

Apocalyptic Hope: Words to a Church at War

Revelation 2-3

This is the third week of the 'Apocalyptic Hope' series. In week 1, we had an overview of how Revelation is a book expressing the coming hope to a Church under persecution. For week 2, we went over the specifics of how Jesus presented Himself to John; giving everyone the very crucial perspective that HE holds our fate and establishing that this perspective should guide our actions going forward. This week we're looking at some examples of people Jesus intended to guide the actions of... with the images of Himself that he presented to the 7 churches.

If you missed those messages, you can catch up on www.theproject.community/podcasts/media. While this document outlines most of the message, it does not always include all examples and explanations. The audio of the full message is available also on the website.

Introduction:

To be up front, there are way too many tangents: Nicolaitans, Jezebel, prophecy of the Churches Fate, the actual fate of each Churches, the ottoman empire, rise of islam, Constantine, Byzantine...to cover today. This is a sky-high overview to gain an idea of the purpose and general objective of these chapters. Hopefully it will spark curiosity and individual study!

The format of the message today is to go over 4 scenarios expressed in 7 churches. We will look at how Jesus introduces Himself, His praise of the Church(es): the good, His criticism: the bad, and the hope he leaves them with.

Sardis-The Dead Church: Read Revelation 3:1-6

The introduction: Jesus introduces Himself to this church as the One who holds the 7 stars. This indicates that Jesus has full control of the angels that are over each Church. It is a restatement of the One who holds the future. (Revelation 3:1)

The Praise: There was 0% praise for this church aside from saying, 'Well, not all of you are bad.' (Revelation 3:4)

The Complaint: This church looks like it is alive from the outside, but is dead on the inside. What's that mean? Clue: Who else did Jesus say this about?...White washed tombs? The Pharisees.

The Pharisees, and apparently likewise, this church, were so worried about procedure and appearances that they had lost their loyalty to God, just like the 'blind guides' that came after Jesus.

There are works done, but not in God's sight. I.E. they were working for themselves and their own motives, working to be seen, but not necessarily seen by God. Religious, but missing the point. They were missing true obedience. In other words, they were looking for a Savior, but not a Lord. (Revelation 3:2)

The Hope: White robes represented purity, glory, and honor. What they sought by their own means would be granted through submission. (Revelation 3:4-5)

Ephesus & Laodicea - Warnings of Lost Momentum: Read Revelation 2:1-7 & 3:14-22

The Introduction: Jesus introduces Himself as the One who holds the 7 stars and the Amen to these churches. It indicates His control of the angels that are over each Church and is a restatement of the One who holds the future. The Amen is the Final Say. Getting the point yet? Let the finality of His decision guide your future actions. (Revelation 2:1 & 3:14)

The Praise: Ephesus was credited with patient endurance whereas Laodicea received 0% praise. Yet they shared a similar problem. (Revelation 2:2-3)

The Complaint: Ephesus had abandoned their first love while Laodicea was lukewarm. Both churches represent a loss of momentum. They were pursuing Jesus a little less seriously than they originally did. Jesus is using fading love and fading heat as metaphors. (Revelation 2:4 & 3:15-16)

Like growing colder in temperature or growing distant in a relationship, losing momentum in your faith is awkward and painful. Familiarity and complacency are your enemy. Assuming that a love will always be there without you making an effort to kindle it will soon end that love. Assuming the fire will burn without you tending it will soon burn out.

After addressing each of these churches, Jesus advises them to return to and rekindle their love. To Laodicea, He actually says to come to Him directly for all that they need to address their shame and remove their blindness. It's encouraged to ask God to show you where you are lukewarm. It's ok to ask how to repair the relationship. (Revelation 2:5 & 3:17-18)

The hope: Jesus promises eternal life and authority. Read Luke 16:10.

Pergamos & Thyatira- Those Jesus was set against: Revelation 2:12-17, 18-29

The Introduction: Jesus introduces Himself with the features of having a sword tongue and fire eyes (see Revelation 1:14 & 16). These introductions are straight up harsh. Fiery eyes are representative of pure and just JUDGEMENT. A sword tongue represents not only WAR, but war that comes when Jesus literally says so. (Revelation 2:12, 18)

The other introductions are all about how Jesus holds the future. The introduction for these churches are geared towards one thing, and one thing only. "I am against you." Why? The same reason why it was so important under the old covenant. Compromise Kills.

The Praise: In contrast to the introduction, these churches are actually credited with enduring persecution and even gaining momentum better than Ephesus & Laodicea, but they lost something crucial. They allowed something in that is very hard to get rid of. (Revelation 2:13, 19)

The Complaint: Both of these churches, despite being faithful and enthusiastic, allowed religious beliefs contrary to Christ into their order; adopting them from surrounding peoples and cultures. These beliefs involved denying Christ's messianic standing and 'saved by Grace'. (Revelation 2:14-15, 20-21)

Why would they do such a thing while they're being so enthusiastic and zealous? Well, there was a carrot involved. It directly says that these practices and heresies were allowed

because practitioners WANTED to go back to 'Sexual Immorality'. Again, people wanted a Savior, but not a Lord. We want to do things our way...Not God's way.

If there's one thing in all of history that has caused God's people to compromise in every era, it's chasing carnal desire...telling God that His way is wrong, our way is right, and we aren't surrendering it. Noah, Moses, Samson, David, Solomon all compromised when it came down to their desires and how they went about them.

I've heard it said, sin is *pursuing a legitimate need in an illegitimate way*. We love to ask the serpent's question when it comes to wanting this particular sin. What's the serpent's question? "*Did God really say?*" The serpent created doubt of God's true words. This is as old as the earth.

Did He really say to keep it holy or is it just a fun thing? Did God really inspire Deuteronomy 17:17 or 1 Timothy 3:12? Did He really mean one man and one woman in a covenant promise? Did He really mean not before marriage? Certainly He would allow for "extenuating circumstances." Certainly I could be the exception. Did God really Say?

And then we allow things in that go against Him; all in the interest of being our own Lord in this one area. We lose what He has for us because we make up our own idea of what's fair. When in actuality, this rule is the most fair because we are all asked to deny ourselves in this respect, one way or another.

The Hope: Turning from these things will allow you to have authority and a 'new name'. We'll come back to 'New name' in a bit. (Revelation 2:17, 26-28)

Smyrna & Philadelphia - The faithful: Read Revelation 2:8-11 & 3:7-13

The introduction: Jesus introduces Himself as the Alpha and Omega. The One Who opens and shuts and can't be denied. This is a restatement of the One who holds the future. (Revelation 2:8 & 3:7)

The Praise: Both of these churches are praised for being faithful and on fire. Despite persecution, they hold fast to the faith. (Revelation 2:9 & 3:8)

The Complaint: There is no complaint with these churches but they do have different fates. Smyrna was prophesied to suffer. Philadelphia was told that they would be kept from the hour of trouble. (Revelation 2:10 & 3:10)

It is important to keep in mind, just as Jesus introduces Himself, He does hold the future. As such, there will be times He calls you to suffer, and there will be times where He will not let any harm come to you. There are times where 'Come and Live!' obedience is appropriate and times where 'Go and Die' obedience is appropriate. If you're concerned about this, keep in mind what was done for you.

Both were faithful churches but with 2 different results.

The Hope: Jesus promises eternal life and a new name to these churches. New names are indicative of someone's identity changing to who they are 'in Christ'. In other words, you go from who you were and into who God always saw you as. (I.E. Jacob→Israel, Simon→Peter, Saul→Paul) (Revelation 2:10-11 & 3:12)

The Problems Summed Up:

Every congregation faces their own issues: losing momentum and not doing deeds like they had at first, facing persecution, allowing outside atrocities in because it justified sexual sin that they loved so much, focusing on outward works until Jesus was distant and no longer the center, or becoming too familiar with their faith such that it was only part of their life...when Jesus is Life itself.

All of these issues involve losing Faithfulness to Christ for having grown weary by relying on your own strength instead of His. Under our own strength, we slow down and begin wondering what we're missing, so we let in beliefs that justify those sins we crave so badly. As a result, we compromise.

We make Jesus part of our life but not Lord of our life, so we become dead inside. We may look alive with works, but only when it suits us. Not as part of us.

We face ridicule and threat, so we fold and lay our cards down and walk away.

None of these things happen when Jesus is your strength. Your Lord.

The Faithful:

Each of these churches did have faithful members. Read Revelation 2:2, 13, 19 and 3:5. These faithful made a difference. The following is a map that shows the influence the faithful of these churches had on the areas around them.



The faithful were not just bystanders who did the right thing. They were participants in receiving Life, Eternity, a New Name, Authority, and Recognition. But it isn't authority or recognition given by man. It is the authority to bind things, sinful things, and recognition of God Himself.

The knock:

Read Revelation 3:19-22. Take a moment to examine yourself. Every day we could find ourselves falling into one of the problems of these churches...lukewarm, compromise, dead inside. Ask yourself:

- What have you lost momentum on?
- What is an area where you are relying on yourself when you should be relying on Jesus?
- What is something you have backed off of because you are afraid of persecution or what someone else might say?
- Where have you compromised because enticements are involved and you feel that you are deserving somehow...compromising because of hardship you have faced and forgetting the Savior Who faced all hardship and would not compromise because He loves us so much?
- Have you been focused on works rather than our relationship with Jesus?
- Have you valued more what you have done in the sight of others rather than what you do in secret only in the sight of God?
- Have you not been fully committing? Have you only been making Jesus part of your life rather than the center?
- Do you carry Jesus to work, family get-togethers, school, grocery store, when driving and someone cuts you off, etc?
- Are you willing to have a Savior AND a Lord?
 - What do I mean by Lord? Lord is not just accepting the rescue, it's accepting the correction. It's letting Him point out the things that are leading us away from Him and simply coming to a heart attitude that we are willing to give it up even if we are not yet sure how we are going to give it up.
 - Everyone wants a Savior; it's easy to accept rescue. Few people want a Lord; accepting correction, admitting where you're wrong, and surrendering your own way of doing things to the One who has the right and the wisdom to tell you what to do.

Reflection Questions:

- Spend time reflecting on the above questions and allow God to reveal any areas of change needed in your life. Seek Him and trust Him for your present and your future.