 11:13; 16:11
 40. His Christ 11:15; 12:10
 41. The Child Who was to rule all nations 12:4,5
 42. The Lamb Slain from the Foundation of the world 13:8
 43. The King of Saints 15:3
 44. God Almighty 16:14
 45. Lord of Lords 17:14; 19:16
 46. King of Kings 17:14; 19:16
 47. Lord God 18:8
 48. Lord our God 19:1
 49. Lord God Omnipotent 19:6
 50. The Faithful & True 19:11
 51. The Word Of God 19:13
 52. Almighty God 19:15
 53. Him Who sits on the Great White Throne 20:11
 54. The Lord God of the Holy Prophets 22:6
 55. The Root & the Offspring of David 22:16
 56. The Bright & Morning Star 22:16

That Great, Almighty, Living, Omnipotent, Lamb that was slain for you and for me: has sent an invitation. The greatest invitation can only come from the greatest person in all the Universe, Who is revealed in the Scriptures to be beyond anyone we could ever imagine. So what we have come to in Revelation 3:20 today is:

The Greatest Invitation For Any Believer

Jesus is here explaining to us in His Church, that He is standing at the door of our heart,

waiting for us to invite Him in to linger in fellowship as our Lord and Savior throughout our life. Jesus offers Himself, personally and privately for us to spend a quiet time like a longed for time spent with someone you love deeply. What a precious invitation!

Revelation 3:20 (NKJV) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. ***If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.***

Those who lived in the ancient world usually had three meals. In the morning, they had *akratisara*—bread dipped in wine; at noonday, they had *ariston*—a snack eaten at work, or the roadside; the word *deipnon*, used for “dine” in verse 20, refers to the evening meal, the main meal of the day—a time for lingering over the meal after a long day’s work.

Remember Holman Hunt’s famous picture of Christ standing at the door knocking? Friends who saw his painting told Hunt he left the handle off. He replied that it pictured that the handle of salvation is on *our* side, before we trusted Christ; and the handle of fellowship is on *our* side, the moment we became a Christian.

What Does Jesus Offer Believers?

My dad spent a couple weeks of his vacation times each year, for almost two decades with his buddy Holman Johnson traveling to the most remote lakes of Ontario. They rode loggers trains, jumping on with just a canoe, sleeping bag, and back pack to explore, fish, and enjoy God’s creation.

When I grew up big enough to survive the north woods, my dad began to show me what he had found. The journey of discovery, with someone who knows the way, anticipates the journey, and has as their sole desire to share that wonder: is simply amazing. What I experienced with my dad, when another vast and remote Canadian lake appeared at the end of the trail: is just a tiny flash of the wonder Christ offers to us.

Jesus wants to give us a foretaste of knowing and exploring eternity with Him each day. Like a preview of the greatest trip imagineable is the daily video clip Jesus wants to narrate, and show to us each day we meet Him in the agreed upon meeting place: His Word. There in His Word He explains Himself to us. We learn Who He is, what He has done, and how we can please Him.

Nothing is like spending time with Jesus, and nothing quite matches this offer in Revelation 3:20. After spending most of the letter to Laodicea, pointing out the seven areas that are offensive, Jesus explains that all of those areas ruin the fellowship time He awaits with us.

The Offer of Personal Face Time with Christ

The challenges of Rev. 3:14-19 are all pointing to the offer of v. 20. Jesus wants to come in and meet with us, one-on-one, and face-to-face. He wants to not just stop in for a moment,

He is asking for the main meal of the day. Jesus is the one asking, He is the One knocking, and He is the One waiting.

He has already asked the Laodiceans to make changes to their lifestyles so that He can spend time with them. The whole opening section of this letter is a way of answering the question: “What Inhibits My Spiritual Intimacy with Christ”?

The pointed challenge Christ gives is to cultivate seven new habits spiritually and by these choices, abstain from what distances Jesus from our day-to-day lives. After dealing with the distractions and destroyers of spiritual intimacy: Jesus makes the offer.

That is a way to say: please start cultivating habits that please Me. Doing what? Starting to consciously cultivate:

Seven Ways to Promote Spiritual Intimacy with Christ

First, to dine with Jesus we must get zealous about Him & Repent of any Spiritual **Neutrality**

v. 15 “**I know your works** that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

Spiritual *Neutrality* is when we say that it no longer matters that every part of our life come under Christ’s control. Remember I Corinthians 6:19-20:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

To dine with Jesus we must get zealous about Him & Repent of any Spiritual Neutrality.

Secondly, to dine with Jesus we must get dependent upon Him & Repent of any Spiritual **Self-Sufficiency**

v. 17a Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and **have need of nothing**’—

Another form of Spiritual *Self-Sufficiency* is when we stop seeking God’s will before our own in all the decisions of our lives. Christ is to be first in priority. Jesus is to be the greatest influence upon us.

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

To dine with Jesus we must get dependent upon Him & Repent of any Spiritual Self-

Sufficiency.

Third, to dine with Jesus we must get into His Word & Repent of any Spiritual ***Insensitivity***

v. 17b and **do not know that you are** wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Spiritual *Insensitivity* is becoming what James calls a “forgetful hearer” Look again at James 1:22 (NKJV):

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

To dine with Jesus we must get into His Word & Repent of any Spiritual Insensitivity.

Fourth, to dine with Jesus we must get Invested with Him & Repent of any Spiritual ***Wastefulness***

v. 18a **I counsel you** to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, **that you may be rich**;

Spiritual *Wastefulness* is when we ignore Christ’s words in Matthew 6:19-20 (NKJV)

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

To dine with Jesus we must get Invested with Him & Repent of any Spiritual Wastefulness.

Fifth, to dine with Jesus we must get Dressed His Way & Repent of any Spiritual ***Neglect***

v. 18b and white garments, **that you may be clothed**, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;

Spiritual *Neglect* is when we become more concerned with what we look like to men rather than to God. We impress people outwardly rather than pleasing God inwardly, as Paul explains in Romans 13:12 (NKJV):

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

To dine with Jesus we must get Dressed His Way & Repent of any Spiritual Neglect.

Sixth, to dine with Jesus we must Guard our Eyes & Repent of any Spiritual ***Blindness***

v. 18c and anoint your eyes with eye salve, **that you may see**.

Spiritual *Blindness* is when we begin to stumble along, acting more and more like lost people who do not know, can not see, and do not follow the Lord. Acts 26:18 says that Christ

opened our eyes at salvation, and now we can see.

To dine with Jesus we must Guard our Eyes & Repent of any Spiritual Blindness.

Finally, to dine with Jesus we must Hate sin & Repent of any Spiritual **Laxity**

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and **repent**.

Spiritual *Laxity* is when we forget He wants us walking in the light, seeing our sin as He does and immediately seeking His cleansing as we repent and forsake all sin. Jesus hates it when we hide and cover for our sins, instead of confessing and forsaking them. Listen to Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Revelation 3:20 should be burned into our minds as a picture of Christ's standing outside the house and seeking (not demanding) admission by knocking at the front door.

Jesus Waits for You Every Day

When Jesus said "if anyone hears my voice" it mean that, not only does He knock at the door, but he also calls out, requesting admission: and then stands outside waiting.

Christ standing, pleading, and at the door of a human heart is the unique new fact that Christianity brought into this world: that God is the seeker of men.

No human religion has the vision of a seeking God. The distinctive difference of Christianity is seen in, "Man not seeking God, but God taking the initiative in seeking man."

Holman Hunt was right when in his famous picture *The Light of the World* he painted the door of the human heart with no handle on the outside, for it can be opened only from within.

Christ pleads and offers; but it is all to no avail if we will not open the door.

This is the picture of Christ we have in Revelation.

He stands at the door and knocks. He will not crash the door.

Regardless of what some extremists say on this matter of election, the Lord Jesus has moved heaven and hell to get to the door of your heart, but when He gets there, He will stop and knock. You will have to open the door to let Him in.¹²³

Lost Sinner: have you said yes to Jesus, and been saved?

Saved Believer: how many days this past month have you opened the door to Christ by opening His Word and spent time in fellowship with the greatest One of all?

¹²³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Re 3:19–22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus Describes Overcomers as Possessing Life the Way God Designed It to Be

Revelation 3:21-22

One¹²⁴ of the things I love about the Lord is that He always saves the best for last. Unlike the world whose joys run out and fade, God's path that shines brighter each day we walk it (Pr. 4:18).

Just like when Jesus turned the water into wine, all the guests said that the best had been saved for the last. Just like the promise to those who stay close to the Lord in Psalm 92, our God is the God who gives better and better joys so that those at the end surpass all others. As we turn to Rev. 3:21-22 we find that once again, our God has saved the best for last.

Jesus ends His letters to the churches in these two verses; and there again He states an incredible, "best for last" promise. The promise is given to those He calls overcomers. Overcomers possess the life that God designed to belong to His children.

The promise in v. 21 is part of a string of seven precious promises, all to overcomers, and all at the end of each letter. Each of us in Christ are reminded about what God has designed for us: real life, life that way God designed it to be.

As we look at v. 21 the most obvious question must be: "who exactly are these overcomers?" In each of the six other letters (cf. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) this promise is given to all true believers. It is not a promise to a special class of super-Christians, who attain a higher level of life; but as John has previously told us: it is a promise to all of us in Christ.

All True Believers Are Overcomers

Listen to the Apostle John as he wrote to the early church:

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has **overcome** the world—our faith. ⁵Who is he who **overcomes** the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5, NKJV).

All Christians, and every true believer is an overcomer. In Christ, by God's grace and power, we all have overcome the destroying, enslaving power of the world's evil system. Paul

¹²⁴ 120129AM CLW-35 Overcome.doc

explained overcomers in Romans 12 as those who resist the world.

Romans 12:21 (NKJV) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Truly regenerated overcomers, are given seven precious promises: the privilege of eating from the tree of life (2:7), the crown of life (2:10), protection from the second death (2:11), the hidden manna (2:17), a white stone with a new name written on it (2:17), authority to rule the nations (2:26–27), the morning star (2:28), white garments, symbolizing purity and holiness (3:5), the honor of having Christ confess their names before God the Father and the holy angels in heaven (3:5), to be made a pillar in God’s temple (3:12), and to have written on them the name of God, of the new Jerusalem, and of Christ (3:12).

Jesus summarizes what He had already promised us, that is captured in His words written down in the Gospel by John. Do you remember how often Jesus talked about “Life the Way God Designed it to Be”?

Overcomers Possess Life the Way God Designed It to Be

For a moment go back with me and listen to Jesus as He spoke in the Gospel by John about real life. The lost who heard Him and did not receive Him, never understood or experienced life as Jesus described it, and God designed it.

Here is what eternal, endless, abundant life from above looks like in Christ's words:

- John 1:43: A Life of Following Christ
- John 3:36: A Life of Presently Possessing Eternal Life
- John 4:13-14: A Life that Never runs dry or Goes empty
- John 5:24: A Life that Never has to Fear a Bad Ending
- John 6:57: A Life that Feeds on Christ
- John 7:38: A Life that Becomes a Mighty Fountain of Endless Life
- John 8:12, 36: A Life Never trapped in Darkness, but Freed
- John 10:10, 28: A Life Abundant & Secure

So Jesus clearly states that He has come to give the life that God designed for us, that we turned from in Adam, and that He would purchase for us on the Cross. That endless, abundant life is what all who come simply by faith can have endlessly at this moment.

Please listen to the final words, of the final letter to the seven churches. It contains an amazing promise that is also applied by Jesus to each of us to hear and respond to this morning.

Revelation 3:21-22 (NKJV) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

The last message Jesus has for us this morning is His wonderful plan. He has spelled out what He wants us to be like. He has detailed how He by His grace will enable us to live! This

morning Jesus is here.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to give so much. Have you received what Jesus came to give every one of His own born again children? There are seven wonderful promises we have as Christ's children, they are in these two chapters of Christ's personal epistles to His church. They are:

True Believers-1:

Get An Abundant Life, Like God Designed It To Be

Revelation 2:7 (NKJV) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Endless Life: We have the infinite life in paradise, lost in the Garden, regained by faith in Christ's sacrifice for our sins. John 3:16 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Overflowing Life: A Life that overflows our inner being. John 7:38 (NKJV) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

An Abundant Life: The extraordinary life that only God gives. John 10:10 (NKJV) The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

["abundantly" is translated from *perissos*: exceeding some number or measure or rank or need, over and above, more than is necessary, superadded, exceeding abundantly, supremely something further, more, much more than all, more plainly, superior, extraordinary, surpassing, uncommon, pre-eminence, superiority, advantage, more eminent, more remarkable, more excellent]

True Believers-2:

Possess An Indestructible Life

Revelation 2:11 (NKJV) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

We are secure from any physical adversary. John 10:28-29 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. (NKJV)

We are secure from any spiritual adversary: Romans 8:38-39 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of

eternal life. (NKJV)

True Believers-5:

True Believers Receive A Completely Secure Life

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Note a three-fold promise. God gives true believers the best possible security, a triple-layered promise. WE have Christ as Our Garment, Our Advocate and Our Relative:

First, we are given Christ as our garment! v. 5a “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;

Romans 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to [fulfill] the lusts [thereof]. (KJV)

WHITE REPRESENTS CELESTIAL LIFE: “White” is always the color of Heaven. The redeemed of the Great Tribulation are seen wearing robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), then we join them arrayed in white robes (19:14), following our Savior on a white horse; and finally He is seated as Judge of the Universe on the great white throne (20:11). Count Nikolaus Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) sang of this celestial joy and promise in his great hymn: Jesus Thy Blood & Righteousness:

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are my glorious dress:
‘Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in thy great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am--
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame

Lord, I believe thy precious blood--
Which at the mercy seat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead--
For me, e’en for my soul, was shed.

Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all, a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.

Second, we are promised Christ as our advocate! v. 5b “He that overcometh, and I will

not blot out his name out of the book of life,

Hebrews 7:24-25 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (NKJV)

Kept in the book means a secure salvation. Can you lose your salvation? No, clearly this passage agrees with the rest of God's Word, and says no! In Sardis the King could blot a citizen out of the registry of citizens if he did not like them. But not in Kingdom of God. We will never be blotted out is what Jesus promises.

Jesus promises He is now our relative! v. 5c but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Jesus promises we are adopted: Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. (NKJV)

Jesus promises we will be confessed: Revelation 3:5 “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

What an unbelievable promise! Jesus with His nail scarred hands outstretched, welcomes us through the door of death, walks with us through the dark valley and welcomes us to Glory. But not as the fluttering host that slips away, no, He walks by us down the golden streets. He leads us up the broad main street beside the River of the water of life. All around us the saints of all the ages look on in wonder as again Jesus leads one of His precious blood bought brothers and sisters, up to meet their Father in Heaven.

Then, on the Throne in blazing light, with a river of fire flowing out before Him, and billions of angels standing around Him: the Ancient of Days looks upon His Beloved Son walking toward Him.

And there, holding the hand of Jesus, we hear Him call us by our new name, the one He gave us, our name; and standing there before the throne, God will hear Jesus present us by name as His beloved and precious one.

Jesus promises we will be clothed. Then what indescribable joy to hear our Father say, “Bring the best robe and put it on him.” Think of it, a robe of white, bright as the day, pure as the light! When the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount, something happened not only to His countenance, something happened also to His clothes. His raiment became white as the light. What a reward for faithfulness, to have a robe like that draped around the shoulders and to be invited to walk the shining ways of glory in light transfigured clothes. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

True Believers-6:

Get To Enjoy The Wonders of The Ultimate Destination Trip

Revelation 3:12 (NKJV) He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and

he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.

There are some incredible elements that stand out in our Heavenly destination with Christ. To the earthquake wary citizens of Philadelphia, weak and insecure at time, Jesus makes five indescribable promises:

1. I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, **that means permanence**
2. and he shall go out no more. **that means tranquility**
3. And I will write on him the name of My God **that means eternity**
4. and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. **that means security**
5. And I will write on him My new name. **that means personal access**

True believers are promised permanence: because we are pillars; and tranquility: because we are secure:

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if [it were] not [so,] I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And 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. (NKJV)

Lost your treasures on earth to disasters, lost your loves ones to death, lost your dreams to unexpected changes? Jesus says, the best is yet to come.

True believers are promised eternity, security, and access. God writes His Name on us. He signs us as belonging to Him, we have a new name, we are special to Him. We are a love gift from the Father to the Son!

John 17:24 "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (NKJV)

TRUE BELIEVERS-7: EXPERIENCE GENUINE INTIMACY WITH GOD

Revelation 3:21 (NKJV) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Jesus promises that we will get to enjoy true intimacy with our God. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (NKJV)

Jesus explains to us that intimacy is a person. John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (NKJV)

Jesus assures us that intimacy is permanent. Revelation 21:7 "He who overcomes shall

inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (NKJV)

Jesus Saved the Best for Last

Jesus ends His letters to the churches in these two verses; and there again He states an incredible, “best for last” promise. The promise is given to those He calls overcomers. Overcomers possess the life that God designed to belong to His children.

Truly regenerated overcomers, are given seven precious promises: the privilege of eating from the tree of life (2:7), the crown of life (2:10), protection from the second death (2:11), the hidden manna (2:17), a white stone with a new name written on it (2:17), authority to rule the nations (2:26–27), the morning star (2:28), white garments, symbolizing purity and holiness (3:5), the honor of having Christ confess their names before God the Father and the holy angels in heaven (3:5), to be made a pillar in God’s temple (3:12), and to have written on them the name of God, of the new Jerusalem, and of Christ (3:12).

Who is an overcomer? *You are, if you are:*

A person who has *trusted Christ* to overcome the penalty of sin at the cross.

If you, each day are *seeing God* help you overcome the power of sin

Is that you?

If not yet, why not open the door of your life to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

But, the handle of salvation is on your side lost friend.

Christ's Question to Us: Do You See Yourself in the Picture of the Seven Churches?

Revelation 1-3

Today¹²⁵ we are looking back at where we've been. Much like getting home from a trip and spending time looking at the pictures that you took while traveling.

We have invested the past year, looking at the only part of God's Word dictated by Christ, for the express purpose of: being sent to His Church, being read by His Church, and being obeyed by His Church.

There is no part of the Bible so clear, so personal, and so direct: as these three chapters. What exactly did we find in Revelation? We found that:

Christ Actually Posted a Picture

Jesus has posted a picture in the "ultimate FaceBook" of: His Word.

His family and friends are all who claim to be believers in Him.

The responses to His posting will determine who are "really" His Family (those who are related to Him by the new birth); and who are just "friends" (those who are not related by birth, but act like they are, and talk about Him). So this passage helps us differentiate between the two groups.

- **Christ's Genuine Family:** those who personally and actually know Him, and are related to Him by the new birth. Jesus calls this group those who "do His will" (Mat. 7:24-25).
- **Those who are just online "friends":** those who don't personally know Him; but only know Him from pictures and second hand info from others who talk about Him. Jesus calls this group those who "call Him Lord, Lord, but won't do His will" (Mat. 7:24-25).

Back to the picture. These three chapters are unlike any others.

The posting Jesus made 2,000 years ago is a picture of Him, walking through His Church. It is a panoramic shot of all the ages of His Church:

- From ***Pentecost when the Church was born***, through all the ages of trials, triumphs, and tribulations;

¹²⁵ 120205AM CLW-36 Picture.doc

and

- All the way up to the ***Rapture when He takes the Church out of the world*** so that He can resume His plan for His Chosen People of Promise, the Jews.

Revelation, doesn't make sense unless you understand that the turning point in the Book is: the absence of the Church on Earth, from chapter 4 onward.

That is why the Church is challenged to read these words, and promised a special blessing if they do so. The last book of the Bible makes all the other books fit.

There are so many parts of the Old Testament that don't seem to make sense. The Scriptures very plainly talk of a:

- Long lasting earthly kingdom;
- With Jesus ruling over a time of global peace;
- A time of universal prosperity on this place we call Earth;
- A time of world-wide admiration for the nation of Israel.

That seems like Jewish mythology, or a children's fairy-tale, but not like anything possible. Because there are hundreds of verses across a dozen books of Scripture that say those strange things to our ears, it makes many conclude they can't mean what they say.

The vast majority of Christ's Church for centuries have concluded that much of what is written by the Old Testament prophets: is enigmatic, strange-sounding, and best left alone, or re-interpreted to mean something much different than what they said. But, the truth of Revelation 1-3 is that:

Revelation is the Simplest Book

The Book of Revelation is one of the simplest books of the Bible to understand: if you believe what the rest of the Bible has already said.

Revelation just shows God carrying out all the promises He has already made in the Old and New Testaments.

A simple plan unfolds across the pages of this final inspired book of God's Scriptures, His personal, written revelation to His people. Here is an outline you need to remember. This is what God sent as a gift to every member of Christ's Church:

- Revelation 1-3 portrays ***Christ on Earth with His Church.***
- Revelation 4-5 portrays ***Christ in Heaven with His Church.***
- Revelation 6-19 portrays ***Christ working with Israel on Earth.***
- Revelation 20 portrays ***Christ setting up the Kingdom He promised:*** to Abraham's physical descendants, for the purpose of fulfilling all the vast number of promises God made in His Word, to Israel.
- Revelation 21-22 portrays ***Christ inviting all the redeemed, of all the ages, to join Him*** living the banquet of delight consistently promised from Genesis through Revelation, in a city called Heaven & New Jerusalem that merges the Old Testament and New Testament people of God into ONE family

of God.

That is the plan God has, that He wrote about, and that He gave to us.

That plan is simple and wonderful, and that plan is ours from God.

In Revelation 1-3, Jesus sent us a message, He posted a picture of His church and tags those in the picture who please Him, and tags those who don't. The key is the challenge:

Who Can Hear His Voice

Jesus attached a simple challenge: "If you hear what I am saying DO something about it." This portrays an element of salvation: true believers hear and respond to Christ's voice.

Remember back in the Gospel by John? Jesus said in John 10, that there are only two types of people: His sheep and the sheep that are not His. The key that differentiates the two groups is in their hearing.

Jesus said: My sheep hear my voice, I know them, they FOLLOW Me. Simple. Jesus made everything complexingly-simple. Simple statements. Simple truths. Complex results.

So where do you see yourself in the picture? Believers hear Christ's voice and respond to what He shows them.

First, has Christ been crowded out of first place in your life?

*Revelation 2:1,4-5 (NKJV) "To the angel of **the church of Ephesus** write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you**, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—**unless you repent**.*

Their hearts got slowly filled with other things so that Jesus no longer held the position of first place in their hearts, in their schedules, in their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer their supreme love.

Believers respond by repenting of anything that constricts the priority of Christ's supremacy in their heart and life.

Second, have you started to fear persecution?

*Revelation 2:8,10 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 10 **Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer**. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Believers respond by repenting of **any fear in their heart**.

Third, are you slacking off in resisting the worldliness Christ

hates?

*Revelation 2:12,14,16 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 14 **But I have a few things against you**, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 16 **Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.***

They have the symptoms of friendship with the world, and had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike.

Believers respond by repenting of any friendship with the world that displeases God, and instead seek to draw near to God.

Fourth, have you forgotten to fear Christ's chastening?

*Revelation 2:18, 20-24 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 20 **Nevertheless I have a few things against you**, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 **And I gave her time to repent** of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 **Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed**, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 **I will kill her children with death**, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. **And I will give to each one of you according to your works.***

They were tolerating sinful teachers and wicked teachings, and had allowed the infectious disease of false doctrines and practices to permeate Christ's Body the Church.

Believers respond by repenting of listening to and following any false teachers or false teachings, and return to listening to and obeying God's Word instead.

Fifth, are you examining yourself (I Cor. 13:5) to see if you're really saved?

*Revelation 3:1-3 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "**I know your works**, that you have a name that you are alive, **but you are dead**. 2 **Be watchful**, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.*

They appeared dead at the moment, and no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

Believers respond by repenting of just going through the motions of acting like

Christians, and instead remind themselves to allow His powerful grace to work within them.

Sixth, are you seeking to please Christ each day in every part of your life?

*Revelation 3:7-8, 11 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’”: 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.***

Jesus portrays the Philadelphians as normal believers, those who please Him as they: struggle through life, resisting the world, repenting of sin, exercising their calling, and avoiding the deadliness of unconfessed and forsaken sin.

Seventh, Materialistic Christians Can Become Spiritually Blinded & Distant from God

*Revelation 3:14-17, 19-20 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. **I could wish you were cold or hot.** 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. **Therefore be zealous and repent.** 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 dine with him, and he with Me.***

They had neglected what they needed for their spiritual souls. They were so distracted by their materialistic pursuits of pleasure, and had become so un-needing of Christ.

Believers respond by repenting of their apathy for Him and start sacrificially giving Him their attention.

Responding to Jesus Today

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday when He visited the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3, today as He visits us, and forever.

He still longs for our submission and participation in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, using His Word in our lives. Why not pause and in your hearts look up into the loving but very firm eyes of our Savior—and ponder His questions for them, and see how they apply to each of us.

Today, what are Christ’s eyes seeing here in our midst today?

Do we need to repent of letting Jesus get crowded out of first place in our time and

treasures like those in Ephesus?

Do we need to repent of getting on friendship terms with the world that God hates like those in Pergamos?

Is there false teaching and teachers we are tolerating that God's Word had already said are WRONG and we need to repent of our listening to and tolerating like those in Thyatira?

Are we just going through the motions of church, devotions, and ministry? Do we need to repent of powerless prayers and ministry like those in Sardis?

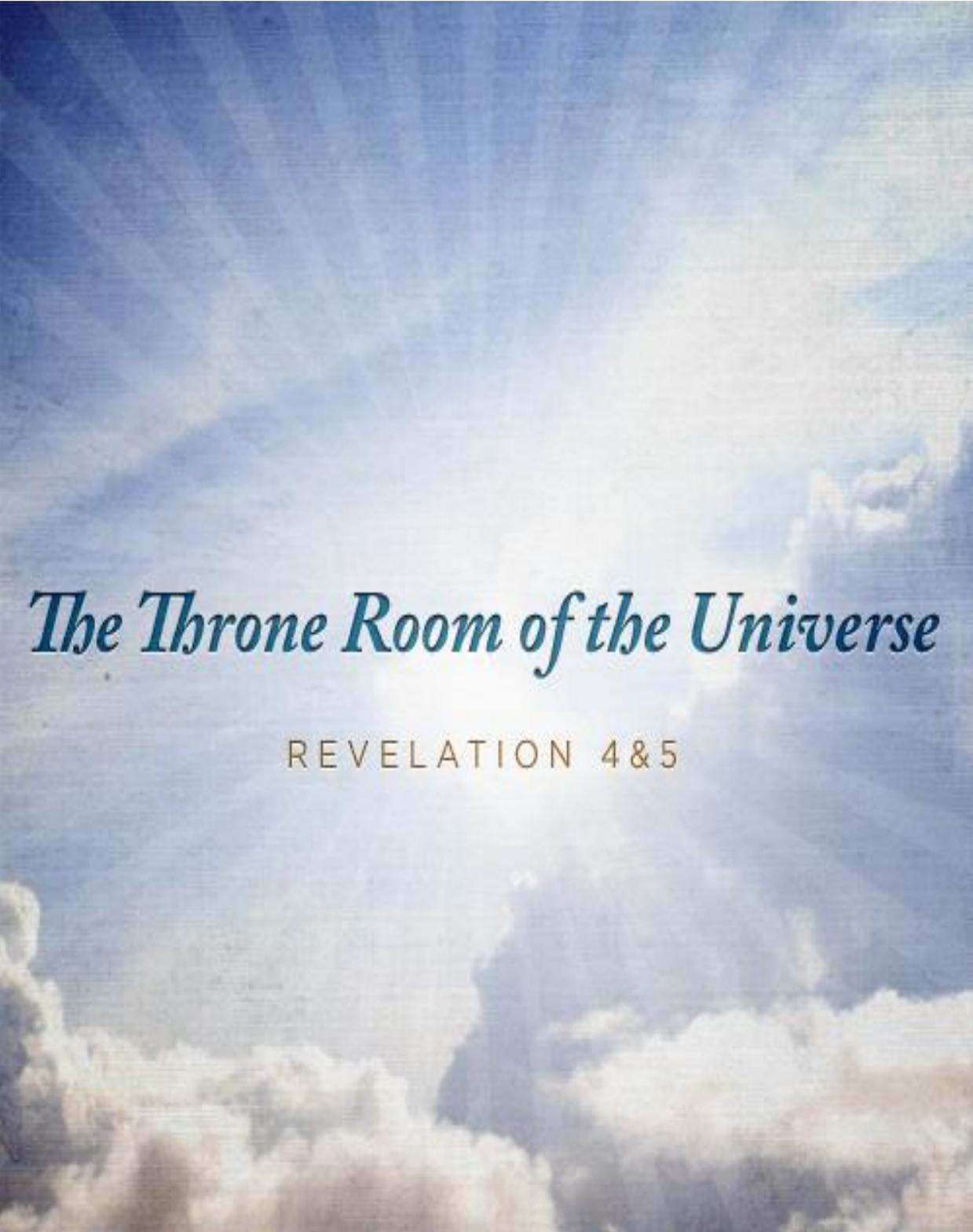
Do we need to repent of any apathy in our sacrificial seeking and serving of Christ like those in Laodicea?

Jesus is here and He is waiting for each of our responses today! When we sing the words of our first chorus during communion: ask Jesus to do what you are singing! Listen to the last stanza:

At the Name of Jesus by Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)

At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess Him King of glory now;
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call Him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

In your hearts *enthroned Him*;
there let Him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true;
Crown Him as your Captain in temptation's hour;
Let His will enfold you in its light and power.



The Throne Room of the Universe

REVELATION 4&5

Looking Through the Doorway of Heaven

Revelation 4

Heaven¹²⁶ is the word God uses for where we as believers are headed.

Heaven is mysterious to many; and a place of many fanciful speculations. But, God's Word has given us all He wants us to know about Heaven.

As we open to Revelation 4, we open to the first words of the only guided tour of Heaven found in God's Word. Note these opening words:

Revelation 4:1 (NKJV) After these things I looked, and behold, *a door standing open in heaven*. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, *a throne set in heaven*, and One sat on the throne.

Think of what we are witnessing as we begin this morning looking through:

The Door of Heaven: Standing Open

There have been many wonderful sights that people have been able to witness: the light from the first light bulb, the awesome sight at the launch of giant rockets into the sky, the glimpse of lost treasures in ancient tombs: but nothing anyone has ever seen compares to this. These next two chapters we will study in Revelation 4-5, starts with each of us given this sight, through the Apostle John's eyes: of the door to Heaven standing open.

As John is taken by the Spirit of God, from his exile, to see through that doorway, he finds himself transported to the Throne Room of the Universe. That is a profound truth. Heaven is where God sits enthroned. It is not just a place "somewhere", Heaven is THE place, made so by God being THERE. If you have ever wondered about Heaven, this is God's way of answering your questions. If we will listen, we will find all that He wants us to know about His Place, His Throne, and life in the Presence of God.

Just like we saw happening in Rev. 1:10, John is guided by the Spirit to hear the words of a loud voice that sounds like a trumpet. It must have been shocking to go from familiar scenes in Patmos, and of the seven churches: to the scenes of Revelation 4 & 5.

The glimpse of the Throne of God, dominated by hard to imagine numbers of angels, as well as sights and

¹²⁶ 120212AM TRU-1.doc

sounds that are so immense: boggles our minds. But that is what is seen through the open door.

1. Heaven is dominated by the Throne of God.
2. Heaven is what surrounds God and His worship.
3. Heaven is always described as God's presence and His Dominion; and with all the events of this world are all seen in perspective to God's Throne.

Jesus sent us Revelation as a reminder that:

Heaven is a Real Place Existing at This Moment

After "these things" (4:1), which summarizes the words and events of chapters 1-3: a new scene unfolds before John's eyes. Just as real as those early churches was the Throne of God: that towered over everything happening to John on Patmos. That is the message. Heaven is real.

The scenes of Revelation 1-3 are given on the island of Patmos, between Roman Asia (modern Turkey) and Greece. John was a prisoner of the Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 51-96) who ruled Rome from AD 81-96. God was on His Throne while John was exiled.

Domitian's father was Vespasian who is best known for building the Colosseum; and who ruled from AD 69-79, winning the Empire after Nero's suicide in AD 68. ***God was on His Throne while the Emperor Vespasian designed the Colosseum.***

Domitian's brother was Titus who ruled from AD 79-81; but is most remembered as the Roman General who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. ***So God was on His Throne while the Emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and a million Jews in AD 70.***

Domitian persecuted the church by allowing provincial purges of churches and believers, but not on an Empire wide basis, just here and there. He banished the last living disciple of Christ, the Apostle John, to Patmos. John had been living and pastoring in Ephesus when he was imprisoned on Patmos, and after Domitian's death in AD 96, John returned back to live his last days in Ephesus. ***God was on His Throne while the Emperor Domitian exiled John to Patmos.***

The vision of Christ (Rev. 1) and the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2 & 3) are literal events, with letters to historic places that are still identifiable today by their geographic ruins.

The sights and sounds of Revelation 4 & 5 are equally real, literal, and John is presented with the fact that while the Romans were doing their thing on Earth, above all the Emperors, soldiers, persecutions, and life's many details: God was ruling the Universe, seated on the

Throne, and the perfect symphony of adoring worship was playing distinctly in God's presence.

Why Does God Give Us This Sight of Heaven?

We can't enter the hallowed ground of Heaven, captured in Revelation 4 & 5, without first reminding ourselves why God sent us these truths.

All of the words packaged in the 404 verses, spread across the 22 chapters of Revelation: are dominated by the opening words of Revelation 1:1-3.

Turn back and look again at what God said. I want to underline three phrases in that opening God wrote. Each are simple and life-changing if you really let it sink in, what God said. Here are the two phrases.

Please read these three verses aloud with me in unison:

Revelation 1:1-3 (NKJV) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, which God gave Him to show His servants— things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and *keep those things* which are written in it; for the time is near.

Note that this book we are reading is not merely the "Book of Revelation". This last book of the Bible is the book of "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". It isn't just a book of revelation, it is specifically showing, or revealing, or literally unveiling: Jesus Christ.

The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

So, this is the Revelation of Jesus Christ we are opening, above all else.

Whether you agree with Dispensational Eschatology, Biblical Prophecy, and the End Times events, or not: That really doesn't matter.

This book is intended to be **supremely** about Jesus Christ.

No other book of the Bible claims to be that. Every word, event, and every teaching in this book is tied to Christ, and **supremely reveals something about Him**.

Let me repeat: no other book in the Bible is like this one.

No other book is declared by God to be the full unveiling of Christ.

No other book is given completely as a book about Him.

This last book is unique, and very transformational to our lives.

This book is what God wants us to think about Jesus Christ in our every day lives.

This is the picture of Him that we need to always keep before us.

This is the **Revelation of Jesus Christ**: who He is today, and everything He is planning to do from today until we get to join Him forever.

Secondly, look in the middle of verse three. There is a second phrase that can slip right

by us if we aren't careful. Those words are the frame for all our studies in this book.

The Responsibility of Every Believer

Revelation contains a final and complete statement of what every believer needs to know and do to get blessed by God. These words before us in this book are so important that God says: above and beyond all the promises already attached to my Word, here is a bonus.

Look at what God Himself says in v. 3:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

If you want to know why Revelation is the most important book to the daily life of any believer: here is why.

Do you see the words in bold, larger print? That is the message many of God's people have missed. There is an inexpressible blessing from God offered.

The blessing is upon those who take the time to read, hear, and DO what God has told them. This book contains what God calls "things" that constitute His desire for His servants. That's us. We are saved to be God's servants who DO what he asks, desires, and commands us to do.

What does God want us to do with the truths of this revelation of Christ, and the clear responsibilities for us as believers? One word sums up His desire: KEEP.

The Greek word God chose to use here is one of the key words that describes the life of following Christ in the New Testament. The word is **tereo** which means to "watch over, protect, guard". God tells us that:

Believers Guard the Truths of God's Word

In the New Testament every positive use of this word speaks of a believers relationship to God's expressed desires in His Word. This is the word from the Great Commission. Look at Matthew 28:18-20:

*Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV) And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to **observe** all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

Turn onward to one of the most intimate chapters John 14, where we find the promise of Heaven, and the comfort of Christ as the Way, Truth, and Life. Starting in verse 15, this is the same word Christ uses to define who are the real believers, His children, headed for eternal life. John 14:15, 21, 23-24:

*15 "If you love Me, **keep My commandments**. 21 He who has My commandments **and keeps them**, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." 23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, **he will***

keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 **He who does not love Me does not keep My words**; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

This is the same word Paul used when he said at the end of his life that he had “kept” the faith (II Tim. 4:7).

This is the same word from James that says believers “keep” themselves from the corruption of the world (Jam. 1:27).

Finally, this is the same word John uses seven times in his epistle of I John, and that Jesus uses seven times in Revelation: both places as the description of true, obedient, blessed followers of Christ. For believers:

The Sign of Authenticity is Keeping Hold of the Truth

Starting in I John 2, look with me at the way believers hold onto, guard, and keep the truths of God.

*I John 2:3-5 (NKJV) 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we **keep His commandments**. 4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever **keeps His word**, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

*I John 3:22, 24 (NKJV) 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, **because we keep His commandments** and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. 24 Now he who **keeps His commandments** abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*

*I John 5:2-3, 18 (NKJV) 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and **keep His commandments**. 3 For this is the love of God, that we **keep His commandments**. And His commandments are not burdensome. 18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God **keeps himself**, and the wicked one does not touch him.*

*Jude 1:21 (NKJV) **keep yourselves in the love of God**, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

*Revelation 2:26 (NKJV) And he who overcomes, and **keeps My works until the end**, to him I will give power over the nations—*

*Revelation 3:10 (NKJV) Because you have **kept My command to persevere**, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Also Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7,9).*

What “truths” does this tiny glimpse into Revelation 4’s doorway into Heaven give us to hold onto and guard today, this week, and for the rest of our lives?

We can distill some simple truths from this chapter. Truths like those that kept the early saints through the gloomy days of persecution and prison; and that made them radiant even when they lost their health,

possessions, and freedoms.

What Truths Need Guarding Today?

Let me suggest Four Truths to Guard in Your heart and life:

Heaven is Real: that means, start planning on the best being yet ahead; and start believing that everything in this final book is really happening. **Heaven is Real!** Say that with me: Heaven is Real. Now say it again and emphasize that last word: **Heaven is REAL!**

God is on the Throne: that is true even if you are being persecuted like early believers, or are suffering at the hands of your enemies like John on Patmos, or struggling just to make it through one day at a time because life is so hard. **God is on the Throne!** Say that with me: **God is on the Throne.** Now say it again and emphasize that last word: **God is on the THRONE!**

I am His Servant: God saved me to be His servant-slave forever. That is what I am designed for, that is what makes me hum spiritually. All systems are calibrated in me to run best when in His service. That makes everything secondary to serving God. **I am His Servant.** Say that with me: **I am His Servant.**

Christ is My True Treasure: that means that the measure of what matters in life is Christ. For me, living is Christ. He is what is worth waiting for, sacrificing for, and living for. Say that with me: **Christ is My True Treasure.**

So, the door swings open, Heaven is right in front of John. God has sent us a message. We are seeing what the vast majority of all humans have never stopped to examine, understand, or even pay attention to. These truths are so important God says GUARD them, keep them, hold them close.

Repeat them one more time as we stand together.

Say these truths, and remember these truths.

Heaven is REAL!

God is on the THRONE!

I am His Servant.

Christ is My True Treasure.

Guard these things. Live these things.

The One Seated on the Throne

Revelation 4:2-3

God¹²⁷ wants us to orient every day of our lives to the truth that He is seated above each moment of our lives. Opening to Revelation 4 & 5 is much like remembering that the blazing stars of a cloudless night are always there, we just rarely see them. So, we must not let the rest of life distract us from the foundational truths that we must always remember as we open our hearts and minds to God's Word. Every moment of every day:

Heaven is Real. God is on THE Throne; and, we are His servants.

As we open to Revelation 4:2-3, we see not only The Throne central to Heaven, we also see: ***The One Seated on The Throne.***

The One Seated On The Throne

Every moment of life is lived before the eyes of God, **Seated** on His Throne.

No event of our life is missed by the One **Seated** there.

That is the message of the next sentence in this letter.

Please stand with me, and listen with me to the voice of God from His Word, speaking through John, as we together read together from the slide:

*Revelation 4:2-3 (NKJV) Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and **One sat on the throne.** 3 And **He who sat there** was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.*

The **Throne** is central to Heaven; but even more **The One Seated** on the Throne, is central to everything.

Every event in the world, every birth, death, disaster, war, social event, or secret meeting: unfolds before the eyes of That One **Seated on The Throne.**

Nothing is ever missed by the One **Seated** there.

That is the **viewfinder**, the **lens**, and the **frame** that God asks us to use: to understand all that happens in our life.

The very first time we see God explicitly showing us an event framed by The Throne is in

¹²⁷ 120219AM TRU-2 Throne.doc

I Kings 22:18-23. Please turn back there with me in your personal copy of God's Word.
As you turn there, we are seeking to learn how we can:

Hear From the One Seated on the Throne

On the way to this passage in the book of I Kings, do you know where that particular book of the Bible even is?

The Bible is our digital device that connects us to the voice of God.

It is the TV set that broadcasts to us the programming streamed right from God in Heaven.

God's Words come on only this channel, talking us through our lives on Earth. How well do you know the Book you are holding?

Do you know your computer, or phone better?

Do you know your cable channel, programming guide better?

Do you know your financial statements better?

Those are very valid questions we should each silently answer. Our personal grasp of the Word often reveals just where the priorities are in our spiritual growth.

How hard is it today, to find things in your personal copy of God's Word?

The reason why so many people today treasure their electronic world is because they have forced themselves to understand how to use it. They have invested so much time capturing ideas, photos, events, words, and basically life: and then learn how to send it out to online pages.

Their computer or smart phone is their gateway to return to that investment: to view, to download, to upload, and to communicate with others.

In a similar way is what God's Word can become in your life. The more time you invest in your personal copy of God's Word, the more you know it, and the more precious it becomes in your life's scheduled times.

The book you hold in your hands contains the ONLY way to be able to personally hear the voice of God speaking into your heart and life. Now to I Kings 22 as we begin:

Learning From The One Seated on the Throne

*I Kings 22:18-23 (NKJV) And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" ¹⁹ Then Micaiah said, "**Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.**" ²⁰ And the LORD said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. ²¹ Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade him.' ²² The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the LORD said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' ²³ Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and*

the LORD has declared disaster against you.”

This can be quite a strange sounding passage all by itself, detached from the rest of God's Word. But it is absolutely true and explanatory of what is going on before the Throne.

God's prophet named Micaiah, was allowed to see what happens 24/7 above us. God is watching over His Word. Everything God promised in the Bible: is going to happen. God is shaping the events of this world according to what is written in the Bible. God is actively involved in “watching over His Word to perform it” (Jer. 1:12, ESV).

Here is one amazing detail we learn from I Kings 22. The Universe is not out of control. God is in control. God sits enthroned and even the Devil and His demons have appointments, to show up and account for their actions.

Right after this Throne event, wicked King Ahab gets slain in battle, just like God's Word said he would: right down to the grisly detail of the blood in his chariot, lapped up by the dogs!

Now turn onward to an even more amazing passage. We get to look at the events of the Book of Job: explained by this frame, or viewfinder of The Throne.

As we look at Job's woes and troubles, understand that the events of our lives are carried out in front of the very same scene of God's power and worship before the Throne.

From Job 1-2, the lesson we will see is that we need to:

Trust the One Seated on the Throne

A quick synopsis of the 42 chapters of Job would be that: *“Each of us are part of something so much bigger than any of us could imagine”*. As believers we are allowed to see what can only be described as: **astounding**.

The Throne set in Heaven has been there, overshadowing all of human events since creation.

But, God is not just sitting there and watching us, like a game on TV.

God is always depicted as actively involved in the affairs of mankind: ruling and reigning, never out of touch, never out of control.

The Lord now shows us the scene around His Throne, during the life of Job (who lived most likely during the few hundred of years between Noah and Abraham).

This account was broadcast by God for us to see the big picture of the God we can trust. The One who is on that Throne: knows us and protects us; but also allows disastrous trials to help us get closer to Him.

The whole Book of Job is summed up from Job's perspective in Job 42:5-6. Follow along as I read what Job learned from all those troubles:

“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. ⁶ Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”

Job says I have heard all about you God. But now, after all these calamities, struggles, and losses: NOW I can really SEE You! That was the goal God had. He wanted Job to see that

The One on the Throne was the God to TRUST.

As we walk through the events of Job 1-2 (NKJV), note that there is the:

Big Picture-1:

The One Seated On The Throne Stays in Touch with Our Lives

Job 1:1-5 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. ² And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. ³ Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East. ⁴ And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

Truth For us #1: God was tracking with everything going on in Job's life.

Big Picture-2:

The One Seated On The Throne Regulates the Adversary Satan

Job 1:6-8 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. ⁷ And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." ⁸ Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

Truth For us #2: God prompted the Devil's attack against Job.

Job 1:9-12 So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" ¹² And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has *is* in your power; only do not lay a hand on his *person*." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Truth For us #3: **Satan wants to make God's servants dishonor their King on The Throne.** (Remember David's sin caused "the enemies" of the Lord to rejoice? That is what grieves our God, when we willfully sin against His grace offered to us in time of need. Job

doesn't do that.)

Big Picture-3: The One Seated On The Throne Allowed Job to Lose His Property and Children

Job 1:13-19 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; ¹⁴ and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ when the Sabeans raided *them* and took them away—indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

Truth For us #4: Satan can incite terrorists to rob and kill.

Job 1:16 While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

Truth For us #5: Satan can send down fire from the sky.

Job 1:17-19 While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" ¹⁸ While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

Truth For us #6: Satan can send tornadoes, and deadly weather.

Big Picture-4: The One Seated On The Throne Listens to the Cries of our Hearts

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the

LORD.”²² In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Truth For us #7: God was magnified by the cries of Job’s heart.

Big Picture-5: The One Seated On The Throne Allowed Job to Suffer Intensely Bad Times

Job 2:1-10 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.² And the LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.”³ Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.”⁴ So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.⁵ But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he *is* in your hand, but spare his life.”⁷ ***So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.***⁸ And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes.⁹ Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!”¹⁰ But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Truth For us #8: Bad things can happen to good people in order for them to glorify God.

Every day we live before the eyes of The One ***Seated*** on The Throne.

Each event that takes place is not missed by the One ***Seated*** there.

That is the frame that God asks us to use: to look at all of life.

As we turn to the New Testament we find that Jesus opens His ministry with His longest message, and explains that we are to:

Pray to the One Seated on The Throne

In Matthew 6 Jesus said, “in this manner pray”, and that “manner” starts with us looking up, and focusing upon God our Father: ***Who sits on The Throne of Heaven, as our King.***

Last summer we briefly looked at the Lord’s Prayer, but the truths contained in these about our relationship to God are much bigger than any of us often realize.

Starting in Matthew 6:9-13, note that Jesus asked us to always use that framework in our prayers. Remember? Listen again to His words about prayer. They are quite clear and

simple. We just need to learn to do what He asks us to do, and follow this pattern:

⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our ***Father in heaven,***

Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ ***Your kingdom come.***

Your will be done

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For ***Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*** Amen.

That is one sentence in Greek, made up of 73 individual Greek words, rendered into 70 English words. Note the Frame God's Throne is to become around each of our prayers:

1. When we address: "***Our Father in heaven***": we are talking to the God on ***The Throne***.
2. When we say to Him: "***Your kingdom come***": we are inviting the God on ***The Throne*** to rule over our life.
3. When we say to Him: "***Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever***": we are seeking for the God on ***The Throne*** to increase in our lives.

Kings have kingdoms. God is the King over all, and we are His subjects. kings,
Each time we pray, Jesus asks us to invite God's Rule over more and more of our daily lives.

Each time we pray, Jesus asks us to invite God to Rule each choice we make ("Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done").

That's why Jesus said, this is the way I want you to PRAY: so you orient your life toward The One Seated on the Throne!

The Father We all Need is the one Seated on the Throne of heaven

Revelation 4:2-3

As¹²⁸ we enter into Revelation 4 & 5 we must always remember that the best explanation of Scripture is Scripture. So to see the Throne of God most clearly we must see it through the lens of all the other times God chooses to show The Throne to us.

In one of the most well known scenes in the Old Testament, The Throne of Godⁱⁱ surrounds Isaiah's call.

Please turn with me to the scene of Isaiah 6, and notice it is representative of what we often see about God's Throne: it is High, it is Holy, and because of the smoke and quaking, it is almost Distant.

Like Moses describing the quaking, smoke-shrouded, thundering at Mt. Sinai: God on His Throne projects Holiness, and that the unholy are put on notice to be cautious.

Like Ezekiel and the fiery whirlwinds, and strange creatures surrounded by dual haloes, and completely covered with eyes: *God and His Throne are the place of absolute holiness, purity, reverence, and awe.*

As we open to Isaiah's visit to God's Throne, remember that:

God Showed to us the Holy Atmosphere Around His Throne

To sense what the presence of the One seated on the Throne is like, please **stand** with me and listen as I read Isaiah 6:1-7 (NKJV):

In the year that King Uzziah died, ***I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up,*** and the train of His *robe* filled the temple.

² ***Above it stood seraphim;*** each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;

The whole earth is full of His glory!"

⁴ And the ***posts of the door were shaken*** by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.⁵ So I said:

"Woe is me, for I am undone!

¹²⁸ 120226AM TRU-3 father.doc

Because I *am* a ***man of unclean lips***,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”

⁶Then ***one of the seraphim*** flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said:

“Behold, this has touched your lips;
Your iniquity is ***taken away***,
And your sin ***purged***.”

As we reflect upon Isaiah’s visit to God’s Throne, we find lesson number one:

God is Absolutely Holy Surrounded by: Flaming Holy Angels, Quakes, and Smoke

Our Holy God is surrounded by those who worship and minister in holiness.

So, Isaiah points us to the Holy Atmosphere of Heaven, surrounding our Holy God on the Throne. Note the three elements that reinforce this distance needed for reverence: smoke, quaking, and angelic creatures.

First, notice the smoke. Our God is a consuming fire, so, each time the Holy Throne of God comes down to be revealed to us as humans, there is this sight of the smoke from that consuming fire. This is like the smoke from a furnace, that Abraham saw when God made a covenant with him in Genesis 15:7-18. This is what the three million Israelites saw in Exodus 19, as Mt. Sinai was “completely in smoke” and the smoke rose like from a “burning furnace”, shooting skyward.

Second, notice the quaking. The whole temple shook as Isaiah saw the Lord in His glory in Isaiah 6:4 and heard the holiness of the Lord declared. At Mt. Sinai when the Lord came down to the top of the mountain to meet with Moses, the mountain quaked exceedingly (Ex. 19:18), as the Lord descended in fire.

Third, notice the amazing, angelic creatures. In Isaiah 6:2 we meet some of God’s creations we only see here. They are called Seraphim, which means the “burning ones”. They seem to be part of the Throne Team that are always associated with carry out God’s plans.

When Isaiah sees how Holy God truly is, the very first response is an awareness of how unholy he is. Like Abraham in Genesis 15, and the Israelites in Exodus 19, Isaiah is smitten at his personal un-holiness, and falls before the Lord asking for cleansing. In similar manner in the New Testament: when Peter saw the Deity of Christ displayed, he fell on his face and confessed his need of cleansing (Luke 5:8). So first we see:

The Big Picture: God is Absolutely Holy. From that flows for us:

The Personal Application: regular confession and cleansing is needed. Look at Isaiah

6:6-7, just as Isaiah needed to be purged so we must be. God has explained to us what He desires from us. We need to bow daily in reverence to God; and seek to be kept cleansed by Christ's work for us on the Cross.

Part of each of our constant responsibility is to be confessing our sins (I John 1:9), so that Christ can cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We are already forgiven once for all (Hebrews 10:12), but we are each in need of constant cleansing.

Next, as we look at Isaiah 6 and God's Throne, we see can see lesson number two:

God is Absolutely, All-Powerful Over Everything That is Anywhere

God shows us His absolute power reflected by the creatures He made to surround His Throne. Note the seraphim in v. 2.

Each of the angels we read about in God's Word have power that exceeds anything we understand.

There is so much we don't know about what else is in the Universe besides us humans; but what we do know is overwhelming, if you pause to think about it.

We are surrounded at all times by these and other supernatural creatures that dwarf us in every way. They are powerful, mobile, and intelligent: ***beyond anything we can comprehend.***

As far as we know the angelic creatures are indestructible, they can't be killed or destroyed.

They travel the universe effortless, with no spaceships.

They seemingly never rest or sleep, or even need to eat.

God on The Throne is the originator, the Creator of angels. God spoke and billions of angels appeared from nothing. So God is greater than anything He created.

Yet those angels He made from nothing have powers that exceed our comprehension.

There are the two types of angels revealed by God: the good angels and the rebel angels. So, it is very clear from the divisions of the angels that God doesn't tolerate any rebellion at all.

There are many orders of both good and bad angelic creatures. On the good side there are at least five orders of good, or holy, angels:

1. ***The Archangels:*** (Gabriel and Michael are named);
2. ***The Flames:*** there are seven angels that seem to always stand like flames of fire around God's Throne (Rev. 1:);
3. ***The Guardian:*** there was an anointed/covering cherub (Lucifer's, lit. "light", role before he fell to become Satan) in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14;
4. ***The Cherubim:*** found around God's Throne and other places (Genesis 4, Ezekiel 1,

Revelation);

5. **The Angels:** (by the billions it seems), all through the Scriptures).

Now remember again that these:

Angels Created by God Have Power that Exceeds our Comprehension

The power of the good angels is clear, but very little is told us about them. But when we look at the other side of the angel spectrum, several orders of bad, or unholy angels begin to test the limits of our minds as we see the scope of their powers.

There are possibly seven orders of evil angels:

1. **The Shining One:** or Lucifer, as Satan is called in Isaiah 14:12, is also called the ruler of this world (John 12:31), is the fallen formerly highest and most powerful of all the angels (Genesis 3, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28).
2. **The Destroyer:** this is a specific, named angel that is also referred to as the one sent from the Lord that brings death. “The **destroyer** was the same angel who had slain the firstborn of the Egyptians before Israel left Egypt (Ex. 12:23), who would kill 70,000 men because of David’s census (2 Sam. 24:15–16), and who, in response to the prayer of Isaiah and Hezekiah, would destroy the entire Assyrian army that was besieging Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:21).¹²⁹”
3. **The Horrible Monsters under The Destroyer—Abaddon:** these are the horrific creatures in the Abyss, awaiting their deployment into warfare during the Tribulation. Rev. 9:1-11 contains a chilling description of them.
4. **The Demons:** or also called “fallen” angels who seem to be the bulk of the 1/3 of the heavenly hosts who rebelled with Satan (Rev. 12:4). We find demons everywhere: from the lying spirit that got Ahab to go into battle and be killed, to the constant demon pests Christ deals with in the Gospels.
5. **The Doomed Angels:** these are described as evil angels chained by God, and imprisoned in the place called Tartarus (“prison” I Peter 3:19 is also called Tartarus in II Peter 2:4), awaiting final judgment (also Jude 1:6-7).
6. **The Nation Princes:** these are like the Prince of Persia, and the Prince of Greece that Daniel learned about in Daniel 10:13-20.
7. **The Others:** Paul describes what may be various other demonic orders of fallen angels, in Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV), where they are called: “principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly

¹²⁹ Quoted directly from: MacArthur, J. (1996). 1 Corinthians 10:10. Chicago: Moody Press.

places.”

Note Just The Destroyer

Just one angel, under God’s direct control, was able to kill every first born of Egyptians and their animals, in Egypt, on a single night in Exodus 12:23 (the angel is differentiated from God, and named the destroyer).

This angel is so powerful, God keeps him locked up in the “bottomless pit”, and looses him only for tasks like the death of the first born, and the slaying of 70,000 Israelites at David’s census (II Samuel 24).

Paul refers to this angel as the “destroyer” in I Corinthians 10:10; and the writer of Hebrews does so also in Hebrews 11:28.

Finally, John explains in Revelation 9:11 that this angel’s name is actually Destroyer (in Hebrew: Abaddon, and in Greek: Apollyon).

To know which was first born among humans and animals, to locate each of them in the darkness, and then to kill only them on the spot would have taken an army plus a database no one presently possesses even today.

The Big Picture: God is Absolutely Powerful.

The Personal Application: fear not and resist the powers of darkness. The battle is already won. Christ as triumphed. We are more than conquerors through Christ.

The sword of God’s Spirit is the Word. We need to believe it, memorize it, have it ready, and use it by quoting the truth we know when we are tempted, fearful, discouraged, and weary. Paul said: Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might! Put on the armor (Ephesians 6:10-13). Peter says: Resist the devil steadfastly (I Peter 5:9), and James adds: Satan will flee when resisted (James 4:7).

So, Isaiah shows us that the ***One seated on the Throne is Absolutely Holy***, and the creatures that surround Him remind us that our ***God on the Throne is absolutely powerful***.

As we turn to Matthew 5 now, in the New Testament, we find the third and final lesson about this One Seated upon the Throne of Heaven. Jesus explains that:

Our Father is The One Seated On The Throne

Jesus described His Father as the One seated on the Throne. Here in Matthew 5-6 Jesus introduces us to ten amazing characteristics or attributes of His Father, The One on The Throne:

1. In Matthew 5:16, ***The One on the Throne of Heaven is God the Father*** (as Jesus makes clear in v.34 “Heaven is God’s Throne”). v.16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify ***your Father in heaven***. v.34

- But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by *heaven, for it is God's throne*;
2. In Matthew 5:45, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: is Kind.*** v.45 that you may be sons of your ***Father in heaven***; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
 3. In Matthew 5:48, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: is Perfect.*** v.48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.
 4. In Matthew 6:1,3-4a, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: gives Rewards*** to those who give to the needy secretly, not for selfish gain¹³⁰. “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have ***no reward*** from your Father in heaven. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ ***that your charitable deed may be in secret***;
 5. In Matthew 6:4b,6, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: sees everything, hears prayers, and is everywhere present.*** “and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”.
 6. In Matthew 6:8, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: Knows our Needs.*** “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.
 7. In Matthew 6:9, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: is the One to Whom we Direct our Prayers.***In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
 8. In Matthew 6:14, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: Forgives Sins.***“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
 9. In Matthew 6:26-32, ***Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: Cares Deeply for Us.*** Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. He even knows each time a sparrow “falls” the Greek word actually is bigger than “falls” (as in “dies”) it can actually also be translated for “hops” along the ground”

¹³⁰ NKJV “charitable deeds” from the same word used 4 x is rendered in the ESV/NIV “give to the needy” and NAS “give alms”. This same characteristic is in Matthew 5:18.

(see also Matthew 10:29-32).

Each Hop or Every Bird

Next time you see one of those clouds of birds swirling, settling on a patch of grass, and all hopping around: remember that God is aware of each hop of each bird. Then look up and say wow. If the birds that exist for a couple of seasons, have each “hop” tracked by God: how much MORE does He care for YOU Jesus said (of little faith)?

He even counts the hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:32). Again that word doesn’t mean total count but more like inventory count, He knows the “serial number” for each one of our hairs individually.

Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: Cares Deeply for us.

In Matthew 6:33, Our Father on The Throne of Heaven: is the One we Seek to Serve as Master and King. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

How Should We Approach The One on The Throne?

Jesus explains how we approach the One on the Throne of Heaven, and it revolutionizes our prayers. First we come knowing in our hearts that He is Our Father.

He is Kind: we don’t have to fear.

He is Perfect: He needs no improvement at His job as Father.

He Gives Rewards: He wants to pour out His blessings upon us.

He Sees everything, Hears Prayers, and is everywhere present.

He Knows our Needs: even before we ask but has chosen that prayer is the way He works in us and through us.

He is the One we pray to.

He forgives sins: and knows how much we have failed Him, and will fail Him, and still forgives us endlessly.

He deeply cares for us: He is neither distant, nor detached. He bears long with us (Luke 18:1-8) as we persistently seek Him.

He is the Same One Seated on The Throne in Revelation 4

That is the Father we have sitting on that Throne.

So every day, we come before that God, described by Jesus as filled with a perfect love;

and with a caring, fatherly concern; and with complete interest and awareness.

To that One on the Throne: Jesus said come to Him asking for His guidance, will, and provision. He promises that “no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

The most amazing thing about God is that He gives us immense latitude.

He is absolutely powerful and holy. He clearly tells us what He wants;

then He completely gives us all the resources to accomplish what He wants;

and then He waits.

God doesn't force what He wants, to take place in our lives as believers. He allows us to choose to obey or disobey.

What Happens When We Worship: The Sounds & Sights Around The Throne Of Our Awesome God

Revelation 4/Ezekiel 1

Most¹³¹ of our lives are dominated by the physical world: our health, the weather, our family, our car, our job, etc. The Holy Scriptures each of us hold, were designed to **transport our minds away from** our physically-dominated-world that is easiest for us to see and feel; and to **transport our minds onto** the spiritually-dominated world of God's Throne.

Paul explained this process that God uses to the Colossians when he taught them to: "Set your affections on things above" (Col. 3:1). Paul was telling them that they still had to live out their life in the Roman Empire (most of them were stuck for life as slaves). But, they could live life on earth in a transformed way when they learned to focus their mind and heart on "things above".

We are actually spending our time together learning about the "things above" in Heaven: The Throne Room of the Universe. God's Throne is central to all things above. The more we understand about what is going on this very moment at The Throne of God, the more we stay in step with God's plans for us while we live in this world.

God's Word explains for us in great detail: The Sounds and Sights around the Throne of our Awesome God. Today, that Throne Room of God is the place:

Where our Worship Arrives

While we are gathered here with the songs of worship to our God in Heaven still reverberating in our hearts from the first part of our gathering: something is happening up there, in the place we have directed our worship.

What we are doing.

What we sang and all of our thoughts.

Each word of our prayers, and the gifts we just gave in the offering:

Each of those actions, that originated in our redeemed hearts and minds, rises above us, rises out of this place on South Drake Road: and arrives before The Throne of God's presence.

Do you realize how much of what you do today, on the Lord's Day, matters to the Lord

¹³¹ 120304AM TRU-4 now.do

God Almighty, seated on The Throne?

To help us understand more about the impact of our lives, look with me at:

What Happens in Heaven

As we just sang, as we gave, and while we worshipped: what was happening at that very moment in Heaven?

Often we think of **Heaven in the past** (when Christ left for earth and the angels came to announce His birth).

Or we think of **Heaven in the future** (when Jesus comes breaking through the clouds at the front of all the saints and armies of Heaven as King of Kings).

But do we often enough stop and focus upon **Heaven Now**: what is happening at this very moment?

While we are gathered here, above us at the epicenter of the Universe, at the Throne Room of God: it is literally pulsating with activity. So what is going on right now up there?

God's Word can take us by angel wings to see the very center of the Universe, to the Throne of God in Heaven. A few moments there will get us in touch with what God is doing right now; and how we can: TODAY, be in tune with Heaven.

God must have wanted us to notice what He is doing because of the way He describes it:

Heaven is Always Presented in Glorious Technicolor & Surround-Sound

For some reason God decided to include not a black & white picture of Heaven: rather He has given us several full color video clips. This is our third clip we will watch today, the others were the Job 1 Throne Clip and the Isaiah 6 Throne Clip.

The colors of Heaven are vibrant. Everything seems to be alive with texture, depth: and shades of colors we can only imagine.

The size of the sights and sounds are immense: beyond what we can figure out how to fully understand them. But to help us get started, God uses colors and materials from our world to paint in our minds eye: the world to come.

Some of the most frequent descriptions of Heaven would be: the sight of fire, and the sound of thunder, flashes of lightning, and the sparkle of gold, crystal, and precious stones.

God is really into celestial beauty, and He shares it with us. First notice that our primary source, Revelation 4, describes for us:

The Scenes of Heaven Around the Throne

First we need to base every bit of our study of Heaven: to the text that God wrote in the Scriptures. If we just work with His Word it astounds us, even with no additions, it is beyond

our wildest imaginations.

Note with me in Rev. 4, that there are five prepositional phrases used to capture the sights around the Throne. But we must examine Revelation 4 closely, to see these five.

The five descriptive, prepositional phrases we will find are:

On The Throne, around the Throne, from the Throne, before the Throne, and in the midst of the Throne.

Every possible word is used to help transport us to this place of wonder. Please stand with me, and read along with me as we see these phrases. Rev. 4:1-6 (NKJV):

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat **on the throne**. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 4 **Around the throne** were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 And **from the throne** proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning **before the throne**, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 **Before the throne** there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And **in the midst of the throne**, and **around the throne**, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

1. **We see The One on the Throne. v. 2-3 “ON the Throne”:** (epi) v. 9; 5:1. The Throne/God on the Throne (Dan. 7; Exod. 24; Ezk. 1)
2. **We are shown our special representatives Around the Throne. v.4 “AROUND the Throne”:** (kuklothen; 4x only in Rev.) 24 Elders are around the Throne in v.10-11; and in 5:14 they are falling down before the Throne.
3. **We witness some very mysterious happenings From the Throne. v.5a “From the Throne”:** (ek) from the Throne are “lightnings, thunderings, and voices”.
4. **We are reminded of the Scene Before the Throne. v.5b-6a “BEFORE the Throne”:** (enopion) before the Throne are the seven flames and the Sea of Glass.
5. **We are introduced to the Ones In the MIDST of the Throne. v.6b-9 “IN the MIDST of the Throne”:** (en mesos) are the four cherubim (Gen. 4; Ezekiel 1,10) and the Lamb (also 5:6).

Now, for a special, even closer look at the sights and sounds of Heaven, around God’s Throne we need to turn back to Ezekiel chapter 1.

In the early sixth century before Christ's birth¹³² an exiled Jewish priest, living in Iraq

¹³² 592-570BC

(ancient Babylon), named Ezekiel, wrote the words of chapter 1:1-28 (NKJV), which we call:

Ezekiel's Vision of Heaven

Ezekiel gets to see through the Door, that Stands open in Heaven only five times. Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:1 “Door of Heaven standing open”: God wanted us to see His glory as the people of Earth were facing great judgment (Ezk. 1; Rev. 4). The New Testament only records four other times that the Heavens opened:

1. At Christ's baptism (Mt. 3, Mk. 1, Lk. 3) to show God's delight in Christ's earthly life;
2. At Stephen's death as Christ stood (Acts 7) to shows God's tender concern at the death of His saints;
3. When the sheet was sent down for Peter (Acts 10) to show God's desire to open the way for the Gentiles coming to Christ; and
4. Finally here in Rev 4:1 to show God's Glory even at a time when sin is being judged.

God's Throne is Surrounded by Clouds of Raging Fires.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:4-6 ⁴Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. ⁶Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 1:7 “great cloud that every eye sees”, that is the same as the cloud in Ezekiel (Heb: ***awnan***). Theologians have defined this cloud as a “theophanic” cloud¹³³ which is a cloud that represents God's presence. We always we see a cloud surrounding God's coming at: the Exodus, the Tabernacle, and the Temple. It is also

¹³³ In 84 of the 88x this Hebrew word for cloud is used, it speaks of the Presence of God (the other 4 times are the rainbow at the flood). Ex. 13:21, 14:19 the cloud and pillar of fire; 14:24 the Lord is in the cloud and looks out; 19:16 cloud settles on Sinai as the Lord descends; 24:10-16 when elders invited to see God's Throne they went up into a cloud; 33:9 when God talked to Moses in the Tabernacle, a cloud came down; Lev 16:2 the Lord is in the cloud hovering over the mercy seat; Ps 97:2 clouds surround the Lord.

often used when God comes in judgment.

Amber: describes the color of gold + silver (electrum), and speaks of a polished glow.

The Ones that Surround God's Throne: Sparkle with the Light of His Glory.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:7-8 Their legs *were* straight, and the soles of their feet *were* like the soles of calves' feet. ***They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.***⁸ The hands of a man *were* under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 1:15 "Christ's feet sparkled like polished bronze": in the Old Testament this word "sparkled" (Ezk. 1:7) speaks of the foaming up of a drink (Pr.23:31); and the bursting forth of a bloom (when used outside Bible).

The Ones that Surround God's Throne: Flash like Lightning.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:13-17 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning.¹⁴ And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.¹⁵ Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.¹⁷ When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:5, 11:19 "lightnings proceeding from the Throne", and those angels that minister there are also like "beryl" (Dan. 10).

Beryl: describes the ocean blue-green color and is the word for the #10 stone of the HP and the #8 foundation stone of Heaven's city.

God's Throne is Surrounded by Highly Intelligent Beings, covered with eyes.

Ezekiel 1:18-19 As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their ***rims were full of eyes***, all around the four of them.¹⁹ When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels

were lifted up.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:8 as God is encircled by these angelic beings “full of eyes”.

The Throne of God is Surrounded by the Glistening of Crystal, Refracting the Light of His Glory.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:22 The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures ***was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.***

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:6, 21:11 as God sits before what is like a sea of “crystal”: Ex. 24:10. Job 37:22. The Hebrew ***kerach***, which generally denotes *ice*, doubtless here signifies *crystal*, and seems to denote that which was well cut and polished, vividly refracting the rays of light.

God’s Throne is Surrounded by the Sounds of Mighty Waters.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:24 When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, ***like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army;*** and when they stood still, they let down their wings.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 1:15, 14:2; 19:4-6 as the atmosphere around God is like “the sound of many waters”.

The Throne of God Sparkles, Like a Burning Fire.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:26-27 And above the firmament over their heads ***was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone;*** on the likeness of the throne ***was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.*** ²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, ***the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it;*** and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, ***the appearance of fire with brightness all around.***

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:2 “throne” like jasper¹³⁴ and sapphire; and Daniel 7:9 adds that The Throne is also burning like a fire, with a river of fire that flows before it.

Sapphire: in Ezk. 1:26 is dark blue like lapis lazuli with gold flecks (Job 28:6); in Ezekiel

¹³⁴ Jasper: this word 4x only in Revelation (hiaspis) and is described as “clear as crystal” (21:11); the #1 foundation stone of Heaven (21:19); and the #12 stone of the HP (Ex.28:20); is also what the walls of the city of New Jerusalem/Heaven are made of (Rev. 21:18) the city is made of gold that is “clear as glass”, but the walls are of jasper. Jasper can be often red, also green, yellow, or brown.

1:26 and 10:1 this is what the Throne looks like; this is the color seen in Ex. 24:10 before the Throne of God. It is also the color of the #5 stone of the HP (Ex. 28:18)

God's Throne is Surrounded by the Beauty of a Rainbow.

Look with me at what he saw and heard:

Ezekiel 1:28 ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. ***This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*** So when I saw *it*, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

That is exactly what we find in: Rev. 4:3 with an emerald green “rainbow” that encircles the One on The Throne.

God's Word explains for us in great detail: The Sounds and Sights around the Throne of our Awesome God. Today, that Throne Room of God is the place:

Where our Worship Arrives

God inhabits our praises, and our worship: and each time we offer Him worship, it rises before The Throne. Do you realize how much of what you do today, on the Lord's Day, matters to the Lord God Almighty, seated on The Throne?

Getting Ready Each Day To Stand At The Awesome Throne Of God

Romans 14:10

Awesome¹³⁵ has lost a bit of its meaning to us in the 21st Century. In the Bible, God is described as awesome, and when He is present there is such a sense of wonder: that it bordered on fear. This awesomeness was an overpowering sense of God's glory that could be felt.

Our God is An Awesome God

When Paul wrote from Corinth to the fledgling church at Rome, he sought some way that He might encourage them. They lived with all the daily load of life, plus the general excitement that came from being at the center of the world in that generation.

You've heard the modern version of the culture that Rome was in the First Century, summed up in the words: "All roads lead to Rome".

That was true, each Roman Road, built across the Empire, was part of a river of activity that flowed into the pulsating heart of the Empire: the city of Rome.

There was no grander place of building, no larger display of power, no more distracting place of fascination than in Rome. Every day something new arrived, either an army, or a caravan, or some breaking news of far off places and events. There were endless distractions that flowed down the roads that all led to Rome.

Today, via the Internet: all roads now can lead to us. There is hardly anything, going on anywhere: that isn't a click away. The river that flowed into Rome brought good and bad information.

Keep Focused by Battling Distraction

So Paul wanted to help these saints live their lives for Christ. After explaining the glorious doctrines of salvation (Romans 1-11), Paul says: "Since you are saved, live for Christ" which is the short version of Romans 12:1-2.

Then, a few chapters later in Romans 14:10, Paul says, guard what you do with your life, because we all have an appointment. Please look at Romans 14:10 with me.

That pathway of blessing comes only to those that obey Him. Jesus allows us to live as

¹³⁵ 120311AM TRU-5 Standing.do

we wish, but reminds us that the clock started running the instant we were saved, and someday, the tape will be replayed. Even in something as small as when a Christian brother disagrees with me, my response matters to God enough that I will answer to Him before the Throne. Romans 14:10 (NKJV):

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For **we shall all stand** before the judgment seat of Christ.

The destination each of us in Christ are heading is that Throne. We have an appointment that will either make us ashamed or confident, the choice is completely ours.

What remains of our life there someday, that glorified Him: is exactly what we did in our life here that glorified Him. It is that simple. You know what will await you at His Throne because it is what we are doing today.

Either my actions are pleasing or displeasing Him. Period. That is the test. We don't get to redo life when we get to Heaven and see what mattered to God, then it is too late. The blessings of God are tied to my getting focused on what matters to Him now.

How did Paul try to get the distracted Romans to get ready for their big appointment with God? He reminded them of the Throne. That is the same method Jesus uses here in His letter to us, the Book of Revelation.

Why Does God Put the Spotlight on The Throne?

A throne speaks of a king, and his authority and power to rule. Thus, The Throne of God speaks of Him as the Sovereign Majesty on High who Reigns over all, as the Supreme Ruler, King above all kings and Lord above any lords. As the King upon The Throne of the Universe, it is He who controls and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Because God's Throne is mentioned specifically, and clearly by name 39x in Revelation: if we want to understand how God rules, this book is vital. In all the rest of the Bible, the Throne of God is only mentioned by name 18x. So in terms of usage more than 68% of the times God's Word describes the Throne Room of the Universe it is in Revelation. And, almost half of the times the Throne is mentioned are in Revelation 4-5.

What Does God Want us to Feel?

Today, I want you to ponder with me what its like to come into the presence of God. We will see through the inspired eyes of the Scripture writers, as they look upon our Awesome and Majestic Lord Almighty.

As we read God's Word we enter into the Throne Room of the Universe and see the Majesty on High, The Almighty, The Ancient of Days in all of His glory.

As we see Him, with reverent hearts, may we bow before Him and worship Him as He is. Listen to the Holy Scriptures as they focus us upon the awesome splendor that awaits us

when we at last see Him as He is.

Our Awesome Destination in Heaven

I would like to read for you a collection of verses in chronological order from the Scriptures. For me, this is the most amazing description of where we are headed that I've ever found, and it is right out of God's Word:

Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty. (Job 37:22, ESV)

There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. (Exodus 24:10, ESV)

I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1-4, ESV)

The Ancient of Days took his seat; His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the court sat in judgment. (Daniel 7:9-10, ESV)

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (Matthew 17:2, ESV)

to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:5, ESV).

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. (1 Timothy 1:17, ESV)

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. (1 Timothy 6:15-16, ESV)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3, ESV)

for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:29, ESV)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

(Heb. 12:22-23, ESV)

to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 25 NIV)

One like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Revelation 1:13-16, ESV)

A throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 3 And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, 6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: (Revelation 4:2-6, ESV)

It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. (Revelation 21:11-23 NIV)

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13 NKJV)

So those Scriptures capture for us:

The Sights of Heaven

When we get to Heaven, we will see this same scene we have already seen through John's eyes in Revelation. His inspired words portray for us a scene of angels—hundreds of millions of angels—“ten thousand times ten thousand”—all clustered about the smooth crystal sea that reflects awesome images from its mirror like surface.

Our senses are besieged by so many different sensations. The colors of the materials surrounding God's Throne are beyond description.

The traditional description of the rainbow is that it is made up of seven colors - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Actually, the rainbow is a whole continuum of colors from red to violet and even beyond the colors that the eye can see.

Heaven is Astoundingly Beautiful

A cool, emerald-green hue dominates the multi-colored rainbow surrounding God's throne; the city that surrounds us has thick walls of sparkling diamonds. To get the sensation

hold up your diamond ring to a light and look through the stone and see dazzling flashes of light.

Multiply that by diamonds large enough to built walls out of and then an entire city that is over 1500 miles high; and looking down beneath your feet you see gold that is transparent so the overpowering radiance of God's glory can refract and glisten through the entire city; everything is made of gems of such beautiful colors that they send forth the light of God's glory.

These are the colors of Heaven, the colors God has chosen to surround Him. His Glory reflected in all these hues: sky-blue stones with translucent, colored stripes; parallel layers of red and white; orange-red to brownish-red to blood-red; a transparent, yellowish gold; light blue aquamarine; yellowish-green; apple-green gold-tinted green; deep blue; shining violet; and intense purple.

Heaven is Enormous

The size is astounding. With just an average platform area for each of us to stand on, just the angels would take up 38,000 square miles. Imagine God's Throne is here at Calvary on Drake and all the saints and angels standing in circles around that Throne. Do you know how big just the Throne area would be?

First, the city of New Jerusalem is 1,500 miles wide, long, and high. So, if we are at the center (under the Throne) this area we just read about, would extend to the entire 38,000 square miles of Michigan as the crystal sea. Then, around the Throne would be the city stretching 750 miles to NYC on the East; and 750 miles to Hudson's Bay in Canada on the North; and 750 miles all the way to Tulsa on the West; and 750 miles to down to Atlanta on the South! (2.7×10 to the seventh = square feet per mile; at 900 per person 1.2×10 to the ninth would be just under 40,000 square miles.)

That is an enormous area. AWESOME is the word!

But, no matter what the size may be, just the sight is hard for us to take in, so much beauty, color, and brilliance overwhelms our eyes. One by one our eyes are riveted on the celestial scene before us.

When we finally Stand Before The Throne

Above us and over the heads of the living creatures hangs an awesome sky—sparkling like ice, framing in a jewel-like setting, the emerald throne.

On the throne sits the One who has the appearance of glowing jasper and carnelian, and before Him “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne” (5:6).

All fall prostrate before him—the four great angels, the twenty-four elders, and the

millions around the sea—and most of all, us! And we sing with them:

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise! (5:12).

First: We'll See The Throne of God

First we see, central to Heaven, the Throne of God. Completely encircled by the emerald green rainbow that is over, around and beneath the Throne: we are overwhelmed by the massive rumble of power, as endless peals of thunder and flashes of lightning seem to radiate outward from within.

Revelation 4:5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of **fire were burning before the throne**, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Listening carefully we hear with John the loud voices like roaring waterfalls rolling past the seven blazing pillars of flame that burn in a circle around God's Throne. An exiled Jewish prophet named Daniel writes these words in chapter 7:9-10:

"I watched till thrones were put in place, **and the Ancient of Days was seated**; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. **His throne was a fiery flame**, Its wheels a burning fire; **A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him**. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. . ."

Second: We'll See The Sea of Glass

Next, the FLOOR if it can be called that, is an ocean of completely clear and reflective glass.

In this crystal sea we can see all the colors, lights and objects are reflected and amplified.

Revelation 4:6a **Before the throne** there was a **sea of glass**, like crystal.

Third: We'll See The Living-Burning Ones

Then the BURNING ONES, that is what seraphim means, and the LIVING ONES, that is what Cherubim means: capture our focus.

Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw **the Lord sitting on a throne**, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 **Above it** stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And **one cried to another** and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole

earth is full of His glory

As our eyes turn to follow the four glistening living beings each with four distinct faces: lion, calf, man, eagle, and completely covered with eyes.

Revelation 4:6b-11 And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were **four living creatures** full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the **second living creature** like a calf, the **third living creature** had a face like a man, and the **fourth living creature** was like a flying eagle. 8 The **four living creatures**, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

They move like flashes of light with fire passing between them, gliding through the expanse around the Ancient of Days in theo-centric orbit always facing the Almighty One.

Fourth: We'll See The 24 Elders

Now as we watch, 24 ELDERS rise and fall, under the awesome expanse of space over the Throne that sparkles like pure on the crystal blue pavement as it is called in Exodus. Then we see a circle just beyond the burning pillars of fire, and the four living creatures that surrounds God's Throne--made up of 24 small thrones seated with white robed celestial men.

Revelation 4:9-11 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the **twenty-four elders** fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and **cast their crowns before the throne**, saying: 11 "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

Each man holds a harp, wears a crown, and holds a golden bowl. These golden bowls contain the worship offered by God's saints on Earth.

And repeatedly we see those twenty-four elders fall on their faces pouring out to the Lord, the collected worship of the saints as the hosts of Heaven loudly chant the Glory of God.

With the mighty sound of seraphim and cherubim wings, we hear the voices, thunders, and sounds of the entire Universe blending into one crystal clear affirmation:

Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.
(Revelation 4:8)

Fifth: We'll See The Countless Angels

Then, ANGELS capture our attention. These countless white robed angels standing like living walls of pure white robes rising in circular rings reflecting the light of God. They rise and fall to the sounds of the four creatures crisscrossing the expanse on the four corners of the

Throne. They move as one: falling down on their faces as they speak the wonders of God's Glory.

Revelation 5:11 Then I looked, and I heard **the voice of many angels around the throne**, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

Finally, at a special moment every angel and every elder and every saint falls prostrate before him—those four great angels, those twenty-four elders, the hundreds of millions around the sea—and most of all, us! And we all join together to say with them:

Revelation 5:12 Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise! (5:12)

Awesome.

In the Bible, God is described as awesome, and when He is present there is such a sense of wonder: that it bordered on fear.

This awesomeness was an overpowering sense of God's glory that could be felt.
Are we Getting Ready Each Day, to stand at the awesome Throne of God?

The Map Of The Future God Left In His Word

Revelation 1-22

God¹³⁶ wrote down an inspired record of the history of the world: from the time when John was sitting on Patmos in AD 95, right up to the very end of days. That is what you are holding in your hands this morning.

The online world mourned for a few moments this week, the passing of another icon from the former, pre-cyber world of the past. After 244 years of publication, the Encyclopedia Britannica will no longer be printed on paper. Thus ended the longest published record of civilization's knowledge.

The byline of that monumental compendium of knowledge, are these words: ***facts matter.***

Facts matter even more to God. Today, the facts about what God has said, describing the future of every person in the world, are crucial. The facts that God has given to us are quite clear. The ability to precisely tell the future is part of God's uniquely Divine identity. First we know that:

God Always Gives the Facts

Do you remember a few weeks ago when we looked at how we know the Bible is true? Remember the fourth reason we should trust God's Word? It was: ***Fulfilled Prophecy is the simplest and yet most profound evidence the Bible offers.*** Prophecy fulfilled is an irrefutable verification found only in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

Prophecy is the missing element in all other sacred scriptures of the world's religions. It is not to be found in the Muslim's Koran, the sayings of Buddha, the Hindu's Vedas, or the Mormon's Book.

By contrast: prophecy comprises about one-third of the Scriptures! The Book of Isaiah contains six of the clearest declarations of God's sole ability to write the future, plus perhaps the clearest and most remarkable prophetic passage, in the Bible!

Look at this string of declarations from the one and only God, who reveals Himself by

¹³⁶ 120318AM TRU-6 MAP.doc

writing down history before it happens. Start with me in Isaiah 41:21.

Prophecy is God's Unique Distinctive:

Isaiah 41:21-22 (NKJV) "***Present your case,***" says the LORD. "***Bring forth your strong reasons,***" says the King of Jacob. 22 "Let them bring forth and ***show us what will happen;*** Let them show the former things, what they were, That we may consider them, ***And know the latter end of them; Or declare to us things to come.***

Prophecy is a demonstration of God's Glory:

Isaiah 42:8-9 (NKJV) *I am* the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, ***And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them.***"

Prophecy is the Acid Test of Deity:

Isaiah 44:6-7 (NKJV) "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: '*I am* the First and *I am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God.⁷ ***And who can proclaim as I do?*** Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. ***And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them.***

Prophecy is a Verifiable Proof of God's Power:

Isaiah 45:21 (NKJV) ***Tell and bring forth your case;*** Yes, let them take counsel together. ***Who has declared this from ancient time? Who*** has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the LORD? And *there is* no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; *There is* none besides Me.

Prophecy is History Written in Advance:

Isaiah 46:10 (NKJV) Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'

Prophecy is to Confirm that God can be Trusted:

Isaiah 48:3-5 (NKJV) "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.⁴ Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,⁵ Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and

my molded image Have commanded them.'

Now, for a moment, move back to Isaiah 45:1. This is what I call perhaps the single most remarkable prophecy in the Bible.

One of the Most Astounding Biblical Prophecies

A person is named in v. 1 as Cyrus. Cyrus is an identifiable person in history, mentioned also in II Chronicles 36, Ezra 1-4, and Daniel 1-10. Cyrus ruled Persia from 559-530BC. Nothing amazing so far, except when you turn back and look when Isaiah wrote this chapter.

For the biblical facts, look at Isaiah 6. When did Isaiah start writing? "The year that King Uzziah died". When was that? 739BC. That date happens to be exactly 200 years BEFORE Cyrus was the King, that Ezra & Daniel are writing about.

Now, to help that event sink in, let me give you a modern equivalent. Russia recently elected a man named Vladimir Putin to be the next President of Russia. On March 4, 2012 Putin won the presidential elections of Russia. That is just a fact of history.

But, for a well know and recognized servant of God to have publically predicted that momentous event in writing, 200 years ago, would be astounding.

There are three very well known and godly men who lived 200 years ago. Most of us in this place have heard of one or more of them. They are pioneer missionary to India William Carey, American missionary Adoniram Judson, and famed orphanage founder and man of faith George Muller of Bristol, England. So, all three of those servants of God were alive 200 years ago.

Impossible But to God

What you are reading in Isaiah 45 about Cyrus being in power would be the historic equivalent of one of those three missionaries writing and publishing, and distributing the world over, that a man by the name of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin would become the President of Russia, in the future.

Only God would know such a thing. Only God could know who will rule on Earth and when. Only God's Word has historic facts prophetically revealed hundreds and even thousands of years before they happen.

In God's Word we hold history written in advance, which is called Biblical Prophecy.

The Book of Revelation is the singles greatest tool to understand the future because it is the only book that clearly spells out each step from today to the end. Each of the stages of God's plans is found in another part of the Bible, but only Revelation features them all in one

place, and explained in detail.

The Map of the Future Events That God Left in His Word

Let me show you what I mean. The following would be a basic statement of what most evangelical, Biblical Bible teachers would see in the Scriptures. By Biblical I mean, teachers that rely upon the Scriptures rather than a theological system to explain the future plans of God.

THE CHURCH at Work:

Before His death, Jesus promised to “build His church” (Matt. 16:18). Born on the Day of Pentecost, Christ's Church is made from remnants of Jews and Gentiles who come to trust Christ as their Savior (Eph. 2-3). God’s plan for Christ's church is to have us share His Word, and see Him call out a people for His name. In addition to discipleship evangelism, the church is asked to wait for Christ (1 Thess. 1:10; Acts 1:8). The church age will close amid global apostasy in a culture obsessed with selfish pursuits, immorality, violence, and emptiness (2 Tim. 3:1-6; 2 Thess. 2:3).

THE RAPTURE of the Church:

The rapture is described in God's Word as the “catching away” of the church. Jesus meets His church in the air to take them home (John 14:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). This event is called the church’s “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). God concludes His plan for Christ's church just before His seven-year plan for Israel called the Tribulation (or the 70th week of Daniel) begins (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). When the church is gone, the Antichrist appears on earth (2 Thess. 2:3-9) and the Tribulation (or time of Jacob’s trouble) begins. During the Tribulation, the church is in heaven with Christ, receiving rewards, enjoying the “marriage feast of the Lamb”; and preparing to return with Him in glory (Rev. 19:7-9).

THE TRIBULATION on Earth:

Daniel’s 70th week (Daniel 9:27) begins as God officially resumes His program for the Jewish nation. The purpose of the Tribulation is to bring national Israel back to the Messiah. A few of the clear events around the Tribulation include: Israel existing as a nation in unbelief (Ezk. 37-38); Persian and Russian allies invade Israel (Ezk. 38) as Satan seeks to destroy the Jewish people before they return to their Messiah. At the midpoint of the Tribulation, the Antichrist enters the temple in Jerusalem, demands worship, and refuses his “mark” to all who will not bow down to him (Mat. 24:15; 2 Th. 2:3-4; Rev. 13). After 7 years, Jesus Christ returns with His saints to take His throne and judge the nations (Mat. 24:25; Rev. 19:11-21). After facing the persecution by the Antichrist and the world seeking to annihilate them, the remnant of Israel (about one-third of them), at the last moment, accept Christ as Messiah (Zech. 12:10-

12; 13:8-9; Rom. 11:25-27).

Christ's MILLENNIAL KINGDOM:

For the next 1,000 years, resurrected believers reign with Christ in His kingdom where God's promises to Israel are fulfilled (Deut. 30:1-6; Rev. 20:4-6). Universal peace and justice prevail (Isaiah 11:1-10), and millennial age believers from all nations worship at the millennial temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-48; Zech. 8:22, 23). Satan's influence on earth is restrained for the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3).

THE FINAL UPRISING of Mankind:

At the end of Christ's 1,000-year reign, Satan is released to incite all the unregenerate to rebel against Christ (Rev. 20:7-9), confirming that mankind is so depraved, that even the presence of Christ on Earth before their eyes is not enough to persuade their conversion.

The GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT:

Every human who has ever lived, but never had their sins forgiven, is resurrected from the Pit (Ezek. 32), to stand before Christ's Throne, and be sentenced to the eternal punishment their sins have earned (Rev. 20:11-15). Each of them finally confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, but they are too late for deliverance (Phil. 2:10-11). Each unsaved human, plus Satan and his angels are then cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

The NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH:

Finally, the promise of Emmanuel, God with us, appears in Heaven, as fire melts the Earth and Universe (2 Peter 3:10), and God makes a new world (Rev. 21:1-5). As God's servants we live in a New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22) in the many "rooms" prepared by Christ for us (John 14:2-3). We get to enjoy our Creator and Redeemer forever.

The whole book of Revelation revolves around these facts of seeing and responding to God's Throne; and Jesus gives us this last book to get us ready to meet Him.

Revelation was written to show redeemed servants of God how to live.

How to Live for Christ on The Throne of Heaven

What exactly does God consider so important in our lives He collects all that we offer Him?

Several things we can do every day. Here is just a brief summary of what God collects from our lives. Let's start with two very unusual verses: Revelation 5:8 and 8:3.

God tells us that our worship prayers, offered to Him, are so important: He keeps them

stored right at His feet. That is the first of these seven treasures we can send ahead to God's Throne:

First, all of our prayers offered in Jesus Name Rise to be collected as treasures by God:

Revelation 5:8 (NKJV) Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 8:3-4 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

See them there, right in front of His Throne?

What do you have in that bowl of our collected prayers? If God loves our prayers so much that He collects them all (like notes from my wife & kids) why don't we send Him even more?

We each need to up our times of prayers. If we just invite God into every praise and problem, every fear and frustration: our life will be revolutionized as we say to the Lord, "I need YOU in every part of my life!"

Second, our devotional love for God is more important to God than all the Old Testament sacrifices ever offered on altars; and that He treasures:

Mark 12:33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Have we offered our devotion up to Him irretrievably, completely, and lovingly—by giving Him time each day because we love Him; by giving Him our complete attention as we focus upon Him in His Word and in prayer?

Third, our life offered in surrender each day for His glory Becomes an act of worship that God treasures:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Have we recently renewed that offering of all we are to Him? Have we repeated those simple words of the child Samuel, that the Lord so delights to hear from us, "Speak Lord, for

your servant is listening!”

Fourth, serving in the ministries of Christ's Church is An offering of worship that God notes and treasures:

Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Are we pouring out our time to God? Time flies by, and we cannot keep it. But if we invest our time with Him, we will never lose it.

Each time you serve: look up in your heart from the classroom, nursery, choir room, youth or children’s ministry room, or where ever you offer that service, and say to the Lord, “I am giving this time to you. I can’t keep it, I could selfishly squander it, but instead I give it to YOU as an act of devotion and worship!”

Fifth, our gifts given to Christ's Church are Worship offerings that God treasures:

Philippians 4:18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

What is the aroma ascending from our gifts invested in Christ's Church today?

Make more of your offerings by praying over each check, hold it in your hand as you mail it or place it in the offering, and breathe out to God: “I give this to YOU as an offering of love and gratitude!”

Sixth, our words of praise and songs of worship Can become offerings that God treasures:

Hebrews 13:15 *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*

When is the last time we stopped and launched a wave of praise filled worship toward His Throne?

Why not make regular plans to burst forth in your car, or on a walk, or when you are all alone: into a cry of love to the Lord.

You can even say something like the words of that chorus we sing: “I love YOU Lord, and I lift my voice, to WORSHIP You.”

Finally, our secret acts of kindness and other good deeds in Christ's Name: are treasured by God:

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is

well pleased

What acts of kindness have we premeditated and carried out this week?

Plan to do intentional sacrificial acts of kindness for others.

Do things unasked, unseen, and without expecting any thanks.

As you do that act of sacrificial investment in your family (like doing the trash, laundry, sweeping, mowing, or whatever) lift your eyes above and say, "I am doing this in YOUR Name, Oh Lord, because I love YOU and I want to serve like You served!"

God consider those choices so important in our lives He collects all that we offer Him.

God tells us that our worship prayers, offered to Him, are so important: He keeps them stored right at His feet.

Which of these seven treasures are you planning to send as an offering of love to God, so that He can store them in your bowl at the foot of His Throne?

Worship 101: Who are True Worshippers?

Revelation 4-5

John¹³⁷ has been in a perpetual state of amazement from chapter one onward. What he has seen has repeatedly overwhelmed him. Once again in this final chapter, John sees such incredible sights that all he can do is fall down (the last time he tried to worship the angelic guide was in 19:10). As he tries to worship the messenger that has guided his tour of Heaven, (that is the context of v. 9), John is corrected by the angel. In this exchange we get the incredible insight that:

Worship is the Central Theme of the Bible

Here we get to the final chapter, of the final book: where we see the final word on worship, given to us by God. Here God instructs us on the most important of all subjects: Worship. A simple definition of worship would be: **worship is honor and adoration directed to God.**

The angel repeats to John, the centrality of the worship of God. Listen to what the angel says to John:

Revelation 22:9 (NKJV) Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book: **Worship God.**”

There is no subject more important to God’s servants than worship.

Worship of God is the mark of true believers.

The worship of God is declared to be the content of the eternal Gospel.

True worship, of the true God, is truly the key to everything that matters.

Worship is no small subject. In this final word from God on worship we hear declared the centrality of worship. The importance of worship we can infer from the rest of God’s Word; but here in Revelation, God makes it clear how central worship is to everything.

Now turn back to Revelation 14:6-7. Here we find the answer to the most vital question: “Who has eternal life?”

Rev. 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the **everlasting gospel** to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—⁷ saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His

¹³⁷ 120318AM TRU-7 Worship 101.do

judgment has come; and **worship Him** who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Notice that the angel’s message is called “the eternal gospel.”

The Message of the Eternal Gospel

What is the eternal message? “Fear God, and give Him glory: and **worship Him** who made the heaven and the earth.”

Those who live forever are those who have responded to the Gospel. Those who respond to the Gospel become true worshippers of the true God.

At the end of everything, how does God summarize those who possess eternal life? God says that they “worship God”.

Worship God. That is the everlasting gospel, the message that God has given from eternity to eternity.

It is the theme of Scripture, the theme of eternity, the theme of redemptive history—to worship the true and living and glorious God.

Before the creation, after the creation, in eternity past, in eternity future, and throughout all time in between, worship is the theme, the central issue in all of creation.¹³⁸

Now, as we open to Revelation 4-5, we can see a future picture of all of us true believers, gathered in Heaven as the true worshippers of God, worshipping at the highest level in: unhindered, focused, and glorified worship.

Those in Heaven are: **unhindered** by time, or by their flesh, or by any distraction; and they are **focused** directly upon the Lamb as they bow in front of the Throne; and most of all, they are **glorified**, so that no more does their humanness, or sin, or the Devil interfere in any way with worship. That is worship at the highest level. We have arrived at a passage of God's Word that gives us what can only be called:

A Theology of True Worship

This passage in Revelation 4-5 gives us the most complete theology or study from God's Word of worship that there could ever be. As we look at the worship detailed in Revelation we see that: worship is the final topic of God’s inspired Word.

We have everything we need to know about anything to do with worship as we hear these final words from God to us.

As we look at what God gives us, we find that He reveals to us the most important element of worship in this passage: the identity of true worshippers. We can ask and answer the question through this passage: “Who are the True Worshippers?” The text answers that by

¹³⁸ MacArthur, J. (1998). The ultimate priority : John MacArthur, Jr. on worship (electronic ed.) (29–31). Chicago: Moody Press.

revealing them as the Redeemed.

The redeemed are those who have been saved, those who have been washed by the blood of the perfect Lamb of God slain for their sins: they are the true worshippers.

Revelation 4-5 breaks into five elements or units for us to study. Remember that God gave this report of what is happening in Heaven for us as His servants.

Which Elements of Worship Does God Emphasize

Here are the observations we can make from Revelation 4-5:

First, God introduces us to the Setting for Worshipping Him, before we hear the words or see the actions of the worshipping saints (Rev. 4:1-7).

That teaches us that the setting for worship is important, and that God wants our worship to start by a reverent focusing upon Him as the Awesome and Almighty One upon the Throne.

Remember that the pattern for our prayers as believers is in Matthew 6:9-13. That pattern starts with focusing our prayers, and addressing them to “Our Father in Heaven” as we choose to “Hallow His Name”.

We need to allow that truth to sink into our minds: God doesn’t start with our words or even our actions of worship in Heaven.

God starts with a long and detailed survey of just exactly where we have arrived, who we are as new arrivals. The focus is most of all completely upon Him: who He is, and what surrounds Him in great majesty. All of that is described before we see us as the human worshippers.

The lesson for us: we need to heed the character of God as awesome in holiness; and not rush before Him without preparing our minds, our attitudes, and our perceptions of how great He is.

The Setting of Worship

So to do so, with Bibles open and following along, please stand, and listen and feel the: **Setting for Worshipping Him before we hear the words or see the actions of the worshipping saints** as we read Revelation 4:1-7 (NKJV):

After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there *was* like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne *were*

twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵ And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶ Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.

Secondly, God presents to us that our Reflective worship of Him as His saints around His Throne is offered in a responsive manner (Rev. 4:8-10).

Our worship around His Throne in Heaven is not individually prompted, but it is Divinely prompted.

Notice that the first glimpse of our worship takes places after, and at the prompting of, those burning/living creatures. It is the seraphim and cherubim that first take the stage to lead our worship.

Above all the other sights of color and sparkling crystal: they loudly declare God's Holiness.

Over all the other sounds of rumbling, voices, and thundering: is their cry that pierces through Heaven that God Almighty is Holy, Holy, Holy.

It is at that instant that everyone and everything responds in worship.

At that moment nothing else matters, nothing else takes place: all of Heaven stops to bow, every conversation ceases, every activity halts, every thought focuses upon the One who sits upon the Throne.

Reflective Worship

So to do so, with Bibles open and following along, please stand again, listen and feel the: Reflective worship of Him as His saints around His Throne is offered in a responsive manner as we read Revelation 4:8-10 (NKJV):

⁸ *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:*

*"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"*

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the

throne, saying:

Thirdly, God reveals to us that the Content of our worship is completely focused upon Him as the Glorious, Honored, and Powerful Lord (Rev. 4:11).

Every word we will say is so carefully chosen to lift His Name high, to make His work the focus, to reflect our gratitude for His wondrous salvation.

Note God's worthiness alone to get the glory, not ours. God is to be honored. We do not want to be taking any of His honor or glory for ourselves.

It is amazing that the front row of the worshippers (the 24 elders) fall down so their faces are not seen, but He is seen. They cast off their crowns at His feet to declare that those crowns came from Him, belong to Him, and are only a reflection of Him.

When we get to Heaven we have a strong aversion to the spotlight. We don't take any of the credit, all the glory, honor and power goes to the Lord.

The Content of Worship

So to get ready for our part up there, with Bibles open and following along, please stand again, listen and feel the: **Content of our worship is completely focused upon Him as the Glorious, Honored, and Powerful Lord** as we read Revelation 4:11 (NKJV):

¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created."

Fourthly, God emphasizes the Redemptive nature of much of the worship in Heaven during the Tribulation reflects the conquest of the rebellion against their Creator and King (Rev. 5:1-8).

In Revelation 5 we are seeing ourselves in the future; and what is it we are doing when God lets us see ourselves? Singing praises to **our Redeemer!**

There are few times that God's Word allows us to actually see what we will be doing in Heaven and they always involves us seeing ourselves worshipping the True and Living God and His Son **our Redeemer.**

Notice what we are focused upon in Heaven—a Redeemer who died in our place!

Redeem, Redeemer, and redemption are words that show up 169 times in the NKJV of

the Bible. These are the last two times the word redeem is used in the Bible.

Redemption is one of the great unifying themes of all the Scriptures. In fact one man entitled a book he wrote as an overview of the entire Bible: ***The Unfolding Drama of Redemption***; and another Bible teacher wrote these words in his introduction to his commentary on every part of God's Word:

“The Bible reveals God’s plan for this redemption from its inception in eternity past to its completion in eternity future. Covenants, promises, and epochs are all secondary to the one continuous plan of redemption.

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Only 4 of them don’t involve a fallen world: the first 2 and the last 2—before the Fall and after the creation of the new heaven and new earth. The rest is the chronicle of the tragedy of sin”.¹³⁹

Redemptive Worship

Redemption is central to everything God is doing, so to get ready for our part up there, with Bibles open and following along, please stand again, listen and feel the: **Content of our human worship is completely focused upon Him as the Glorious, Honored, and Powerful Lord** as we read Revelation 5:1-8 (NKJV):

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

⁴ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

⁵ But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”

⁶ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

⁸ Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Seeing Ourselves In the Future: God actually records for us our words and our actions as we stand around the Throne during the Tribulation (Rev. 5:9-14).

Redemption is a word that speaks of debts being paid, freedom being purchased and a life going in a completely new direction from the point of redemption onward.

So this morning join me for the greatest theme in all the Bible—the redemption of lost

¹³⁹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

sinner by the God who so loved the world that he gave His Son to die on a cross and shed His blood to pay the price of sin! And where better to see that theme than the way we will be—singing the new song of our worthy redeemer.

So to get ready for our part up there, with Bibles open and following along, please stand again, listen and feel the: **Content of our human worship is completely focused upon Him as the Glorious, Honored, and Powerful Lord** as we read Revelation 5:9-14 (NKJV):

*Revelation 5:9-12 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; **For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood** Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"*

13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

*"Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"*

14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Worship 101: Who are True Worshipers?

This passage in Revelation 4-5 gives us the most complete theology or study from God's Word of worship that there could ever be.

First, God introduces us to the Setting for Worshipping Him before we hear the words or see the actions of the worshipping saints (Rev. 4:1-7).

Secondly, God presents to us that our Reflective worship of Him as His saints around His Throne is offered in a responsive manner (Rev. 4:8-10).

Thirdly, God reveals to us that the Content of our worship is completely focused upon Him as the Glorious, Honored, and Powerful Lord (Rev. 4:11).

Fourthly, God emphasizes the Redemptive nature of much of the worship in Heaven during the Tribulation reflects the conquest of the rebellion against their Creator and King (Rev. 5:1-8).

Finally, God actually records for us our words and our actions as we stand around the Throne during the Tribulation (Rev. 5:9-14).

The redeemed: we who have been saved, we who have been washed by the blood of

the perfect Lamb of God slain for their sins: we are the true worshippers.

There is no subject more important than worship.

Worship of God is the mark of all true believers.

Worship of God is the content of the Gospel.

True worship of the true God is the key to eternal life, eternal security, and eternal happiness.

At the end of everything, how does God summarize those who possess eternal life? God says that they “worship God”.

Worship God. That is the everlasting gospel, the message that God has given from eternity to eternity.

It is the theme of Scripture, the theme of eternity, the theme of redemptive history—to worship the true and living and glorious God.

Before the creation, after the creation, in eternity past, in eternity future, and throughout all time in between, worship is the theme, the central issue in all of creation.¹⁴⁰

Today, in Revelation 4-5, we see ourselves in the future, with all of the true believers of all times, gathered in Heaven as the true worshippers of God, worshipping at the highest level in: unhindered, focused, and glorified worship.

Hallelujah, what a blessing!

¹⁴⁰ MacArthur, J. (1998). The ultimate priority : John MacArthur, Jr. on worship (electronic ed.) (29–31). Chicago: Moody Press.

The Foundations of True Biblical Worship

Revelation 4

Today¹⁴¹ there is just one truth I want you to hold onto, and think through, with me: God has told us EXACTLY how He wants to be Worshipped.

That description of how God has told us He wants to be worshipped is the title of our study today: *The Foundations of True Biblical Worship*.

To understand this topic we need to ponder several individual concepts, the first one is:

What Kind of Worship Does God Accept?

This question about worship is vital to every believer because:

If our worship is not built upon the foundation that God has laid down: *it is not Biblical*.

If our worship is not Biblical: it does not please God, *nor does He accept that worship*.

Think about that for a moment.

That means that any worship not offered the way that God has dictated is unacceptable worship.

That means that worship prompted by unsaved people is rejected; and any fleshly motivated, self-guided worship offered by un-surrendered believers is also rejected. Always remember the severity of Christ's judgment upon the fleshly excesses of the Corinthians.

Worship acceptable to God is what we must think about as we offer our adoration, and honor to God. God spends so much time in His Word describing the clean hands and pure hearts that must deliver any worship that is given to Him.

Have you ever gotten a meal on a dirty plate, or a drink in a greasy unwashed cup, or seen raw food being prepared on a filthy counter, and right there and then decided: I will not accept that food?

Worship is much like the medium God used to portray sacrifices in the Old Testament: all of the sacrifices were from "clean" types of food or animals. Any unclean offering or any unclean person making an offering: made the worship offered, get rejected by God.

That idea of rejected worship is the theme of the final book of the Old Testament called Malachi. The Jews were going through the motions of worshipping God, but their hearts and lives were dirty: ***so their worship was rejected***.

People were also bringing to God animal offerings that were defiled, unclean, or sickly:

¹⁴¹ 120429AM TRU-9 Foundations.doc

so their worship was rejected.

God wants us to worship Him, but He is very specific on what He accepts. That brings us to our second concept. Not only should we understand what kind of worship God accepts, but we also need to understand the truth that:

Biblical Worship Always Has Three Elements

Think about everything you know from the Bible about worship.

Every time worship is portrayed in the Bible it always has three elements: **first**, the person that is offering the worship; and **second**, the offering that they are bringing; and **third**, the One they are giving that offering to.

Those three perspectives are always present in the Bible. And all three elements had to be RIGHT or the worship was WRONG.

The first worship scene in the Bible is in in Genesis 4. The two characters are Cain & Abel. We all know the story. They bring their offerings to God, one offering of worship (Abel's) is accepted, the other offering of worship (Cain's), is rejected. Did you notice three parts to the scene of worship?

1. God was the One they worshipped.
2. They were the ones bringing the worship.
3. They presented offerings to God.

All three elements had to be RIGHT: the Right God, the Right offering, and the Right way they offered it. We know the story: Cain brought the **Wrong** offering (un-bloody produce), the **Wrong** way (self-styled, and un-submissive), to the **Right** God. Even though one element was right the worship was rejected.

All three elements must be **Right**, or the whole process is rejected. That could be a summary of the entire Old Testament, as each chapter of the Old Testament is about whether: people lived the **right way**, offering the **right thing**, to the **right God**.

With that three part grid in mind you could analyze and organize much of the Old Testament.

There are passages about the God we worship to: Holy, Merciful, Eternal, and Almighty.

Then, there are passages about what types of offerings are acceptable to Him, and those that are not.

Finally, there is so much about the life of the one who offers to God: how they come, when they come, what preparations are needed, what is a wrong or bad way to come, and what is the best and pleasing way to come.

Most of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is all about worship from those three angles. Now, fast forward to the most important verse about the Bibles we hold in our hands. We can

ask another question. What is:

The Purpose of God's Word

Turn with me to II Timothy 3:16-17. Here Paul tells us where God's Word came from: **God inspired it**. So it is unlike any other book in the world. The Bible is Divinely breathed out truth.

Then Paul explains how we are to use the Bible as God's servants. He lists off what all Scriptures are written to do: all Scripture profitable for our "1. Doctrine; 2. Reproof; 3. Correction; and 4. Instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Now, using that verse, as we do our study of worship today, each time we look at the Scriptures we are seeking to find:

The **Doctrine** about true Biblical worship: what God has taught us in His Word is the "right" way to worship.

The **Reproof** about true Biblical worship: what God has taught us in His Word is the "wrong" way to worship.

The **Correction** about true Biblical worship: what God has taught us in His Word is the "way to get right" in our worship.

The **Instruction in Righteousness** about true Biblical worship: what God has taught us in His Word is the "way to stay right" in our worship.

Since worship is so important to God, we need to come to this study with our hearts open, and our minds seeking to hear and respond to what God says.

The Book of Revelation sums up what the whole Bible is all about. This is especially true in the subject we are in the midst of today. This last book of the Bible clearly identifies the three parts of worship. These three parts are simple.

The Worshipper: who can worship God and how they prepare to do so. This is the one who offers.

The Worship: what worship God desires, God seeks, God accepts, and what worship God is pleased by. This is the offering.

The Worshipped: God as the object of our worship, and God as the receiver of our worship. This is the One we bring our offerings to.

There are three passages outside of Revelation that are so critical and foundational for our understanding, that we must remind ourselves of them before we proceed in our study of the elements of true Biblical worship. They are: John 4, Romans 12, and Philippians 3.

Worship Offered by Saved Believers

Please open with me to Christ's words in John 4:22-24, first. As we read these words we are hearing Christ Jesus, who is God the Son, explaining what we are to be offering forever to

Him: which is worship. So this is an incredible passage for worshippers.

John 4:22-24 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit [The One Worshipped], and those who worship Him [The Worshipper] must worship in spirit and truth [The type of Worship God accepts]."

The essence of what Christ explains is that: true Biblical worship is only offered by born-again people who follow God's Word. The Spirit is the seal of the believer; and the truth is only found in the Bible.

So there is one of the most crucial building blocks of true Biblical worship.

Worship Offered by Surrendered Believers

The second vital piece of truth from God about worship that we need is in Romans 12:1-2, and here we find that true Biblical worship can only be offered by a surrendered believer.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you [The Worshipper] present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God [The Worshipped], which is your reasonable service [The type of Worship God accepts]. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

God only accepts surrendered worship, conformed to His Word, that is not conformed to worldly, proud, self-exalting, unconsecrated living. So the character of the one offering the worship is vital. God rejects worldly offerings in the NT, just like He did in the OT.

Worship Offered by Sanctified Believers

Finally, Paul combines the words of Christ and the life of surrender, and states in Philippians 3:3 that only those who are saved can worship, they focus upon Christ as their source of joy, and they are denying the flesh.

Philippians 3:3 (NKJV) For we are the circumcision [The Worshipper], who worship God [The Object of our Worship] in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh [The type of Worship God accepts],

God wants us saved: that is in the Spirit; and humbly-surrendered: that is rejoicing in Christ Jesus; and finally, consecrated: having no confidence in the flesh.

Flesh-denial is critical to worship: anything that leads to pride or self-exaltation is to be avoided. Just as Nadab and Abihu were smitten for their misguided offering, so we are to

never allow the flesh to guide our worship. In other words:

Beware of Fleshly Worship: God Wants Humility

That is one reason why we should pause before following some of our modern, popular worship leaders and see if their lives match up to the God they are serving. If their lives are not conformed to His Word, then their worship is not pleasing to Him, and should be avoided.

Just because music appeals to us, doesn't mean it pleases God. There is so much more to music than the sound, it is whether it is offered in Spirit and in Truth.

Worship always conveys the idea of giving something to God. The act of worship ascribes to God that He is worthy of our adoration, He is worth our devotion, and He is the delight and desire of our hearts.

God doesn't accept anything we throw at Him. He has carefully described the content He desires as: Truth; and the manner He desires as: in the Spirit.

Because there is no subject more important to us as God's servants than worship; and
Because worship of the True God is the mark of true believers; and

Because only those who respond to the Gospel become true worshippers of their true God and King.

Then true Biblical worship is *selflessly* giving our adoration as a way of life, serving our King; and God's Word shows us:

How to Truly Worship the King of Heaven

The unity of the message of God's Word is amazing. Across 40 authors writing over 1,600 years: God gets one message across. That message is that He is the One and Only True God. His way is the only way. His Word is the only truth that leads to life eternal.

In Genesis 4, God would not accept Cain's worship because it was self-styled, and not obedient to His revealed Word: so Cain was rejected by God.

Then, from Exodus onward, God devotes 50 chapters to instruct Israel in just how to properly approach His presence in worship through the Tabernacle's offerings. Any deviation was met with rejection and disaster.

In Leviticus 10 God would not receive Nadab & Abihu's worship because it was offered in their own self-styled way, not His way: so God burned them up on the spot.

In II Samuel 6 we see the same with Uzzah's offering to help God out, but disobeying His rules: God struck him dead on the spot.

As we get to the New Testament we find that the Lord does not budge when it comes to what worship He is willing to accept.

Jesus explains to the woman at the well (John 4) that He only accepts the worship He prescribes, no matter how fervent or enthused it may be.

Paul explains that only those who are un-conformed to the world can offer that which

is good, acceptable, and perfect worship (Romans 12:1-2)

Then, Revelation portrays for us the Heavenly pictures of worship that God desires, ordains, and sends as instructive portraits for us. Remember that Revelation was given to us as God's servants so that we might understand God's plans and desires.

In Revelation we see God illustrating for us the elements of true worship.

What God has already revealed from Genesis onward, is just repeated and emphasized in Revelation. So, the Book of:

Revelation Gives us the Four Elements of True Biblical Worship

All that the Bible has taught about worship is applied in Revelation 1-3, as Jesus, who is God the Son, comes down and walks among His servants, the saints of His Church: and watches their worship. Here are the four elements of True Biblical Worship that are emphasized in these three chapters.

1. True Biblical Worship: Starts with and Flows from the Words that God Gave to Us (Revelation 1:1)

The right way to worship God is found only in His Word.

God's Word is vital to us, and the pathway God left for us to approach Him in our worship. All three elements of worship must be Right according to God's Word. The Right God, the Right offering, in the Spirit-prompted way of Truth.

In John 4:24 Jesus has already said that we are to worship God in Spirit and in truth: "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Here in Revelation 1:1 we see that the One we worship wants us to approach Him with our worship in truth, that is: based upon the revealed Word of God. Worship that is to be accepted by God must be Word-guided, and Word-based. So first, **True Biblical Worship: starts with and flows from the Word that God gave to us** (Revelation 1:1).

Do you stop to eat from God's Word so that you can live each day in step with God? We were created to worship or glorify God. He wants our worship. If we desire to please Him, we will hunger and thirst for Him in His Word: our way of knowing how to properly worship Him.

2. True Biblical Worship: Is Only available for Those who are "in the Spirit" (Revelation 1:10)

John was able to see God in His Glory, worship Him as King, all because of the power of the regenerating, indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul says in Philippians 3:3 that those who are saved worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in

Christ Jesus, and have no hope of salvation by fleshly efforts.

The Spirit quickens the flesh profits nothing John 6:63, only spiritual worship prompted by the Spirit can please God.

Principle 2: True Biblical Worship: is only available for those who are “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10).

Do you know that you have the Spirit of God dwelling within, the seal of every true born-again believer? The only worship God accepts comes from the power of His Spirit within us. Our connection to God, is only powered by His Spirit. To worship in an acceptable way we must not quench the power of the Holy Spirit. Anything that diminishes His power we must avoid at all costs.

3. True Biblical Worship: Involves Seeing Christ's Beauty & Falling in Reverence Before Him (Revelation 1:17)

When John turns and sees Jesus as the Risen King of Kings, he falls before Him.

John falls before Christ just like Peter. When the huge school of fish were caught, in Luke 5:8-9, Peter fell on his face like John.

John falls before Christ just like just like the disciples in the boat, when the sleeping Christ was awakened and stilled the storm. Mk. 4:41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

Principle 3: True Biblical Worship: involves seeing Christ's beauty & falling in reverence before Him (Revelation 1:17).

We were created to glorify God. We most glorify Him by our adoring worship. Worship flows from reverence. Do you come in reverence, bowing before Him? Are you seeking with all your heart to find Christ in His Word? He said we only find Him in worship, when we “seek Him with all our hearts”.

4. True Biblical Worship: Is Always Being Watched and Tested by Christ (Revelation 2:1)

Jesus reminds us that He walks about the Church as we gather (Rev. 2:1), to see if we are offering to Him the worship He desires, in the way He desires.

Jesus is examining our hearts and minds as we live, work, and worship. Jesus declares in Rev. 2:23: “and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

Principle 4: True Biblical Worship: Is Always Being Watched and Tested by Christ (Revelation 2:1)

What does Jesus see each day as He watches? Are there days we are without time to worship? Are there days we are un-surrendered, so that we become worship-less? Are there

days we are unconsecrated, so we neglect to adore and honor Him? Whether we eat, or drink, or anything we do, it is all to be done for the glory of the One we worship.

What Kind of Worship Does God Accept?

These truths about worship are vital to every believer because: If our worship is not built upon the foundation that God has laid down: it is not Biblical. If our worship is not Biblical: it does not please God, nor does He accept that worship.

There is a song we all know, that captures the humble, seeking heart of true worshippers offering their pleasing sacrifices to God. Please stand with me, and sing to the One whose ***Amazing Grace*** has saved us: so that we can live lives of worship offered to Him.

The Essentials of True Biblical Worship

Revelation 4:10-11

As¹⁴² we open to Rev. 4:10, we are looking at the other side of the worship spectrum. Last time we saw what always makes worship unacceptable to God. This week we are looking at what always makes our worship acceptable and pleasing to God.

As we read these words, think about what you are looking at as we see a picture of the 24 elders; most likely, each of these 24 men seated on the inner circle of the Throne were formerly imperfect sinners, saved by grace, cleansed each day by the sacrifice of Christ, glorified at the moment of their death, and now in Heaven offering perfected worship.

Did you catch one very profound truth? Each servant of God that we will ever find in Heaven was once an imperfect servant of God, the entire time they lived on Earth.

Truth # 1: All Believers, in Every Time Period, Have Always Been Imperfect, All throughout Their Lives

One of the most amazing truths of God's Word is that God accepts and uses imperfect people. The simplest and most accurate description of the Apostles would be: twelve imperfect men. The simplest and most accurate description of the John, Paul, Peter, Noah, Daniel, Moses, Hannah, and even Mary would be: they each were imperfect servants.

The same could be said for every servant, every saint, every Christian home, and every Christian marriage. The simplest and most accurate description of all we do, and are, is: **imperfect.**

Truth # 2: Imperfect Saints that are Surrendered Can Offer Worship that God Treasures and Rewards

So what is it that makes what we do acceptable, pleasing to God, lasting, golden like the crowns of Heaven, and eternal? Submission. In the verses we have before us this morning portrays the submission God delights in.

The elders (who were formerly imperfect earthly saints) do a visual for us as they worship in Heaven: they humbly fall on their faces, bowing submissively before Christ the King,

¹⁴² 120506AM TRU-10 Crowns.doc

and as an offering of worship, lay their golden crowns at His feet.

They humbly fall on their faces in Heaven, because they had humbly worshipped on Earth. They submissively bow in Heaven, because they had submissively bowed on Earth.

They offer golden crowns in Heaven, because God declares their worship on Earth was tested as they offered it, and was found to be like gold. Remember what God has already told us in I Corinthians 3:10-13, that all of our good works will go through the fires of refinement to see what is true gold.

As we open to Revelation 4:10 look again at what is perhaps the most well known aspect of worship in Heaven. Note first the elders, note what they do, and then note what the Bible says they actually cast at the feet of Jesus:

*Rev. 4:10-11, and 4the twenty-four elders **fall downbefore Him** who sits on the throne and **worship Him** who lives forever and ever, and **cast their crowns before the throne**, saying:¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”*

*⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had **crowns of gold** on their heads.*

As John sat to write the scenes of Revelation unfolding before his eyes, the scene of the 24 elders, kneeling, and casting their crowns before the Throne of God the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: was a powerful image in the minds of the early church.

Truth # 3: The 24 Elders Casting Crowns Portray their Surrendered Lives as They Offer Worship to God

Often, our distance from the history of past events can lessen the impact of some of these images. To us, it is wonderful that the elders (representing all believers) get to worship in such a beautiful way; but there is even more beauty in the picture.

First-century readers in churches across the Empire, would have been reminded of the much-celebrated event in their Empire. During Nero's final two years as Emperor (AD 66-68) there was the much celebrated, and single most expensive event in Rome's history: the visit of the Parthian prince Tir-idates.

To begin the rule of Rome over this distant land, Nero crowned Tiridates, as king of Armenia. The sequence to show this vassal king's submission was planned. Once he was crowned, he fell down before Nero publicly in worship. **Then, as a symbol of his submission, he laid his crown at Nero's feet.**

This event was made into an ongoing performance in the theaters where characters celebrated Rome's subjugation of far away enemies; so the event lived on in theaters across the empire.

This picture of the 24 elders casting their crowns at Christ's feet is a very powerful lesson in worship. They were submissive, not just acting like it, neither were they forced to

take off their crowns. It was the voluntary act of adoration in worship.

God always responds to submission, surrender, and the humility it portrays. Always remember that when the wickedest Israelite king of all, Ahab, humbled himself. God was moved by Ahab's humble acts of contrition. Bowing to please God always prompts His well done.

Casting a crown at Christ's feet speaks powerfully of our absolute surrender to Him, and adoration of Him. Now for a moment, we need to define that word: **surrender**.

¹**sur•ren•der***verb*: to yield to the power, control, or possession of another upon compulsion or demand; to give (oneself) up into the power of another especially as a prisoner; to give oneself up into the power of another. ¹⁴³

Surrender is the key to true worship that God accepts. The worship that flows from a surrendered life is pleasing to Him; but from an un-surrendered life, the worship is not pleasing Him.

A life surrendered to God is moving along in the process of sanctification, which can be described as a life that is yielded, consecrated, dedicated, and Spirit-filled.

An un-surrendered life is described in the Word as unsanctified, carnal, fleshly, and quenching the Holy Spirit's work. Remember God always portrays only two positions, pleasing God or pleasing our self. With God there is no neutral, or middle ground.

Surrender = Pleasing God	Un-Surrendered = Pleasing Self
Allowing Sanctification	Resisting Sanctification
Spiritually Minded acceptable Worship	Fleshly Minded Rejected Worship
Spirit-Filled Walking	Spirit-Quenching Neglecting

Truth # 4: We can Worship God as We Surrender our Lives to Him Each Day

Turn back with me to Romans 12:1-2, where we read last week about presenting ourselves. That presentation is actually the act of surrender. We give ourselves over to the power of the Lord.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies [that is the surrender element that pleases God] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Think about the scene around the Throne with those 24 elders bowing face down in Heaven, and now think of how to personalize that same humble and adoring worship attitude in your heart, as an act of surrender.

There is a song we sing that captures the beauty of the 24 elders and invites us to join in

¹⁴³ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

the offering. Here are the words of that song, read them with me and think of making that surrender to worship the Lord, as His servant today:

We fall down
and lay our crowns
At the feet of Jesus

The greatness of
Your Mercy and love
At the feet of Jesus

And we cry holy, holy, holy
And we cry holy, holy, holy
And we cry holy, holy, holy
Is the lamb

Bowing as an eternal picture of surrender; and laying crowns at His feet is what these 24 elders are doing over and over, that is so powerful.

The amazing truth is that as long as we surrender to Him, Jesus accepts our worship, from our lives imperfect as they are. As we surrender we confess any sins and that brings glory to Him. The only part of our lives Christ rejects are the un-surrendered ones.

Truth # 5: Revelation Shows us the Elements of Surrendered Worship

All that the Bible has taught about worship is applied in the book of Revelation, as Jesus, who is God the Son, comes down and walks among His servants, the saints of His Church: and watches their worship. Here are the four elements of True Biblical Worship that are emphasized in these three chapters.

1. Surrendered Worshipers: OFFER worship that Pleases God Because it Starts with, and Flows from the Words that God Gave to Us (Revelation 1:1)

The way to offer worship that pleases God is only found only in His Word.

God's Word is vital to us, and the pathway God left for us to approach Him in our worship. In John 4:24 we heard Jesus say that we are to worship God in Spirit and in truth: "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Here in Revelation 1:1 we see the "Revelation" which God gave His servants so we can please Him by approaching Him with the truth, that is: based upon the revealed Word of God.

Worship that is to be accepted by God must be Word-guided, and Word-based. So first, True Biblical Worship: starts with and flows from the Word that God gave to us (Revelation 1:1).

Do you stop to eat from God's Word so that you can live each day in step with God? We were created to worship or glorify God. He wants our worship. If we desire to please Him, we will hunger and thirst for Him in His Word: our only way of knowing how to properly worship Him.

2. Surrendered Worshippers: COME boldly before God to offer acceptable worship because they come “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10)

John was able to see God in His Glory, worship Him as King, all because of the power of the regenerating, indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul says in Philippians 3:3 that those who are saved worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no hope of salvation by fleshly efforts.

The Spirit quickens the flesh profits nothing John 6:63, only spiritual worship prompted by the Spirit can please God.

Principle 2: True Biblical Worship: is only available for those who are “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10).

Do you know that you have the Spirit of God dwelling within, the seal of every true born-again believer? The only worship God accepts comes from the power of His Spirit within us. Our connection to God, is only powered by His Spirit. To worship in an acceptable way we must not quench the power of the Holy Spirit. Anything that diminishes His power we must avoid at all costs.

3. Surrendered Worshippers: LONG to see Christ's Beauty and as they do so they fall in reverence before Him (Revelation 1:17)

When John turns and sees Jesus as the Risen King of Kings, he falls before Him.

John falls before Christ just like just like the disciples when the sleeping Christ was awakened and stilled the storm. Mk. 4:39, 41 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

Principle 3: True Biblical Worship: involves seeing Christ's beauty & falling in reverence before Him (Revelation 1:17).

We were created to glorify God. We most glorify Him by our adoring worship. Worship flows from reverence. Do you come in reverence, bowing before Him? Are you seeking with all your heart to find Christ in His Word? He said we only find Him in worship, when we “seek Him

with all our hearts”.

4. Surrendered Worshippers: WORSHIP the way God’s Word instructs because we know Christ is always watching and testing our worship (Revelation 2:23)

Jesus reminds us that He walks about the Church as we gather (Rev. 2:1), to see if we are offering to Him the worship He desires, in the way He desires.

Jesus is examining our hearts and minds as we live, work, and worship. Jesus declares in Rev. 2:23: “and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

Principle 4: True Biblical Worship: Is Always Being Watched and Tested by Christ (Revelation 2:1)

What does Jesus see each day as He watches? Are there days we are without time to worship? Are there days we are un-surrendered, so that we become worship-less? Are there days we are unconsecrated, so we neglect to adore and honor Him? Whether we eat, or drink, or anything we do, it is all to be done for the glory of the One we worship.

5. Surrendered Worshippers: KNOW their worship rises to merge with the worship around the Throne of our King (Revelation 4:1)

The 24 elders hold the bowls of collected prayers (Rev. 5:8) of the saints that have been offered in worship; and later (Rev. 8:3) angels mix those prayers with incense and coals from the altar, and pour them out.

Only this worship scene around God’s Throne explains why God waits so long. He waits to combine our prayers with His plan and pour them out together.

Principle 5: True Biblical Worship: Rises to Merge with the Worship Around the Throne of our King (Revelation 4:1)

Do you realize that each time you adore and honor the Lord by submitting to His Word, confess a sin, asking for cleansing, or obeying His Word: that worship rises and merges with the majestic offering that always surrounds His Throne?

6. Surrendered Worshippers: FOCUS upon offering their worship to God Himself and none other (Revelation 4:2-7)

Everything above us is pointed at the King of Heaven’s Throne.

Our King is the Supreme Attraction up there. For of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things in Romans 11:36: For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be

glory forever. Amen.

God said on the Mount of Transfiguration to focus on Christ, nothing else. While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Principle 6: Surrendered Worshippers: Are Focused upon Offering Their Worship to God Himself and None Other (Revelation 4:2-7)

This point brings us back to where we started. Surrender is the key to acceptable worship. Bowing to the Lord, surrendering every part of life we know of, to Him. That is how we focus our life in worship offered to God alone.

To renew that surrender, why not join me in those words we read earlier? Please stand, as we bow our hearts and lives, breathe out a personal offering prayer of surrender: to your King. Tell Him you are His, He can do whatever pleases Himself in and with your life.

Now, look up with me at these words, and as we sing them, bow in adoration, worship through surrender, give your all to your King!

In Romans 12:1-2 we read last week about presenting ourselves. That presentation is actually the act of surrender. We give ourselves over to the power of the Lord. Think about the scene in Heaven, and now think of how to personalize this act of surrender.

We fall down
and lay our crowns
At the feet of Jesus
The greatness of
Your Mercy and love
At the feet of Jesus
And we cry holy, holy, holy
And we cry holy, holy, holy
And we cry holy, holy, holy
Is the lamb

Redeemed: How I Love to Proclaim It

Revelation 5:9

This¹⁴⁴ morning as we open to Revelation 5:9, we are analyzing the words of the first song we see ourselves singing in heaven—the song of our redemption.

We who were slaves to sin, and lost sinners: were purchased by Christ's blood.

The God who so loved the world that he gave His Son to die on a cross; and shed His blood to pay the price of our sin! The message of this verse could be reduced to the simple phrase:

Redeemed: How I Love to Proclaim It

In Revelation 5:9 we see ourselves the way we will be—singing the new song of our worthy Redeemer. Please **stand** and follow along as we read these words:

*Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; **For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood** Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,*

Redemption is so important, that is what we sing about as soon as we are given the opportunity to express our gratitude in Heaven. So, redemption is a big subject, and one we each need to more fully understand. How about this morning we all become redemption-focused, and ask the Lord to open our hearts to the blessings we will be singing about in Heaven, while we're here on Earth?

The only way for us to really focus upon understanding redemption, is to see and hear Christ as He redeemed us. Turn back with me now to John 19:30.

In John 19:30 we witness the climactic end of Christ's redemption as the Lamb of God. This summary, of the work of redemption, was captured by John, as he stood at the foot of the Cross. While looking up through the darkness, John heard and recorded Christ's one word explanation of the work of redemption.

*John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*

In English we would say: "it is finished"; but in Greek those three words are summed up

in the single word that John heard Christ gasp on the cross—*tetelestai*.

TETELESTAI Means: It Is Finished

“**Tetelestai**” was Jesus declaring to God His Father that the price of salvation was paid; and the debt of the sin of the world was paid; and the work of redemption was complete.

This word that Jesus gasped from the Cross, was a word that was very familiar to those of the New Testament times.

This word “tetelestai” should burn into our hearts and minds because it was exactly the same word that a Roman judge would write on a criminals certificate of debt when he was released from prison—“tetelestai”: your debt to the Roman law is now paid in full. That meant there was no further condemnation or penalty that ever needed to be paid.

It is the same word that would be written on the certificate of a slave who was redeemed. After he had been enslaved to pay off a debt—“tetelestai” meant, your debt is paid in full, you may now go forth as a free man!

Those two historic usages help us to understand the implications to each of believers who have become followers of Christ, when:

JESUS DECLARED: Paid in Full

Think of the wonders of the Cross. Think of the meaning of Christ's words that the price of our redemption as born-again believers had been paid in full.

Paid in full is what Jesus cried from the cross of our redemption, as the work of salvation was once and for all time completed.

Paid in full is what He declares each time we come to Him confessing our sins.

Paid in full is what Jesus our advocate says while standing before God the Father as Satan the Accuser points out yet another time we have sinned.

Paid in full is the reality that Christ's payment of our redemption has made us *forever free, forever forgiven, and forever His child*.

Redemption involves the blood of Jesus shed as He died on the Cross to pay the purchase price of our salvation.

So redemption sums up Christ's death: His blood was shed, and His life was given as a substitutionary sacrifice.

So if any portion of salvation can be ranked as any more vital than any other—redemption would be at the top of the list. Now, let me remind you of my years as a youth

pastor, and:

Illustrating Salvation's Big Three Doctrines

Remember the illustration of the "Big Three Doctrines"? Those big three salvation doctrines we need to always remind ourselves about are: redemption, justification, and sanctification.

Redemption Illustrated: We started life on earth as dead in our trespasses and sin (pictured by my pen laying on the palm of my hand); **redemption** is when Jesus reached down and bought us out of the slave market of sin (that is my hand grasping the pen);

Justification Illustrated: **justification** is Jesus lifting me to be seated with Him already in Heaven, we are completely freed from the penalty and record of our sin (pen raised to illustrate our righteous standing in God's sight);

Sanctification Illustrated: **sanctification** is God forever binding our souls into His grasp and pulling us closer and closer to Him until at the end of our earthly life, He safely lands us into His Presence for ever (pen illustrating us pulled daily a notch closer to God's presence in our choices of life).

Now, go with me back to the context of our study of redemption. Remember how we got to this topic: God wants us to see that redemption is the theme of our worship in Heaven. Here is a reminder of those lessons in True Biblical Worship that Revelation 4-5 teach us.

The Elements of Worship Portrayed in Heaven

First, we have already seen that:

Element # 1: Holiness is Always the Atmosphere of True Biblical Worship (from Rev. 4:1-7)

That teaches us that the setting for worship is important, and that God wants our worship to start by a reverent focusing upon Him as the Awesome and Almighty One upon the Throne.

Element # 2: True Biblical Worship is Always in Response to God's Holiness (from Rev. 4:8-10)

It is the seraphim and cherubim that first take the stage to lead our worship.

Over all the other sounds of rumbling, voices, and thundering: is their cry that pierces

through Heaven that God Almighty is Holy, Holy, Holy.

It is at that instant that everyone and everything responds in worship.

Element # 3: True Biblical Worship is Always Focused Upon God (from Rev. 4:11)

It is amazing that the front row of the worshippers (the 24 elders) fall down so their faces are not seen, but He is seen. They cast off their crowns at His feet to declare that those crowns came from Him, belong to Him, and are only a reflection of Him.

When we get to Heaven we have a strong aversion to the spotlight. We don't take any of the credit, all the glory, honor and power goes to the Lord.

Element # 4: True Biblical Worship Centers Upon the Cross of Christ's Redeeming Sacrifice (from Rev. 5:1-9)

The content of True Biblical Worship is focused upon redemption in Heaven.

Redemption is a word that speaks of debts being paid, freedom being purchased and a life going in a completely new direction from the point of redemption onward.

Application #1: Redemption Should Always Remind us of How Unworthy we are of the Price Christ Paid

The wonder of Christ's redemption needs to be is always kept before us. When John Newton (1725-1807) wrote down his personal meditation on redemption here is his conclusion:

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)

That sav'd a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

Application #2: God Has Provided The Only Way of Redemption

Redemption is all about the debt our sin has piled up before God.

The legal obligations of debt, was an illustration Paul liked to use. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was writing to a church he had never visited. When he explained to them salvation he used a picture they would instantly recognize and never forget.

Open with me to Colossians 2:13-14 and watch Paul masterfully take those saints from Colosse and the world they lived in each day and transport them before the Holy God of

Heaven and then back with a clear understanding of Christ's work on their behalf.

*Colossians 2:13-14 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out **the handwriting of requirements that was against us**, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

The rule of law reigned in the Roman Empire that surrounds the New Testament. Each time a person was convicted of a crime: the law courts that convicted them also produced a “certificate of debt” that listed the exact crime; and the punishment that had to be paid before the criminal would be freed.

The convicted criminal or debtor would have to sign the certificate, and acknowledge the debt or punishment for the crime was rightfully his.

This certificate of debt was then nailed to the door of the cell where they were imprisoned,(or to the cross if it was a capital crime and they were crucified): until their sentence was completed and the crimes were “paid” for.

Look at that phrase in v. 14 “handwriting” that was against us: now, doesn’t Paul’s imagery leap from the page?

Can’t you see the sign over Christ’s head? That is how redemption should touch our hearts, reminding us that:

Application #3: We All Are Convicted Debtors to God

This is precisely the legal imagery that Paul draws upon in Colossians 2:13-14. The word ‘handwriting’ in v. 13 is the exact word for the list of crimes and/or debts the person was responsible for. Jesus took each of those “Certificates of Debt” upon Himself as He hung upon the cross.

The doctrine of redemption means that: “Believers’ sins were all put to Christ’s account, nailed to His cross as He paid the penalty in their place for them all, thus satisfying the just wrath of God against crimes requiring punishment in full”¹⁴⁵.

Application #4: Redemption Means that Christ Died to Pay the Debt of My Sin

So as God the Father looked down at Christ He saw your sins and mine. John calls it “the sin of the world”; and it was the totality of the sin of all humans that was nailed on Christ's Cross.

The Cross was Jesus declaring that He was guilty of every sin listed off for everyone of us and all who would ever live.

Now connect the imagery of Colossians 2:13-14 back to the record of Christ's death

¹⁴⁵John F. MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur Study Bible, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997, in loc.

upon the cross. The climactic end of Christ's redemption as the Lamb of God captured in John 19:30:

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is finished!**” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Tetelestai was Jesus declaring to God His Father that the price of salvation was paid; and the debt of the sin of the world was paid; and the work of redemption was complete.

Application #5: When Jesus Died, Sin’s Debt Was Paid in Full

Paid in full is what Jesus cried from the cross of His redemption as the work of salvation was once and for all time completed; and paid in full is what He declares each time we come to Him confessing our sins.

Paid in full is what Jesus our advocate says while standing before God the Father as Satan the Accuser points out yet another time we have sinned.

Paid in full, bought by the blood of the Lamb, and redeemed—that is what we shall forever sing in Heaven around His Throne.

So if any portion of salvation can be ranked as any more vital than any other—redemption would be at the top of the list.

We go through life in growing gratitude the more we understand that:

Paid in Full Means the Gift of Redemption is Mine

We need to experience by faith lived out through daily choices, what the Scriptures often declare—God has **liberated** us from our slavery to sin, **broken** sins chains that long had enslaved us; and **freed** us to focus our lives on what really matters to Him.

First personal impact:

Because I’m redeemed—Jesus destroyed the records of my sins and took my punishment. Romans 3:24

being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”.

Because I’m redeemed—Jesus destroyed the records of my sins and took my punishment.

Second personal impact:

Because I’m redeemed—Jesus is all I need! 1 Corinthians 1:30

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and

righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

This verse summarizes the three tenses of our salvation. In the past we *have been saved* from the penalty of sin (His redemption applied); and in the present we *are being saved* from the power of sin (His sanctification applied); and in the future we *shall be saved* from the presence of sin (His righteousness applied).

Because I'm redeemed—Jesus is all I need!

Third personal impact:

Christ bought me from the slave market with a high price—I belong to God. 1

Corinthians 6:20

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”.

Christ bought me from the slave market with a high price—I belong to God.

Fourth personal impact:

Because I'm redeemed—my sins are forgiven forever. Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works.

Because I'm redeemed—my sins are forgiven forever.

Fifth personal impact:

Because Christ bought me in redemption—I am God's workmanship. Ephesians 2:10

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”.

Because Christ bought me in redemption—I am God's workmanship.

Sixth personal impact:

Because I'm redeemed—God will finish what He started in me. Philippians 1:6

“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will

complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”.

Because I’m redeemed—God will finish what He started in me.

Seventh personal impact:

Because I’m redeemed—I am set free from any bondage, to be zealous for God! Titus 2:14 “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”.

Because I’m redeemed—I am set free from any bondage, to be zealous for God!

Final personal impact:

Because I’m redeemed—I will worship the Lord forever! Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

Redemption our song of eternal gratitude is a present possession, for which we should always give thanks!

Because I’m redeemed—Jesus destroyed the records of my sins and took my punishment.

Because I’m redeemed—Jesus is all I need!

Christ bought me from the slave market with a high price—I belong to God.

Because I’m redeemed—I will live for my Redeemer.

Because I’m redeemed—I no longer live for myself!

Because I’m redeemed—my sins are forgiven forever.

Because Christ bought me in redemption—I am God's workmanship

Because I’m redeemed—God will finish what He started in me.

Because I’m redeemed—my sin debt is forever paid in full.

Because I’m redeemed—I am set free from any bondage, to be zealous for God!

Because I’m redeemed—I will worship the Lord forever

The Context God Gives For the Tribulation

Revelation 5:9

For¹⁴⁶ several weeks we have been looking at the elements of worship that are so incredibly displayed in Heaven around the Throne of God. As we have examined each element there has been in the background a scroll.

As we open to Revelation 5 this morning, we have come to the merging of two themes in Scripture that often do not go together in our minds. I am talking about our worship of our Redeemer being portrayed in the very same verse as the judgments of God's wrath being poured out upon the Earth.

Watch with me as we read v.9 and see:

The Context God Gives For the Tribulation

Please hear God speak through His Word:

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: **“You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals;** For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

The context of all the tribulation and judgment of Revelation 6-20 is the worship around the Throne of Revelation 4-5. That is what is amazing. All the destruction ravaged scenes on earth during all those chapters are punctuated with the serenity of the songs around the Throne. What a picture of the security and peace that God alone can offer through any storm.

Now scan with me this chapter and note the big picture. Chapter 5 opens with God the Father on the Throne. In His Right Hand is a seven-sealed scroll. Of all the chapters in the Bible this is the one with the most references to this scroll. Look at v. 1-9, and note that there are 8 mentions of this scroll.

The word scroll is the Greek word *biblion*, from which we get book. But in this time period as John writes, a book is what we now call a scroll. Books as we know them as flat, square pages, bound together were called a codex. So what God is holding is what we would

call a scroll.

The Scroll Contains the Plan of God for Earth's Future

Most likely this scroll is the same scroll we see in Ezekiel 2:9-10 and Daniel 12:4. It refers to the plan of God to take back the kingdom of the Earth, temporarily taken over by Satan. Some call this scroll the title deed, but it has so much more to do with the actual plan of action to judge sin and end the rebellion.

As we watch the scene of worship in Heaven, we have been studying the element of redemption. As we are hearing songs of worship that we will offer in the future, we are seeing the wonders of the beauty God has surrounded Himself with in Heaven.

Now skip down and look at the opening of chapter 6. This scroll has seven seals. When we see that scroll opened in chapter 6 it is representing the unfolding of the plan for God's wrath to start pouring out in three parts: through the seven seals (Rev. 6-8), then the seven trumpets (Rev. 8-14), and finally the seven bowls (Rev. 15-19).

First, as each seal is loosed by Christ, the Lamb, the plan explodes into action. In chapter 6 there are six seals opened, and in chapter 8:1 the seventh seal opens to launch seven trumpets.

Second, the seven trumpets which cover chapters 8-14, where the seventh trumpet sounds in 11:15 it is the prelude to the final set of judgments known as the bowl judgments.

Finally, the bowls of wrath get poured out starting in Rev. 15:7 as they are introduced, and these seven bowls initiate the final events before Christ's Second Coming in power and glory in chapter 19, and His final acts consuming all the rebels in chapter 20.

But this sequence of seals, trumpets, and bowls always makes me wonder. How can Revelation swing from Heaven and worship to Earth and horribly destructive judgment? We can see the answer by understanding the explanations God has given. First, we can see twice mentioned collected prayers of the saints. See them mentioned in Rev. 5:8 and again in 8:3? Revelation is showing us God as he finally launches:

The Answer to Centuries of Prayers

For twenty centuries God's servants have prayed obediently: "Thy Kingdom Come". Now, all of those prayers, collected by God, in bowls at His feet, in v. 8 are scooped up and the wrath begins.

But the mystery has always been: why does God wait? One of the greatest expositors of the last century was W.A. Criswell who pastored First Baptist of Dallas for almost 50 years, preaching 4,000 sermons. Here are his words, on this moment of God's wrath sent forth:

The mystery of God is the long delay of our Lord in taking the kingdom unto Himself and in establishing righteousness in the earth. The mystery of God is seen in these thousands of years

in which sin and death run riot.

The pages of history, from the time of the first murder until this present hour, are written in blood, tears and death. The mystery is the delay of God in taking, the kingdom unto Himself. That is the most inexplicable mystery that mind could dream of, the mystery of the presence of evil.

For these thousands of years, God has allowed Satan to wrap his vicious, slimy, filthy, cruel tentacles around human life and around this earth. Does God know it? Is He indifferent to it? Is He not able to cope with it? Oh, the mystery of the delay of God! That mystery has brought more stumbling to the faith of God's people than any other experience in all life.

The infidel, the atheist, the agnostic and the unbeliever laugh and mock us, and God lets them mock and laugh. The enemies of righteousness and the enemies of all that we hold dear rise and increase in power and spread blood and darkness over the face of the earth, and we wonder where God is. Our missionaries are slain, our churches are burned to the ground, people in this earth by uncounted millions and millions are oppressed, living in despair, and God just looks. He seemingly does not intervene; He does not say anything, and He does not move. Sin just develops. It goes on and on.

Oh, the mystery of the delay of the Lord God! But somewhere beyond the starry sky there stands a herald angel with a trumpet in his hand, and by the decree of the Lord God Almighty, there is a day, there is an hour, there is a moment, there is an elected time when the angel shall sound and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ."¹⁴⁷

What Revelation illustrates is what the rest of the Scriptures have already shown us.

Christ's Three Roles are Always Visible in the Word

Jesus has three very special roles given to Him as God the Son, by God the Father. Paul uses a message in Athens at Mars Hill, to explain them to us.

Turn with me to Acts 17 and see how Paul uses these three roles of Jesus Christ to present the Gospel to pagans with no understanding of the Scriptures. This is a fascinating sermon Paul preached. Start with me in Acts 17:22-31

Listen as Acts 17 reminds us of the three roles Jesus Christ fills. Here in Revelation we see all three of them side-by-side. Always remember that:

Jesus is Always: Creator, Savior and the Judge

He is Creator (v. 24-26).

He is Savior (v. 27-30).

He is Judge (v. 31).

When mankind refuses to acknowledge their Creator, and when they refuse their only

¹⁴⁷W. A. Criswell, Expository Sermons on Revelation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961-66), p. 190.

Savior, Jesus then becomes Judge.

Now back to Revelation 5. The context of the judgments of sinful and rebellious humanity is the worship of Heaven. But look where we started in Rev. 5:9. The theme of that worship in Heaven is what? Our wonderful Redeemers who purchased our redemption. And, God's Word explains to us:

Redemption's Three Purposes

The word redeemed in Rev. 5:9 is just one of three words¹⁴⁸ in the New Testament that are translated "redeem". Each of these three words that God chose to use tell us one facet of the triumph of the Cross, forever the theme of our songs in Heaven. Each word that God chose to express the work of Christ on the Cross speaks of His power to redeem us. Take a moment to ponder each of these truths.

The first word that is used in the New Testament to describe redemption is the one used right here in Rev. 5:9. It is *agorazō* (ἀγοράζω), which means: "to buy a slave in the market place"¹⁴⁹.

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have **redeemed us to God** by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

The depth of meaning for this word comes as God explains what His redemption accomplished. We are redeemed/bought for God. God bought each of us for Himself. Wow. Let that settle in, and permeate your life.

I am owned by God. God went to the slave market of sin, and reached down and chose me, paid the redemption price with the blood of His own Son, and now owns me. Turn back to the second place God explains this special word.

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were **bought** at a price; therefore **glorify God** in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Lesson # 1: Redemption Means Bought to Be God's Servants That Glorify Him

Christ bought us in this slave market of sin by His own blood; we as believers are His bondslaves. The slave market is this earth. All the unsaved are slaves of sin and Satan.

Our Lord paid the penalty for sin at the Cross. Those who trust in His blood, belong to Him as His bondslaves. The song of Heaven that should reverberate through our lives each day is that we were bought to glorify God.

The second word used for redemption in the New testament is *exagorazō* (ἐξαγοράζω),

¹⁴⁸ Wuest, K. S. (1997). Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader (Romans 3:24; Titus 2:11). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, in loc, electronic edition.

¹⁴⁹ This word is found six times in Revelation (3:18; 5:9; 13:7; 14:3-4; and 18:11).

this word means: “to buy off, to buy up,” thus, “to buy out of the slave market”. There are two

Galatians 3:13 Christ has **redeemed** us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”); 4:5 to **redeem** those who were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons.

Ephesians 5:16 (NKJV) **redeeming** the time, because the days are evil.

Lesson # 2: Redemption Means Bought to Be God’s Servants, Adopted & Never Sold Again

The saved are never to be put up for sale in any slave market again. They belong to the Lord Jesus forever. Paul added in Ephesians 5:16 the concept that now our time also belongs to the Lord. We are to love our new Master so much that we invest (redeem) our time for things that please Him.

We are adopted, we are in His family forever, so we should never allow our precious time to get back under the control of our former master. That is a daily choice we need to make.

The third word translated redemption in the New testament is *lutroō* (λυτρω), and this word means: “to set free by the payment of a ransom”, “to set free by paying a price”. The most well know usage of this third word translated redeem in the New Testament is in Titus 2. Lets turn back there.

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem** us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

1 Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

Lesson # 3: Redemption Means Bought to Be God’s Servants that Are Special & Zealous

We as believers, have been set free from sin by Christ's redemption. We are now free to live a life pleasing to God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our redemption price is the precious blood of Jesus. He alone makes it possible for a righteous God to justify us, when we as believing sinners come to Him through Christ's redemption that satisfied God’s justice.

We are redeemed to become God’s slaves. We are set free from the bondage we had to sin. We are no longer under the control of our old master Satan. Christ's redemption now allows us to experience the fellowship with God, and ministry for God we were created for.

Now, back to Rev. 4-5, as we see this final element of worship that connects the Tribulations judgments with the worship of the redeemed.

The worship of the King flows out and explains His wrath against sin. Paul explains the wrath of God in Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Jesus returns in the blazing fire of wrath against sin in II Thessalonians 1:7b-8 when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 6-20 completely fits as a result of the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. He stands with His arms open to the world and pours out His righteous and holy wrath against sinners who will not turn to Him away from their sins.

The fifth and final element that God reveals in Revelation 4 & 5 about True Biblical Worship is also the least understood. God actually uses worship as the context for all the rest of the Book of Revelation.

In other words, the way to understand the Tribulation is to see it as the systematic fulfillment of the Lord’s Prayer. Remember the words of Christ that are to frame our daily lives? We call it the Lord’s Prayer, but it is actually our mission statement for all our earthly life.

The first three elements deeply impact our understanding of Revelation 4-5. They are these words:

“Our Father, Who art in Heaven, Hallowed by Thy Name”:

that is a summary of Revelation 4, and the holy scene of constant adoration and worship around the Throne of God in Heaven.

“Thy Kingdom come”:

that second phrase is the summary of the constant repetition of the word “Throne” (eleven times) in Revelation 4-5. That is a reminder that God is the Great King of all the Universe. He sits enthroned in Heaven. We bow with all of creation before Him. That bowing starts when we bow in the humble repentance of salvation to Him as our Lord, Master, and Savior. We live a life of reverent submission, which is what walking in the Spirit, pleasing God, and a life of progressive sanctification is all about.

“Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven”:

this third phrase bridges the scene of us in Heaven worshipping around the Throne, and us here on Earth growing in our desire to love, serve, and follow our Lord and our God. But this phrase is also a conundrum: why does such a powerful Omnipotent God allow evil to run amok? When will He finally put an end to all rebellion and sin, and finally right all wrongs?

Each time we pray we are asking God to come back and take this rebel world back under

His direct control, that prayer will be answered in God's perfect time.

But we also pray: Lord, bring me under Your control. I want to be zealous for you. I want to do your will and redeem my time for what pleases You.

Invite God's rule over every part of your life today as we stand and pray those wonderful words of reminder back to our Redeemer!

The Redemption-Driven Life

Revelation 5:9

One¹⁵⁰ of the best-selling books of modern times was called the Purpose-Driven Life. Author Rick Warren hit a collective nerve in society because so many people feel aimless at times, and struggle for a clear purpose to point our lives at.

The amazing truth is that we are bought and owned by God. He tells us that the purpose that should drive us to focus upon how we use our river of time, that rushes past us at 60 minutes-per-hour.

The Redemption-Driven Life of Revelation 5:9 is:

Redemption **will be** the theme of our songs in Heaven.

Redemption **will be** the focus of our worship around the Throne.

Redemption **should be** the purpose that directs our lives on Earth.

To help us calibrate our lives, the Lord shows us this scene we have been watching in Revelation 5. Please stand as we read and hear God speak through His Word:

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, **And have redeemed us to God by Your blood** out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

Last week we began to unpack the three layers of meaning that God has built into this one word in English: redemption. We have seen so far that God explains:

Redemption's Three Purposes

To display the wonders of our redemption, God has chosen to use three different Greek words¹⁵¹ in the New Testament, that are translated "redeem". Each of these three words tell one facet of the story of the Cross, which is forever the theme of our songs in Heaven. Each word that God chose to express the work of Christ on the Cross speaks of His power to redeem us.

Scattered across every single city in the Roman Empire was a place called by the word Agora. It was the city-square, marketplace, or forum. Though the size differed from place to place: the function remained. Things were bought and sold at the agora, and most notably: people were bought and sold at the agora. In time the word for buying a slave became

¹⁵⁰ 120603 AM TRU-14 Driven.do

¹⁵¹Wuest, K. S. (1997). Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader (Romans 3:24; Titus 2:11). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, in loc, electronic edition.

synonymous with the place and thus was called agorazo.

Word # 1: Bought “at” The Slave Market

That is the most common term for redemption; and the first word that is used in the New Testament to describe redemption. This word *agorazō* (ἀγοράζω), which means: “to buy a slave in the market place”¹⁵², has a depth of meaning that flows from the key New Testament passages where redemption is explained:

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have **redeemed** us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were **bought** at a price; **therefore glorify God** in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Redemption Means we have a:

Purpose # 1: Bought to Be Slaves That Glorify God

Rev. 5:9 says that Christ bought us at of the slave market of sin by His own blood; and we as believers are bought by Him to become His bond-slaves.

The slave market is this earth. All humans are born as sinners; and all subjects born in slavery to sin are born under the domain of Satan. Jesus explained it this way in John 8:44 (NKJV):

You are of **your father the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Jesus further explains our plight in v. 34 (NKJV):

Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is **a slave** of sin.

Then, into the hopeless slavery that our sins brings us, comes our Redeemer. Jesus declares His power to liberate us in v. 36 (NKJV):

Therefore if the **Son makes you free**, you shall be free indeed.

Jesus died on the Cross to make us free. This morning, our redemption means that we were each bought to be slaves that glorify God. Our Lord paid the penalty for sin at the Cross. Those who trust in His blood, belong to Him as His bond-slaves. The song of Heaven that should reverberate through our lives each day as our purpose: **Bought to be slaves that glorify**

¹⁵²This word is found six times in Revelation (3:18; 5:9; 13:7; 14:3-4; and 18:11).

God.

Word # 2: Bought “out of” The Slave Market

The second word used for redemption in the New Testament is **exagorazō** (ἐξαγοραζω), this word means: “to buy off, to buy up,” thus, “to buy out of the slave market”. There are two key places this word is used. Both speak of the buying and removing of the purchased possession “out of” the market.

Like a house taken off the market, and no longer for sale: Jesus when He redeemed us, takes us off the market, we are His and no longer to be sold back to the slave master of sin.

Closely tied to redemption is the great doctrine of adoption. Jesus chose us, purchased us, and did that so that He could adopt us into His very own family. We are bought and paid for, liberated and immediately adopted into His family. Paul explains this precious truth in Galatians 3 and 4.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has **redeemed** us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”); 4:5 to **redeem** those who were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons.

Ephesians 5:16 (NKJV) **redeeming** the time, because the days are evil.

Redemption Means we have a:

Purpose # 2: Bought to Be Adopted & Never Sold Again

The redeemed are never for sale in any slave market again. They belong to the Lord Jesus forever. But, as each of us learns by going through life, there is one slight problem: our will to choose.

We have been chosen, we have all of God, but He asks to now have all of us.

Remember the great truth at the end of I Cor. 6:20, where Paul says that: because we were bought (redeemed) at such a great price we should “glorify God”? That is the purpose that drives the redeemed. We want to offer every moment of life to the Lord, and bring them under the gracious Lordship of Christ. Whether we eat or drink, whatever we do: we want to do it all for the glory of God.

The plan to make our lives lived out for God glory is presented in Romans. Turn back to Romans 6 with me. As we turn to Romans 6, the flow of the chapters in Romans is so instructive:

Chapter 3 reminds us we all are sinners.

Chapter 4 declares that faith is the key to life in Christ.

Chapter 5 describes the greatest doctrine of salvation: justification.

Then we get to chapter 6:6, and Paul picks right up where Christ Jesus left off. Paul said that we who are redeemed by Christ's blood must no longer allow ourselves to go back to

slavery to sin.

Romans 6:6 (NKJV) knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should **no longer be slaves** of sin.

Redemption makes us no longer slaves to sins, but only a series of correct choices allow us to enjoy the benefits of our liberation.

Romans 6, starting with v. 7, is all about the choices we are allowed to make each day, as freed men and women.

Either we choose to surrender of bodies back to the daily control of our new master, or if not, our old master begins to reassert his control upon us.

Listen to Paul's plea on behalf of God in v. 7-10:

Romans 6:6 (NKJV) For he who has died has been **freed from sin**.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.

Because Christ redeemed us "out of" the slave market, adopted us into His family, and declares that we are never for sale again: v. 11 onward has some powerful words about the choices our Redeemer expects from us on a daily basis.

Redemption Choice-1: Reckon on Truth

v. 11 Now that I am redeemed I can choose to increasingly say yes to my new Master, and obey Him more and more of each day.

Romans 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)

Reckon is the Greek word: *logidzomai* 'operate on what you know is true'. I can resist sin, resist my besetting sin, resist my long-term patterns, because God has given me the strength to do so.

Redemption Choice-2: Say No

v. 12 Now that I am redeemed I can choose by grace and through faith to say NO to my old master and deny my flesh more and more each day.

Romans 6:12 Therefore **do not let** sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (NKJV)

"Don't be so foolish as to try to be what you are not!"

Redemption Choice-3: Stop the Pattern

v. 13a Now that I am redeemed I can choose to STOP the patterns that my old sins led me to follow, like: wasting my time, neglecting God's Word and prayer, and avoiding the

sanctifying habits of Scripture memory and accountability.

Romans 6:13a And do not present your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness to sin, (NKJV)

Paul told the believers that they had to put a stop to those patterns that displease God. It is our choice, enabled by God, but made by us: that breaks the patterns of sin.

For example, if you struggle with time in the Word you call out to the Lord in prayer, and ask for help to break the old habits that keep you from God. Then, make a plan to read the Bible and pray before the smart phone or computer, or TV. Put your Bible out in plain sight, maybe right where your phone is plugged in, or by your keyboard.

Then as you wake up, or come home and it is time to make a choice: right then with the two choices in front of you of either: God or TV, God or FaceBook, God or gaming, right then you cry aloud and ask God for help. Which leads directly to the next choice:

Redemption Choice-4: Start a New

v. 13b Now that I am redeemed I can choose to ask God to help me START a new pattern of holy habits.

Romans 6:13b but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness to God. (NKJV)

This means asking the Lord to change your appetite. This means asking the Lord to give you the strength to get rid of things that enslave, entangle, and trip you up.

There may be cable subscriptions that need to be canceled. There may be an online accountability that may need to be set up. There may need to be an agreement with someone you love and trust to hold you accountable for your new habit of time in the Word, or listening to your Scripture memory.

Redemption Choice-5: Deny the Old

v. 14 Now that I am redeemed I can choose to firmly deny my OLD master any place in my life.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (NKJV)

Redemption Choice-6: Surrender Anew

v. 19 Now that I am redeemed I can choose to Surrender again and again to my NEW MASTER.

Romans 6:19 I speak in human [terms] because of the weakness of your flesh. For **just as you presented** your members [as] slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness [leading] to

[more] lawlessness, **so now present** your members [as] slaves [of] righteousness for holiness.
(NKJV)

This takes us to the final word God used to describe us as His redeemed:

Word # 3: Set Free From The Slave Market

The third word translated redemption in the New Testament is lutroō (λυτρω), “to set free by the payment of a ransom”, “to set free by paying a price”

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem** us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

1 Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

Redemption Means we have a:

Purpose # 3: Bought to Be Zealous for Good Works

We as believers, have been set free from sin by Christ's redemption. We are now free to live a life pleasing to God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our redemption price is the precious blood of Jesus. He alone makes it possible for a righteous God to justify us, when we as believing sinners come to Him through Christ's redemption that satisfied God's justice.

We are redeemed to become God's slaves. We are set free from the bondage we had to sin. We are no longer under the control of our old master Satan. Christ's redemption now allows us to experience the fellowship with God, and ministry for God we were created for.

In other words, the way to understand Redemption is to see it as the systematic fulfillment of the Lord's Prayer.

The Prayer of the Redeemed: Focus me, Control me, Lead me

Remember the words of Christ that are to frame our daily lives? We call it the Lord's Prayer, but it is actually our mission statement for all our earthly life.

The first three elements deeply impact our understanding of the daily surrender of Redemption. They are these words:

“Our Father, Who art in Heaven, Hallowed by Thy Name”:

Focus me on the reality of Revelation 4, and the holy scene of constant adoration and

worship around the Throne of God in Heaven.

Focus my heart, my life, my mind upon You as My King.
I bow before You. I adore You.
You are the King of My Life.

“Thy Kingdom come”:

You my God are the Great King of all the Universe.
You sits enthroned in Heaven.
I bow with all of creation before Him.

Control my life is what this petition is all about. Our bowing started when we bowed in the humble repentance of salvation to Him as our Lord, Master, and Savior.
I want to live a life of reverent submission.
I want to walk in the Spirit, pleasing You my God.
I want the life of Your progressive sanctification.

“Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven”:

This third phrase bridges the scene of us in Heaven worshipping around the Throne, and us here on Earth growing in our desire to love, serve, and follow our Lord and our God.

Lead my steps in your pathway, is My heart cry as the one You redeemed.
I need You as my Master to lead me.
Show me Your way, and guide me through life.

When God Finally Answers Generations of Prayers for Justice

Revelation 5:9b-14

Unanswered¹⁵³ prayers: what happens to them? As we open to Rev. 5, we find the answer to one of the great mysteries of God's Word: Where do all our prayers go? After we prayed them, God heard them, and then what?

What Happens to All Our Prayers

Do prayers become like deleted emails? Does God get them, see them on His screen, read them; and then just hits the trash button, and poof, they are gone?

No, that is never the image God wants in our minds.

Prayers to God, from all His saints (which includes all believers of all time from Adam and Eve, to the final redeemed person of the Millennium) are so special: God has collected them, and continues to collect them.

As we open to Rev. 5:8, think for a moment at what it means to pray. You and I have been invited to lay at the feet of Almighty God, the deepest longings of our hearts, expressed through our prayers. And God Almighty hears them, and keeps them always before His Throne, where they are presently found this very moment.

God Collects and Saves Every Prayer from His Saints

That is what we are going to see as we read Revelation. Wow, I wonder how many prayers I have there right now? How many do you have? How much do we pray, since God loves our prayers so much He collects them?

Please follow along as we read Rev. 5:8-6:1 (NKJV):

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

¹⁵³ 120826AM TRU-16 Justice.doc

¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,
¹² saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

6 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.”

Did you notice the clear message of that sequence of descriptions John is guided in presenting for us Christ's Church?

God is Showing the Plan For His Wrath against Sin

In Rev. 4-5 we are in the worship-filled atmosphere of Heaven. We can see the three elements of the flow in these chapters of what God wants us to see and understand: first we are shown:

The Throne and the surrounding Worship; then
The Lamb that was slain (Jesus Christ) is introduced; and then
The Scroll and the bowls of prayers.

In Rev. 4:1-5:7, we are surrounded by the Throne, awesome angelic creatures, white-robed saints, myriads of worshiping angels, and the breathtaking glory of God sparkling all around us.

Then, in Rev. 5:8 the Lamb who was slain for sinners, steps before the Throne. There is a scroll that we are told was at the right hand of the Almighty. Then in our text today we see that the scroll is given to Christ. This scroll with seals (which we will soon find out is the exact script for all the events recorded in Rev. 6-20) is placed into the Hands of Christ, the Lamb slain for sinners.

Then, John is instructed to point out to us the prayers of all the ages. They are not from just the church. In Heaven God widens our understanding and says they are the prayers of all the saints.

Old & New Testament Believers are Called Saints

Believers are called saints from the very first prophecy in God's Word (Enoch's which

says: “the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints”).

“Saints” is what God calls His people from Deuteronomy through Zechariah. Those saints are also named as some who were raised by the earthquake at Christ's crucifixion; and who later step out of their graves at the same time as Christ on Sunday morning (Matthew 27:52).

So the saints of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament all have their prayers collected and held before the Throne of the Almighty God. But, what was not clearly explained in the Old Testament, becomes very clear through Christ in the New Testament.

Remember how Jesus left a model prayer for us His followers? We all know it, we've prayed it, and we believe it is part of His plan for us.

The second statement of that model (or Lord's) prayer is the plea: “Thy Kingdom Come”.

Thy Kingdom Come

Most of us have only a slight understanding of just how serious that request really is. Martin Luther, over 500 years ago called this that “terrible petition” that invited God's to powerfully control our lives.

Each time we pray this personally, it is a request for God to Rule my life. That is how it applies to us as believers.

But, what else have all of us saints been asking God to do?

Sometimes we forget to connect the dots, and see the much bigger picture. Thy Kingdom Come is a cry to Almighty God, from all of us believers, throughout all of the centuries since Christ instructed us to pray that way.

But what are we asking? And, when does God answer one of the most repeated requests, by more of His saints than nearly any other?

Revelation 5 explains the manner and timing of His answer to all those prayers.

Why Doesn't God DO Something

Have you ever heard someone say, “Why doesn't God DO something? Look at all the oppressed; look at all the innocent people massacred; look at all the injustices around us? Why doesn't God do something?”

Well, as we come to Revelation 5 we find that God has done something all along: He has collected those prayers, deposited them right in front of His Throne; and finally, in His perfect timing, God shows us His response.

Perhaps the best way to answer what God will do about all of the horrors of sins that have run amok through humanity for thousands of years is that God writes down a fifteen-chapter description of His perfect answer to mankind's wicked rebellion against His rule. God's

answer to sin is the exact content we have before us in our Bibles we call Rev. 6-20.

Revelation Explains: When God's Wrath Comes

In Revelation 5:8 we see for the first time, where all the prayers have gone. Every prayer from the very first prayers of humanity lifted up from Adam and Eve, through all the Old Testament era, and on through the New Testament era, and right up to the most recent prayer being lifted at this moment around the world by saints like us today: EVERY prayer has landed in one spot.

God is amazing. He does not forget us, He never misplaces our requests, and He doesn't ever ignore us.

God Almighty is amazingly patient. Paul explains that all of the hardness of every sinful heart is "treasuring up" wrath from God (Romans 2:5). God stores His wrath, like an electrical charge, building up until with blinding light, blazing power, and a deafening roar, His wrath begins to stroke downward like a deadly thunderstorm.

We have now come to the final element of worship in Revelation 5:9-14. As we earlier studied Rev. 4-5 we found that these chapters describe worship that surrounds God at this very moment and into the future. That element is:

True Biblical Worship: Understands God's Wrath is Against Un-Confessed, Un-Forsaken, and Un-Forgiven Sins (from Revelation 5:9b-14)

The first warning from God to the world, about His immense wrath against sin, was when He destroyed all but eight humans with a flood of water, in the days of Noah. The global flood is a critical doctrine in the plan of God. That is why that Flood has been so belittled by those who want to push God far away, out of touch, and not an Almighty cosmic interrupter of humanity's unbroken sinfulness.

The second, and mightiest warning from God about how severely He looks upon mankind's sin was demonstrated when God showed the world His abundant mercy and grace by pouring out His wrath against sin onto Jesus as He hung upon that cross.

Then, God has patiently waited while His saints have crossed the globe, sharing the Good News. Explaining how to avert the wrath of God forever against sin. Now, God is going to start pouring out His stored up wrath against the earth-dwellers here in chapter 5, and then finally, in Rev 20, against all sinners who have not enrolled in God's amnesty for sinners program, by casting all un-forgiven sinners into Hell forever.

God connects for us, in Revelation 5, the Tribulation's judgments with the worship of the redeemed around the Throne, mixed with the prayers of all the saints.

Paul explains the wrath of God in Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from

heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Jesus returns in the blazing fire of wrath against sin in II Thessalonians 1:7b-8 when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 6-20 completely fits as a result of the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. He stands with His arms open to the world and pours out His righteous and holy wrath against sinners who will not turn to Him away from their sins.

This final element that God reveals in Revelation 4 & 5 about True Biblical Worship is also the least understood. God actually uses worship as the context for all the rest of the Book of Revelation.

From Rev. 5:9, look down to Rev. 6:1, the seals that unleash God’s wrath, are tied to the scroll introduced to us in chapter 5.

So what exactly was Jesus as the Lamb surrounded by worship worthy to do? Unleash the horrors of the Great Tribulation.

What is the Tribulation? For any student of the Bible you know that God has promised a time when He will judge the inhabitants of the earth for their rebellion. It is a time when God at last pours out direct wrath upon the people who have followed Satan in his rebellion against God. That time period, described in the Bible as the “great tribulation” is a time that can only be summarized by some:

Staggering Numbers

In the Great Tribulation more than 2 ½ million die every day for 42 months.

In the German death camp called Auschwitz just over a thousand died each day.

That means during the Tribulation, 2,500 times as many people will die every day.

Or to put it in Auschwitz terms—the number of people that died in every 24 hour day at Auschwitz will die **every 15 seconds** in the Great Tribulation!

Or in other terms living on earth will be like living in an Auschwitz death camp—and in death toll there will be the equivalent deaths of the entire WWII Holocaust **every other day, for 42 months!**

A brief look through the pages of Revelation starting in chapters six, describe the living hell you can avoid if you are saved this morning.

Seven Elements of the End of Days

Here are seven elements of the end of days, which only a few of the dreadfully detailed disasters that take place during the Tribulation:

1.) One out of every two people will die (see Rev. 6:8 and onward), some through

the ravages of war, others by starvation, and amazingly many others by the 'beasts of the earth'. So, whether by death that come instantly and thus less dreaded or a slow and painful death that is lingering and agonizing—50 % of all people will die.

The world's population was 7,034,897,482 yesterday, so that means at least 3,517,448,761 will die.

That amounts to just about eleven times the current population of the United States. Can you imagine that?

And remember that the population of the world is doubling every 39.5 years. So every day the number of people who will die becomes larger and larger.

2.) One third of all vegetation will be burned up. All grass, every tree, everything green will be destroyed.

Revelation 8:7 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.

3.) The sun and the moon will be darkened as nature goes into revolt.

Revelation 8:12 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.

4.) The gates of hell will open and hordes of locusts, the size of horses, will come upon the earth. Those locusts will be allowed to sting men like scorpions and the pain will last for five months. The Bible says men will beg God to let them die but they will not die.

Revelation 9:3-6 Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

5.) There will be worldwide famine unlike anything the world has ever seen.

Matthew 24:7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

Revelation 6:5-6 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

Revelation 18:8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day--death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.

6.) There will be a world war so bloody that the blood of those killed in battle will flow

for two hundred miles, splashing up to the height of the bridle of a horse in the valley of Jezreel. This will be the Battle of Armageddon.

Revelation 14:20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

7.) All told, during the Great Tribulation, as many as **half of all the people on the earth will be killed.**

Now do you see why God refers to the Rapture as a 'blessed hope'? It is because the Tribulation to come is so horrible! God explains that we are gone and will escape everything, right?

Yes, exactly, we will miss every part of the TRIBULATION, but we will probably go through some of the worst days we have ever seen before it starts.

Back to unanswered prayers: Revelation 5 reminds us that God collects those prayers, deposits them right in front of His Throne; and finally, in His perfect timing, God gives His response.

Only we, as God's servants, understand that the Tribulation is to display His Wrath against un-confessed, un-forsaken, and un-forgiven sins.

That is why Jesus left us with a challenge, a request to pray for each day we live:

Thy Kingdom Come

Thy Kingdom Come is a cry to Almighty God, from all of us believers, throughout all of the centuries since Christ instructed us to pray that way.

Why not join me in offering that prayer as another deposit before the Throne of God Almighty.

When God writes the Lyrics: The Songs of Heaven's Worship Teams in Revelation 4-5

As¹⁵⁴ we open to Revelation 5: we have come to the greatest *portion*, of the greatest *book*, about the greatest *place* there could ever be anywhere: ***the Place of God's Personal Presence called Heaven.***

Today, Heaven's worship, distilled before us in our Bibles, into words we each can understand: is the most challenging message we could ever hear to prepare us for serving God!

Worship is the offering given to God from my heart, quickened by His Spirit, unto a true awareness of my unworthiness, and His Almighty Immensity. That is how we sync with the constant atmosphere of Heaven.

God is the Center of Attention in Heaven

Heaven is filled with immense activity, constant travel, endlessly changing scenes, and enough sights and sounds to captivate even the most active observer. There is no boredom possible in Heaven; but neither is there any doubt about Who is the center of all attention.

Worship in Heaven is only offered to God Almighty, who is Majestic, Awesome, and completely in charge of everything.

When we cross the threshold into the spiritual world, His Throne towers as central to everything that goes on. But from that scene around the Seat of the Most High God, a message has been sent to us.

Today we begin a look at the recorded content of the worship of Heaven. If the Book of Revelation was a worship service, it would have 14 doxologies written into the program.

Lyrics of Worship God Wrote

When God writes the lyrics, what do the choirs of Heaven sing? That is the wonder we see as we open to Revelation 5:8-10. Our passage today captures the third of 14 different doxologies in Revelation. Please stand with me, and with all the fantastic imagery of the

¹⁵⁴ 120916AM TRU-17 Lyrics.doc

scenes we have seen of God’s Throne on your mind, follow along as we read these words:

*Rev. 5:8-10 (NKJV) Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:
 “You are worthy to take the scroll,
 And to open its seals;
 For You were slain,
 And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
 Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;
 And we shall reign on the earth.”*

The 14 Doxologies Recorded In Revelation

For a moment, just page with me through your Bibles and see the actual words of each of these doxologies in Revelation. Each of these doxologies is a specific, focused offering of worship. Each has a very special context; but all point their worship to the Ancient of Days, seated upon the Throne.

Reference	Those Offering Worship	Those Receiving Worship
4:8	4 Living Creatures	1. God the Father
4:11 (3-fold)	24 Elders	2. God the Father
5:9-10	24 Elders + 4 Living Creatures	3. The Lamb (Christ)
5:12 (7-fold)	Many Angels	4. The Lamb (Christ)
5:13 (4-fold)	Every Creature	5. God the Father and the Lamb
7:10	Tribulation Martyrs	6. God the Father and the Lamb
7:12 (7-fold)	Angels, 24 Elders, and 4 Living Creatures	7. God the Father
11:16-18	24 Elders	8. God the Father
15:3-4	Tribulation Saints	9. God the Father and the Lamb
16:5-6	Angel	10. God the Father
16:7	“The Altar”	11. God the Father
19:1-3 (4-fold)	A Great Multitude	12. God the Father
19:4	24 Elders + 4 Living Creatures	13. God the Father
19:6-8	A Great Multitude	14. God the Father

Now, move back in your Bibles to the third doxology, it is in Rev. 5:9. This doxology is

recorded differently than the first two, which were chants; this doxology is a song.

The Words of the First Song in Heaven

Starting in Rev. 5:9-10 we see the very first song in Revelation. This is a song that God sent to us, wrote down for us, and gave to us His church. Once again look at these inspired words:

And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
v. 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”

What do these lyrics, that God wrote, teach us who hear them in our hearts and minds?

Each of these seven phrases declares a facet of Christ's character, work, and life as recorded in Scripture. What we have before us in clear, plain, understandable language are the exact facets of Christ that glorified saints in Heaven offer in worship.

How They Worship Jesus in Heaven

These are the first targets of the glorified saints worship in Heaven.

- 1.) **They Worship Jesus as the Owner of the Universe:** Jesus Christ the Lamb is the only rightful Heir of all things. Only He can take the scroll. “You are worthy to take the scroll.” Jesus who is God the Son, Creator of all things, has the Name that is above all Names; and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.
- 2.) **They Worship Jesus as the Judge of All:** Jesus Christ is the Judge of all and thus has the right to open the seals which release the wrath of God. And to open its seals. The Father has given all judgment into the Hands of the Son. Someday all the nations will hide from His Face as He comes to right all wrongs.
- 3.) **They Worship Jesus as the Lamb that was Slain for the world:** Jesus is the Lamb that was slain for the sin of the world. For You were slain. Jesus is the Lamb of God, the once for all time sacrifice offered on the altar of the cross, to become the eternal payment for sin.
- 4.) **They Worship Jesus as the Redeemer:** Jesus is the One who alone could redeem us, and did so with His very own blood. And have redeemed us to God by Your blood. Jesus who was holy, harmless, and undefiled became sin. He who knew no

sin was made sin so that He could purchase us. In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the complete forgiveness of all sins.

- 5.) **They Worship Jesus as the Savior:** Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost. His Great Commission plan has succeeded, we see and hear those from every branch of humanity are around the Throne, safe in heaven. Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Jesus was moved with compassion. He called out to all those who were weary of their sins, and heavy laden with their frustrations: and promised them rest.
- 6.) **They Worship Jesus as the Great High Priest:** Christ's redemption brings us into the kingdom of God where we can come into His presence as His priests. v. 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God. Jesus is the new and living way. He has opened God's presence to us. We are now able to come to Him bringing Him gifts of worship and adoration.
- 7.) **They Worship Jesus as the King of Kings:** Christ's promise that we as His joint heirs reign with Him is accomplished. And we shall reign on the earth. "The weak of this world are strong in their King. The poor of this world are rich in their King. The promised rule over a world and a universe that are His is given to us who are joint heir with Jesus.

There is even more that this first song opens for us. The introduction to the very first song we ever hear the words for in Heaven, comes after the introduction of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb before the Throne, and:

Lamb is the Most Frequent Title for Christ in Heaven

In Rev. 5:6 we are introduced to Christ's most frequent title in Revelation. Look back with me at that verse.

*Rev. 5:6 (NKJV) And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, **stood a Lamb as though it had been slain**, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

Here in Revelation 5:6 is the first time of the 29x that Jesus is called the Lamb in Revelation. This title of Jesus Christ as the Lamb is first given in the New Testament in the Gospel by John 1:29, 36; and one other time in I Pet. 1:19. So three times in all of the New Testament up to this last book, and then 29x here.

The Lamb is also the single most used title of our Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation. He is called (in the NKJV): Christ 11x, Jesus 14x, Lord 22x; but He is called Lamb 29x. Here in the chapter where Jesus is first called the Lamb in Revelation, He is called that 4x in chap 5. That means Jesus is called the Lamb more in this single chapter than in all the other chapters of the Bible combined.

Just one other note about the names of Jesus can also be seen in this chapter. In Revelation 5:5 we find the only time that Jesus Christ is called the Lion. So He is first and only

called the Lion in v. 5, and then in v. 6 he is called the Lamb, His most frequent title in Revelation. Jesus is a Lion and a Lamb. He is powerful and sacrificial. He suffered as a Lamb, and will conquer as a Lion.

Seven Lessons from the First Song of Heaven

What can we apply to our lives today from this first song?

1-Surrender back all you have to Jesus as your Creator & Owner:

Jesus Christ the Lamb is the only rightful Heir of all things. Only He can take the scroll. "You are worthy to take the scroll." He is our Creator & Owner. Our complete and constant surrender belongs to Him.

1 Cor. 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

All to Jesus I surrender

All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

I surrender all,
I surrender all.
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power,

Let Thy blessing fall on me.

J.W. Van DeVenter (1896)

2-Surrender back all you have to Jesus as your Creator & Owner

Reflect upon Jesus as the Judge of your life: Jesus Christ is the Judge of all and thus has the right to open the seals, which release the wrath of God. And to open its seals;

II Cor. 5:10 (NKJV) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

3-Reflect upon Jesus as the Judge of your life

Be grateful that Jesus is the Lamb that was Slain for your sins: Jesus is the Lamb that was slain for the sin of the world. For You were slain.

I John 1:7b (NKJV) But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.
Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.
Washed all my sins away, washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.
Be saved, to sin no more, be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.
And shall be till I die, and shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.

W. Cowper (1772)

4-Be grateful to Jesus, the Lamb That was Slain for your sins

Unleash Jesus as the powerful Redeemer of your life: Jesus is the One who alone could

redeem us, and did so with His very own blood. And have redeemed us to God by Your blood.

Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea.
A great High Priest whose name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart.
I know that while in Heaven He stands, No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there, Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied, To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there the risen Lamb, My perfect spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM, The King of glory and of grace,
One in Himself I cannot die. My soul is purchased by His blood,
My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ my Savior and my God!

C. L. Smith (1863)

5-Unleash Jesus as the powerful Redeemer of your life

Seek to show the same compassion for the lost as Jesus your Savior does: Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost. His Great Commission plan has succeeded, we see and hear those from every branch of humanity are around the Throne, safe in heaven. Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

Seek to show the same compassion For the lost as Jesus your Savior does

6-Follow Jesus as your Great High Priest:

Christ's redemption brings us into the kingdom of God where we can come into His

presence as His priests.v. 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson (1926)

7-Worship Jesus as Your King of Kings:

Christ's promise that we as His joint heirs reign with Him is accomplished.And we shall reign on the earth."

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee (#379).
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

F.R. Havergal (1874)

Worship Jesus as Your King of Kings

Revelation 5: we have come to the greatest portion, of the greatest book, about the greatest place there could ever be anywhere: the Place of God's Personal Presence called Heaven.

Today, Heaven's worship, distilled before us in our Bibles, into words we each can understand: is the most challenging message we could ever hear to prepare us for serving God!

How Should Revelation 4 & 5 Impact Each of our Lives Today?

Revelation 4-5

Do¹⁵⁵ you realize how much of the theological fog and confusion that surrounds so many sincere believers each day, can be cleared up just by a simple reading and believing of the truths of Revelation 4-5? To get a very foundational view of what God has taught us, please open with me to the last 4 verses of Revelation 5.

One of the truths that we never can hear often enough is that we are each in possession of God's Word today. God's actual voice recorded, His actual words written down, the Divine Revelation of God is ours in the Holy Bible.

When I travel to remote places, I usually leave on my phone a message from Bonnie, and others of my grown children, so I can play it over when I especially miss them, and hear again their voices.

Jesus told us His Voice is the key to everything that matters eternally to us. "My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27). One of the greatest evidences of salvation is when Jesus said that those who are His would know, listen to, hear, and respond to His voice in John 10. That was not just true 2,000 years ago. It is true today. Each time a believer opens the Bible they hear not just the words that saved them (faith comes by hearing the Word) but also the Word that guides us for life. Our Bibles are:

A Literal, Trustworthy Record of God's Voice

God has spoken, He has spoken clearly, and He has made sure that we have a written copy of His Word. Most likely the Bible we now hold, was started as a written document on Mount Sinai as Moses stood and watched God write with His own finger (Ex. 31:17-18), the Ten Commandments.

After that initial written Word from God, Moses was directed to write down, not his own words and thoughts and ideas, but the very words of God. No book has ever been written like God's Word the Bible.

No other record exists of the very mind and thoughts of God communicated in direct revelation, in human language; like the Bible we hold. So now for the application of everything we have studied from God's about the Throne Room in Heaven.

How should what we hear God say impact us from Revelation 4-5? May I show you just

four ways that are critical to making it through the maze of daily life and safely into our Father's House in Heaven? I call these:

Four Foundational Truths To Guide us Through Life

Here they are:

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 describes the Real Heaven: There is only one Real Heaven and Rev. 4-5 describes what it looks like, so none of the other accounts that you read or hear about Heaven, other than the truths of God's Word, are accurate or inspired.

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 declares Eternal Heaven & Hell: There are only two destinations, one is an eternal place God calls Heaven, filled with joy, peace, bliss, and endless pleasures; and the other is a place of conscious, endless torments called Hell: and you are going to one or the other.

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 demands One Way of Salvation: that the only way to Heaven is through having imputed to you by faith alone, the redemptive, blood-soaked, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross, as described in God's Word.

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 destroys Self-Sufficiency: the only true salvation is the one that saved us out of our hopeless and helpless lostness; and that makes us bondservants of God. His salvation brings us into complete submission (that is the real Islam) to God the Father, to God the Son, and to God the Spirit; and the eternal embodiment of Almighty God is manifested for us as Jesus Christ the Lord.

First, join me in listening to that voice of God, written down for us plainly in His Word. Please listen to God speaking. His words are in Rev. 5:11-14 (NKJV):

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" 14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

The Ultimate Guided Tour of Heaven

Revelation 4-5 is a guided tour of Heaven, guided by God Himself.

Look at Rev. 1. How did we get this Book? It was a gift to us from God.

Why do we have this Book? So we can know the things God wants us to know.

Every word we have in these two chapters (plus all the rest of the Bible) are actual words from God. Let that settle in as we ponder this first truth.

The first Foundational Truth that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to

in the days ahead is this:

Truth-1, God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 describes the Real Heaven:

There is only one Real Heaven and Rev. 4-5 describes what it looks like, so none of the other accounts that you read or hear about Heaven, other than the truths of God's Word, are accurate or inspired.

How should we apply that truth? Here is one of the most powerful and helpful ways to do so. Jesus said that the closer to the end of days we get, the more deceptive Satan's lies become.

The errors from the Pit are going to infect the earth more widely and deeply than ever before as the end approaches. What is one way that we can protect ourselves from Satan's lies today? Here is a very simple application:

Beware of Anytime Heaven is Described Differently than How God Described it

Just a quick search through the electronic stacks of the world's largest bookstore, Amazon, yields many books that testify to out-of-body journeys from earth to Heaven, and back.

Here are the top-ten listen, which are just a few:

1. To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story by Mary C. Neal (May 29, 2012)
2. Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back by Todd Burpo, Sonja Burpo, Colton Burpo and Lynn Vincent (Nov 2, 2010)
3. The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven: A Remarkable Account of Miracles, Angels, and Life beyond This World by Kevin Malarkey and Alex Malarkey (Jun 30, 2010)
4. Flight to Heaven: A Plane Crash...A Lone Survivor...A Journey to Heaven--and Back by Dale Black (May 1, 2010)
5. My Time In Heaven by Richard Sigmund (Dec 14, 2009)
6. We Saw Heaven: True Stories of What Awaits Us on the Other Side by [Roberts Liardon](#) (Oct 1, 2006)
7. Nine Days In Heaven: The Vision of Marietta Davis by Dennis Prince (Jun 28, 2006)
8. 23 Minutes In Hell: One Man's Story About What He Saw, Heard, and Felt in that Place of Torment by Bill Wiese (Jan 30, 2006)
9. 90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life by Don Piper and Cecil

Murphey (Sep 1, 2004)

10. Matthew, Tell me about Heaven: A Firsthand Description of the Afterlife by Suzanne Ward (Sep 2002)

11.

Point One: ONLY God's Word Can Describe the True Heaven

So, beware of whenever Heaven is described differently than how God has described it so clearly in His Word.

How about this book with such a beautiful cover, so beautiful that five million copies were sold in just the first 9 months, and over seven million and climbing. It is still in the top 100 selling books for 55 weeks on the NYT best sellers listing¹⁵⁶.

The online encyclopedia¹⁵⁷ of publications listing states:

Todd Burpo, a Christian pastor, says that during the months after emergency surgery, Colton began describing events and people that seemed impossible for him to have seen or met. Examples include his miscarried sister, who no one had told him about, and his great grandfather who died 30 years before Colton was born^[2]. Colton also claims that he had personally sat in [Jesus'](#) lap, while the angels sang to him^{[3][4][5]}, and that he saw the [Virgin Mary](#) standing beside Jesus in Heaven^[6].

What Should We Do When We Hear Claims Like That?

Paul said in his very first letter to a local church of believers, that they were to test everything against the doctrines taught in God's Word, and only hold onto as truth what matched the doctrines from God (I Th. 5:21). So, how does Colton's story of Heaven match up with God's Word? Not very well.

Here is a quick Biblical analysis¹⁵⁸ of the doctrines of God's Word vs. the doctrines Colton explained to his parents that are now coming out in a children's version so that millions of children can be taught doctrines that are not from God:

Heaven is For Real is a book that chronicles, supposedly, the trip of a four-year-old during an appendectomy to heaven. He went to heaven, came back. You would think that a book like that couldn't fall off a shelf, let alone have somebody take it off a shelf and buy it. But five million were sold in the first nine months...five million books in which a four-year-old describes what he saw in heaven while he visited there during his appendectomy.

He saw the Father, he says, who has wings like Gabriel. [**DOCTRINE CHECK:** Does God have a body? No, God is a Spirit. He is not material but spiritual, and has no wings. By the way, the Bible never says that angels have wings, only Seraphim and Cherubim have wings. Gabriel was seen by Daniel 2x, Zacharias 1x, and Mary 1x, and none of those three who actually saw

¹⁵⁶Michael Hyatt <http://michaelhyatt.com/an-interview-with-todd-burpo-author-of-heaven-is-for-real.html>

¹⁵⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heaven_Is_for_Real

¹⁵⁸ 214 words from John MacArthur <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/90-424>, with added bracketed comments

Gabriel ever describe wings.]

He saw Jesus who has blue eyes and is only half as tall as Michael and shorter than Gabriel. But though He's really short, He's more powerful than the rest of them and He rides a rainbow horse that only He can ride. [DOCTRINE CHECK: We know exactly what Jesus Christ looks like in Heaven. John wrote an inspired word picture in Rev. 1.]

And he saw the Holy Spirit, too. And the Holy Spirit is a blue transparent fog floating around up there who shoots out power toward the earth. [DOCTRINE CHECK: The Holy Spirit is a Spirit, not fog.]

The Holy Spirit has been turned into the latest transformer toy. He can become whatever you want Him to be. Whatever shape you want Him in, whatever comforts you, whatever interests you, whatever allows you to manipulate people for your own ends.

Now an illustrated version is out so that this Christmas you can buy one and help your children and grandchildren get a false, un-Biblical picture of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit burned into their minds so that when they grow up they will think that maybe God does have a body just like the cults and false teachers all have said that He does.

So, this is where we get our view of the Holy Spirit and God the Son and God the Father and heaven? From a four-year-old whose imagination is prompted and expanded by his parents, no doubt?

Point one: God and His forever settled Word says beware of whenever Heaven is described differently than how God has described it so clearly in His Word.

Test All Things, Hold Fast to God's Truth

The truth from God's Word that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to in the days ahead is this:

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 says:

There is only one Real Heaven and Rev. 4-5 describes what it looks like, so none of the other stories that you read or hear about Heaven, other than God's Word are accurate or inspired.

Even if the book is in a Christian Bookstore, don't accept it as truth. God is the sole source of truth about Heaven, no person's experience or modern so-called prophet is to ever be trusted over the Lord God Almighty!

Even if the book has been read by your friends, and strongly affirmed by them, and they are godly and devout followers of Christ: don't accept it as truth. God is the sole source of truth about Heaven, no person's experience or modern so-called prophet is to ever be trusted over the Lord God Almighty!

Even if a local church in the area that knows the truth, preaches the truth, and is filled with godly believers uses one of these books about Heaven in a small group study or Christian

education class: don't accept it as truth. God is the sole source of truth about Heaven, no person's experience or modern so-called prophet is to ever be trusted over the Lord God Almighty!

To protect your mind from confusion about truth: beware of whenever Heaven is described differently than how God has described it so clearly in His Word.

The second Foundational Truth that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to in the days ahead is this:

Only Two Destinations

There are only two destinations, one is an eternal place God calls Heaven, filled with joy, peace, bliss, and endless pleasures; and the other is a place of conscious, endless torments called Hell: and you are going to one or the other.

How should we apply that truth? The errors from the Pit are going to infect the earth more widely and deeply than ever before as the end approaches. Here is a second simple application:

Beware of Satan's Lie that "All Religious roads lead to Heaven"

Ten years ago there was a book that swept the country. The author, Betty Eadie, told a story that gripped millions. It was her account "as a follower of Jesus Christ" she called herself, of her near death event. The book chronicles her out of body experience in 1973. The book is still selling well, called:

Embraced by the Light

by Betty J. Eadie (Oct 29, 2002)

A close examination of the book reveals that though she claimed to be a follower of Jesus Christ she was actually, by her own writings, a follower of Mormon doctrine, with heavy New Age leanings.

Woven into her tale of angels, robed spirit-guide monks, and the light that warmed her soul as she met Jesus Christ, are the following doctrines she described in detail:

Humans pre-existed as spirits before they were born into this world. This pre-existence of human spirits is central to Mormon doctrine. Betty said, "All people as spirits in the pre-mortal world, took part in the creation of the earth."

Of course that is completely contrary to God who said that the first human, Adam, became a living soul as God breathed life into him in Genesis 2:7. There is no pre-existence of human spirits allowed in the doctrines of God's Word.

There are multiple gods in Heaven. This denial of the Trinity is also central to Mormonism, as well as the rest of the false religions of the world. Betty said, "My Protestant upbringing taught me that the Father and Jesus Christ were one being." But as she toured around Heaven she states: "I understood to my surprise that Jesus Christ was a separate being

from God.”

Of course this is completely contrary to God's Word that states in John 10:30 “I and My Father are one”. Jesus is God the Son and He is one with God the Father. (See also Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:6; I Tim. 2:5).

Humans can become gods. This Mormon doctrine of the deification of the human soul, was also restated by Betty with these words: “God wants us to become as He is, and that He has invested us with god-like qualities.”

That is exactly contrary to the Lord who says that only He is God in Isaiah 42:8 “I am the Lord, My glory I will not give another.” We are to become more and more Christlike, and when we see Him, we will be like Him, but never with the qualities and attributes of God.

There is a second chance at salvation in the after life. The New Age and most false religions all share some form of Universalism, that people will get another chance and then become “embraced by the Light” as Betty describes salvation.

This is of course contrary to God who said in Hebrews 9:27, “It is appointed unto man to die once, after this the judgment.”

The universe has two eternal forces or energies: positive and negative. This dualism is part of Gnosticism, Hinduism, and most science fiction stories. The “Force” is either positive or negative; and if you can just focus the good side that is within, you can use this positive energy to be healed, and to create your own destiny, and so on.

Satan started his lies to humanity in Eden, and they haven’t changed. Each version is just a redo of the old. The false teachers, the cults, and Eastern Religions of today are just reincarnating Satan’s deceptions for each new generation.

Today’s New Agers, false religions like Hinduism, and Satan’s lies usually all have three strands that are woven throughout their teachings:

Pantheism (the belief in the divinity of both the creation and the Creator vs. the One Living and True God separate from His creation as seen in God's Word);

Mysticism (the belief that truth is something that one finds within themselves vs. from God's Word);

Syncretism (the belief that religion is blending and merging religious ideas from various sources vs. one source God's Word)

Point number two that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to in the days ahead is this: **Beware of Satan’s Lie that “All Religious roads lead to Heaven”**

Foundational Truths To Guide us Through Life

Today we saw the first two:

God’s Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 describes the Real Heaven: There is only one Real Heaven and Rev. 4-5 describes what it looks like, so none of the other accounts that you read or hear about Heaven, other than the truths of God's Word, are accurate or inspired.

God’s Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 declares Eternal Heaven & Hell: There are only

two destinations, one is an eternal place God calls Heaven, filled with joy, peace, bliss, and endless pleasures; and the other is a place of conscious, endless torments called Hell: and you are going to one or the other.

Allowing Revelation 4 & 5 To Impacts Our Lives Today

Revelation 4-5

One¹⁵⁹ of the most remarkable elements of Revelation is seeing into Heaven. But one of the most vital truths we learn from learning about Heaven is that God affirms that:

There is Only One Road That Leads to Heaven

Heaven is where God is, His Throne, His perfected worship, and the way things look untainted by sin. We hardly ever get to see what something looks like that is perfect, during our earthly lives, because everything we see is marred by sin, the fall, and the rebellion of Satan swirling around us.

But each time we get to open our Bibles, we see through the window of the Word, a perfect sight of the way things are right now in Heaven,.

In Revelation 4-5 we see the perfect, flawless picture of who exactly it is that will be in Heaven.

WHO it is that will be in Heaven? You ask that question on any day and you can get as many answers as there are people answering. Is there no definitive, last word on that subject? Yes, we hold it.

Beware of the Wrong Pathway to Heaven

Today, religions across America and around the world offer a bloodless path to Heaven. This path allows people a comfortable journey to Heaven. They walk upright and un-bowed, they go at their own speed and in their own strength, and most of all, they get to follow their own path.

Some try to head to Heaven by way of mystical religious experience, others by way of rigorous ascetic denial.

Some follow a road to Heaven designed by their churches (Catholics and Protestants), others by their synagogues (Jews), others by their Temples (Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus,

¹⁵⁹ 121007AM TRU-20.doc

Shintoists), and others by their Prophet (Muslims, Scientologists, cultists).

Others go on a road to somewhere, but one they designed themselves (secularists, atheists, evolutionists).

But any road that anyone travels that does not match the road that we see in Revelation: is not a road that goes to Heaven.

There Are Two Completely Different Destinations

Any other way, than The Way of God's Word, is the way that heads straight to Hell by way of the first stop through the door of the grave called Hades. The grave is where dark terrors greet each new arrival awaiting their turn to stand at the Great White Throne's Judge that they rejected whose Name is Jesus Christ the Lord Almighty.

This morning, note the contrast: the joyous delights of the church of the firstborn assembled in Heaven, and the horrible plight of all others. That is the last-word on destinations and roads out of this life that is finished up, once and for all by God in His Word the Bible.

God's Word today is ours. God's actual voice has been recorded, and His actual words are written down. We have the Divine Revelation of God that is ours in the Holy Bible.

There is One Completely Clear Pathway to Heaven

For just a moment, sit back, and with your own personal copy of the most priceless treasure you could ever buy and own, follow along in God's Word as we back through the book of Revelation.

Now to orient you to what I am doing, think of this. We are looking at how Revelation 4-5 should impact our lives today. We saw last week that those two chapters give us God's reliable description of the place called Heaven; and that not everyone ends up there. Those were the first two truths that should impact every day of our lives.

This morning we are looking at the next two truths contained in Revelation 4-5, and they are both about God identifying exactly who are the humans that actually make it to Heaven.

I actually can't think of anything more vital to someone who has a life expectancy of 78.2 years or less, depending on your age, health habits, and gender according to the most recent stats by the World Bank.

Each of our bodies has an internal mortality clock counting down to death, of how many breaths, how many heartbeats, and how many moments are left for us to live. So, no matter what we do, God has programmed us all to inescapably face death. All humans except those to whom God has promised: whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (John 11:25-27).

So, the most crucial question everyone should be asking is: "How do I escape death?" We have a trustworthy picture, of everyone who will ever escape eternal death.

Everyone who only has an average of 78.2 years or less to live, should be interested.

The Final Word on Who Makes it To Heaven

Attached to that picture of everyone who makes it to Heaven are instructions for how to get there. That is the most interesting information I can think of in the entire world.

To see those instructions, open to the very last chapter, Revelation 22, and note these simple truths sent directly from God.

- Those in Heaven drank the water of life (Rev. 22:17).
- Those in Heaven believed that Jesus was who He said he was: *the Root* (the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Creator) *and Offspring of David* (the promised Seed was the Messiah through Abraham, Isaac, and David, not through Ishmael or anyone else, Rev. 22:16).
- Those in Heaven repented of their sins and were set free of these 6 or 7 enslaving sins (Rev. 22:15).
- Those in Heaven were doers, and not just a hearers of God's Word (Rev. 22:14).
- Those in Heaven served God and the Lamb during their lives on earth and into Heaven (Rev. 22:3).

Now back to our goal today. How should what we hear God say impact us from Revelation 4-5? May I show you just four ways that are critical to making it through the maze of daily life and safely into our Father's House in Heaven? I call these:

Foundational Truths To Guide us Through Life

Here they are:

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 describes the Real Heaven: There is only one Real Heaven and Rev. 4-5 describes what it looks like, so none of the other accounts that you read or hear about Heaven, other than the truths of God's Word, are accurate or inspired.

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 declares Eternal Heaven & Hell: There are only two destinations, one is an eternal place God calls Heaven, filled with joy, peace, bliss, and endless pleasures; and the other is a place of conscious, endless torments called Hell: and you are going to one or the other.

God's Voice from Heaven in Rev. 4-5 demands One Way of Salvation: that the only way to Heaven is through having imputed to you by faith alone, the redemptive, blood-soaked, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross, as described in God's Word.

The Only Way to Heaven is faith in the Substitutionary Sacrifice of Jesus

Point number three that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to in the days ahead is this: **Beware of other ways of salvation that bypass Christ.**

God's Voice from Heaven says: that the only way to Heaven is through having imputed to you by faith alone, the redemptive, blood-soaked, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus upon

the Cross, as described in God's Word.

A decade ago theologians across the country were buzzing about Boston College's religion professor's newest book on ecumenical ministry. The idea was to join hands with every religion possible to help get the world changed for good. I came across his book as I was researching my dissertation at Dallas Seminary.

The book was entitled, *Ecumenical Jihad: Ecumenism and the Culture War* by Peter Kreeft (Mar 1996). This book is a prime example of the notion that it is okay to work with anyone as long as they believe in God. Ecumenism is when you fail to identify who "God" is by using God's Word the Bible as the final word. The lesson for each of us:

Beware of Ecumenism's Dropping Doctrinal Differences to Advance Good

Briefly stated, the author, a Dutch theologian who teaches at Boston College, was out surfing, got hit on the head, and had an out-of-body experience and stepped into heaven. The first to supposedly greet him and shake his hand in heaven was Confucius. The theologian asked him, "What are you doing here?" Confucius explained that he believed in one God, too, and assured him that it was the same god.

Then Kreeft met Buddha and was really shocked. Buddha told him that the four laws of Buddhism are exactly what he, the theologian, believed. After thinking about it, Kreeft answered Buddha saying, "Yes, I guess I do."

Next, he met Mohammed and asked, "Mohammed, you are in heaven?" He said, "Yes, I believe in Mary, too." And I thought: Okay, this must be a joke.

Then the theologian met Moses in this out-of-body experience in heaven. Moses reportedly informed him, "Yes, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, and a lot of other people are here because we all are seeking the same thing. We are seeking to worship Jesus and his mother."

Amazingly Kreeft exposes the unifying element that will end up bringing all world religions together: it is Mary. Eastern religions, Islam, and Catholicism all can revere Mary.

Beware of Anyone Who Preaches Another Gospel

The whole book was dropping the offense of the Cross, taking away the heart of the Gospel. That's what ecumenical co-operation almost always does.

I shut the book right then. But as I shut it, on the back cover I noticed that two of the best known Christians of the day had their recommendations printed right in front of my eyes on the cover of this heretical book. Who were they?

The first was by J. I. Packer who says: "Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox alike need to ponder Peter Kreeft's vision of things-preferably in discussion. **What if he is right?**"

The second was by Charles Colson who says: "Peter Kreeft is one of the **premier**

apologists in America today”.

Is that hard to believe? Then type into Google: Amazon Kreeft ecumenical jihad, when the book appears click on the “look inside” link, go to the back cover and read it for yourself.

The Only Way to Heaven is Faith in the Substitutionary Sacrifice of Jesus

Point number three that we each need to settle in our minds, and hold tightly to in the days ahead is this: **Beware of other ways of salvation that bypass Christ.**

God’s Voice from Heaven says: that the only way to Heaven is through having imputed to you by faith alone, the redemptive, blood-soaked, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross, as described in God's Word.

Jesus Christ as God’s Lamb was our substitute that was sacrificed to take the penalty of our son. This guiltless, sin-bearing sacrifice by Christ is remembered in Rev. 5:6:

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb as though it had been slain**, having seven horns (*code for Omnipotence, all powerful*) and seven eyes (*code for Omniscient, all seeing and knowing*), which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

How Does God's Word Guide us to Understand Disasters, Massacres & Bad Things That Keep Happening all Around Us?

Luke 13:1-5; Revelation 1-6, 19

Please¹⁶⁰ open with me in your Bibles to God's final written communication to humanity.

God's Final Written Communication to Humans

The Book of the Revelation is unique. These 404 verses were sent to the Earth by God the Father, through His Son: the Lord Jesus Christ. Those final written words are part of the Holy Scriptures, inspired by God, sent through His Prophets and Apostles, to us who hear His voice.

The flow of Revelation is simple to see.

- **Chapter 1 is Jesus Christ showing Himself as God the Son in all His glory, like the Sun's blazing light.**
- **Chapters 2 and 3 are His personal letters to the churches that bear His Name.**
- **Chapters 4 and 5 are His guided tour of the Throne Room of God Almighty.**

But as we turn the page to Revelation 6, everything seems to change. Before we launch into this biggest section of Revelation, covering the fifteen chapters from Revelation 6-20, we need to conclude this study of the Throne Room of the Universe.

Why Did God Send Us Revelation 6-20?

The last thing we need to consider is: *why do we even need Revelation 6-20?*

Why would God devote the majority of His final words to humanity, portraying such gloom and doom? As a warning.

Why do we need to read God describing disasters, plagues, solar storms, wars, murders,

famines, demon armies, and hard-hearted human rebellion? As a reminder.

Or even more simply: why does God choose to make His Last Words almost exclusively negative? Out of 404 individual verses only 25% of them or 1/4th could be called positive, or encouraging. The rest of the verses are about sins, horrors, warnings, and blazing judgments poured out. That is a ratio of 3:1. There are three sharp warning verses for every one encouraging verse.

That is the Lesson God Wants us to Learn

There is the lesson of the Book of Revelation for us. Nothing has really changed in the ratio of positive to negative from the first time Jesus spoke, and His words were written down. If you closely read Christ's words you find them similarly laced with warnings.

Turn with me to Luke 13 this morning, and I'll show you what I mean in. Jesus is speaking to the largest crowd of His ministry, and He warns them over and over.

The portion we will read in Luke 13 is a continuation of a teaching time that started in Luke 12:1, which uses the word "innumerable" *muridon*, which comes into English as myriads.

Many times the Gospels say there were multitudes following Him. Sometimes they say that great multitudes followed Him; but only here does it say that the multitude was uncountable.

Tens of thousands were crowding to hear Him. What does Jesus say to the largest group He ever got to address? Repent.

Please listen to Christ's voice, the written Word of God, which we have and hold in our hands this morning:

*Luke 13:1-5 (NKJV) There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans **were worse sinners than all other Galileans**, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but **unless you repent** you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, **do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem**? 5 I tell you, no; but **unless you repent** you will all likewise perish."*

Jesus here confronts questions about two recent disasters by warning of a greater disaster.

First, in v. 1-2 the people wondered about the "Temple mass murder". Innocent, moral, upright, religious people were slaughtered in a horrible manner, while doing what they were supposed to be doing.

Second in v. 4 there was discussion about the "Tower tragedy". Unsuspecting people going about their lives were crushed to death. They had done nothing wrong, nothing deserving of death.

We could even, justifiably compare Christ's two situations to similar ones that we have

thought about in our lives.

The mass murder at the Temple in Luke 13:1 was like a similar one at Sandy Hook Elementary School last month (and I might add 17 other mass murders in America in 2012). Innocent, moral, upright, religious people were slaughtered in a horrible manner, while doing what they were supposed to be doing. But why, Jesus, did God allow this to happen? That is the question on everyone's mind in this passage.

The disaster of the Tower collapsing in Luke 13:4 was like the similar collapse of two towers on September 11, 2001. Unsuspecting people going about their lives were crushed to death. They were not doing anything morally wrong, nothing deserving of death. But why, Jesus, did God allow this to happen? That is the question on everyone's mind in this passage.

These kinds of questions are what have gnawed at people for thousands of years. We all know that everybody dies. We're not talking about that. Everybody dies. We're talking about calamities that come unexpectedly, horribly, and inexplicably.

How Does Jesus Answer?

Amazingly Jesus gives two responses. First, through a repeated question, He says that all of us are sinners. Note the repeated phrase in v. 2 and v. 4.

2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"

4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?"

God doesn't usually sit in Heaven looking for specific sinners to drop building on, or get them massacred. Disasters are very rarely the result of specific sins.

But its Christ's second response, that has the very sobering element. Look what Jesus says in responding to both disasters. He repeats His warning in v. 3 and v. 5: I tell you, no; but **unless you repent** you will all likewise perish.

One word frames Christ's answer to disasters: Repent. Jesus said that for facing the unexpected calamities, disasters, massacres, and inexplicable woes of life, get ready ahead of time by repenting.

There have been disasters all through human history. Jesus says that when God allows a cataclysmic calamity, it only punctuates His normal, merciful patience.

Disasters are allowed by God as reminders that death is around the corner for all of us; and we don't know when. That was Christ's only answer.

Jesus told them: you don't know when you're going to die, but you are going to die.

Since you can't predict it and you can't plan it, you just need to be ready.

So we can see that Jesus explains to us:

How God's Word Guides us to Understand Disasters, Massacres & Bad Things That Keep Happening all Around Us

Each of us this morning live in a world unlike anything human history has ever known.

The advent of electronic media has ushered in the relentless barrage of visual images that cause the average person to vicariously experience the equivalent of what would have been a lifetime of disasters for the average 18th Century individual about every month.

Mass, global, instantaneous, on demand communication means we see everything, and it means that we see and hear it constantly. Media has catapulted most Westerners onto the observation deck of human misery and evil. Almost without realizing it we sit and get numbed by over exposure to more and more disasters, each day.

No other generation before ours of the past ten years has ever seen anything like what we now can and do see constantly. We see or hear about every major disaster, catastrophe, and tragedy sooner or later, delivered to us in full color.

As we watch and listen we vicariously experience the sorrow, pain, loss, anguish, and death that fellow humans have gone through.

We are each Experiencing Lifetimes of Tragedies

Whether it is a stampede after an athletic event where weak and unsuspecting people are trampled, or the family barely escapes or is burned alive in a house fire. Earthquakes in Japan, genocide in Sudan, another truck bombing with pools of blood in Iraq. Nothing escapes the relentless assault of the media reverberating every pain, sorrow, tragedy and death across our screens, and into our minds.

Generations past lived in a small world. They knew everything close to them, some things that were not close but touched them, and almost nothing about most of the rest of world.

No one in the past ever had to bear the weight of all the troubles in the entire world, all the time.

Inescapable Sufferings Surround Us

There is almost no escape for the emotional weight that gets piled on our backs. We may not watch or listen to all the news, but someone at work, or school, or a friend or relative does. Then they start to share another numbing tragedy, and our hearts get another poke. Most often our initial reaction to evil things is outrage, but soon we end up numb.

But the truth is, the calamities of the world aren't any worse or any more frequent.

There have always been wars, rapes, murders, thefts, suicides, and disasters. There've always been calamities in the world catapulting unexpected people into eternity.

Every day in America an average of 40 people are murdered..But those deaths are actually very slight compared to the scope of what is happening in the rest of the world.

Horrible But Tiny Compared to the Rest of the World

For example, take the events in Syria. For the past 21 months people have been slaughtered at the rate of over 100 every day, for over 600 days in a row. There have been 60,000 Syrian civilians murdered in just 21 months. The ways that Syrians are being killed are unspeakably gruesome even for the newscasters to recount.

Add to that the constant echoes of car bombs in Iraq that have claimed an average of 1,000 civilians each month for the past ten years, or a total of 121,227 as of New Year's Eve.¹⁶¹

Three hundred thousand people are dying around the globe each year because of civil wars, plus another two hundred thousand are murdered. How does God want us to understand that?

What is Christ's message for All Calamities?

Jesus explains in Luke 13 what is clearly taught cover-to-cover in God's Word: that we don't live because we deserve to live.

We live because, though we deserve to die as guilty sinners, God is merciful.

Why does God let anybody live? God is holy and righteous, the wages of sin is death, and we all deserve to die. The soul that sins, it shall die.

The only reason we can take another breath is because God is merciful, and His patience and forbearance are leading us to repentance.

We all deserve to die, but instead, God lets us live. Most humans in history have actually lived, loved, laughed, and enjoyed many of the blessings of life.

That is the patience and forbearance of God. That any of us have had even a moment of enjoyment in life is the kindness of God.

This compassion of God is intended to lead us to repentance. Jesus said, "It's time to

¹⁶¹ <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2012/>

repent, God is giving you the opportunity”.

What did Jesus mean by repent in Luke 13:5?

Unless You Repent

Jesus affirms the two vital truths we must understand about repenting:

Truth one, we must change our mind about our sinfulness.

Most people think they're pretty good. But, that is a damning attitude.

Change your mind. Acknowledge that if you've ever broken one of God's Laws one time, you're headed for hell. Accept personal responsibility for the judgment by God as a guilty sinner.

Truth two, we must acknowledge Jesus Christ as our only Savior.

Repentance in the New Testament always includes faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior.

Acts 16:31 (NKJV) So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

John 14:6 (NKJV) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Every Disaster & Calamity Should Remind us

Jesus teaches that the real disaster was not being slaughtered by a mass murderer at the Temple, or unexpectedly being swept away in a calamity by a Tower's collapse; the real disaster is perishing forever (apollumi: to be destroyed, lost).

Jesus said the real disaster is facing eternal judgment. Feeling the wrath of God forever is the unspeakably horrible disaster for people who die without repenting.

That should make communion so sweet today.

Communion is a reminder to each of us of our repentant affirmation that we were hopelessly lost, under God's wrath, but we have by faith embraced Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer.

ⁱ For a moment, let me give you a thumbnail survey of the content of God's Word:

A Thumbnail Survey of The Entire Bible

*The opening book of the Bible: **Genesis**, traces the origin of both ourselves as humans and the Universe in which we live, and the people through whom the Bible and the Messiah would come: the Nation of Israel.*

***Exodus** gives us the rescue of Israel from Egypt; **Leviticus** gives the way God looks at sin and redemption; **Numbers** explains God's expectations for obedience; and **Deuteronomy** His way of*

keeping His covenant promises.

Joshua explains God's power to deliver; *Judges* portrays His unwillingness for His people to do their own thing; and *Samuel* through *Chronicles* shows God's simple evaluation of the lives of His people: they either do right in His sight or evil.

Ezra traces God getting the Jews back into the Land of Israel from their 70-year Babylonian captivity; *Nehemiah* captures the 52 day wall building project around the city of Jerusalem; *Esther* describes how God watches over His people to keep them from extinction.

Job reveals the God who is enough, Who is named El Shaddai; the *Psalms* lead us in how He is worshipped by His people; *Proverbs* explains how to "live daily" pleasing Him; *Ecclesiastes* gives the framework for "a lifetime" of pleasing Him; *Song of Solomon* shows the parallels between marital love and Divine Love.

Isaiah can be called the Gospel in the Old Testament; *Jeremiah* cries out about how hard it is to minister to God's Wayward People; *Lamentations* records the pain that came to God's disobedient people; *Ezekiel* records Yahweh God's explanation of how to know that He alone is the True God; *Daniel* portrays the "God who rules" over all nations, empires, and peoples.

Hosea explains how faithful God is to His unfaithful people; *Joel* paints the record of the Day of the Lord to come; *Amos* is the account of a God who sees and repays all wrongs.

Obadiah is the portrait of how evil pride becomes; *Jonah* is about how patient God can be with sinners and saints who disobey; *Micah* shows how God never gives up on His people even when they sin.

Nahum reveals how bad Ninevah got after their revival, and the ruin God brought them; *Habbakuk* is built around a Psalm of hope in the midst of the burdens of life; *Zephaniah* describes God's wrath against sin, and His remnant that always follows Him.

Haggai declares the way God's people so easily get distracted from the real reason they are here; *Zechariah* lays out God's Future plans for His chosen people of Promise the Jews and how that fits into world events; and finally *Malachi* shows how much God pays attention to all the actions of His people.

Then we have the Four Gospels giving us a quadrophonic symphony of Christ's life and ministry; *Acts* shows what the Spirit of God can do through normal people; *Romans* through *Jude* gives God's expectations of His Children in Christ's Church.

Finally, the most , fascinating and revealing of all the books of the Bible for all of us believers who are part of Christ's Church—the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* shows Jesus working in His Church every day to get them living out the expectations, taught in those *Epistles*, that He left them to do!

ⁱⁱ God's Throne is seen in these passages: I Kings 22:9; Psalm 9:7, 11:4,45:6,47:8,93:2,97:2,103:19; Isaiah 6:1,66:1; Jer. 3:17; Ezekiel 1:26,10:1; Daniel 7:9; Matthew 5:34,19:28,23:22,25:31; Heb. 8:1,12:2; Rev. 1:4,3:21,6:16,7:9,20:11,21:5,22:1,3.