

The 7 Churches

Revelation – from the ALIVE Reading Plan

Good morning RCM. So very good to have each of you with us this morning. Today is the final Sunday in our bible reading plan where we together worked through a large portion of the New Testament together. Now, I want to encourage you, just because we're done with the plan don't wake up tomorrow and think "now I don't have to read my Bible"...Instead, pick a book of the Bible and commit to reading it slowly, prayerfully, and consider its application of the Gospel to you.

But for today, we're in the book of Revelation. I mentioned this last week, that I've heard it said that the book of Revelation is the one book most church members want to understand but it's also the one book that is less frequently taught. It's intimidating, and some may even find it scary – writing about dragons, and bowls, and trumpets, and seal. The beast from the earth, the two witnesses. End of the world. Final judgment. New heaven, new earth. I get it, it can be intimidating. But, this is inspired Scripture, so if we really believe that all of the Bible is profitable for us – even the hard parts – we have to consider them, study them and trust them.

And, we need to allow for the Scriptures to inform us on these things rather than other sources. Because the Scriptures are enough. Too often we would rather read a fictional book like "heaven is for real" about a fictional account of a boy and his father – rather than allow the Scriptures to inform us on these things. If you have those types of books – I'd encourage you to place them in your recycling bin and set them out by the curb on your recycling day.

A couple of things to remember:

- The book of Revelation wasn't written to scare us – it was written to give us hope
 - Because, as illustrated all throughout this book, God is absolutely sovereign even in the face of evil and suffering
 - John had been doing ministry in Ephesus and the surrounding area
 - He got thrown into jail, and eventually banished to a deserted island called Patmos
 - While he was there he gets this incredible vision and is told to write down what he sees
 - Persecution was about to be ramped up in the early church – and this book – this book was written to the early church to give them hope in the face of persecution and suffering that you and I will never experience
 - It is a book about hope → the only hope that we can have in life and death – the Gospel of Jesus.
 - Jesus will come back – the first time he came as a suffering savior. When he comes back he will come as King, Judge and Conqueror.
- The book of Revelation also wasn't written so that we can chart out and speculate about how all of this will come about → it was written to give us hope and point us to the greatness of Jesus, the glory of God in Christ, and the beauty of the Gospel
- We must approach this book with great humility
 - What we know
 - God takes sin seriously – and all sin will be judged and all sin must be paid for.
 - For the Christian, the penalty of your sin was paid completely by Jesus. Not Jesus and you throwing a few bucks in the plate and making sure you don't cuss too much. Not Jesus and then a few penance or a few years in purgatory. Paid for completely by Jesus. And as a result you are completely forgiven.
 - For the non-Christian – Your sin will be paid for eternally, and forever and it will be excruciatingly awful.

- The good news of the Gospel is the only hope for sinful people
 - Our God Wins
- These are things that we all should agree on
- There are other things in this book that, God-saved & Jesus loving people disagree on. And that's ok. You could go to a big church with a dozen pastors on its staff, and chances are these 12 men would have different views on some of these "other things" in Revelation that are debatable. And that's ok.

SO...with all of this before us, I want us to consider together, hopefully you read the early chapters in Revelation this week...I want us to spend the rest of our time together looking quickly at the 7 different churches that John writes to in the early chapters, and then landing on the one that I think best describes RCM and best describes a church that I want to give my life to being a part of. 6 tough examples, then 1 that I see us in.

I. The Church at Ephesus – The “Loveless” Church

The first church John writes to is the church at Ephesus.

- 2:1-3 This letter opens praising the church
 - ² I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. ³ I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary.
- Don't miss the point here – this church was doing a lot of STUFF! If we put it into today's context, it might say – you guys are doing good work, full sanctuary, lots of great things for kids, homeless food pantry every week, men's group, etc. They are doing a lot of good things, but the very next verse is a call to repentance
- 2:4-5A
 - ⁴ But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.⁵ Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.
- And the message loud and clear to us, right here in Bradenton, FL – service that is separated from love for God and love for Jesus, is something to be repented of. Said another way, this is a warning about serving out of obligation alone – and a call to serve out of devotion instead.

II. The Church at Smyrna – The “Persecuted” Church

- 2:9-10A – I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer...”
- Persecution is real – and it is NOT outside of the knowledge, and sovereignty of God.
- The Bible never promises a life free of suffering, and a life free of persecution.
- The call to the Christian, in the face of persecution & suffering, is a call to be faithful.
- 2:10B – Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- How do we deal with persecution and suffering → faithfulness to Christ, and a trust in his faithfulness to His people

III. The Church at Pergamum – The “Compromising” Church

- 2:13
- ¹³ I know^[i] where you live—where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me,^[a] even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

- They are holding on – staying faithful BUT...
- 2:14-15 ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block^[h] in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- They had compromised. Balaam – Numbers 22-25 – was a prophet that tried to use his role for personal gain and led the nation of Israel into wild immorality and direct defiance of God’s commands. Nicolas – was a leader that went astray and led people into all kinds of bad stuff.
- The moral for us – where we have compromised, we must repent. A compromising church is a powerless church. And when I talk about power here, I mean spiritual power. It’s entirely possible for a big church to be powerless, it’s entirely possible for a small church plant like ours to be powerless. Regardless of the size, a compromised church is a powerless church.

IV. The Church at Thyatira – The “Corrupt” Church

- 2:19-20A
- ¹⁹ I know your works—your love, faithfulness,^[k] service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.
- Like, there’s a reason why no one names their daughter Jezebel. OT in 1 Kings Jezebel led the people of Israel into all kind of jacked up stuff. Now in this letter, a “Jezebel” had risen up.
- And, while the church was doing a lot of good things, they failed to deal with false teaching and false lifestyle. They failed to see the corrupting nature of falsehood.
- Takeaway for us: What we believe matters. And what we teach matters. There are things that if we deny, we are no longer a Christian church. And we cannot compromise. Not like on music style, or this or that, I’m talking about key truths of Christianity that if we deny we are no longer a Christian church. (Exclusivity of salvation through Jesus; Grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone; Inerrancy of Scripture; priority of mission and evangelism). And because we can’t afford to compromise, if we find ourselves in conversation with others and we hear they may be compromising the truth of the Gospel – we need to love them enough to correct. If you ever hear me compromise, you need to love me and Victoria and our kids, and our church enough to correct.

V. The Church at Sardis – The “Dead” Church

- 3:1B – I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.
- Like the church playing Weekend at Bernie’s. You remember that 80’s era movie – the guys come for a weekend at the beach to discover that Bernie (their boss) is dead. And they take dead Bernie around all weekend and use some trick to convince everyone out at the beach that he’s alive.
- This is a striking, and piercing letter → a church can appear alive and be dying and/or already dead.
 - Illustration – we all have known or known of someone that was very sick and they didn’t even know it.
 - Physically – our outward appearance doesn’t always indicate our health. It can, but it doesn’t always.
- Jesus, through this letter, call this dead/dying church to repent.

VI. The Church at Laodicea – The “Lukewarm” Church

Now, if you have your Bible open, you’ll see for a second we’re going to skip over one of the churches, we’ll end with that one. But next up is the Church at Laodicea – the Lukewarm Church

- 3:15-17 - ¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit[□] you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
- General malaise. Neither hot (actively pursuing the mission of Christ as a church) or cold (openly denying the Gospel), and worse yet this church is blinded to their own condition.
- Christians in name only type of thing.
- And to this church – Jesus tells them he is standing at the door knocking, desiring for their salvation that he would enter the church.

And lastly, the last church – how I would describe RCM, and the type of church that I desire to pastor for as long as I am able to think, speak and work.

VII. The Church at Philadelphia – The “Faithful” Church

This is a long section, but I want you to hear the words of the Lord to the Faithful Church at Philadelphia:

3:7-11

- ⁷ “Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: Thus says the Holy One, the true one, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens: ⁸ I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.

Don't miss the keys to their faithfulness:

- Not their size (you have but little power)
- Their works – the tangible evidence of their faith
- The commitment to the Word
- The commitment to the Name
- The obedience to endure

CLOSING...

How is this lesson applied? Personally, as individual families, as a church family? What will they say about us?