

7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION



STUDY GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor

WHAT IS REVELATION?

If Revelation were a movie, what genre would it be? It would be in the genre of apocalyptic. The apocalyptic genre is about disaster and destruction. As far as movies go, it's kind of a serious and science-fiction-ish genre. Interestingly, these types of movies are getting more and more popular. In the pre-1950s there were 4 movies in that genre. In the 1960s there were 25. From 2010 through 2019 there were 101 movies in that genre. So, the genre of the Book of Revelation is popular right now. But the book of Revelation tells us the true story.

Revelation is the last book of the Bible. A lot came before it, from Genesis to Jude, that informs our reading of it. I know some people that read books and go straight to the back and read that first. I don't understand that. It doesn't make sense to me. I do, however, eat pizza crust first, so maybe you think I have no room to talk. But the point is this: understanding the beginning of a book is vital to truly get the end. This is especially important when we consider that there are over 300 allusions to the Old Testament in the book of Revelation, and that's in a book that is 404 verses long!

Revelation 1:1–3 shows us what kind of book it is. Revelation is a revelation, prophecy, and letter. We're also told who the author is: Jesus Christ.

REVELATION IS REVELATION (APOCALYPSE)

Revelation 1:1 says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ..." The term *revelation* (Greek ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalupsis*) here means "uncovering" or "revealing." And that's what the book is, a revealing of unseen spiritual realities. The genre of apocalypse has two main functions: (1) it offers encouragement to Christians in the midst of trials, and (2) it provides a new perspective on life in light of Jesus's coming reign.ⁱ

We, essentially, are walking through life with wool over our eyes. The reality is we can't see. We don't always know what's what. Satan is the great deceiver and the god of this world (Jn. 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4). Revelation is a jolt. It is a wake-up call. Revelation is a blind person seeing for the first time. Revelation reveals the truth that on every forehead there is a name. We are all aligned and carry the allegiance of Satan or Jesus. We're all ultimately marching to Satan's or the Savior's beat. We don't always see it as it is, but Revelation says it as it is.

REVELATION IS PROPHECY

Revelation 1:1 tells us it is a prophecy. It is about "the things that must soon take place." Richard Bauckham says that "Biblical prophecy always *both* addressed the prophet's contemporaries about their own present and the future immediately impending for them *and* raised hopes which proved able to transcend their immediate relevance to the prophet's contemporaries and to continue to direct later readers to God's purpose for their future."ⁱⁱ So, Revelation

was both for the contemporary audience and for us, the future audience.

REVELATION IS A LETTER

John wrote “to the seven churches that are in Asia” (Rev. 1:4), and Jesus offers both commendations and rebukes. So, Revelation is addressed to first-century churches in Asia. It’s a letter but also a revelation. It’s revealing the truth of the unseen cosmic spiritual battle, and it is also prophecy. It’s telling what is and what will happen.

Revelation was given to John, and he passed it on to the churches and us. They needed it then and we need it now. We need to see the true picture of reality. We too need to see what John saw.

WHY READ REVELATION?

Reading and heeding Revelation brings blessing. It tells us how to live. It tells us what to value and why. “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (1:3). There are seven blessings, the number for completeness, listed in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). One of the reasons we read Revelation is because it leads to blessings.

Revelation wakes us up to the wonder and makes the unseen, seen

Have you ever said, “I’ve never seen it like that before”? That’s what the book of Revelation is all about—opening our eyes. Revelation gives

us a picture of reality. A new perspective by which to see the world. John tells about all he “saw.” Revelation offers “a divine perspective on what is true, valuable and lasting.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The church may appear poor like the church in Smyrna, but in reality, it is rich. The lamb appears to be slaughtered but He reigns. We might be tempted to think the wicked have chosen the best lot, but in the end, they will experience the recompense of the Lord and will be outside of the city of God (Rev. 22:12-15). It may seem like Jesus isn’t coming back soon, but He is. We are essentially told not to close the book because the time is near (Rev. 22:10).

When we see things from the perspective of heaven it breaks the earthbound delusion of the beast’s propaganda.^{iv} We need to see what John saw. We need the book of Revelation to open our eyes to unseen realities. As C.S. Lewis has said, “What is concrete but immaterial can be kept in view only by painful effort.”^v If we are going to resist the allurements of the city of man, we must see the utter glory of the city of God. Revelation reorients us; it helps us see God’s powerful reign in 3-D.

The revelation of Jesus is showing us something (v. 1). It’s showing us something we didn’t see before, and we don’t see it without Jesus’ revelation. The book of Revelation is like smelling salt. Revelation helps us see that since the present world will be dissolved, we should not live for this world but the next, and thus, have morals shaped by the next Kingdom and not this evil one (2 Pet. 3:11; 1 Cor. 7:26, 29).

I can tell you that sin is bad. I can tell you that it takes you longer, deeper, and destroys more than you'd expect and that's true. That truth, however, often falls on deaf ears. But if I tell you the story of Sméagol who turns into Gollum and ends in lava, that picture is more poignant and communicates at a different level. Revelation paints a powerful picture of the awful reality of sin.

Revelation helps us see the unseen and reveals what will soon happen

In the book of Revelation, you have beasts and Babylon. You have terrible bowls (Rev. 16) and a terrible dragon (Rev. 12). You have persecution and plagues. You have what is pure and what is putrid. You have what is right worship and what is wrong. You have death and the second death. You have earth and the new earth. You have now and you have later. You have the Lamb that's the Lion.

In the book of Revelation, you have things as they really are. Revelation is a revelation of the way things are. It's a disclosure. A revealing. It's the truth made literally seen through symbols.

It's the uncovering. The unwrapping of a Christmas present. The truth of what is inside is hidden and unclear until the package is unwrapped and opened. That's what Revelation's wild imagery is for. It paints a true picture for us through powerful symbols.

Revelation tells "the things that must soon take place" (v. 1). The main point of the prophecy is that Jesus wins and all those who trust Him will dwell with God forevermore in perfect peace. The serpent

that destroyed in the beginning, will be destroyed in the end. In the Marvel movie *Endgame*, Thanos said, "I am inevitable." We, however, know what's actually inevitable. We know who wins: Jesus.

This truth must motivate us to live faithful lives as exiles waiting for our blessed hope. We must constantly remind ourselves of His nearing return and of the feast we shall share with Him (cf. Matt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:16; 1 Cor. 11:26; Rev. 19:9). "We are called to be a people of memory, who are shaped by a tradition that is millennia older than the last Billboard chart. And we are also called to be a people of expectation, praying for and looking forward to a coming kingdom that will break in upon our present as a thief in the night."^{vi}

Revelation shows us what will happen soon and helps us see the glory of the gospel

Revelation reveals the true identity of Jesus the Jewish carpenter (e.g., Rev. 1:5-8). He's not just a lamb, He's a lion. He roars and devours. Again, that is a big point of Revelation, to show God through Jesus is victorious! This truth encouraged John who was exiled to Patmos and all the churches that were being persecuted to whom the letter went. If we read the letter, especially in that context, we will respond by saying, "Come Lord Jesus, come!"

Revelation shows us that no one can ruin the One who reigns. No one can liquidate the Lord. No one can silence the Sovereign. No one can cancel the King. That's reality. And soon all will see! I want us all to see the truth now and live in light of it now.

R.E.A.D. BIBLE STUDY METHOD

We are going to use the R.E.A.D. Bible study method. First, you will *read* the passage for the day. Second, you will *explain* what the passage means in your own words. Third, you will write out how the passage *applies* to your life today. Third, you will decide what you are going to *do* as a result of what you read.

It is important that we understand God's word, but we also want to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). We want to be like Ezra who "set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it" (Ezra 7:10).

PART ONE: JESUS IN OUR MIDST

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 1

Revelation helps us see the reality that Jesus is in our midst. Jesus is the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), the head of the Church (Eph.1:22-23), the great high priest and mediator (Heb. 4:14-16), the model of servanthood and sacrifice (Phil. 2:5-11), the source of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12), the example of love and unity (Jn. 13:34-35), the bridegroom of the Church (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9), and the coming King and Judge.

While Revelation doesn't offer a narrative about Jesus' life it nevertheless teaches us about who He is, it portrays Jesus' exalted nature and triumphant rule. Jesus is the coming King who will return to establish His eternal kingdom and judge the world. The anticipation of His second coming shaped the outlook of the early church and its mission, and it must also shape us.

In Revelation 1:12-18, John describes a vision of Jesus Christ. He sees a figure "like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13-14; 10:16; Rev. 14:14) clothed in a robe with a golden sash, with hair as white as snow, eyes like flames of fire, and feet like burnished bronze. Christ holds seven stars in his right hand and a two-

edged sword comes out of his mouth. This vision emphasizes Jesus' divine and majestic nature.

Throughout the book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as the "Lamb." This title of Jesus symbolizes His sacrificial role and links back to Old Testament imagery of sacrificial lambs. He is the one that was sacrificed to enable peace with God (Is. 53:7; Jn. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9-14; 13:8; 21:14).

In Revelation 19:11-16, a vision of Jesus is presented as a rider on a white horse. He is depicted as a conquering warrior, defeating the forces of evil and establishing His reign. This portrayal highlights Jesus' role as the victorious and righteous ruler. Jesus is the one who will eternally reign over the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a symbol of the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan and the eternal fellowship between God and humanity. Jesus' role as the Lamb continues in this context, with His followers being part of the redeemed community in the New Jerusalem.

It's important for us to understand that the messages to the seven churches are intended to convey spiritual lessons to both the original recipients and to Christians throughout history. We need to hear what Jesus has to say to us *today*.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the introduction of Revelation 1 emphasize both the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ? In what ways does John's

vision of Jesus in Revelation 1 impact the way we receive the message of Revelation?

- How do the promises given to those who conquer provide encouragement and hope for believers facing challenges and trials?
- What might the church in America hear from Jesus? What about our own local church? Where might Jesus personally commend you, and where might He rebuke you?

THEME: THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

DAY 1: THE SERPENT CRUSHER.

Jesus is the promised offspring, the long-awaited Messiah, who will crush the head of Satan. He is the son of Adam, the son Abraham, the son of David, the Son of God (Matt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-38). He is the offspring that was bruised on the heel by the serpent on the cross but by His death and resurrection He struck Satan the serpent of old with a death blow by bruising his head. Jesus is the offspring through which the nations are blessed.

Read: Genesis 3:15; 22:18; Romans 16:20; Galatians 3:15-16; Revelation 20:10

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2: THE BETTER ADAM.

Jesus is the better Adam. Sin came into the world through the one man Adam and it is through the one man Jesus that we can receive the free gift of righteousness.

Read: Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12, 17

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3: THE CREATOR AND RECREATOR.

Jesus is the creator of all things, and it is in Him that all things hold together. Jesus is God. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.

Read: John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3; Isaiah 9:6; 7:14; Matthew 1:23

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4: THE LAMB.

All through the Old Testament there were lambs sacrificed for intentional and unintentional sins. We know that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22) and yet “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). So, there was a need for a better lamb, and Jesus is that lamb. Jesus is the perfect Lamb without blemish that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the true High Priest (Heb. 7:23-28). Jesus went into the holy place not with the blood of animals but with His own blood and thus He secured an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).

Read: John 1:29; Revelation 5:9-12

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5: THE COMING JUDGE.

Jesus will soon bring His eternal righteous reign. His justice will be swift and perfect.

Read: Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 17:31; Revelation 19:11-16

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART TWO: THE COLD CHURCH - EPHESUS

Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor

READ: REVELATION 2:1-7

In Revelation, Jesus addresses the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Ephesus is mentioned several times in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:18-21, 24-28; 19; 20:17-38; 1 Cor. 15:32; 16:8-9; and the letter Ephesians). The city of Ephesus was known for its pagan worship and culture. Ephesus housed the temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Artemis was known as the goddess of fertility. The Temple of Artemis was a religious center and an economic hub. Pilgrims would bring offerings and purchase various religious artifacts and souvenirs. The production of religious statues, sculptures, and art was a thriving industry in Ephesus. Artisans and craftsmen made a good living. But as people turned "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9), they stopped purchasing these trinkets; and this brought a cultural clash. The riot described in Acts 19 was a result of this tension. Silversmiths were angry because their livelihoods were threatened.

The church in Ephesus faced tense and confusing challenges. The letter of Revelation is an encouragement. It highlights the importance of maintaining love and devotion to Jesus while remaining vigilant against false teachings and practicing good works. We also see a call to repentance and the need for a genuine relationship with God.

Commendation

The message begins with praise for the Ephesian church's hard work, perseverance, and refusal to tolerate false apostles. They are recognized for their discernment and efforts in testing those who claimed to be apostles but were not.

Admonition

The message also contains a warning. The church is reproached for having lost its initial love and devotion to Christ. They must remember their first love and repent.

Promise

A promise is given to those who overcome: the right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

The worship of Artemis and other pagan deities gradually declined with the rise of Christianity. The Temple of Artemis fell into disrepair over the centuries and was eventually destroyed. Yet the worship of a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth continues. It continues because Jesus truly is God. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 21:6).

THEME: LOVE FOR JESUS

DAY 1

Read: Matthew 22:34-40

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: 1 Corinthians 13

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Psalm 51:7-17; Jeremiah 2"1-3

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: 1 John 2:15-17, 28-29

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: 1 John 3

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART THREE: THE CRUSHED CHURCH - SMYRNA

Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor

READ: REVELATION 2:8-11

In the midst of suffering Jesus exhorts the church in Smyrna to be fearless and faithful. The Church in America has a lot to glean from the message to the brothers and sisters in Smyrna. We too need to persevere and show endurance when faced with challenges. We too must put spiritual wealth over material riches. Despite the people's poverty, Jesus acknowledges that the church in Smyrna is spiritually rich.

Persecution and suffering are a part of the Christian journey, especially when one's faith clashes with the values and systems of the world. Which is increasingly the case in America. Jesus promises the believers in Smyrna the "crown of life" if they remain faithful unto death. This reminds us of the ultimate reward we must look for and desire. Faith in God overcomes fear and adversity. Like the church in Smyrna, we need our faith in God renewed so we will be able to be faithful.

Like the other exhortations in Revelation, the message to Smyrna ends with the phrase "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:11). Let's

have ears to hear. Let's heed the Lord's call to persevere. It will be worth it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways can the example of the Smyrna church inspire you to remain faithful even in the face of adversity?
- Are there areas in your life where fear of persecution has hindered your willingness to share the gospel? How can you overcome this fear?
- What does it mean to you to receive the "crown of life"? How can this hope motivate you to persevere in your faith?
- Can you recall a situation where enduring through a trial ultimately led to spiritual growth or a deeper understanding of God's faithfulness?
- What practical steps can you take to remain faithful to Christ even when culture contradicts your faith?
- Reflect on God's promise in Revelation 2:11 that "the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death." How does this promise impact your perspective on suffering and persecution?

THEME: SUFFERING

DAY 1

Read: Matthew 10

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: Luke 22:28-30; Romans 8:9-21

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Romans 12:1-2, 11-13; 14:7-8

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:12

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART FOUR: THE COMPROMISING CHURCH - PERGAMUM

**Written by Pastor Chris Standridge,
Communities & Ontario Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 2:12-17

When you think about the future of the church in the West, you can't help but consider the obstacles to survival it faces both now and in generations to come. It would be easy to assume that the church's greatest threats are external. Threats like the degradation of society, the erosion of morals, or the elimination of God in our public spaces. Are these issues of concern for the church? Of course. But they're not the primary issues we should be concerned with. The church's greatest threat comes from within. It's the spirit of compromise.

In Revelation 2, Jesus warned the church in the city of Pergamum about the slippery slope of compromise. When reading the words of Jesus "to the angel of the church in Pergamum," it's like reading a letter to the American church today. Pergamum had a culture similar to ours. Just as America has historically been a symbol of hope and progress to the world, Pergamum was a picture of what could be to other cities if they would just bend the knee to culture. It was a place of culture, diversity, excess, education,

and distinction. There was even religious freedom. But that religious freedom came with unspoken expectations. Practice your religion...at your own peril. Worship your god, practice your faith, live out your convictions, but do it in private. Believe what you believe, but to get along, you're going to have to go along with popular culture.

For the most part, the church in Pergamum was faithful to biblical doctrine and lifestyle. So much so that the Lord commended them. He said in verse 13, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith." He knew the world they lived in, the pressures they faced, and the persecution they could and did suffer as a consequence of living boldly and faithfully for Christ.

But the allure of compromise is powerful and deceptive. And the church in Pergamum struggled to protect its purity. The influence of the world crept in and demanded compliance with its ways. To keep in step and relevant with culture, some in the church began to compromise both morality and doctrine. And The Spirit had strong words to them in response to that. He said in verse 16, "Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth." Imagine the Prince of Heaven, the One who commands Heaven's armies coming against His own bride, the church! This is what He threatened if they didn't repent of their slow fading ways.

This is a message we need to heed today. Who are we going to walk in step with? Who do we aim to please? The world and

its ways or the Word and His ways? Will we bow a knee to the demands of the world and compromise biblical convictions, or will we stay faithful to Scripture's teachings even if it means loss of relevance or even persecution?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some external threats to the church that may cause Christians to compromise their convictions and practices?
- How have you seen Christians already begin to change their beliefs in order to be accepted by popular opinion?
- Based on Scripture, how should a church handle an unrepentant believer who compromises the name and the teachings of Christ?
- What can you do to proactively protect the purity of your church's theology and testimony to the world?

THEME: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

DAY 1

Read: Ephesians 4:11-16

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: James 3:13-18

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: 2 Thessalonians 2

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: 1 Timothy 4

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART FIVE: THE CORRUPT CHURCH – THYATIRA

**Written by Pastor Keegan McQuate,
Waterford/Fredericktown Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 2:18-29

Unlike many of the churches in the Book of Revelation, not a lot is known about the Church of Thyatira, which forces us to be more careful when interpreting this section, as there is not a large amount of historical literature to point to. This is the only time in the seven letters where Jesus is referred to as the Son of God, who sees the actions of the church and will be quick to bring judgment and justice upon them for their actions.

While Thyatira is praised for their love, faith, service, and patient endurance, they are judged because some in the church tolerate and participate in the sinful actions of the prophetess Jezebel. Jezebel is tempting the people in the church in Thyatira to give into the temptation of sexual immorality and eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols (like that which Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 8). Jezebel is attempting to push Christians to compromise their faith in Christ and their obedience to the Word to reflect the sinful culture they are living in. Our culture also has false teaching that seduces even Jesus' servants to practice sexual immorality (Rev.

2:20). Jesus warns His followers in Thyatira, and He warns us, to repent or there will be grave consequences (Rev. 2:22-23). Jesus searches mind and heart and will give to each according to their works (Rev. 2:23).

While Christ brings swift judgment to Jezebel, He shows patience to His people in offering them a way to repent of their sins, receive forgiveness, and avoid the impending judgment coming for Jezebel and those who do not turn from their wicked ways. Those who do not repent (both Jezebel and her 'children' or followers) will face the punishment of suffering. In contrast, the letter gives Christians in Thyatira a vote of confidence to continue pursuing and holding fast to that which they have, faith in Christ, remaining steadfast for His return. Those who remain faithful will be given the gift of authority, stemming from the authority that the Father has given to the Son.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How have you been tempted to compromise your faith due to the pressure of the culture that we live in?
- How can you remain steadfast in your faith in Christ, while others around you are fleeing from Christ and towards what the world has to offer?
- How does seeing the patience that Jesus has for those of Thyatira, allowing them to turn from their sin, impact the way you view Jesus' love and patience?

THEME: SEXUAL IMMORALITY

DAY 1

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: Galatians 5:1-24

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Galatians 5:25-6:5

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: Ephesians 4:17-32

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: Ephesians 5:1-12

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART SIX: THE CORPSE CHURCH - SARDIS

**Written by Pastor Mike Mahek,
Missions & Shelby Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 3:1-6

At first glance, it is easy to miss the significant impact that Jesus' words would have had on the church at Sardis. At one time, Sardis was a magnificent city, one of the prize cities in the kingdom of Lydia. However, Sardis had fallen. In fact, it had been conquered multiple times, twice invaded at night. When John wrote Revelation, Sardis was a remnant of what it had once been. As John Piper wrote, "Its past reputation exceeded its present reality." Therefore, the words of the Lord would have resonated with the people of Sardis on multiple fronts. They had lived the effects of being surprised at night and the significance of their unprepared slumber.

Jesus, seeking to spiritually awaken them from a false reputation based on past obedience, challenged them to revive themselves. This seems impossible. Dead people don't have any life left. However, God is in the resurrecting business. First and foremost, Jesus rose from the dead after three days. And there are other examples of resurrection in Scripture, such as Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and Tabitha, among others. There are Old Testament examples also, like the widow of Zarephath's son, and the

Shunammite woman's son. In Luke's gospel, Jesus spoke figuratively of resurrection in the Prodigal Son parable, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Lk. 15:24). The point is, the church at Sardis needed a spiritual jolt from an AED. They needed to be revived, resurrected. With man, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible (Matt. 19:26)

Commendation

Sardis does not really receive a commendation like some of the other churches did. Instead, Jesus points out that they had a misleading reputation. He calls out their hypocrisy.

Admonition

As is common in apocalyptic language, Jesus used the metaphor of sleeping and waking to represent His return. He told the church of Sardis to wake up. They needed to implement what they had heard throughout the Scriptures. They needed genuine obedience and repentance, and they needed to act quickly, for if not, they would be surprised by Jesus' return, like a thief surprises his unsuspecting victims.

Promise

A promise is given to those who are obedient. Their names are permanently written in the Book of Life. And Jesus Himself will confess their names to the Father.

The worship of Artemis and other pagan deities gradually declined with the rise of Christianity. The Temple of Artemis fell into disrepair over the centuries and was

eventually destroyed. Yet the worship of a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth continues. It continues because Jesus truly is God. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 21:6).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Think of a situation when you were not really the person someone else thought you were. How can you avoid situations like this in the future?
- Jesus was calling the church at Sardis to obedience. How does that call resonate in your life?
- What are the practical ways you will put the lessons from the church at Sardis into practice?

THEME: AWAKENING

DAY 1

Read: Matthew 24:36-51

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: Matthew 25

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Luke 21:5-36

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: Ephesians 5:13-21; Romans 13:11

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: Philippians 3:7-21

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART SEVEN: THE CAPABLE CHURCH - PHILADELPHIA

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 3:7-13

As Christians, we live in the city of man while also being part of the city of God. Sometimes we can be tempted to act as if the city of man is ultimate, but it's not. The city of man may demand our ultimate allegiance—telling us to have the same views and values, passions and pleasures—but we must remember where our loyalty lies. The ultimate city is the city of God. That's the city that we must focus on.

The city of Philadelphia was renamed Neocaesarea for a time, which meant "Caesar's New City." In Revelation 3:12, Jesus talks about His city. Jesus says there will be a day soon when it won't be Caesar's city or any earthly ruler's city. Jesus will establish His city on earth. Jesus says it won't be Caesar's name plastered all over the city; it will be God's name. The new Jerusalem will come down from God out of heaven (Rev. 21:2).

The Christians in Philadelphia "have but little power" (Rev. 3:9), but Jesus has all power. He will establish His city, a city of perfect and eternal peace, that truth is a spur and encouragement to endurance. We must

remember that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14).

It is Jesus “who opens and no one will shut” and “shuts and no one opens” (Rev. 3:7); it’s not Caesar or any earthly or heavenly power. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). Those who position themselves on the side of Satan will bow before Jesus, and they may hate Christians, but they will see that Jesus loves them (Rev. 3:9).

If we keep Jesus’ word, He will keep us, and so we have encouragement to patient endurance (Rev. 3:10). We must remember Jesus is coming soon, and so hold fast to Him and His truth (Rev. 3:11). In this world we will have tribulation, that’s what Jesus plainly said, but we can take heart because Jesus has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).

THEME: ENDURANCE

DAY 1

Read: 2 Thessalonians 1:4-6

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: Hebrews 11

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Hebrews 12

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read: 1 Peter 3:13-18; 5:10-11

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: Matthew 24:13; Romans 15:4;
1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrew 10:36; James 1:12;
Revelation 14:12-14

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

PART EIGHT: THE CONTAMINATED CHURCH - LAODICEA

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

READ: REVELATION 3:14-22

Jesus hates half-hearted religiosity. The church in Laodicea is criticized for being lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. This underscores the importance of a fervent and passionate commitment to Christ. Remember the image of Jesus from Revelation 1? He's worthy of our attention. If we see Jesus in all His glory and power, we should be anything but lukewarm.

Despite their lukewarmness, Jesus extends an invitation to dine with the Laodiceans. This demonstrates Jesus' desire for reconciliation and restoration. Jesus seeks and saves the lost. Even though we so often fail, Jesus cares enough to call us out. He stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). He desires a personal relationship with us.

The church in Laodicea was materially prosperous but spiritually impoverished. They weren't self-aware. They didn't know their need. They thought they were rich and didn't need anything (Rev. 3:17). But Jesus pointed the truth out to them. They were in need. This should be a warning for us to not allow material wealth or comfort to blind

us and lead us to neglect the things that matter most. We must prioritize God over possessions. We need to be zealous not for earthly clothing but for the white clothes of righteousness that the Lord Jesus provides (Rev. 3:4, 18; 6:11; 7:9; 19:8).

Revelation 3:22 says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We need to have ears to hear. We need to be open to what Jesus has to say to us. We also must know that it is easy to be self-deceived.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How would you describe the spiritual temperature of your own life and faith? Are you "hot," "cold," or "lukewarm"? What might be some signs of spiritual lukewarmness in your life, and how can you identify and address them?
- What steps can you take to ensure that your worship of God is heartfelt and genuine, rather than merely a religious practice?
- Are there areas of spiritual blindness or ignorance in your life that you may not be fully aware of? How can you seek God's guidance and wisdom to remove any blind spots?
- Have you ever experienced a significant season of repentance and transformation in your faith journey? What prompted it, and what were the results?
- Reflect on Jesus' invitation to "dine with Him" and have a close, intimate relationship. How can you cultivate a deeper, more personal relationship with Christ?

THEME: SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

DAY 1

Read: 1 Corinthians 2

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 2

Read: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 3

Read: Matthew 5:2-14; John 3:19-21

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 4

Read:John 9:39-41; Luke 4:18

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

DAY 5

Read: Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8;
1 Thessalonians 5:4-5; 1 John 2:7-11

Explain: _____

Apply: _____

Do: _____

CONCLUSION: WILL YOU CONQUER?

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

What does the book of Revelation mean by "conquer," and how can Christians conquer with all the challenges we face?

As we said before, the book of Revelation is in three literary categories. It is a prophecy, apocalypse or revealing, and a letter. It's specifically a letter to seven churches in Asia. Revelation, however, is also written to us. And there is a lot of application and encouragement for us today.

What does it mean to conquer? Is this talking about an armed conflict? Is this passage talking about conquering by force?

When I think about "conquering," I think of a sporting event, whether softball, soccer, basketball, football, or track, they all have difficult aspects. So, to win you must overcome those obstacles. You must sacrifice. You must stay motivated.

It's not easy and it's not always fun. It's challenging. That's what sports are like, and that's what the Christian life is like. But conquering or victory for the Christian is not about military might, political power, or athletic achievement; instead, it's about faithfulness to Christ and His calling on our lives to love Him and love others.

One of the reasons we must work to conquer is because there is one who would like to conquer us. In fact, he often kills us (Rev. 11:7; 13:7). So, the word "conquer" is fitting because life, in some ways, is war. We are in a cosmic battle; our lives and our allegiances matter. Christians conquer the beast and the wicked one "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they [love] not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12:11).

Revelation tells us this. And it tells us that we must conquer. We must work to win. We must overcome the challenges to have victory! What are some of the challenges we face?

Christians at that time had various challenges. They were accused of cannibalism because of confusion over the Lord's Supper. They were accused of atheism because they didn't believe in the pantheon of Greek gods. And they were accused of political disloyalty because they wouldn't give ultimate allegiance to the empire or offer sacrifices to the emperor.

We, of course, don't have those challenges, but we have other challenges. What are some of the biggest challenges you face? Perhaps living out your faith and making it your own? Maybe it's living in a growing anti-Christian culture? Or it could be negative media influences and sexual temptation. It could also be your own self-image, what you think about yourself. It could be you're consumed with what others think about you, or maybe you're consumed with things, material items you want.

We may have different challenges, but we have challenges, nonetheless. This brings up an important question. Revelation 21:7 says that the one who conquers will be the son or daughter of God. On the other hand, it would seem if one does not conquer, they won't.

DOES CONQUERING SAVE US?

The short answer is "No." We're not saved by conquering. We are saved by trusting in Christ, our great conqueror. Titus 3:5 says, Jesus "saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

If, however, we are saved by faith, we must continue in faith. We must continue to trust; continue no matter the opposition we face. So, we're not saved by conquering, but if we're saved, we will and must conquer. Revelation is a means of grace to that end. It tells us that we cannot give in or give up. We must give our all. Revelation helps us continue by telling us we must conquer.

Revelation is like a coach cheering for us. It's saying, "Keep going! Don't give up! Keep your head up! Remember your motivation!" So, conquering does not save us, but it is vital that we conquer. It is vital that we run the race with endurance; that we keep our eye on the praise. We can't be passive.

WHAT DOES THE COACH OF REVELATION HAVE TO SAY ABOUT CONQUERING?

Revelation talks about conquering a lot. It's an important theme in the book. This is especially the case in chapters 2-3 (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21). So, what are the main takeaways from Revelation about the Christian call to be conquerors? If we are going to be Christian conquerors, we need to...

1. See the glory and goodness of Christ

Seeing the glory and goodness of Christ is a big part of what the book of Revelation is about. When we see how awesome and worthy of worship Jesus is, it motivates us to continue following Him. It motivates us to be the conquerors we're called to be.

As Dennis E. Johnson has said, "The church under attack needs not only to see the splendor of our King but also to hear his imperial edicts, assuring us that he knows our situation, probing and exposing our subtle alliances with the enemy, and lifting our sights to the city that is destination of our pilgrimage." The book of Revelation is addressed to seven churches, and Jesus has a word for each of them. He has encouragement, rebuke, or some mixture of those. But, in each of the parts where Jesus is addressing the specific church, there is a powerful description given of Jesus. Jesus "holds the seven stars" (Rev. 2:1), and yet He is the one who "died and came to life" (Rev. 2:8). Jesus "has the sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. 2:12) and "has eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev. 2:18). He "has the seven spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1). He is "the holy one, the true one" (Rev. 3:7), "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14).

Before we get into anything else, we need to see how awesome Jesus is. That's the progression that Scripture shows us. We won't care about being the conqueror we're called to be if we don't care about Christ. If we don't see the glory of Christ, we won't care to listen to Him.

The other day my sister-in-law had a cool shirt on that she had received from running in a 5K. After I saw the shirt, I was instantly interested in running in the 5K. I saw "the glory of the sweet t-shirt," and it made me consider running in a 5K in a way I haven't considered in a long time. When we see something cool, beautiful, and glorious, it grabs our attention. We need to have our attention grabbed not just by t-shirts and a shiny new iPhone; we need to see the might and majesty of Christ.

Seeing how awesome Jesus is, is a prerequisite to being a conqueror. This is important for a lot of reasons, for one, Satan wants to conquer us, and he uses various means to try to.

1) Distraction: "Babylon" has all sorts of devilish and deceitful delights.

2) Deception: Trusting the "beast" for deliverance. Seeing the beast as worthy of worship instead of the lamb who is the lion or giving into the deception of false doctrine.

3) Dominance: Another device of the devil is violent persecution. Christians paradoxically conquer by being conquered.

How can we keep from being distracted and destroyed by Satan's schemes? Instead of being distracted, we need to, again and

again, be attracted to Christ, the one alone who is worthy of all our attention.

Can I also say, however, that the one who is the Lion—who is fierce beyond imagining—is also the gentle and lowly Lamb. Jesus, though worthy of all glory and the one who holds the stars, is accessible. He is the same one who said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "For all his resplendent glory and dazzling holiness, his supreme uniqueness and otherness, no one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus Christ."

We're likely to fall into one ditch or the other. We're likely to think of Christ as just chill and nonchalant. Or we think that Jesus is completely unapproachable and cares nothing for us. Both of those are false. Jesus takes our sin seriously because He loves us and wants what's good for us. Jesus is good and glorious.

Look what happened when John saw Jesus: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. But He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17-18).

The distressing depiction of Jesus must have shocked and jolted the original readers. Jesus is not just meek and mild; He is mighty beyond description. I'm sure the description of Jesus was sobering. We too must see and savor the supremacy of our Savior if we are to be protected from the devil's deceitful schemes. Our vision of Christ must eclipse our

vision of the world's distractions. So, if we are to conquer as Christ calls us to, we need to see how good and glorious Christ is and we also need to...

2. Hear His approval (or rebuke)

We naturally want to please our coaches, parents, and teachers. That's not an inherently bad thing. It can be really encouraging to hear someone you look up to say, "Good job." It's just the way we are as humans.

I remember playing football and hearing people cheer my name. It was motivating and seemed to give me more energy. Can you relate? Have you ever been in a race, by the finish line, and people started shouting your name and encouraging you? It helped you push just a little bit harder, didn't it? That's what we see in Revelation 2-3. Jesus is Himself coaching us. Cheering for us.

A good coach will give a lot of encouragement, but there is a time for rebuke too. Coaches will know that and will do both. Sometimes the team needs to hear "Good job," and sometimes they need to hear, "Do better." Jesus is the ultimate coach. He knows how to give us the encouragement or rebuke that we need.

Jesus coaches the churches addressed in Revelation. Some of the churches receive encouragement. They're doing a good job. Ephesus has done a good job holding to right teaching and enduring (Rev. 2:1-7). Smyrna was encouraged too; they are spiritually rich and enduring persecution (Rev. 2:8-11). The church in Pergamum is

commended for holding tight to Christ's name and not denying Him (Rev. 2:12-17). Thyatira is encouraged for its growing love (Rev. 2:18-29), and Philadelphia is exhorted for patiently enduring and keeping God's word (Rev. 3:7-13).

A few churches, however, do not receive any encouragement. They are simply rebuked. Sardis is said to have dead works (Rev. 3:1-6). "The church at Sardis was like a museum where stuffed animals are exhibited in their natural habitats. Everything appears to be normal, but nothing is alive." Laodicea is spiritually blind, bankrupt, naked, and lukewarm (Rev. 3:14-22). That's not what you want to hear. Yet, if it's the truth, it's gracious because it's needed.

Some of us might need to hear a strong rebuke. We need to hear Revelation 3:15-16: "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless" (The Message). We need to hear, "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4 cf. 1 Pet. 2:11). Therefore, if we're not loving and living for Christ, we need to hear His rebuke. If we hear and heed Christ's rebuke now, we'll rule with Him in the end.

What rebuke do you need to hear? Honestly. Really consider that question; it is gracious if it helps you conquer. If there's a rebuke we need to hear, we want to hear it. It will help us. We also need to...

3. Remember the rewards for the conquerors

As we have said, Revelation is a revealing. It tells us the way things are. It doesn't say it will be easy to hear, and it doesn't say we'll necessarily like it, but Revelation opens up the truth to us. And the truth is, we must conquer or face the consequences; because the reality is there are only two sides in the cosmic battle we're all in. There's the serpent that brought the curse on one side and the Savior that took the curse on Himself on the other. There's the devil that deceives and the divine Lord that delivers on all His promises, the king of chaos or the good King of all Creation.

I won't deny the heaviness of the book of Revelation. It does not act like a slick salesperson trying to dress something up, even if it means lying. No. Revelation is sometimes rough to read because it is honest to reality. But better to know reality and be able to respond to it than being sold something that's not true. And the good news is, there is a bunch of rewards promised to those on Christ the King's side. Jesus emphatically calls us to listen. So, listen to what He has to say:

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:11).

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on

the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it (Rev. 2:17).

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26).

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels (Rev. 3:5).

The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name (Rev. 3:12).

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev. 3:21).

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and she will be my son (Rev. 21:7 cf. Rev. 15:2).

Do you know why Christ is making that repeated point? He's saying, "I know it's hard. I get that. I know it's hard, but it's worth it." He's laying out the incentive for us. He's coaching and encouraging us.

CONCLUSION

Jesus knows there are temptations. He knows the devil wants to destroy. He knows Satan wants to slither to us and whisper his lies. So, Jesus, as our good coach and King, is saying: "Don't back down! Continue! It's worth it!"

If anyone entangles themselves with Satan and does not trust Jesus, they will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night (cf. Rev. 14:9-11).

This is serious stuff. This is why Jesus is so adamant that we conquer. And so, Revelation 14:12-13 says, "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"

We need to know Christ calls us to be faithful until the end. Christ calls us to follow Him to the end because He is good. He's that good. He's worth the extreme cost that must be paid. As Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool that gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."



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