

NECMA Feb. 21st 2004

The Seven Churches of the Revelation - 2

Last Sunday I was in a bind over this series on the seven churches of the Revelation, and asked for your thoughts on how to proceed, as my original intention was to breeze through the first three last week, and then cover the other four today.

I mentioned that to do justice to each of the seven, it wasn't possible to do that - because of the need to follow through on each set of links discovered - using computer language - in order to explain adequately what the Lord was actually saying to John.

About eight people spoke with me afterwards, all agreed, asking that this week we should look at just the second one on the list, and to put the remaining five back to the elders in their planning to provide five further opportunities later to complete the study. Today we shall resume with the second church.

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear, what the spirit is saying to the churches. Listen to the trumpet sound. Hearken to the trumpet.

Are we listening? Are you and I listening? He is talking to us. He is talking to you and me. He says it seven times, the way of scripture to reinforce the message.

The Seven Churches, just the one in each of the seven major cities of the Roman province of Asia, are named by Jesus Christ, as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and a reminder to us that they are depicted as having Jesus in their midst.

We saw that each church is completely different from the other six, and, in spite of Him being there, each is failed or flawed in a major way. As discussed last time, put them all together into one body and we see the overall church today, all of its good points and all of its bad ones being quite obvious.

Rev 2:8 "to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 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.

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... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

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'."

2 - THE CHURCH LOCATED IN SMYRNA.

Its name means Myrrh. It is here that we find the church of suffering and persecution. There are nations where the church is greatly persecuted today, which is difficult to reconcile with a teaching of ease and prosperity.

I ask you, if there are genuine prophetic utterances to the church promising wealth and well being for these last days, should it not pertain to all of the body, not just a select group?

The reality is that the church is more apt to suffer for righteousness than it is to gain popularity and political power.

One of the signs of the end of the age is that the church will be afflicted and hated, so we should not rant and rail at those who hate us, but accept the accuracy of God's word. Mt. 24:9

4 'And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you, For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

We notice Jesus says those who maintain their salvation unto the end, shall be saved. This suggests to me that we should not presume that we automatically retain salvation once it is offered, if we choose to wander off... and presumption is rampant in many areas of the church these days. Mark 13:13

11 "But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Paul also warned of FALSE APOSTLES masquerading as apostles of Christ. 2 Cor. 11:13; This is not amazing, because Satan himself represents himself as an angel of light. His deception will be accomplished and completed in the person of the antichrist. 2 Cor. 11:14

12 I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

The segment of the church that seeks after the spectacular is positioning themselves for the revelation of the antichrist. He will burst upon the scene with all manner of sensational acts, with ALL POWER, miracles, breath-taking signs, unusual occurrences, manifestations, many of which have no previous spiritual history.

They are NOT recorded in the Word as having take place in Bible days. Lying Wonders, amazing events, impressive breath-taking displays of the extraordinary and very obviously, supernatural. 2 Thes. 2:9

2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

This is an issue that every generation of Christians has had to face. Unfortunately, we are living in the end of the age where these things are increasing in great volume. Those who deceive are themselves deceived, and they will multiply in numbers and wickedness as we come closer and closer to the end of the age.

Smyrna is representative of the church that is subject to opposition from the world, and is living in worldly poverty, their riches not being of this world.

We know that wealth doesn't bring contentment and satisfaction. Only Christ can meet and satisfy our innermost desires.

I ask you to consider... is persecution truly a thing of the past?

If so why are there Christians being persecuted today? There are many signs appearing in Australia. When will our turn come?

Paul prophesied that all those who have a strong desire to live a holy and Godly life in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer persecution.

If WE are not persecuted, is it possible that we are not living that kind of a separated life that generates persecution?

Certainly we don't want it, but 2 Tim. 3:13 says it will happen. As before we include the context on both sides of that verse, noting at the end that famous verse which explains why all scripture is needed, not just a verse here and another there...

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

BE WARNED, BE PREPARED.

They were also troubled by religious hypocrites working within the body of believers representing themselves as converted Jews - when in reality, they were of the synagogue of Satan.

Strong words. False teachers, presenting heresies, false doctrines, misleading the people. We are warned of disruptions that will come within the ranks of Christianity, particularly in the last days. 1 Tim. 4:1

4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says - EXPRESSLY SAYS - that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry - don't we know about that problem in certain areas - and

commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. To this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

These things command and teach.

That could not be any more to the point, could it?

These things COMMAND and TEACH

It is interesting to note that Jesus uses no words of correction, nor a call to repentance in this letter, to this church. The problems they faced were sufficient to guarantee that they were a praying people. Haven't we noticed how prayer is intensified when we face adverse situations in life? The Lord was well aware of every trial and tribulation that confronted them.

DO NOT FEAR THOSE THINGS THAT YOU WILL SUFFER.

Definitely not the kind of prophetic utterance that any of us would want to hear. Rev. 2:10

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

This world is actually entrenched in fear now. Our youth see little future for themselves and mankind, and many are walking away from life. One of the signs heralding the end of the age and the subsequent return of Christ, is a spirit of fear griping the hearts of the peoples of the world. This fear is generated by the acts of the unscrupulous and lawless, and can only increase if the Bible is true; have we not seen its increase?

However much we would like it to cease, it won't. Jesus said that mens' hearts would fail because of those things. The events to which He was referring are not minor happenings but will be the manifestation of the Almighty's judgments. Luke 21:26

23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall

by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. Nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”.

Not only will this earth shake but whole of the universe will convulse. Peace is removed from the earth. Further on where John presents the different coloured horsemen for our understanding, we find that the red horse fits in here.

Any peace that does come will be short lived. When men think that they have created a time which will be called a time of “Peace and Safety”, that will be the time when sudden destruction will break forth on the world, and Christ will come. 1 Thes. 5:3

5:1 Now, brothers, about times and dates, we don’t need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

While people are saying, “Peace and safety”, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman; they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day shouldn’t surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

The only source of peace is to be found in the Lord Jesus.

IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING, TRIBULATION, AND IMPRISONMENT.

Be faithful unto death. This is the commitment of the true child of God. Not an easy one, but the only one of full reward.

We look at the three young men in the fiery furnace, who are an example of dedication to the Lord. When faced with a choice of worshipping an idol or staying true to their convictions, they stayed true, rejecting the idol.

God is able to deliver, and even if He appears not to, we must not worship an idol. The Lord sent the fourth man to deliver Daniel and his friends. Who was the fourth man?

They were completely untouched by the fire, neither scorched nor did they smell of the fire. The fact that the furnace was heated “seven times” hotter must be considered. Seven times, relates to the end of the age.

In seriousness, we could well know and experience the same situations as the church at Smyrna.

Be faithful even to death, the supreme sacrifice; the reward is great and eternal. Those who overcome will be granted a crown, the emblem of a winner. It is a gift of eternal LIFE.

The second death - what do we actually know about that? It has absolutely no power or authority over those who are triumphant, who have been granted life everlasting. The second death is for the ungodly and involves eternal separation from all that is Godly. Rev. 2:10-11

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution... Be faithful, even to the point of 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 at all by the second death.

Okay, that has covered Smyrna to the extent for which we have time. Next time we can check this next message out...

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

demo modern military ceremonial two-edged sword

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.

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.

Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Interesting, that the “deeds of the Nicolaitans” are mentioned again. However these people don’t have the determination of the Ephesians, and allow these doctrines of “no absolutes” to infiltrate their community with dire consequences.

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

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'."

3 - THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS.

More than any other method, the sword of the Spirit makes known the will of the Lord. Any directions outside of that which is written in the BOOK, must be scrutinized and measured by the BOOK. If it does not fit the "more sure word of prophecy" it must be rejected.

They were at fault for allowing those who believed in the doctrine of Balaam to be in association with them. If they were not allowed to teach publicly such a false doctrine, it is certain that they would propagate it privately. Nevertheless, It was there in their midst and was accepted.

A COMMAND FROM THE COMMANDER, REPENT.

Change your attitude. Change your approach to the Word of the Lord. Change your heart. Change your desires. To confess and continue in the same sin is futile. The Word tells us that sin must be abandoned. The Lord would literally fight, commit warfare, against those involved in false doctrines that were troubling this church. The force that was to be used was the "sword of His mouth" or the Word of the Lord. Rev. 2:16

Please stay tuned for the next episode... a very real message...