



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



The King And His People: A sermon series looking at the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor

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“Let him who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

OVERVIEW

The book of Revelation is one of those books that too many Christians do not touch. Some have seen it abused, some have seen it start fights and others have seen it and, frankly, cannot understand what it is saying. Because of all of this, Revelation gets relegated to the back of their Bibles, never to be read or studied. What a great loss.

When properly studied, Revelation sends us a bold call to discipleship. It is a discipleship that calls for courage, discernment and a willingness to give up everything to follow the Lamb that was slain.

When it was originally written, the world (and church) seemed to be in chaos. The Roman Empire was imprisoning and killing Christians for their refusal to worship their deities, false teachers were corrupting the church, and many Christians were abandoning the call to discipleship in favour of an easier, compromised version of Christianity. In the letter, Jesus gives a strong call to his people: Do not worry, stay faithful and worship me. Though the temptation to sell out may be strong, the need for disciples who are willing to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4) was never stronger.

Perhaps this book has never been more timely. This series will focus primarily on the foundation of the book of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. We will see together that the voice of Jesus to his people then, is just as strong to us today.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

HOW TO READ REVELATION

Passage:

Revelation 1:1-12

Summary:

Revelation 1:11 shows us that Revelation was a letter written to a group of churches in the first century. This should not be a surprise to anyone who is familiar with the New Testament.

The New Testament is made up of 27 books, many of them letters to people or churches at the time. The documents were authoritative, believed to be breathed from God himself (2 Tim 3:16). As a result, they were passed around the early church for the purpose of teaching, rebuking and encouraging God's people and have been carefully preserved and taught through the centuries.

Though Revelation reads differently than some of the other letters, with some careful study, we can see that this is indeed an authoritative book that calls us to courageous discipleship. In fact, this is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those who read it and hear what it says (bonus!).

Questions For Discussion:

1. Why do you think that Revelation is a book avoided by so many today?
2. Why do you think "the end of the world" is a topic that people are so interested in? Why are TV preachers so drawn to Revelation and other apocalyptic books?
3. Read Rev. 1:1-4 and then vs. 11 again. What similarities does this book have with other NT books? What are some of the obvious differences?
4. Why is it important to keep verse 1:1 in mind as we read the entire book of Revelation? Why might it be an unfaithful reading of the letter to get distracted by things that do not focus on Jesus?
5. Where do the following areas of our world need a "breakthrough" of Jesus: a. Canada. b. Your family c. Your work/school?

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BEHOLD!

Passage:

Revelation 1:12-20

Summary:

The Island of Patmos was no summer beach destination. It was a place for political prisoners. John, the writer of Revelation, was exiled there for his testimony that Jesus was the Son of God.

It would have been a crazy time to be a Christian in his day. Jerusalem was in shambles after the Romans sacked it in AD70, Peter and Paul were martyred, false teachers were abundant and the church struggled with all of it. It is in this situation, on a Sunday morning, that John gets his revelation. He does not get a canoe to row home, a plan to execute Caesar nor the perfect church strategy. Instead, he sees Jesus. And, consequently, that will be more than enough.

The question then becomes, in light of the chaos of our world, our church and our lives, will seeing Jesus be enough for us?

Questions For Discussion:

1. Picture John on Patmos. He is removed from all his comforts and affections. He is removed from his church and all seems lost. What do you think he thinks about in this time? What does he pray for? What does he ask God to do?
2. What are your prayers like in times of crisis and despair?
3. Read Rev. 1:12-16. What does John notice about Jesus? What is the significance of how Jesus revealed himself to John?
4. Would that be sufficient answer to your prayers? Why or why not?
5. Why does Jesus say to John, "Fear not" (1:17)? What is the foundation for the courage Jesus wants him to have? How can we rest on a foundation of trusting God's character in times of trouble?
6. What does "beholding" Jesus look like for us today?

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EPHESUS: THE CHURCH THAT LOST ITS FIRST LOVE

Passage:

Revelation 2:1-7

Summary:

“The honeymoon is over.” It is a popular expression in our culture as couples realize that the initial rush of “love adrenaline”/infatuation no longer drives them. Instead, what was once novel becomes habit. What was once exciting fades to what is commonplace. Though we may continue on with our duties, sometimes our affections also drift.

The letter to the church of Ephesus is a reminder that even though we may be doing things well on the surface, our hearts can drift from why we started doing them in the first place. A heart transformed leads to Christian service. Our hearts, however need to consistently be stirred so that our motivations to serve Jesus are driven by love for him.

Questions For Discussion:

1. How could a church persevere in suffering, resist evil and yet still abandon their love for Jesus? Does this happen overnight or is it over a longer time span?
2. Have you seen any examples of a church that resisted evil, abstained from “cultural sins” and yet their love for Jesus eroded from the inside?
3. How could someone avoid this from happening again?
4. What does it mean to “do the works you did at first”? (vs. 2:5) What are some admirable characteristics of young Christians?
5. What is God saying to a church that is rich in good works and yet whose hearts have drifted from his heart?

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SMYRNA: THE CHURCH THAT PAID A GREAT PRICE

Passage:

Revelation 2:8-11

Summary:

Paul told his disciple, Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life would face persecution. As a disciple of Jesus, it is part of the deal. Granted, in certain places and at certain times in history, it varies in intensity.

We should never be surprised when people oppose us for being associated with Jesus. Jesus promised it. He calls us to endure it and promises us that, in the end, our perseverance will be rewarded. Such was the case with the church in Smyrna, as it is also with us today.

Questions For Discussion:

1. Why is it comforting to be helped by someone who has suffered in the same way that you have?
2. Why would it be comforting for the Christians in Smyrna to know that Jesus knew their “tribulation and poverty” (vs. 2:13). How did Jesus know tribulation and poverty?
3. Read vs. 2:10. How does the devil throw people in prison? How does he influence people to do evil things? Why does he do this to people? How does Ephesians 6:12 shed some light on this?
4. How does the “crown of life” motivate a Christian to be “faithful unto death”? (vs. 2:10)
5. What are some examples of Christian persecution today? Does it exist in Canada? If so, in what way?
6. What does Jesus have to say to the persecuted church worldwide? What does Jesus say to you today when you endure opposition for your alignment with Jesus?

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PERGAMUM: THE CHURCH THAT HAD NO GUTS

Passage:

Revelation 2:12-17

Summary:

Can you get God wrong? Is there a right and wrong when it comes to issues of “faith”? According to the Bible, the answer is clearly, “Yes!”

Orthodoxy, that is, right beliefs about God are extremely important. False teaching in the church is as old as the church itself. Christians are called to guard our life and our doctrine closely (1 Tim 4:16). Though it doesn't always make us popular, it does make us faithful to what God has called us to do.

The church of Pergamum was a church that had tolerated false teaching. God called them to repent before it was too late. Let those who have an ear, heed to this same warning.

Questions For Discussion:

1. Discuss a time when some false information you had about someone hurt the relationship. Why do you think the right information about someone is important to having a relationship with them?
2. Why is it important for Jesus that his church believe the right things about who he is?
3. What does it mean to “guard your doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16)? How does one do this?
4. How should you lovingly confront a Christian who has some unorthodox views about Jesus, the nature of salvation or other Christian doctrines? How might it be different with a non-Christian person?
5. How does one “repent” for holding to false teaching (vs. 2:16)?
6. What are some ways to make sure you are filling your mind with truth rather than the “teachings of Balaam and Balak” of our day?

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THYATIRA: THE CHURCH THAT LOVED THE WORLD

Passage:

Revelation 2:18-29

Summary:

In Western culture today, tolerance is the only real virtue, and intolerance, the most condemning of sins. The main criticism of the church in Thyatira is the acceptance of something that God deems unacceptable (2:20). The sins led by the character named “Jezebel” involve sexual immorality and food offered to idols. It doesn’t seem like the Jezebel influence is coming from within the church but outside of it.

The church is told to hold on (differing from the call to “repent” like Pergamum was told). This suggests that the call to the church of Thyatira is to stand strong and endure as a distinct Christian witness despite the temptation to go along with the world.

Today, we have all kinds of pressures to compromise our Christian integrity. How we live “in the world but not of it” is the modern day Christian’s greatest challenge.

Questions For Discussion:

1. How does one love the world and yet hate the world as well?
2. How have you seen this done well? Where have you seen it go terribly wrong?
3. Why is it easier to tolerate sin in the church, in our friends, in our family and in our lives rather than confront it? Do Canadians struggle with this more than other cultures? Why or why not?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. Is there a difference between how you deal with sin in the life of a non-Christian rather than a Christian brother or sister?
5. Sometimes exposing the truth of our sin hurts. How can we be a community that “speaks the truth in love” with each other (Eph. 4:15)?

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SARDIS: THE CHURCH THAT FELL ASLEEP

Passage:

Revelation 3:1-6

Summary:

How embarrassing. Don't you hate it when you think you are alive but you are actually dead? A little self-awareness was needed within the church of Sardis. The message to this church lists no enemies within or outside. There is no synagogue of Satan, no Balaams, Jezebels or Nicolaitans.

It seems like the only enemy of this church was itself! The call to wake up from spiritual sleep is clear and urgent. Those faithful ones will be given white robes, a symbol of moral purity as a gift of devotion to God (3:5). Should this church not arise, the thief would come.

Let us not think that any church is immune to the Sardis sleepiness and, as a result, lives with the threat of consequences for it.

Questions For Discussion:

1. What does it mean to look spiritually alive but, in reality, be dead?
2. How would this person act, talk, even pray? Could you have flawless moral performance and be spiritually dead?
3. Who are some characters in the Bible who showed life on the outside but were dead inside? How did Jesus confront them?
4. What is the significance of the faithful ones wearing white? Read Rev. 6:11. Where did they get the white robes from?
5. Instead of cleaning up our lives from the outside to the inside, the gospel reverses it. God gives us a new heart and that changes our actions. Why is it important to go inside-out rather than the other way around? How does the gospel challenge your approach to living the moral Christian life?

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PHILADELPHIA: THE CHURCH THAT FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Passage:

Revelation 3:7-13

Summary:

Everybody wants to be part of the Philadelphia church! It is the darling of the seven churches. The message to this faithful church has captured the imagination of Christians through the centuries. No other letter is so rich in encouragement and promises. Though they were small, the Philadelphians endured trials and resisted the false teaching of the Judaizers.

This church is promised the presence of Jesus, the mark of Jesus and is promised citizenship in the New Jerusalem, the city of God. With promises like that, who wouldn't want to identify with this church?

Questions For Discussion:

1. What is the significance of Jesus' authority to open doors and close doors? Why would this be important to a first-century hearer? How does this encourage you as you walk through the hallway of your own life?
2. Patient endurance through trial is a key theme in the book of Revelation. How does one actually endure in times of suffering (knowing that suffering and pain cause many to abandon their faith)? Is there a "secret" to enduring suffering faithfully?
3. What are some relevant Bible passages that help us endure suffering?
4. The Philadelphian Christians are marked by Jesus himself. Why would this be an essential part of how they see themselves? What does it mean to get your identity from Jesus?
5. What are some counterfeit identities that we often chase after? Why is this a bad idea?

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LAODICEA: THE CHURCH THAT TASTED USELESS

Passage:

Revelation 3:14-22

Summary:

Like the Thyatirans, the church in Laodicea had a problem with how they saw themselves. They thought they were rich and had everything. Jesus saw things differently (3:17). He saves some of his most scathing words for the final church of the Asia Minor Seven.

Perhaps the reason that Jesus is so upset is because he stands outside a gathering of “his” people and is clearly not invited in. He knocks but they have not opened. They are busy with their self-contented activities. Their works function for neither hot (healing) or cold (refreshing) purposes. These lukewarm Christians are about to be spit out of Jesus’ mouth. And with that, a loud warning was sent to churches all through history to listen to Jesus knocking and open the door.

Questions For Discussion:

1. Have you ever seen someone overestimate their own stature or identity? Discuss what it felt like to be around them. What happened to them in the end?
2. How could the Laodiceans be so off on their evaluation of themselves (3:17)? Knowing our human proclivity to deception, how does one take their spiritual temperature with any kind of objectivity?
3. Why does Jesus threaten to spit the Laodiceans out of his mouth? Isn't that too harsh to say to a bunch of people who are “a little” distracted by worldly things? What is the warning for us today?
4. How can we be like cold water, a source of refreshment to others in our church and in the city? How can we be hot water, a source of

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WORSHIP GOD!

Passage:

Revelation 4

Summary:

Who runs the world? Is it Hollywood? Wall Street? The White House? Facebook? All of these have an element of power to influence people, affecting history. There is none, however, that can rival the power of God. John's revelation is anchored in the most important vision of the whole book, the throne room of the Almighty. This is the most real vision anyone has ever seen.

World history is ordained by decree from the throne. God is in control. He is powerful. He is worthy of worship. Like the angels, we best devote our lives to the one who sits on the throne. In doing so, we will be guaranteed to be on the right side of history.

Questions For Discussion:

1. The key theme of Revelation is "Worship God." How have you seen this theme missed in our world today?
2. How does keeping the throne vision in mind affect: Our view of world history? How we watch the news? How we feel about the future? How we interpret the events in our own lives?
3. Do you find the doctrine of God's sovereignty troubling or comforting? Why do you feel this way?
4. In Psalm 10, the arrogant man who fought God ultimately failed. What are some examples of men, governments or ideas that tried to be above God but failed in the end?
5. Does God receive all the glory and honour in your life (3:11)?
6. What are some expressions of worship you can offer to "the one who sits on the throne"?
7. How can you encourage others with the theme of Revelation: "Worship God!"

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BEHOLD THE LAMB

Passage:

Revelation 5

Summary:

How tragic it must have felt in that moment. There was a scroll. The scroll was clearly important. The problem was that there was no power or authority to open it up. It caused John to weep. His weeping turned to rejoicing when he heard that indeed, an authority did exist. There was a worthy One! A lion had conquered and achieved a great victory. When John turned to see the Lion, he saw a Lamb instead. The great achievement that was deemed the great authority was a slain Lamb.

This is how God conquers. Not through displays of violence, power or human might. God triumphs in weakness and through his own death. Rather than this being weak, it actually calls for the most courage. There is no greater force to conquer than sin. There is no sin tougher to conquer than human pride. The lamb has overcome. This is how his followers do the same.

Questions For Discussion:

1. How have you seen authority abused? What led to its folly?
2. Why is it so difficult for many people to worship a God who was supposedly crucified? Why, to Christians, is the slain Lamb the greatest act of love and power ever?
3. Read Matthew 5. Why is it significant that God's kingdom blessing comes to the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, etc.? How might we re-write the Sermon on the Mount according to its values? Which sermon does your life's values reflect?
4. Why is it important to remember that Jesus is BOTH the Lion of Judah and the Lamb who was slain?
5. What is an appropriate response to the Lamb who was slain for your sin? How will you worship him this week?

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