

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION



*"Strength for today and
bright hope for tomorrow"*

with Pastor David Legge

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David Legge is a Christian evangelist, preacher and Bible teacher. He served as Assistant Pastor at Portadown Baptist Church before receiving a call to the pastorate of the Iron Hall Assembly in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He ministered as pastor-teacher of the Iron Hall from 1998-2008, and now resides in Portadown with his wife Barbara, daughter Lydia and son Noah.

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The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 1

"Introduction To Revelation"

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Now turn with me to Revelation and chapter 1, and I think we'll read the first 9 verses - although we'll only really be looking at the first three tonight, and not in much detail. Tonight will really serve as an introduction to this book of 22 chapters, and there really is enough information in each verse to keep us there a week a verse - but we can't do that! But it will be slower to start with, and then hopefully we might be able, as we go through this series, to deal maybe with a chapter a night, at least on some occasions. But we'll start slow, so that we lay a good foundation that will help us in understanding the rest of this book in the weeks that lie ahead.

So let's begin at verse 1 of chapter 1, through to verse 8: *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty".*

Now, the first thing we want to deal with tonight is the title of this book. Like most of the Biblical books, we have within the first verse the title. Now, it depends what version of the Bible you're reading tonight, but most of you, I'm sure, will have the Authorised Version, and the title given in it, or most editions of the Authorised, is incorrect. It says that it is 'The Revelation of John', it is not the Revelation of John. It is, as you see from verse 1, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'. Now that is very important. Now it could mean 'the Revelation about Jesus Christ', or it could mean 'the Revelation that came from Jesus Christ'. In my opinion it could be both, and the first is correct, that this is 'the Revelation about Jesus Christ' - and if this last book of the Bible is about anything, it's about the Son of God.

Now the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, revealed the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ - and it's important to understand that: that the four Gospels were fulfilling prophetic Scriptures in the Old Testament. But prophetic Scriptures in the Old Testament are often seen to be quite jumbled up concerning the first coming of the Lord Jesus into this world to Bethlehem, to be the humble Servant of the Lord, to go to the cross and die for sins, rise again the third day, and ascend unto heaven - that's what they encapsulate, the humiliation and condescension of the Lord Jesus. Yet so many other Old Testament Scriptures speak of how Messiah would come as a King, would set up an earthly kingdom, and would rule with a

reign of righteousness. So this book is a revelation of Jesus Christ, not in the sense that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John revealed Him, but rather than the humiliated Christ, we have in Revelation an unveiling for us of the exalted and glorified Jesus Christ. All the events of this book centre around visions and symbols of the resurrected Christ, who alone has authority to judge the earth, eventually to remake the earth, and then to rule over the earth in righteousness. So many people get caught up with the intricate details concerning future events, that they miss the point that the Lord Jesus Christ is the chief subject of this book. If you miss Him, you've missed everything.

Now look with me very, very quickly at chapters 1 to 3 - we see Christ as the exalted Priest King in the midst of His churches. We will look at that in more detail in weeks to come - chapter 2 and chapter 3 in particular - Christ is in the midst, ministering to His church. Then if you look quickly at chapters 4 and 5, we see Christ as the glorified Lamb in the midst of the throne, Christ is in the midst reigning. Then chapters 6 through to 18, a few more chapters, we see Christ as the Lion in the midst of the nations of the world, Christ in the midst judging. Then in chapter 19 we see Christ as the conquering King of Kings, and Christ comes into the midst returning. In chapter 20 we see Christ as the Heavenly Bridegroom in the midst of the marriage supper, and Christ is in the midst of His people rejoicing with them and over His new-found bride and wife, the church. Then in chapter 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the book, Christ is the light in the midst of eternal glory, Christ in the midst of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, shining.

I hope you can see that it's all about Jesus Christ. Someone put it well: 'He is the arbiter of the destinies of the church and of the world'. Whatever we find in these Monday nights in the book of the Revelation, we better find Christ, because this is the revelation about Jesus Christ! As the line of that hymn says: 'Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee Lord'. What have you come here for tonight? It's great to see you, but so many people are tantalised by prophecy. Sometimes I wonder, whilst I think we should be excited by it, is it at times the same excitement as a pagan has when they get someone to look into their tea leaves or a crystal ball? It's got to be more than that. I think of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's hymn, which was written, of course, in relation to the Lord's Supper, but it's so applicable to the second coming truth:

'If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him;
O may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face'.

Don't get caught up with the signs of the times tonight and miss that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it's all about Him! It's His love that will cause the scales to displace from off our eyes, and we will see Him beyond the sacred page. If you think knowledge is the most important aspect to interpreting the book of the Revelation, you're wrong, it is love: love for the Lord, love for His word, love for His people. May I remind you in our introduction of 1 Corinthians 13:2: 'Though I have the gift of prophecy', Paul says, 'and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity', love, 'I am nothing'. Christ is the love of God to our hearts, let's not miss Him.

This is the Revelation about Jesus Christ, but the second understanding of this title, 'The Revelation that came from Jesus Christ', is equally authentic. If you look at verse 1, you will see that this revelation 'God gave unto him' - and that 'h' there of 'him', really should be a

capital, because it's not speaking of John, it's speaking of Christ. God gave this revelation to Christ, 'to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent', God sent, 'and signified it by his angel unto his servant John'. Now follow with me the process here: God gave this revelation to Jesus Christ about His future, how He would be glorified, how the history of mankind would come to consummation in God's eternal plan. God sent that message by Christ, through an angel, to the apostle John. Now sometimes in the book John is spoken to by the Lord Jesus Himself, and other times an elder speaks to John. There are times we see a voice from heaven speaking to him, but the process of the delivery of this revelation was from God, given to Jesus Christ, sent by Christ by an angel to the apostle.

Now that's the title of the book: about Christ, from Christ. Let's look for a moment at the recipients of this revelation. Verse 1, right in the middle says 'to shew his servants things which must shortly', or quickly, or swiftly take place. Now right away that designates this book as being prophetic. It is speaking of things that as yet have not happened, but would come to pass. As we know from the last two chapters, chapter 21 and 22, that goes right until the eternal state, after Christ has returned, reigned for a thousand years, and set up an eternal Kingdom forever - so there's a lot of prophecy in this book.

Now let's look at the author, at the end of verse 1 he is designated as John. Now we believe that this is indeed John the apostle, the same John that wrote the 1st, 2nd and 3rd epistles of John, and of course the wonderful Gospel of John - four times within this book the writer identifies himself as John. Now some have cast doubt upon the fact that this is John the apostle, but the early church tradition was in unanimous agreement that this indeed was John the great apostle - who, of course, ministered many many years in the church of Ephesus, one of the churches of Asia which he writes to here. In verse 2 we read of John's circumstances as he authors the book, 'Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw'. In verse 9 he elaborate on his circumstances, 'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ'.

John, the author, wrote this book from a vision he received on the Isle of Patmos, and the book was probably written in the late first century, around the 90s AD, which were the latter years of the reign of the Roman Emperor, Domitian. Now that's important, it's important as we'll see a little bit later, the message that this book conveys to these Christians and to ourselves today - to know that John himself was exiled as a persecuted Christian to the Isle of Patmos, and John, when on the Isle of Patmos, receives a vision to give and write to persecuted Christians in seven churches in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey.

Titus Flavius Domitian, this Roman Emperor, reigned when the empire was making great bloodthirsty strides. By this stage they had touched parts of Germany and, believe it or not, Great Britain. Domitian demanded of every member of the empire that they should worship him as Lord and God, and if you refused to do it you were severely persecuted - and tradition tells us that Domitian sent John to the Isle of Patmos, and condemned him to work in mines on that island which was a Roman penal colony off the coast of Asia Minor in the Greek Aegean Sea. There is a map of it on the screen, and you may be able to see the Isle of Patmos there. I just wonder was that one of the reasons why we find the word 'sea' 26 times in the book of the Revelation? John saw an awful lot of it! There is another picture of it - quite idyllic looking, I don't think it was as nice for John, but there we have it: that's where he was.

Now in verse 3, I want you to note something else. We've seen the title, the recipient, the

author, and this book begins with a benediction in verse 3: 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand'. Now this benediction is, I believe, the motivation for studying the book of the Revelation. Now I will talk a little bit later about my own motivation for beginning this series, but this is a book with a blessing - and indeed it is the only book that is designated in such a way in the whole Bible. I'm not saying the others aren't blessed, of course they are, and you will accrue a blessing through reading them! But this is the only book that begins with this pronounced blessing upon those who read it, hear it and obey it; and ends, incidentally, in chapter 22, with another blessing upon those who imbibe it.

Incidentally, there are seven 'beatitude', blessings pronounced in the book of the Revelation. We've just read the first in chapter 1 verse 3, turn with me to the rest. The second is found in chapter 14 verse 13, speaking of martyrs during the tribulation period here on the earth, in chapter 14 verse 13 John says: 'I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth' - those martyred for the cause of the Lord Jesus are blessed. Chapter 16 and verse 15, we read there: 'Behold, I come as a thief', Jesus says, 'Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame' - those who are faithful until the coming of the Lord Jesus are blessed. Then turn with me to chapter 19 and verse 9, the marriage supper of the Lamb when the Lord Jesus will be united with His church, 'He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb'. Then in chapter 20 and verse 6, we read: 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years' - those who rise when Christ raptures His church are blessed. Chapter 22 verse 7 Jesus, speaking of how He will come: 'Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book'. Chapter 22 and verse 14, the ending blessing: 'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city'.

Seven, and you will encounter over these weeks the number seven and again and again - it is the number, biblically, of completion, of perfection and fulfilment. There is a complete blessing, chapter 1 verse 3 says, to those who read this book, who hear this book, and obey this book. Now I don't know about you, but I need a blessing! Am I the only one? Do you need a blessing? I think we all do! We need it every day! We need to count the blessings we have, surely, but we ought to be seeking more - so let's make these studies the blessings that they ought to be to us, that's what God wants, that's what I want, that's what you should desire - and make sure they don't become a curse!

Now please note in this verse 3, this benediction, it says: 'Blessed is he that readeth'. Now 'he', obviously, is in the singular. Now follow with me: 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy', now 'they' is in the plural. Now that's important: the 'he' is in the singular, and it insinuates that the person here who is reading is reading aloud. This isn't reading in your bedroom or in your study, and then the 'they' insinuates that the person reading aloud is listened to by a plural people. The hearing there is not in the physical sense, but in the responsive sense - that they are not just listening, but they are doers of the word - they are listening with responsive hearts of faith.

Now that is very significant, because the practice in the synagogue - we know this from Luke's gospel chapter 4 and other portions of Scripture in Acts - the practice was that there was someone got up, a man, and read the Scriptures, and everyone listened. They couldn't have Torahs, laws, for everybody to have, like you have Bibles this evening, so one read and the

rest listened. It was the same, we believe, in the early church, in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 13 Paul told Timothy: 'Give attention to reading' - now that was the public reading of the scriptures in the assembly. They didn't have Bibles the way we have, a copy each.

Why am I telling you that? Because there has already been a tremendous blessing to me, as the one who is reading and expounding this book. I'm blessed, and I'm going to be further blessed over these weeks - but you should be blessed by listening, but oh to God that you would listen with responsive hearts, and then it could be said of you that you're not only blessed because you're reading too and you're listening, but you are doing, you are obeying this word. So this book is intended for public proclamation rather than a mere personal perusal, but it is intended to be kept - who of us will keep the sayings of this book? What a lesson! We could spend all night on this one alone: the most blessed will be the most obedient - that runs right through the whole of Christian experience. Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. May you know that blessing.

Then we see in this blessing at the end, we are to 'keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand'. Now the word for 'time' there in the original Greek that Revelation was written in, is the word for an 'epoch', or an era, a season of time in history. But he is saying that this time, this epoch is at hand. John is telling us that the great epoch, the next great epoch in God's redemptive history is imminent, it is at hand. Now the word 'imminent' is very important in Biblical prophecy, it means 'impending', something that is about to take place without delay. Now the word 'imminent' is different than 'immediate'. 'Immediate' is something that is going to happen there and then, but the second coming of the Lord Jesus, as it is portrayed within the whole of the Bible, tells us that we can expect it at any time - and yet 2000 years have passed and it still could be at any moment, because it is at hand, it's imminent not immediate.

Now whatever persuasion you are prophetically and theologically when it comes to prophecy, surely you have to agree that the coming of the Lord is at hand? I can almost hear the footfall, the hymn says, on the threshold of the door. Now, let me challenge you before I go on any further: there may be those among us who are not Christians, have never been born again; there may be those who are cold in their faith, backsliders; even believers need to study this book to get blessed, and it is my prayer that in the subsequent weeks you will be able to say:

'I am waiting for the coming
Of the Christ who died for me,
O His words have thrilled my spirit,
'I will come again for thee'.

I can almost hear the footfall,
On the threshold of the door,
And my heart, my heart is longing
To be with Him evermore'.

Is it? Will you be with Him evermore? Well, let's move on. For an introduction I want to give you four points tonight. The first is: my motivation for studying this book. The second is: the mystery that is often perceived in this book. The third is: the methods of interpreting this book. The fourth is: the message of the book.

My motivation for studying this book, if I can be personal for a moment or two. A number of

people for some time have encouraged me to take on this subject, but that was never enough for me! Of course we need the leading of God in all these things, but during the summer recess I had occasion to be at one Bible Conference in our land, and heard of another one where the amillennial interpretation of Bible prophecy was advocated. If you don't understand what that means, just let it go by, you will by the end of the meeting. My problem was not with people holding this, I respect those who hold it, and some of you here tonight hold it. But this was delivered to what was essentially, in the right sense, an ecumenical gathering where people from different denominations were, and different theological persuasions - it was delivered as a standard, and what seemed to come across as the most credible interpretation of biblical prophecy. Now that disturbed me, and the more I thought about it, it was obvious to me that these speakers - good men and godly men that they were - obviously assumed that it was safe to teach this without being challenged. I wondered why that was, and I came to the conclusion that the reason is: prophetic truth of the pre-millennial return of the Lord Jesus that we will be expounding throughout this series has largely been lost to the church of the United Kingdom. So I felt compelled, and indeed stirred up, to present what we believe to be the only biblically credible interpretation of prophecy in this exposition of the book of the Revelation.

Now, that said, let me add a caveat to it: it is essential to distinguish in Christian doctrine fundamentals, fundamental issues, from issues that are important but not fundamental. Now listen carefully to this, because this will stand you in good stead for a lot of doctrinal disputes: it's important to distinguish between fundamental issues and important issues that are not fundamental. Now what do I mean by that? Well, what I mean is: the fundamental non-negotiable truth in prophecy is, Jesus is coming again! Anyone who denies that has denied a fundamental, and has put themselves beyond the pale of Christianity. You've got to understand that. But though that is the fundamental, how we understand prophetic scripture, and how Jesus will return again, is not a fundamental - and that's why we need much grace and love when we deal with a subject like this. There's much heat rather than light when it comes to prophetic preaching and teaching these days.

But though it is not a fundamental, let it be said that it is important. You see, there are fundamental issues, there are important but not fundamental issues, and then there are nonessentials which really aren't that important - but the teaching of prophetic truth and how we understand it is not a non-essential, it is something that is important because it has ramifications in other directions, not least how you interpret the Bible in many places. So what we are saying tonight is: we need much grace and love, because whether we are of a particular prophetic persuasion, though it is not all-important, it is important. That's why I'm stirred to teach it, and it's also the reason why many shy away from it.

So my second point is the mystery that is perceived in the book, some people are afraid of the book of Revelation because they just feel: 'I cannot understand it'. Often because they feel they cannot understand it, they believe that no one could. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Ireland, once said that to him the former Soviet Union was, I quote, 'A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma' - and to many people that's what the book of the Revelation is like! Joseph Scallinger was a 16th century critic, and he complimented the reformer John Calvin by saying, I quote, 'He has shown his sense as much by not commenting on the book of the Revelation, as he had by the manner in which he had commented on the other books of the Bible'. Often - and I have to echo this at times - there is a defeatist attitude when we come to this book. Now it has to be said that no one has all the answers concerning this book. We cannot be dogmatic on many things that we find within this book. But that being said, we must face, all of us, whatever our prophetic persuasion, the

fact that this is the only book in 66 books of the Bible that is called 'a Revelation' - the opposite of a dark concealment! It is revealed!

'Apocalypsis', which is the Greek word for 'Revelation', unfortunately today has become synonymous with chaos and catastrophe - and a lot of films haven't helped that - but it literally means 'an unveiling', 'a disclosure', 'a revealing'. Now we find this type of Biblical literature in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, Ezekiel and Zechariah; and the only New Testament book that is apocalyptic is the book of the Revelation. Now when Daniel finished instructing in his apocalyptic book, in chapter 12 of Daniel and verse 4 we read: 'But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end'. He was told to close the book, conceal it; yet when we come to this book of Revelation, chapter 22 if you look at it and verse 10, John is told after having been given all these visions: 'Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand'. Why the difference? Both are apocalyptic literature, Daniel was told in the Old Testament 'Conceal it', John is told in the New Testament 'Reveal it'. Well, the answer is very simple: Calvary, Jesus died for sinners; the Messiah of God, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the King of Israel - He was buried, three days later He rose again, He ascended into heaven forty days later, ten days later He sent the Holy Spirit into this world. All of these events, these New Testament gospel events, ushered in what the Bible calls 'the last days'.

We read in Hebrews 1:1-2: 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds'. He is told in chapter 22 and verse 10, John that is, to reveal this apocalypse because the time is at hand. Now the total significance of this message, though we cannot understand absolutely everything contained within it, we must say tonight upon the authority of God's word that the total significance and focal message of this apocalypse is plain to the ordinary man and woman, it has to be if God's word is true. So don't be mystified by it all, whilst there's difficult things in it, don't be put off - you could put that phone off maybe! - don't be put off by the mystery that is in this book!

Now, the reason for the misunderstanding of the book is probably due to my third point: the methods, the various different methods of interpretation that are applied to it. Here are four - now if you don't have a notebook and pen with you tonight, you need to get one because you'll never remember all these things, or get the CD or tape and study these things again. There are four basic approaches to the book of the Revelation. The first is called the preterist school or approach. Really the preterist, which means 'past', he interprets Revelation as having already been fulfilled in the first century AD in the events after AD 70, which was after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the scattering of the Jews. They say it symbolises and records the struggle of the Christian church with the Roman Empire of the day, and now that is all past, it's all fulfilled - that's what the preterist says.

Now the strength of that particular approach is that it makes the book meaningful to the recipients who received this letter, it meant something to them. But the weaknesses are obvious, because although it might have meant something to them, it doesn't mean anything to us, it becomes meaningless to subsequent readers, and also there are many parts of it that are left unfulfilled. What it does is it robs the book of the Revelation of its prophetic nature and it becomes merely historical, and we know that it is a prophecy, as we've seen already.

Then secondly there is the historicist school. The historicists really believe that the book comprises the unfolding of Church history until the second coming of Christ. Now the strength

of that view is that it makes it relevant to subsequent ages, and it has a meaning to other generations other than the generation to which it was written. It has to be said there are many parallels between truths in the book of the Revelation and things that have happened in Church history. The weakness of the historicist view is that though it becomes relevant to us, it becomes therefore irrelevant to the original readers, because they would have needed to have an extensive knowledge of history which hadn't happened yet, and even subsequent readers need to be au fait with history. Though there are parallels, it has to be said that the interpretation of this book by historicists is often in the light of Western European church history, it forgets the rest of the world - and there's a great divergence of opinion regarding what these symbols represent, and what historical characters they represent, among historicists.

The third interpretation of this book is given by the idealists, or the topicists, or topical interpreters. The idealists believe that this book is symbolising an eternal conflict between good and evil in the universe - it's not meant to be taken literally. Now the strength of that view is that there is a conflict going on between good and evil, rather God and Satan, and that would have been relevant to the recipients of this book, as it is relevant to us today. But the weakness of the idealists view is that it betrays the prophetic nature of this book, it also denies the correspondence between this book of Revelation and all the other prophetic Scriptures in the Old and New Testament, it doesn't harmonise them. So these passages in Revelation, they have to be seen as prophecy rather than mere principles - it's a prophetic book.

There's the preterists, everything is past; there's the historicists, this is Church history up to the second coming of Jesus; there is the idealist, it's just the principles rather than prophecy - then there is the futurist. They believe that this book depicts mainly the end times from chapter 4 right through to the end. Now the weakness of that particular approach is that often there are many way out interpretations among futurists, and I would have to say that often they do not seek what was the initial message to the recipients of the book - and if you miss that, you will misinterpret the rest of the apocalypse. I think highly speculative ideas, and even fictional works, though they have popularised the futurist position in recent years, have turned many Christians against it unnecessarily I would say. Please be careful: criticising the claims of certain futurists is very different from disproving the interpretation in general.

I am a futurist unapologetically, and I believe that from chapter 4 on we have what God is still going to do - but let it be said that I do believe there is certain merit in these three other interpretations. I agree with Sidlow Baxter who was a futurist, when he said: 'Thus my futurism can find some accommodation for all these other three, though none of them can possibly allow a place for my futurism'. Now maybe that's over your heads, but some of you will get it. What I'm saying is: there's no doubt that some of the descriptions of the second coming were foreshadowed in AD 70 for these early Christians, but it was not the complete fulfilment as we clearly see from the book of the Revelation. The historicist speaks to us of Church history, and there is no doubt that there are parallels for many of these passages. The idealist looks at principles that are right throughout in the symbols, and there's no doubt that they are there. But let us not rob the book of its essential prophetic nature: it's telling us about some things that are going to happen!

Now here are the reasons why we must look at this book from a futurist perspective. One: the futurist interpretation is the only scheme where the literal, grammatical, historical rule of interpretation is intact. Let me take time for this: literal, if it says what it says, that's what it means; grammatical, whatever it literally says in the Greek language, that's what it means;

historical, whatever it says in the historical context and culture - pulling those three together, that is the rule of sound interpretation right throughout the whole Bible, and here as well. If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.

Now that is not espousing a wooden literalness when we come to the Bible. It's not a denial of the symbolism of the book of Revelation, but it is an acknowledgement that these signs and symbols in Revelation represent actual biblically interpretable realities. They are symbols and signs, yes, but they represent real things, literal things that are going to happen. If you have a working knowledge, particularly of the Old Testament, you will be able to interpret the majority of the symbols in this book, if not all. It's the only consistent method of interpreting the book of Revelation.

The second reason for futurism is that it's the only view that harmonises the Old Testament and New Testament prophetic passages. Now, while there have been partial fulfilments of some Old Testament prophecies, and there have been foreshadowings of many of those prophecies, it is only the future events of the book of the Revelation that will bring them to completion - and there we see them coming to consummation and conclusion. The third reason for a futurist approach is that it fits the chronological outline that John himself gives us in chapter 1 and verse 19. The Lord tells him: 'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which are to come'. Now that simply says, as an outline - if you look at the screen, you'll maybe not see too much of it - but you will see there in that first column at the very beginning the things that you have seen, and he's speaking of the vision of Jesus Christ, that we will look at probably next week. The things which he has seen, the vision of Christ; the things which are - and when he speaks of the things which are in this next column, he's talking about the seven churches of Asia Minor that he deals with in chapter 2 and chapter 3, they were existent in his day. The things which are to come are the events that chapter 4 of Revelation right through to the end of the book speak of, things that are future: the tribulation period, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven key figures, the seven vials or bowls, and then we find the Lord coming and setting up His earthly kingdom and reigning for a thousand years, and then the eternal state and so on.

So John gives us that outline: the things that you have seen; the things which are, the churches; and the things which are yet to be. Let me give you a classic example of the significance of how your method of interpretation relates to your understanding of this book. Turn with me to chapter 20, this is a passage of Scripture that talks about Christ reigning for a thousand years on the earth, it's the famous millennium passage. Now the amillennialist school, if you look up at the screen, they spiritualise this passage and tell us that the first resurrection here is spiritual conversion. They say that the millennium, the thousand years, is a symbol of the church age, the period that we are now living in, which is also the tribulation - we're going through tribulation now, but we're also going through the reign of Christ in our lives, and then Christ will come and return and take us effectively into the eternal state.

Now what they, in effect, do if they spiritualise the book of the Revelation, and they spiritualise other Old Testament prophecies - I don't have time to go into it, but historically speaking what you're doing is using the Alexandrian interpretation that was later adopted, after Origen and other church fathers, by Augustine. It filtered its way into Roman Catholicism, and then eventually into Reformed theology, and it's still with us today in amillennialism. If you want to know more about that get a CD or tape that I did a few years ago on 'Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Part 1', 'A, Post, or Pre Millennialism - Does It Matter?'.

You can see the danger of spiritualising and not taking this book literally. Then there is post-millennialism, again they see, as amillennialism, the first resurrection as a spiritual conversion, they see the church age and the millennium running together, but they believe that the preaching of the gospel and an improvement in humanity in general, like evolution but in a religious sense, will usher in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the eternal state. They do the same as amillennialism, they spiritualise, but they actually invert the biblical order, because the Bible says things will get worse and worse and the Lord Jesus will come and He, at His coming, will usher in a better age in the millennial reign.

Then there is pre-millennialism, which is the futurist approach. It reads as the Bible is written, and as prophecy is written. It harmonises the prophecies in the Bible together, Old and New Testament, and it keeps the biblical distinctions that we have within the Bible, God's prophetic plan of history is not only for the church but it is for Israel, it is for the Gentiles and it is for the church. It keeps the biblical distinctions and yet marries together prophetic scripture in perfect harmony.

Now, finally, if you'll bear with me for five minutes: the message of the book. H.B. Sweet says this, and it is profound, and I want to spend a bit of time on it: 'In form this is an epistle', never forget that, this is a letter to seven churches that was circulated around Asia Minor. 'In form it is an epistle containing an apocalyptic prophecy', apocalyptic meaning, it's full of signs and symbols that are revealing something, it's a prophecy, it's pointing to the future. 'But', he says, 'in spirit and inner purpose it is pastoral'. Warren Weirsbe puts it well, who is a pre-millennialist and a futurist, he says this: 'Do not get lost in the details, but try to see the big picture and keep in mind that John wrote this book to encourage believers who were going through persecution. Every generation of Christians has had its antichrist and Babylon, and the hope of the Lord's return has kept those saints going when the going was tough'. Now, yes, it is speaking of the future - hope for tomorrow - but that hope for tomorrow is meant to give you strength for today. It has an application for today: it was a book that wasn't originally given to these early saints to satisfy their curiosity about the future, it was given to them pastorally to comfort them, to give them hope for the days that lay ahead. Remember what we said: it was written by John, a persecuted Christian; it was written to the churches of Asia Minor, persecuted churches; and it was written for the purposes of encouraging and exhorting them, by reassuring them of this central fact - don't miss it - Jesus Christ controls the course and the climax of history! The course and climax of history is in His control!

That's why I chose the title 'Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow', because our present difficulties, your difficulties now, have a connection with the future. The central message of this book is clear: God is in control of history, Christ is coming back and He will come in judgement, rewarding those who have remained faithful to Him. Irrespective of what interpretation you have, or what method you use, the central idea on which we all should agree is: Christ will return some time in the future, and that will be a welcome sight to His people, will it not? Warren Weirsbe puts it well: 'We are not the planning committee for the second advent, but we are the welcoming committee'. Our hope and prayer is, as John's, 'Even so, come Lord Jesus'.

Can I finish with this story that I think ties together these two aspects: strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, the fact that this book points us to the future but roots us in spiritual principles in the present. It's from the persecuted church in China, it's a conversation that was overheard by an author between an American pastor and a Chinese church leader.

This is how it went, and I'll just read it as it is, the American pastor asked the Chinese leader:

'What book in the Bible is most precious to you?'. The Chinese pastor said: 'Well, probably the book of Revelation, because...', and the American pastor interrupted him, 'Because your suffering makes you long for the end of the world, and you're strengthened by the vision of how it will end with Christ's victory? Yes?'. The Chinese pastor: 'That too, but we don't just take Revelation to be a description of the way the world will end, we see it also as a description of the way the world is now'. 'I'm not understanding you', the American pastor said, 'Surely Revelation is a book that tells us how the world will end?'. He agreed, 'Yes it is, but I am telling you that it is also a description of the way the world is now. Suffering has made this clear to us in China, clearly prosperity has hidden this from you in America'. 'You see', he went on, 'We had a Caesar here in China called Mao Tse Tung and he, like the Caesar of the early church period, demanded what was only God's - that he should be worshipped as a god. As in Revelation, he used a beast to coerce us, communism; and a false prophet to beguile us, false bishops. When we resisted this idolatry with the testimony of the Lamb, we were slaughtered and jailed. In this way we saw that Revelation is a description of spiritual warfare that always goes on in any society, including yours'. The American pastor said, 'But it's not going on in America today - you say we have that hidden from us, what do you mean?'. 'Well', said the Chinese leader, 'this conflict is obvious to us in China. You could not miss that Mao Tse Tung was setting himself up as an idol and demanding worship, so the veil was removed and we saw the world as it really is - a place where idols are demanding our worship. But this is not obvious to you in America because it is more subtle'. The pastor from America said: 'Maybe it's not happening at all, we are a Christian country and we have a Christian president'. The Chinese pastor said: 'I tell you, there are Caesars or idols in your society just as much as in ours, and even in your churches - and there are false prophets telling you that the idolatry is biblical, and beasts coercing you. For example, your Caesar may not be a person but an idea. In our fellowship', he said, 'we have a clever young man who lived with an American family for a year whilst studying. The couple was generous, but he noticed something about them: they were always exhausted. Both worked incredibly hard, though they had plenty of money. They had three cars, two homes, expensive country club memberships - and, as far as he could tell, gave only a minimum to the Lord's work. They never asked him a single question about the Chinese church, and when he left they give him an envelope with \$20 in it. He told us: I felt so sorry for them, they thought they were free but they were slaves. They were dropping from exhaustion because they had to live up to something called the American dream, but they never knew that the pursuit of that life had stolen their heart from Christ'. 'Hmmm', said the American pastor, 'If what you say is true, then consumerism could be a more effective killer of faith than communism'. The Chinese pastor said: 'You're right, and this is what we are afraid of here in China. Consumerism clutters up life so much that' - listen to this - 'we fail to see the world as it is: full of idols trying to steal our worship from God'.

Revelation is about the future, but do not miss its message for the present. It doesn't just describe the world as it will be, but that iniquity works already - it describes the world as it is! May we see that in the weeks that lie ahead of us.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 2
"The Greeting To The Seven Churches"

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Now do turn with me to Revelation chapter 1 please, and our title this evening is 'The Greeting to the Seven Churches', and we'll be looking at verses 1 to 8 of chapter 1, but we will read from verse 1 where we began last week.

Verse 1 of Revelation chapter 1: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty".

Now I said that I would not cover the ground that we touched upon last Monday night, save to recap a little. We looked at the title of this book, which is not as some editions of the Bible have it 'The Revelation of St John', but rather it is 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' - it is about Him and it is from Him. Then after looking at the title we looked at the recipients of this book, verse 1 tells us that it was given to His servants, the servants of Christ, to show the things which must shortly come to pass. We also looked in a bit of detail at who the author of this book was, none other than the Apostle John - the same author of the fourth Gospel, and 1st, 2nd and 3rd epistles of John the beloved apostle who ministered many years in the city of Ephesus. Then we also looked at verse 3, and we witnessed the fact that this is a book with a benediction, and John pronounces a blessing upon those that read it - that is in the singular, the one who reads it publicly - those, plural, who hear it, and everyone who keeps the things that are written therein, for the time is at hand. The benediction that is upon this book, we saw, is also the motivation for us reading and studying it. We all need, we all - I hope - want a blessing from God, and there's a special blessing, I believe, in these last days for those who take note of the teaching of the book of Revelation.

We also mentioned the fact that many people approach this book with fear and trepidation. It's a bit mysterious to them, and that usually is because of several of the misunderstandings concerning this book that I believe are often derivative from false methods of interpretation that are applied to it. We looked at three false methods and one true method of interpreting this book. I'm not going to go into it tonight, get the recording. Then finally we looked at the message that this book holds, and I quoted a man by the name of H.B. Sweet, and I'll do it

again because he very succinctly grasps the message of this book. He says: 'Revelation in form is an epistle', a letter, 'containing apocalyptic prophecy' - apocalyptic simply means something that is being unveiled and revealed, and characteristic to apocalyptic literature is the signifying through signs and symbols. It is prophecy, apocalyptic prophecy, through these signs and symbols there is a message about the future. Here's how he ends his quote: 'in spirit and in inner purpose this epistle, apocalyptic prophesy, is pastoral'. We must always remember that as we're going through this book: this book has a message to people in John's day who were suffering, persecuted for their faith - and, coincidentally, it has a message for us today, those of us who might well be suffering for our faith, or suffering indeed in any way.

Now this evening we're going to begin looking at the sender of this book, he's mentioned - the Authorised Version in verse 4 has his name in capitals, 'JOHN', and we'll not take time to look at his identity, we've done that already. John is the sender - who are his addressees? Well, verse 4 tells us: 'John to the seven churches which are in Asia'. Now, if you look at the screen you will see there is an old map of Asia, and of course Asia is not what we understand to be Asia today. Asia in the ancient Roman Empire was roundabout where modern Turkey is, and certainly the part that we are interested in was West Asia, that is Asia Minor, an imperial province of Rome.

Now if you look at verse 11 you have there designated the names of these seven churches, the second half of the verse tells us they were: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Let me say right away that there were most certainly more than seven churches in Asia Minor, we know that from the Scriptures. I'll give you two for instance: there was Colossae, the letter of Paul to the Colossians proves that; there was Miletus, as Acts chapter 20 shows us, and there were various other churches, we'll not take time to mention them. So the fact that John mentions seven, the Lord Jesus is inspiring him to do so, it's obvious that these seven in particular were representative of something that John wanted to communicate - and we will see that very clearly when we turn to chapters 2 and 3 and look at those seven churches in detail, but they are chosen for characteristics that the Lord Jesus wanted to highlight.

Now it's interesting when you note that Paul the apostle also wrote to seven churches - I'll let you work out what they were. Of course, he didn't write the same letter to them, and to some of them he wrote several letters, but it's interesting isn't it? Now if you were to look at verse 7 again, and then home in on this map, you would see that if you read verse 11 and then followed the map in the order that it is written, each church as John writes about it, you would roughly follow a journey on a circle, roughly now. Now that's interesting, let me show you another map just to make that clear - I know it's a strange looking circle, but the point that I think is being made is: John, right throughout this book has, as one of his major themes, completeness. There are seven churches here, and seven of course is the biblical number for perfection and completeness - I'm only posing the question: could it be that this circular movement as we travel round the seven churches as he has them in verse 11 also speaks of completeness?

Now, add to that the fact that in the vision that we will look at, God willing, next Monday evening in verses 12 and 13, the vision of the Son of Man, we read: 'I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; And in the midst of the seven lampstands one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle'. These seven lampstands are the seven churches - now, where is Christ in relation to them? He is in the midst of them, they are around Him. Now I know this is only a picture, but it tries to graphically bring to our minds

that vision that John saw, and the relation to the churches - and I know the lampstands aren't correct in that picture, but it gives you the idea of the circular seven churches with the Lord in the midst.

Then we come to the salutation, if you look at it: 'John to the seven churches', here we have it, 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne'. Now of course this greeting, 'Grace and peace', corresponds to the customary greeting that often was in letters in this particular age, and also corresponds directly to how Paul addressed his letters, and how John also did in his second epistle. Now 'grace' was a Gentile, a Greek greeting. Of course we know in a Christian context, 'grace' means 'undeserved favour', the gift of God that we cannot earn nor merit - but grace is also something that we need to get through the Christian life, that is what we derive our strength from: the free gift of God.

The second greeting is 'peace', and if 'grace' was the Gentile greeting, 'peace', 'Shalom', is the Hebrew greeting. Right away we see that John is bringing together both Jew and Gentile in the church of Jesus Christ as he writes to these seven churches. Peace, shalom, speaks of the calm that we need along with grace to face suffering, sorrow, and even death for the cause of Christ. Now please remember the context of this book: it is being written to persecuted Christians who needed grace, who needed peace - and, praise God, even in the age in which we live tonight, those two commodities are the rightful claim of every child of God. If you're a Christian here tonight, do you know, in spite of what you're going through, that you can have the grace of God that Paul was told of, the grace of God that was sufficient for his need? The grace of God that can enable your weakness to display the strength of God, and glorify His name! Can you hear tonight what God's Spirit said to the apostle: 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'? Now that is what these believers needed to hear. They also needed peace, and praise God we have Christ's peace! Philippians tells us to be anxious for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make our requests made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, transcends all understanding, will rule our hearts and our minds through Christ Jesus our Lord.

This book, this letter is from a persecuted Christian, John on the Isle of Patmos for his faith in Christ; to persecuted churches, the seven churches in Asia Minor, with a message of hope, grace, peace! Isn't that wonderful? Now we might well ask: who has the authority and indeed the ability to give such a message to such people in such a predicament? Well, that leads us to the source, or if you like the signature of this letter. Look at verse 4, the grace and peace is 'from him which is, and which was, and which is to come', and we'll stop there. First of all we see that this peace is given by - and forgive this terminology, but you'll understand why I'm using it - the ghost writer of the book of Revelation, because though John is the penman, this message is coming from God Almighty. We saw that in verse 1, let me remind you of it, this is: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ', about Jesus Christ, 'which God gave to Christ', and then we saw Christ gave it to an angel, that the angel might give it to John. This is a divine message!

Now I want you to know right at the beginning of our study this evening that we are going to encounter many Christian doctrines as we look at this portion of Scripture tonight, many fundamental and important truths from the word of God. Here's the first one: the great truth of the inspiration of holy Scripture. This message that we are reading, that is in our hands in the 21st-century, is the living Word of God. Listen to what 2 Peter chapter 1:21 says about divine inspiration, specifically it talks of prophecy: 'the prophecy came not in old time by the

will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'. Paul to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:16 says: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'. The doctrine of the inspiration of holy Scripture. Now inspiration did not violate personhood - let me explain that. We can see that John the apostle was the man that wrote Revelation because the writing, though very different in places, is also similar to his three epistles and to his gospel. You can see his character and his personality in it - but God's inspiration used those characteristics, those personality traits, in order to get across what God wanted to say.

So we believe in what is called the plenary, verbal inspiration of holy Scripture. That means: plenary, every word of the verbal Scripture, that is every word of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that were given to the authors of those books, are divinely inspired by God. Let us never lose that, for we are living in a day where in many places it has been lost. The ancient designation is given to the source of this letter, God is described as 'him which is, and which was, and which is to come'. Now there is a lesson for us: these Christians who were facing fiery trials from the Emperor Domitian, they were taking security in the One who was the source of this letter, that is the unchangeable God - the One who was, and is, and ever shall be the same. There is another doctrine: the doctrine of the immutability of God, the unchangeableness of the Almighty.

I want you to note one difference in this designation of God in verse 4 from the original ancient name for God. You see the original name goes like this: 'The One who was, and is, and ever shall be', that's not how John has it. He has it: 'The One who was, and is, and is to come'. I want you to note that, because right away we are seeing that John is emphasising the prophetic nature of this book. This God that is inspiring, who is the source and signature to this book, He's coming! He's not just the One who ever will be eternally in His nature, but He's coming, He's going to enter history again.

We see also hear another doctrine, the doctrine of prophecy. We saw it in verse 1, you will remember that this letter was to show Christ's servants things which must shortly come to pass, things which must shortly take place. Then in verse 3, the blessing is upon those who hear the words of this prophecy, this is prophetic literature. Then in verse 4, as we've seen, God is designated as the One who is to come, and also the same in verse 8. This is a prophetic book, don't let anybody tell you it's not.

Now we encounter in this ancient name for God another biblical doctrine, the doctrine of the triune Godhead, that is that we believe in one God, one substance, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see here this triune Godhead displayed: the One who was, and is, and is to come - and then we have mentioned to us the seven Spirits, this letter is also from the seven Spirits which are before the throne. So we have the Father, and we have the Spirit. Now let's pause there and look at the Spirit for a moment. The Spirit is spoken of as being the seven Spirits, now you've got to realise right away that this is, as we've said, apocalyptic literature, and it's filled with symbolism. People get distressed at the Holy Spirit being spoken of as seven Spirits, and they try to explain it as being some other spiritual beings that are before the throne, and I don't think that's the case at all. This number seven, as we've already seen, is found I think over 50 times in this book of Revelation. It speaks of perfection, it speaks of completeness, and as it speaks of the Holy Spirit here, it's speaking of the fullness of completeness that is in the Spirit of God.

If you have a margin to your Bible, if it's a study Bible, it might even render the seven Spirits of God as 'the sevenfold Spirit of God'. Now, let me show you what I think this actually means

when it says 'the seven Spirits of God'. Turn with me to Isaiah 11, verse 2 of Isaiah 11 reads like this, speaking of the One who was to come, that is Messiah in His first coming to earth, that's already happened, it says that: 'the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him', there is the first description of the Holy Spirit there, 'the spirit of the LORD', which is the name for Jehovah, so it is 'the spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him', one; 'the spirit of wisdom', two; 'the spirit of understanding', three; 'the spirit of counsel', four; 'the spirit of might', five; 'the spirit of knowledge', six; and 'the spirit of the fear of the LORD', seven. It's speaking, I believe, of seven characteristics of the one Spirit of God. If you had time, and we don't tonight, you could go into Zechariah chapter 4 and see that the Holy Spirit is represented there as the seven branches of the Jewish menorah, the candlestick, the lampstand.

Now the seven Spirits of God in their completeness, in their perfection and fullness - look at their location - are found before the throne of God. Now that is significant, I believe, because anyone who is found before a throne, it speaks of the government of that particular throne going out from it. Here we have the Father, and here we have the Spirit, and the Spirit is acting governmentally on the earth on behalf of God, and He's doing it via the church - for it is the Spirit, along with the Father, who is sending out this message to the church. Now, do you want evidence for that? All you need to do is go home and read the Acts of the Apostles, because that could better perhaps be titled the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles', the 'Acts of God via the Holy Spirit in the Apostles'. We see through the first 30 years of the church's infancy that the Holy Spirit was being manifest in governmental authority from the throne of God in the early church.

Now I'm tempted to ask the question: is the Holy Spirit governmentally working here in the church of our age, in our generation? Is He allowed to work? Or is it, as I fear, that men in their wisdom and their ingenuity have usurped the Holy Spirit's authority in their local assemblies?

Well, we must move on. We have seen God: the One who is, who was, and is to come. We have seen the seven Spirits, which of course is the Holy Spirit - and both God and the Holy Spirit, the Father and God the Spirit, have sent this message; and now we encounter another person in the Godhead. The only reason He is third in this instance is that there is going to be a long description of Him in the rest of this portion of Scripture. Verse 5: 'And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth', we'll stop there. Jesus Christ, this message comes from Him, and is about Him.

I remember when we had our gatherings over in the old building, that one evening after a Monday night meeting, or before it, or before Sunday or something, I lifted a little booklet that was pushed under the door about the book of the Revelation. The long and the short of it was, this author - who remained nameless, but I know who he is because sometimes he comes to this meeting - he actually propounded that the book of the Revelation was not inspired. His reasoning for doing that was, he said it portrays Christ as a mere man apart from God. He was implying that the book of Revelation is not trinitarian, and because it's not trinitarian it should be rejected. Now that man is not here tonight, but if he were - just in case any of you are thinking along the same lines - you need to read the fact that this book is not only a book with a blessing, it's a book with a curse. In Revelation 22, we read at the end of it: 'If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book'. It's bad enough to take something out of the book, but to take Revelation out of the Bible is an entirely different and more serious sin.

Now let me say that this is a falsehood, because Revelation - just like John's gospel - is one of the clearest representations and presentations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Sure, even the literary structure which is before us - just like right throughout the Bible - is, here in Revelation, triune: 'The One who was, the One who is, the One who is to come'. There are more triune designations, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', the Trinity is right throughout the book. Now let me show you another trinity, though it is a three in relation to our Lord Jesus, in verse 5 and part b He is described as being 'the faithful witness'. He is the dependable witness - and I remember His words to Pilate in John's gospel 18:37, 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth', that's why He came the first time. That's what He did faithfully, and in all of His doing of it, He never lacked courage, nor did He ever compromise - praise His holy name!

Then He is described secondly as 'the first begotten from the dead', or 'the firstborn of the dead' - now that doesn't mean that He was the first person raised to life again, because He wasn't, He raised three Himself. But He was the first to rise from, now mark this, the mass of men who had died, in order that He would die no more, now that's different. Lazarus was raised, he died again. The widow of Nain's son was raised, he died again. Jairus' daughter was raised, she died again - but Christ has risen to die no more in the power of an endless life!

So this speaks of another doctrine, the doctrine of the resurrection. He is the firstborn from among the dead ones. He is pre-eminent in His position of resurrection. Now, can I say just in passing that there is going to be a similar selective resurrection for the Christian, like Christ's resurrection. Philippians 3 and verse 11 tells us about it, Paul says: 'If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead', literally 'unto the resurrection out from among the dead'. So that teaches us, as we will see as we go through the book of the Revelation, that there is not going to be a general resurrection when the graves are opened and everybody just comes out at the one moment, there are several resurrections - and Christ, because He is the pre-eminent in position as the firstborn from among the dead, has led the way for all who believe in Him.

But it also speaks, the fact that Christ has risen, of the pre-eminent order of the resurrection. First Corinthians 15:20 says not that Christ is the firstborn from among the dead, but He is the firstfruits - that means that when the Jewish farmers were gathering in their harvest, they would take the firstfruits of the harvest and offer it up to God. Like a resurrection there's going to be harvest day, and Christ has been the firstfruits of that resurrection, and we will follow Him - isn't that wonderful - because He has risen first! As He said: 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Believest thou this?'. My favourite hymn says:

'Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head.
Made like Him, like Him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies'.

He is the firstborn from among the dead, pre-eminent in position, pre-eminent in order. The third description we have of Him here in verse 5 part b is He is described as the Ruler over the kings of the earth, that is the doctrine of divine sovereignty. Mark this well: how foolish it is to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is not in the book of the Revelation, this attribute of divine sovereignty is only attributed to God. In Daniel 2 and verses 20 and 21 we read:

'Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding'. That's the Old Testament record, the New Testament record gives the same, Romans 13:1: 'For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God'. Here we see Christ as the Ruler over the kings of the earth, don't tell me He's not God!

The faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth - how do you think that related to those suffering saints? Think about it for a moment: faithful witness, they needed an example of a faithful witness, didn't they? They needed courage, they needed not to compromise in the face of fiery persecution. The firstborn from among the dead - many of them were being martyred, sent to the stake, fed to the lions. They needed to know that this is not the end, but be faithful even to death. They needed to know, though Domitian was asking them to bow and acknowledge him as lord and god, that there was One who is the Christ of God who is far above all, over all the kings and emperors of the earth. It's wonderful, isn't it?

But I want you to see also in these three names of the Lord Jesus Christ that, first of all, faithful witness speaks of how He began this age. What am I talking about? Well, He came as the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us, and He witnessed to God, He displayed Him. Then we see that He died, but He became the firstborn from the dead - He rose again! He ascended to heaven, and that's the present, that's where we are now. How is it all going to end? He's coming back as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Those are the three offices of the Lord Jesus Christ: the faithful witness, He is God's Prophet; the firstborn from the dead, He is a man in the glory at the right hand of God, a Mediator for us, a Great High Priest, Prophet Priest; and He's coming again as King, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Well in verse 5, at the very end, is it any wonder that John bursts into a doxology of praise? Can I just say that it's wonderful to have a spirit that naturally and spontaneously bursts into praise? We don't have too many like that these days! How could you not praise God after getting a glimpse of the One who was, and is, and is to come, of the seven Spirits before the throne, of the faithful witness, the firstborn from among dead ones, the ruler over the kings of the earth? He cries, look at it, 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood'. Why does he do that? Apart from the obvious, as I've stated. I think it is because he knows that this One who he has just seen and had described to him by the Holy Spirit is not an august and distant Deity who is administrating His rule passively without care or feeling, but this Christ is the One who loved us and washed us from our sins in His very own blood!

Now I know I say this all the time, and I'm probably going to get sued by whoever wrote the song, but I hate it: 'From a distance God is watching us...', He's not at a distance! He's at blood-nearness, flesh and blood. Incidentally, the tense here is not 'loved' in the past, it actually speaks of the present continuous action, 'He loves us'. He loves us, and 'washed' is in the past - completed work! He has loved us, but He does love us, but His washing of us is something that happened a long time ago! There is an order here, now mark it carefully, and this is precious: He loved us before He ever washed us - now that's mighty. Romans 5 and verse 8 says that it was 'while we were yet sinners', while we were still in our sin Christ died for us - add to that fact that He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, and we were in Christ then.

The price that He paid was His own blood. Do you know what this letter is? It is a letter from

a loving, life-giving Lord. Can I ask you tonight: is He your Lord? Is He your Saviour? Let me speak for a moment about His blood. Verse 5 tells us it washes, it cleanses us from our sin. Those stains that make you unworthy to come into the presence of a holy, righteous God in heaven, washed away by the blood of Christ. Chapter 7 and verse 14 says the same, and then we find in chapter 5 and verse 9 that this blood that Jesus shed on the cross, it redeems us, it has bought us back from the slave market of sin. Verse 11 of chapter 12 tells us that it is that same blood that washed us and redeemed us that causes us to overcome the devil. Do you need to be washed from your sins tonight, and have the assurance of salvation? There is only one way - water will not wash it, whether it is baptistic water, it'll not do anything - only the blood of Christ will wash it away. Do you want to be redeemed? Not redeemed by your tradition, or by your religion, or by money, you're redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. You must trust in that blood. If you're a Christian and you're struggling with sin, you need to hear tonight that you've died with Christ, and His shed blood has allowed you to have His righteousness. You can overcome the devil himself by the blood of the Lamb and the power of your testimony.

We need, all of us, to be depending upon the blood of Christ. There's another doctrine - theologians call it 'soteriology', the doctrine of salvation. It's wonderful, isn't it? To save us at such a price was more than we ever deserved, but do you know what the mighty thing in this portion of Scripture is? That's not where God stops, for He doesn't just leave us saved, but verse 6 shows us - look at it: 'He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father'. He has enrolled us in service. We have salvation, but now He calls us to serve, and not to serve an earthly sovereign but the Sovereign, the God of all heaven.

Imagine what this meant to these first Christians. They meant nothing in the present day world system of Rome, but they meant everything to God for they were the servants of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords - and that's what you are. Though they were the enemies of Imperial Rome, and we might be the enemies of our godless society today in a moral sense, if we are children of God we are members of a greater Kingdom - and your margin should read 'a kingdom of priests'. Verse 6: 'unto God and His Father' - by the way, there is the Trinity again - 'unto Jesus Christ's God and Father'.

Now here we have another doctrine in this phrase 'the kingdom of priests', because this is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It's not heard often these days, and so I want you to turn with me - my time is always running away from me - to 1 Peter chapter 2, in verse 5 we read, Peter says to believers: 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices' - a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices. Now go down to verse 9: 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. Now keep your Bible open there. We have become a kingdom of priests through the Lord Jesus Christ, and Peter says in verse 5 that we're holy priests, he says in verse 9 that we're royal priests. Now the priesthood was something that was only available to Israel, and now he's talking to Gentiles here as well as Jews, and he's telling them that they are a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood. Now don't make the mistake of interpreting the church as taking the place of Israel, that's not what it's saying, there are many Scriptures that still have to be fulfilled in the nation of Israel - but what it is saying is that we who were not a people have become a people by the grace of God. Look at verse 5, as holy priests what do we do? We offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Now, what are those spiritual sacrifices? Well, Romans 12 verse 1 tells us to offer our bodies,

we are to offer all our persons to the Lord Jesus. Have you done that? Everything you are and have, that's how you worship as a holy priest: give yourself to God. Hebrews 13 verse 16 says: 'Do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased'. We are to buy our possessions in giving to others, worship God in a holy sacrifice. Hebrews 13:15 says: 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually'. How do we offer our sacrifices as holy priests unto God? We give everything that we are, body, possessions and praise! Do we do that?

Verse 9 of 1 Peter 2 says that as royal priests there's something we do also, we 'shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. So if we operate as holy priests through worship, practical service, what Peter is saying here is that we operate as royal priests in witness. We tell others of the wonderful Saviour whom we have! Can I just say in passing that the priesthood is not the domain of professionals. There is no clergy/laity system in the word of God, for that matter there isn't any one-man ministry at all. We are all priests before God, men and women. As holy priests we worship, as royal priests we witness - and a priest is a person who speaks to God on behalf of men, and he's a man who speaks to men on behalf of God, and that's the two sides of this responsibility. As holy priests we go into the church, the assembly, to worship; and as royal priests we go out to witness. The problem is, because it has become a professional job for ministers and pastors and the rest, the saints of God have ceased doing it and decided, 'We'll pay somebody else to do it on our behalf' - that's unbiblical.

Do not sink beneath the dignity of your calling as a holy priest. The only conclusion that we can have is found in verse 6 at the end: 'to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen'. He alone is worthy! Look what He has done for us: saving us, calling us to serve Him. Glory speaks of His intrinsic value of who He is in Himself, the Lord Jesus. He deserves our honour, He deserves our worship and our praise. 'Glory and dominion' is His - dominion speaks of His essential attributes, that is: He ought to have our lives, He ought to have dominion in His church, and eventually He's going to control the whole universe.

That will become manifest in verse 7: 'Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen'. This is the theme of the book, it's what it's leading up to in chapter 19, where the Sovereign Lord comes to dispossess His enemies from the earth. This blessed One that you have just seen is coming! Here's three things about this coming: one, it is an undeniable certainty. 'Behold, He is coming with clouds'. In Acts chapter 1 we read that the apostles gathered and saw the Lord Jesus go up into heaven in a cloud, and the angel said: 'This same Jesus that you have seen go in this manner, shall so come again in like manner as you have seen Him go with clouds' - is that not what it says? 'Behold, He cometh with clouds'. The scoffers may say, as Peter said in his day, 'They say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? The fathers have died and sleep, they spoke of His coming, and He didn't come and they died''.

My friend, His coming is an undeniable certainty, it is also a universal sight. Every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. Matthew 24 concurs with this in verses 28 and 29, that this is not an invisible coming, this is different from John 14, and 1 Thessalonians 4, and 1 Corinthians 15 where there is no indication in those passages that anyone other than the raptured saints of God will see the Lord - but this is the revelation of Christ to the whole world! Even they that pierced Him will see Him, and that's significant that John should use the word 'pierced', because it was he in his record of the cross in John 19 who spoke of the Saviour being 'pierced', and those looking upon Him who pierced Him. Zechariah 12 and verse

10 says: 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn'. What does that mean? The house of David will mourn His coming, those who pierced Him - it's not talking about the four Roman soldiers that were over His crucifixion, it's talking about the people, the nation, His own who He came to who would not receive Him. The individuals that pierced Christ literally died long ago, they will have their comeuppance at the Great White Throne - but the nation accepted the guilt, 'Let His blood be upon us and our children's children'. Peter, when he preached at Pentecost in Acts 2, he said: 'Ye men of Israel, ye took the Prince of Life and slew Him'.

How could it mean anything but the nation of Israel? A true revelation to them, praise God, they will repent at the sight - but for others it will be a coming of unprecedented sorrow. Look at the end of the verse, all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. He comes to judge the earth, to set up His kingdom. My friend, will you be among those who weep and wail when Jesus comes again, because you have never been washed from your sins, you have never trusted Him as your Saviour? Praise God, the believer doesn't have to wail, but he says just like John: 'Even so, come. Amen'. Is that how you approach it?

In verse 8 we have a change of speaker, it is now the Lord Jesus speaking, and He calls Himself the 'Alpha and Omega', which is the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, 'the beginning and the end'. Now please, again, note the Trinitarian doctrine of the Godhead - there can't be two Alpha's and Omega's, there can't be two beginnings and endings, so there must be one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Think about an alphabet for a moment, because in an alphabet - A to Z as we would call it, although it's A and O here - an alphabet is an ingenious mechanism whereby we can store and communicate, as far as we are concerned as human beings, all knowledge. All human knowledge can be stored and communicated by 26 letters, at least in our English alphabet. It can be arranged into almost endless combinations to convey what we want.

What this is speaking of is that Christ is not only the beginning and the ending, but He is the Supreme Sovereign Divine Alphabet, there is nothing outside His knowledge. Colossians 2: 'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', that's why He is called at the end of verse 8, 'the Almighty' - El-Shaddai, the Omnipotent God! The book of the Revelation is the consummation of all things by the Alpha and Omega, by the beginning and the ending. Someone has called it, and I like this, 'Revelation is the Grand Central Station of the Bible, because it's here where all the trains come in'.

'What trains?', you say. Trains of thought, trains of thought that began in the book of Genesis and followed through to the other Bible books, such as the concept of the scarlet line of redemption, the nation of Israel, the Gentile nations, the church, Satan and the adversaries of God, God's people, the Antichrist, many many more trains - and they're all coming together. I wish I had time to show you tonight. In Genesis you have the commencement of heaven and earth, verse 1 chapter 1, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth'. Here in chapter 21 of Revelation we have the consummation of heaven and earth. Genesis chapter 3 we have the entrance of sin - praise God, in Revelation 21 we have the end of sin, the end of the curse. In Genesis chapter 3 we have the dawn of Satan and his activities, in Revelation 20 we have the doom of Satan and all His adversaries. In Genesis chapter 2 and 3 we have the tree of life relinquished, rejected, and then in Revelation 22 the tree of life is regained. In Genesis chapters 2 and 5 death makes an entrance - praise God, in Revelation 21 death makes an exit, gone forever! In Genesis 3 sorrow begins; in Revelation 21 sorrow is banished - we could

go on and on, and on and on - all of it due to what? The Revelation of Jesus Christ, it's all in Him, He is the total message of this book. Indeed, He conveys the whole revelation of the truth that God wants man to know, it's in Him! There is nothing revealed before Him, there is nothing after Him, there is nothing without Him - He is the sum total of all of God's revelation to mankind.

William MacDonald put it well: 'The one He is who spans time and eternity, and exhausts the vocabulary of excellence. He is the source and the goal of creation, and it is He who began and will end the divine programme in the world. He is the Almighty'. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 3

"The Vision Of The Glorified Lord"

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Turn with me then to Revelation please, chapter 1, we're going to read from verse 9 this time through to the end of the chapter. We've a lot to get through tonight, so I trust you'll stay with us as we get through these verses.

Verse 9 of chapter 1: *"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches"*.

Tonight we are considering 'The Vision Of The Glorified Lord', and in verse 9 at the very beginning of our section once more this evening we are confronted by the recipient of this revelation, that is the apostle John. Now we've covered considerable ground concerning him in previous nights, save to say that he designates himself in this verse in a different way than he has hitherto. He says: 'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation'. He doesn't use any ecclesiastical terms concerning himself, not even the title 'apostle' that he was perfectly right in using if he had done - but he just calls himself 'John', and he also confesses his solidarity with those who were in the churches of Asia Minor who were suffering for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the apostle John was there incarcerated on the Isle of Patmos. So we saw in previous weeks that this book is a letter written by a suffering saint to the suffering saints of Asia Minor. It's terribly important that we remember that in all of our interpretations.

Now, as we'll see in the weeks that lie ahead, the seven churches, some of them, that he is writing to are already experiencing such persecution. If you turn to chapter 2 just for a moment and look down at verse 10 concerning the church at Smyrna, the Lord Jesus speaks to them and says: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be

thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. Now these believers, and indeed we today, should not be surprised that we will face suffering and persecution. Our Lord promised it, the apostle Paul indeed described in the book of Acts that suffering must come before the kingdom enters in. You may remember his words, that his business as an apostle and a servant of the Lord was to confirm the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.

Of course, James 1 tells us that such trial and tribulation develops in our lives, as the children of God, patience and Christian maturity. So right away we see that the weight of New Testament teaching is that God's plan is that we should endure tribulation, trial and trouble as a pre-requisite for reigning in the kingdom of God in a near future day. Now right away that puts the cat among the 'health and wealth' pigeons, the preachers that tell us we ought not to be poor, we ought not to suffer in any sense - the Bible teaches the converse of that. Indeed, in Romans 8 Paul said that if we are the children of God then we are 'heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together with him'. Of course that famous verse that Paul spoke to Timothy in his letter, his second epistle, 'If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us'. God's plan is that suffering, tribulation, is the pre-requisite for entering into the kingdom of God. In other words, there will be no crown without the cross - for the Saviour the cross must come before the crown, and it is no different for we, His servants. It is the suffering, and then the glory: that is God's order.

Now we see this personified in none other than the recipient of this revelation, John the apostle. He is effectively in the Alcatraz of the day, out on the Isle of Patmos, and verse 9 tells us he is there 'for the testimony of Jesus', 'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ'. That word 'testimony' is very interesting, it literally is the word 'witness', and it is the basis for our English word 'martyr'. So this testimony, this witness that John is engaged in, and indeed the first century saints of God were all engaged in, it doesn't just involve sweat and tears, but it incorporates the very shedding of their life's blood. Now we could spend some time on that just now: how is our witness for Christ? Do we even shed a tear? Precipitate sweat in an effort to see others won for Christ? I'm sure for none of us we have resisted to blood, striving against sinfulness and in our testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ - it makes me feel very pygmy-like in comparison to John and the other saints of the first century. We want to entertain people into the kingdom of God today, these folk were dying to get them in - literally.

John was exiled in an effort by the authorities to silence him. He was there because of the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ - but what was the result? They wanted to shut him up, but there on that island he is given the greatest revelation of Jesus Christ ever! That ought to be an encouragement to all our hearts tonight: was John discouraged a little out on that island? I'm sure, as a human with a nature like ours, he was. Was he despairing? Well, I don't know about that, but I'm sure he was near to it. He probably thought at times that his ministry was over, and his usefulness for God was behind him - but little did he know that the best was yet to be. The pinnacle and the climax of his whole ministry was ahead of him. Can I say to you, discouraged servant of the Lord: that is always the case for the saints of God. No matter what you have experienced in your past, and no matter how useless you feel you are in the present, the best is always yet to be - even if that is death itself. Things can only get better for the people of God!

So the recipient of this vision is indeed John again, this suffering apostle. Now look at verse 10, because there we have the reception of this vision, and I want to bring this to you under

three headings. First of all: the manner it was given. Then secondly: the time it was given. And thirdly: the One who is giving it. Now if you look at verse 10 you will see that John says he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Now let's just deal with that first expression: 'I was in the Spirit' - that is the manner in which the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Apocalypse was given to him. Now let me make a general application upon that thought: if you or I ever want a glimpse of Him in glory, as the hymn says, we will need to be in the Spirit in a general sense. We need to be walking in unclouded fellowship, thus in a position to receive divine communications - in other words, we need to be near to hear. Is that not what the Psalmist said, when he said: 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him'?

Now they tried to isolate the apostle John from communion with Christian people, and in effect what happened was: they could not isolate him from communication with the Christ. That's wonderful, because if we are in a position of unclouded communion with the Lord Jesus, you as a Christian can be in two places at once. Now, as a man, I'm sure some of you are often heard to say: 'I can't be in two places at once' - or maybe it's the women say that? But all of us as Christians can say that truly, because here we see John on the Isle of Patmos, but he is also dwelling in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He is imprisoned by the Romans, and yet he's also at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Samuel Rutherford was imprisoned in Aberdeen for preaching the gospel, very similar to the circumstances of John, and writing to his own church he ended one of his letters by saying these words: 'Jesus Christ came to me, into my prison cell last night, and every stone in it glowed like a ruby'. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; and sometimes the darker the cell, the greater the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ will be - what a wonderful privilege! Constant, uninterrupted communion with the King of kings and the Lord of lords - and yet how little all of us avail of it, including myself.

But the specific meaning, when John said 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day', is more than simply his communion with God. What John was in effect saying was that he was carried, beyond the normal sense, into a state where God could reveal supernaturally to him the content of this book of Revelation. Other prophets of God experienced this, like Ezekiel, and the apostles Peter and Paul. Now, I know that some of you, along with myself, revere the great apostle Paul - and it is only right that we should. He has given us about 13 books in the New Testament, the apostle to the Gentiles, but please - as you set him on a pinnacle - don't forget the apostle John. John was there on that snow-capped Hermon Mount when the Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured before the three disciples. John was there in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord Jesus was in an agony of prayer. John was the only disciple who remained at the foot of the rugged cross. Some of the last words of our Lord on this earth were spoken to John the disciple: 'Behold, thy mother'. Now John becomes the recipient of the last inspired revelation of God in the New Testament to His people, that we have in this last book of the Bible.

He is a wonderful character, and whilst he had great depth of knowledge and understanding of spiritual things, what primarily marked the recipient of the book of the Revelation was his love. There is a lesson for us all, and please don't miss it: to love the Lord Jesus Christ is to view the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not how much you know, but it's got a lot to do with how much you love. This beloved disciple who had a special place before the Lord when He was on the earth, also found a special place before the Lord when He had ascended to heaven.

The manner that this vision was received...look also at the time that it was given: 'I was in the Spirit', verse 10, 'on the Lord's day'. Now some people feel that this expression means 'the day of the Lord', and that expression is an expression for the time period when God will

judge the nations by the tribulation, and pour many judgements upon them. Many believe that, because John saw a vision of these future events, that he was propelled into 'the day of the Lord'. Now I have to say that the - and I'm not an expert in Greek, far from it - but the Greek expression here seems to be quite different than the one that is often used of 'the day of the Lord'. That literally could be translated like this: 'I was in the Spirit on the Lordly day' - the Lordly day, 'Lord' is used as an adjective here. There's only one other time in the New Testament where Lord is used as an adjective, and that is the 'Lordly Supper' - the Lord's Supper. Of course, the Lord's Supper was practised, eventually, on the first day of the week, which was the day of resurrection, which was also the day that subsequent to the Lord's resurrection there were two appearances of the Lord to His disciples. It was on that first day of the week that the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, and it was in the book of Corinthians that Paul instructed those believers to take collections, stewardship, on the first day of the week. The Lordly Supper was on that day.

Now add to that fact that history testifies, and there is quite a lot of evidence to show, that in some parts of the Roman Empire, notably in Egypt and Asia Minor (and these letters are being written to the churches of Asia Minor), that there was an imperial cult existent - that is, a religious system dedicated to worshipping the Caesars as god. Incorporated within their religion were 'Emperors Days', and sometimes they were once a month when they commemorated worship to their deity Emperor - and even in some places they observed that day once a week. Now it's my persuasion, for what it's worth, that the Christians in contrast adopted the first day of the week in honour of their Lord, and that became 'the Lordly Day' - and how fitting, even if that's not the case, how fitting it is that it is on this particular day that John receives a Revelation of Jesus Christ. I believe this was the Lord's day.

The third thing I want you to notice regarding the reception of the vision was the One giving it, verse 11, John heard behind him a great voice, as a trumpet: 'Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last'. Now I want you to notice that in verse 12, John turns to see the voice that spake with him and, after seeing the golden candlesticks, in verse 13 we see that he sees the Son of Man, that is the Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of the candlesticks, in the midst of the churches. So the voice that spoke and said 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last' is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Son. How could anyone doubt the doctrine of the Triune Godhead, and the deity of our Lord Jesus? Again we see in verse 11 the addressees of this letter: 'What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea'.

Now let's move on swiftly to the core of this passage of Scripture, the record of the vision. We've looked at the recipient of the vision, the reception of the vision, let's look at the record that we have before us. Now verse 12 tells us that John turned to see the voice, and even before he sees the Lord Jesus, he sees the seven churches of Asia Minor. Now he sees them as lampstands, how do I know that these lampstands are the seven churches? Well, He gives us the interpretation in verse 20, if you look down, after describing the mystery of the seven stars He says at the end that: 'the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches'. Now, of course, note in verse 13 that the focal point of this vision is not so much the seven churches, but Christ in the midst of the church - He is the focal point of the vision. The Spirit of God wants these seven churches of Asia Minor to recognize the One who is in their midst.

Now before we look at the depiction of Him, let's consider why it is that the Holy Spirit uses this figure of a lampstand for each church. Some of you may be familiar that in the Old

Testament in the Tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and in the Temple stood a lampstand - rather a candlestick might be a more accurate description, there is a picture of one here on the screen which, incidentally, I believe is the one being prepared for the new Temple in Jerusalem. It's already finished, that's interesting, we will use that in weeks perhaps that lie ahead. But this is a menorah, which is one lampstand with seven candles on it, seven lights. In the Old Testament this was always a symbol for Israel's national testimony for God on the earth, they were His chosen Old Testament people to bear witness and shine the light of God unto the Gentile world nations. Of course Old Testament history shows us, as we see in 2 Chronicles 36, that they failed so miserably in bearing testimony to God that that menorah was removed to Babylon. Now we know that there is a day yet to come, according to Zechariah 4, when the testimony will be restored to Israel, and we see that menorah again in Zechariah 4, and that will be fulfilled in the millennial reign of Christ on the earth for a thousand years.

Now why do I tell you all that? Well, at the moment Israel's testimony for God is suspended because of their unbelief. So, during this age, which is the church age, the Church of Jesus Christ gives testimony to God on the earth, and it is a complete testimony - as the seven lampstands testify, seven being the number of completeness - but these seven lampstands are separate. It's not now seven lights on one candlestick, it's not an entity that is one nation, but seven separate local churches giving testimony to the Lord Jesus - individual congregations, each of these lampstands, as you can see, stands alone: single stemmed, freestanding, with one base.

Now let me give you some practical applications from this figure and symbol that John uses. Here's the first: during this New Testament age of grace the complete church, that is the body of Christ that is made up universally of born-again believers alone, the complete church through the witness of the local churches is the organ of God's testimony on the earth today. Now that might seem elementary to some of you, but I believe that this truth needs to be rediscovered in the day in which we are living. The first reason I believe that is that there is a very low view of the church abroad in evangelicalism, and there is also a very low view concerning New Testament church principles that we find in the Bible - but what we see here in this letter is that the church matters to God, and so it should matter to us.

The second reason why I need to rediscover this truth is because in our modern age organisations have replaced God's organism of the New Testament body of Christ. Now let me say that I'm not faulting Christian organisations, I feel that they have stepped in where the church has failed, and I believe God ordained them to do the work that the church was failing to do. But God chose, from the beginning in His plan, that the church should be His organ of testimony on the earth, and the revelation that we are given here is of the Lord Jesus in heaven, operating on the earth through the church; and the church operating in localities through assemblies. Therefore it follows that the church on earth should function for the Lord Jesus - is it a revelation to you that the church does not function for unbelievers? It doesn't. It functions for Christ. We have to reach out to unbelievers, but we don't order ourselves according to what suits them, but what suits Christ for He is the one and only Head of the church. Of course the parable of the lampstand, which we looked at as we were going through Mark's gospel, shows us that the Lord Jesus envisaged that we, the church, should be the ones who should shed abroad His light in this age.

Here's a second practical application: Christ, just as He is in this vision, today is in the midst of His church. Now let me ask you: do you believe that? Do you believe that Christ is here, now? He said: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age'. He said: 'I will not

leave you comfortless, orphans, I will come to you'. He said: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst'. That is a truth that should revolutionise our gatherings as Christians: that Christ is still in our midst!

Here's a third practical application of the lampstand: please note that there is nothing between the Lord Jesus and each individual lampstand. Let me be more specific: there is no agency, there are no hierarchies, no organisations - each of these lampstands are autonomous, they are self-governing, and the only thing that unites them in common is their relationship with Christ. I believe that's the way it should be. No denominations, no churches gathering concerning particular interpretations, but just in their relationship to Christ. That's the way it was in the beginning, and I believe it's the way it should be today.

Then look at verse 13, John hadn't seen Him for well near 60 years, and here he - in the midst of the seven candlesticks - sees 'one like unto the Son of man', Christ in the midst of the churches, like unto the Son of Man. Now the Son of Man and this depiction is an apocalyptic one - now what I mean by that is that though 'the Son of Man' is the favoured title of the Lord Jesus that He uses of Himself in the Gospels, in the Gospels it's put like this: 'the Son of the man', literally in the Greek language, but here it is 'a Son of man'. Now, 'What's the difference?', you say - well, that is the exact expression that is used way back in the book of Daniel. Now I want you to turn with me to Daniel 7 please - and if you can't find Daniel, just look for Ezekiel, and it's a big one, and right after Ezekiel you'll find Daniel. Daniel chapter 7, and you'll see right away the similarity of the description given here of 'a Son of man' - Daniel 7:13: 'I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him'. Now if you go back to verse 9 there is a depiction of God: 'I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days', that is God, 'did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire'.

Now go to chapter 10 of Daniel and verse 5: 'Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude'. This is a depiction of not only the Ancient of days who is God, but a Son of man who is always within the Scriptures, in the book of Ezekiel and the book of Daniel and other prophetic apocalyptic books, the One who would come - not just speaking of Christ's humanity, but speaking of His messianic identity. He would be the prophesied One!

Now how does He appear here in Revelation 1 in the midst of the church? Let's look first of all at His dress. The first thing we see - and if you look at the screen it will give you a picture of it, but do look at the scriptures primarily - is that the Lord Jesus is wearing a linen white robe, and He is adorned by a sash across His breast. Now Exodus 28 verse 4 tells us that this was the garb of the High Priest of Israel. Now there are many other things mentioned there, but certainly this dress that the Saviour is shown to wear here is the high priestly garb - but it's a little bit different in that the Lord is appearing here as not just the High Priest in the midst of the churches, but He is appearing to judge them, so we could say that this is the High Priest Judge before us.

Now look please at the features as the Lord Jesus is depicted - now remember it is a depiction of Him, apocalyptically, with signs and symbols; it's not a literal feature of the Lord Jesus.

There is a sevenfold description here of Him. First of all in verse 14, the first part, we see His hair and His head are white like wool. We read from Daniel 7 that this is identical to the Ancient of days, which is a title of God. If we were to look at Matthew chapter 17 and verse 2, John would have witnessed before that as the Lord Jesus was transfigured before them, His face did shine as the sun, and His garment was white as light. That speaks of Christ's holiness, the white purity of the Son of Man - He is God, for only God is truly holy.

Then we see in verse 14 again that His eyes were as a flame of fire, and that speaks very similarly to His righteous judgement. These fiery eyes, in holiness, are able to sear our souls and judge us righteously according to God's holiness. It speaks specifically, I think, of Christ's omniscience - He is the all-seeing God who can see into the depths of our hearts. Then we see a third description in verse 15, His feet like unto fine brass, brass refined in the furnace. Now that 'brass' could be translated 'bronze', and that helps us a little because bronze in the Old Testament is a figure of judgement - that's why you've got a bronze, a brazen altar on which there was a sacrifice for sin. God was depicting judgement for sin on that lamb. Here in these bronze feet we have a picture of how this High Priest Judge is chastising and judging His church through this vision.

Then we find fourthly, His voice is as many waters. Now that correlates with Ezekiel 43, a description of God there, it correlates with Psalm 29 if you care to read it, and it's describing to us a cataract that drowns all other voices. Have you ever been to some of the great waterfalls of our world, like Niagara or Victoria? You can't hear anything other than the roar of the water. This speaks of Christ's authority: no other voice needs to be heard by the churches, other than Christ's - boy do we need to hear that today!

Then we have fifthly, in his right hand, verse 16, He is holding seven stars. Now the right-hand was the hand of favour and protection. If we look down to verse 20, the Lord Himself gives us the interpretation of what these stars are - the stars equal the angels of the seven churches. Now really the figure, whatever this means, the figure and the lesson that is being given to us is: Christ is in control of the churches, He holds them in His hand. Now let's deal with the controversy for a moment, because many people ask: 'Who are these angels?' - and we could go on with interpretations, but generally there are three. The word 'angel' could be translated 'messengers', and some believe that these were the human messengers that took the letters to these seven churches. Then there are others who say: 'Well, these were the pastors, or the pastor of each of these seven churches' - the Bishop if you like, the one head in each of these seven assemblies. Now the third interpretation - and I'll deal with the other two in a minute - is simply that 'angels' here means angels - that's a strange one!

Now I don't believe that these angels speak of messengers, and I'll tell you why in a moment. I don't believe that it speaks of one pastor or one bishop, as the head representing each of these churches, because frankly the New Testament knows nothing about one single representative of a local assembly - it's nowhere else to be found in the New Testament, so it would be a surprise to find it here. I believe it means angels, and the word is not used in any other way in this book, and indeed scarcely is it used meaning anything else in the New Testament. In Hebrews 1 verse 14 we read there concerning angels: 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?'. Angels minister in strange ways, very unknown ways at times, to believers in the church of Jesus Christ - therefore I don't think it unreasonable to think of angels having a role in the church. Now this is a bit hard to define, and yet in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 regarding headship and indeed head-covering, Paul told the believers there: 'For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels'.

Now in Scripture we find that angels represented nations, we find that Peter, according to the church of his day, had a guardian angel who looked after him when he was in prison and escaping. We find in Hebrews that angels are ministering spirits - should it be strange if we think that angels can represent churches before God? After all, God gave this vision to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ gave the vision to an angel, and an angel gave the vision to John the apostle. Why should it be strange that these letters should be addressed to angels that may well represent some of these churches? But the final reason for me interpreting it like this is verse 20: it's very unlikely for John to interpret the symbol of a star by another symbol - did you hear that? It is very unusual for John to interpret one symbol by another symbol, because that's what he'd be doing if these angels meant something other than angels - but he interprets the symbol, star, as an angel. Well, I'll leave it there, I'm sure many of you won't agree with me on that. The point is this: these stars are in Christ's right-hand, and in the next number of weeks we're going to see in these seven letters to the seven churches that He has some scathing criticism of them as their High Priest Judge - and yet, with all that, they are secure in His right hand.

The sixth description we have of Him here in verse 16 is that out of His mouth comes a twoedged sword - and that is, I believe, the judging power of the word of God as we see it in Hebrews 4 and John 12. It is here Christ's judgement not of the church's enemies, but of the church! Then seventhly in verse 16 we see that 'His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength', 'brilliant' is the word, it is the word 'dynamus' that we get the word 'power' and 'dynamite' from, it is Christ's glory. When you can find all of these depictions and descriptions of the Lord Jesus, you see Him as the Lord Jesus Christ, the High Priest as He is in His ministry to the church now in this age, supremely as the High Priest and Judge of His people. Now later we're going to see in this Apocalypse that He judges His enemies and His foes, but here He is judging His church - why? Because judgement must begin at the house of God! So that's where it begins here in the book of Revelation.

Now, please don't misunderstand me, the churches are being judged here with the purpose of purification and reward, but the nations of unbelievers will be judged with the purpose of punishment. We will never be punished because Christ was judged for our sins on the cross, but here it's the matter of purification and reward, and being fit to stand before Him. Now look at verse 17, because here we have the reaction of John to the vision: 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last'. Now this is beautiful: John expires, as if he was dead he falls. This was not prostration of worship, he was so overwhelmed by what he saw that he falls before Christ! The Lord Jesus reaches out His right-hand and touches him - this is mighty! The hand in which He holds the church is also at the disposal for an individual saint of God who needs His touch. Does that help you tonight? It helps me! He's not too busy to take my needs into account, and He says to John and He says to us: 'Fear not; I am the first and the last', the title of Jehovah Himself - why should we fear?

Verse 18: 'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen'. Now that literally is 'I am He that became dead', that's what it literally means. It doesn't sound that good in English, but that's what it means, because He could not die. We are dying from the moment we are born, but this is the Eternal Son of God and He became dead. The One eternally alive died and rose again, and is now alive for evermore. He says, look at it in verse 18, He has the keys of Hades and of death. Now Hades was the realm of the dead, and that speaks of the soul. Death speaks of the grave, which is where the body goes. What the Lord is saying is: 'Because I died, and because I was buried, and because I rose again, I have

the keys of Hades - the place for the soul - and the grave - the place for the body'. Oh, this is precious: Christ snatched from Satan his power over death, it was his and it's no longer his! Now He possesses authority over death; and that means, Christian here tonight, no one can die who is saved apart from His divine permission. That helps me - as one old saint of God said: 'I am immortal until it is my time to go', so are you if you're a child of God.

What the Lord is saying is: 'Fear not' - are you here tonight and you fear what the future might hold? He's saying to you: 'Fear not, for the keys are in my hands'. Remember that these are suffering, persecuted believers, and He's telling them: 'Fear not, I'm in control - not the lions, not the burning stake, not the Emperor - I'm in control!'. Could your future be in a safer pair of hands? One day, as this book will show us in later weeks in chapter 21 and verse 14, He is going to cast Hades and death into the lake of fire, and there'll be no death any more - Hallelujah!

John's reaction was to fall at the feet of the Lord. Can I ask you in the closing moments of our meeting: what is your reaction to this vision of the glorified Lord? Because I have a suspicion that our view of Him now is very often not John's view of Him here in chapter 1, am I right? We have an image that's maybe from children's picture books, of a humble Galilean, the despised Nazarene, the Man of Sorrows. Now please look at verse 19 with me for a moment, because here is the outline of the book that we saw in previous weeks, John is told: 'Write the things which thou hast seen', and we saw that the things that he saw, the 'had seen', were the things of chapter 1, this very vision itself. The 'things which are' are chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the seven churches. The 'things which shall be hereafter' is the rest of the book and the future of this world - but you need to realise that though chapter 1 is past when John's writing this book, it is a description of how the Lord Jesus Christ is now! We need to realign our view of Him to this vision here before us. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying please, I sing with the best of them:

'Tell me the stories of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word.
Tell me the stories most precious,
Dearest that ever were heard'.

We must meditate on how He was in the Gospels and what He did, because it's through His life and through His death and through His resurrection recorded here in the gospel that we derive our salvation. Not only do we need to meditate on it, it is our message: we preach Christ crucified! It's only through that message of the Saviour that lived and died and rose again that people can be saved. It's also our motivation, Hebrews 12:3: 'For consider him that endured such contradiction', and opposition, 'of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds' - and boy, these suffering Christians needed such motivation. They needed to draw strength and instruction from how the Lord Jesus lived and died. How He was comprises the foundation of our faith, but please note: don't make the mistake that the past is the present, because it isn't. As Paul said: 'Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him' - now! - 'and given him a name which is above every name' - that's how He is now!

Now when John was in the upper room in the Gospels, you remember in John 13 he leaned on Jesus' bosom - but when he sees the glorified Lord as He is now, he falls on his face. Paul told the Corinthians: 'From now on we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh; yet now we know Him thus no longer'. Don't confuse how

He was with how He is. Now this is important - why? Because these downtrodden saints in the first century, like downtrodden saints in the 21st century, can take comfort - yes - from the Gospels, from the One who suffered as their forerunner, but their confidence is in the One who is now, who has risen and overcome, and who is no longer trodden underfoot but soon shall tread the wine press of fierceness and the wrath of Almighty God. To the suffering Christian he says today: 'The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly'. The result of what He is now ought to inspire in us faith and praise, for the highest place that heaven affords is His by sovereign right, now!

You see, the potential problem with the church in John's day, and I believe it has been the church's problem every day since Pentecost, is that they lose a vision of the glorified Lord. The tempter, Satan, is conscious that many good men will never be deflected by outright evil, so his ploy is that he seeks to get them obsessed by other things. He gives preeminence of place to displace Christ from His central position. Church history observers for years have pointed out that almost every organisation that began in the power of the Spirit, sooner or later gradually were drawn away from their devotion to Christ - every one. What has been true of organisations has also been true of individuals: distracted from a vision of the glorified Christ in our midst.

We're going to see in the weeks that lie ahead that these seven churches are representative of the churches in John's day; we're going to see, I believe, that they're representative of the church right up until our day. We are in danger, folk, of losing a vision and losing sight of Christ. That is why they needed a revelation of Him, that is why we need a revelation of Him - and I believe the only thing, listen to me, that is going to save the testimony of Jesus Christ in the local churches of our land today is a fresh vision of the glorified Lord - it's the only thing!

A father was trying to get peace to read his copy of the Daily Telegraph. The problem was, every time he settled down with his cup of tea his little girl kept on asking him questions. So he came up with a bright idea, and off his coffee table he lifted a missionary magazine. He ripped a page of a map of the world out of it, and ripped it into several pieces, and then said: 'Dear, I've got something for you to do, it's a little puzzle. Here's a map of the world, see if you can put the jigsaw puzzle together', and he sat down again to his Daily Telegraph. In a few minutes she was back - and he couldn't believe it, she had it all done! He asked her: 'How did you do it so fast?', and like a flash she replied, 'Well, Dad, it was easy. I found a picture of the Lord Jesus on the other side, and I knew when I had Him in the right place the whole world would be all right'.

He needs to be in the right place as the glorified and risen Lord in the church. He is the only head of the church, in your life, believer. As we will see in this book, until He is in His right place in this universe, this world will not be alright - but, praise God, it will when He is given preeminence. I trust that you, this evening, have been granted a vision of the glorified Lord.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 4

"Ephesus, The Loveless Church"

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Revelation chapter 2 and beginning to read at verse 1: *"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God".*

Now let me refer you back, please, to chapter 1 verse 19 for a moment because there, you will remember, we have the inspired outline of this book. Many outlines have been offered by scholars and theologians over the years, but here we have the one that God's word actually gives us. We'll not spend too much time on it, save to say, as we have said in previous weeks, that John was instructed to 'Write the things which thou hast seen' - that comprises the vision of chapter 1 - 'and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter'. The things which shall be hereafter, chapter 4 right to the end of the book, things that are yet to be, in the sense of future. What we are looking at these weeks, as we look at the seven churches, in the things which are - the things that were for John as he wrote these books, these seven letters - but these are also the things which are for us, because as they referred to the church age, we are also in the same age as John was.

You remember that we noted that there are seven churches - there were, of course, more than seven in Asia Minor in John's day; and therefore the seven are representative of something. Seven, of course, as a number in the Bible means completeness - and so we deduce that John, by the inspiration of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Spirit, is giving us a complete picture and overview of the Church of Jesus Christ, and conditions that will prevail within it throughout this age. So this is a divine revelation concerning the church age, if you like, a complete picture of the moral and spiritual history that will prevail in the church of Jesus Christ before the Lord Jesus returns.

Now that being said, and accepted by most, there are three understandings of how John depicts the church age. Let me give you those briefly: the first is that they should be understood literally, that is that these seven letters are depicting the actual conditions that were extant in these seven literal Asia Minor churches that the Lord Jesus addresses through the apostle. Now we have to say that that is emphatically the case, these are seven literal churches. They existed in John's day, and these are seven literal letters that were sent to them all, and we must maintain that. Then the second understanding of these letters is that they are not only literal but universal, that meaning that they depict Christendom on the earth at any one time in its history. What I mean by that is that any of the features in any of these

seven churches are existent, at least in part, in every century since the church was born at Pentecost. So they are universal, as far as the church age is concerned.

There is the literal understanding, the universal understanding, and thirdly there is what is said to be the prophetic understanding - that is that John gives us here a preview of the whole history of Christendom, and each church representing a distinct actual period, and there are general trends downward from the apostolic age right down to the age of the last day in the Laodicean church. There is no doubt about it that when that interpretation is taken, even the very names of these seven churches is seen to be significant - for instance this first church that lost its first love is Ephesus, which literally means 'desirable'. That interpretation, the prophetic interpretation, might account for the mystery that we read in verse 20 of chapter 1, the mystery of the seven stars. Of course a mystery in Biblical terms is always something that hitherto had never been revealed, but God by inspiration is revealing it.

Let me just go back to number two for a moment, this universal understanding - that is that any of these conditions could be existent at any time in the church's history. That interpretation actually fits in very well with the parables of Matthew chapter 13. In Matthew chapter 13 we have the mystery parables of the kingdom, and there the Lord Jesus Christ gives seven parables describing the conditions of the kingdom of God during the church age - that is, this particular age in which we live. Just look at the screen for a moment, and there you have it, and we see a rather strange correspondence between the seven churches of Revelation and these seven parables. I'll not go into it in great detail this evening, I encourage you to go home and look at it yourself - but the church of Ephesus shows great similarities to the parable of the sower, the church of Smyrna similarities to the parable of the wheat and tares, the church of Pergamos similarities to the parable of the mustard seed, the church of Thyatira similarities to the parable of the leaven, the church at Sardis the parable of the treasure hidden, the church at Philadelphia the parable of the pearl, and the church at Laodicea the parable of the dragnet. You see there a continual growth and increasing apostasy until the rapture of the church to heaven.

Incidentally, when our Lord Jesus introduced these seven parables of the kingdom, do you remember the words that He spoke? 'Let him who has ears to hear, hear', which is a phrase that is repeated seven times, once in each of these churches. Of course, if we look at Ephesus as our example this evening, the church in Ephesus was faithful in sowing the word of God. The parable of the sower which corresponds to it tells how the children of God would sow the seed of the word of God throughout this church age: some would receive the seed and would not bear fruit because, Jesus said, of their love of other things - isn't that so?

Now let's move on to the prophetic interpretation to give it some time for a moment. When we look at the seven churches from that perspective and understanding, we see that this loveless church of Ephesus speaks of the post-apostolic church, that's how scholars often understand it - that is, the first century church that was generally praiseworthy but had already begun to leave its first love. Next week we will look at the church of Smyrna, which speaks of the persecuted church, the church from the first century through to the fourth century who were persecuted under various Roman emperors. The third church of Pergamos is the compromising church, which fits very well with the church of the fourth and the fifth century Christianity which became recognized as the official religion through Constantine the emperor's patronage. Incidentally, some scholars see these first three churches as conditions of the early church, and the next four as general conditions and main components of what we would call Christendom today - those who profess to be Christ's, whether they belong to Him or not. So those four remainder churches are: Thyatira, which we could title 'The Corrupt

Church', and it fits well with the sixth century to the 15th century, or if you like right up to today. The Roman Catholic Church largely held sway in Western Christendom until it was rocked by the Reformation, and in the East the Orthodox Church ruled. Then we have the church at Sardis, which could be called 'The Dead Church', the 16th and 17th century, or right up to today, the post-Reformation period where various reformation denominations began to grow cold and away from the doctrines of the Reformation. Philadelphia could be called 'The Faithful Church', and of course it is very similar to the 18th and 19th century right up to today, where there were mighty revivals and awakenings, and missionary endeavour increased right across the globe - and we know that that's still happening in places today. Then finally the seventh church of Laodicea, and in the prophetic understanding of these seven letters they are 'The Lukewarm Church', picturing the last days church, an apostate church through false teaching and various other problems.

Now I'm not going to spend time on either interpretation two, that is the universal interpretation, or the prophetic one - save to say that it would seem incredible that such similarities would be pure accident. Though that is said, and we could spend the whole series looking at those particular understandings of these seven churches, I think we must beware of pressing them beyond their bounds because their interpretations under those understandings are based on deduction from the contents, and not from explicit statements in the text. Therefore I want to major first of all on the literal understanding of these seven letters as they were written to those seven literal churches, but I also want to introduce to you tonight a fourth understanding that I haven't mentioned, and that is a personal application - they've got something to say to you and to me. Seven times repeated, we find it here in our passage tonight in verse 7: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches' - seven times it is repeated. In other words - 'He that hath an ear to hear' - there is a personal application, as well as a prophetic, a universal and a literal, there is a personal application of the teaching of these seven letters to the seven churches.

Looking at all these seven letters together, with minor exceptions, there is an organised and general pattern in them all, and I'm going to be following this pattern each week. First of all we see that each letter to each church is introduced by some of the characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ which are directly derived from the vision of the glorified Lord that we studied last week in chapter 1, that vision of Him being of a Priest Judge in the midst of His church, judging them in glorified risen power. Each of these characteristics that introduce each letter is very fitting to the particular problems that dwell within each of the seven churches. For instance, let me give you the example from Ephesus tonight - if you look at verse 1, the Lord Jesus is introduced as 'He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks'. Now if you look down please to verse 5, you see that the Lord threatens to come to them quickly and remove their candlestick out of his place, except they repent. Now we will look at the significance of that a little bit later, but I just want you to see that the introduction of our Lord Jesus Christ in each letter, in His particular characteristic to that church, is significant to the problems that they find themselves in. He's introduced as the one in the midst of the candlesticks, and here He is threatening to take away their candlestick of witness. In other words, it was the vision of Jesus Christ that that church needed.

What is the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ that this church needs? What is the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ that you need? Hopefully you'll get one of Him at some stage tonight. Not only are His characteristics introduced, but secondly there is a commendation given to each church - except, of course, Laodicea, the last church of the seven. What a terrible thing it is to be at church that Jesus Christ cannot commend! Then we find thirdly that there is a criticism

given to each church - of course, except Smyrna and Philadelphia. What a blessing to be a church that the Lord Jesus Christ does not judge! Fourthly there is given to each church a corrective command in order to sort out the problems that are existent within that particular church. Fifthly in each letter there is a commitment given, a promise to overcomers in those churches - and we'll see how that is particularly relevant to the church at Ephesus later on.

Before we move on to look specifically at Ephesus, let me please highlight this beautiful fact: no matter how bad any of these seven churches in Asia Minor were, if the Lord Jesus Christ could commend them before He condemned them, He did. I think we could take a leaf out of His book, couldn't we? This is something that is characteristic of God Himself, even in the Old Testament we see in the book of 1 Kings and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, that concerning the Kings of Israel and Judah the Holy Spirit always by inspiration mentions their good attributes before criticising their bad. Let me ask you a question that I've asked myself today: if it were you who were judging the seven churches of Asia Minor, how would you judge them? Take Thyatira for instance: Jezebel is among them, probably a woman ministering in the assembly; immorality was rife - would you or I have anything good to say about that church? I doubt it! Yet the Lord did.

Now what is the lesson that we take out of that? Well, it's simply this: neither you nor I have the gift of omniscience. You cannot see everything, I cannot see everything - what does that mean? None of us should judge anything. There's only One who can judge, because there's only One who knows all things. How critical we often are of our own church, and of our churches, and of other brothers and sisters in Christ, when we do not have the grounds to be so critical.

So let's look at these five different features in this particular letter to Ephesus tonight. First of all let's look at the characteristic of Christ that we find in verse 1. He is depicted for us as the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. In other words, Christ is in His proper place in that sense of guiding, controlling and ruling all that goes on in this assembly. The churches are depicted as being secure because Christ is holding them firmly in His right hand. Now incidentally there are four mentions of these seven stars being held in the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the first, it's found in verse 16 of chapter 1 and it speaks of the seven stars being in the right hand of the Lord Jesus - that speaks of security. If you look at verse 20 of chapter 1, we read of the seven stars being on the right hand of the Lord Jesus - that speaks of support. In chapter 2 verse 1 He is holding the seven stars in His right hand - that speaks of control. In chapter 3 verse 1 it says He has the seven stars in his right hand - speaking of possession. He controls the churches, He is the support of the churches, He is the security of the churches, He has the churches in His possession - and what is being communicated to us in all of these visions is that all the church needs is in the hand of the risen Christ! Do you believe that?

Now of course it was Jude in his epistle who talked about 'wandering stars', that was a figure of false apostles and false prophets - but you notice that these stars aren't wandering, these stars, at least outwardly, are in their proper position in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. But note that there's something different about this description of the characteristic of the Lord that we find in chapter 1, because He is said to be walking in the midst of the church. If you look at chapter 1 verse 13 where we first see this characteristic of Him of having the seven stars in His right hand, He is spoken of being in the midst of the churches but not walking. What we have here in this characteristic given to Ephesus is a sign and symbol of the intimacy wherewith the Lord Jesus Christ is dealing with His church, His priestly activity among them. It reminds us of how the Old Testament priests in the holy place of the Tabernacle and the

Temple tended the lamps, you can read about it in Exodus 30, and they were responsible for lighting, for supplying oil, and for trimming the wicks of the lamp in the Temple. Our Lord Jesus Christ is being shown here in this characteristic as the High Priest who cares for His church, not only individual saints as we read of in Hebrews 4 - we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities - but this is a High Priest who cares for the assemblies of His saints. Here He is walking in the midst of the churches, specifically the church of Ephesus. He's not only walking, but we'll see later He says: 'I am coming and, if you don't repent, I'm going to take away your lampstand'.

Do we perceive, as New Testament Christians today, the risen Lord Jesus Christ intimately involved in our churches? What I mean by that simply is: can I see the outcome of Christ in our midst? Can you? You see, what we need to do is stand back and look objectively, and even look at the history of our churches - whatever they may be - can we perceive the Lord Jesus active in our midst, at work, judging? In other words, do you see the conditions of your local assembly as a result of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Great High Priest Judge ministering to His church? I suppose what I'm really asking is: do we look at conditions in our assemblies through man's eyes or Christ's eyes? We're going to see later how intimately involved the Lord Jesus really is in our churches.

Of course this letter is being written to the church at Ephesus, and without lengthy comment this was indeed the most important city in Asia Minor. Although Pergamum was the capital city of the province, this was the greatest city, the city of Ephesus. It was the centre of the worship of Artemis, and of course Artemis was also Diana of the Ephesians, and the people worshipped this goddess with great devotion. It was the location of the Temple of Artemis, and of course it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was a huge centre of religion, particularly occult worship, and it was also a strategic commercial centre and a great seaport of Asia Minor. Now of course these were the reasons, as we have seen, that Paul the apostle strategically invested nearly three years in establishing a church there. But when we read the New Testament we find out that other famous New Testament characters were involved in the church here: Priscilla and Aquila, and Apollos, Timothy was sent by Paul to Ephesus, Onesiphorus and Tychicus - and of course John the apostle who is given this revelation, for 30 years himself was engaged in ministry before he was exiled by Domitian from Ephesus to the Isle of Patmos. So we can see that Ephesus had a rich heritage as a New Testament church - three or more great individuals involved in ministry there.

Now let's look at what the Lord says to them, secondly the commendation to the church that is found in verse 2, verse 3, and later on we will look at verse 6. Verse 2 first of all: 'I know thy works'. Now in each letter, each of the seven letters, the omniscient, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-being God says to each of them: 'I know thy works'. Do you know that the Lord knows all about your works? He knows all about a church's works, He is the Judge. Now look at their works: 'thy works', specifically that speaks of their service, they were a serving church, 'and thy labour'. Now that Greek word for 'labour' there means 'exercise to the point of exhaustion' - the Revised Version translates it 'toil'. In other words, you couldn't just settle into the back seat of this church - no offence to the folks in the back seat tonight - and decide that you'll not be committed in any involvement, that wasn't an option in Ephesus. Everyone worked to the sweat of their brow!

Their works, their labour and 'their patience' is commended by the Lord. They served, they were sacrificial in their labour, and they were steadfast in their patience. That speaks of endurance, stickability, their Christian faith was not a flash in the pan experience that was here today and gone tomorrow, it was something that endured. Then He commends them

again: 'thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars'. They were separated, in other words they didn't let anyone into their pulpit, or for that matter into their assembly. Of course Paul warned them - that is the elders of this church in Ephesus - when he left them in Acts 20, that, after his departure, grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock. Now in all likelihood the apostle John who is writing this book was the last living apostle. Yet there were other people, just as there are today incidentally, who were rising up in the church claiming apostleship and apostolic authority.

So Revelation 2 and verse 2, and also 2 Corinthians 11 and various other portions of the New Testament, tell us that there were false apostles. Where there is something true, the devil seems to always raise something counterfeit. Not only were there false apostles, but we find in 1 John 4 that there were false prophets, in 2 Peter 2 there were false teachers, and even in Galatians 1:7 there were false evangelists. So in the New Testament apostolic age, or just almost after the apostolic period, falsehood was abroad - that should reassure us a little bit, because it's certainly abroad today. But the commendation to the Ephesians was: they didn't take things at face value, they tried these false apostles and found them out to be liars and false teachers, false prophets, false evangelists. So we are getting a picture painted for us by the Holy Spirit that these Ephesian Christians did not take their Christian faith lightly, they understood the great demands that were upon them as believers in the Lord Jesus.

But very quickly the Lord Jesus moves from commendation of this church to criticism of this church. Let's look at that in verse 4, for He says: 'Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love'. Who would ever have expected it? I doubt none of us would have, other than the Lord Jesus Christ who, remember, has these eyes of fire. With x-ray omniscient vision He was able to see what no one else could see. Now if love was measured by activity, the Ephesians would have been the most loving church in existence, but you see it's not. Activity is not the same as love.

Now, what does this verse mean? 'You have left your first love'. What is your first love? Well, it's not immediately clear from this verse, and some have said that this means 'a love of first importance'. What I mean is, it's speaking of their love for Christ, they have lost their love and devotion to the Lord Jesus. Others have said: 'Well, this means their love for one another', and it was a common characteristic of the New Testament church how much they loved one another. Others have said: 'Well, it is their love for mankind in general'. It is very hard to pinpoint exactly which one of those three it would be, but then there are others who say: 'This is not speaking of a love of first importance, but rather a love that is first in point of time'. What I mean by that is - and that of course incorporates all three of these loves - the love for the Lord, the love for one another, and the love for mankind in general. Let me put it how J. B. Phillips translates it: 'You do not love as you did at first', I believe that is the sense of this verse. You do not love the Lord Jesus, love one another, love all mankind, as you did at first. To put it in our terms, if I could, what is being said to Ephesus is: the honeymoon period of your early love in the first days of your Christian faith is now over - for the Lord, for one another, for the lost world.

Someone told me today an illustration that encapsulates this well. When a man, or woman for that matter, is first married, maybe they won't go out the front door without kissing goodbye to their spouse - but after one year, two years, or I don't know how many years, some are just content shouting down from the study or shouting down from the bedroom making the beds or reading a book: 'Bye bye, see you later'. What has happened is that they have become taken up with the place rather than the person. What a picture of this church: they

had got taken up with the place or with the practice, but the first love that they had in the beginning for the person of the Lord Jesus, and for each other, and for a lost world, had disappeared. This first love that John is speaking about is marked by first love as we have it in a romantic sense, the first ardour, and fervency, and constancy of our love.

Now we see this in the Israelites of the Old Testament, because after Jehovah delivered them from Egyptian bondage and they were redeemed by the blood of the lamb, we read in Jeremiah 2 verse 2, Jeremiah says: 'Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals', or thy betrothals, 'when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown'. In other words, when you were first delivered from Egyptian bondage God said to Israel: 'I remember the love you had for Me, like the love of one who was to be married to their betrothed'. Well, in Israel something tragic happened, and in Jeremiah 2 and verse 13 we read these words: 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'. In other words, they were providing for their own satisfaction, they had grown to love something else more than the Lord.

Incidentally, isn't that so like the seed was sown in the soil among thorns, and Mark 4:19 says that as the thorns grew and choked it, that speaks to us of the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust or the desire of other things entering in and choking the word, and it becomes unfruitful. You do not love as you did at first! Solomon is a mighty illustration of this in 1 Kings 3:3 it says: 'And Solomon loved the LORD', and then later on in 1 Kings 11 it says, 'But king Solomon loved many strange women'. Jehovah was displaced in his affections by something else.

It's very interesting when we go to Timothy's epistles - and Paul wrote them to Timothy when Timothy was engaged in ministry in Ephesus - that Paul warned Timothy that the love of money was the root of all evil, which was tantamount to telling him: 'Make sure that the love of money never displaces your love and devotion to Christ'. The Lord Jesus Christ, did He not say that we can love family more than we love Him, and if we do that we're not fit for the kingdom of God. Paul the apostle in Corinthians says that we can love our husbands or love our wives, but in the day and age in which we live it's not that we should love them less, but we should not love anything at the expense of loving God! We should love all our loved ones more, but we should love Christ infinitely more! It's hard, and yet according to Christ's criticism of Ephesus it's necessary. Is there something in your heart that has taken the place of the Lord Jesus Christ? I love Cowper's hymn:

'The dearest idol I have known,
What'er that idol be,
Help to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee'.

What about your enthusiasm that you used to have years ago for the Lord Jesus Christ? Could it be said of you: you do not love as you did at first? Has the fire and the passion, and the fervency and the ardour, has it gone? For the Ephesians - who knows, only God - but could it have been that the idol of their sound doctrine had taken the place of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself? Therein lies a great danger, because orthodoxy costs too much when love has to go out the window. These Ephesians were like the pitbulls of doctrinal dogma: in the midst of their fight with false apostles, and in the midst of their right, correct doctrine, they lost their love for Christ, for one another, and for mankind as it was in the beginning of their faith.

So the Lord gives them this corrective command in verse 5, and it is found in three steps, and they are three R's if you like alliteration. The first is 'Remember', the second is 'Repent', and the third is 'Repeat the works you did at first'. Look at the first: remember. Now, somewhere along their history there had been a considerable drop off in the fervency of their love. Now, a generation earlier, when Paul the apostle wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, we see that they were commended for their love. Turn with me to Ephesians for a moment, Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 15, Paul says: 'Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers'. 'I'm rejoicing because I've heard of the great love you have'. Now, when we go to the end of the book to chapter 6, turn with me, verse 24, he says: 'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity', and I think the implication is that they did.

Now not only did Paul commend them for their love, but he commanded them to grow in their love. Look at chapter 4 please of Ephesians, verse 2: 'With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love', love each other in your dealings. Verse 15: 'Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ', converse with one another and deal with one another in love. Verse 16: 'From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love', edify one another, build one another up, encourage one another in love.

Now the Lord is saying to Ephesus: 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen', and that word 'fallen' is in the perfect tense, and it gives the sense of a tragic error of completeness - they had completely fallen from the heights that they had risen to! These Ephesians that the Lord Jesus is now speaking to are the second generation Christians to the first-generation ones that Paul wrote to, isn't that very interesting? Thirty or so years had passed since Paul ministered to the Ephesians - and, oh yes, these new Ephesians that the Lord is speaking to were serving the Lord in the manner that they had been taught by their forefathers, but they had lost the first love of the first generation Christians!

What generation of a Christian are you? I know how many generations of a Christian I am, and it is so easy to slip away gradually from our love as it was at first without hardly realising that it is happening! What is the answer to that? The Lord's corrective command to this church was: remember from whence you are fallen! Go back in your thoughts to those first days - and the Greek of 'remember' here is in the imperative present, that literally means 'keep on remembering', hold in your memory, never forget on a continual basis the love you once had for the Lord! Pray to God that it will come back again! Again Cowper grasps it:

'Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the LORD?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus, and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill'.

Now this is corporate. Let me ask the folk of the Iron Hall here tonight: is the Iron Hall what it

once was? Now before you start pointing fingers at anybody - elders or members - are you what you once were? For our churches will be what they once were when we are what we once were. Repent from where you are fallen! Remember the heights, and repent is the second command. That is in the Greek aorist tense, which means 'a sharp break', now, change your mind completely about the way you think about your sin, and the way you think about the Lord. Would we be big enough in this meeting to have another meeting for repentance and confession if it was necessary? That's what the Lord's asking these Ephesians to do: remember, repent, and repeat! Do the first works, the works you did at first, the works that were motivated by your love - there's a lesson! Service must never be out of mere duty, though there are things expected of us as Christians, service must always be motivated by love.

But there's a fourth 'R' - remember, repent, repeat - but this 'R' is not a command, it's a threat: 'Or I will remove your lampstand'. Look at the verse, the end of verse 5: 'I will come' - the Authorised Version gives the sense of future, but the Greek actually is in the present tense, which means this - 'I am coming'. The Lord was approaching this church, and He is teaching the Ephesians that a church can continue only for so long on a loveless course. Now it's not speaking that they would lose their salvation or anything like that, that's an impossibility if you're truly saved - but what the Lord is saying is: 'You will cease to exist, I will remove your lampstand'. It's not just speaking that their testimony wouldn't be there any longer and they would be a cold church - no, no, no. It's not saying, 'I'm going to blow the flames out of the light of your witness', it says, 'I'm going to remove the lampstand'.

Incidentally, in the Old Testament the removal of Israel as the lampstand for God among the nations of the world was the actual physical removal of the people to the land of captivity, Babylon. We're going to see in a future week in Revelation 11 that the two witnesses that God sends, who are also called the lampstands, God takes them physically to heaven - He removes their witness. Now, do we consider that the Lord Jesus, as the Judge Priest moving in the midst of His church, walking among His people, has the authority to remove an assembly? This is serious stuff. Now, He may use a variety of means to do it - it's His prerogative, He's the High Priest - but here's the lesson we all need to learn here tonight: the only way to avoid it is to keep repenting. Repenting is not just for unbelievers to change their mind about sin and Christ, it is for us - every day of our lives as believers we ought to be repentant!

Where Ephesus, those ruins that you saw tonight, are now there is no church as was then! Did the demise of the city of Ephesus, perhaps, affect the church? Or was the manner of Christ's judgement the demise of this city of Ephesus, and the silting up of the harbour that you saw? Are you viewing it through Christ's eyes or the world's eyes? If you see it through Christ's eyes, He removed the candlestick. He used geographical, meteorological means. He can use political means, He can use theological means. Can I ask you again, whatever assembly you belong to, and particularly the folk here in the Iron Hall: can you see the outcome of Christ in our midst? Do you look objectively at our history and our present and see Christ at work, judging in His church? Do you see conditions prevailing in local churches today as the intervention of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest Judge? Or do you look at it all from man's perspective?

Another commendation which we missed is found in verse 6: 'This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate'. 'You hate what I hate', the Lord Jesus says, that's a wonderful thing. Now notice please that it was the practices of the Nicolaitanes that they hated, not the persons themselves - that's an important distinction to make. Now we

can't be positive who these Nicolaitanes were, there are really two views on this generally. The first is that the church fathers testify that this sect was connected with Nicolas, who was one of the seven leaders in the church of Jerusalem who were appointed in Acts 6:5, and they say that he started teaching falsehood and people followed him into this sect. But there are other early writings that deny that, and of course Acts 6:5 says that Nicolas was a man full of the Holy Ghost - he was a good man, so I don't think that's the case. It may well have been a radical movement that taught immorality and various other heresy. But there are other scholars who believe the second interpretation, that when you dissect the meaning of this name it actually means 'conquerors of the people', or 'rule over the laity' - and they see a reference there to the clerical system. In fact, Archbishop Richard C. Trench himself stated plainly: 'Nicolaitanism is clerical'. Now it is true that not long after John wrote this book of the Revelation, Ignatius, a church father, counselled the church to look upon her bishop as they would upon Christ - and we see the beginning of something that has plagued the church of Jesus Christ for centuries.

Now if you don't want to pinpoint one of those interpretations, I would favour the second - we certainly can see both: that the Lord hates anything that divides His people! Heresy or clericaly, Jesus hates it, the Ephesians hate it, and we should hate it too. Incidentally, what the Ephesians rejected, we will see in a later week, Pergamos embraced in chapter 2 verses 15. They fully imbibed the teaching of the Nicolaitanes. There is a lesson for us as an assembly and as churches of God's people: you don't do things because other people do them, or other assemblies do them. Though they lacked love, they didn't get rid of their orthodoxy - notice that? In fact, the Lord commended them for their orthodoxy.

Then fifthly and finally, the Lord makes a commitment to the overcomers among them. Now, again there's a wee bit of controversy here concerning who these overcomers are, and there are basically two interpretations. The first is that they are all believers, all people who have put their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus, in keeping with 1 John chapter 5 verses 4-5 that says: 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?'. Of course John is writing this book, as he did his first epistle - incidentally, I think that out of 27 references to overcomers in the New Testament, 23 of those are made by the apostle John, so it's a favourite word of his. Here he shows that those who overcome are those who simply have faith in believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

But there's a wee bit of a problem with that, simply because these promises to the overcomer seem to be conditional: 'If you do this, you will overcome'. It seems to be upon overcoming the conditions that are prevailing in these particular churches that they would be blessed. So the second interpretation is that these overcomers are the faithful and obedient children of God, and failure to overcome means a loss of reward - not salvation of course, but of reward. Now there's a problem I foresee with that as well, because the blessings that are given to each of these overcomers in the seven letters are all common as the heritage of every believer - you look at them when you get home. It might be up to you to make up your mind, but I think a satisfactory answer may be found in that I think these overcomers are what a true believer is expected to be in the assembly where these conditions prevailed. So in this assembly that had lost its love as it was at first, it needed to remember, to repent, to repeat the works they did it first, and they would know the Lord's blessing as evidence that they were true believers of the Lord Jesus Christ. For each church that may well be different, but it demonstrates their genuineness in churches that ultimately were a mixed multitude, as you will see next week, and from the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Incidentally, please notice the first three of these churches, the voice of the Spirit speaks to the whole church, and the voice of the Spirit speaks before the overcomer - and so the Spirit is speaking to everyone. In the last four churches we find the Spirit speaking after the overcomer, so the Spirit is speaking to the overcomers in those four last churches - which is like an implication that for the first three churches, they had a chance, but the last four hardly have any chance, and people in it need to listen up as individuals! That's really the message tonight. You might disagree with the odd point that I'm making tonight, and I'm sure many of you will, but here's the important question: if you were in any one of the seven churches, would you have overcome the conditions that prevailed? You see the lesson is: we must overcome where we are. There was only one church in Ephesus, probably, and they didn't have cars and buses and trains to, when they got upset, go to the one down the road! They had to overcome where they were! You don't hear much of that today.

Their reward was the tree of life in the Paradise of God, the Garden of God, Eden restored, which we find in chapter 21 and 22.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 5

"Smyrna, The Persecuted Church"

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Turn with me to Revelation chapter 2, to what is the shortest account of the letters given to the churches - the second, that being to Smyrna. Verse 8 of chapter 2, reading through to verse 11 - 'Smyrna, The Persecuted Church': *"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death"*.

Now you will remember if you have been with us that in chapter 1 verse 19 we have a divinely inspired outline of this book of Revelation. John is told to 'Write the things which thou hast seen', that being the vision of the risen, glorified Lord as the High Priest Judge in the midst of His churches - and we find that in chapter 1 and verse 9 and following. Then he is also told to write 'the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter'. Now the things which shall be hereafter are from chapter 4 right to the end of the book, but the things which are are the things which were current to John in his day and age, that being chapters 2 and 3, the seven churches of Asia Minor. Of course, we noted that there were far more than seven assemblies in Asia Minor in John's day, and so these seven are selected by the Holy Spirit - seven is the number of completion, and so seven is representing the church age, the things which are now. So we have here a divine revelation concerning the church age. John was present in the age, we too are also.

So we are given a complete picture of the moral and spiritual history of the church of Jesus Christ. Now that can be understood in three ways, and let me remind you of those. The first is that that history is understood literally. We have to say that these seven churches were seven literal churches that existed in Asia Minor, those conditions were present in John's day. Not only are they understood literally, but secondly they are understood universally. What I mean by that is that they are illustrative of the good and bad conditions that will prevail in the church everywhere during every age of her existence. We did say last week that there is a marked resemblance between the seven churches here in Revelation, and the seven parables of the kingdom, mystery parables that we find in Matthew's gospel chapter 13. Incidentally, every one of these letters has the words spoken by the Lord that, 'Let him that hath ears to hear, hear', and those words were spoken in the mystery parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13.

Now I may have misled you last week by saying that these parables each corresponded to one of the seven churches, that was incorrect. I should have said that each of the parables really speak of some aspect of all of the churches during all of this church age. In other words, you can find the characteristics in each of the seven parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 in each of the churches right throughout the whole of the church age. Smyrna - how is that relevant to them? Well, the Lord taught right throughout His whole earthly ministry that there

would not just be a tribulation period that would be second to none in the history and prophecy of this world, but all churches throughout every age would face impending tribulation and persecution for their faith during the whole of the church age. The Lord Jesus said: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'. The apostles agreed, Paul in 2 Timothy 3: 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution'.

Such a time would come for every church of every age, a time when believers would be separated from mere professors of Christianity because of the persecution and trial that would come upon them. That corresponds, incidentally, with a couple of verses from the parable of the sower - listen to them, Matthew 13 verses 20-21: 'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended'. So you see how that's relevant, and also how the parable of the wheat and tares, and various other parables are relevant. Let me say, and this might go over some of your heads, that these seven parables in Matthew 13 really represent the external nature of the kingdom of God: how it is perceived by the world, that is professing Christendom in our age, during this church age - whereas the seven churches are the Lord Jesus Christ's view of how the churches actually are in truth and in spirit. Well, I'll leave that there, that is the universal aspect: these seven churches represent every church during every age in different aspects.

So there is a literal approach, there is a universal approach, and then there is a prophetic approach - that approach simply interprets these seven churches as being a preview, chronologically, of the history of Christendom from Pentecost right to the rapture of the church - each of these seven churches representing a distinct period. For instance, last week we thought about the church at Ephesus, and we saw that that was the loveless church, but it also was the post-apostolic church. It was founded by the apostles, and it transpired the period of the late years of the first and the early years of the second century. Generally speaking it was a praiseworthy church, but we see, as church history testifies, that already that post-apostolic church was beginning to forsake her first love. Then that brings us on to the church at Smyrna, understood prophetically as the persecuted church, the church from about the first century right through to the fourth century, the church that endured the persecution of various Roman emperors. We could call this church 'the martyr age of the church'.

Now it would seem incredible if such similarities with history were only accidental, but though that is the case, I have said in previous weeks that we should not press these analogies beyond their bounds. So tonight I want us to consider first and foremost the literal approach to this church at Smyrna, what it meant to the people, the Christians of this particular first century church that John is writing to. Then I want us to think of the fourth approach that I introduced you to last week, and that is the personal approach. This letter, as all the seven letters, has something to say to each of us as Christians. Notice verse 7a: 'He that hath ears to hear', in the singular, 'Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. It is for us as individuals to take heed to God's word, to Christ's revelation to each of these churches, and apply them to our own lives.

We noted last week that each of the seven churches, they are seven letters - with minor exceptions - that are organised in a general pattern. First of all we are introduced to a characteristic of the Lord Jesus Christ from the vision that John received in chapter 1, the vision of Christ as the High Priest Judge in the midst of His churches. The particular

characteristic that is introduced to each church is fitting when we consider the needs of that particular church. As far as Smyrna goes, in verse 8 you see that the Lord Jesus is introduced to them as, 'the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive'. If you look down at verse 10, you will see that the Lord Jesus is encouraging His people in Smyrna to be 'faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. The characteristic that is revealed to Smyrna is for their particular need, to stand firm in the midst of tribulation and suffering, and not deny their Lord. It is particularly applicable to these would-be martyrs.

A vision of Christ - I hope you will agree - is what we all need. But there is a particular aspect to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ in His Great High Priestly judging ministry to the church that you need to see - I wonder what it is this evening? First of all we see this general pattern in the characteristic of Christ that is revealed, then secondly there is a commendation that is given to the church. In verse 9 we have it here to Smyrna: 'I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan'. All the churches, all seven of them, are given a commendation except the last, the seventh, the church of Laodicea.

Now often in the general pattern we find thirdly that there is a criticism of each church, but we see here that Smyrna has no criticism. The only other church of the seven which does not have a criticism is the church of Philadelphia, and that's very interesting - not only because it is praiseworthy that Christ doesn't find grounds to criticise them, but also when we consider that the church we studied last week, Ephesus, that had left their first love, has more praise than Smyrna. Indeed Thyatira, which we'll study in a couple of weeks time, has also more praise than Smyrna - and yet these two churches are two of the most criticised by the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I'll leave you to work that one out, but I think it's in the nature of our Lord Jesus - who is full of grace and truth - to commend first when He can, particularly those churches that He's about to critique.

There is no criticism, and there is no corrective command because there is no criticism - which is often the fourth aspect to these letters. But rather, instead of a corrective command, we have in verse 10 counsel given after the Lord's commendation: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. Then, as in each of these letters, in verse 11 we have the final factor which is a commitment that the Lord gives to the overcomers of that church, a promise that He gives: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death'.

We will look at each of these as we go through our study tonight, but let us look first of all at the city that is the city of Smyrna. Now Smyrna, as I've already said, is the modern day city in Turkey of Izmir, and it was an important seaport in the day of the apostle John. It was about 35 miles north of Ephesus that we considered last week. Now there is nothing known about this church of Smyrna, how it began, how things transpired in it up to this point that we find it in John's Apocalypse. Yet with all the persecution that had endured, we find that Smyrna endured, and there is still a witness and testimony to Jesus Christ today in Izmir in modern-day Turkey.

Now there are several things I want you to note about this city where this church was found. The first is: it was an idyllic city. Smyrna occupied a most attractive site in Asia Minor, in fact it was known as the 'lovely Smyrna, the crown of Ionia, the ornament of Asia'. Yet behind that physical facade of great beauty there lurked an evil, the Satanic opposition to Christ in the

whole of Asia. Now that's interesting for us to note, because it certainly is representative of our society and world in which we live. Whatever the outward appearances of beauty and attractiveness might be, we've got to face the reality that outward appearances matter very little. We live in a world that is, generally speaking, against Christ - whatever it might say about Him. Smyrna was idyllic, yet behind it all there was something inherently Satanic.

Secondly please note that this was not only an idyllic but an industrious city. The name 'Smyrna' really means 'Myrrh', and Smyrna as a city operated a trade in myrrh - that is, the aromatic resin. They produced from that resin from the tree a gum that was often used for embalming dead bodies. It was an industrious city that was famous for myrrh. Thirdly it is also marked for its idolatry, it was an idolatrous city. It offered worship to the emperor through an imperial cult, and this cult, and indeed a large Jewish population, made life extremely difficult for the believers of the Lord Jesus Christ in Smyrna. None of the other cities of the seven cities written to here in the Apocalypse were so stained with the blood of the martyrs like Smyrna.

Now can I just pause there for a moment, because I think there is a worthy lesson for us to note: out of all the seven churches - which, let me remind you, are generally found in the same vicinity - only Smyrna suffered like this. Why? We could equally ask the question: why is it that some people, some believers in the Lord Jesus Christ indeed, suffer more than others? Why is it that the godliest of men and women seem to suffer more than others? Well, I have no answer to that, save to say that I think the answer lies deep in the sovereignty of God - but it's worth noticing. Smyrna suffered more than the rest of the seven.

So that is the city of Smyrna: it was idyllic with a Satanic undertone; it was industrious in the production of this aromatic resin, myrrh; and it was idolatrous in the emperor cult. Secondly I want you to note this characteristic of Christ that is revealed to the church at Smyrna. Verse 8 gives us that, the second half: 'These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive'. The first characteristic we have of the Lord revealed to Smyrna is 'the first and the last' - incidentally, which is a description of God that John, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, plucked out of Isaiah's prophecy in the Old Testament. It is a title for Jehovah that is being applied and attributed to the Lord Jesus Christ - hence, you see, He is God of God.

But the point, I believe, that is being made by the Spirit is that this God, who is the first and the last - look at verse 8 - is also the One who became flesh, the incarnate Son of God, and who literally, as verse 8 says, became dead. He lived eternally as the eternal Son, uncreated, eternally begotten of the Father - but He became dead, having been incarnated, going to the cross, dying as a sacrifice for sin, He entered into death voluntarily as a sacrifice for sins forever. Verse 8 says He became dead and, literally, 'He is the one who became dead and who lives' - presently He is living, for He rose again the third day in the power of an endless life, and He lives eternally and gives life to all who believe in Him. So in the midst of Smyrna's suffering, the vision of Christ that is given to them is of One who suffered, who died, who entered death, but who is victorious over it all.

First of all the Holy Spirit wants Smyrna to see He is the Eternal God - and, boy, if you're going through any form of suffering tonight as a Christian, you need to get a glimpse of Jesus Christ in His deity as the first and the last, the eternal God, and realise that the power of Christ can support anyone, at any time, in any circumstance. He is God! But secondly the Holy Spirit wanted Smyrna to see that though He is the eternal God, He went the same way as they were presently going. He went through a baptism of blood, their blessed and glorified Head was crucified - and in death He slew death, and became Master of it. Having been tested

and tried, and lived and died, and rose again, He has now become a Great High Priest to those who believe in Him - and He can enter into the suffering of our infirmities because of all that.

The first and the last who became dead and lives - boy, how they needed to hear that, because what the Lord Jesus was saying to them was: 'You can have all my compassion, you can enter into all my companionship, because you are going the way that your Master went'. Are you hearing that tonight, suffering child of God? Of course, Smyrna had its own death and resurrection. Round about 580 BC the city was destroyed, and then in 290 BC it was rebuilt again completely. So there is an allusion there - the first and the last, the one who was dead and is alive - to their particular history. But Smyrna's name, as we have seen already, means 'myrrh' - and that aromatic resin was associated with death, the embalming of the dead. But the process of getting that resin out of the tree was something deeply symbolic to these suffering Christians in the church of Smyrna, because to get this resin an incision had to be made in the bark of the tree, the sap had to be allowed to bleed, and then that fragrant and bitter resin had to be produced through the wounding of that tree.

Prophetically speaking we are entering into a church period where, for 200 years, the church would be crushed by the iron heel of pagan Roman. As we look down this passage, in verse 10 it is prophesied that for ten days they would be thrown in prison, and would be tested and tried, and they would need to be faithful unto death. Now you might not know this, according to the history books there were 10 separate attempts by 10 separate Roman emperors to exterminate and eradicate Christianity from the Roman empire. The tenth attempt was by an emperor by the name of Diocletian, and that tenth attempt lasted 10 years! Christians during those 200 years or so were martyred, butchered, burned for Jesus Christ - and the church in Smyrna particularly typifies that prophetically speaking. They, like the resin that they represent, would be cut, bruised, wounded, crushed for Christ - but from that process of tribulation there would be a savour, and a fragrant smell that would ascend unto God that had never gone up before.

They were never as Christ-like as when they were suffering. Let's not miss that please, because our Lord Jesus Christ was the Man of Sorrows, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. Incidentally, myrrh is always associated with Him. In Matthew chapter 2 we find that the wise men brought - what did they bring? Gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then when we travel from Bethlehem 33 or so years, we come to Calvary and He's hanging on the cross, dying for men's sins, and they reach up a sponge on a spear and try to give Him wine mingled with myrrh to dull the pain. Then we find Him dead, being buried, and Nicodemus, John gospel tells us, brought an embalming ointment of myrrh to prepare His dead body for the tomb. What suffering our Lord Jesus experienced from His birth, to the cross, to the tomb itself. Right throughout the Old Testament it is used - that is, myrrh - as a type of our Lord Jesus Christ in His suffering. But there's something I want you to note: in the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 6, we read prophetically of when our Lord Jesus Christ will come again. He will be presented at that time with gold, and with frankincense, but there is something missing! The myrrh isn't there! Because when He comes again, Isaiah 60 verse 2 tells us, He will not be coming as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, He will be coming as the Sovereign King of Kings and the Lord of Lords to judge, to reign, and to rule.

Suffering child of God, just like Smyrna, you need to see these characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great, the epitome, the pinnacle of all human suffering - and yet He is the divine, the first and the last, who became dead and now lives. Fix your eyes on Him, John tells Smyrna - that's what you need to do, for just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of

life repay. Those are the characteristics of the Christ revealed.

Now come with me to verse 9, the commendation of the church: 'I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan'. 'I know', first of all the Lord Jesus says to Smyrna, 'thy tribulation'. Now look at that word for a moment, for that word is the Greek word 'thlipsis' - it is the word which conveys the idea of pressing out the grapes until the juice comes forth. In classical Greek language it was used of a huge rock that would crush anything beneath it, and here the word is used in the singular, and that means this is a great tribulation that these people are experiencing - not the great tribulation, but a great trial, serious trouble. 'I know thy tribulation', what must that have meant for those Christians in Smyrna?

Then He goes on: 'I know thy tribulation and poverty'. Look at the word, there are two Greek words for poverty, the first speaks of having no surplus - in other words, you've got enough to get through but no more. That's not the word that is used here, it's the other word that means 'destitution', absolutely nothing! Not even enough to get through, sheer beggary! Now under the persecution of Domitian, who is the present emperor as John is living and writing, the worship of him as the emperor was compulsory upon every citizen. In Smyrna, therefore, it meant something to be a Christian - you had to stand up and be counted! You see, many of the trade guilds, a Christian couldn't be a member because they had pagan associations. If you were a Christian and were seen to be a rebel to the cause of the emperor, the likelihood was that your employer would get rid of you very quickly. Christians were seen in the empire at this time as atheists, because they did not believe in the gods of Rome. They were seen as traitors who were committing treason because they would not acknowledge that the emperor was lord. So it was very easy to arouse a rabble, and to go to a Christian's home and smash it up, and pillage his goods, and even confiscate his possessions in the name of Caesar and the empire. There's no insurance policies, and as a Christian you would be living in one of the wealthiest cities in existence in Asia Minor, let alone the empire, and yet like these people in Smyrna you would be destitute - destitute.

Yet with all their destitution, look what the Lord says in verse 9: 'but thou art rich' - thou art rich. They have suffered the loss of many things, indeed all things I would say, and though they were poor in this world they were rich in faith! Indeed, as poor, they were able to make many rich because of their faith. What others thought was wealth was actually poverty, and what people saw in their lives as destitution, according to God was rich. Now we're running ahead of ourselves, but if you turn with me to the church of Laodicea in chapter 3 and verse 17, they had the opposite said of them by the Lord Jesus - chapter 3:17: 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked'. They thought they were rich, yet they were poor! The church in Smyrna was poor, destitute, and yet in Christ's eyes they were rich!

Can I ask you a very searching question: have you got the values of Christ or the values of this world? Do I need to repeat that? Have you got the values of Christ or the values of this world? Do you value material things over spiritual? Incidentally, do you see suffering as an enriching experience in the Christian life? It's not the popular health and wealth gospel that you'll hear on the God Channel, but it's the Bible's teaching regarding suffering: it enriches the Christian's life and testimony! That is why, often, the godliest of men and women have suffered the most. Charles Stanley said: 'Jesus is specially the partner of His poorer servants' - why is that? Because to be poor, to be destitute, is to go the way that the Master went.

Can I remind you of a verse that you know well, 2 Corinthians 8:9: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich', that's the same word that is used here of Smyrna, 'yet for your sakes he became poor', that is the same word for destitute used of Smyrna, 'that ye through his poverty and destitution might be spiritually rich'. It's the way He went. It was the way He came into this world - Joseph and Mary, heavy with child, came to the inn, and an inn was a place where you were judged regarding what you had, and they were refused entrance. He was born in a stable. Then when Mary comes to bring the offering to the Temple, after birth she brings a working man's offering. The Lord Jesus for 30 years adorns the apron of a carpenter in His father's shop. When He begins His ministry, He has to ask a man for a penny. He borrows a boat in which to preach. The very tomb that His cold corpse lies in after His crucifixion is not His own! The moment He died, He left nothing behind Him, even His clothes were gambled for by the soldiers. Yet being destitute, He possessed everything! He holds the world in His hand!

Is that the way we are? Do you know what our problem is? Oh yes, we ought to be thankful for what we have here in the West, but I think all of us have got too rich - we have you know. I think we would be better men and women, myself included, if we had a lot less. Churches are often judged today on how much money they have, and how much clout they can bring - that's not how Christ judged this church: they were destitute, yet they were rich.

'I know thy tribulation, I know thy poverty, I know' - look at it - 'the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan'. Now that word for 'blasphemy' is the word for 'slander': 'I know those that slander you', and this slander was caused by Jews who called themselves Jews but were not. Now what that simply means is the same as what Paul said in Romans chapter 2, they were Jews outwardly in external religiosity, but they were not circumcised in their heart toward God. Isn't it amazing that these Jews, who in the Old Testament were called the congregation of Jehovah, are now being spoken of as a synagogue of Satan. Satan, incidentally, is the accuser of the brethren. Satan is the one who is inspiring these Jews to slander God's people in Smyrna. They may have been the Judiasers of the book of Galatians, but I happen to think that these Jews primarily were a group of folk who were rabble-rousers, who were just stirring up trouble towards these Christians.

Now historians tell us of the Jews' eagerness in aiding the martyrdom of Polycarp that you have heard about already. Polycarp was martyred on the Sabbath day, and even though it was the Sabbath the Jews gathered the wood for the fire - it didn't matter! You've got to understand why they were so antagonistic towards the early Christians. You see the empire was reasonably tolerant towards Christians initially, as they were to any religion providing they did not threaten the peace. They looked upon the early Christians really as a sect of Judaism, and so they were allowed to practise as the Jews were. But you see the Jews didn't like Christians being seen as part of Judaism, and so they created a fuss and often spread slander concerning the Christians. Now this is not a Jewish slander in the early church, but it certainly was one that went about, and that was that the love feast - when the believers broke bread and drank wine - was the practice of cannibalism, the flesh and the blood of the Lord Jesus. They slandered the church as cannibals!

Let me remind you: it doesn't matter that it says here that the Jews were bringing this slander, as many of the pagans often did. In all this neither the Jews nor the Romans were the real problem - we've got to see that. This had become a synagogue of Satan, Satan was the instigator behind this persecution. The seven churches at Asia that we have before us

here in chapters 2 and 3, Satan is mentioned five times as being against the church! When are we ever going to wake up to the fact that Satan is real and alive in the 21st century, and he is working against us - and, incidentally, some Christians are working along with him! Ephesians 6:12 says: 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood', we've got to see beyond flesh and blood, and see that there are spiritual principalities and powers in high places that are orchestrating this persecution towards the church in John's day and in ours. Christ says, this is the message, 'I know thy tribulation, I know thy poverty, I know the slander of the synagogue of Satan'. Isn't it wonderful that they could know that He knew? Child of God tonight, He knows:

'He knows the storms
That would your way oppose,
He knows, and furthermore
He tempers every wind that blows'.

Their commendation: 'I know thy tribulation, thy poverty, and the blasphemy'. Fourthly look at the counsel to the church, verse 10: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer'. Hold on a minute now! 'Thou shalt suffer'? Would they be forgiven in thinking: 'Lord, hold on a minute! OK, we've endured a lot so far, but the things which we shall suffer - future? No more, Lord! Is it not enough, Lord?'. Do you ever feel like that? There's no talk of deliverance here, there's no talk of the miraculous - whilst God can do it, it's not mentioned here - but Christ is telling them: 'You're going to have to go through more! You might be destitute, but there's more to come!'. It's frightening, isn't it? Yet please note, we don't find any complaining among them. I know I would be complaining, wouldn't you? But they were Christ-like.

Can I remind you of what Peter said: 'What glory is it if, when we be buffeted for our faults, we take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, you do take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were we called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously'. Not a complaint! The Lord counsels them first to be fearless, 'fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer'. We fear many things, don't we? Yet they were facing things that we could understand them fearing. We need a reality check as we study this passage of Scripture tonight: these Christians were facing prison, they were facing death, and the Lord said to them literally, 'Stop being afraid!'.

Why should they stop being afraid? Well, all the reasons we've already given concerning the identity and power of Christ - but the reason specifically here is, Jesus says that the devil, the accuser, will put them in prison and try them for 10 days. Now imagine this for a moment: they are being put in prison for something they didn't do, they are being slandered - imagine if that came to your door tonight, and you were carried off to your local prison for something you didn't do, would you be afraid? If there was a rope at the end of it all, or an electric chair? Yet they were told not to be afraid. They were in the company of Joseph, and Jeremiah, and Paul, and Peter, all who had been behind bars for the cause of God. Now prophetically, as we've said, these 10 days mean something else, but literally they mean 10 days - and that is a limited time of intense persecution. So how could Christ tell them: 'Don't be afraid'? This is why: it will come to pass - after 10 days of intense persecution, it will be over. That might be cold comfort to us, but not to them.

I love that little phrase in the Scriptures, and I think some of you love it too: 'And it came to pass'. It will end, don't fear - though this might be instigated by Satan, it is controlled by Christ! Do you hear that? Often our sufferings do come from the devil, but praise God: our Lord Jesus Christ is in control. What He was saying to these believers was simply: he might rob you of your wealth, he might rob you of your health, he might rob you of your very life - but he can't rob you of your eternal riches! Maybe we have become so earthly minded that that doesn't matter any more. It mattered to them because they didn't have anything else.

Be fearless, then the second counsel was: be faithful. Incidentally, this is coming from the One who in chapter 1 verse 5 is spoken of as 'the faithful witness' - be faithful rather than renounce your faith Smyrnan Christians. I have really searched my heart today, I want you to search yours: could you be faithful unto death? Now let me add a caveat to that: I believe God gives grace to die whenever the time comes - that's maybe why I don't feel like being able to do that just now. Yet they were encouraged in anticipation. What are we: fearful or faithful? Now it might even be fearful - these people were going to die, but your fear might be even to be a witness with your mouth of Christ. We all know about spiritual lockjaw when it comes to speaking a word for the Saviour.

Fearful or faithful, if these believers were faithful unto death, they would receive a reward - look at verse 10. They would be given a crown of life. Now the Greek word there for 'crown' is 'stephanos', not 'diadema' - 'diadema' is a kingly crown, 'stephanos' is the laurel wreath that was put on the head of a victorious athlete. James 1:12 speaks of the same crown: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him'. Under trial, even to the point of death, there is a reward. Now there are several crowns that are reward for believers, and I haven't the time to go into those tonight, and I don't even want to because I want to labour on this one: will you, will I, get a reward for enduring trial, for suffering? Now it's not suffering with an ingrown toenail, this is suffering for the cause of Christ. You say: 'Sure, who's suffering for the cause of Christ today?'. I don't have time to elaborate on this, but I believe all of us, in some shape or form, should be suffering for the cause of Christ today. Maybe it's because we're not taking our stand? Will we be faithful or fearful? Will I? When it comes - and it's very close to the day - when to say that homosexuality is a sin and an abomination in the eyes of God, you'll be put in prison for it, will I say it? Or will we just keep quiet about it? That's what we're talking about here. The Lord Jesus says: 'You count the cost. Lose your life for My sake, and you'll find it'. This is the crown of life:

'Give thy sons to bear the message, glorious;
Give thy wealth to speed them on their way.
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer, victorious;
And all thou spendest, Jesus will repay!'

Do we believe that? That the suffering of this age, this present time, is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us - that was the counsel to this church. Be fearless, be faithful, and I will honour you! Fifthly and finally, the commitment to the overcomers in verse 11: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death'. Again it's singular, 'ear', 'he that hears', there is an individual responsibility upon us all here tonight to think about the cost of discipleship. The magnitude is tremendous, because the one who lends their ear to the Spirit and what He says, might find himself or herself tested to the very point of death! That's more than a dander down an aisle, isn't it?

That death for these Smyrnan Christians could have been torture, then maybe the rack, perhaps out to the stake to be burned, or to be fed to lions. Now, if you were in this church, Smyrna, would you overcome? Remember who the overcomers are: in one sense they are those who, John says, are born of God and overcome the world, and it's our faith that gives us that victory - those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. This is a church where believers had to prove their faith by their devotion to Christ to the very point of death! If that was you, would you take the name of Christ? The Lord said that if they did, they would not be hurt by the second death - that is in the emphatic double negative: 'You certainly will never be harmed' - never!

Do you know what the Lord is saying? You as a believer-overcomer might have to face death, and pass through death, and a gruesome death at that - but not the second death! Is that the way we live? The second death, if you don't know, is what Revelation 20 describes as the lake of fire - it's separation from God for all eternity. Now all of us might have to die once, but some will die twice because they have never believed the Gospel. If that's you, my friend - make sure that you're believing in the Lord Jesus. Because the sinless Saviour died, can you say, 'My sinful soul is counted free; for God, the just, is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me'? Are you believing? Are you saved? Are you born again?

We've been to Smyrna tonight, the purifying lamp of affliction has caused the lamp of testimony to burn all the more brilliantly - but I want to ask you as we close tonight: what if, one day soon, you will be called to be faithful unto death? You know, it wasn't long after this book of Revelation was written that Polycarp, a bishop in Smyrna, 86 years of age, had a knock on his door. Then he was hauled before the courts of Smyrna to renounce Jesus Christ, and they said to him: 'Just say, 'Caesar is Lord', and we'll let you go'. He flatly refused, he never wavered, and said these words: 'Fourscore and six years I have served the Lord Jesus, He has done me no wrong, how then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?' - and he was burned alive. The present-day church of Smyrna told the world in April of last year that five Muslims entered a Christian publishing company, and killed three believers in the southeastern province of Malatya, Turkey - 300 miles from Antioch where believers were first called Christians. One of them was a man called Necati, and he was buried in his home town of Izmir, Smyrna. His wife says these words - wives, could you say this? - 'His death was full of meaning because he died for Christ and he lived for Christ. Necati was a gift from God, I feel honoured that he was in my life. I feel crowned with honour, I want to be worthy of that honour'. Do you know what the pastor said? I think at the funeral, he asked the world: 'Don't pray against persecution, pray for perseverance'.

No later than three weeks ago a dozen Christians in the Izmir district of Istanbul were attending Sunday morning worship, and were suddenly rounded up and taken to police stations. They were all accused of holding illegal meetings, and were fined, and the church in that Izmir district remains closed and sealed pending the results of a court case that could take months. Do you know something? The devil hasn't changed, this world hasn't changed, Jesus Christ hasn't changed - but the Western church has changed. In the south of Scotland there is a monument to two women. For their faith they were brought to the sea, sentenced to death by the stake - and the stake was put, for the older woman, way out in the ocean. She was asked to recant her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and she refused, and she died of drowning. The young girl whose stake was planted nearer the shore watched it all, and as the tide rose to her ankles, then to her calves, then to her hips, then to her chest, then over her head - a couple of soldiers ran and lifted the stake high, and said: 'We'll give you another chance, recant and live'. What would you have done? She refused.

'Fear not, be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life'. Next week, in the will of God, we'll look at 'Pergamos, The Compromising Church'.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 6
"Pergamos, The Compromising Church"

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Now let's turn to the Scriptures, to Revelation chapter 2, beginning to read at verse 12: *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it".*

May I direct you back to chapter 1 and verse 19 again, to this outline given to us by God of the book of the Apocalypse, the Revelation. John was told to write the things that he had seen, that is chapter 1, the vision of the risen Christ as the glorified Lord and Judge-Priest among the church. Then we see that he was also told to write the things which shall be hereafter, which comprises the visions from chapter 4 onwards, things that are yet future. But he was also told to write the things which are, that's what we have here, these seven churches are the divine revelation concerning the church age - a complete picture of the moral and spiritual history of the church.

We have seen in past weeks that that can be understood in three ways: first of all it can be understood literally, and the most important way to interpret these churches is in a literal sense; that is, these were conditions that actually existed in each of these cities where an assembly of God's people resided. Then secondly they are to be understood universally, that being that they illustrate the good and bad characteristics in churches everywhere in every age. We noted that there is a marked resemblance between the seven churches and seven characteristics that are shown in Matthew chapter 13 in the mystery parables of the kingdom - every church age will show those characteristics. Then we saw that not only is there a literal approach and a universal approach, but there is a prophetic approach. In our first study of the first church, Ephesus, the loveless church, we saw that that corresponded in church history to the post-apostolic age, just after the death of the apostles we see that doctrine was reasonably pure, but they had lost their first love, or the things they had loved at first. Then we saw last week that Smyrna, the persecuted church, corresponds in church history to a period between the first and fourth century where the church endured persecution under several Roman emperors, in fact ten in total - the tenth being under Diocletian, which lasted for 10 years.

Then we're looking this evening at the third church, Pergamos, which I've entitled 'The

Compromising Church'. Now each of these churches say something to us by their name, their name means something that sheds light on the teaching of God's word. 'Pergamos' means 'thoroughly married'. Here we have a compromising church that, in a historical sense, really correlates to the church of the fourth and the fifth century - the church that lost its fidelity to Christ, and actually became allied to the world. 'Now how did that happen?', you might say. Well, you may have heard of a man called Constantine, and Constantine had a spurious conversion. There's a lot of doubt whether he was genuinely saved, and indeed he adopted, for the whole empire, Christianity as the state religion around AD 313. So there was a great influx of people who professed Christianity to get into the empire, and there was much incentive to do that, and with them they brought much of their pagan spiritual baggage.

But of course we are concentrating literally on these churches, and personally - we remember, don't we, that to each of these churches the Lord said: 'Let he who has ears to hear, hear'. There is a personal responsibility that all of us, as we study these letters, put into practice what they're saying to us as an individual. Now we did note, please, and let's look at it again, that with minor exceptions there is the same pattern to the outline of each of these letters. First of all, there is always given to us a characteristic or characteristics of the Lord Jesus that we have already seen in the vision of chapter 1. Here we have it in verse 12, the Lord Jesus reveals Himself as the one who has the sharp sword with two edges. Of course, that's derived from the vision in chapter 1, where it can be seen that this two-edged sword is coming out of the Lord's mouth. Now how was this fitting to the church? We remember that the very characteristics that were revealed to each of these churches are particularly relevant to the problems that are found in each church. If we look at verse 16, we can see what the relevance clearly is: He tells Pergamos, 'Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth'. In other words, if the Pergamos Christians didn't deal with the falsehood, false teachers, false doctrine and false living that was in their ranks, the Lord Jesus Himself would come and fight against those false teachers with the sword of His holy word.

So that is the characteristic of the Lord revealed to Pergamos, He has this two-edged sword. Then in each letter, with the exception of course of Laodicea, there is a commendation to the church, and here we have it to Pergamos in verse 13: 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth'. We'll look at that in detail in a few moments. Then each letter, thirdly, has a criticism - except, of course, Smyrna that we considered last week, and Philadelphia that we have yet to consider. In verses 14 and 15 we have the criticism of the Lord Jesus towards Pergamos, and we sum it up just with the first few words of verse 14: 'I have a few things against thee' - and we will see tonight what those were.

Then fourthly, each letter has a corrective command, except those who didn't need to correct because they were not critiqued. But Pergamos did need correction, and we find it in verse 16: 'Repent', or the Lord Jesus was going to take direct disciplinary action against this church. Then, as in each of the seven letters, we have finally a commitment that the Lord Jesus makes to the overcomers, overcoming the conditions that prevailed in each church. We have it here in verse 7, that the Lord promised to give to the overcomer hidden manna, and a stone with a new name written on it.

Now let's, as we have done in previous weeks, look first of all at the city where this church of Pergamos, or Pergamum, resided. Now it is the modern Turkish city of Bergama, it is 55 miles north of where we were last week in Smyrna, and in fact is the ancient Asia Minor capital of

this region, and it was for approximately 250 years. So it was no mean city, indeed it was one of the finest cities that was renowned for many features. First of all it was a city of culture and learning. It was known as a common royal residence, there was within Pergamos a university - so it was a university city - it also owned a very eminent teaching hospital where medicine was practised along with various superstitious rituals. Pergamos also owned a prestigious and famous library that was second only to the great library in Alexandria, and that library in Pergamos contained 200,000 books. Indeed, history tells us that that library was later sent to Egypt as a gift from Anthony to Cleopatra. Incidentally, 'parchment', the word 'parchment' is derived from the name 'Pergamos', as the people of Pergamos actually devised their own particular method of producing parchment that ancient writings were scribed upon. Now the Egyptians invented it, but the people of Pergamos had their own particular method of production of it, and were famous for it.

Not only was it a centre of culture and learning, but we see very clearly that Pergamos was a centre of spirituality. You could describe it as like the Hyde Park Corner of ancient Asia, it was a marketplace for all kinds of false religions and beliefs. As you have already observed, high on the Acropolis of the city was an altar to Zeus overshadowing the whole of the populace. There was also, within Pergamos, a temple to Zeus, as well as a temple to Athena, and a temple to Dionysius - all pagan gods, and Dionysius, incidentally, is the same god as Bacchus, who was the god of drunkenness. One of the more renowned temples in Pergamos was dedicated to a god called Asclepius, and in that temple to Asclepius there was a prominent monument and object, that being the wreathed serpent. Now you're familiar with that, whether or not you realise it, if I just go a couple of slides you might recognize it now. On the left you have actually a statue of Asclepius from the Berlin Pergamum Museum, that statue actually from ancient Pergamum; and on the right you have what is the modern symbol for medicine. That is in fact where it derives - it's not from Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness as many people suppose - but it is in fact from this pagan god Asclepius, who was understood as the god of healing. That is why Pergamos was considered to be the Lourdes of the day, and all sorts of people from all over the empire and indeed the world would come to find healing for various diseases, particularly from the god Asclepius. The supplicants would actually enter into the temple of Asclepius, and lie on the floor, and non-poisonous snakes would come and writhe over them - and they believed that by these snakes touching them, the god Asclepius might indeed heal them. So Pergamum was indeed a centre of spirituality.

A centre of learning and culture, a centre of spirituality, thirdly it was also a centre for the Imperial cult - that's a bit of an offshoot from being a centre of spirituality, but I want to highlight this in particular because it is highly relevant to what we're doing tonight. This was a centre for the Imperial cult that worshipped the Emperor of the day as divine. As early as 29 BC there was a temple dedicated to the worship of the Emperor in Pergamos. In due course there was a second temple added, and eventually a third. So you can imagine how all that has been said would make it very difficult for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to live and operate in a place like Pergamos, especially when you consider that it was the centre in this particular region for the worship of the Emperor. Now what did that mean? Well, every single year every Roman citizen was required to go to the temple of the Emperor, to take a pinch of incense, to drop that incense on the altar, and to confess 'Caesar is Lord!'.

Now, obviously a true Christian could never do that - but can I ask you before we paint the picture of Pergamos any more this evening: how do you think you would fare if, by law, you were required to do that? What would your reaction be? That leads us on a little to the characteristic of the Lord that is presented to the church at Pergamos in verse 12, the one who has the two-edged sword. Now Christians who refused to go through this rite and confess

that Caesar was Lord may well have to face the sword of the Roman proconsul, and here Christ is revealing Himself to these Christians, fearing persecution and perhaps even death, and gives them a salutary reminder that there is an even greater power than the power of the Emperor. There is a greater power than any earthly governor or government, that is the power of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ!

Now I want you to note that the sword is an instrument of judgement. The sword, as it is revealed to us in chapter 1, is coming out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now if the sword is for judgement, the mouth is for speaking, and that gives us a little bit of an indication of what God's method is in executing His will. God's method in executing His will is to use His word. In Genesis 1 God created the heaven and the earth through His word, and God said 'Let there be light', and there was light. When the Lord Jesus came as the incarnate Word and dwelt among us, His miracles, many of them were performed by just the speaking of a word: 'Arise and walk'.

The Bible tells us that there is a day yet to come when the church of Jesus Christ will be translated, those who are alive will meet the Lord in the air, those who are dead will go before them. The Lord will do this, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 tells us, by descending from heaven with a shout. Indeed, in Revelation chapter 19 we shall see later on that when the Lord Jesus comes again to judge the world, He will come displaying a two-edged sword out of His mouth - point is, He will use a word, and in a word He will destroy all the enemies of God! But I think it is proper that we should note that at no point does the Lord Jesus ever strike a blow, not once, but His word does the work, even the work of judgement - and one day is coming when He will speak and vanquish every foe.

But please note here that this sword in verse 12 is not now coming out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus, it's just described in this manner: that the Lord 'has this sword', it's implied perhaps that it's even in His hand - but the thought is that He possesses it, and He wants these Christians in Pergamos to realise: 'I am in control of your destiny. Your life is in my hands, and no matter what the sword of Rome might threaten towards you because you will not comply to the worship of the Emperor, my sheep are in my hand and no man can pluck them out of there'. Isn't that wonderful? He's telling them, listen: 'I'm the one who ultimately will judge everything by my word', that is the characteristic He reveals to this church - and incidentally, let us not forget, He begins His judgement in the house of God. That's why we're here.

Then thirdly, in verse 13, after the characteristic of Christ is revealed we have His commendation to Pergamos: 'I know thy works, and where you dwell, even where Satan's seat', now that really should be 'throne', 'where Satan's throne is'. Now what does 'Satan's throne' refer to in relation to Pergamos? Some people say it was the altar of Zeus that was on that hill that overshadowed the city. Some say it was many, or indeed all of the temples to these various gods - some highlight Asclepius himself, whose symbol you see on the screen, and say: 'Well, a serpent would naturally have spoken to these believers in Pergamos of the devil himself' - and we see from Revelation 12 and 20 that the servant was a symbol for Satan. Was it this imperial cult that worshipped the Emperor, and that threatened death to anyone who would not confess Caesar as Lord? Which one is it? Which corresponds to Pergamos being Satan's seat? Well, I would say all of them do, particularly the emperor worship, but all of them signify how Satan was operative and instrumental in this city of Pergamos.

Now if you remember last week, we highlighted the fact that Smyrna faced the opposition of

the synagogue of Satan - you remember that? Satan was coming to hound that church in a religious way, but now we are seeing that Satan is coming to the believers in Pergamos in a different ilk: he's coming through a regime. Now I want to remind you of a verse that is very familiar to most, it is found in Ephesians 6 and verse 12, Paul says: 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'. Pergamos was a place where Satan's throne was, it was the administrative capital for this particular province as far as Rome was concerned, but I want you to see beyond Rome: there were principalities and powers, high spiritual realities that were working through the politics and the regime of the day, and so this wasn't just the Roman administrative centre of Asia, this was the Satanic administrative centre of Asia. It was where Satanic policies emanated from, indeed I believe that the primary aim of the devil at this point from this place was to attack the whole Church of Asia Minor.

Now we've got to remember something concerning the devil: he is not omnipresent, he can't be everywhere at the same time - that's why he utilises his minions, a hierarchy of demons in a network of activity. Some believe that Ephesians 6 verse 12 that I quoted really illustrates that type of rank among demonic spirits - but at this time it seems that the centre of Satanic operations was the city of Pergamos. Now historically we know that the original seat of Satan and idolatry on the earth was Babylon. In Alexander Hislop's book, 'The Two Babylons', one I would recommend for you to read, he details how the Pagan mystery cults at Babylon transferred to Pergamos after the death of Belshazzar, the Babylonian Emperor. So it moved from Babylon, moved to Pergamos, and incidentally Hislop traces how it moved from Pergamos eventually to Rome - and many of the trends we find in the Roman Catholic Church are owed to paganism.

The book of Revelation teaches us that there is a day yet to be when Babylonish mystery religion will be found in another political system, in another ecclesiasticism that will be found in the end times. I think we can see it today in embryo in ecumenism. Let me pause there for a moment: Satan's seat in Genesis was found in Babylon, the centre of idolatry. In the time when John is writing this letter inspired by the Holy Spirit, Satan's seat is found in Pergamos. It moved to Rome, eventually it will move somewhere else, but I wonder if we were to answer the question: where we think Satan's seat might be in the United Kingdom? What would our answer be? Does he have a centre of operations, an administrative centre from which he operates and influences? It's not hard for some of us to imagine where it might be - and before any of you say to me: 'Well, you have to remember that the powers that be are ordained are ordained by God', well that is correct, but you've also got to remember that they might be ordained by God but they're not inspired by God. Some of the Babylonish emperors themselves were chosen by God to discipline Israel, they were even spoken of as God's anointed, God's instrument, but they were inspired by the evil one himself. I think we can see through the administration of our government, even in our day and age, the inspiration of Satanic devices.

Well, Pergamos were to be commended, and in verse 13 we see that in the midst of such opposition and paganism the Lord Jesus commends them and says: 'Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth'. In the midst of such opposition they remained loyal to Christ: 'You have held fast my name, and not denied my faith, even when it meant death'. Now before we criticise Pergamos, as we will with the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to ask the question: could any of us, under such circumstances, hold fast to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and not deny His faith? Antipas did it to the point of

martyrdom. We know nothing about this man called Antipas apart from what legend tells us - that he was roasted alive in a brazen bull - but we don't know anything more about him. But we know this much: the Lord Jesus Christ marked his martyrdom and his faithfulness as a witness to His name, and He even crowns Antipas with his own title, the Lord's own title that we find in chapter 1 and verse 5: 'The faithful witness'. That word 'witness' is the same word for 'martyr' that is designated to Antipas, and the reason why it's interchangeable here is simply because in these early days of Christianity, if you lived in a place like Pergamos or like Smyrna, the likelihood was that if you opened your mouth or displayed in your life a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ it would probably mean your death.

If that's what witnessing meant in our day and age, how many of us would be doing it? Sure we're not even doing it now, and it doesn't mean death! At the most it means a bit of an embarrassment! Yet here we have Antipas, do you know what his name means? 'Against all', I love that. Can I give you an illustration concerning Antipas that is actually taken from the prophetic approach to this church of Pergamos? It was during this particular period of church history that we're talking about, the fourth and fifth century, there was a theological controversy that was raging for over a hundred years. It was called the 'Arian' controversy, it was concerning false teachers who were casting doubt on the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The debate really went like this: is it just that the Lord Jesus was of like substance with the Father, or was He of the same substance as the Father? Now in modern Christianity that would be seen as splitting hairs, but in these early days it was a fundamental issue. Is Christ just like the Father, or is He of the same substance with the Father? In AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea in the South of France, the church there ruled that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures teach, was the same substance as the Father, God of very God. Now if that hadn't taken place, and they had decided He was just of like substance, the rest of Christian history would have been characterised by Unitarianism. Thank God that that never happened.

After that ruling concerning the deity of Christ, the teaching of Arianism stayed in the church, many were still espousing it. A godly man called Athanasius, who championed the fight for Christ's name just like Antipas, would not permit fellowship around the Lord's Table to anyone who was of the Arian persuasion. He was so strict in this regard that the emperor, Theodosius, commanded that Athanasius would admit these Arians to partake of the bread and the cup. Athanasius refused the emperor, and Theodosius reproved him sternly for what he saw as insubordination to his emperor, and Theodosius said these words: 'Do you not realise that all the world is against you?'. This was Athanasius' answer: 'Then I am against the world'. Do you think that's a coincidence? Of course it's not! Prophetically speaking this church at Pergamos were commended by the Lord for not denying the name and the faith of the Lord Jesus, the name that is high over all in hell, or earth, or sky; the name of the one who is God's Son and God the Son. It's no coincidence that during this church period this Arian controversy was raging, and with all the faults that there may have been in Pergamos - praise God, they held fast to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Christ still needs men and women like that, like Luther - who, when all the known religious world was against him, could say: 'Here I stand, I can do no other, my conscience is captive to the word of God'. I think we have lost that today. We need to defend Christ's name and Christ's faith. What a commendation they were given by the Lord Jesus, and yet this letter is not without criticism.

So come with me, fourthly, to the criticism of the Lord Jesus. Now you remember that the first church we considered was Ephesus, and there was one cause for censure that the Lord Jesus brought to them: 'You have left your first love'; but here to Pergamos He says, 'I have a

few things against you'. Now, incidentally, let me say that if you look at the screen you will remember that we are saying prophetically that in the history of the church - though the church seems, in an external sense, as the kingdom of God, to progress and even appears to expand just like the parable of the mustard seed that grows into the great tree - the true spiritual condition of the church declines, particularly in relation to purity and doctrine, that being the parable of the leaven.

The Lord Jesus says to Pergamos: 'You have those there' - and before we look at the doctrine of Balaam, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, just note this fact that the Lord is saying to this church, 'You have those there'. Now that means there were true Christians in this church, and there were false Christians. I think that's the case in every church, through each period of church history - by the way, that is the parable in Matthew 13 of the wheat and the tares. This church in Pergamos allowed these false teachers to fellowship with them, to stay there, and the Lord was telling them: 'If you don't discipline them and put them out, I'm going to come with my sword of judgement, and I'll do it' - that's the parable in Matthew 13 of the dragnet, when the Lord is going to separate those that are His from those who are false professors. It's interesting, isn't it?

'You have those', look at the verse, verse 14, 'who hold the doctrine of Balaam' - now what's that? We have to go into the Old Testament to find out what that is. Let me recap the story for you from the book of Numbers. The Moabite king called Balac was afraid that Israel would do to the Moabites what they did to the Amorites, so he came to one of the prophets of God by the name of Balaam, and he hired him. Incidentally the New Testament talks about 'the way of Balaam', Peter talks about it, and it's simply covetousness. Just as Balaam served the Lord for filthy lucre, the way of Balaam is to be covetous in the work of God. That's not what we have here, it's the doctrine of Balaam, and Balac hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel. Incidentally, Jude verse 11 talks about the error of Balaam, which was supposing that you could get God, as Balaam thought, to be forced to curse the children of Israel - that's the error of Balaam, that's not what we have here, we have the doctrine of Balaam. What is the doctrine of Balaam then? It's simply this, now come with me: Balaam couldn't get God to curse Israel, so he decided he would give King Balac a plan to corrupt Israel. Now stay with me, we read in Numbers 25 that at the place called Shittim Israel's consecration and separation unto God was completely obliterated when the Moabite women committed fornication with the Israelite men, and they ate flesh offered to idols - that's what we have here in verse 14.

'The doctrine of Balaam', look at it, 'who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock', a trap, 'before the children of Israel', look, 'to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication'. The devil couldn't use Balaam to curse God's people, so he used him to coerce God's people! He couldn't corrupt them, so he courted them into compromise and powerlessness through these Moabite women. As a result they became powerless, now here is a lesson for all of us as children of God and as churches of God, that if the devil can't get at us as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, he'll come as a serpent with subtlety and beguiling. Here we have both in Numbers and in this church in Pergamos what is effectively the breaking down of their holy separation unto God and consecration to His service. We have an encouraging of union with the world.

Now let's come back to Pergamos for a moment. You know, it wasn't easy living in Pergamos, you hadn't much of a social life if you were a Christian. The reason being: there was so much paganism and idolatry, that the meat that was being offered to idols that would be ate by the priest was in such surplus that it had to go to the markets to be sold cheap. So in all

likelihood, if you went to someone else's house, or a public festival of some kind, you would be eating meat offered to an idol. The Bible taught that that should not happen. The Christian should not eat meat offered to an idol - and that might even involve fornication. Now it could in a literal sense, because in the temples where this meat was offered there were vestal virgins, and fornication with them was seen in those religions to be an act of worship, and there may have been professing Christians that got involved in that. Whether that was the case or not, one thing is for sure: there was spiritual fornication going on. Because many of these believers, perhaps, were eating meat offered to idols, they were displaying spiritual infidelity toward God, they were betraying God!

Maybe you think that's a bit strong, just over eating a piece of meat. The fact of the matter is, in James 4 and verse 4 we read: 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God'. You see, this was a problem. Paul in the Corinthians letter says that he wanted to offer the Corinthian church as a chaste virgin, betrothed and engaged to the Lord Jesus Christ, and if he was going to do that they had to be pure. Now in the book of Revelation, later on we encounter a religious system that is described as a defiled harlot - but there's also the pure spotless bride of Christ, that's what we're meant to be! In Acts chapter 15 verse 29 it is recorded that at the Council of Jerusalem the Apostles and the church there ruled that, among several other things, believers were not to eat meat offered to idols, and were not to commit fornication - but teachers were coming into the church at Pergamos and saying: 'Ah, you don't need to worry about that, that's old hat now. It doesn't do any harm! You don't need to be exclusive in your separation from the world'. Do you know what they were doing? They were challenging the teaching of the Apostles - that's what we're having today in the church of Jesus Christ. People are challenging the principles of New Testament apostolic doctrine, they're watering it down in whatever way you like: critical ways, cultural ways, ways that reflect our modernity today, or our pluralism.

Looking at this from a prophetic approach, we see that this became a problem in the fourth and fifth century - because Constantine professed conversion, he made the whole empire Christian, supposedly. All of a sudden it was popular to be a Christian, all you had to do was be baptised and then you were given a white robe and a few pounds - that was any incentive to someone to get 'saved'. What was happening was that the church was in the world and the world was in the church, and universally this has always been a problem! Whether it is union with the world socially, or union with the world sexually that we have here, worldliness has always been a scourge in the assemblies of Jesus Christ! Socially, let me say, we must beware of any philosophy that says that we must be like the world in order to reach the world - did you hear that? I don't believe we should put unbiblical barriers in the way of people getting saved - no, no. I think there's more that we could be doing, even than we're doing here in the Iron Hall, to see people saved - but don't you swallow this lie of the devil that we have to get like everybody in the world and appease their appetites and attitudes to get them saved!

We need to be socially aware, and we also need to be sexually aware. The doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock, an entrapment, before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. This entrapment used seductive women. Now I'm going to be near the knuckle just now. There shouldn't be any seductive women in the church of Jesus Christ. Whether it is in a literal sense or a mental sense, no man should be seduced because of what you wear, sister. But in a literal sense: we need to be aware that seduction, sexually, is still the honey trap of the devil. I believe personally that the church of Jesus Christ is suffering from a secret epidemic that we're all in denial about.

Let me give you a few statistics. There was a survey done very recently in the United States that found that 5 out of 10 Christian men in America are addicted to pornography, 5 out of 10 - 2 out of 10 women were too. Does that surprise you? I know some of you folk, dear help you, you can't even turn a computer on! You don't realise what's going on out there in the world, but I'm telling you what's going on: 50 percent of men in America who regularly attend a church said they were addicted to pornography - 50 percent, 20 percent of women said the same. There was a recent University survey done in universities, I believe, in the United Kingdom that found that only the cream of Roman Catholic students and only the cream of evangelical students went into marriage with virginity intact. That just tells us that Christians in the 21st century church are bogged in sexual sin - and there are probably several men, young, middle aged, and older, who have a problem with this. All men generally do, and all men have to come to a crisis experience in their life where they put it to death! And that then has to go on daily after that.

The teaching of Balaam. Life was hard in Pergamos, I know life is hard today - you look everywhere, and it's before you, and the temptation is there - but the message is from the risen Christ: 'It is possible to overcome! Not be overcome!'. Listen to what John said in 1 John 2:14: 'I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one'. We have all faced problems similar to this, but it is possible to overcome. People are saying today: 'It doesn't matter if you go out with a non-Christian, or even marry them for that matter', and the unequal yoke doesn't seem to count any more - whether it's in marriage, or incidentally in business - 'Ah, that's old hat now, unequal yoke in business? Who talks about that any more?'. It's an unequal yoke, and 2 Corinthians 6 and verses 14-18, which is often quoted regarding churches, has got nothing to do with leaving one church to go to another, it's got everything to do with the world: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty'.

Whatever happened to holy separation from the world? Whatever happened to holiness? Then we wonder in the next thought why we are blunt instruments for the Lord, why we're not seeing things done for Christ in our day and generation. Though outwardly we might have all the doctrine right concerning the deity and humanity and all the rest of our Lord Jesus Christ, but there could be the teaching of Balaam among us, and it's all secret. The Lord Jesus criticised them also for the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes - I'm not going to spend as much time on this, save to say that the Ephesians, you remember, opposed this doctrine. Isn't it interesting that what the Ephesians opposed, now Pergamos is embracing? That, first of all, shouldn't be a reason to judge doctrine or practice by what another assembly is doing. We are to judge things by the two-edged sword of the word of God. We are seeing Christendom at large embracing things that God hates, and God has said is an abomination in His sight. We sit and watch the news, or read the paper, and we are amazed week after week at what we see going on in the name of Christianity! Why should we be surprised? Here we have it: it will happen until the Lord comes. Now, that knowledge makes a lot of people indifferent, but it shouldn't. It should make us determined to keep our doctrine, our teaching, and our lives pure in the sight of God.

The Nicolaitanes may have been involved in immorality, but it seems that the primary aspect to this doctrine was the starting to divide God's people into two classes: clergy and laity. Prophetically speaking this happened during these centuries, and eventually evolved to the point where these men who were separating themselves as priests were pronouncing absolution over the people of God, forgiveness of sins, taking confessions, sending people to heaven, damning people to hell! Christ says: 'I hate it!'. He hates immorality, He hates heresy, and a good judgement of where you are spiritually before the Lord Jesus tonight is: do you hate what He hates, or do you love what the world loves? You see, people talk about 'grey areas' and confusing questions, but we are moving so far away from this simple Christian holiness that we find in the New Testament: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for if you love the world the love of the Father isn't in you'.

Then we have a corrective command in verse 16: 'Repent'. Now the only way these folk could repent was to put these people out. Phew! How often does that happen? This is New Testament discipline that the Lord Jesus prescribed in Matthew 18. Now there are principles that have to be operated, and they have to be operated correctly, but the only way these believers could repent was to put these false teachers out. This was the Lord's ultimatum: 'If you don't put them out, I'll come and fight against them myself!'. You remember a couple of weeks ago we were thinking about how the Lord ministers in the churches, and sometimes maybe when an oversight doesn't do what they ought to do, sometimes the Lord can come in and do it - whether it's taking a person home to glory, or maybe even sending them to hell, who knows? Taking them off somewhere else - but the Lord is moving about in His church. We are seeing Him here in a way, perhaps, we're not used to seeing Him. He is writing these letters, as He inspires them through John, but we're seeing Christ hating and fighting. He says: 'Repent, change your mind about your sin, change your mind about your false doctrine, and change your mind about Me. You as a church, Pergamos, should not tolerate evil!'

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul says: 'Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened'. What Paul is really saying is that we need to use the two-edged sword to rightly divide doctrine, to sharpen our lives, and ultimately to judge ourselves by the word of God - judge everything, weigh everything by the balance of the Bible. If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged! The Lord says to Pergamos: 'Sort it out, or I'll come and sort it out myself'. It's serious, isn't it? Then in verse 17 we have the commitment to the overcomer. He will be given hidden manna and white stone. Now you remember that when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, God provided this bread from heaven - 'manna' means 'What is it?'. It was to replace the onions and the garlic of Egypt, and it was a type of Christ, wasn't it, being fed in the wilderness? It is being given to the overcomer here, and it might speak of heavenly food - remember that these believers were being told not to eat of the meat sacrificed to the idols, so they would have to be fed by something. Remember the Lord Jesus had the disciples coming to Him, and saying: 'Take something to eat, Master', and He said, 'I have food that you do not know of'. Be faithful to Christ and He will feed your soul - but this is hidden manna. The manna in the wilderness wasn't hidden, it was out on the ground. Now if manna is a type of the Lord Jesus, as it is in incarnation, coming as the bread of God from heaven, could the hidden manna be the fact that there is a Man in the glory now, a glorified Man in Christ? He is able to supply all that we need in the church and as individual saints. It might also mean the future glory that we will share with Him. Age upon age and eon upon eon will reveal new glories of Christ to those who have overcome, and enjoy His splendour in heaven.

Not only are they given hidden manna, but a white stone. That has been explained away in

many comparisons. In this ancient age the white stone was often a token of acquittal in a legal case, to say that you were not guilty; or it was a symbol of victory in an athletic contest, to let you into the celebrations afterwards. It could also be an expression of welcome to a guest from a host - but whatever it is, it seems to be a reward to the overcomer, expressing individual approval of them by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. They are even given a new name upon it! Acceptance with God, and a title to glory!

Now here's my question, and I'm finished tonight: Pergamos was the compromising church. The Lord Jesus didn't say: 'Get out of that church and go to some other place', did He? He said: 'Overcome where you are'. Would you have overcome? Would you? Are you overcoming now? Or are you wedded to the world? I was speaking to our young people on Saturday night on the subject of alcohol. We used this illustration to end, and I want to use it tonight. It is very very simple, but profound: the moon was eclipsed one night, and it said to the sun, 'Why do you not shine on me the way you used to?'. The sun said, 'I'm shining on you the way I always do, but the world has come between us'. The world has come between us. May God bless His word to all our hearts tonight.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 7

"Thyatira, The Corrupt Church"

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Now let's turn to the text of Scripture, Revelation chapter 2 and beginning to read at verse 18. This is the longest letter of the seven, to the church at Thyatira, which we have entitled this evening as: 'The Corrupt Church'.

Verse 18 of Revelation 2: "And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches".

Now we have noted in previous weeks that, with minor exceptions, the pattern of each of these seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor are the same. Each of them begins with a revelation of a characteristic, or characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He had been revealed in the initial vision in chapter 1 of the book. The church at Thyatira receive a vision that is no exception to that rule. For, as you note in verse 18, the Lord Jesus is revealed as 'The Son of God, who has his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass'. If you were to turn to chapter 1, you would see that that description is derived from verse 14, the end of the verse, and the beginning of verse 15. It is very fitting for this particular church, as we shall see. If you cast your eye down to verse 23, you see that the Lord Jesus, with these flaming eyes of fire, is searching the reins - the kidneys, literally - the inward parts and the hearts of the people in the church: 'And I will give unto every one of you according to your works'. He is, in chapter 1, the Judge-Priest moving in the midst of the churches.

So that is how He is revealed, with the characteristic of these all-seeing eyes, and these judging feet of brass. Then secondly we have the commendation - now the only church that doesn't receive one is the seventh, that is Laodicea. In verse 19 the Lord commends them: 'I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last', the last works that you're doing, that is, 'is to be more than the first'. It's amazing, as we shall see in our study tonight, how the Lord Jesus Christ commends this church. We saw in our previous week that this follows the same pattern as Jehovah through the prophets and the Old Testament writers in the book of 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, because

there Jehovah commended even evil kings before He condemned them. It's an interesting thing when we see that the Lord Jesus, if He can find anything to commend us for, will do that first, before He condemns us. I wonder do we follow Him in that example?

Now from this commendation in verse 19 you would be forgiven for thinking that all was well in Thyatira - but, as we shall see very graphically, this church was corrupt in that it was tolerating grievous sin and error in its midst. We shall learn, I hope, a very valuable lesson tonight, and that is simply: much activity can often camouflage great iniquity. Activity in a local church can be hiding, covering up deep and grievous sin.

So we have the characteristics of the Lord Jesus, His commendation, then thirdly - according to the pattern of these letters - we have a criticism. The only two churches not to receive a critique from the Lord are Smyrna and Philadelphia, but Thyatira does. In verse 20 we see it: 'I have a few things against thee', and we shall look into those things in detail in a few moments.

Now in the other letters the fourth feature is often a corrective command, but here it is a bit stronger than a corrective command: Thyatira receives condemnation. It seems that for many in this church there was no return. In verses 21 to 23 we find that condemnation. He gave this church, and this woman in it, space to repent of her fornication, but she repented not. In verses 22 and 23 we find the outcome of that. Then the fifth feature is a commitment which we have in each of these letters. In verses 24 to 29, the end of the chapter, to the overcomers, to those faithful remnant, small they may have been, who were standing according to truth both in their profession and in their lives.

Now you will remember from chapter 1 and verse 19, from the divinely given inspired outline of this book of the Revelation, that what we're dealing with here in chapters 2 and 3 is not primarily what John has already seen in his vision, not what is yet to be from chapter 4 on - which is future, prophetically speaking - but the things that are: these seven churches that actually existed in the province of Asia Minor. There are seven of them, even though there were many more than seven churches in Asia Minor, seven being the number of completion and perfection. What we have here is a divine depiction concerning the church age - if you like, a complete picture of the moral and spiritual history of the church of Jesus Christ. So each of these seven churches have been hand-picked by the Lord Jesus because they are representative of prevailing circumstances that will be in the church of Jesus Christ throughout our history.

Now we noted, and I think it's worthy of note again, that these churches can be understood in three ways. First of all, literally: these were seven literal churches in these seven literal geographical cities. Secondly, these churches are also understood universally, in that they illustrate the good and the bad in churches everywhere in every age. Seven similarities can be found in the seven mystery kingdom parables in Matthew 13, which also show us characteristics that will be in the kingdom of God displayed in the external church during the church age - very similar characteristics to what we're seeing in these seven churches of Asia Minor. So there is that universal approach, but then thirdly there is the prophetic understanding of these seven churches.

Let me remind you of how we have witnessed this. First of all in the church at Ephesus, which of course was the loveless church, we saw that this represented the post-apostolic Church, the church as it was coming up to the end of the first century and entering the second, the church that was generally speaking sound in doctrine but was starting to depart in small

ways, but had lost the things that they had loved in the beginning. They ceased doing the work they had done at first. Then we saw secondly the church at Smyrna, the persecuted church, and that represented prophetically the church from the first to the fourth century that underwent persecutions from various emperors. The third church we looked at was Pergamos, which was the compromising church, and you remember 'Pergamos' means 'married', and this was a church historically speaking that had lost its fidelity to Jesus Christ, and had become allied with the world. This is the church of the fourth and the fifth century. Through Constantine's spurious conversion, Christianity became the state religion - it was married to the state, and in AD 313 that took place and many adverse spiritual effects came with it.

Now Thyatira that we're looking at tonight is the corrupt church, and the word 'Thyatira' literally means 'a continual sacrifice'. So prophetic scholars have seen, I believe correctly, that in the prophetic approach to this church we can see the rise of what we know today as Roman Catholicism, around the sixth and seventh century right through to the Reformation around the 16th century. Now you will note, as I have already pointed out to you, that this church was commended for her devotion and her zeal, and it has to be said that - like many false cults and religions - Catholicism has indeed shown much devotion to their cause and zeal in the execution of it. There were many godly saints during the Middle Ages who faithfully followed the Lord and sought to serve in a continual sacrifice of service. Even those in error could teach us a thing or two regarding how they are serving their particular cause. Yet Roman Catholicism can be seen in Thyatira in the sense of a continual sacrifice through the abomination of the mass. Of course, this was an invention historically of the Roman Catholic Church, the teaching that in the sacrament of the mass, through the broken bread and the poured out wine, there is a perpetual sacrifice over and over again of the Lord Jesus Christ in His death. That is why a priest is necessary - and so they believe that, through this continual sacrifice, we in some way can merit some grace.

So you can see how you Thyatira, the name 'continuous sacrifice', is very apt if we are to liken this church historically and prophetically to the church of Rome. Jezebel could also picture the system, the whole Romish system that has called herself 'the mother and mistress of all churches'. Eventually we will see in the book of Revelation, near the end, about chapters 17 and 18, that eventually this church of Rome will embrace many other false religions and will be found in what is called there 'the great whore of Babylon' that God will judge. Now that might seem very harsh language to some of you, but it's in this book of Revelation, Jesus Christ has revealed it to us. As Jezebel was in Thyatira, Rome has accommodated many elements of paganism, just as this prophetess in Thyatira did. She was encouraging the believers there, as we shall see, to commit fornication and to eat meat offered to idols. When Constantine made Christianity the religion of the state, many pagans brought their heathen baggage along with them. Catholicism down through the years has been notorious for marrying pagan rituals and principles to what they have called Christianity.

Let me give you two examples of that. Idolatry: the second commandment says, 'You shall not bow down to an idol'. The church of Rome has enshrined idol worship as a part of their devotion, they have even omitted the second commandment in the Ten Commandments. How do they get ten then? They split number 10, coveting, into two. A second way they have adopted pagan practice is the worship of Mary. The worship of Mary as the mother of God, setting her up as a co-redemptress, and indeed a female deity almost, to be worshipped and revered. That type of practice can be seen down through history in many pagan religions, right back to Babylon itself. Incidentally, the Old Testament character of Jezebel that we will touch on a little bit later, she was guilty of combining the worship of Jehovah with the worship of the god Baal. God condemned her for it, and Ahab her husband and the whole nation for

going after her ways, because God Jehovah will not share His glory with another. He will not be worshipped as a graven image.

Now we shall see that Thyatira and Jezebel herself were given a chance to repent, and the Roman Catholic Church during the 16th century, at the time of the Reformation through godly men like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, Wycliffe - you know them as well as I do - they were given an opportunity to rediscover the truths of Holy Scripture: that salvation is through grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone; and the Bible alone, sola scriptura, should be our only rule of faith. Largely speaking they did not heed that clarion call, and that is why we are left with an apostate system in Roman Catholicism which is far removed from the simplicity of what we find biblical Christianity is within the scriptures.

A Roman Catholic once asked a bright little Christian schoolgirl: 'Where was your church before the days of Henry VIII?'. Catholicism would say that Protestant evangelical Christianity didn't exist before Henry VIII. The little girl was wiser than he thought: 'Why sir', she said, 'It was where yours never was - in the Bible'. That's not to be offensive, but it is to be real. We must judge everything by the word of God, and we see from this church at Thyatira that the Lord Jesus was going to judge it, and the Lord Jesus has judged and will judge its prophetic counterpart, the Roman Catholic system. Indeed, the Lord will judge her children, that's what the passage says, those who choose to come under her influence in ecumenism. The message is, and here I leave this prophetic approach: we as the church of Jesus Christ need to get back to the Bible.

I want to labour not the prophetic viewpoint, but the literal viewpoint, as in previous weeks, and the personal: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church'. Now let's look first of all, as we have done each week, first to the city in which this church is found, the city of Thyatira. It, as you can see from this map, is about 40 miles southeast of Pergamos. It is the modern day Turkish city of Akhisar, and it was relatively speaking an insignificant city to have the longest letter of these seven written to it. Incidentally, if I could just revisit the prophetic approach, that's an indicator to us that these messages reach far beyond the immediate circumstances of each of these churches. This was an unimportant city, and yet such a long letter is written to it.

It is first mentioned as a city in the Bible in connection with Paul's first conversion on the continent of Europe. When Paul was in Philippi preaching the gospel, the Bible says that a businesswoman from Thyatira, a seller of purple named Lydia, was born again by the Holy Spirit. The Lord opened her heart. She was a seller of purple, Thyatira her home town was famous for its trade in purple dye, and indeed the textile industry in general was well known. As you have already heard, there were more trade guilds in Thyatira than any other Asian city, and a trade guild is simply the equivalent of a trade union today. Now that is very important, and I want you to remember that because it is significant in our understanding of the predicament that the Christians in Thyatira faced. Now we do not know from the Scriptures how this church at Thyatira began, and it may well have begun by the witness of Lydia who was from Thyatira. It is possible that she went home to her town and shared her faith, and gossiped the gospel. Now if that were the case, that is very ironic, isn't it? This church may have begun through a godly woman, and it eventually is destroyed by an ungodly Jezebel.

That is the city of Thyatira, let us move on to the characteristics of the Lord as He is revealed in this vision to the church at Thyatira. Verse 18: 'These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass'. The only time the Lord

Jesus is described as the Son of God in the book of Revelation is here to the church at Thyatira, that must be significant. Why only here? Well, can I remind you of the words of Hebrews chapter 1: 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son'. The means by which God has communicated His full and complete revelation of Himself is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Now why is that significant? Well, Jezebel claimed to be a prophetess. This woman in Thyatira was claiming to have received revelations from God, and was teaching under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So Christ comes to the church of Thyatira and reveals Himself as the supreme source of all divine revelation, the Son of God by whom God has revealed Himself to this age.

His eyes are seen to be as flames of fire, piercing vision into the hearts of men, and into the bowels of this church. He sees all, He sees all as it is, the all-seeing, omniscient eyes of the Son of God. Now I don't know how you view things in your life, in the life of your church. Maybe you are satisfied with your view of your life, and your view of your church - I wonder how the Lord Jesus Christ views it all, how He sees your life and mine, how He views your church and mine? You see, these fiery eyes see through sham, hypocrisy, pretence, camouflage, playacting! How does He see you?

Then He is described as the Son of God having eyes of fire and feet of brass, and we saw in previous weeks that that speaks of judgement, brass refined in the fire. These feet are for walking, so He is walking in judgement in the church at Thyatira. So let's put it all together as He is revealed in His characteristics: this Son of God knows everything, this Son of God who knows everything sees with these eyes of flame and fire into the depths of truth, and this One is moving to judge the church at Thyatira. It's an awful picture, isn't it? It is the awfulness of Christ in the midst of the churches. Now listen: I don't think we really have a grasp of this. The Lord Jesus Christ is now in the midst of His church. This is how He moves in the midst of corruptness, as the Son of God who knows all things, with eyes of fire that see all things, with feet of bronze that judge all things. He came to Ephesus in this judging way, and said: 'I will remove your lampstand unless you repent!'. He came to Pergamos with a sword out of His mouth, and He says: 'Unless you deal with the false teachers teaching the teaching of Balaam, and the teaching of the Nicolaitanes, I will come and fight against them with the sword of my mouth'. This is the awfulness of Christ in the midst of the church.

Here we find the Lord Jesus Christ is coming, and He says in verses 22 and 23 that, according to how people have followed the teaching of this Jezebel, He will cast her into a bed, 'and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death'. Is this how we view the Lord Jesus? Maybe we need to refocus on how the Lord Jesus is operating within the church of Jesus Christ in our age, particularly among churches that are corrupt.

Those are the characteristics as He is revealed to Thyatira. Now come with me to verse 19 where we have the commendation: 'I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first'. Now Thyatira had much evil in it, and we shall see that in great detail in a few moments, but Christ looks first of all at what is to be commended! Now what would you think of a church that was doing the type of things that Thyatira was doing? A woman was teaching, taking a primary role, but she was teaching the Christians to commit fornication and to eat meat offered to idols. If I were to ask you now, after the meeting tonight: what do you think of a church like that? You would say, 'It's not a New Testament Church at all'. Well, can I ask you: did the Lord Jesus Christ get it wrong? For as He addresses this church here before us in verse 18, He addresses it to the

church in Thyatira - the word is 'assembly' - of God's people. Now I grant that, as with the parables, the mystery parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13, there is a mixture of wheat and tare. Profession is not the standard by which Christ judges His church, but possession. I'm sure that many of these people were not genuinely converted - and yet the Lord Jesus addresses it as an assembly.

There's a lesson I think I taught you a couple of weeks ago, and it's simply this: none of us have a right to judge anyone or any church, none of us, because we are not omniscient, we don't know everything. Now, of course we must judge righteous judgement according to the word of God, but we have no reason nor right to condemn anyone - unless they have completely rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have no right to say that they're not an assembly; that's not given to us, that's given to Christ. The Lord didn't get it wrong, and His strongest commendation of all the seven churches, believe it or not, is given to this church. Now, I have got a bit of work in trying to work that out, and I think you will have too! But those are the facts, and we are the ones have to do the work.

He commends them for their work, they were a busy church - boy do we need that in these days! We need to be busy for the Master, work because the night is coming. There were no bystanders, there were no uncommitted persons, there were no hangers-on, there were no people sitting on their hands, resting on their lees, everyone was in it and at it - hard working! The Lord commends them for their love, their charity. They loved! Now we have to take this at face value, that this love was genuine, otherwise they wouldn't have been commended for it. We must therefore assume that they loved God, they loved Christ, they loved fellow believers, they were loving the lost, they were loving the truth of God in some capacity at least - and when you went into this meeting at Thyatira you would have felt that love, the affection would have been almost tangible. It was a nice place to be. Now we need that, we could learn a thing or two from Thyatira. The church should be a welcoming place where we love one another and are known by the world that we love one another.

They are commended also for their service and their faithfulness in service. That word 'faith' in the Authorised really is 'faithfulness', it means endurance, their stickability. We need this, in service for Christ we're not to be of a flash-in-the-pan mentality, that we start a work this day and then give it up the next because we haven't got what it takes to follow through. We are called to be faithful and endure, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, great hardship. We need that in these days. Now look at the end of verse 19, they are commended because their last works were greater than their first - now what does that mean? They are progressing, they are an advancing church, they are doing more now for Christ than they ever had - and we need that today because the church, in the West at least, largely speaking, is in decline.

So they have beaten us already on all those scores. They are, as far as we have gone in this passage, outstanding as a church. Now recall the church at Ephesus as the Lord writes to it, they have left their first love, they have ceased to do their first works - that can't be said at Thyatira! They are doing more than they have ever done, and they're still loving one another and God - that's something! Yet even though, through all their activity and all their charity, Thyatira appears to have the picture of ecclesiastical health, there are putrefying sores deep in the body of this assembly. There is a cancer that is eating this church's life from the inside out. In verse 20 at the beginning the Lord says: 'I have a few things against thee', and these x-ray eyes of Christ are seeing things that you or I could never see or uncover - what a lesson! What is the lesson? I believe it is this: few people realise how things really are in the churches. Now we might think, and even pastors and elders might think that they have got it sussed, and have weighed up circumstances very well; but let's face it: all of us can only see

things on the surface. A church might seem to have an effective ministry, it might even be growing numerically, it might be filled with activity and charity, and it might be going from strength to strength - but it might be like Thyatira, corrupt to the core.

Can you just imagine, let's not forget - because we're in biblical exposition each Monday night, we could forget that these are letters. As this letter, if they had letter boxes, fell through the letterbox and onto the mat, so to speak, of the church in Thyatira; and it was opened by one of the overseers and taken - what do you think the shock would have been when it was read on the Lord's day? I tell you, if it had come to some of our churches, it would never have got a hearing! I don't think it would have been read! It was so far removed from what people thought was the reality, but it was inspired by the all-seeing Christ, and it was telling them that their great activity and charity was all a cover-up for a great deal of sin! Do you know that? That activity can cover a multitude of sins? You know, I have a conviction of my own, and I don't know whether you'll share it with me, but I think we're all too busy today - even too busy in the work of the Lord. Now I know some of you might think that's not possible, but sometimes our overactivity is hiding the fact that most of us are spiritually anaemic and biblically illiterate because we're not spending any time at the Master's feet. That great old hymn that we don't sing much these days:

'Take time to be holy,
Speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always,
And feed on His word'.

Listen to the second verse:

'Take time to be holy,
The world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret,
With Jesus alone'.

The third verse:

'Take time to be holy,
Let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him,
Whatever betide'.

The last verse:

'Take time to be holy,
Be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive
Beneath His control'.

Activity can be a great camouflage for the way your spiritual life really is. The Lord Jesus didn't judge this church on their activity. Now come with me, for we must move on from the commendation to the criticism, for the greater amount is given to this. Verse 20 - now though love is vital, 1 Corinthians 13 teaches us that clearly, the Lord is saying that no amount of love, no amount of sacrificial work can compensate for the tolerance of evil. In verse 20 the Lord says: 'I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest', you tolerate, 'that

woman Jezebel'. Now you remember that Ephesus was criticised by the Lord because she was weak in love, but strong in judging false teachers; whereas Thyatira is growing in love, but is too tolerant in judging false doctrine and immorality in her midst. Now there's a lesson for us all: both extremes are wrong, both extremes are wrong! We need a biblical balance: unloving orthodoxy, you know these cold, conservative, unkind, fundamental Christians, and there's not a look of love on their face, or a word of love on their tongue. We want to avoid that extreme, that's probably the extreme we are in danger of here. Then there's the opposite extreme to uncaring, unloving orthodoxy, and that is liberality of love, loving compromise that is so loving that it embraces everything, even error.

Listen to the balance of the Bible, it is found in Ephesians 4:15, we are to speak the truth in love. Wonderful, isn't it? Speak the truth in love. This church tolerated this woman Jezebel - and I don't believe her name literally was Jezebel, who would give that name to a child? It meant the same in those days as it does in ours, for this was a character from the Old Testament. The name, I believe, is signifying the character of this woman who was literally in this church. Her claim is seen in this verse, she says she is a prophetess - the Lord doesn't give her that title, she has given it self-appointed to herself. Now let me say the New Testament Church refers to prophetesses, but never are they teaching publicly in the local church. Yet this woman Jezebel, claiming to herself the prophetic gift, is actually teaching, functioning in the New Testament assembly, teaching the word of God. The result is given here: it's seduction, the Lord says 'She has seduced my servants'. Now seduction simply is being taken from something that is good to something that is evil, from something that is right to something that is wrong, from something that is true to something that is erroneous. This self appointed prophetess teaching in the assembly was doing this.

Now why was she given the name 'Jezebel'? Well, Jezebel in the Old Testament, as I've said, was a character who was a Zidonian princess that married Ahab, the king of Israel, the Northern ten tribes. It was through Ahab's wife, Jezebel, that idolatry was introduced to the Northern Kingdom. It was through Jezebel that the prophets of Jehovah were slain. Jezebel inhabited 850 prophets of Baal in her own home. She caused the murder of Naboth to get his vineyard. The Bible says she stirred Ahab to be one of the most wicked kings of all Israelite history. Listen to 1 Kings 16: 'Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him'; 1 Kings 21, 'There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up'. Elijah prophesied concerning Jezebel that she would die in the portion of the field of Jezreel, and dogs would eat her flesh.

Why was this woman called Jezebel? For several reasons: one certainly is that it was Ahab's weak leadership as a man king that allowed the evil woman Jezebel to adulterate the nation. The weak leadership in the church at Thyatira among the male overseers was permitting this woman to do what apostolic teaching had forbidden her to do - what was that? One: to teach as a woman. Now I know that I'll get no awards from the politically correct movement for saying this tonight, but I'm standing on the Bible, not on what is popular. The Bible clearly teaches in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 12 that women are not to teach, in a public capacity, the whole assembly. Now let me clarify that: women missionaries are evangelising, women Sunday School teachers are not met in the assembly when they're doing it - an assembly is not a building. We've got to get away from this, this is not the house of God, you're the house of God! God's Spirit dwells in you, so when women are teaching women, that is not the assembly meeting. I'm sorry if that offends you, but that's the Bible. But when God's people are all met together as the assembly of God's people, that is forbidden, that women should teach.

So there was a transgression there, but secondly it was not only the fact she was teaching, but she was claiming in her teaching that she was inspired as a prophetess - and that was a big problem, why? Because Jude verse 3 tells us that the faith was once and for all delivered to the saints, that means that every revelation that we need has been given to us in the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, and we have the apostles' doctrine in our hands in the New Testament Scriptures. Yet here in Thyatira, only 30 years after the Apostles, this woman was claiming that her revelations superseded the apostolic authority of the word of God - that was the problem. Now, what relevance has that today? It has an awful lot of relevance, because Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, wrote a book called 'Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures', and she said that she had the key to understanding the Bible as it never had been understood before, and it was in her book. She was a liar and a false prophetess, and she was inspired by the devil. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed to receive tablets of gold that nobody could find, that were strangely taken back to heaven and nobody had seen, and he interpreted and translated it and it became the Book of Mormon, which incidentally has also a subtitle as 'Another Revelation of Jesus Christ' - there isn't another one! He was an impostor, and a liar, and a false prophet - just like this Jezebel!

Now how did she get away with it? Well, she got away with it the same way as Joseph Smith got away with it, Mary Baker Eddy, and false prophets and prophetesses today. She probably was beautiful, she most likely was very intelligent and articulate, she had a great personality as a gifted speaker I'm sure - and the people were gullible and swallowed it all. Now, you might think that is very condescending to many followers in cults and religions today, but that's the long and short of it. You hear people saying: 'Oh, but they're so kind, they're so charismatic, they're so attractive, they're so good, they're so gifted - they couldn't be wrong!' - don't be so gullible! God's word says that the angels of Satan, his emissaries and apostles, will come as angels of light. I remember studying in school at history that all the women in Germany loved Adolf Hitler - now that's a generalisation, I know, but he was a very charming man you know, very charming but very evil. Don't be gullible.

Isaiah chapter 8 verse 20 says: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them'. This woman seduced these believers, what to do? To fornicate, to eat things sacrificed to idols, they were ignoring the apostolic decree in Acts chapter 15 not to do those two things, among other things. They were ignoring 1 Corinthians 6 to flee fornication, they were ignoring 1 Corinthians 10 to flee idolatry, and this woman was teaching that these Scriptures don't apply any more the way they used to. She is saying to these believers: 'You're too rigid! The Bible doesn't need to be taken so literally now'. Now listen to me tonight: you beware of anyone who tells you that the New Testament apostolic doctrine doesn't apply today!

That's how she seduced them - let me give you the prime example, I believe, of how she did it. These trade guilds, trade unions, and you had to be in them to make a living, to be in a job, to have a business - and now and again, from time to time you'd be invited to a social function, and usually that social function would be in the temple of a pagan deity. There would be a big slap up meal, the meat you would be eating at the table would have been offered to the idol, and then around were the vestal virgins - and once the drink got in, the wit went out, and before you knew it that gathering could become an orgy of immorality that would be interpreted as great worship to that pagan deity. These Christians were faced with commercial suicide: they either went to these social gatherings, or they lost their livelihood and became destitute. Builders, owners in the textile business, tradesmen - to refuse the social circuit was the end of their career!

Now, Jezebel comes in with the answer: 'You don't need to be so tight! You're so rigid and legalistic - be sensible! You have a wife, don't you? You have a couple of wee children, you have your family to think about. We're entering the second century now, we've moved on from all that stuff! Anyway, how do you expect to win these people for Christ if you're going to be all standoffish with that attitude?'. In a brilliant way she convinced many of these believers to separate in their mind the spiritual and the secular. Now you grasp that tonight: she convinced them to have one set of principles for church, and one set of principles for work; one for the assembly, one for the office. You can understand how that was successful! How people embraced it! But do you understand how dangerous it is? I'll tell you why: because it wasn't long until this error developed into what we know as Gnosticism, which was a dualism. Now let me not confuse you: a dualism was the separating of the spiritual and material, and these false teachers were saying that everything that is material is wicked, so go away and live immorally because your body is going to be destroyed, and the only good thing is the spirit - but even if you live an immoral life in the body, it cannot affect the good that is in your spirit.

That was beginning to be taught in the church, propagated: commit immorality of any kind, it will not affect your spirit nor your standing before God - that's what these Christian teachers were saying. Now, see the graciousness of our Lord in verse 21, He gave them space to repent - which she didn't. I wonder is the Lord speaking to someone in our meeting tonight, and He's giving you time to repent and you haven't done it yet. This is not, by the way, something just for unsaved people, this is something for Christians and the church of Jesus Christ. They would not repent, and so there was a condemnation in verses 21-23, and you will note there three 'I wills' that the Lord speaks. In other words, He is saying: 'If you don't deal with this woman, I will, I will, I will!'. He says: 'I'll give her a sickbed, a bed of tribulation in place of the her bed of lust. I'll limit her movements and her teachings, and those who have committed adultery with her, both literally and metaphorically in spiritual error, they will be thrown into that bed as well - a bed of great tribulation for people endorsing this falsehood'. 'I'll kill her children, adherents to this falsehood, with death', it says - and that word is 'pestilence', 'Unless they forsake her and escape from her deeds. I'm going to do this', look at the verse, 'I'm going to do this so that all the churches will know that the Lord is watching, and the Lord rewards and judges according to deeds'.

I'll tell you, this is serious stuff: this second generation of Christians in the church at Thyatira had fallen into what is called here 'the depths of Satan', verse 24. They should have been in what 1 Corinthians 2 verse 10 calls 'the deep things of God revealed by the Spirit'. Let us bring that into a modern comparison today: is it possible that Christians know more about the world than they do about the word? Possible? Is it possible that believers practise their freedom in Christ by their indulgence in all sorts of immorality? Is it possible that they express their liberty in the Spirit by licence in sin, and they say 'Well, I'm spiritual enough'? They don't say it openly of course, but: 'I should be spiritual enough to handle a wee glass of wine beside my dinner, it'll not corrupt me'. I'll tell you, this is a big problem in the Christian church - and I know I'll get shot down for saying this, but I don't care - because many middle-class Christians that grew up in Christian homes where there was no drink, have never ever seen what drink can do. They think, 'We can handle it. I can go to the clubs and be a Christian - it's a witness, even though I can't talk because nobody can hear. I'll not get tainted, I can go and watch a film, and watch things that are tantamount to the immorality of Jezebel - but I can discern, you know, that that's not the way to live. I could listen to music that talks about all sorts of immorality, and it doesn't affect me'. The Lord Jesus says it does! Stay away!

Jezebel's teaching is: 'You can live like the world and not be affected. You can have their social life, you can have their sex life, and still be in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and around the Lord's Table'. Horatius Bonar said: 'I looked for the church and I found it in the world. I looked for the world and I found it in the church' - that was Thyatira, the corrupt church, is that the church today?

A commitment is given finally in verse 24 and following to the end, to the overcomers, the rest: 'As many as have not this doctrine'. Praise God there's a faithful remnant, there was a faithful remnant in the church of Rome down through the years, there were faithful people that were outside the church of Rome in mountains in Italy and various parts of Europe, and they weren't tainted by the false doctrine. God has a faithful remnant, even in corrupt churches. Do you know something? Sometimes He needs the faithful remnant to turn to, and so that is tantamount to saying to you: the first thing to do is not run, the first thing to do is stand for truth. A lot of you are good at getting up and walking out when things don't suit - that's not the way it's done. If you've got a case on the authority of this book, you've got cause to stand, cause to stand.

This faithful remnant were told: 'I'm not going to put any other burden on you', look at the verses, 'than to hold fast what you already have been told until Christ comes'. Now what had they already been told? The apostles' doctrine, Acts chapter 15, listen: 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well'. They needed to get back to the book - boy, that's what we need today. The easy way was Jezebel's way, it's the same today - the easy way is the popular way, the trendy way, the neo-evangelical way, but it's the wrong way for it wasn't Christ's way!

Here we have to the overcomer the Lord Jesus saying, verse 25: 'Hold fast till I come'. He's going to reward the church, the faithful ones. Part of that reward will be reigning with Him in the millennium, verses 26 and 27, quoted from Psalm 2. The Lord Himself will come, who is described here as the Morning Star. In chapter 22 it shows us that that is the Lord Jesus - do you know this? The morning star, literally, in our skies appears three hours before the sun rises. Now the Jewish nation are waiting for the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ their Messiah, to rise with healing in His wings - that's His coming in judgement to judge the Jewish enemies. But here we have the Morning Star rising three hours before the Sun rises in righteousness - this is the Lord Jesus Christ coming back for His people to reward them, and part of that reward will be reigning in the millennium. In verse 29 notice these words, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches', are coming after the promise to the overcomer, and up to now in the other letters it has come before. The point is that it's as if the Lord only expects these overcomers to listen, things have got so bad in this church, that it's only going to be them that will heed.

Now can I ask you tonight as we close: could you have overcome in Thyatira? Could you? Let me ask you again: if the Lord Jesus Christ were to come tonight, would you be found to be faithful and true? I'm not asking you are you saved - now that's important, nothing is more important - but if you're a Christian, are you ready? If the Morning Star should rise tonight before we reach our homes: are you ready, are things right? What I mean is: would you be happy for the Lord Jesus to come now, right now? Would things be right in your business dealings? Would things be filled in right on your tax forms? Would money you owe be paid? Would things be right in your marriage? Would things be right with your children or your parents? What about your dealings in private? If you judged the way you have been living the

last few months, the last few weeks or days, would you be happy if the Lord Jesus came?

I never cease to be astounded with the reply of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, when he was asked this question: if the Lord was to tell you you were going to die this time tomorrow night, what would you do? He said: 'I would do the same things I did today'. How many of us could say that? Or will it be: 'By and by, when I look on His face, I'll wish I had given Him more'.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 8

"Sardis, The Dead Church"

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Now let's turn together to Revelation chapter 3, as we read those verses from verse 1 to 6 concerning Sardis, which we have entitled 'The Dead Church'.

Verse 1: "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches".

With minor exceptions, we have noticed as we have studied these churches thus far that there is a pattern in how the Lord Jesus addresses each of them. First and foremost He is revealed to each assembly with particular characteristics that are fitting for that assembly. For instance, here in chapter 3 verse 1, the Lord Jesus is revealed to Sardis as 'the one who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars'. Of course, we saw that each of these characteristics is derived from the vision that we have in chapter 1 of the glorified, risen Lord Jesus, as the Great High Priest and Judge of the church. Of course, we see in chapter 1 verse 16 that the Lord Jesus is seen there as having the seven stars in His right hand. We also see in chapter 1 verse 4 that the seven Spirits of God are described as being before the throne of God.

So the characteristic of how Christ is revealed to Sardis is particularly fitting to their need. They are, of course, as we shall see in great detail tonight, 'the dead church'; and Christ is revealed to them as the one who has the life-giving Spirit, the seven Spirits of God depicting the perfection and completion of God's Spirit - He having all that we need to succeed and triumph as Christians and as the church. Sardis is lifeless, and Christ is the one who has the life-giving Spirit. Now, if these seven stars are angels - as I believed them to be several weeks ago - or indeed if they are elders and overseers of this assembly, it doesn't really matter: these seven stars seem to represent God's administrative control in the church. So I believe Christ is being revealed here as the one who has the seven Spirits of God, possessing the seven stars, as the answer to Sardis' problem of lifelessness. What is the answer? The answer is spiritual ministry and spiritual leadership in this church. That might seem to be a strange answer for deadness, and we will tease that out a little bit later on - but it is clearly how Christ is revealed to them: they needed spiritual ministry and spiritual leadership.

Then secondly in each of these churches we found a commendation - however, there is no commendation to the church at Sardis, except perhaps in verse 4 where we read that there are a few names where a few people have been faithful and not defiled their garments. That's

the only thing that Christ can find to commend in this church in Sardis. Thirdly we have found that each of these churches, except of course Smyrna and Philadelphia - the persecuted church, Smyrna, the faithful church, Philadelphia - we have found in the others a criticism or a condemnation. Here we have it in Sardis in verse 1, at the end of the verse, 'I know', Christ says, 'thy works, that thou hast a name', or 'you have a reputation that you live, and are dead'. Then we see in verse 2, the second part, another criticism: 'I have not found thy works perfect', or complete, 'before God'. So Christ is accusing them of having a name that they live, and yet they were dead, of being a superficial church. Their beauty, in other words, was only skin deep. He also accuses them of having much activity, 'I know thy works', and yet they were falling short of what Christ really wanted for them. Their works were not found perfect, or they were imperfect in the sight of God.

Then fourthly we find in this church a corrective command. If you look at verse 2, at the beginning of the verse, the Lord Jesus tells Sardis: 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die'. Then in verse 3, at the beginning of it, He tells them to 'Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent'. Now in verse 2, if you look at that phrase 'Be watchful', it literally could be translated 'Waken up!'. Then in verse 3, after they are told to strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die, they are told to remember what they had received and heard. Now that word 'remember' is in the present imperative, which literally means 'keep on remembering what you have heard and learned'. There is great danger, isn't there, that we forget what we already know. Then they are told to hold fast to those things, and again that is in the present imperative, 'keep on holding fast to the things that you can remember and have learned'. Then their third instruction is 'Repent', now that is in a different tense, the aorist imperative, which literally can be translated 'Repent now, once and for all, make a new start, a new beginning'.

By the end of the studies of these seven churches we will have seen that only two churches are not called upon to repent, the other five are. The two that aren't are the church at Smyrna, the persecuted church, and the church at Philadelphia, the faithful church that we will look at next week. Every other one is commanded to repent! Keeping in mind that what we have here in these seven churches is a depiction of the church age in general, we can see clearly that there is a need, a great need right throughout the existence and history of the church, for the church to keep repenting. I will spend time on that later on.

The consequences of not repenting are found in verse 3, the second half: 'If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee'. Now many believe that this is speaking of the return of the Lord Jesus, because of the similar phraseology used, but I do not believe that is what it means. I believe, like the other churches preceding it, this is speaking of the Lord Jesus coming as the Great High Priest Judge to this church, and dealing with their problems personally Himself. Then fifthly, as with the other churches, we find in verse 5 a commitment that is given to those who overcome the conditions that prevail: 'He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels'.

Now in chapter 1 verse 17 we have a divinely inspired outline of the book of Revelation, and we see that we find ourselves in chapters 2 and 3 dealing with the things that were in John's day - as it says, 'the things that are'. But we also see that there were seven churches - and there were many more of course in Asia Minor - but Christ picks out seven as representative churches, we believe, to depict the whole of the church age from the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ and the birth of the church at Pentecost, right to the second coming of our

Saviour. So we have here in these seven churches a divine revelation concerning the whole period of the church age, a complete picture, if you like, of the moral and spiritual history of the church.

Now that can be understood, as we have seen, in three ways. Let me remind you of those: first of all, that can be understood literally, and it must be understood as literal churches - seven in total - in Asia Minor...tonight's is Sardis. It was a literal church, in a literal geographic location, with literal Christians in it, with these literal circumstances prevailing. Secondly these seven churches can be understood universally, that meaning that they are illustrations, if you like, of good and bad conditions in the church, and churches everywhere in every age during the church period. The conditions are similar to those found in the seven mystery kingdom parables of Matthew 13, traits that will be in every church through every age of this dispensation. Thirdly these seven churches can be understood prophetically. We saw in our first study of the first church at Ephesus, which we entitled 'The Loveless Church', that that spoke in a very graphic way of the post-apostolic church, the church just after the apostles that was beginning to lose its first love. They were quite sound in doctrine, though there was a little departure already entering in, and yet they had lost the things they loved at the beginning, and they needed to do those first works again.

We saw secondly that the church at Smyrna, which we called 'The Persecuted Church', very graphically painted a picture for us of the church between the first and the fourth century, the church that underwent various persecutions from various Roman emperors. The third church, Pergamos, 'The Compromising Church', Pergamos meaning 'married', spoke to us of the church that had lost its fidelity and had become married and allied to the world. We learnt there that the church during the fourth and fifth century was recognized by the Emperor Constantine, and after his spurious conversion he eventually, when he came into greater power, made Christianity the state religion in AD 313. Then we found that after that event the church entered, prophetically, the Thyatira period, 'The Corrupt Church' - paganism was married to Christianity through its recognition and patronage by the Emperor. Of course, Thyatira meant - you remember, I hope - 'continual sacrifice', and it spoke very graphically of the church of the sixth and seventh century, what we know today as Roman Catholicism, right through to the church of the 16th century where there was a schism during the Reformation.

Now tonight we arrive at Sardis, and Sardis we have entitled 'The Dead Church', and Sardis literally means 'those escaping' or 'the remnant'. Now that should become evident to you what it depicts prophetically, it depicts that Reformation church that came out of the Roman Catholic Church, the Thyatira period. So, if you're wanting to look and study this particular church in Sardis prophetically, we would call it the post-Reformation church, the church just after the period of reform. Now, I do believe that the Reformation was a divine act of God. Through the translation of the Scriptures, men and women rediscovered the truth of justification by faith, and the truth that salvation is by grace in Christ alone. The Reformation, I believe, was of God; and yet we must say that many of the ecclesiastical systems that evolved out of the Reformation were established by men. Not long after the Reformation we see that the Protestant church became formal, ritualistic, even worldly and political. After the rise of Protestantism during the Thyatira period, prophetically speaking, it's not long before there is a declension in this Sardis period - in many ways, we have to say that today in Protestantism there is much deadness. The life has gone from many of the denominations that came out of the Protestant Reformation, and often their 'protest' has gone as well.

Can I just say in passing - and I don't want to spend much time on this prophetic element, I haven't done during these studies - but we hear a clarion cry, and have done for several years

now in evangelicalism, that we need to get back to the period of the Reformation. I believe that that is to look at that period somewhat with rose-tinted glasses - thank God for the Reformation, as I said, I believe it was an act of God, and I believe that we ought to have no regrets for it. But we must say that the Reformation did not go far enough! We do not need to get back to the Reformation, on the contrary we need to get back to the New Testament! Let us go further back, to the teaching of the apostles' doctrine, and the power of the Spirit of God - that was the instruction that was given to this church by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let's leave that and turn to the interpretation that I want to major on tonight, that being the literal. This church is a literal church, with literal Christians, with literal problems, with literal answers - and there is also of course, as there is every week, a personal application. We find it in verse 6: 'Let the one who has ears to hear, hear, and apply personally these truths to their own life'.

Now each week we have looked first of all at the city in which the church was found, and this is the city of Sardis. If you look at the map on the screen you will see that Sardis was approximately 27 miles south of Thyatira. It is today the modern Turkish city of Sart, which is only a small village. But Sardis, in its heyday, was one of the oldest and greatest cities of Western Asia. It was, indeed, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. It was the city of the wealthy King Croesus, his wealth became proverbial - and I'm sure some of you have heard that saying: 'To be as rich as Croesus'. It was a boom town economically, it was situated at a junction of five main roads, and therefore inevitably became a trade centre. It flourished with a carpet industry, and a woollen industry that I think the Lord alludes to in speaking of these white garments. You could actually pan for gold in the streams within the city limits of Sardis. Some historians believe that gold and silver coins were first minted in the city of Sardis, and so inevitably, because of its wealth and economic success, it became a playground for the rich and famous. It was a city with a name.

However, this great city - partly through military conquest and particularly through its own complacency - lost its former glory. Now the patron deity of this city was Cybele. Her form was often found on the coins of this town and district, and she was supposed to have power to restore the dead to life again. Yet Cybele was unable to bring this city, Sardis, back to its former glory. Now, you can see of course, obviously, the imagery that our Lord Jesus is picking up on concerning this geographical city. Sadly the church in Sardis had become like its city - alive only in name! It had died, and there was no sign of a resurrection!

Now we are not told anywhere in the Scriptures where or when this church came into being - but we do know that, like the city of Sardis, the church of Sardis had an illustrious past, and a grand reputation in the eyes of many. Indeed, one of the famous names associated with this church was a man called Mileto of Sardis, who was an apologist bishop in the late second century, a great defender of the faith who came from this church. But whatever Christians and outsiders thought of the church at Sardis, whatever reputation and name it had, as ever: the only opinion that really mattered was the Lord's. In verse 1 we find His words concerning Sardis: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead'. It had a name that it was alive, it had much activity, a great reputation, a magnificent history - yet Christ said: 'It's dead'.

What do we know about dead churches? Do you feel you belong to one? Do you feel like a dead Christian? A little boy on one occasion was travelling to church as per usual on a Sunday evening with his father, and he sat beside him there on the pew, and the service - as usual for him - seemed extremely boring and dull. He could predict everything that was coming next, because the routine was rigid and repetitive, it never ever varied. Finally the benediction

startled the young lad into consciousness, and he sighed in relief and moved toward the door with his father. There on the wall hung a beautifully embossed bronze plaque, and the little lad often wondered what it was for. This time he plucked up the courage to ask his dad what it was all about, and proudly his dad told him that it was in memory of those who died in the services. Immediately the innocent boy replied: 'Which one? Was it the morning or the evening service?'

The New Testament teaches us that the Church of Jesus Christ is the body of Christ, a living body made up of living stones. It is an organism with life and vitality pulsating through it. Yet here we have in Sardis a church that has a name that it lives, and it is dead! Have you ever considered that there is such a thing as a dead assembly? It might still have Christians belonging to it, but Christ speaks to us tonight, concerning Sardis, of a dead church. Theirs was a name without life, a form without power, a facade without any reality - what do we know of that today? How it reflected the city where it was found, and characteristically how the Lord reveals Himself to this church again enforces the fact that it is a corpse as a church. Look at verse 1 again, He reveals Himself as the one who has the seven Spirits of God, and seven stars. Now, if I was to gather some of you men, perhaps, here for a moment and ask you the very pointed question: what advice would you give to this church regarding how they could fan the flames afire again, the dying embers that need to be roused, what should they do to make a dead church live again? I don't know what you would say, but what the Holy Spirit knew they needed was a vision of Christ - that's what we need, that's what every dying church and every dying Christian needs to see: a vision of the risen and glorified Lord.

Now this is a twofold vision that Sardis receives. First of all He is seen as the Christ who possesses the Spirit, the sevenfold Spirit - seven being the number of perfection or completeness. So this is speaking of the perfect, complete power of the Holy Spirit supplying everything that the church and the Christian needs. Now we saw in one of the weeks near the start of our study that this phrase 'the seven Spirits of God' relates to Isaiah 11, where the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit are depicted as resting upon the Messiah, of course prophetically speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now in chapter 1 of Revelation verse 4, as I've already alluded to, we see the seven Spirits of God there before the throne, speaking of the executive authority of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church at large. We're going to see later on in chapter 5 and verse 6 that the seven Spirits of God are seen there going into all the earth, and that speaks of the universal impact of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But here this sevenfold Spirit is depicted as being possessed by Christ Himself; and Sardis, this church who is dead, needed to see Christ as the possessor of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit!

Then secondly He is revealed as having the seven stars in His possession also. If these stars are angels or if they're elders, they represent God's administrative control in the assembly. Now putting those two things together, what is the point of how Christ is revealed to Sardis? The message is: only the Holy Spirit of the living God can adequately control and guide a church! Have you got it? Only the Holy Spirit can control and guide a church. So, as I've already said, they needed a spiritual ministry, and they needed spiritual leadership.

Now here's a truth that has been lost to Christianity today, I believe, generally speaking, and it's one I want to bring to your attention. The New Testament teaches something called 'the presidency of the Holy Spirit', or to put it in another term, 'the executive authority of the Holy Spirit'. Now what is that? We ought to believe, as New Testament Christians, that the Church is run not by men but by the Holy Spirit of the living God. Now He might use men as His instruments, but He is the President, He is the one who is the Vicar of Christ, the representative of Christ on earth, ruling Christ's rule and administration in His church. So the

question, practically, that obviously evolves from such a truth is: is the Holy Spirit ruling our churches today? Who rules your church? Who rules this church? Think about our meetings - and I'll look at this in more detail on the Lord's Day, when we consider again 'The Lord's Supper' - but who presides in authority over our gatherings? Is it the Holy Spirit of God?

Now, some of you might say: 'Well, this is all very idealistic and quite mysterious in fact, but put this in black and white terms for us - how is it possible for the Holy Spirit to preside, to be in charge, to rule, to administer in the church today?'. Well, here's the answer and it's inherently simple, it's found in Ephesians 5 and verse 18, we read these words: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be being filled continually with the Holy Spirit'. You say: 'Well, you're misapplying that verse, that's to individual Christians'. Well, I know it is to individual Christians, and that's exactly my point - because the lesson is that if any assembly, if any church is dead, it is only because Christians are dead! If any church does not experience the presidency and administration of the Holy Spirit in its meetings and its affairs, it's only because the Christians belonging to that assembly are not controlled personally by the Holy Spirit. It naturally follows: if churches are to be alive, they must be filled with Spirit-filled Christians. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?

We all have heard the saying, haven't we, that if we point one finger there are three more pointing back at us - it's so true, isn't it? Many of us, including myself, can complain about our own assemblies - what is being done that shouldn't be, and what is not being done that ought to be - and yet at the end of the day, if we have dead churches and dead assemblies, we must first look at ourselves and ask: are we dead as Christians? Quite an eccentric preacher on one occasion on a Sunday morning told his congregation that he believed that his church was dead. Now you can imagine the murmurs from the pews when he said: 'Come back tonight, and I'm going to preach the funeral service of this church'. The members were shocked and they couldn't believe their ears - needless to say, it was the greatest turnout they had in a long time on a Sunday night. In front of the pews was a casket, and as the people sat down stunned in silence, the preacher delivered his message. After the benediction he said: 'Now some of you may not agree with me that this church is dead, and so that you might be convinced I'm going to ask you to view the remains. I want you to file by the casket one by one and see who is dead'. In preparation for that unorthodox presentation, the preacher had placed a mirror in the bottom of the casket. Who did they see when they came to view the corpse? Themselves!

Churches are made up of people. This church is made up of you people. Whatever church you belong to, we've all got a responsibility. I'm not saying everything is my fault, or everything is your fault, but our first responsibility as the Lord said to Peter: 'What is that to thee, what someone else does? Follow thou me!'. They needed to recognize the control of the Holy Spirit over them, and they needed to experience what it was to be filled - that's what that verse means, 'be continually controlled by the Holy Spirit'. If there were Spirit-controlled Christians in our churches, meetings would be controlled by the Spirit - that's the answer.

Thirdly we see the criticism: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead', that is the first criticism. Because they were not filled with the Holy Spirit as individuals and as a church, they were living on a past name, a heritage of history. They had a past to be proud of, but they had a present to be pitied. Does that describe your church tonight, or even this church? Sometimes our churches become shrines to the good old days, to better times, and we're living down memory lane as Christians - and, I say it reverently, you'd think the Holy Spirit had gone back to heaven! You'd think Jesus Christ was not the same yesterday, today, and for ever. I know things might be pitiable in the Western church, but Christ has not changed,

and His Spirit is still with us! John MacArthur, speaking of the church at Sardis, says: 'It was a museum in which stuffed animals were exhibited in their natural habitats. Everything appears to be normal, but nothing is alive'. Our churches can be like that, can't they? We're going through the motions, we look the part, we do the right things, say the right words in the right places, turn up at the right gatherings at the specified time - and yet our Church could be like Sardis: a well kept mausoleum! A dead church! It describes many churches today: cold and dead. They had a reputation, they had a history, they had big names connected to them, but they were dead!

The second criticism is found if you look down at verse 2, the second half: 'I have not found thy works perfect before God'. In other words, your works are incomplete. Now please see the picture: they carried on great activity without the power of God infusing it - as 2 Timothy puts it, 'They had a form of godliness, but denying the power'. Let me ask you a question, I hope you'll not mind me saying it, it's not meant to be irreverent - but imagine the Holy Spirit went back to heaven on Saturday evening at 12 o'clock, would anything change in your church or mine at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning? Would we miss the Holy Spirit? Would things just carry on as normal, because we have learned to operate in our lives without His control personally, and therefore we have learned to operate without Him in the church.

Their works were incomplete. Now how do we know, how do we know if our works are incomplete? How do we know today? Well, one preacher put it like this: first of all you'll not have any love for the lost; and the knock-on effect of that will be that people will not be getting saved. Are people getting saved in our churches? Sometimes, not often. Do we have a love for lost people? Sometimes, not often. A second work that will not be incomplete is we will be growing as Christians, and our knowledge will be increasing of Christ as the saints of God - is that happening? A third thing will be that we will each individually be developing further into more Christ-likeness - is that what is happening? Fourthly, we will immediately experience warmth of fellowship when we enter in with God's people in our gatherings. Fifthly, there will be the production of spiritual gifts, because the Holy Spirit is the one who gives them, and there will be the exercise of those gifts within local assemblies to the glory of God. Sixthly, there will be sacrificial giving - not just of money, but of time, resources and energies to the cause of God and the gospel. We could go on - that's how you know whether or not works, as a church, are incomplete. Can I just say to you tonight - and this is a terribly sobering thought - the Lord Jesus Christ says in verse 2: 'I have not found thy works perfect before God', before God! You see, some people get a 'B' in their bonnet, and a twist on, and they say: 'I'm going to do nothing in this church because of the elders, or because of the pastor, or because of that deacon who offended me, or because of that decision that was taken'. Listen! It's not about the elders! It's not about the deacons! It's not about members! This business of church life in the assembly is before God! Serious stuff. That's the only time the Godhead is mentioned in these seven churches, and its in association with how the assembly operates - it's got to do with God.

Sardis had begun as a spiritual movement, we don't know how, but people were saved and they formed an assembly - but now we see it is ending as a monument to an outdated bygone day. Vance Havner is very helpful concerning this, he points out how spiritual ministries often go through four stages, and they all begin with 'M'. First there is a man - you can think of him - there is a man. Then there is a movement, then that movement becomes a mechanism - and before long that mechanism becomes a monument, devoid of life, devoid of power. Sardis was that monument to a bygone age. They had had a reputation, but now they were dead!

But praise God, for a church even as dead as Sardis, there was still hope. So we have a

corrective command from the Lord, and Charles Swindoll says: 'What begins as a deathbed scene, however, suddenly shifts to an emergency room drama'. In verse 2 this command is given: 'Be watchful', literally 'Waken up!'. 'Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die', verse 3, 'Remember therefore...hold fast...repent'. Now what the Lord is doing here is, He's attempting to shock them into life again. They had gone asleep. Twice in Sardian history the city had been invaded because of complacency. You saw in that depiction the great hill that the city was found on, and they thought that it was impregnable, and because of that presumption they didn't guard themselves - and so twice they were attacked. Yes, Sardis was a materialistic place, Sardis was a worldly place, Sardis was an idolatrous place, but perhaps the greatest problem for these believers was their complacency. They had not been on their guard, they had not watched, they had not remembered, they had not held on to those truths, and they had stopped repenting - and because of that they were overcome.

They were overcome by materialism, they were overcome by worldliness, they were overcome by idolatry - but the primary reason why they were overcome was: they stopped watching! They needed to remember, present imperative, keep on remembering. They needed to hold fast, present imperative, keep on holding fast. They needed to repent, aorist imperative, repent now once and for all, make a new start! I'll tell you: if ever there was a message, a one word message that the church of Jesus Christ needs to hear right throughout her whole history, it is a message to repent. Every believer needs to repent daily - but how often do churches repent? When was the last time Sardis repented? Christ said: 'If you don't, there are consequences' - the end of verse 3, 'I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee'.

Do you know what I believe? I believe this church, and every church, needs folk within it who will say: 'Things can't go on like this any longer, let's stop and make a new start'. Now that's biblical: repent, aorist imperative. Stop what you're doing now, repent now and make a new beginning. Now ideally those people, surely, first of all should be overseers in the assembly - but if they don't do it, people who have an exercise ought to do it. Individually, will you do it? Maybe you're not allowing the Holy Spirit to control your life personally? Then there are those who come, and they gather with us, and they never ever contribute to anything. I'm not just talking of practical matters, I'm even talking about praying. We could spend the whole night on this itself, and I know certain people have certain problems at certain times, but at the end of the day we all need to ask ourselves: if we are withholding something from the assembly, why is it? Why don't you tonight decide: 'Things can't go on like this any more, I'm going to stop and make a new start. I'm going to waken up!?' Some of you men need to waken up. In many assemblies around our land women are taking on the role of men, and one of the reasons why it's happening is because the men won't be men. I pity some of you sisters at times, what you have to listen to and go through. Do you see when you're praying? Pray for the men, that they'll be men, and that they'll be exercised, and that they'll be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that they'll allow God's Spirit to use the gifts that He has promised to give to the church, that they might be wakened up!

I don't know how our Lord comes in such circumstances today, but I know this much from Sardis: that churches who never repent, and never make new starts, die. When was the last time we repented as a church? When was the last time your church repented? When was the last time you, as a believer, repented? There is a commitment to those who will, verses 4 and 5. There was a remnant, even in Sardis, which had not lost their Christian testimony, and these believers had not defiled their garments with worldliness. They would therefore walk with Christ in white, they had not defiled or soiled their garments. 'True religion undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affection, and to

keep himself unspotted from the world'. Because of that, they had overcome - now here's my question: who will overcome today in Sardis-like dead churches? Will you? Who is overcoming? Is it those who are troubled about the conditions? Surely we need more people who are grieved because the Spirit is grieved, but that's not enough. Those who overcome don't just have bad feelings about the conditions that prevail, but they are resolved to do something about it, to change their mind and allow the Holy Spirit to change their heart and their life! It is those people who one day will find themselves walking in white with Christ.

I tell you, it's not easy to be an overcomer in this day and age in which we live. It's not easy in the church to be alive and vibrant and buoyant with the Spirit's power - but I'll tell you this: on that day no one will regret it, for on that day they will walk in white with Christ. I think that speaks of a special fellowship: they will be glad that on earth they repented and made a new start. In verse 5 we read that the overcomer as a true child of God will never have their name blotted out of the book of life. Then this address ends in verse 6 with a simple call to a simple act, that this church would hear and respond - and it's seldom heeded.

Now let's recap. If a church is dead, it's because the Christians in it are dead - because you are dead. Ask yourself: 'Am I dead? I might be saved, but is my vibrancy and my vitality as a Christian, is it dead?'. All the man made programmes in the world can never bring a Christian or a church to life again, that must come from the Lord who has the sevenfold Spirit of God. He is the source! It's not going to church growth gurus, or the latest vogue way or principle or program or practice - it's going back to Christ who has the Spirit! The church was born in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended. Life, spiritual regeneration, comes from the Spirit - but when the Spirit is grieved, the church begins to lose its life and its power, as does the Christian. But when we stop, and when we say: 'Enough is enough! Things cannot go on like that any longer!', and we change our mind about our ways and about the claims of Christ on us, and we confess our sins before God, and put things right with members of the church...when we do God's will found in His word, the Spirit infuses new life again and what is dead becomes alive. Do you know what that is called? Revival!

Let me finish with this story: Peter Brandon tells the story of how in 1958 he spoke to the late W.W. Faraday who some of you will be familiar with because of his writings. When he spoke to him, it was just before he died and went home to be with the Lord, and Faraday spoke to Brandon about the mighty manifestations of the power of God in some of those meetings he had been in in the early Victorian period. He told that on Sunday morning after they broke bread around the table, invariably a soul would be saved - at the table! Many came in to see a meeting that was controlled by the Holy Spirit - in those days, he told Brandon, we had no fixed gospel meetings - that's interesting, isn't it? We would say they were backsliders today! Do you know what they did? After they broke bread in the morning, they all bowed their heads and asked God for direction. He said: 'We would hire a town hall or a theatre, and some Sunday nights we had up to 200 people converted!'. The Spirit of God was mightily at work, God was moving in power - but Faraday said that when it came near to the beginning of the 20th century many of the Christian periodicals and magazines were encouraging the Lord's people to repent and to humble themselves, but they didn't. These are Faraday's words: 'Slowly and insidiously we declined, until we moved from the organic to a mechanical movement'. From the organic, life-pulsating power of the Spirit in the church, to a mechanical movement - and then the old man, nearly 99, by this time blind, looked into Brandon's face and said these words: 'If the Lord doesn't come in your lifetime, and you live to be a mature man, you will see many assemblies closing'. Then he stopped and added these words: 'Don't worry. You will have to start all over again, just as we did, and recover the truth, and rediscover the power of the Spirit, and God will multiply you'.

Can I tell you something? If I have a conviction about anything in these days, it is that. There is a decline, but if we would but repent and start all over again as they did, the dead would live again. May God bless His word to every heart.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 9

"Philadelphia, The Faithful Church"

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Let's turn to our portion tonight, Revelation chapter 3, and we are beginning to read at verse 7 - 'Philadelphia, The Faithful Church'.

Chapter 3 verse 7: *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation", or tribulation, "which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches".*

Now we have noted over these weeks studying the seven churches, this being our sixth, with minor exceptions there is a pattern to each of them. Let me remind you of what that is: first of all, as Christ speaks to each of these churches He reveals certain characteristics of Himself that fit the need of that particular church. Up until this church, the characteristics have derived from the vision that John initially had, recorded in chapter 1. However the characteristics that we have given to the church at Philadelphia do not come from that vision. We will refer to those characteristics later on, but just let me make this particular point - noting that he does not get these characteristic traits from the vision in chapter 1, it might well tell us, and I think at least it is a true sentiment to say, that there is no vision of Christ, however great, that can depict Him personally in perfection. We revere the word of God, don't we? Rightly so, and yet even verbal descriptions, even visual, supernatural descriptions cannot ever exhaust or fully depict the wonder of Christ as He is. They hymn writer tried to capture this by saying:

'Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore:
All are too mean to speak His worth,
To mean to set my Saviour forth'.

So John - at least John is the penman - our Lord Jesus goes outside the vision of chapter 1 to describe Himself to Philadelphia as 'the holy and the true', verse 7, 'the key to David, the one who opens and shuts'. Those are the characteristics as Christ reveals Himself to Philadelphia.

Then secondly in each church there is a commendation, except of course to Sardis - we looked at that church last week - and Laodicea, which will be our next study. But there is a commendation to Philadelphia, and you find it in verse 8, the second half of the verse: 'For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name'. They kept His word, though they had a little strength - that means they were obedient Christians, an obedient church. They had not denied His name, even though they were little in strength - that shows that they confessed Christ with their mouth and with their lives. Wouldn't it be wonderful if it could be said of everyone here and this church, that we were obedient, and we confessed Christ with our mouths and lives? So they are commended.

Thirdly in most of these letters there is a criticism, but there is no criticism to Philadelphia in their letter. The only other letter that does not receive criticism from the Lord is the letter to Smyrna, the suffering church. Isn't it interesting that the only two letters who do not receive a critique from the risen Christ are the suffering church, Smyrna, and the church of little strength, the weak church, Philadelphia. I think there must be deep spiritual truth in the fact that there is no criticism for Philadelphia and Smyrna, and we'll see what that is in a few moments.

Fourthly in most of the letters there is a corrective command, because they have been criticised the Lord tells them how they must go on the right road - and there is no criticism, neither is there any corrective command to Philadelphia. It's wonderful, isn't it? Imagine being a church, or for that matter being a Christian, that Christ could not criticise, being a Christian that Christ did not have to give a further command to!

Now though there is no corrective command, there is indeed counsel given to Philadelphia. That is found in verse 11: 'Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown'. They are given counsel, how to stay faithful, whatever would befall them. Then fifthly, as in each letter, in verses 9-12 we are given a commitment by the Lord to those who would overcome, those in this church of Philadelphia overcoming the conditions that prevail. Verse 12 in particular states: 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name'. Interesting that the Lord Jesus here is speaking, as a man, of 'my God', and then He not only writes the name of His God, and the name of the city of God, but He writes His new name upon the overcomer. We'll look at the significance of those statements later on.

Now let me remind you of why we are studying in great depth, and why indeed John gives us the letters to the seven churches. Chapter 1:19 gives us an inspired outline of the book: the things that John saw, being the vision; the things that were, that is the seven churches that existed that Christ is writing to; and the things which are to come, which really comprises chapter 4, or at least chapter 6 right through to the end of the book. So the things that are are these seven churches of Asia Minor. We have noted, and it's worth reminding you of, that there were more than seven churches in total in Asia Minor - but these seven churches have been chosen by the Holy Spirit to be representative churches. If you look at the screen, let me remind you - I may not have said this since our first week - but if you were to travel from the first church mentioned by Christ, Ephesus, right round as they are mentioned by the Lord and written to by John, you would come in a complete circle, clockwise, please note. Therefore we have to say that, because the number seven is the biblical number of completion, and because these have been chosen out of the churches that existed in that day and age for their representative characteristics, we believe that prophetically - and Revelation, of course, as we

have found out, is a prophetic book - prophetically what John is giving us is the complete timeline and prophetic history of the Church of Jesus Christ, a divine revelation concerning this church age in which we live. It is a complete moral picture and spiritual history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Now that is understood in three ways. We have seen that it's understood literally, these were seven literal churches in these geographical locations. Secondly it's understood universally, each of these churches illustrate good and bad conditions in the churches as they have existed right throughout the church age. Similar to Matthew 13, and the seven mystery parables of the kingdom there that depict certain characteristics that can be found in every age in many churches. So you can see traits that are found in each of these seven churches right across the globe today in many churches. Yet there is a further interpretation, that being the prophetic. Not just literal and universal, but the prophetic. In other words, that each of these churches actually looks chronologically at that particular period of church history.

We started in Ephesus, which was the loveless church, and we saw that the characteristics there equate dramatically to the post-apostolic age of the church - that being just after the death of the last apostle. We saw there that generally speaking the doctrine in the church was pure, but their devotion to Christ was beginning to wane - that would have consequences. The next stage we found to be that of Smyrna, and not long after the apostles' death there was great persecution, and from the first to the fourth century we see under ten Roman emperors, ten very strenuous persecutions of Christianity - the tenth lasting ten years. Smyrna was the persecuted church, then after Smyrna came Pergamos, and we saw that it was the compromising church - Pergamos means 'married'. During the fourth and fifth centuries we find that Constantine, after his spurious conversion to Christianity, made Christianity the state religion in 313 AD. From that moment on the church lost, generally speaking, its fidelity to Christ because it became allied to the world. That was the church of the fourth and fifth century, answering very graphically to Pergamos. Then after Pergamos came Thyatira, the corrupt church. Thyatira meant 'continual sacrifice', and during the sixth and the seventh centuries we see the rise of what we recognize today as Roman Catholicism, and they espouse great dedicated sacrificial works for God, and also celebrate the continual sacrifice of the Mass. Of course, in the 16th century there was the Reformation, and here enters the church at Sardis. Though that Reformation was an awakening of God to the rediscovering of the truth of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, we see that what started as a work of the Holy Spirit and God's grace, a work of God, developed into ecclesiastical bodies that were originated by men. In Sardis we see a dead church, Sardis means 'those escaping', 'a remnant', that is the post-Reformation church. The Reformation was of God, but many of the ecclesiastical systems were established by men. If you want to know more about that, see last week's study.

This brings us now to Philadelphia, the faithful church. Now Philadelphia means 'brotherly love'. Now prophetically speaking, after the death of Protestantism, there were many gracious revivals that the Lord instrumentally brought to the church. The reason being that the Holy Spirit was bringing Evangelicalism back to the simplicity and the primitiveness of New Testament truth. You can see that very clearly in church history, that out of the dearth and deadness of Protestantism in general there came, during the 18th and early 19th centuries, a period of great evangelical awakening. Study it in church history, it is very instructive, and indeed encouraging. During that period many New Testament principles that had been lost to the church were rediscovered, particularly doctrines relating to church order and practice; and also the doctrine of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and many other truths related to that.

Also during that Great Awakening period, a great door was opened, a door that would allow the church once more - as the Apostles had originally done - to spread the gospel worldwide. What we see during this particular church period is the birth of what we know as the modern missionary movement. Out of all the periods of the seven churches, I think this was the period that I would have most loved to have lived during. Can I just say, as I leave this prophetic issue here: if the Lord should wait any longer before He returns for us, we are going to need a fresh breath of the Holy Spirit of God. Whilst this is a characteristic that generalised this period of church history, there are still revivals in our world today, hence the universal interpretation of the seven churches - we can have these characteristics today in the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, and oh how much we need it in Ulster! You remember last week that Sardis was the dead church, and there was then a transition from a dead church to a faithful church, Philadelphia, and it can still happen today - dead Christians can become faithful Christians, dead churches can become faithful churches once more if they rediscover many of the lost principles of the New Testament.

Can I remind you of what I shared with you in closing last Monday evening, the words of W.W. Faraday to Peter Brandon many years ago, speaking of a movement of the Spirit that God worked mightily through many years ago. He said: 'Slowly and insidiously they declined, until they moved from the organic to the mechanical'. What had been a living movement became a mechanical movement, and that has been the transition of every movement, I feel, that has not known subsequent revival. Faraday, predicting that decline, said to Brandon: 'Don't worry. You will have to start all over again as we did, and rediscover the truth, and rediscover the power of the Spirit, and God will multiply you'. Oh, do we need that today!

'Oh, for the floods on a thirsty land,
Oh, for a mighty revival.
Oh, for a sanctified fearless band,
Ready to hail its arrival'.

Now let's leave that prophetic interpretation there, although it will have application as we go through our study of this faithful church tonight. We want to primarily look at Philadelphia from a literal sense and a personal sense, verse 13: 'Let those who have ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. Each night we have looked first of all at the city where this church is found. So let us look at Philadelphia. Philadelphia was known as a rich city, partly from the grape growth, grapes flourished in this particular vicinity - but it was mainly known as rich because of the location where it was situated. It was known in its day as the gateway to the east. Its founder, who also gave it its name, Philadelphia, intended the city to be a strategic missionary city to propagate the Greek, or the Hellenistic way of life. So he intended that Greek philosophy and Greek wisdom would spread right across the known world, far and wide, from Philadelphia. It was an ideal location for this, because it was on the main route of the Imperial Postal Service that ran from the capital city of the empire, Rome, right to the east - and so it was a pathway along which many would traverse. The Roman army would march across it wherever they were going in the empire, there would be travelling caravans, business merchants - so you can understand why the founder of this city wanted this missionary endeavour to begin there. We can understand also then why the Lord speaks of opening the door, an opportunity to propagate the gospel through this church in Philadelphia.

Now let's look at the characteristics of the risen Christ as He is revealed to Philadelphia. Verse 7: 'These things saith he that is holy, he that is true', let's deal with these first. Holy and true - now again we say that these are characteristics that are independent from the vision that

we have in chapter 1, but it's very easy to trace what the meaning of them is. Isaiah 43 and verse 3 reads: 'I am the LORD thy God', Jehovah thy God, 'the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour'. 'Holy' is a designation of God. Now when we turn to chapter 6 of Revelation and verse 10, we read: 'And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'. So in this very book, in chapter 6 and verse 10, 'holy and true' are descriptions given to Almighty God - and yet here our Lord Jesus reveals Himself as 'holy and true' to Philadelphia. Of course 'holy' is a divine title, and the Lord Jesus Christ is God.

These were encouragements to these Philadelphian Christians who were faithful, Christ found them such, to remain faithful. You see the holiness of God is not just a doctrine that we celebrate and defend against all error, but Peter tells us that it is a reason for us to be holy: 'As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation', in your manner of life. So Christ is revealing Himself as holy to these faithful Christians, that they might remain holy and be encouraged to do such. He reveals Himself as true. Now there are two Greek words, I'm led to believe, that correspond to our English word 'true'. The first means 'true in contrast to that which is false', that is not the meaning here. It is rather the other meaning, which is 'true in contrast to that which is an imitation'. So what the Lord is revealing to these Philadelphian Christians is: 'I am really God, I am the holy and the true, I am not an imitation, I am not a substitute, I am the true and living Christ, the Son of the Living God'.

Now we need to emphasise this great truth in these days. I don't know whether you have followed the presidential candidacy in the United States of America - I haven't followed it that closely, but I have noted that one of the favoured candidates is a man called Mitt Romney, and he is a Mormon. Incidentally, he's not the first Mormon to run for the office of the presidency of the United States - do you know who the first one was? Joseph Smith in 1844, the founder of Mormonism. Now I'm not against a Mormon taking office in a sense, we've got to have freedom of religious liberty and so on and so forth, but he was asked on many occasions what his view of Jesus Christ was, and he said: 'Often I am asked this fundamental question, 'What do I believe about Jesus Christ?', this was his answer, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind. My church's belief about Christ may not be all that other faiths believe', but that's what he believes, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind. Now that sounds good, doesn't it? That's what many people in many religions and even cults will say concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, but the truth of the matter is that that statement is somewhat of a gloss, because the Mormon church believe that Christ was 'a god', just like all human beings can achieve 'godhood'. They believe that He was not unique - indeed He was the brother, they say, of Lucifer himself. They say that our Lord Jesus married several wives, fathered children, and Joseph Smith himself claimed to be one of Christ's descendants.

Now, all of the cults and false religions of this world, they dispute the identity of Christ. Now you know what that means, let me put this in very strong but definite terms: their christs are not this Christ, they are imposters! This Christ is the real thing: very God of very God, Light of Light. He is not a copy. 'In the beginning was the Word', Christ, 'the Word was with God', Christ was with God, 'the Word was God', Christ was God. John 1 verse 14: 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' - Jesus Christ is and ever shall be the Eternal and Only Begotten Son of the Living God. Any caricature less than that is not the Christ of the Bible, it is not the Christ of history, and it is not the Christ of the saving Gospel. Did not Paul say in Galatians 1:8: 'Though we', that is, though any apostle, 'or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed'.

Another Jesus is not the Jesus.

This church in Philadelphia were being encouraged by the Lord Jesus to reflect the true character of Christ in their day and generation, that was marking them as faithful. We must do the same today. We must be absolutely sure in what we declare about our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me leave that there and bring a secondary point out of this: how the Lord is revealed to Philadelphia would show us that truth is linked with holiness. Do you see it? He is the holy and the true. Truth is linked to holiness. Now that means true doctrine and holy living go together. Therefore, the converse sense is that there can be no true holiness without truth - there can be no true holiness without truth! That, therefore, means - now listen carefully - holiness is more than mere morality. It involves the truth, and you can have morality without the truth. You can have morality in religion, you can have morality in the cults - but that is not true holiness without the truth.

Now, in their difficulties the Philadelphians needed to grasp this. They needed to look to Christ to gain courage, to continue to be faithful, to live holy lives, to be real - not to be an imitation of the true, to have genuine holy lives that manifested and revealed the truth of God. That's why Christ revealed Himself as the holy and the true. But He reveals Himself also as 'the key of David', look at verse 7: 'the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth'. Now of course in chapter 1:18 the Lord Jesus is revealed in that vision as having the keys of Hades and death, but I don't think that's what this is referring to - it seems to be an allusion from Isaiah 22:22, and there we read of a man called Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. It is recorded that Eliakim, according to Isaiah 22:22, had the key of the house of David the King. And God said: 'I will lay upon his shoulder', Eliakim's, 'so that he shall open, no man shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open'. This was a literal man, who had a literal key, to the literal Treasury of the literal King David. Eliakim is a great type of our Lord Jesus Christ who has the key of truth, the key of holiness, the holy and the true - but He's also got the key of opportunity, he can open doors, doors of service, doors of testimony. He has administrative power, He has incontestable control, He is the Sovereign Christ - in other words, He has the key to everything! He's the risen Lord, and these Philadelphian Christians are encouraged to look to Him to be holy, look to Him not to be an imitation, and look to Him knowing that no matter what they were going through in trials and tribulations, He had the key to everything. You can look to Him tonight as the Captain of your salvation, isn't it wonderful? What characteristics as He is set forth to us.

Then we see in verse 8 the commendation given to this church, look at it with me. In verse 8, at the beginning: 'I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name'. Now what is this open door? Well, in the New Testament this is a phrase that is common, and it speaks primarily of an opportunity for ministry. Listen to these verses, Acts 14, speaking of Antioch Luke says: 'And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles', opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, an opportunity to minister. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul says: 'a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries'. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, 'Furthermore', Paul says, 'when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord'. Requesting prayer in Colossians 4:3, Paul again says: 'Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds'.

Christ here is the Lord of the harvest, and with this key He is opening a door of ministry, an opportunity; as the Head of the church He is determining where and when His people are

servicing, these people in Philadelphia. There is much truth in this. Turn with me for a moment - and time is beating us somewhat, but turn to Acts 16 till I show you this - maybe because it's Christmas you'll give me a present of 5 or 10 minutes at the end of the meeting tonight! Verse 6 of Acts 16, now please, before we note this, note the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Christ in evangelism in the early church, verse 6: 'Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them'.

The Lord has this key to open and shut, He is the one who determines where and when His people serve. Now if ever there was a need in the church today, there is a need for Christians to recognize the Lordship of Christ, and the Spirit who is the Lord over our evangelism. The Lord gave Philadelphia a great opportunity for ministry, He had placed them on this Imperial coastal route where they could reach the whole world. Now let me ask you a question: what great opening has the Lord of the harvest given you? What door has He opened, and opportunity of ministry has He given to you? Well, I can think of one immediately for all of us in general. We are a bit like the church at Philadelphia, because the world is coming to our doorstep. Now whatever you think of immigration in a political sense, it matters little to me: I'm looking at it from an evangelistic perspective, and evangelistically it is a masterfully wide-open door - but the church, it has to be said, at least some churches, are doing very little about it.

The Lord is opening doors. We need also, don't we, to recognize the doors that have already been opened by the Lord, and give praise and glory to Him for it. I'm only speaking personally, but one that the Lord opened to me - and I never pushed it open - is the open door of the Internet. Almost every day there is something coming my way of encouragement, even today I received an e-mail from a doctor of chemistry and biology in Brigham Young University in the United States, the Mormon University. Now wait for it: he has listened to our series that we did on Monday nights here on the epistles of John, three times right through. He has listened to the series on Ephesians that I did several years ago, twice. He has almost listened to the whole series in 1 Corinthians, and he's right up to date in our Sunday mornings on Mark's Gospel. You can't tell me that that's not an open door of the Lord. Who else could do something like that? We had a breakfast several weeks ago in La Mon House Hotel, and I can't remember the last time we had 25 unsaved men at a gospel meeting, but there were 25 men turned up for breakfast and they got a gospel meeting! That was their dessert, they got the gospel preached to them! Now that's an open door, and we've got to walk through these open doors these days - but think about planes, and all sorts of aspects of technology that the apostles didn't have. Think of the learning that is available, whether it is learning languages, and all these things are open doors for us to spread the gospel - and yet, arguably speaking, we're slower than those in the primitive church were to do it! It's an indictment to us all.

Here's another question: are we praying for the Lord to open more doors? Now that's different, by the way, than praying that people will wander into our gospel meetings - that's not what this church is being told. They were the church of brotherly love, and we need that for others outside to say: 'Look how they love one another' - but if they loved one another, it is implied that they loved the Lord; and if they loved the Lord, they loved the lost. Because they were already engaged in work for the Master - please note that - 'I know thy works',

that's why He opened a door for them, and He'll give you more openings when you walk through the openings that are already there. Remember Sardis last week, the dead church? Warren Weirsbe says: 'The church that doesn't reach out will pass out'. Many churches are turning in on themselves, becoming parochial - 'Us four and no more, and the world can go to hell', let's not be like that.

Verse 8b, another commendation: 'You have a little strength, you have kept my word, and not denied my name'. That could be translated 'a little power'. Now please note this: they had a little strength, a little power, but they had enough to be obedient to the Lord, and they had enough not to deny His name. Now what does that say about the strength we must have? If they had little strength, whatever little they had it was real. Like Christ, as He is revealed to them, it wasn't an imitation, it was the real thing. Now I suspect, and you may disagree, that they were not only little in strength but they were little in number. Yet Christ commends them! This is the most commendable letter in all seven. Where did we ever get this idea that bigger is better? Do you know where we got it? The world. I'm not saying that God shouldn't add to your numbers when you're faithful, He may well do - but what I am saying is: little is much when God is in it. God was in this church in Philadelphia, and I think generally speaking that more often God is in the little things than the large things, so that no flesh should glory in His sight. For when we are weak, He is strong!

Some people get perturbed when folk resign from meetings, and when the numbers reduce they start to panic - but I don't get discouraged, in measure at least, because a reduction in numbers does not equate to a reduction in power. No, no. In fact, Jeremiah 45 tells us: 'Do you wish great things for yourself? Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not'. The Lord Jesus didn't choose 12,000 disciples, He chose 12. Assemblies, Christians need to follow the Lord, we all need to get low again:

'Wouldst thou be great, then lowly serve;
Wouldst thou go up, go down;
But go as low as e'er you will,
The Highest, has gone lower still!'

The Highest of all has come as low as any could. Now, Philadelphia teaches us, surely, that we - no matter what size we are, no matter how many people leave our ranks and ostracise us - we, like Philadelphia, are to hold the truth, whether we get the crowds or not. Most of all, we ought to practise it whatever the consequences! The flesh wants the limelight and the accolades of worldly success, but how many of us like Philadelphia can say:

'Give me to serve in humble sphere,
I ask not aught beside;
Content to fill a little place
If God be glorified'.

You see, the lesson of Philadelphia is: as a church or as a Christian, you can be too big for God to use, but you can never be too small. It's a hard lesson to learn. In verse 9 we have another commendation, the Lord tells them: 'I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee'. Now we saw this 'synagogue of Satan' in chapter 2 and verse 9, incidentally they opposed Smyrna and persecuted them. Now they were probably Jews outwardly - Romans 2 speaks of Jews that were outwardly Jews, but not inwardly Jews, they hadn't the circumcision of the heart by faith, they weren't saved.

They may have been the Judiazers that were trying to impose upon Gentiles Jewish rites and rituals. Either way we know this: the Jews were persecuting the early Christians, and the synagogue doors were shut to believers - but the Lord is saying: 'Don't you worry about those shut doors, I'm opening doors for you and no one will shut them'. Hallelujah for that.

This is a strange phrase, the Lord tells them: 'I'm going to bring these Jews, that are not, to worship before your feet'. Well, it seems initially to be a bit odd, but when we look into the Old Testament we find it was an old idea. In Isaiah 45 we read about it, Isaiah 49 verse 60, and it there relates to Israel, and speaks of the nations of the world coming to worship at the feet of Israel in the kingdom. So the idea here, I think, may well be that some of these Jews of the synagogue were going to get converted, and come down the road to the little church of Philadelphia and fall at the feet of Christ, and acknowledge in the presence of the Christians that God was among them. The synagogue used to be called 'the synagogue of Jehovah', but now Jehovah has left it and gone to the assembly of God's people. Were these converted Jews going to say: 'Of a truth, God is among you'? A triumph of the gospel amongst its greatest opponents - have we got faith to pray like that? Are there open doors like that for us? When God saves 'big sinners'? Sure, the biggest opponent of the gospel of all was immersed and embraced by the grace of God, Saul of Tarsus, Paul the apostle.

Then in verse 10 another commendation: 'You have kept my word of patience', what does that mean? Well, I believe this is indicating that these believers were effectively taking the position of Christ that He has now in relation to this world. What does that mean? Well, the kingdom of God does not exist today in power, it is in tribulation, it is in men's hearts. Our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned - and so this is a time of patient waiting, a time of working, a time of waiting, a time of watching until our Lord does come in power. The hour is drawing nigh, the crowning day is coming by and by, and the kingdom will come in power, and He will take control. Now that's not now, that's why these believers had to be patient. Christ is waiting for the moment when He will return, we must await it too.

Now here's an application of that: you can't make the world Christian. We've been talking about open doors to evangelism, and that's important - but never you think that you can change the world and Christianise it, it's impossible! This world is a wicked system, and now the church, which literally means 'the ecclesia', it's a company of called out ones, called out from the world. Their commission is to save others out of this world, and one day judgement is coming upon this world - and just before it, Philadelphia is told, Christ will call His own out of this world. He says, look at it, verse 10: 'I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world'. That temptation is the Great Tribulation spoken of in the Old Testament as 'Jacob's trouble', the time that has never been, or will be repeated. It's depicted for us in Revelation chapter 6 right through to chapter 19 - incidentally, the church isn't mentioned in all of that part of the book of the Revelation. The Lord says to this faithful church: 'I will keep thee from the hour', it literally means not 'I'm going to keep you through it', but 'I'm going to take you out of it, and I'm going to try those who dwell upon the earth', the earth dwellers. This isn't for the church, this is for unbelieving Jews and for unbelieving Gentiles.

This is the doctrine of the rapture. We haven't got time to go into it, but it's not for those who dwell upon the earth - they won't be raptured. Those who dwell upon the earth, and the word for 'dwell' is not the word just 'to dwell', it means 'to settle down', these are people who do not have the pilgrim nature of the church. You know what that is, don't you? Philippians talks about our lifestyle, our conversation being in heaven, from whence we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus. Peter said: 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims,

abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul'. Christians are to be pilgrims, they are not to put their tent pegs in deep, they're to be ready to go up, and to go out with the Lord! We've lost this pilgrim nature, many believers look more like earth dwellers. We are to be pilgrims, why? Verse 11, Christ is coming quickly, and that speaks of the imminence of Christ's return, in the sense of the return for His people to the air, to take them to be with Him - it's imminent. 'Behold, I come quickly', therefore you've got to be ready. We're not waiting for seven years tribulation to come before it, it could happen at any moment! Therefore, because it could happen this very night, hold fast. In the meantime, hold fast, and let no man take thy crown.

There's the counsel - they needed it, and we need it. Now please, just slow down for a moment and grasp this: this is a church that Christ couldn't condemn, He couldn't say a word about it now - but she was in danger of losing her crown then. That's serious stuff, isn't it? Not a harsh word to them, and yet they had to be warned, they had to be counselled: 'Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown'. That's the same for the Christian: it doesn't matter how you start, it doesn't matter how you've gone on if it ends in a shambles, in an apathetic stupor. If we miss our open doors, Philadelphia, Christ says if we miss opportunities, Philadelphia, we might well miss our reward - and then we will be ashamed before Him when He comes. Now come on: if He came tonight, how would you feel? What are you in? What are you doing? Where are you spiritually? Are you living like an earth dweller, or are you a pilgrim ready for the Bridegroom call? Listen to the words of Charles Luther's hymn:

'Must I go, and empty handed,
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,
Lay no trophy at His feet?

Not at death I shrink or falter,
For my Saviour saves me now;
But to meet Him empty handed,
Thought of that now clouds my brow.

O the years in sinning wasted,
Could I but recall them now,
I would give them to my Saviour,
To His will I'd gladly bow.

O ye saints, arouse, be earnest,
Up and work while yet 'tis day;
Ere the night of death o'er take thee,
Strive for souls while still you may.

Must I go, and empty handed?
Must I meet my Saviour so?
Not one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty handed go?'

To the faithful in verse 12, there is given a commitment. The overcomer will be a pillar in the inner sanctuary of God. Now that must have been meaningful for these people who lived experiencing many earthquakes. They would have no need to go out of this heavenly city in

the way they had to flee Philadelphia many times because of the earthquakes. This heavenly city would be something that no persecution, or no earthquake could destroy. The thought here is to this weak but faithful people in that day: you'll be like a pillar in the sanctuary of God, strong, honourable, permanent, unmovable. Those who have been faithful in the day of Christ's rejection will realise the glory in the day of His enthronement.

That glory is seen in these three names that Christ writes. You see Christ as a writer here: first He writes the name of God upon the overcomer. Now that's in contrast, I think, to the mark of the beast that's coming later. The earth dwellers will be identified as a possession of the mark of the beast, they will belong to him, he will give them their rights. Here we have the name of God being written upon these possessions of the Almighty, and then secondly there is the name of the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God. If the name of God tells people who they are, the name of the New Jerusalem tells where they belong. Then there is the new name of the Lord Jesus - do you know what that is? You don't, because no one knows - but do you know what that tells me? In eternity we are constantly going to be given fresh revelations of Christ from Christ. Sure, when He was on the earth, John the apostle said - the same John - 'There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen'. That's when He was on the earth, what will it be up yonder?

Age to age will tell more and more, show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Oh, we love to sing:

'O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me,
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me'.

Now it will if you're saved - you'll see Him - but the challenge for overcomers tonight is that the amount of glory, I believe, that we'll enjoy up there is related to the amount of faithfulness we have shown down here. It is a trade-off: glory down here, or glory up there; life down here, or life up there - the choice is yours.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 10

"Laodicea, The Lukewarm Church"

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We've been at the church of Ephesus, the church at Smyrna, the church at Pergamos, the church at Thyatira, the church at Sardis, the church at Philadelphia - and now we come to the church of Laodicea. We begin our reading at chapter 3 and verse 14, and it will take us right to the end of the chapter. I've entitled this message, of course, tonight: 'Laodicea, The Lukewarm Church'.

Verse 14 then: *"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans", or the church in Laodicea, "write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"*.

It's a while since we were at the church in Philadelphia, and for the benefit also of those who are with us for the first time tonight in this series, let me just summarise how we understand these seven letters to the seven churches. We've seen, with some minor exceptions, that there is a pattern that is common to each of the seven churches written to. The first thing we encounter in each is a revealed characteristic, or characteristics, of our Lord Jesus that are particularly fitting to the church that He is speaking to. Of course, this book is, let us remember, the Revelation of Jesus Christ - but as He is revealed to each of these churches, He is revealed in different aspects of His character that they in particular need to see because of their predicament.

Now, in Laodicea we see in verse 14 how He is revealed: 'These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God'. Now most of the characteristics that we see in the seven churches are derived from the vision that we have studied in chapter 1, but these characteristics here in verse 14 don't come particularly from that vision, but from chapter 1 and verse 5 where we see these similar titles given to our Lord. Now we did say, in our last study I think it was, that there is no adequate vision of our Lord Jesus that could fully depict Him in His full-orbed personality and characteristics. So the Holy Spirit here guides John to go outside of the vision given in chapter 1, and speaks of our Lord as 'the faithful and true witness'. Now that was so relevant to where Laodicea were, we'll see that as we go through our study tonight. They needed to look to Him as the Faithful One, as the True One, as the Amen of God.

Not only do we see in each letter a characteristic of the Lord, but then there often comes a commendation. Now of course there are a couple of exceptions - Sardis didn't receive a commendation of the Lord, and Laodicea that we're looking at tonight, doesn't receive one either. In fact, there is nothing positive that our Lord has to say about Laodicea. He did commend some in Sardis, but there's nothing good said to the Laodiceans. The irony of that is the fact that they think they're perfect - more time will be spent on that in a few moments.

Then thirdly, in each letter we often find a criticism, of course with the exception of Smyrna who were the suffering persecuted church; and Philadelphia that was a small church and very weak, but the Lord Jesus was pleased with them. Now when we encounter this church tonight, Laodicea, in human terms they are the strongest of the seven - and yet they receive the strongest criticism from our Lord. They are wealthy and, as far as they are concerned, without any want - and yet, as far as our Lord is concerned, in His eyes they have the greatest need of the seven. In verses 15 to 16 we see that very clearly: 'You are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. You're lukewarm, because of that I'll spew you out of my mouth'. Verse 17 tells us they were deceived - that's not how they saw themselves at all! They saw themselves as rich, increased with goods, and having need of nothing - self-deceived, an awful predicament to be in! So that is their criticism.

Then fourthly, we find often in these letters a corrective command - and we have it here to Laodicea in verses 18 and 19. The Lord counsels them to buy gold tried in the fire, so on and so forth, as we'll see that in detail later on. Then to each church He ends with a commitment, it is here in verses 20 and 21 to Laodicea, to the overcomers, to those in church circumstances, the prevailing circumstances of the city and assembly in which those Christians resided, those who overcame those conditions would be rewarded. Here we have the reward to Laodicea in verses 20 and 21: if they opened the door to the knocking Christ, well, they would sit with Christ in His throne on a day that is yet to be.

Now let me just remind you of the significance of these seven letters. In chapter 1 and verse 19 we have what we feel is an outline of this whole book of Revelation: 'Write the things', John is told, 'which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter'. Now the things that he had seen was the vision of chapter 1, the things which were in his day are the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, and the things which shall be here after are chapter 4 - or thereabouts at least - right through to the end of the book. We have seen, of course, that there were more than seven churches in Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit guided John to pick out these seven as representative churches, and they are addressed in clockwise order as you will see from the map on the screen, and as you can read from the account in the scriptures - which may well indicate that what we have here, in a prophetic sense, is a complete timeline, chronologically, of the history of the church from the ascension of our Lord Jesus right through to His second coming.

So we have here in the book of Revelation a divine revelation concerning the church age, a complete picture, if you like, of the moral and spiritual history of the church. Now that has been understood in three ways: first, literally - that's always the way we should understand Scripture, as far as we can do. These were seven literal churches, in literal Asia Minor, with literal Christians, in these literal situations, with literal problems, with literal counsel from the Saviour that they needed to put into practice. Secondly we can also see in these seven that there is something universal, they are each an illustration of the good and bad characteristics that will be in the church everywhere in every age. Those characteristics are very similar at times to the characteristics that we find in the seven kingdom parables of Matthew chapter 13, features that we will find in every age of church history.

So these seven can be understood literally, universally, and thirdly: prophetically. We saw this each week, though we didn't labour on it much. Ephesus gives us a very graphic picture of the loveless church, of the church in post-apostolic days. When John alone was alive and very old, and about to pass into glory, the church was orthodox in doctrine and yet was beginning to lose - if it had not completely lost - its first love, the things it loved in the beginning. Then we saw that after that church came the church in Smyrna, a period that we would liken to, perhaps, the persecuted church period from the first to the fourth century when the church endured the persecution of many Roman emperors. Then we came to the church at Pergamos, and that was the compromising church, and of course Pergamos means 'married', and this was a church who historically speaking had lost its fidelity to Christ and had become allied with the world. The church of the fourth and fifth century, after the spurious conversion of Constantine when the church became the state religion of the empire in AD313, we see much corruption entering in at that stage.

Then we have the church at Thyatira, it is the corrupt church, and of course Thyatira means 'continual sacrifice', and it is during this historic church period around the sixth and seventh centuries that we start to see what we now know as Roman Catholicism coming to the fore. Eventually there is a glorious Reformation in the 16th century and we are led into the Sardis period, Sardis meaning 'escaping' or 'remnant', and this was a church that had a name that they lived but they were dead, the dead church. Whilst we must definitely say that the Reformation was a glorious act of God, many of the ecclesiastical systems that came out of it were established by men, and that church began to die - and we have the remnants of it in several denominations even today. Then we have the Philadelphian church, 'the faithful church' we called it, and Philadelphia means 'brotherly love'. After the general death of Protestantism as it was seen in the early Reformation days, God was pleased to send gracious revivals, His Holy Spirit bringing Christians back to the simplicity and primitiveness of New Testament truth - and so we liken that to the period of the 18th-century revivals and the early 19th century. During that period we saw that many New Testament principles concerning the church and the local assembly were restored, and principles concerning Christ's second coming were rediscovered. Also during that time there was a great door and effectual that was opened for the opportunity to spread the gospel worldwide in new modern missionary endeavours.

But this evening we visit Laodicea, the lukewarm church. If we're going to classify this in a prophetic sense, and attempt to fit it into the whole chronology of the church age, the meaning of Laodicea literally is 'the people ruling', or 'the rights of the people'. People in the church who are demanding their own rights, and the result of that is that public opinion begins to prevail rather than the standards of the word of God. So democracy is marking this Laodicean church, and indeed democracy that is almost ending in anarchy. I think you'll agree, hopefully, as we pass through this study tonight, that we see clearly - at least in a prophetic sense - many of the characteristics of what Paul spoke of to Timothy when he said: 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears'. The rights of the people become more important than the rights of the Lord. Many believe, myself included, that this paints a picture to us of the church that will be before the Lord comes. Indeed, would you allow me to say the church that exists, perhaps, today, at least in the West?

But we want to study this church, as we have done the others, first and foremost in a literal sense. What was the Lord saying to this church as it existed in John's day? Then another interpretation that is too often left out of this glorious book of Revelation: we need to

interpret it personally. At the end of each of these letters, including this one, in verse 22, we see that we are called upon personally to 'have an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches'. So let us look at Laodicea tonight, the lukewarm church and not only see what it has to say to a church just before the second coming of Christ, not only what it says to a church today that is lukewarm in the West, but what it is saying to our church and what it is saying to me as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in the day and age in which we live.

Now each night we've looked first of all at the city in question. Of course the city is Laodicea, it's about 40 miles from Philadelphia where we were last. When it was under Roman rule, Laodicea became a very very wealthy city - indeed it was one of the richest commercial centres of the world, and this is illustrated by the historical records: when Laodicea was destroyed by a terrible earthquake about AD 60, they were able to rebuild the whole city without any outside help, they had so much wealth of their own. Now we don't know how this church began in Laodicea, it may have begun through the wider missionary influence of the apostle Paul nearby. We do feel that he didn't visit it, we read that in Colossians chapter 2 and chapter 4 where he mentions it as he writes to the church at Colossae - and it may be, as Colossians 1 verse 7 would indicate, that Epaphras was actually the man that first preached the gospel and planted a church there in Laodicea. Now we know from Colossians 4 verse 16 that Paul instructed that the letter to Colossae should be read in the Laodicean church, and he indicated there that there was another letter that was coming from Laodicea that he had written to them. Now that was either a letter that has been lost, or it may well have been - as some feel - the letter to the Ephesians, which was a circular letter that may have been instructed to be read in Colossae and indeed in Laodicea.

Now in later times this city was known as a Christian city of great importance. Two reasons why we think that: there was a bishop in Laodicea, and there were church councils that were conducted at that venue of Laodicea. Very little is known other than that when the middle ages came, the Muslims destroyed the city of Laodicea, and what was once the greatest city of wealth in that area became a mass of ruins - most of Laodicea still is under the ground, it has not been excavated. Now when that happened, I suspect that it was round about the time, if not the exact period, when the lampstand of that church in Laodicea was removed. We saw in previous studies how politics, how even geography, how even earthquakes and all sorts of natural disasters can be seen in the history of the church to actually be the hand of God disciplining the witness in that particular area. Something happened to the church at Laodicea, the likelihood is that its witness was taken away by the Lord Himself - why? I'm reminded of the words of Horatius Bonar: 'I looked for the church, and I found it in the world; I looked for the world, and I found it in the church'. This was a wealthy city, one of the wealthiest in this region, and the wealth of that city had affected the church, and it lulled them into a spiritual slumber and anaesthesia. So what we are getting tonight, as we look at Laodicea, is a picture of a church in an affluent society. Could I therefore say that I don't think there's any other church that is as relevant to us in our age here in the Western world.

The characteristics of how our Lord is revealed to Laodicea are very instructive. Verse 14: He is presented, as He is to each of the seven churches, as the Christ for their need. How is He presented here? 'The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God'. The Lord is saying: 'This is what you need, Laodicea, you need to get a fresh glimpse of Me' - that's what every church needs in every age, that's what this church needs, that's what these Christians need - get a fresh glimpse of Christ, a new revelation, a new manifestation of His Glorious Person! The aspects, as He is revealed to Laodicea, are very telling - first He is revealed as the Amen. Now that might initially seem to be a strange title for our Lord Jesus - it is often translated, by the way, in the New Testament by the word 'verily', or 'truly'. Of

course John, who is writing this book, is very fond of that term in his gospel: 'Verily, verily I say unto you'. It is the same word that we end our prayers with, because that's the usage in the Scripture, where we say 'Amen' at the end of our intercession, which actually means 'So let it be', 'So be it'. So what it is describing is something that we are saying is true.

In Isaiah 65 and verse 16, God is called 'the God of truth'. By calling the Lord Jesus 'Amen' here, we are seeing His divinity, and the fact that He is the Word of God, and He is the Truth of God, and in Him is the message that God wants to speak to the world. Or as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 1: 'All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us'. In other words, Jesus Christ is God's final Word, Jesus is God's 'Amen'. Can I just say in passing that that means Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, all the prophets of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians - you name it - Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy: they're all impostors! All of them! Because Jesus Christ is God's final Word, His Amen, and He has nothing more to say after Him.

He is the Faithful and True, which is of course along the same vein. He's saying to Laodicea: 'Look to Me!'. Now this is the import of it, I believe: 'I was faithful in a similar situation to you in Laodicea, look to Me. If you look to Me you will overcome in Laodicea'. Now remember, this is a church that is living a lie, they are self-deceived - and the Lord is telling them: 'Look up to Me, the One who is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness. In My humanity I was pure, I was faithful, and testified to God in absolute completeness and perfection. Look to the Truth - I am the way, the truth and the life'.

Then thirdly, He is described as 'the beginning of the creation of God'. He is the beginning of the creation of God materially and spiritually, both. Now that phrase does not mean that the Lord Jesus was the first created. It does not say He had a beginning, it says He is the beginning - and if you turn to Revelation 21, if you don't believe me on that one, and verse 6 you will see that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who says: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end'. He is the beginning, not had a beginning, He is the beginning! John's thought, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is that this One who reveals Himself to Laodicea, He is the origin of all things, He is the first cause. In other words, every work of God begins with Him - spiritually and materially. I believe if you take this book from cover to cover, you will find that that is true. Look at every work that God performed, and I guarantee you that the Lord Jesus Christ was involved in it, if not completely instrumental in it. Now remember: this was a church who needed a new beginning, if ever a church did. This was a church who needed a work of God done in its midst - and the irony, the tragic disaster of it was that Christ who is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of every work of God, was outside the door! It's astounding, isn't it?

I wonder is there a Christian in our gathering here tonight, and you need a work of God in your life? You're a lukewarm Christian, you need a new beginning; you've made a mess as far as you're concerned, you need a new start! Forget about the personal just for a moment, and think about the corporate: church-growth gurus, theologians, popular pastors and preachers and teachers are all asking, 'What does the church of Jesus Christ need today? We need to do something, we are dwindling, there's fewer people coming to church. Even the Christians aren't committed any more, there's no changes in their life, real devotion and sacrifice'. Of course, there is a great temptation to turn to all sorts of gimmickry and human imagination and ingenuity. What does the church of Jesus Christ in the West need? What does it need? I'll tell you what it needs: it needs a fresh vision of Christ - but it needs something else. If it's going to turn to look on Christ, it needs to turn from its sin - and that's why the Lord says to this church, and indeed, remember, to five out of the seven churches, 'Repent! Repent!

Repent! Repent! Repent!', five times.

Now the problem is: the church today, at least in the West, is characterised by a Laodicean spirit, which is the rule and the rights of the people. What am I talking about? Well, 'Vox populi, vox Dei', 'The voice of the people is the voice of God' seems to be our motto today. Many churches are operating on this basis: things are advocated if they're popular with the people outside, or with carnal Christians inside - and the Bible is effectively set aside. The rights of the people alone, whether it's the people inside or the people outside, is now the compass by which we make decisions and take direction within the church of Jesus Christ. The rights of the people - we hear folk giving advice, and saying: 'What we need to do is take questionnaires, and go round the district here, and ask people what kind of a church they would like'. Don't think I'm making this up, I've heard these things. There was one Bible teacher who said: 'Yes, we should do that, and then we should do exactly the opposite of what they would like - because that's what God says we ought to do!'

We are at a stage now, even in Ulster, at least in some places, where - in the church now - it can be easier to get on without a sense of Christ than it is to get on with Him. It's easier to get on with a programme when the Holy Spirit is not intruding on our plans, and our wisdom, and our devices, and our strategies - it's easier to get on without Him than it is with Him! Do you know what we need? We need a glimpse that the Laodiceans got of the revealed Christ: the Amen, that's His deity; the Faithful and True Witness, that's His humanity; the Beginning of the creation of God, that's His eternity. We need to see Him as the Amen, the All-conquering One; the Faithful and True Witness, the All-convicting One; the Beginning of the creation of God, the All-controlling One - that's what we need! When was the last book you picked off the bookshelf that was telling you how to fill a church, that told you to look to Christ? Turn from sin?

Well, those are the characteristics they needed to see, and we see that clearly of course from the criticism that is found in verses 15 and 16 that our Lord levels at them. 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' - now there's a contrast here that you've got to see. The contrast is between what the Lord thinks and what they think, what His diagnosis is and what the church's diagnosis is. He says: 'You're neither hot nor cold, and I would that you were either hot or cold'. Now think about this, the word 'cold' here means 'frozen', 'chilled'. The word 'hot' means 'a burning passion', but He says: 'You're neither cold nor burning, but you're lukewarm, you're tepid'.

Now here is a lesson - and I haven't fully followed this through by the way, I'll leave it to you - but I think it is clear, at least, that the Lord is saying: 'I would rather have you one or the other'. Can we say that at least? I'd rather have you a Mary or a Judas, cold or hot - I'd rather have you out and out, or not at all! Boy, that's a revelation in itself! Because here in the West, at least, Christianity for a lot of Christians is a bit of a hobby - it's the weekend, it's the Christianity of convenience, it's not an all-consuming passion, it's not the discipleship that we find in the Gospels and the New Testament, it's a tag on to your career and to your family! Could we interpret what the Lord is saying in this light - it's only a thought and an application - 'I would rather you weren't evangelical, but evangelistic', there's a difference you know! You can be evangelical and not evangelistic. What the Lord is crying for is a people who are out and out, and if they're not out and out, He'd rather they were cold! Now that might confuse you, but I have a suspicion that the reason for that is - and those who witness round the doors will know this - it's often easier to get across to a person who is more antagonistic, than it is to somebody who just agrees with you but has no intention of changing. I think that's the

Lord's point. At least when you're cold you know you need something, but being lukewarm is a bit of a salve to the conscience, where you think: 'Well, I've got some temperature at least, that's better than nothing' - the Lord says, 'No it's not!'. You might be more receptive if you were cold, you might see your need if you were cold, but now you're in need of nothing as far as you're concerned!

I'll leave that with you, but one thing is certain: the happiest people in the church of Jesus Christ today are those that are out and out for Him. Do you know who the unhappiest people are? The ones who are trying to have the best of both worlds, and a foot in both camps. They're even less happy than the people out in the world! Do you know what the Lord says? 'You're neither hot nor cold, you're lukewarm, and you make me sick!' - serious, isn't it? This is the Lord of glory speaking! I don't think He's talking about salvation here when He says, 'I'll spew you out of my mouth', He's talking about their testimony, their witness for Him. They are a church, He has addressed them as such. Now in the city of Laodicea, nearby there was a place called Hierapolis and there were hot springs there. Then when you go to Colossae that wasn't far away, there were cold streams there, very refreshing. But by the time the water got to Laodicea through an underground pipe, it was tepid. Now listen: hot water can cleanse and heal, cold water can quench and revive and refresh - but do you know the only thing lukewarm water is good for? It's an emetic, do you know what 'emetic' is? It's an inducer for vomiting. They made the Lord sick - the church!

Look at their verdict on the situation, verse 17: 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing'. Materially they had everything, and yet they had nothing and they didn't see it! The word 'I am' there is in the present tense, which means they were habitually going on saying: 'We're alright, what's all this about?'. I imagine, can you imagine: when they got this letter and began to read it out, the indignation and offence that it was to them! They were completely self-deceived. Now that's interesting, because they were obviously proud - 'We have need of nothing' - and pride and ignorance go together. They didn't see things the way they really were. They had become like the city in which they resided: smug, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, self-righteous - and they didn't realise that the very presence of Jesus Christ in blessing had departed from them!

The Lord's verdict continues in verse 17, but rather 'thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked'. He has nothing good to say. Now listen: they were still a church, the Lord addressed them as a church, I believe they were a church - but mark the difference between this church and the others of the six that we have studied. There is no mention of any adversaries that Laodicea had. They have no false doctrine, it would appear. There's no throne of Satan as there was in Pergamos, that had a spiritual and political centre of administration for the ways of Satan from which went out persecution to the church in most of Asia Minor. Because Laodicea wasn't an offence to Satan, he didn't bother with them, no throne of Satan there! There was no synagogue of Satan, there may well have been many Jews in Laodicea - I think I'm right in saying that - but they didn't bother, because the believers here were no threat to them. There was no doctrine of Balaam troubling the people, there was no teaching of the Nicolaitanes here - do you see it? There was no Jezebel teaching when she should have been quiet. This was a church who offended nobody but Christ!

'Thou knowest not', He says, 'that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked'. Let's take the first one, 'wretched' - that word is found in Romans 7, where Paul says: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?', and it means 'a burden'. They had a burden, now mark it please: their burden wasn't their debt, their burden was their wealth! That's not how we see things these days. Then He calls them

'miserable', 'You're an object of pity'. Now please note, the Lord isn't angry here, He got angry at times with these other churches, but He's not angry here. He gets angry at apostasy, but He's not angry, He's ill - feeling ill at least! Nauseated! It nauseates Him when His people are indifferent! We get all annoyed about apostasy, don't we? What about this? What about the thing that makes the Lord sick?

They're poor, that word means 'destitute'. Now please compare this with these other churches for a moment. This church, Laodicea that says 'We are rich', the Lord says 'You're poor, you're destitute' - now that is the poverty of riches! Now when we went to Smyrna in chapter 2 and verse 9, if you look at it, He says: 'I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty', destitution, '(but thou art rich)'. They were suffering for their faith, that's the riches of poverty! Destitute in man's eyes, but in God's eyes they were rich. Then when we go to Sardis we see something similar in verse 1 of chapter 3, the Lord says: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead' - 'You've got a reputation that you're alive, but I know you're dead!'. This church of Laodicea was rich materially, but they had the poverty of riches - they were poor spiritually.

The Lord then says, again in verse 17, 'You're blind'. Oh, they thought they had great vision, but the Lord says: 'No, you don't know where you're going!'. Now this is interesting, you go to the period of the Judges in the Old Testament - who was the last Judge? Samson! Blind! Go to the period of the kingdom, who was the last king? Zedekiah, blind! Now we are in the church age, and it's the last church, and she's blind! Then the Lord says: 'Not only are you blind, but you're naked'. Like Hans Christian Anderson's tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes', they thought they were well attired when they were starkers and didn't know it. I think what Lord meant is: 'You're not adorned with the beauty of the simplicity of New Testament truth, as I have given it to my apostles'. This could have been a church that showed off its new premises and fancy wealth, and had a great budget every AGM and all the rest - not that there's things wrong with that necessarily, but they were favouring the material at the expense of the spiritual! That often happens - but they lost the duty of the primitive simplicity and nature of New Testament truth, and we are in danger of losing that today. I'll tell you this: there is nothing more attractive than it, nothing. A group of God's people meeting around His truth in absolute primitive New Testament simplicity, you'll not need any gimmicks, you'll not need to be sophisticated or professional, people will come to see what God is doing among you!

Laodicea, on a human level, was the place to be - and yet they couldn't see that the greatest enemy was a silent one who took them by stealth, what was it? What was it? Let us sum it up in one word: it was materialism. You've seen the news, and you know the Olympics are coming up soon in China. Though they wouldn't admit it, there is a capitalist revolution there. Communism and its philosophy has largely been rejected in some respects. Yet we have seen there in that nation in modern days one of the greatest revivals, if not the greatest revival in terms of how quickly it happened and how far it has spread, in all of history. Yet tonight, Christian Chinese leaders are saying: 'It could be that consumerism is more an effective killer of Christianity than communism ever was!' You know, they're right.

William Macdonald puts it like this: 'Whatever interpretation we take of the book of the Revelation, it is undeniable that the church of Laodicea presents a vivid picture of the age in which we live. Luxury living abounds on every hand, while souls are dying for want of the gospel. Christians are wearing crowns instead of bearing a cross. We become more emotionally stirred over sports, politics, television than we do over Christ. There is little sense of spiritual need, there is little longing for true revival. We give the best of our lives to the business world, and then turn over the remnants of a wasted career to the Saviour. We cater

to our bodies, which in a few short years will return to dust. We accumulate instead of forsake, lay up treasures on earth instead of heaven. The general attitude is: 'Nothing too good for the people of God. If I don't pamper myself, who will? Let's get ahead in the world and give our spare evenings to the Lord'. Macdonald says: 'This is the condition on the eve of Christ's return'.

That was the criticism, now there comes a corrective command. All is not lost. Though we might be nearing the end of the age, if we're not in the last days, or even the last of the last days, it's not hopeless! The Lord gives them a prescription for their condition, and we see it in verses 18 and 19: 'I counsel thee to buy of me', now that's a strange expression, to buy from Christ? Well, in Isaiah 55 and verse 1 we read: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price'. The Lord is speaking of an exchange here. They are to give Him what is useless, and He will give them their usefulness again in exchange - exchange your wealth for gold that is tried in the fire. Now Laodicea was a banking centre, what's the Lord speaking of here? Well, 1 Peter 1 and verse 7 gives us a clue I believe, Peter says: 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ'. What's this gold tried in the fire? It's true faith, faith that can be tried and tested. What the Lord is exhorting them to do is exchange their wealth for faith, not to have assurance in uncertain riches but in heaven's bank of faith, not to lay up treasures on earth but in heaven where moth or rust doesn't corrupt. In other words, live for things that money can't buy, and they will endure in the end.

'Buy of me gold tried in the fire', secondly, 'white raiment'. Laodicea was famous for its black wool, and they made black garments with it. The Lord is saying: 'Trade your black for white, repent!'. White garments in Revelation, as chapter 19 and verse 8 tells us, are the righteous acts of the saints. What He is exhorting Laodicea to do is: 'Don't be marked by the flashy clothes you wear, but by an attractive spirituality that is insatiable to those around'. In other words: put off the works of the flesh, and put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 3, the ladies were told not to adorn themselves, necessarily, in the ways of the world - plaiting of hair, wearing of gold, putting on of apparel - 'But let it be the hidden man', now that applies to all of us, not just the females, 'the hidden man of the heart, adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price'. Others don't see it, others don't value it, but in God's eyes it's worth a fortune!

The third thing they were to buy, exchange, was eye-salve. The eye powder that was manufactured in Laodicea was world-famous. It was made into tablet form, and they would grind the tablet down into powder and then they would apply it to eyes. These Laodicean Christians were living in a fool's paradise, they needed their eyes to be opened, they needed the Holy Spirit to give them open eyes of understanding. They needed to see themselves as He sees. They needed to assess themselves as He assessed them. Didn't the Lord say: 'The light of the body is the eye', 'The lamp of the body is the eye'? 'If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'. They were in darkness, they had lost their vigour - lukewarm! They had lost their values, they were valuing gold rather than faith. They had lost their vesture, not clothed with the righteous acts of the saints. Now we see that they had lost their vision, and without a vision the people perish.

In verse 19 the Lord says: 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore,

and repent'. Would you not look with pity on someone who was poor, wretched, blind and miserable? That's how the Lord is looking at them now: pity. Now, praise His holy name, He's not walking away yet. He loves them! He rebukes them, He chastens them - for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. But what you need to see tonight, wherever you're coming from church wise, or if you're in this church: do we see the hand of God and the Lord Jesus as the Judge-Priest of His church in the troublesome affairs in churches these days? Sure they need to be shaken up, we all do. We need to be chastened, we need to be rebuked. We see it in 1 Corinthians 11, it was happening there: 'If we would judge ourselves', Paul said, 'we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world'.

You see, we've got to face up to something: the church is whatever we have made it - but praise God, all was not lost. I'll tell you this: there's some people who believe that there's no point in praying for revival these days, because the Lord is coming soon and that's the way it has to be - that's a lot of nonsense! OK, there mightn't be a worldwide revival, but here - even in the last days before Christ's return - there is a commitment given by our Lord in verses 20 and 21: 'I stand', what condescension, what patience! The Lord is outside of His church, and He's trying to get in - and He's saying that if only but one member would answer to Him, what a change there might be! Oh we have programmes that are second to none, maybe premises that are palatial, but the presence of the pre-eminent One could be and often is outside the door!

There's similar imagery in the Song of Solomon chapter 5: 'I sleep', said the Shulamite, 'but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled'. Now in verse 8 we saw a door in Philadelphia that God opened for the spreading of the gospel, but this is a different door - we have to open this one! The Lord Jesus doesn't force Himself upon us. Campbell Morgan said well: 'The only cure for lukewarmness is the readmission of the excluded Christ'. There's no other answer. Now we're not talking here about union, people being saved, we're talking about communion. We're talking about fellowship with the Lord, and He says: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock', it might have an application in the gospel - but its interpretation is to us. 'If any man hear my voice', singular, 'and open the door, I will come in and sup', the word is 'dine', 'with them, and they with me'.

Do you know that in Palestine they had three staple meals a day? The first was breakfast, that usually was a bit of bread dipped in wine. The second was lunch, and that was only a little snack. The third was the evening meal, and that was the time when they didn't hurry it, but they spent all the time they could eating and fellowshiping with one another, and sharing and enjoying one another's company. That's what is used here: He will dine with us - a special experience of the Lord personally, where you will enter into His circumstances, and He will enter into yours in a way that others are not knowing in a day like the Laodicean age. Now that's possible, it doesn't matter what the conditions are that prevail: the Lord says it is not only possible, but inevitable, if we open the door. He says: 'I am knocking', it is in the continuous sense, 'I am knocking over again and again'. He knocks through the circumstances of our lives. He knocks through His holy word preached and read. How, child of God, is He knocking on your heart in this day of materialism and sensuality and selfishness? How has He been knocking at your door this week, this month, this year? How is He knocking at the heart door this moment as you listen to this message? Or are you indifferent to it? He is wanting to get in, He's wanting to do something in Belfast, He's wanting to do something in Ulster!

Verse 21 says that the one who answers is the one who overcomes, and they are promised

that they will share the glory of Christ's throne. Now please notice there's two thrones mentioned here in verse 21: there's Christ's throne, and there's the Father's throne. Now Christ's throne and the Father's throne are not the same thing. The Father's throne is what we read of in Psalm 110 and verse 1: 'The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool', and the Lord Jesus is on the Father's throne now until He makes His enemies His footstool. But here we see that He promises the overcomer that they will sit on His throne, now that's Christ's throne - that speaks of when He will reign on the earth, when the waiting period is over. He's saying: 'If you overcome now, you will be associated with me in my earthly reign'. What a day that will be, when He comes as the Son of Abraham to claim the land of Israel, when He comes as the Son of David to claim the throne of David, and when He comes as the Son of Man to claim the whole world!

Do you realise, Christian, here and now you are training for reigning? How well are you doing? When we invite the Lord into the Supper Room, it becomes a Throne Room, and we know His communion, and ultimately we experience His victory. Last verse, 22: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches'. Tirelessly, seven times, the Spirit has inspired John to write these words coming from our Lord Jesus, pleading with individual hearts in each church. We're going to see from next week on, and subsequent weeks, God's awful plans of judgement for this world - but John's message has been: judgement must begin in the house of God.

We're not going to have a closing hymn, we're going to bow our heads and pray together. We'll not be at these seven churches again, at least in this visit - have you heard what the Spirit has said to you? Lord Jesus, have Your way with Your church and with Your people, for Your glory. Amen.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 11

"The Throne Of God"

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I want to read chapters 4 and 5, because I think that the division we have in our English Bibles is a bit unhelpful, because it divides the unity of what is effectively one scene that we have before us in these two chapters. Effectively chapter 4 is the background to what we see in chapter 5. So let's read the two of them together, they're only about 20 - what is it? - 25 verses in total.

Verse 1 of chapter 4, John says: *"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

"And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I

beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever", Amen.

You will see from the obvious nature of what is written at the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, we have reached a definite break within the outline of John's Apocalypse. It seems to be between chapter 3 and chapter 4. Now, let me remind you that in chapter 1 verse 19 we have a God-given outline of the book, if you look back at it John was told to: 'Write the things which thou hast seen', and that is the first division of the book of Revelation, the things that John had already seen - and that is chapter 1, the vision of the risen, glorified Son of Man as the Judge-Priest in the midst of the churches. Then in the second division, John was told to write 'the things which are', those were the things that existed in his day as he was writing, and those are the things we looked at in chapter 2 and chapter 3, the seven churches of Asia Minor. Now we come to chapter 4, another section, and it is the largest section of the whole book because it runs from chapter 4 right through to the end of the book, chapter 22. It relates, as verse 19 of chapter 1 tells us, the things that are to be - and so we see that in the first verse of chapter 4: 'After this I looked'. Now some say that that only designates the fact that John is going to see a new vision after the last vision - well, if you think that, look to the end of verse 1 where it says clearly that the Lord instructed John to 'Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter'. This is the part of the outline of this book, things that are yet to come, things that are in the future.

Now it is very important that we notice that from here on in, right to the last chapter of the book of Revelation, the church is never mentioned. Now it is dealt with, of course, in great detail in chapters 2 and 3; but after the seventh church has received the critique of our Lord Jesus Christ, Laodicea that we looked at last week, the church is not mentioned again until chapter 22 and verse 16 - the conclusion of this book, which is effectively a letter to seven churches. Now, of course, in chapter 19 the bride of Christ is mentioned, and that of course is a name for the church - so the bride is there in chapter 19, but even that term referring to the church isn't mentioned anywhere else in the whole of the book of Revelation. Now that's not the only reason why we believe, but it certainly is one of them, that the church has been taken to heaven. If you were wanting to look for this chronologically in the book of Revelation, you probably could fit it just between chapter 3, the end of it, and chapter 4. We call it the rapture of the church, it's spoken of in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and 1 Corinthians chapter 15 - it is the translation of the saints.

Now in verse 1, where it says, John said: 'Behold, a door was opened in heaven, and the voice told him to 'Come up hither' - some feel that's an allusion to the rapture, and it may well be, I don't think we can be dogmatic on that one - but nevertheless, this is to happen. The purpose of chapters 4 and 5 that we read this evening is to set, if you like, a divine backdrop for the judgements that God is going to unleash upon this planet Earth after the church of Jesus Christ is taken from the scene. Now a closer look at your diagram I gave you, your outline of Revelation, will show you many of the judgements that we're going to see in later weeks - the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven key figures of that tribulation period, the seven bowls being poured out, and the seven dooms pronounced upon Babylon,

and then the return of our Lord Jesus. This is setting the scene for us in chapter 4 and chapter 5 for a great judgement.

Now if we were to turn this evening to Isaiah chapter 6, or Ezekiel chapter 1, we would see that there are similar visions of God that those prophets saw - and, incidentally, both of those saw those similar visions just before they pronounced judgement on God's behalf. Now if you've been with us for the last seven weeks, you will remember that we looked at the seven churches where Christ in their midst, as their Judge-Priest, pronounces that judgement must begin in the house of God. So in the book of Revelation the church is to be judged first - and you remember what happened before that happened? John was given a vision of the glorified Son of Man, the Judge-Priest who was in the midst of the churches. So a vision of Jesus Christ was given before the judgement to the churches, and we are seeing this pattern repeated once again. We're going to see in these subsequent weeks the greatest judgement that this world has ever known. We have the words of our Lord Jesus for that, for He said in Matthew 24: 'Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be'. But before pronouncing these great judgements, John is given a divine vision.

A little time after the saints have been raptured and translated to heaven there will begin a seven-year period of tribulation in which God will deal with unbelieving Jewish people and unbelieving Gentile nations. Jeremiah called it 'the time of Jacob's trouble'. It's spoken of in the prophet Daniel as 'Daniel's 70th week', you can read about that in Daniel 9 and verse 27. But this vision of God that we are going to look at tonight in chapter 4 is the prelude to all that is going to be poured out upon this world of God's wrath. So let's look at it.

What was the last word that the Lord spoke to the churches? If you look at verse 21 of chapter 3 you will see this: 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne'. Now what the Lord refers to there is His joint occupancy of the Father's throne, and that is the way things are now. He is waiting for the moment when He will rise from that throne and He will call His people home, and then He will begin to administer God's purposes in humanity and pour out the judgements upon this earth. But as we enter into chapter 4, it appears that Christ's role is different in that vision - chapter 5 is the same, if you look at verse 6 of chapter 5: 'I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth'. Now where the Authorised Version says: 'I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne'; the New American Standard Version translates it like this, I believe more accurately, 'Between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders there was a Lamb standing'. The Lamb is not on the throne, the Lamb is before the throne, and that suggests that the Lord is in a different role now in chapter 5 than He was in chapter 3 and verse 21. He is no longer sitting on His Father's throne, but He has arisen and He stands before the throne.

You might say: 'Well, you're just splitting hairs really, aren't you?'. Well, no, because this suggests that the church age is now closed, and Christ now has a different relationship. We've seen already in this book that to be before the throne, whether it is angelic creatures, whether it is the seven Spirits of God, to be before the throne signifies the administration for God. So what we are seeing here in chapter 5 is that Christ is about to do something for God, He's about to administer God's rule, He's about to open the first seal of the seven-sealed book of the Lamb and usher in the Tribulation period. It's very important that we see that. Something is changing here.

Now though chapters 4 and 5 are linked, we shall see more of the significance of chapter 5, in the will of the Lord, next week. We need to ask: what is the reason for this vision, chapters 4 and 5, before unleashing all these judgements in the Great Tribulation period? Well, the answer is simple, and it is the most common word that we find in chapter 4: it is the word 'throne'. That is the key word of this chapter, and I would go as far as to say that it's probably the key word in this whole book. It is found 14 times in this chapter alone - if you try counting it you'll not get 14, but the seats that are referred to that these twenty-four elders are sitting on are also really thrones. But John, as the writer of Revelation, he uses the word 'throne' 43 times out of the 62 times it's used in total in the New Testament as a whole. Indeed, the second most common usage of the word 'throne' is found in Matthew's gospel, and of course most of you will know that Matthew is the gospel of the King and the kingdom - but it's only used 5 times in Matthew. In this chapter alone it is used 14 times, in this Revelation 40 times, and what we are seeing here is God emphasising His own throne.

Now we saw in the church at Pergamos in chapter 2 and verse 13 that Satan's seat - the word is 'Satan's throne' - was there in Pergamos, that was his earthly, geographical, logistic location. What we're seeing now is that though Satan's throne might be on earth, God's throne is in heaven - and God's throne rules over all! God's throne will never be defeated! So what is God doing through John? Well, He's showing us, before He shows us these awful wrath judgements that will be poured upon this planet, He shows us that the place of supreme authority is in the throne of God in heaven - heaven rules!

Now we need to remember who John is writing to. John's readers are troubled because of Caesar's throne. They are being persecuted by their own emperor and empire, and by other religionists, particularly in Judaism. John does not want them to forget that God is still on His throne and will ever be there. There is a higher throne than all this world has known, where faithful ones from every tongue will one day come. You see, John wanted them to see their fortune and their future was not in the hands of a human despot, but the scroll of all creation's destiny is in the hand of Almighty God who sits on the heaven's throne, and one day soon will deliver that scroll into the hand of the Lamb that was slain, to judge all the persecutors of righteousness. So chapters 4 and 5 are simply setting the scene for all that's going to come in chapters 6-22. It's simply saying to John, and to those he writes to, and to us today: no matter what may happen on earth, no matter what experiences we go through in life, God is on His throne and He is in complete control!

Now let's look at this vision, and we're going to look at it slowly and in detail, so do take your time with me and follow it. One of the first things that we encounter is a door: 'I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven'. Now that may refer, as some think, to the rapture - but one thing is certain: the voice which John heard was the voice that he had already heard. He says that he heard it in chapter 1 verse 10, if you want to remind yourself of that, and that voice is calling him up in the spirit to heaven: 'Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter', things which must take place after this. Now, if you underline your Bible, underline that word 'must' - because here again we have this theme: these things that you're going to read in chapters 6-22, they must happen! The strong emphasis is that John is not writing about matters of chance that may come about or not if conditions are right, but these events will certainly occur because they are part of a divine plan, they are God's will. He's the one on the throne, He's the one in supreme control.

So there is a door, and there's a voice, and then in verse 2 we see that there is a throne: 'And immediately I was in the spirit' - and if you want to know what that is you can get one of our

previous studies where we looked at that in chapter 1 - 'and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne'. Now what we're going to read now is a wonderfully graphic account of the throne of God in the courtroom of heaven. All the language that John uses here is metaphorical in the sense that they are giving us suggestions of what this throne is like, and what the aura coming from the divine Persons are like, because he cannot in accurate language convey the full-orbed attributes and nature of the scene that is before him, the majesty and the unfathomableness of Almighty God. So he uses language to help us.

In verse 3, in the first part, he says that He that sat upon that throne 'was to look upon like a jasper and a sardias stone'. John was so overwhelmed that he had to refer to precious stones and jewels to refer to what he saw at that throne. Now jasper is a clear jewel, and we think that what he's getting at here is the purity that was coming, emanating from this throne. Sardias we know is a ruby red stone, and that could speak of a number of things, but often in ancient times it spoke of anger and divine judgement. Here, emanating from this throne is this pure, transparent jewellike ray from a jasper stone; a ruby red ray from a sardias stone - and what he's trying to grasp for us and convey is the majesty that robes and envelops the Person who is sitting upon this throne.

The Psalmist said that the Almighty 'coverest himself with light as with a garment: the one who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain'. Paul to Timothy tried to convey this when he spoke of God as only having immortality, 'dwelling in light which no man can approach; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen'.

'Shoreless Ocean!
Who shall sound Thee?
Thine own eternity is round Thee,
Majesty Divine!'

Now some people feel this isn't actually a depiction of God, rather it's a description of the throne, not God Himself. Well, I don't know about that, but Leon Morris has a very good comment, and I want you to listen carefully to this. He says: 'Flashes of light from precious stones form an apt symbol of the divine presence. This is why: at once they are restrained as regards detail, but clear as regards excellence'. I'll repeat that: 'At once they are restrained as regards detail, but clear as regards excellence'. In other words, there's a blinding excellence whereby you know there is something great, there is something other coming here, there is something transcendent that you're viewing; but you can't focus, you can't describe it, you can't see it in specific detail. I think he's right, and I think it is John's attempt to depict the glory of God that emits from this great throne.

Add to this as well that if you're familiar with Exodus 39, the High Priest's garments, you will know that the breastplate of the High Priest had a jasper stone on it and a sardias stone. The jasper stone, like every other of the stones on the breastplate, represented one of the tribes of Israel - the jasper stone represented the tribe of Rueben. Rueben was Jacob's firstborn. The sardias stone was the last stone on the breastplate - jasper was first, sardias was last - and sardias represented the tribe of Benjamin, who was Jacob's last born. Some scholars believe that these two stones depict that God here is operating for all His people, all the children of Israel from the first tribe to the last - but I think there's more than that in it. Rueben, who is represented by the jasper, his name means 'Behold a son'. Benjamin, represented by the sardias stone, the last son of Jacob, means 'Son of My Right Hand'. Could it be that what is being depicted here is not just a representation of God's people Israel and God moving on their behalf, but the fact that the divine Son, born to the people of Israel, will

be shown later in chapter 5 as the dispenser of all God's justice and wrath - the Son of God's Right Hand.

In verse 3, the second part, John then sees a rainbow. Now please note, it's not very clear just in our English version, but it says 'a rainbow round about the throne' - now that literally means that this was a rainbow in a complete circle, not just an arc. It's described as being like emerald, now what does that mean? Well, when we go back to the book of Genesis, we see in Genesis chapter 9 verse 16 that the rainbow was given by God as a symbol of His covenant with the whole of creation. Now it was the Noahic Covenant we call it, but it was not just a covenant made with Noah, it was a covenant made with every thing in the whole of creation. God was saying that He would not judge the earth again with a flood, and what we have here is this emerald rainbow depicting that, yes, this is a vision just before God is going to pour out His judgemental righteous wrath upon the earth, but even in the midst of all that anger and righteous judgement God is merciful! He does not forget His promises, nor His covenants, and He has no intention of obliterating the whole of creation.

Now you know, don't you, that usually a rainbow comes after the storm - but here we have a rainbow before the storm, isn't that beautiful? Remember now that this vision is being given to God's people, and God is telling them that in wrath He will remember mercy - and could it be another allusion of how the Lord is going to take His own people, those suffering saints, out of the scene before any of this comes to pass? It's certainly a sign of hope.

Then come with me again, verse 4, John further sees round about the throne - the circular rainbow was round about in a vertical sense, upward; but this description of four and twenty seats and elders is round about the throne on a horizontal level. Twenty-four elders, and there are twenty-four thrones, one each. Look at the verse: these elders are robed in white garments, and they're wearing golden crowns. Now the word for 'crown' there is 'stephanos', which is the athletic crown, the reward for running the race and winning it, not 'diadem' which is a crown that speaks of governmental authority.

Now can I say, without going into much detail, that no one, I believe, can say for certain, dogmatically, who these twenty-four elders are. They have been variously understood by scholars down through the years. Some say they are angelic beings, and they have reasons for saying that - they think that these angelic creatures represent the saints of God in some capacity. Others believe that these twenty-four elders represent the redeemed of both the Old and the New Testament - the twelve tribes of Israel represented in the patriarchs, and the twelve apostles representing the New Testament church. Of course we know that in the New Jerusalem the twelve tribes' names will be written on the gates of the New Jerusalem, and also the foundation of that great new city will be the twelve apostles' names. Then there's another group of scholars who believe that all of these twenty-four elders represent all the believers in the New Testament Church and them alone. They say this because of the fact that they are crowned and enthroned on twenty-four thrones, which suggests to them that these people have been judged and are rewarded, and therefore must be Christians. Also in the Old Testament there were twenty-four courses of the levitical priests in the Temple, and of course in the New Testament we as the saints of God have been made kings and priests to serve unto God, and so that's how they understand it - these twenty-four are all believers, and they're operating as king-priests, and of course that would lend support to the idea that the church has been raptured, and the church indeed is dwelling in heaven. I'll leave you to come to your own conclusion on that one.

In verse 4, as we read on to verse 5, we see that out of the throne proceeded lightnings and

thunderings and voices - lightnings and thunderings and voices. This is all depicting for us a scene of judgement. Now mark that the rainbow is still intact, God is judging but His mercy and His grace is still extant. Then John sees these seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, and he interprets for us that these seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God. We have seen on a previous occasion that the seven Spirits of God speak of the One, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost - but it's speaking of His completeness and His full ministry as the perfect Spirit. Isaiah chapter 11 verses 2 and 3 talks about that, the full-orbed nature of His ministry and His Majesty.

Come to verse 6, and before the throne John sees more: 'there was a sea of glass like unto crystal' - a sea of glass, what does that speak of? Well, this throne of the Almighty God is located in a place that is undisturbed. The sea speaks of restlessness, but this is a sea of glass, it is undisturbed, it is separate, distinct, transcendent from the wild tossing seas of this world. The opposition of the wicked is described in the Bible as those who are tossed about like the troubled sea, not so with this sea, it is unshakable. Now 'sea' in the Bible often speaks of separation, and perhaps the reason why it is here before the throne of God is that we might know, as sinful creatures in humanity, that we are different, we are separate, we are distinct from God - and He is unique. Do you know that's what holiness means? Unique, utterly unique! We cannot approach to God, who is of awful holiness.

Then follow with me again in verse 6, the second half, 'in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind'. Now that would better be translated 'four living creatures', 'beasts' confuses it with other things in prophetic literature, these are four living creatures. Now again it is very difficult just to identify with accuracy what these four living creatures are, but they seem to be - as we study them and dissect them - a kind of combination between cherubim and seraphim. Now cherubim, we read of them in Ezekiel chapter 10, and I think verse 7 here speaks of the cherubim. The cherubim were to have a face like a lion, a face like a calf, a face like a man, and a face like an eagle. Then when we go to Isaiah 6, we read about seraphim, and they had six wings. You can read all about it yourself, and I think that is found in verse 8: six wings about them, and those wings were full of eyes. So they are a type of mix of cherubim and seraphim, and they are covered from head to toe with eyes before and behind. In other words, behind is God, and they are all-seeing as far as God is concerned; and before them is the creation and the universe, you and me, and they are all-seeing as far as we are concerned. Now of course no one is all-seeing apart from God, and these four creatures are just reflecting this attribute in the Almighty as they stand before the throne of God. They are the guardians, it would seem, of God's throne.

Now I think these four living creatures reflect three things at least. First of all they reflect the whole of creation. You remember that I told you God made a covenant, not just with Noah but with all of creation. Now in Genesis 9 and verse 10 we read about it, listen carefully, God said: 'I'm going to make a covenant with every living creature that is with you', who is the 'you'? Noah, so it's a covenant made with creation that was made with man. He goes on: 'And I will make a covenant with the fowl', that's the birds of the air, that's the eagle, 'and with the cattle', that's the ox, 'and with every beast of the earth with you', the beast of the earth, the chiefest of them, is the lion. So this reflects the whole of creation. I think too it might reflect Israel in some nature. It was Walter Scott who observed that the ancient rabbinical writers declared that the tribes of Israel pitched their tents and their standards, their insignia, on the four sides of the Tabernacle in the selfsame order that we have here. Now Judah, his insignia was the lion; Ephraim's insignia was the ox, Reuben's insignia was the man, and Dan's insignia was the eagle. You can read about that in Numbers chapter 2 and verse 2. I cannot

prove that, but it's very interesting, isn't it, that these four creatures might well reflect God's purposes to Israel.

But of course, I'm sure it's obvious to some, the certainty of what they reflect is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Down through the years Christians and Bible scholars have always seen in these four faces - the face of a lion, the face of a calf, the face of a man, the face of an eagle - how the four evangelists - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - have depicted the various characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Matthew is the gospel of the King, the king of beasts is the lion. Mark is the gospel of the Servant, and the chief beast of labour and burden is the calf or the ox. Luke's gospel is the one that focuses on the Son of Man, on the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the face of a man. John's gospel is the one that takes us into the heights of glory and shows us the divinity of Christ, as we soar like an eagle in the heavenlies.

God puts the picture of Jesus Christ everywhere. Here it is in these four living creatures, and they are before the throne of God - that means, remember, before the throne they are administering God's rule. Now there's four of them, and four is the number of universality - and as we will see going through the rest of the book of Revelation, these four living creatures are involved intrinsically in the judgements that will be poured out upon this earth. Do you see what God's saying? Four, this will be universal judgement. Eyes, this will be all-seeing judgement. This will be judgement that will be executed by that Man which God hath raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want you to see something else in John's description of the throne room of heaven, because I believe John seems to suggest that the earthly Tabernacle, and the Temple that we read about in Exodus and other books in the Old Testament, was based upon the heavenly sanctuary of the throne room of God in glory. If you look at the Tabernacle diagram on the screen, you'll see many parallels between the earthly Tabernacle, or the Temple, and the sanctuary of God in the throne room of heaven. There is the Holy of Holies, you can see it right over here, or the holiest place of all - and that speaks of the throne of God. There's the seven branched candlestick, and that is seen clearly here in this chapter in the seven lamps that are before the throne of God. There is the bronze laver that was filled with water, you see it there, and that's seen in heaven as the sea of glass. If you were to go into the holiest place of all, you would see the Ark of the Covenant, and of course overarching that Ark there would be the cherubim, the wings of the cherubim. You've got these four living beasts, living creatures in heaven as well. You've got priests in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and you've got twenty-four elders that may well be king-priests in heaven. You've got a brazen altar in the Tabernacle, and in chapter 6 of Revelation we'll see that it is also in heaven. We have an incense altar in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and we've also an incense altar in chapter 8 of Revelation. We've the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and in chapter 11 and verse 19 God gives us a glimpse into the sanctuary in glory and the Ark of the Covenant is there as well.

Now of course there is no material temple in heaven as such, all heaven is God's sanctuary - however, when we come to Revelation 15 it's indicated to us that there is a special sanctuary of God, even a heaven of heavens. It's amazing. I don't know about you, but this is a glorious sight that we're seeing tonight. I don't know what your reaction to it is, but John's was that he was overwhelmed. You can imagine why, can't you? He's trying to pour the ocean into a teacup, and convey it to us who have never seen even what he saw. Isaac Watts put it like this:

'Earth from afar hath heard Thy fame,
And worms have learn'd to lisp Thy name;
But, O, the glories of Thy mind
Leave all our soaring thoughts behind'.

All this creation that is in heaven, what is their occupation? Well, they're lost in wonder, love and praise - and if you look at verses 8 to 11 of chapter 4, we see this great doxology before us, and it's mighty: the four beasts, the living creatures, with the six wings about them, they are full of eyes, 'they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created'. What a scene! Moving through the heavenly realm, and there is this picture of unceasing worship from all of creation - what a contrast to the way things are today.

You know what Paul said in Romans chapter 1, don't you? Mankind has changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen. Everything has been switched around, that's why there's a day has to come when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and switches it back round the right way. Augustine said: 'Thus does the world forget You, its Creator, and falls in love with what You have created instead of with You'. But here is the heavenly scene, and I believe it's similar to the scene now, where all of created life around the throne is constantly, day upon day, crying: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God Almighty'. Man is for God, not God for men, and these struggling saints that John is writing to, they needed to get a glimpse of the Almighty. Nine times in the book of Revelation we read this depiction of God the Almighty, they needed to see it! He is in control, not Rome, not the Caesar, not the Jews, He is the one who is worshipped by all of His creatures in creation.

We need to remember as we study this book that God didn't give this book to satisfy Christians' curiosity about the future. He didn't give us this book to tell us who the four and twenty elders were with 100% accuracy - if that's what you get hung up on, you're missing the point entirely. This book and this vision is for comfort, it is for hope, it was written by a persecuted Christian - John on the Isle of Patmos - it was written to persecuted Christians in all of Asia Minor. 'To suffer for Thee was their work, but to think of Thee was their rest'. They needed to see Him, that's the vision they needed most - and this vision was written with the purpose of encouraging and exhorting them by reassuring them that God in Jesus Christ controls the course and the climax of human history. That's why I've given this series the title 'Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow', because if all of us could only get a vision, a revelation of God and His Son, His eternal purposes that must come to pass - what a difference it would make for the present!

A W. Tozer, upon this phrase 'they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come', said: 'They rest not day or night, my fear is that too many of God's professing people down here are resting far too often between their efforts of praise' - how true. Here is a vision of God in control of everything, and that is the vision - my Christian friend - that will get you through your life. Any tribulation, any trial, any suffering, any hardship - a vision of God and His Christ, even in the harshest persecution, will carry you through! But there is a problem: if we're going to have such a vision, we need to take time to get it; we need to take space to gaze upon God.

Now I'm led to believe that A. W. Tozer had a practice, that he would go into his study in the morning, and he would put on a set of overalls, and take an old mat that he had bought from Sear Roebuck and throw it on the ground of his study, lock the door and lie prostrate on his face and belly for the whole morning thinking on God. Sure, what do we know about that? Do we spend time gazing on God? That's what this vision is giving us, that was fuelling them for the worst that was to come in their life, and ultimately the worst that will ever come in this earth's history - a vision of God who is in control, and that would get them through.

I love the poetry of F.W. Faber. He spent many hours himself, like Tozer, gazing on God. Listen to a couple of verses from a few of his poems. He says this:

'Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name
Earth has no higher bliss.

Father of Jesus, love's reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee!'

As if addressing the Lord personally, he says directly:

'I love Thee so, I know not how
My transports to control;
Thy love is like a burning fire
Within my very soul.

O Spirit, beautiful and dread!
My heart is fit to break
With love of all Thy tenderness
For us poor sinners' sake'.

Oh, to get a vision of God like that - that our transport and rapture we cannot control, that our hearts almost burst for a love of Him! I'll tell you: that will carry you through like nothing else. Our problem is, even as Christians, we don't have time for that stuff. I'm going to share a story with you as I close, I've already shared it with the people here in Iron Hall. I read it in a book by Ron Boyd Macmillan, the son of the previous pastor in Templemore Hall years ago. He was in China and he met a Chinese Christian named Wang Mingdao. Wang Mingdao had been persecuted many times and kept in solitary confinement for his faith. He spent a bit of time with him, and he said to him one day: 'Wang Mingdao, I will never be put in jail like you, so how can your faith have any impact on mine?'. Wang Mingdao seemed a bit nonplussed by that, and then he started asking Ron Macmillan a series of questions. He said: 'Listen to me carefully, and answer: When you go back home, how many books do you have to read this coming month? How many letters do you have to write? How many people do you have to see? How many articles do you have to produce? How many sermons do you have to prepare and preach?'. He kept on asking these questions, and Ron Macmillan as he writes says: 'I answered them each time, and after about 15 of these questions I was beginning to feel panicked at the amount of work that was ahead of me'. Wang Mingdao seemed to sense this, and Ron says: 'We sat in silence, and suddenly an insight burst into my consciousness with

scalding ferocity: I need to build myself a cell!'. A cell, like Wang Mingdao's cell.

Ron shared that thought with Wang Mingdao, and he grew very excited and explained, and this is just a quotation as he wrote it, Wang Mingdao said: 'When I was put in jail I was devastated. I was 60 years old, at the peak of my powers. I was a well known evangelist and wished to hold crusades all over China. I was an author, I wanted to write more books. I was a preacher, I wanted to study my Bible and write more sermons. But instead of serving God in all those ways, I found myself sitting alone in a dark cell. I could not use the time to write more books - they deprived me of pen and paper. I could not study my Bible and produce more sermons, they had taken my Bible away. I had no one even to witness to as the jailer, for years, just pushed my meals through a hatch'. Now listen to this, he said: 'Everything that had given me meaning as a Christian worker had been taken away from me, and I had nothing to do' - and then he stopped, and his eyes moistened again: 'Nothing to do', he said, 'except get to know God. For 20 years that was the greatest relationship I have ever known - but the cell was my means'. He ended with this parting shot: 'You need to build yourself a cell, so that you can do for yourself what persecution did for me: simplify your life, and get to know God'.

Now hopefully we'll never face a cell for Christ - but you see if you're going to get through this life with your testimony intact, you're going to have to make yourself a cell and gaze and gaze on God.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 12

"The Lamb And The Scroll"

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Well, do turn with me now to Revelation chapter 5, beginning to read at verse 1 - and trying to keep in mind, by the way, what we learned last Monday evening without reading chapter 4. You remember the vision of 'The Throne of God' that we were given, and so this chapter 5 is actually running on from chapter 4 - they really should be read together, but we'll not read it for the sake of time tonight.

Following on from we heard last week, John says: *"And I saw", chapter 5 verse 1, "in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever".*

Now of course, all the recordings of our previous studies are available tonight, and it might be helpful for you to get last week's study to glean the truths that we found in chapter 4 - but you will remember, if you were here last week, that chapters 4 and 5 together are a backdrop that the Holy Spirit through John gives us for the judgements that we are about to face from chapter 6 through to about 18 or chapter 19, judgements that are going to be unleashed upon the earth from God. Now we noted last week that this pattern - that is, being given a vision of deity before the pronouncement of judgement - it's something that we've seen already in holy Scripture. We cited Isaiah 6, where Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up in the throne room, His train filling the Temple, and he cried 'Holy, holy, holy' - what we saw last week from Revelation 4 in a similar vein. Isaiah saw that vision before he pronounced his judgements. Ezekiel was the same, in Ezekiel chapter 1 we have a great vision of the throne of God, very

very similar to the graphic details that we have in Revelation 4 - and again, that vision was given to the prophet Ezekiel before he pronounces the judgements upon the nation.

Now in chapter 1 of Revelation we were given a vision of Christ as the ascended, exalted Priest-Judge of His people - that is, the church. There He is in the midst of the churches, weighing them and judging them - the reason? Judgement must begin in the house of God. So before He judges the seven churches, we see a vision of Christ. Now we move to chapter 4 and chapter 5, and just before the wrath of God is poured upon this world we are given, through John, a vision of the Almighty, and in chapter 5 of His Christ. Now we're going to come in these next weeks to what we know in prophetic truth as 'the tribulation period', the greatest judgements that this world has ever known - and we have the word of our Lord Jesus on that in Matthew 24:21: 'For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be'. It is without precedent, and there will be nothing like it ever again.

So John is given this vision of the throne room of God in chapter 4, and of the Lamb and the scroll in chapter 5, to prepare us for the judgements that are going to fall upon this planet. Of course, as you see from the diagram on your screen, and of course from prophetic scripture, we know that it will be a little time after the church is translated - 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, John 14 - it will be a little bit after the time that the church is raptured that the seven-year tribulation period will begin in which God will deal with the Jewish people, and all unbelieving Gentile nations. Now I didn't mention this last week, I did mention it in the past, but we must always remember that God's prophetic plan of history involves three groups of people: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church. It's important, if we're not to confound and confuse prophetic Scriptures, to differentiate and distinguish between these three groups we have seen in 1 Corinthians 10:32: 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God'.

In Jeremiah 30 this seven-year tribulation period is called 'the time of Jacob's trouble', it's specific to Israel in a particular way. In Daniel the prophet it is spoken of as his '70th week' - now we haven't got time to go into this in great detail, because we're trying to expound the book of Revelation in particular, but if you want to look at it more: a few years ago I did a six-week series entitled 'Crucial Questions on Christ Return', and there was one whole week I took on the subject of the tribulation period and several other important topical issues regarding prophecy. Now in chapter 3 and verse 21 we saw a reference to Christ's current position in heaven. There was a promise given to the overcomer in Laodicea, chapter 3:21: 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne'. So Christ, presently, has risen and ascended to the right hand of God, and He is seated on the Father's throne - there is joint occupancy of the throne in heaven. So that is His position now. Psalm 110:1 puts it: 'The LORD said unto my Lord', Jehovah said unto my Lord, 'Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool'. He will make His enemies the footstool of His feet when He comes again - but this has not transpired yet, and so we are still in this waiting period where the Lord Jesus is seated on His Father's throne.

But in chapter 5 of Revelation we see that something seems to have changed. We noted last week in verse 6 of chapter 5 that Christ, the Lamb, is in the midst of the throne. Now the New American Standard Version renders this verse 6 that the Lamb was 'between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing'. The Lamb is before the throne, it would seem. We have noted already as we have gone through this prophecy that to be before the throne, whether it's these four living creatures that we looked at last week, or whether it's

the seven lamps that signify the seven Spirits of God, to be before the throne speaks of God's administration on the earth - doing something for God. So Christ now, look at it, is before the throne - and He's not sitting, no longer sitting, He's standing. Now that suggests that the church age has passed, of course, obviously it has passed - we see that at the end of chapter 3 where the seventh church has been addressed.

Chapter 5 shows us that our Lord Jesus, standing before the throne of God as the Lamb, is about to usher in the tribulation period by taking this book from the hand of God the Father seated on the throne, and opening the seven sealed book of the Lamb. Now we read of John's unspeakable joy to see this vision, having seen the vision of Almighty God over all creation as sovereign, to now see God's Spirit putting the Lamb of God at the centre stage of all of prophetic history. It's a bit like the spirit of the hymn:

'Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned,
By the many still neglected,
And by the few enthroned,
But soon He'll come in glory,
The hour is drawing nigh,
For the crowning day is coming by and by'.

This is the vision that John is getting, remember he's a persecuted man on Patmos because of his faith in Jesus Christ. He's writing to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor, but God's Spirit is giving him a vision of something that is yet to be. The great late Bible teacher, Dr Henry Jowett, attended the Coronation of Edward VII in Westminster Abbey. He records that on that occasion he observed with interest all the congregation assembling, the seating of princes and princesses, dukes and duchesses, and others of lesser nobility; and how homage was paid to each of them as they entered the great Abbey. 'But then the king arrived', Jowett said, 'and all eyes turned away from those of lower rank, and were fixed upon him'. That's what's happening to John: the Lamb steps from the shadows into the spotlight in chapter 5 of this vision, and every eye is focused on Him. The Lamb, we see, is the theme of their song in heaven. The Lamb is the centre of their thought in heaven. The Lamb is the object of their adoration in heaven. Why? Because the Lamb is all the glory in Emmanuel's land.

Now I want us to get a glimpse of this vision of the Lamb exalted in heaven tonight under four figures that are given to us in this chapter. First of all I want us to look at this scroll that we find in verses 1 to 4. Then secondly I want us to see the Lion and the Lamb, two figures of our Lord, in verses 5 and 6. Then thirdly we need to see, if we've time, the incense in verses 7 and 8. Then the larger portion of the chapter, the worship in heaven, verses 9 to 14. Let's start with the scroll, verses 1 to 4. Now, of course, in subsequent weeks we will see that this scroll will be opened and the seven seals speak of seven specific judgements that are going to come upon the earth. Now when you read in the Authorised Version that this is a book, please do not have in your conception the idea of a modern bound book - that will completely mislead you. What is being spoken of is a scroll, the ancient papyrus scroll that they had in ancient times. Verse 1 tells us that it was written within and on the backside - the information on this scroll was on the front and on the back. The implication is that there was nothing more could be written on it - that's interesting. The complete record of what God is going to do is there, and no one needs to add to it. So we don't need the cults' addendums and appendices to the New Testament - do we? This is it! God's final revelation given to us in this last book of the Bible.

There are seven seals on this scroll. Now that means that no one knows the content of this book, up to this point at least, in the book of Revelation. Now it's interesting to note that in John's day a Roman will had seven seals, a will and testament. Those seven seals spoke of seven witnesses to that will, and each put their own personal individual seal on each of the seven seals. Now what that meant was: if that will was to be opened and read, each of those seven witnesses had to loose their own seal before the will could be executed.

Now, what is this scroll? Well, some scholars say it's the Old Testament prophets. I don't believe it is. Some think it's the book of Revelation itself. I don't think so, because neither the Old Testament prophets nor the book of Revelation require worthiness in order to open them. I think the Roman will gives us a clue. What we have here - remember, it's in the hand of the One who sits on the throne, that is God the Father - it must be God's will, God's Testament for this planet. Now that's a biblical idea, because in Jeremiah 32 we get a glimpse into the Jewish law regarding the redemption of a piece of land. Let me explain it to you: if you owned a piece of land, and because you couldn't repay your debts you forfeited it, you had eventually the right to buy back that piece of land in the future, at some stage anyway. Even if you never ever repaid your debts, after a prescribed period of time your heir, or your next of kin, could buy it. The idea was that it would keep the land in the family, even if you hadn't paid your debts.

Now there's an example of that in the prophet Isaiah, because Jeremiah's cousin, Hanamel, came to Jeremiah the prophet and asked him to redeem his field in Anathoth. Now when Jeremiah's cousin lost the field, the land, there were two scrolls - if you like, contracts - that were written up, and both of them contained the terms of redemption. One scroll was used as a public record of the events, and the other - interestingly - was sealed with seven seals, placed in a clay jar, and put in the Temple; and it would only be brought out when someone showed proof of their right to redeem the land. So this idea of a seven-sealed scroll speaks of a title deed, if you like.

Now I don't think it's hard to think of the analogy that is before us tonight, because right at the very beginning of creation God created all this universe, and He gave man a certain sovereignty over it, a jurisdiction. He made man king of all that we see round about us in nature and creation. So earth was given to man, but we know that Adam sinned, and in effect he gave the jurisdiction of this earth, in a sense, over to the evil one, Satan. He lost it to the devil. The Lord Jesus came, as we know from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to be the Redeemer of mankind, and indeed this whole universe - but before He went to the cross to do that great work of redemption, please remember, in Matthew chapter 4, what did Satan do? He requested that the Lord Jesus, by one act of worship, should acknowledge his sovereignty over this planet as the god of this world, and the Lord Jesus would receive the whole of the world back in return. But that would have been the easy way, it wouldn't have been the right way either - but the Lord Jesus went God's way, to Calvary, and He won the right to receive this scroll in Revelation 5 when He gave Himself on the cross of Calvary. That's why he's the Lamb here in this chapter, that's why this scroll is rightfully His: this scroll is the title deed of the creation of the universe, but Christ has the right to have it not because of creation, but because of redemption.

He is the rightful heir of everything. He created it all, but He has the right to take it back because He has redeemed it by His precious blood. Now that fulfils prophecy - Psalm 2 verse 8: 'Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession'; Hebrews 1 verse 2 says that God has appointed Christ heir of all things. So - isn't it wonderful? - He is our blessed kinsman-redeemer, He is the one who is

worthy, qualified to claim the scroll, to open it. This scroll, therefore, must represent God's plan for history that is fulfilled in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Now, of course, as we will see, it's the record of judgements that must fall upon the earth before our Lord comes and fulfils God's word and plan, and sets up His earthly kingdom, and eventually the eternal state. But this scroll speaks of all that the Father promised the Son when He would die at Calvary on our behalf.

Now, we could spend a bit of time on this, and we haven't got it, but that should colour our view of world events, shouldn't it? That the control of the fulfilment of human history is in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, He's going to bring it all to a conclusion, to a God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, and saint-satisfying end! You see, that's what helped John face Patmos a bit easier, and it must have helped these persecuted Christians that would have been reading this letter - remember, Revelation is a letter to suffering saints - to see that Christ is in control. Around that throne in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 5, a strong angel stands forth and proclaims with a loud voice: 'Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?'. 'And no man in heaven, verse 3, 'nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon'. This strong angel stands forth and appeals: 'Who is worthy, someone worthy to take the scroll, to open it, to break the seals one by one?'. Now please note: the angel didn't ask 'Who is willing to open the book?', he said 'Who is worthy?'. You see, history has seen many figures who dreamt of world domination, and they were very willing to take over the earth by their own human empires. You can take whoever you like: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; Alexander the Great of Greece who wept because there were no more worlds for him to conquer; Julius Caesar led his legions across Europe to impose Pax Romana by force upon those nations; Charlemagne; Napoleon of France; more recently Adolf Hitler of Germany envisaged a worldwide Reich that would reign for a thousand years - a millennium! But they all failed, do you know why? Because none of them was worthy, none of them! They were willing, but not worthy.

You see John had to face this, and it was traumatic for him. No one in heaven, verse 3, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. No one in heaven, that's any celestial beings, angelic creatures. No one on earth, human beings or animal life; or under the earth, that's subterranean beings, perhaps demonic personalities - none anywhere, no one was found qualified to unroll this scroll and to read it, to break the seven seals. It wasn't because of failure of power - there's many a one had great power in those three realms, heaven, earth, and under the earth - none of them had worth! This was heartbreaking for the apostle John. In verse 4 he said: 'I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon'. He wept, and the word for 'wept' there speaks of a noisy grief, it speaks of a wailing. It's interesting, isn't it? Here's crying in heaven! The Bible only says there's no tears in the eternal state, here John is weeping because no one was found worthy.

Now, why is he taking it so much to heart? Well, you have to remember, in the previous chapter, in chapter 4 verse 1 John was promised that he was going to see things to come, and now it seemed that because no one was worthy to open this book that none of the wrongs upon earth would ever be righted, that the righteous who were suffering - like John - would never be vindicated, that the wicked would forever go unpunished, that God's kingdom would never come because there was none worthy to open this book. Ah, but come with me and see the glorious sight, for in verse 5 one of the elders said unto John: 'Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof'. The Lion of Judah, He is worthy!

Now let's take our time with this, because it's important. These titles are very informative that are given to our Lord Jesus here. First He is called the Lion of Judah by this elder. Now that takes us way back to the book of beginnings, Genesis chapter 49. There we see in verses 8 to 10 that Jacob, before he died, prophetically gave certain pronouncements upon his own children, the patriarchs of the twelve tribes. He spoke of how this sceptre would be given to Judah, that means they would become the tribe of the Kings. Now let me just say in passing that Saul was the first king, but God never meant Saul to establish a dynasty before him, because he was of the tribe of Benjamin, not of Judah. God used Saul to discipline Israel because the people asked for a King - but when He gave them His king, it was David, and David was of the tribe of Judah. But the point being made here, calling our Lord 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah', is that the great Messiah Saviour-King would be of the tribe of Judah. He would fulfil that prophetic pronouncement in Genesis 49.

Not only is He called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but He's spoken of as the Root of David. Now 'Root' speaks of the fact that He existed before David, He brought existence to David, He was the Root of David - but also it infers that He brought David's kingly line into being as well. So here we have in this title 'Root of David' two things: we have the humanity of Christ, because we know from Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel that in His lineage, His genealogy, that He was in the line of David the King - it speaks of His humanity through His mother Mary. But He was before David, and He brought existence to David by His deity - that's how the Lord Jesus is both David's Lord, and David's Son. Is it not the question that He gave to those religious boys in Matthew 22 and verse 45: 'If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?'. The reason why David could call Him Lord was, He was God. The reason why he could call Him Son was, He was in the line of David according to the flesh.

Now both of these titles are important for many reasons, as we have just stated, but there's one thing that you need to see. Both of them refer to the nation of Israel, and you can't spiritualise this out of the chapter - they clearly indicate that Israel is coming back to the centre stage at the end of history. As the second coming of Christ approaches, Israel will have the promises of God fulfilled to them - and we'll find out, as we go through later chapters in this book, that the prophetic key to the Scriptures is the nation of Israel. If you want to really open up the scriptures regarding the future, you need to understand the place that Israel takes in it all. We have already said that chapter 6 right through to the end of the book really features on God dealing with His ancient people.

Now, look at verse 6 again, the elder said in verse 5 that there is one that is worthy: 'Weep not: the Lion of the tribe of Judah' - so John turns to see a lion, but what does he see? He sees a lamb. The lion speaks of Christ as the Judge, coming to judge those who oppose Him; but the lamb speaks of Him as Saviour, the one who saves those who believe in Him. You could nearly see in those two descriptions His first advent and His second advent - coming to the world to be Saviour, and coming again to be Sovereign and Judge. The remarkable thing about this name of our Lord Jesus and designation as a lamb is the Greek word that is used. The Greek word for 'lamb' here means 'a little pet lamb', that's what it means. It's slightly different from John 1:29 where the Baptist declared: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world', it's not identical. It means 'a little pet, harmless lamb'. I want you to grasp the importance of this. As we will travel through this book, we will see Satan represented as a great red dragon, we will see nations depicted as monstrous beasts, we will see the emissaries of Satan as wild beastly creatures - and that follows the trend of humankind, doesn't it? When nations want symbols of power, they conjure up mighty beasts and birds of prey. Russia took the image of the bear, Britain the lion, the USA the spread eagle - and they're all ravenous animals and birds of prey - but right away John turns to see a

lion, and he sees a little pet lamb.

Now you'd be forgiven, as I'm sure John was at first glance, for thinking: 'This is a disastrous mismatch to pit a lamb, a little pet lamb, against colossal oppositions of red dragons, and all sorts of beasts and monstrous creatures'. That's what this book is all about: 29 times you find this word 'lamb', 'a little pet lamb'. Now grasp the import of this to these persecuted believers in Asia Minor. They're surrounded by the great beasts of the Roman Empire and other persecutors in religion, and they felt just like little lambs - but they needed to see that the Lamb of God, that was slain for them in His earthly life down here on earth, was in control. It was the Lamb of God that was in charge, not the mighty beasts of world empires. It was the One who suffered on the cross who had the sovereignty - that's what He's teaching these folk, you know. I'll tell you, He's teaching it to us if we would only listen: the path to sovereignty before God, the route to reigning with God, is not the path of power and popularity, but it is the road of pain, suffering, rejection, and humiliation. The cross before the crown, always!

The cross, as we see now, and this Lamb, is central to God's plan of history. The cross is there, the Lamb, and He's telling us and telling them that the cross needs to be central to our lives. If we're going to get through, we're going to have to concentrate on the cross, be beneath the cross, take up our cross and follow the Man carrying the cross - do you see it? It is as Christ crucified that the Lord Jesus is worthy to take this scroll and to open the seals thereof. Do you see what He's saying? John's readers could say, just as Paul wrote to the Romans: 'As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us'. Am I communicating to you what this vision meant? John looks for a lion and sees a lamb, and Christ is saying: 'John, Christians of Asia Minor, I overcame as a Lamb, and you can overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of your testimony' - chapter 12 and verse 11.

This Lamb is described more for us in verse 6. It was as if it had been freshly slain. Now the Greek verb there is in the perfect tense, and that indicates that this was a past event, it had already been slain. So the import is: it had died, but it's very much alive as John sees it. The implication is: the freshness of the slaying speaks of the fact that the atonement is still efficacious, and there is power, wonder working power - still! - in the blood of the Lamb. But the point is that the cross is the fulcrum of all human history, as one has put it: 'Eternity in the past knew no other future than Calvary, and eternity in the future knows no other past than Calvary'. Here is this freshly slain Lamb alive, He will always - our Lord Jesus in His glorified flesh - bear the wounds of His suffering and humiliation. There He is, standing - Isaiah 3:13 says: 'The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people'. Here is this Lamb, standing to judge.

Verse 6 says He has seven horns. Horns speak of strength in the Bible, that is His omnipotence, His all-power. This Lamb has seven eyes, it is all-seeing - seven being a complete number - that is omniscience. It possesses, look at verse 6, seven Spirits of God. The Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry was endued with a full and complete measure of the Holy Spirit, and these seven Spirits are sent out into all the earth - that suggests His omnipotence again - this is none other than the incarnate Son of God. The point that John is getting here is that the reins of the universe's government has been passed into the nail-scarred hands and palm of Jesus Christ! Therefore it was right for the Moravians to have as their motto: 'The Lamb has conquered' - He has conquered! The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world.

I don't know whether we have time to consider the incense, I feel we don't, verses 7 to 8 - but these are prayers, and it's interesting to note that it might be in chapter 6:10, as we will see, that these are prayers of persecuted Christians and the martyrs. They're going to be vindicated at last as Christ reigns in righteousness, and puts down His own enemies - but they might be your prayers as well. Have you ever prayed this prayer: 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', that's what's happening now! Christ is standing to execute God's will with a judgement that will bring His kingdom to the earth - don't ever say your prayers won't avail much! You might be unanswered yet, but some time, somewhere, you will see the answers to your prayer.

Let's move on quickly to fourth point - we've seen the scroll, we've seen the Lion and the Lamb, the incense - but fourthly: the worship, the greater part of the chapter, verses 9 to 14. Now the word 'worship' means 'to ascribe worth'. 'Who is worthy?', the angel said, and they worshipped the One who alone has worth-ship. The statement goes out: 'Thou art worthy!' Now please note this new song they sing in verse 9. They don't say what was said in chapter 4 verse 11: 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created...' - creation is not the grounds of the worth for the worship here, but it is redemption. 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation'.

Whether these are angels speaking or, as many believe, redeemed men - the fact of the matter is: their praise is undiluted. The redeemed, eventually in this portion, say that the Lord has made them kings and priests - that's what you are, kings and priests unto God. As priests we worship God, as holy priests offering up holy sacrifices. As royal priests we can witness for God, and be His ambassadors and representatives in this day and age. But one day we will have the joy, if we will be rewarded such, of not only being priests but kings, and reigning with Him for a thousand years on the earth. Then verse 11: 'And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands'. What we're seeing here is that there is a circle of praise in those verses, and there's three cycles from verse 9 right through to the end of verse 13, until every creature in all of the universe worships the Lamb that has the scroll. That number that is mentioned in verse 11 is just trying to grasp an innumerable company of all creation in the whole universe worshipping the Lamb that was slain, who alone is worthy - what a sight!

I know it's a bit of an aside, but I think it's very instructive: Warren Weirsbe speaks of how this shows us how to write good songs of praise. Look at these points in it: this was a worship song, for it tells us 'He is worthy', Christ was central to this song and doxology. Now many of our modern songs today - some of them are very very good - but many of them are self-centred, man-centred, 'I' and 'me'. This was Christ-centred. It was also, secondly, evangelistic - because it reminds us that Christ has paid the price for our salvation. Isn't it wonderful to think that heaven resounds with songs about the cross and Calvary, songs that extol the precious blood of Christ. Weirsbe said he once heard, and I've heard it as well, about a denomination that went through its hymn book and removed all references to the blood. Weirsbe said: 'Well, you couldn't use that hymn book in heaven!'. The blood is extolled in glory, because that is what has redeemed us to God.

Not only is it worshipful and evangelistic, it had a missionary emphasis because it shows how this redemption has reached to the ends of the earth and embraces all men. It's also devotional, please look at this in verse 12, they said with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb

that was slain to receive power' - do you know what that means? Power over your life, power over my life, power over the church, power over the whole universe. He's worthy to receive power, He's worthy to receive riches - that means, as the hymn said: 'All my silver and my gold, not a mite will I withhold'. Don't sing that He's worthy of your riches, and then be tight-fisted. He is worthy of power, He is worthy of riches, he's worthy of wisdom - the finest of your intellectual powers and use that God can use. 'Strength', your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies - He's worthy of it all! 'And honour', a single and a pure desire to magnify Him in all your ways. 'Glory', your entire life should be devoted to glorify Him. 'And blessing', all power to praise should be lavished upon Him.

How devotional this song is, but finally it's also prophetic. Worshipful, evangelistic, missionary, devotional, and prophetic because it tells of the coming day when He will reign here on earth, and we will reign with Him if we're found worthy. Now, maybe you don't know this - I'm being a bit facetious - but heaven is a place of worship. If you can't handle worship down here, what are you going to do up there? Some people have never understood what it is to praise and worship God on a regular basis in their own personal life, and I would advise you to get started now! John Owen said, in his book 'The Glory of Christ': 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'.

Well, verses 13 and 14: 'Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever'. Do you know what that parallels? Philippians 2 verses 10 and 11: 'That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. Written by a persecuted Christian to persecuted Christians, chapter 4 and chapter 5 proclaims that this world's destiny is not under the control of some blind fate or despotic regime, but we are in the hands of a loving heavenly Father, and a Saviour who bled and died for us. God in Jesus Christ controls the course of the climax of history - that's why we can have strength for today, because there's bright hope for tomorrow; and it will only be if you get a revelation of God's eternal purposes in His Son, that you will get strength to live the here and now.

Those who weather the storms of life best are those who have the clearest view of Christ now. How is your view of Him? Hanging in a Berlin Gallery is a most unusual picture by the artist Menzies, it's called 'The Unfinished Painting'. The artist was portraying the King and his generals, but took so long painting the details of the generals that he died before he ever got round to painting the central figure. So this unfinished painting, in its centre, has a blank where the King should be portrayed. An empty space where the King should have been central - is He central to your life? He mightn't seem central to history now, but God's purpose is that He will be! One day He will stand before the throne, and take the scroll, and do God's will - and He will become the centrepiece of all time and all space. Is He the centrepiece of your life now? He needs to be. Only then will you be able to say, and will I:

'Throughout the universe of bliss,
The center Thou, and sun;
The eternal theme of praise of this,
To Heaven's beloved one:

Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow,
That every knee to Thee should bow'.

Now let us have a word of prayer, and ask God's blessing upon the word and our leaving tonight: Father, we would see Him, and we have seen Him, high and lifted up - where we ought to see Him always. We thank You that He's not on a cross any more, He's not humiliated any more, He's not suffering any more, He's not in the cold grave any more, but He's at Your right hand. He's waiting for that moment when He will stand before You and take the scroll, and come and do Your will. Oh Lord, we thank You we've already bowed the knee by grace through faith. If there's any here tonight haven't, may they do it before it's too late, before they're forced to bow the knee. We thank You that one day this whole universe will be synchronised and in harmony with the eternal Son of God, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Lord, we need a vision of Him to get through this life here, nothing else will do. May we see Him as we've never seen Him before, for Christ's sake, Amen.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 13

"The Seven Seals"

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Chapter 6 right through to chapter 8 verse 5 of Revelation, now we're not going to read this whole portion as an introductory reading. We'll just be looking at certain verses as we pass through it this evening, so let's look at 'The Seven Seal Judgements'.

Now in Matthew 24 we have what is called 'the Olivet discourse', and our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the events that would take place at the end times. In verse 21 of Matthew 24, He said these words: 'For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be'. Now the people who take the Bible literally, and that's us - not with a wooden literalism, but taking it as it says it, in a literal, grammatical, historical sense - believe that this subject of the tribulation is given more space in the Bible than any other comparable event. Let me give you some examples: there is more space given to the tribulation than the millennial reign of Christ, His reign on the earth for a thousand years, in scriptural terms. There's more said about the tribulation than heaven or hell. Indeed, the only other subjects that seem to say more in Scripture are related to salvation and the general promise of the second coming of our Lord Jesus. So in both the Old and New Testaments, there's a great deal of Scripture given to this subject of the tribulation period.

Now perhaps the most significant Old Testament passage related to the tribulation is found in Daniel chapter 9, now you can turn to it if you wish. It's found in verses 24 through to verse 27. Now there's a chart on the screen here that looks rather complicated, but I don't want you to get bogged down with much of the detail there, save to say that in Daniel 9 verses 24 to 27 Daniel was given a prophecy from God concerning 70 weeks, or 490 years. Now Daniel tells us that the tribulation would last for one week, that is Daniel 9:24. Now, of course, it's not speaking of a seven-day week in our ordinary terms, but the Hebrew that is used in Daniel 9:27 indicates a week of years, a prophetic week - most scholars agree with that. So a prophetic week equals seven years, just as an ordinary week is seven days, a prophetic week is seven years.

The first 69 weeks of years in Daniel's prophecy span from the decree that King Artaxerxes made to restore the walls of Jerusalem, and those 69 first weeks ended with the rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ when Messiah was cut off. So you see it there, the decree to begin the building of the walls again, and then 69 of these prophetic weeks later Messiah is cut off, and there is His crucifixion at the cross. So this is what Daniel tells us. Now that whole period, from the first week to the 69th week, 483 literal years, is the time period that takes us from that event where it was decreed that the walls should be built in Jerusalem, to the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus - exactly 483 years. Now Daniel tells us that the last week of the 70 week prophecy would be the tribulation period as we know it, it would therefore last one prophetic week - which is not seven days, but seven years.

Now in the book of Revelation, we see this seven years again spanning the whole of this tribulation - but it's divided into two periods, two periods of 1260 days, or 42 months, or as it is put in Revelation 'three and one half years', 'a time, and times, and half a time'. That's how it is spoken of in Revelation 11, Revelation 12, Revelation 13, and you add up all those sums

and you get seven years spanning this tribulation period. The first half of the seven years, or the first 42 months, is often designated just 'the tribulation', while the last half is called by our Lord Himself 'the great tribulation'. Now that might all be double-dutch to many of you, and I can understand that. You say: 'Well, what's the point in going into so much detail?'. Well, when I'm talking about the tribulation period tonight, and talking about it as seven years, I have a fear that people think: 'Well, where did he pluck that number out of the air from? What is the basis for this literal time period that you're saying will be the time when these seven seals are opened, the seven trumpet judgements will come, the seven bowl judgements will be poured out?' - there is a biblical basis for the chronology of this time period, seven years. If you want to know more you need to do an in depth study of Daniel 9 verses 24 to 27.

Now, the details, biblically, that are provided for us, and the various references in Scripture to the tribulation make it obvious that this is a future event. The reason being, simply, that no such period has yet occurred in the whole of human history. The Lord said there has never been a time like it, nor will be a time after it, and it's obvious that this has never ever happened in the history of humanity. We certainly would have to say that it's not what Christians are going through now, however difficult their circumstances may be in the 21st century. Add to that that the Lord Himself said that the great tribulation would take place just before His glorious appearing and coming to this earth, in Matthew 24 we read those words again. If you care to turn with me to them, Matthew 24:29 and 30 read like this: 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'.

So all these things have got to happen before our Lord comes, in His second coming, to judge the world and eventually usher in His millennial kingdom for a thousand year reign. Now the reason why the tribulation must be such a holocaust of unique proportions is because it combines three things: first of all, the wrath of God is being poured out on humanity; secondly, the fury of Satan is being let loose; and thirdly, the evil nature of man is running wild. One author has put it like this: 'Take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and cast off all restraints so that the unspeakable cruelty, and hatred and injustice of man toward his fellow men can fully mature; and compress that all into a period of seven years - even if you could imagine such a horror, it wouldn't approach the mind-boggling terror and turmoil of the tribulation'.

Now you might be asking: 'Why does such an awful experience have to come upon this earth?'. Well, let me sum it up in at least four reasons why there must be a tribulation. First of all, it must happen to bring history to the right conclusion. Daniel was told in his vision in Daniel 9:24 that this great tribulation period would happen to bring in everlasting righteousness. You see, the tribulation happens to bring a fitting consummation to all of history, which has been the grand experiment of the ages. From the first man Adam, to the second coming of Christ, individuals have been given the opportunity to fall and surrender themselves voluntarily in worship of our God. This tribulation period will bring that great experiment to a conclusion when everlasting righteousness will reign.

The second reason why it must happen is to fulfil Israel's prophecies. In Daniel 9:24, Daniel was told that this is specifically related to his people, and 'the holy city'. His people were the Jews, and the holy city was Jerusalem. Now we know of course, last century, historical fact,

that the Jews returned to their land and they were recognized as a nation in 1948 - but that's only one respect of some of the prophecies related to the Jewish people that we find in Ezekiel 36 through to 37. There are many other prophecies that relate to Israel and the Jewish people that still have to be fulfilled, such as the rebuilding of the temple, the renewal of temple sacrifices, and some of those things are in preparation as we speak - but many of those aspects will be fulfilled completely during the tribulation period.

Incidentally, that shows, does it not, that God is not finished with the Jew. Irrespective of what some reformed theologians will tell us, God still has a plan for His ancient elect people. He's going to do something with Israel in the future, just as the prophetic scriptures teach. So first of all this tribulation must happen to bring history to the right conclusion, secondly to fulfil Israel's prophecies, thirdly: it must happen to shake mankind from his false sense of security. What am I talking about? Well, when the earth is stable and life generally is comfortable, man tends to function independently of God. But what we see during this period are earthquakes, plagues, and other physical phenomena that will cause many men on the earth at that tribulation time to, perhaps for the first time in their existence, consider the Almighty. From that, we will see tonight that there is a number that no man can number that will be saved during this tribulation period.

The fourth reason for the necessity of the tribulation is derived from the last, and that is to force man to choose between Christ or antichrist. Billions will not be able to live out the normal lifespan of their existence and, amidst the traumatic events that will befall this planet, people, the Earth dwellers, will have to make an eternal decision. If they choose Christ we are told that they will become the servants of our God, and they will receive the mark of the Father on their foreheads. The likelihood is that they will be martyred, we're going to see that tonight, but they will ultimately be eternally saved. But if they accept the antichrist as their Lord, people on the earth will receive the mark of the beast placed on their foreheads and their hands, and that seems from Scripture to be an irrevocable and irreversible decision.

Now we are concentrating tonight on the seven seal judgements, and so if you have your chart with you that you should have, spanning the whole of the book of Revelation, you will see that the tribulation period is broken into about five sections, five or six sections. We are dealing with the first here tonight, which deals with the seven seals, and there it is in close-up. It comprises chronologically with the first quarter, if you like, of these seven years of tribulation - about 21 months of the beginning. Now during that period we read that the antichrist will come to conquer, and that's - as we will see - what the significance of this first seal is. He will conquer through world diplomacy. At the end of these seven seals, the breaking of the seventh seal - we see from chapter 8 and verse 1 - all the breaking of the seventh seal does is introduce us to a further seven judgements that are called 'seven trumpet judgements' that are even more catastrophic than the seven seal judgements. You can see that in that diagram that, after the six seals, the seventh just ushers in seven more trumpet judgements. The seventh trumpet judgement, incidentally, opens up the seven bowl judgements which are in the second half of the tribulation, and they are the severest judgements of this whole period.

Now, as we have seen chronologically in this book, the seven seal judgements appear first. Now please remember our last study, we saw that in the hand of the one who sat on the throne was a book, a scroll with seven seals. We learned during that week's study that in the ancient world wax seals were used to close up the scrolls. The sender of the scroll would press his signet ring into the melted wax, and by doing that he would be the sole one with the right to open that book when it was sent to him eventually. In chapter 5 we saw that the scroll was

the title deed of the earth, and only the Lamb was worthy to open the seals thereof. In other words, only the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus, is worthy to come and judge this world in this manner that we are seeing unfolding before us in these chapters.

So we read how this first seal unfolds in chapter 6 verse 1: 'And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see'. The four horsemen of the apocalypse is what John is confronted with initially. Now let's look at each of these seals individually, all seven of them. First of all, we find in verse 2 of chapter 6 the first seal: 'And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer'. This is a white horse - who is the rider of this horse? Now some people would launch in prematurely, and say: 'Well, it must be the Lord Jesus', because in chapter 19 when the Saviour comes to the earth, He is riding a white horse. Well, that is the only similarity that this horseman has to the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 19. We believe he is the antichrist who rides this white horse, he comes to conquer at the very beginning of the tribulation, he is wearing a crown - which incidentally is not a 'diadem', that is the Greek expression for the crown that the Lord Jesus is wearing in chapter 19, but it is 'stephanos' which speaks of a conqueror's crown. He is carrying a bow, the verse tells us. Christ is carrying, in chapter 19, a sword, not a bow - and this bow, verse 2 of chapter 6 tells us, has no arrows. Now that indicates that the one riding this white horse is going to conquer the governments of the world by peaceful diplomacy rather than military might and force. So you could designate it as 'cold war'.

That is the first seal, and of course it corresponds to exactly what we find in prophetic scripture as to how the antichrist will approach the world. He will be their beloved and long looked for peace-giver and universal messiah. He'll even take Israel in, and they'll make a covenant with him that he'll break halfway through the seven-year period. The second seal we find in verses 3 and 4, and it is the red horse - verse 3: 'And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword'. Now red indicates, as a colour, blood or death. This rider carries a sword which speaks now not of cold war and international diplomacy, but of actual hand-to-hand combat. The combat is very great, that people should kill one another right across the globe.

First Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 3 tells us, I believe related to these first two seals, that 'when they shall say, Peace and safety', that's the first seal, 'then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape'. This is the false peace, the first seal, of a false prophet, the antichrist - but it will usher in such war as this world has not known. Then the third seal is found in verses 5 and 6, the third beast said: 'Come and see. And I beheld', John said, 'lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand', a pair of scales if you like, that's what the rider of this black horse held. He said in these words, another translation: 'A quart of wheat for a denarius', which was a day's wage, 'and three quarts of barley for a denarius', a day's wage, 'and do not damage the oil and the wine'.

Now what this rider is indicating is that there is a severe famine. That is often the case, that severe famines follow great wars - we've seen that in our own experience even in our present world. But from his declaration concerning a quart of wheat, what it costs, and three quarts of barley, we see that purchasing power will be reduced at this time of famine - and effectively it will be reduced to 1/8 of its former level. So staples of diet like wheat and barley will be sold

at prohibitive prices, wheat and barley sold for a day's wages - imagine it. What does this mean when it says: 'Touch not the oil and the wine'? Well, it probably refers to the fact that this is luxurious food for the rich, and often during famine time the rich are not touched.

Then the fourth seal, we find in verses 7 to 8: 'I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale', or an ashen, 'horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him'. This is the most severe of the riders of the apocalypse. Who is the pale rider? Well, it is death and Hades, and we see that authority was given to death and Hades - the second half of the verse - over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. One fourth of the earth's population will be killed with sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts - can you imagine it? Think of the pestilence alone, William MacDonald says: 'We might think that plagues are no longer a threat because of modern antibiotics and wonder drugs. However the great killer diseases are not conquered, but merely dormant. They can spread throughout the world as fast as jet aircraft can carry them'. Very true, and it will be witnessed during this fourth seal as it is opened.

Then there's the fifth seal, same chapter verses 9 to 11: 'And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held'. These are the martyrs of the tribulation. Now, remember the last seal, death and Hades, a fourth of the population of the earth - 25% - will die, but now when this fifth seal is broken there will be martyrs during the tribulation, believers who will die for their testimony. They will cry out from under the altar in heaven for justice upon the unbelievers, the earth-dwellers who took their lives from them. Now in the book of Leviticus whenever the Old Testament sacrifices were made, the blood was poured out underneath the altar - that's what it's speaking of here. These Christians during this period laying down their lives for their faith, and their blood, and indeed their souls, under the altar are crying out to God for vengeance.

Our Lord Jesus spoke of the same thing in Matthew 24, again the Olivet discourse, and verse 9 - He said to those Jews: 'Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake'. These, we believe, are Jewish believers who will go out into all the earth to preach the gospel of the kingdom, and they are slain because of their testimony. We are told in chapter 6 verse 10: 'They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'. The Lord tells them that the time for vengeance has not yet come, but it will come - but there are more martyrs yet to be to make up that great number under the altar. The Lord assures them that their prayer finally will be answered, and we'll see that in a subsequent week in chapter 16, when the third bowl judgement is poured out vengeance will come for their name's sake.

But we're told in verse 11 that 'white robes were given unto every one of them; that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled'. They are given white robes, which is a symbol of their righteousness, and they're told to wait. It's hard to wait, isn't it, when you're in the right and everybody is in the wrong? I just wonder what the believers who were receiving this letter - remember Revelation is a letter - what they were thinking in the midst of their persecution. John's telling them, is he not, to wait: 'One day vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay' - that's not our job, it's His, that's why we leave it to Him.

Then we come to the sixth seal in verses 12 to 17, and we see in these verses six tremendous

convulsions on the environment of nature. Now let me highlight them for you: the first is a great earthquake that the Bible says shook the sea and the very heavens itself; the second tells us that the sun was blackened out; the third, the moon becomes like blood; the fourth, the stars fall to the earth like ripe figs fall to the ground when a fig tree is shaken; the fifth is the sky tears apart like a scroll; and the sixth, every mountain and island is moved out of its place. Imagine it! Chapter 6:14: 'The heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places'. It was Vance Havner who said: 'The day will come when the most expensive piece of real estate will be a hole in the ground'.

We read in these verses, verses 15 and 16, that every class of society will be seized with panic because of the wrath of God being poured out on the earth in the opening of these seven seals. People on earth will recognize that God is pouring out His anger. Verse 15 says that 'the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'. In other words, they were prepared for the rocks of the mountains to crush them, rather than endure the wrath of the Lamb that was coming upon them. Staggering, isn't it? Earth dwellers on that occasion, people who love earth more than they love God, will rather die than face His judgement - and yet at that moment they are still rebellious.

Now I don't know if there could, at a Bible reading like this tonight, be someone who is rebellious against God - but I want you to know tonight that you can be rebellious right to the pit of hell, and it will make no difference to God! These people were rebellious to the very end, and they will have their portion with the devil and his angels in the lake of fire. The very wrath of God - they recognized it, but it didn't make them turn, it made them rebel all the more. Hardness of man's heart.

Then we must go to the seventh seal, and we read of it in chapter 8 - we need to skip a chapter, we'll come back to chapter 7 in a moment - verse 1: 'And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour'. Heaven is aghast at what is going on now on the earth - silence in heaven for 30 minutes! 'And I saw', verse 2, 'the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets', and the seventh seal opened introduces us to the seven trumpet judgements as we have said, and we will look at that in our next study. But if you look down at verse 5, we see that 'the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar', and the censer was filled with the prayers of the saints, and he poured it into the earth: and there was violence, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. Now please grasp this: these are the prayers of the saints and the martyred for Jesus, and they're returning to the earth in wrath and vengeance.

H.B. Sweet, in his commentary, says this: 'The prayers of the saints return to the earth in wrath, and that ought to make us very sober when we pray these words, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'' - that prayer is now being answered. Now there's an encouragement with that, that the prayers of God's people will be answered, and the prayers of God's people play a vital and intrinsic part in the governing of this world. Don't listen to these hyper-calvinists who say: 'Well, everything's going to be ordered the way God said, and so what's the point in praying for anything, or doing anything for that matter?'. Yes, this is God's plan given to us in advance, but He's saying to us that He is working in this world in answer to the prayers of His people. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said: 'If the veil of the world's machinery were lifted off, how much we would find is done in answer to the prayers of

God's children' - it's amazing, isn't it, how God's sovereignty is mingled with our responsibility and even our prayers?

So there's the seventh seal. It started with a rider on a white horse, and the tribulation period therefore is opening with a rider on a white horse, but we're going to find when we get to chapter 19 eventually that the tribulation period ends with a rider on a white horse - but it's not the antichrist this time, it's Jesus Christ! Now you know, I hope, that 'anti' doesn't just mean 'against', it is a Greek prefix that also means 'in place of'. You see, this first white horse rider is a counterfeit christ, and he is inspired and energised by the master counterfeit of all time, Satan, who is an angel of light and deceives mankind. Now John, in Revelation, though he uses 'antichrist' in his epistles, calls the antichrist 'the beast' - but it's sobering, is it not, to consider that the world, this world, our world, would not receive and accept the true Christ of God but it will receive the false christ.

The Lord Himself said these words in John 5:43: 'I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive'. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:11: 'For this cause', at this period of time in tribulation, 'God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie'. This man who sets himself up as the messiah of the Jews, as the saviour of the world, as the Christ of God Himself - people who would never believe in Christ will believe this! In fact, before 2 Thessalonians 2:11, in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul indicates that even before the tribulation period, even before the rapture of the church, that mystery of antichrist iniquity does already work. There's only one thing holding it back, Paul says, and he's inferring that it's the witness of the church, and the power of God in the church - but it's already working its wickedness now!

Now let me, before we go on to look from the seal judgements to the saved of the tribulation, point out to you the many similarities between these seven seal judgements and the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24. Some people think that when we preach on Revelation, it's the opposite nearly to what you find in Matthew 24 - not a bit of it! You look at it, and the Olivet discourse recorded also in Mark 13 and Luke 21 is the same. In Revelation 6 we have a false messiah, the antichrist; false prophecies, 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace - we find the same in the Olivet discourse. There's wars in both passages, international discord in both passages, famine in both, pestilence, persecution, martyrdom, earthquakes, cosmic phenomenon in both - it's speaking of the same thing. The seven seal judgements can be found in Matthew 24, but we must move on to the saved of the tribulation.

This really is found in chapter 7. Chapter 7 is a bit like a parenthesis between the sixth and the seventh seal. Really it's answering a question that's posed at the end of chapter 6, look at verse 17 of chapter 6: 'For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'. Who's going to be able to stand all this? The answer is being given, and John is given courage because he realises that some will be able to stand, and God's grace will still be at work even in the tribulation. So we read of two groups of people who are believers who will be spared, either through or from the tribulation, to enter into the millennial reign of Christ for a thousand years on the earth.

The first is the 144,000 that we find here in verses 1 to 8 of chapter 7, and we read there in verses 2 to 4: 'And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads'. The implication is that the worldwide judgement is being paused for a moment or two, so that these 144,000 believers should be sealed as a

witness to God: 'And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel'.

Now the second group of believers who will be able to stand this awful day are the converts of these 144,000 evangelists, and we read of them in verses 9 through to verse 17. Now who are these 144,000? Well, John tells us that there are 12,000 from each tribe - twelve 12,000s making 144,000. Now many scholars say: 'Well, that number is metaphorical, and its symbolic. It symbolises and signifies perfection and completion, because it is 12 times 12, and that's what those numbers signify in the Bible'. That's quite true, but some have derived from that that it speaks of the completeness of the whole people of God, both Old and New Testament combined. Now that might be somewhat of an application OK, but it certainly is not the correct interpretation of this portion, because it clearly says that these 144,000 are Jews - and it distinguishes them from the later group of people from verses 9 to 17 who are described as Gentile people from all nations upon the earth, and all tongues. Now please note the difference between the two of them: the 144,000 are Jews, these other people in verses 9 to 17 are Gentiles from the nations. The 144,000 were numbered, the other group are a group that no man could number. The 144,000 are sealed on the earth, and the other group are standing before God in heaven - so it's obvious that this is not the church. These are Jews from every tribe of the nation of Israel.

Incidentally, they are not Jehovah's Witnesses either - and they claim that these 144,000 are Jehovah's Witnesses who will inherit heaven. Now they'll not claim it for themselves, personally, when you're talking to them at the door, because none of them feels worthy enough to do it - that's the sad thing, they feel that they'll not get into heaven, but they'll have to be related to those 144,000 to perhaps get through. The problem is: you have to belong to one of the tribes of Israel, and they surely do not. Even a Jew living today in the flesh cannot tell you for sure, and prove to you, what tribe they belong to - do you know why? Because all the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was burned in AD 70. So it's very unlikely that the Jehovah's Witnesses will be able to prove it either. The Lord alone knows who these folk are from each tribe of the Jews - and we don't have all the answers, because there are some oddities in this portion. Joseph is mentioned, but Ephraim and Dan, those two tribes, aren't mentioned here. Levi is mentioned who was said in the Old Testament not to have an inheritance with the rest of the tribes. So there is mystery, and we've got to leave that with God - the things that are revealed are for us and our children, the things that aren't, well, we don't need to know. God knows, there is a reason for it, and maybe we'll find out one day.

What we do know is that this is like a missionary corps of redeemed Jews who are instrumental in the salvation of many Jews and Gentiles during this tribulation period. They are, if you like, the first fruits of Israel which, as a nation - Romans 11 verse 26 tells us - will ultimately be redeemed when our Lord Jesus sets His feet upon the Mount of Olives again. Now what does that mean? Finally, through the ministry of these 144,000 Jews in the seven-year tribulation period, and at the second coming of our Lord Jesus and the issuing in of the millennial reign of Christ, finally Israel will be the witness nation that they refused to be throughout their whole Old Testament history. Now it'll take a lot for it to happen, seven years of hell on earth, but praise God it will happen.

Now in verses 9 to 17 we come to this other crowd, and they are the Gentiles from all the nations. In verse 13 the question goes out: who are they, and where have they come from? The answer is given in verse 14: 'Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the

blood of the Lamb'. Now whilst this tribulation period will be a time of unprecedented judgement, praise Almighty God: it will also be a time of unparalleled salvation. Our Lord Jesus said Himself, in Matthew 24 verses 12 and 14, that this would happen - if you care to turn with me to it for a moment - Matthew 24, maybe you already have your finger in it. Verse 12, the Lord Jesus says: 'And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come'.

Isn't it wonderful that in the midst of the darkest hour that this world has ever seen, in wrath our God remembers mercy? He's a wonderful God, isn't He? That would have been an encouragement, surely, to the suffering saints who John was writing to. It would have been an encouragement in their trials not to get all self-weak and sorry for themselves, but to get out even in the midst of their persecution and death, and witness to the lost and seek to win them for Christ - because even in the darkest days that are yet to come, in the great tribulation, the Lord will be saving men and women. It's mighty, isn't it, that even at one of Satan's greatest hours of supremacy, God will have the upper hand? Where sin abounds, grace - that's always the rule - grace much more doth abound.

So John says: 'I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands'. These people didn't go up with the raptured church, because they weren't saved when the church was raptured - but what lengths the Lord goes to during the tribulation period to save them! He opens these seals, judgements, to shake them out of complacency. He sends 144,000 apostle Pauls to witness to them! There's two supernatural witnesses that we will see later on in this book, that are sent to preach. There's even an angel that declares the gospel of the kingdom across the world. The Holy Spirit, Joel tells us, will be poured out at this time in a mighty way. During the seven years these people will be saved, probably martyred, and then enter into heaven - by the grace of God and by the blood of Jesus, the same way you were saved, the same way anybody was ever saved.

Now, see what's theirs in heaven - this is mighty! William MacDonald points this out, look at verse 15 of chapter 7 please, at the end of verse: they will 'serve God day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them' - they will have perfect nearness, perfect nearness. They might have been martyred, but they're going to have perfect nearness with the Lord - and we'll have that one day, but there's more. Verse 16, it says: 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more' - they'll have perfect satisfaction, and we'll have that in the presence of God too. The second half of verse 16: 'neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat' - they'll have perfect security, nothing will touch them. Verse 17: 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters' - they'll have perfect guidance. And in verse 17 we see: 'and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes', they'll have perfect joy, and that's a New Testament version of the 23rd Psalm - and here it is the Lamb who is the Shepherd! On that day the martyrs will be able to sing, and I believe we'll be in heaven with them:

'It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ'.

Is that not strength for today from bright hope for tomorrow? Now keep in mind that John is writing these chapters to encourage saints in every age of time, we ourselves here and now, that Christ will ultimately bring the victory to all His people! You're suffering tonight, believers in China and Vietnam and Laos, and all sorts of God-forsaken places, suffering for the name's sake - yet one day they'll have the victory. Now, in the meantime, John is telling us that the saints should be waiting, and the saints should be watching - but surely the saints should be winning? This is the most terrible hour that's going to come on the earth, and if you don't have the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, I say to you: 'Flee from the wrath to come'. You don't have to go through it.

During the early days of the Second World War, there was a little group of passengers on a ship who got wrecked on a desert island right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. After several weary months a ship saw them and sent a boat ashore, but the boat didn't land at once - one of the sailors threw a bundle of newspapers on the beach and shouted to them: 'The captain sent you this message, after you've read those papers he wants to know whether or not you want to be rescued!' Well, now that you know what is coming up on this earth, surely you want to be rescued? Our Lord Jesus Christ can do that, and He does it if we bow in repentance and faith now, rather than in judgement and fear then; when we're forced to do it, and we're judged, and we're sent to hell. This is going to happen, we have God's word for it - where will you be on that day? With the saints in glory, or Earth dwellers crying for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to shelter them from the Lamb? Believers: the time is short, the day is far spent, let's redeem the time while we have it.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 14

"The Seven Trumpets"

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I want you to turn with me to Revelation chapter 8, please. Let me just say, before we launch into the portion tonight, that - having now arrived at chapter 7 - we will be doing somewhat of a summary, an abridgement of the book. It's very easy to get bogged down in a lot of detail in these middle chapters, if you like, of Revelation - they are so detailed and intricate, and we could very easily get lost in the detail and miss the big picture, and I don't want that to happen. It's already quite difficult to get our heads round a lot of what we are facing each night, without making it unnecessarily difficult. Now, that, I believe, necessitates taking a number of chapters on a night in order to get the theme. So we've already dealt with the seven seals that comprised a number of chapters to where we are now, and we'll be dealing tonight with seven trumpets that will take us from chapter 8 through to the end of chapter 11.

Now, I have to say that I'm not a great fan of PowerPoint when it comes to preaching - I think it's more of a hindrance at times than a help! - but I do believe that there are certain subjects that it does help with. You will remember that I used it when we came to the cults, and I believe it can be helpful in this prophetic theme, because a lot of the stuff we are dealing with is very difficult to imagine and retain in our minds. I think if we can see some of these things, as well as hear, it helps - and so that was my justification for using PowerPoint over the next number of weeks at least.

We're looking tonight at 'The Seven Trumpets'. You will remember, I hope, last Monday evening we were looking at 'The Seven Seals', that I reminded you of the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 and verse 21, where He spoke of a period that would come upon this world of great tribulation, that's what He called it, 'such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be'. We spent a bit of time in introduction in our last study looking at how this period of time is also prophesied by Daniel, and it's called 'Daniel's 70th week' in Daniel chapter 9. Now there we read: 'Seventy weeks', in verse 24 of Daniel 9, 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city', that is Jerusalem, 'to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy'. Now we saw that a prophetic week in the Bible is not a week of seven 24 hour days, but rather a week of seven years. So Daniel was given, by God, a vision of these prophetic weeks of years that would comprise the whole of Jewish history. The first 69 weeks from the decree to build the walls of Jerusalem in King Artaxerxes day, right through to the cutting off of Messiah that's described in Daniel 9, are the first 69 weeks - and if you calculate, you'll find that that is exactly the time period of seven years of each of those weeks, 69. Then there's a pause that comes in where God's prophetic clock, in effect, concerning Israel, is stopped. There is a parenthesis, a gap, where a mystery takes place that was not known before - and that is the church as we know it today, the age of grace where the Lord Jesus is bringing Gentiles and Jews into the church, the body of Christ.

Now that prophetic clock concerning Israel will start ticking again at the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy, which is this week of seven years, which is the tribulation period as you see it on

the screen. Now if you want to know more about the chronological calculations concerning all that, do get the recording of our last study - we went into a bit more detail. There are at least four purposes, we saw, in this tribulation period in the mind of God. The first was to bring history to a right conclusion, and we see that Daniel refers to that in Daniel 9:24, where he speaks of the Lord bringing in everlasting righteousness. So this tribulation period will bring a fitting consummation to an age when men have been called upon to obey and believe in the Lord, and so the Lord will eventually bring in a reign of righteousness. Secondly, a purpose that God has in the tribulation is to fulfil Israel's prophecies. You will recall in our last verse from Daniel 9:24, it is specifically the 70th week that relates to 'thy people', Daniel's people, that is the Israelites, and 'the holy city', that is Jerusalem. So we see that there is a purpose, particularly towards the Jew, in this 70th tribulation week.

So the Jews' return to the land in 1948 was not a coincidence, it is indeed a fulfilment of prophetic scripture - but there are many other prophetic Scriptures related to the Jew and the nation of Israel which still have to be fulfilled during this tribulation period, such as the rebuilding of the Temple, and the renewal of sacrifices in the Temple. So we see very clearly that God is not finished with the Jewish people - whatever certain theologians in the Reformed school of prophetic theology might tell us - God still has a plan for the nation and the people of Israel.

The third purpose we outlined for the tribulation period in the mind of God was to shake man from his false sense of security. Of course, stability on a human level leads man to think that he can function independently of God - but we're going to see, of course, as we have seen in the seven seals, again in the seven trumpets tonight, that God, through various physical phenomena - earthquakes, plagues and so forth - will cause humanity at least to consider the existence of Almighty God. Then what outshoots from that is the fourth reason we gave for the tribulation period: God intends to force mankind to choose between Christ and antichrist. During this seven year time period, billions of human beings will not live out their normal lifespan amidst many dramatic events, and they will have to make an eternal decision - either for Christ or for antichrist. If they choose Christ they will become servants of God and receive the mark of the Father on foreheads; and if they choose antichrist, they will receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads and on their hands - and that will be an irrevocable decision.

Now all the details provided concerning this 70th week of Daniel, this seven-year tribulation period, throughout the whole of Scriptures make it very clear, I believe, that this is a future event. Nothing has ever taken place like this in the whole of human history, and it certainly isn't happening now as some would try and tell us. What's more, the Lord Jesus Himself said that 'great tribulation' would take place just before His glorious appearing, Matthew 24:29-30: 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'.

I quoted to you last week one author who sums up this time period like this: 'Take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and cast off all restraints so that the unspeakable cruelty and hatred and injustice of man towards his fellow men can fully mature, and compress all of it into a period of seven years - even if you could imagine such a horror, it wouldn't approach the mind-boggling terror and turmoil of the tribulation'. Now last time, you will remember, we looked at chapter 6 through to chapter 8 verse 5. We looked first of all at the seven seals that would be opened, which would be seven

judgements. Then we looked also at another parenthesis, another gap period, where the saved of the tribulation are brought to us - and those were found in two groups: 144,000 Jewish evangelists who would preach on the earth, that's chapter 7 verses 1-8; and their converts from verses 9-17 of chapter 7, who would be converted to the gospel and would be martyred, and they would eventually end up in heaven.

Now there were two things that we learned, at least two things anyway, from our study the last time. First of all: we saw that, through this 144,000 Jewish equivalents of the apostle Paul, Israel would eventually become the witness nation that God intended them to be, and they refused to be, in all of their Old Testament history. So God is fulfilling His will and His word to Israel, and we saw those twelve tribes delineated for us in chapter 7. Then, secondly, we learned that whilst the tribulation period will be a time of unprecedented judgement, it will also be a time of unparalleled salvation. We have the words of our Lord for that also in Matthew 24:14, He said: 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come'. There will be a great soul harvest ingathering of men and women's souls to the gospel of Christ. It's wonderful, and we rejoice that in wrath God remembers mercy. There is, I believe, in chapter 7 an overwhelming emphasis that in the darkest of days that are still before us in human history, the Lord is still saving men and women and boys and girls. In one of Satan's darkest and greatest hours of ascendancy, God will have the upper hand. We ought to rejoice in that: that where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound.

Yet, I fear, and I'm going to spend a bit of time on this tonight, I fear that there is a danger in misapplying chapter 7 to the extent that many have, and they have concluded: 'Well, if there's going to be a great ingathering of souls during the tribulation period, I'll just wait until the rapture of the church, and that will be my green light signal to get saved because I'll know that it's all true and it's time to get right with God because the end is near, and seven years later the Lord Jesus is going to come and return to the earth in judgement'. Now let me say categorically that whilst Scripture is very clear, as we have seen from Revelation 7, that there will be a great ingathering of Gentile souls as well as Jewish people, that is a false hope to hold out such an attitude: to wait until the rapture, or indeed the tribulation, in order to be saved. Now let me show you why: first of all it is a false hope because Scripture never ever encourages us to wait until tomorrow to get saved. There are two reasons for that, and if you hear gospel preaching - which you don't often hear these days - the first reason for it that's often given is death. You can't wait until tomorrow to be saved, because you don't know whether you've got tomorrow or not - you could die before tomorrow. The second reason that is also given is the Holy Spirit's striving and conviction upon your life - you might live to see tomorrow, but there's no guarantee that even if you live to see tomorrow that the Holy Spirit will still be speaking to you and convicting you of your sin.

So we encourage folk: 'Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; and if you hear His voice, harden not your heart'. Now that's what we are always telling people: for that same reason no one in their right mind should be waiting until the rapture to be saved, or indeed the tribulation period. First of all, because you might die before it, you might die tonight, you might die tomorrow; and if you do, you'll be in hell and there's no second chance there. Secondly, the tribulation period is going to be filled with death, more than now. People will not live out their full life expectancy, and so there's more chance of dying before even trusting in the Saviour during that period than there is now. The second reason why we tell people to get saved is because of the Spirit's conviction, it may not always linger with us. During the tribulation period, we're told that there will be strong delusions, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2:11-12: 'For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they

should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness'. So there will be great pressure to believe a lie, to receive the mark of the beast - and that is why, just as our emphasis in preaching the gospel during this age of grace, in this church period, is: 'Today, today is the day of salvation'; we should not be holding out hope for ourselves or for anyone that when the rapture comes or the tribulation comes, well then they'll be saved. We should be commanding men to be saved today, and we should be praying for men and women and our loved ones, our kith and kin, to get right with God today.

A second reason why this is false hope, I believe, to wait to the rapture or tribulation to be saved is because those who will be saved during that period will experience this great tribulation, plus - if they trust Christ - they will experience great persecution from the forces of Antichrist, and it is almost certain, if not 100% guaranteed, that they will be martyred for their faith. Would you not rather be saved now and have the opportunity in this time of relative peace to enjoy your life in Christ, and cultivate a testimony for Him. That is why I believe the message of Scripture concerning this tribulation period, this time of Jacob's trouble, the 70th week of Daniel, this time of the outpouring of God's wrath, is 'Flee from the wrath to come!'. Not, 'Flee to this to have comfort', no, no.

The third reason for not waiting until the rapture or the tribulation to be saved is: many Bible teachers and scholars believe it will only be those who have never heard the gospel who will be saved during this period. That is a sobering thought. They espouse that it is not those who have heard now in this age of grace, not those who have heard and rejected and hardened their heart. In fact, for those people, they would say, it will be harder to be saved than it is now. Now it's not easy to prove either way regarding that particular issue, but one thing is sure in my heart at least: God's great display of grace during the tribulation should never ever be interpreted as a grounds to delay coming to Christ - that is a lie from the devil. Anything that tells you to wait to be saved is falsehood, irrespective of what camp it comes from, in my estimation at least. Just as God's long-suffering grace now, at this moment, is the reason not to wait until tomorrow; and just as we have no guarantee that we will have an opportunity tomorrow in this age of grace, there's no guarantee then - in fact, I think there is less of a suggestion that those who have it now will have it then.

I've been re-reading the beginning of the biography of a man called James McKendrick, I don't know whether you know of him or not. He was an evangelist many many years ago, and mightily used of God - but in his biography, it's an autobiography, he talks concerning his own salvation. He says that he really, as a young man, desired to be saved. He was brought up in a mining community in a village in Scotland, and down through the years, even in his own family, they had seen many great tragic accidents where people's lives were cut short through mining tragedies. He as a young man became very anxious about his own life, for fear that he would be cut down unprepared to meet the Lord. He actually says, I'm quoting him: 'My desire was of short lived duration, and speedily passed away'. He was concerned about his soul, but that didn't last too long. Then he goes on about how he grows up and comes into young adulthood, and he says: 'I had three hairbreadth escapes from death, and on none of those occasions did I think of God or my soul's salvation'. He cites them, he says: 'I fell through the ice on the River Clyde and was 10 minutes in the water, freezing water. My companions were powerless to help me, and all the while I struggled for my life not one thought of God or of eternity entered my mind. My only thought was: 'Can I get out?'. He went on: 'I had a similar experience in the same river while bathing. Though a good swimmer, I was almost drowned, and was dragged out waterlogged - but neither before I lost consciousness, nor after I came round, had I any thought of God'. The third example: 'Once,

while engaged in a coalmine, the roof fell in. Though my escape was a miracle, God was not in all my thoughts. To escape from death on each of these occasions was my only concern'.

Now if there should be one person here that, through anything that is said last Monday evening or tonight, is holding out hope for themselves, or deciding 'I'll not pray as hard for my relatives because of the rapture or those who'll be saved during the tribulation'; I say to you, Proverbs 27:1: 'Boast not thyself of tomorrow'. None of us can. That applies to the tribulation, it applies to tomorrow - who in their right mind would want to be on earth during this period of great tribulation? Who in their right mind would want their loved ones to be on earth during this period of great tribulation? Who would want anyone to be on earth during this period of great tribulation? So be saved now! Believers, get out, and while there is time get people into the kingdom of God!

Now we're coming this evening to these seven trumpets, which brings us near to the middle of the tribulation period - about 3 1/2 years into this seven-year period. You see that the seventh of the seven seals brought us into the seven trumpets, that's all it did, it opened up the seven trumpets for us. We'll see tonight, and then in further studies, that the seventh trumpet, all it does is what the seventh seal did, and that's open us up into seven other judgements which are the seven bowl judgements which take us into the second half of the seven-year tribulation period.

Now we begin at verse 2, where we left off, or thereabouts, last time, and we see the introduction of these seven trumpets by these angels. In verse 2: 'I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets'. Now we're going to take time to go through each of these, but the first four of the seven trumpets, you will note, affect man's natural environment, the world in which he lives. The last three trumpets affect man personally, affect himself. Now as we go through each of them - I don't have time to cite every comparison that there is with other Scriptures - but you will see clearly that many of these trumpets, and the various traumatic circumstances that they bring, can be paralleled with the ten plagues that were brought upon Egypt in Moses' day - you can read about that in Exodus 7-11. It's interesting to note that: God is visiting similar judgements upon the earth once again.

So let's go through these seven trumpets this evening. The first trumpet is found in chapter 8 and verse 7: 'The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up'. So this is a judgement of hail and fire, a third of the earth is burned up, a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burned up. So we say that this was a judgement that was thrown down upon the earth - now that is interesting, because what we are being caused to look at here is the direction that the judgement is coming. This is not just a natural disaster that can be put down to natural causes. Often this is what we hear, even theologians look back at great miracles and devastation that took place in a bygone era from a biblical perspective, and say: 'Well, there must be natural explanations, whether earthquakes, or volcanoes, or whatever'. But here we see that John wants us to know that this is judgement that is coming directly from God, these judgements are coming from heaven.

Now this particular first trumpet parallels the Old Testament judgements on Sodom and Gomorrah, fire and brimstone coming from heaven, you can read that in Genesis 18 and 19 - but it also is very similar to the seventh plague that came on Egypt, you can read about that in Exodus 9. What was that plague? It was hail, and the great hail destroyed the crops and

the agriculture of the Egyptians. Now it's a similar message that God is giving to us here for a future day. God is telling us that there's going to be calamity on areas from which man derives his food. Hail is going to destroy the crops.

Now we come to the second of the seven trumpets found in verses 8 and 9: 'The second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed'. Now you will recall, if you know your Bible, Exodus chapter 7, that has a similarity with the first plague that was sent upon Egypt, the plague that turned the Nile River into blood. Now this is very interesting: a third of the ships will be destroyed. So in the first trumpet we see that where man derives his agricultural supply from, his crops, is going to be destroyed; but just in case there is any possibility that he would be able to transfer and import any foods from elsewhere, the ships will be destroyed. Not only will this judgement decrease man's local food supply, but there will be a reduction in his means of obtaining food from distant places. You know at the minute, don't ask me to recite it accurately, but bits of fruit that you take for granted, that you could get from a closer locality, they're shipping it halfway around the world to get it to our doorstep - it's unbelievable! That will all be done away with.

The third trumpet found in verses 10 and 11: 'The third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter'. Now this great star falls from heaven, it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs, this star is named 'Wormwood', which literally means 'bitter'. Now it is difficult to identify whether this is just some kind of meteoric disturbance, whether or not it is in fact an angel, because angels are named by God and we know that angels are also called 'stars' in the Old Testament, at least in the book of Job. Yet we can't be sure what it means exactly, but one thing is sure: when this trumpet sounds these verses will become very clear to those who are living on the earth at that time - because many will die; 'Wormwood, which means 'bitter', will embitter the waters, all the springs of the earth, and effectively poison humankind so that many will die.

The fourth trumpet, verses 12 and 13: 'The fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven', some versions say 'an eagle', 'saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!'. So this fourth trumpet: a third of the Sun, a third of the moon, a third of the stars is darkened, a third of the day, a third of the night, 'Woe, woe, to the Earth dwellers'. That is very similar to Exodus 10 where the ninth plague that came on Egypt was 'thick darkness over all the land'.

Now the three remaining trumpets announced are also called 'the three woes' - three woes aren't anything different, they are these remaining three trumpets. What Revelation is trying to bring to us is the dire effect that these further three trumpets will have upon all mankind on the face of the earth. So let's look at them. We read of the fifth in chapter 9, if you turn to it with me, verses 1 to 3: 'The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts

upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power'. If you look further at verses 4 to 6: 'And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days' - what a verse! - 'shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle'

Another star falls to the earth, again from heaven, but this one is possibly Satan himself - now, how do we know that? Well, when we look to verse 11 we see that this one who fell from heaven who had the key to the bottomless pit is also described as the king over this demonic force, 'which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon'. We know that those are names for the devil himself. 'Abaddon' means 'destruction'; 'Apollyon' means 'destroyer'. So this fifth trumpet is a demonic invasion in effect. Abaddon with a key to the bottomless pit; locusts, which seem to be demons, come out of the smoke of the pit - locusts to hurt people, not green things - they will torment for five months, which incidentally is the lifespan of an ordinary locust here on the earth, I think from the month of May through to September, something like that. Those people will long to die because of their torments, but will not be able to: death will escape them.

These locusts will have a very odd appearance. So when this bottomless pit is opened, it will billow forth smokes that will veil the landscape and the whole sky in darkness, a great swarm of demons. There is an impression being created for us that this demonic force will make conquest of all of humanity. Let's look at the description given to us in verses 7 to 10. These locusts appear like horses prepared for battle - that would describe that this is a conquering host that wishes victory. Each of them is wearing a gold crown, they are authorised to rule, therefore, to a certain extent in men's lives. They are being allowed to overcome him and torture him. They have a human appearance, they have faces, and that would indicate that they are intelligent creatures - more than simply insect or animal life. Verses 8 to 10 tells us they have hair like women, which would indicate that these demonic entities are attractive and seductive to mankind - and yet they have lion-like teeth, they are ferocious with their bite. They have armour-like iron breastplates, which would indicate that they are difficult to attack and destroy; and they have wings that make a great sound, they are terrifying and demoralising to those who see and hear them.

One of the most important descriptions of these scorpion-like creatures is the fact that they are equipped with tails, like scorpions, to torture, physically, mentally, emotionally, men and women for five months. Their power, it says, to torment men for five months - unrelieved suffering! Now this, and it's such an understatement to say it, will be a terrible time for unbelievers on the earth! I don't like the expression 'hell on earth', because I think that nothing will surpass hell in its ultimate torture, and yet if anything should come near to it, surely it is this? Verse 12 announces that the first three woes are passed, and the indicator there is that - believe it or not - the worst is yet to come! The judgement is now intensifying, and so we come to the sixth trumpet, and things appear to get worse.

In chapter 9 verses 13 to 24 we see that four angels - incidentally, who are bound at the River Euphrates - are released. Now, let us just pause there for a moment, because the fact that these four angels are bound at the River Euphrates is not just purely irrelevant. The River Euphrates was one of the rivers that came out of the Garden of Eden, we see that in Genesis. If you follow the biblical record, you find that it was near the River Euphrates where Satan first alighted upon this planet in our fallen state to tempt Adam and Eve. Therefore it was near the River Euphrates that man first fell into sin; it was near the River Euphrates that Cain slew Abel, the first murder; it was near the River Euphrates that Babylon and Babel first raised its head, and ultimately will be revived. Incidentally, it is the land of Iraq where we were geographically cite this location near the River Euphrates and ancient Babylon - I'm not saying that's of any prophetic significance, but what I want you to note is that these four angels are being released there at what would appear to be the geographical source of all humanity's problem! But now God is turning, and where the birth of the sin problem took place, God is going to bring it all to a conclusion!

These angels command an angelic host of 200 - grasp this - 200 million demons, I believe they are demons anyway. Some believe they are armies from the East, but the description that we have of them here as they come forth on horses to inflict death upon a third of the people of the Earth, the horses are described as having heads like lions, mouths that belch fire, smoke and brimstone. They are described like the creatures from the previous judgement, that we have just cited, from the bottomless pit - they are very similar. But there might be a spiritual meaning behind them, one author has put it like this: 'Their power is in their mouths, which might indicate some irresistible delusion of the devil. Whether they are demons themselves, they are surely demonically inspired'.

Now, please calculate with me the awful fatalities of humankind. By this time during this tribulation period, at least half of the world's population has died - half the world's population in a few years. Now let me just show you this, you can look at chapter 9 verse 15. You will see that the four loosed, who were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, were to slay a third part of men. Now that leaves two thirds, doesn't it? But you've got to remember that back in chapter 6 and verse 8, where we were in our last study, at the opening of the fourth seal in 6 and verse 8 death and Hades followed the rider, 'And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger', etc. So a quarter of humanity has already been killed, that therefore leaves threequarters, and if another third of the Earth is to be taken away in death, that leaves one half of the earth's population still extant. Yet what is more staggering than that is what we read in verses 20 to 21 of chapter 9, look at it, the half of the population of humanity that is left, verse 20: 'The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their theft'. All this, half of humanity exterminated from heaven, and yet man, with his puny fist of flesh, still rebels against Almighty God - isn't it staggering? I'll tell you what one lesson from that is: that punishment and suffering can never change a human sinner's heart. That applies to Purgatory, that is a lie from the devil if ever there was one: to think that we could be purged by the fires of hell, for whatever time, and be fit for heaven - it is impossible! The only thing that can mend what has been broken in the fallen state of humanity, in the human heart, is the new birth - regeneration, the new nature, the divine nature which is a gift of God! Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Well, time is running away with us, the seventh trumpet is in chapter 11 - we have to skip a

chapter or two - chapter 11 verses 15 to 19, and really all it does is introduce us, as I said, to the seven bowl judgements that follow. You see that again, as I showed you at the beginning of the meeting, and that takes us into the second half of the tribulation. But there are two more things that we have to look at tonight, not just the seven trumpets, but chapter 10 and chapter 11, the first number of verses - because in chapter 8 we have seen the seven trumpets, but in chapter 10 there is a mighty angel and a little scroll. Read with me chapter 10 verse 1, please, and I hope you'll give me the time to deal with this: 'And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire'.

So he had a rainbow round his head, this great angel. The rainbow, of course - as we saw in chapter 5 wasn't it, where there was a rainbow round the throne of God the Creator - speaks of God's covenant, His faithfulness with His people Israel, and indeed to all His promises. This angel had a face like the sun, which is an expression of his unveiled glory, and he is reflecting the glory of God. Verse 1 tells us that his feet were like pillars of fire, pillars speak of strength, and fire speaks of judgement. Verse 2 tells us that 'he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth'. This little book or scroll, surely is the record of the impending judgements that are about to be released. His right foot is on the sea, his left foot is on the land, so what he is doing is claiming right to world dominion over land and sea. Verse 3 shows us that he calls out, and cries 'with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices'.

Now verses 4 through to 6, we'll not take time to read it, appears to indicate that John understood the message of these seven thunders - but he was about to write them down, and the angel forbade him to do so. So we don't know what the message was. Now that's a lesson for us, in Deuteronomy 29:29, 'The secret things belong unto God', and not everything about prophetic scripture is known to us - interpretative, or indeed anticipative - we don't know everything that is going to happen, and here is a case in point. Then the angel, we see, swore by God the Creator that there should be no time, the Authorised Version says, now that is an unfortunate translation - people, therefore, interpret it 'When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more', and whilst I like that hymn, that is an erroneous line. There will never be a stage, I believe, when time will be no more, I believe we will always be experiencing time. What the word here means is 'delay', there will be no more delay. God's mystery will become clear, the mystery of God, verse 7, will be fulfilled during the time of this seventh trumpet. The mystery of God is God's plan to punish all evildoers, God's plan to usher in the kingdom of righteousness, the kingdom of His dear Son. So it is the answer to the prayer of the saints under the altar crying out for vengeance because of their martyrdom - what was their cry? 'How long, O Lord? How long?'. We sing it too:

'How long, how long,
Shall we shout the glad song:
Christ returneth'.

Now it's coming. In verses 8 and 9 John is commanded to eat the little book that he was to read, and that insinuates that he was to read it and meditate upon the truths and the judgements recorded. Verse 10 shows that, as predicted by the angel, the scroll, as John ate it, was sweet as honey in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach. Now Jeremiah the prophet, Ezekiel the prophet, had similar experiences. Now this is profound: do you ever feel like I do when you come to prophetic scripture, that you possess within your breast mixed emotions? What am I talking about? Well, you rejoice at the sweetness of knowing the hope that there is for the believer, and the hope that there is for God's vindication of His name, for He is

determined to glorify His Son and His claims:

'The Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned,
By the many still neglected,
And by the few enthroned,
But soon He'll come in glory,
The hour is drawing nigh,
For the crowning day is coming by and by'.

That is sweet, it's sweet to read that the wrongs of all time will be righted - but there is a strange mix of bitterness with the sweetness. For, as John takes this prophecy to his lips, though it is sweet there is a bitterness in his belly. If you study prophetic scripture, particularly where we are tonight, there is a bitterness! There is a self-judgement that comes upon us all, even as believers. 'Seeing all these things shall be dissolved', Peter says, 'What manner of persons ought we to be in all holiness and godly conversation?'. There is a bitterness in viewing the judgements which must soon fall upon apostate religion, whether it is apostate Judaism, or apostate Christendom - but oh, the bitterness, and this is what I feel heavily upon my heart tonight, the bitterness of contemplating the eternal doom of all who reject Christ!

We must move to the two witnesses. The seven trumpets, the mighty angel and the little scroll, and then in chapter 11 verses 1 and 2: the two witnesses. In verses 1 and 2: 'There was given me a reed', a measuring rod, 'and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months'. John is commanded to measure the Temple and the altar, and to number the worshippers - not the court of the Gentiles, because it will be trodden by the nations for 42 months later, in the second half of the tribulation period.

Now, what is this Temple? Well, the Temple that is being mentioned at this moment is the Temple that will be standing in Jerusalem during the tribulation period. Now, there isn't one now, of course, and this is a large subject that we don't have time to deal with this evening, but hopefully you can make a bit of sense out of this chart up on the screen. There are several temples throughout Scripture that relate to Israel, and one that relates to the church. The first Temple is Solomon's Temple, the Shekinah glory was present and then it was removed because of the apostasy of the people, they were 70 years in captivity. The second temple was Zerubbabel's that was rebuilt, the Shekinah glory never came to it, and it was eventually enlarged by King Herod, and it was the Temple our Lord knew - Herod's Temple. Then it was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, and there the prophetic clock stops for Israel - as we said, the 69 weeks have been completed of prophetic scripture, and a spiritual Temple takes place which Paul tells us, and the apostles, is the church of Jesus Christ. Now that Shekinah glory is going to depart as well at the rapture of the church, and there will be a third temple built during the tribulation period. It is spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where it says that the Antichrist, 'Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped', he will set himself up as God in this Temple, shewing himself that he is God. Now that is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, that our Lord spoke of, and that is yet to happen when the Antichrist seeks worship in this third temple. Then there will be a millennial Temple, a different Temple, that will be through the millennial period, the thousand year reign of Christ - you can read about that in the last chapters of Ezekiel.

Now that is not there at the moment, but the fact of the matter is: if you open your eyes and ears to the press you will know that the Jews are making preparations to rebuild that Temple already. We don't have time to go into this, that's where the temple will be, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem - I hope to see it in a fortnight's time. That is where the Al Akza mosque is at the moment, but the Jews are already preparing for the rebuilding of their Temple. I don't know whether you've heard of the Temple Institute, but it is an organisation that is making ready for that day. These are the items, instruments that have already been prepared, they are already made - there is the menorah, the crown for the high priest's brow, the table of shewbread - and the fact of the matter is: this is being prepared as we speak, it's being made ready. But not only are Jewish devout believers preparing the instruments for the Temple, but the Jews politically are re-establishing their sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Some of you will remember a few years ago that Ariel Sharon, when he was only in opposition in the Likud party, he visited the Temple Mount - which of course is where the Muslim mosque is - on Friday, which is the Muslim day of prayers. It was reported that Yasser Arafat had agreed to let him come on the Mount, but after it there were inflamed riots in Jerusalem, and what we now know as the second intifada, the uprising, which was over the Temple Mount.

Now the Temple of the Jews which will be the tribulation Temple will be on that Mount. Some believe that the Al Akza mosque will have to be destroyed, but there are others who believe that the Temple will actually exist right beside that mosque - and there is certainly room for it, and grounds to believe in that. So this Temple, John is asked to measure it, and then in verse 3 we see that there are these two witnesses given power, two witnesses to prophesy 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth. God will raise up two witnesses, verse 4 says that they are compared with olive trees - olive trees are filled with olive oil, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit. They are spoken of also as lampstands - lampstands bear testimony to God - and they have power, as we see, to turn water to blood, and plagues. Now that reminds us of two men: Moses, as we have already seen in the similarities of these trumpets to the plagues of Egypt, had power of God to turn water to blood. So we believe that one of these characters will be Moses. A prophetic character that had power over fire and weather was Elijah in 1 Kings 17 and 18, and 2 Kings 1; and so we believe that Elijah is the second character. Incidentally, though we don't have time to go into it, the chart on the screen shows you that Elijah has a very prominent place in prophetic scripture. Malachi prophesied that one with the spirit of Elijah would arrive before the Lord Jesus - John the Baptist. He was not Elijah, he was in the spirit of Elijah, but the Lord Jesus later told us in Matthew 17 - if my memory serves me right - that Elijah would come as a forerunner to His second coming, and that's why we believe that one of these two witnesses is Elijah himself.

Now we are told that these two witnesses will stand at the Temple, this tribulation Temple, and preach to those who are entering in to worship the man of sin, and they will preach as to his real identity as Antichrist. They will admonish them to turn from him, that the true Christ is coming and He will punish all the followers with the word of His mouth - what faithfulness. Now verse 7 of chapter 11 tells us that Antichrist, the beast from the bottomless pit, will kill these two witnesses, he will slay them. God's servants are immortal until their work is done, but their work was done and now they are dead. Verse 8 tells us that their bodies will lie in the street of Jerusalem, Jerusalem is called Sodom there in Egypt because of their rebellion, because of their sin, because of their idolatry and their pride. Verse 9 says that they are not buried - the height of indignity - and we read that everyone on the face of the earth will see this. Now that could not have happened a decade ago, before global news, satellite television, and the Internet - at least a couple of decades ago. The wonder of it all is, as we read in verses 11 to 14, that those two corpses heard a voice from heaven saying: "Come up hither", And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same

hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly'.

There is a wonderful doxology at the end of chapter 11 that speaks of how our Lord is coming: and there will be set up the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. And yet we still read that Earth dwellers will hate, verse 18, the nations were angry! Then we get a glimpse into the Temple that is in heaven, and the very Ark of God, and I think the message there is that Antichrist and his forces might be able to shake the Temple on the earth, but nothing can shake the unshakable Temple of God in heaven.

Now, I'm finished - and you're glad to hear that! - but two things I need to leave with you tonight. Because of all these things, believers, should we not be waiting, should we not be watching, should we not be winning? Unbeliever, if you're here tonight: Flee from the wrath to come - but listen, believers, listen to me, and I have challenged my own heart with this today: David Legge, do you believe all this stuff? Did you hear that? Do you believe all this stuff? Do you believe it? If we believed it, because of the terror of the Lord we would persuade men.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 15

"The Seven Key Characters"

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I want you to turn with me now please to Revelation chapter 12, we've a lot to get through tonight as usual, and I want to make sure we get to our concluding point. It's going to necessitate you to move swiftly from verse to verse as we refer to them tonight. We're looking at chapters 12 and 13 - the newspaper ad did say 14, but we'll not have time to look at that this evening. We're looking in chapters 12 and 13 at 'The Seven Key Characters' of the book of the Revelation. Now they are comprised in chapters 12 and 13, although we find them right throughout the rest of the book. But if we were to look at chapter 12 first of all, we will quickly see - we're not going to do an initial reading, we will just follow verse by verse as we study it tonight - we will see that what we have in chapter 12 is essentially a summary of the history of God's ancient chosen people Israel. But not only do we have a history of Israel, we have a history that is posed in such a way that it becomes a prophecy concerning their future, things that are still to happen to that nation.

So chapter 12 is a summary of Israel's history, and prophecy of her future. Really when we look at it, verses 1 and 2 in particular, we see that that is also a review of the great conflict of the ages, from the beginning of time, between God and the forces of darkness, Satan and his minions. So we're looking tonight, if you have your chart with you, don't worry if you don't, you can get one on the way out if you've lost it, we have covered the seven seals in chapters 6 to 8, the seven trumpets in chapters 8 to 11, and now a kind of parenthesis - chapters 12 through to 13 - and we'll take up next week, God willing, the seven bowl judgements, chapters 15 to 16. But tonight we're looking at the seven key figures - and as I said, not only do we have a history and a prophecy of the Jewish people, but we have in essence the whole story of God and man, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. That's why, 28 times in the book, we have the Lamb mentioned; and 36 times we have the beast mentioned, who is the embodiment of evil and satanic darkness. So there is a story being told here, not just in chapter 12, but throughout the whole book, to show us the history of Satan's enmity towards God - but not just his enmity toward God, his enmity toward the nation of Israel and all of mankind throughout history.

Indeed, not only do we see that in a historical sense, but as I've already intimated it is posed for us here in chapter 12 also in prophetic aspect to show that God is going to bring to consummation in the end of days this great tension between God and Satan. So what we are really saying is that the past history that we're given here in chapter 12 is related to the future. As we shall see tonight, it also has a great application for the present, and our title for the series of course has inferred that - that what we see here in the future that's going to take place from the book of Revelation, gives us strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. It's not all about something that's going to happen that has no relevance to us today. Remember that this was a letter that is being written to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor in John the apostle's day.

So the past, as we will see it here in chapter 12, has a relation to the present and to the future in God's plan. Now in chapters 12 and 13 we're going to encounter seven key figures or key characters in the book. Here they are - this is not the order we will consider them in, but

this is the sum total: first of all we encounter in verses 1 to 6 a woman, and we will see that we identify this woman as the nation of Israel. In chapter 12 verses 3 to 17 there is also a great red dragon, it's also called a serpent, and he is Satan. The third key figure is the male child, the man child, Jesus Christ, in chapter 12 verses 2 to 5. The fourth character is Michael the Archangel - by the way, the only Angel that is called an Archangel in the word of God - verses 7 through to 9 in chapter 12. Then at the end of chapter 12 we find the fifth group, key figure, a remnant of Israel - those who have been saved, born again by the Spirit, and recognized the Lord Jesus as their Messiah - chapter 12 verses 14 to 17. Then we move into chapter 13 and we see two further characters, two beasts. The first beast, verses 1 to 10 of chapter 13, we identify as being the antichrist - and we will see the reason for that later on. Then the seventh character, the second beast, is his sidekick, the false prophet - verses 11 through to 18 of chapter 13.

Now chapter 12 shows us that John's vision opens with two wonders in heaven. The first wonder he sees is a woman giving birth to a son, and the second wonder he sees is a great red dragon. So let us consider the first wonder tonight, this first key figure, the woman of verses 1, 2, and we'll also read verse 5. Look at verse 1: 'There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered'. Verse 5 please: 'And she brought forth a man child', a male child, 'who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne'.

Now let me just say, before we start to interpret who this woman is, that the identity of this woman bearing this child is crucial to the whole interpretation of the rest of the book of the Revelation. Now some believe that this woman signifies the church, as setting forth Christ to the world. Others believe that this woman signifies Israel, and Israel has brought salvation to the nations through her Messiah - though she did not recognize Him, nevertheless salvation is of the Jews, giving us the Christ. I believe we'll see in a moment or two that it's very clear that the man child is definitely Christ, but we must also conclude that it was through Israel, and not the church, that the man child Jesus came into the world - for the church was not in existence, was not born until Acts chapter 2. Indeed, we believe the New Testament bears this out - of course, Paul, writing about the Gospel in Romans 1 and verse 3 says that our Lord Jesus 'was made of the seed of David according to the flesh', He was a Jew, born from the nation of Israel. Again in Romans 9:4-5, speaking of the Israelites, Paul's brethren according to the flesh, he speaks of them, Israelites 'of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen'.

So Christ was born to the Jews, and I believe that indeed the symbology that is here very clearly shows that this woman with the twelve stars around her head is indeed Israel. Let me show you why, if you turn back with me to Genesis 37, the book of Genesis please, chapter 37 - you remember that Joseph had a number of dreams. One of the dreams he had in verse 9 of Genesis 37, we read: 'And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me'. So here we have the same key figures: the sun and the moon; Jacob, Israel and his wife; and 11 stars, that was Joseph's brethren. Verse 10: 'And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?'. Of course Jacob, Israel's, children were the twelve tribes, the promised nation would come from them. So the parallels are obvious, are they not, with chapter 12 of Revelation and verse 1? This woman is clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of 12 stars signifying the 12 tribes. Her

identification with Israel is obvious.

Now it's important, as I said, to identify this woman, because it will determine the rest of our interpretation of the book - and we must not confuse symbols in the book of the Revelation, particularly this symbol of the woman. You see, a woman in Scripture can be a symbol of the church, and we will see later on in the study of this book in chapter 19 a bride, a pure, chaste bride is presented there as a figure of the church. We will see also that in Revelation 17 there is a harlot, an immoral, illicit woman, who is presented as a figure of the apostate world religious system of the day during the tribulation period. Both of these figures, though they are women, are very different from a woman travailing in birth. When we look in the Old Testament we find that Israel is said to be the wife of Jehovah, not the bride of the Lamb, and certainly not a harlot. She was the wife of Jehovah, and on several occasions she is presented as a woman being in travail, birth pangs.

Let me just give you one example, for the sake of time, of this. If you turn with me to Micah's prophecy, you're coming near the end of the Old Testament, Micah's prophecy - I'll give you time to look it up, it's not the easiest to find. Micah's prophecy chapter 5, verses 2 and 3 - we know these verses well, but do we consider the implication of them in the light of Revelation chapter 12? 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel'. 'She that travaileth brings forth', and there are many other verses that indicate that Israel, as the wife of Jehovah, would be the one who would travail in birth and bring forth the Messiah.

So those prophetic verses in the Old Testament - Genesis 37 - would indicate to us that Revelation 12 and verse 1 is speaking to us of the nation of Israel. Of course we know from many other scriptures that the nation of Israel is God's prophetic sign to history. In the Old Testament she was to be a light unto the Gentiles, and it's still the case in prophetic Scripture that Israel is a thermometer regarding prophetic truth. Now please listen: if you confuse Israel with the church, you will make a mess of interpreting prophetic Scriptures - and that is what many evangelicals are doing today. Israel is the cornerstone of prophecy, and if you have her rightly placed the whole prophetic superstructure will be erected accurately.

The woman is clearly Israel, but there is a second key figure here, and that is the man child in verses 2 and 5 - Jesus Christ. 'She being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered', verse 5, 'she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne' - chapter 12, the man child, Jesus Christ. Now we read that Satan, this red dragon, attempts to devour this one who could only be Christ, the chosen child of Israel, the Messiah, and verse 5 says 'who would soon rule all the nations with a rod of iron'. So it is Christ who Satan is trying to devour, and we know from the New Testament history of the gospels that Satan tried to kill our Lord Jesus Christ on many occasions. When he failed in that, he now tries to devour the saints of God, the New Testament Christians, and also the Jewish people as a nation. You have to remember that this is a letter, let's always get back to this, this is a letter being written to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor who are being devoured by the Roman Imperial system.

Well, please notice that this Son is born, verse 5 says, and then immediately, according to this record anyway, this Son is caught up to the throne of God. So what we have here concerning Christ is His birth, and then immediately after it His ascension - there is nothing

about His life or His death. Now that is very interesting - Warren Weirsbe says that that little colon there in verse 5, in the middle of the verse, represents 33 years of history, it has been missed out! That is very significant, because chapter 12, as we will see this evening, as we read through it gives no indication to us of time gaps existing between some of these events, or indeed that these events are necessarily in chronological order as they are recorded in the chapter. Now that's often characteristic of prophetic Scriptures. Let me give you another example, Daniel 9 - we don't have time to look at it, but Daniel 9 gives that prophetic calendar of 70 prophetic weeks that would give the history, prophetically, of the nation of Israel. In all of those weeks, from the 69th through to the 70th, there is no mention of the church age whatsoever - it's missed out completely. Now why is that? Because it was a prophecy to Israel concerning their history, and yet there's a whole gap of - up till now - 2000 years that is not accounted for. That often happens in prophetic literature in the Bible. It's the same in chapter 12, much of Israel's history, if you like, is telescoped into the verses of this chapter - but the main point is clear: that the plan of God in choosing Israel with Abraham at the very beginning was to bring the Saviour of the world to all the nations through the Jewish race.

So the woman is Israel, and the man child is Jesus Christ. Then thirdly, our third figure is the dragon, and we're looking at verses 3 and 4: 'And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born'. So the first wonder was this woman in heaven bringing forth a child, the second wonder that John sees is this red dragon in verse 3 that is unquestionably Satan, the devil. Verse 9 gives us that clear interpretation: 'The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him'.

Now of course we have seen already in chapter 6 and verse 4 that the second apocalyptic horseman was riding a red horse. Red spoke of death, and he was going to bring death on much of the earth - and this red dragon is showing his colours, truly, because he's going to bring death, and we know that Satan was described by our Lord Jesus in John chapter 8 as being a murderer from the beginning. Satan, as he is depicted here as the great red dragon, has seven heads and ten horns - verse 3. Now we'll see the significance of that when we come to chapter 13 verse 1, because this first beast is described in the same manner - let's skip over that for a moment. Verse 4 says that his tail drew a third part of the stars from heaven. Now some liken that to some of the judgements of the tribulation that we have seen already through the opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets - but most Bible scholars see in this an inference to the fall of Satan, that is right at the very beginning of time when Satan tried to exalt himself to be God and was cast out of heaven, and a third of his angels with him. Therefore they see that also in verse 7, a war in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. Then we see also in verse 9: 'The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him'.

So the dragon is cast out, he takes a third of the angels with him - of course stars are often used as a figure of angels in the word of God - and it does seem reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12 through to 15, if you want to turn to that for a moment you'll see clearly what I mean. Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12 through to 15, listen carefully if you don't want to turn to it: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend

into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit'. Now there is no doubt, I think, that John's vision is alluding to that great event before time was for us. Yet we've got to remember that what we have here in chapter 12 is not just a summary of Israel's past, and the past of the human race, but it is history posed as prophecy regarding the future in relation to the past. Now that's vital to understand.

So there is war in heaven, there is a casting out of Satan and a third of his angels, and this passage seems to indicate that there is yet a future aspect to all of those things. What do they mean? Well, there will be again a war in heaven. Satan again will be cast out and a third of his angels with him. There is a future aspect to this. Now before we delve into the future, let's consider the past, the history of this great battle of the ages. Turn right back to Genesis chapter 3, and we see where the conflict between Satan and the woman started. Satan was cast to earth, he deceived Eve and her husband and they fell into sin, but right at that moment of fall into depravity we see a promise from God - chapter 3 and verse 15: 'I will put enmity between thee', speaking to the serpent, 'and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. So God has promised a Saviour through the seed of a woman to deliver mankind, and right from that moment on throughout Old Testament history Satan is trying to prevent the birth of the Redeemer through a woman. You can trace it right throughout Old Testament history - there has always been a dragon standing by waiting to destroy the nation of Israel, who are the ancestors of the Messiah child.

Think about it: Pharaoh in Egypt, trying to exterminate all the children of the Hebrews - incidentally in Ezekiel 29 Pharaoh is called a dragon. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Jeremiah 51 speaks of him as a dragon. Satan does such a good job at attempting to exterminate the Jews, in order to prevent this man child Deliverer coming from them, that there is one point in Jewish history in 2 Kings 11 where the royal line is limited to one young boy, King Josiah. Now when the Lord Jesus Christ comes on the scene we know, don't we, from Matthew chapter 2 that Satan used King Herod to try to destroy Him. Right up to Calvary we see that Satan devised that through Judas the Lord would be betrayed and crucified, and as far as he was concerned done away with for ever - all hope of a Deliverer and Redeemer to the Jews and mankind at large. But little did he know that what he thought was his greatest victory and triumph, the cross, was actually his defeat!

That's why we have, in chapter 12 of Revelation verse 11, that even during this tribulation time those Jewish believers will overcome Satan and his emissaries by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony - that's where their victory comes from. You know, whilst we're looking far into the future, maybe not so far, but a little bit into the future: things are very much the same today, because Satan still has access to heaven, we know that from Job. He can accuse God's people, we the church, believers in Christ - now, praise God, he cannot dethrone our Lord Jesus in His exalted state, having ascended to the right hand of the Father, but one thing he can do is persecute Christians. Peter tells us that, if he could, he would devour us as a roaring lion. These believers that John is writing to were experiencing just that, but praise God: he can be overcome!

That's what suffering Christians need to hear today. Do you know that the devil hates us if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Yet, whatever he does to us, we have the victory through the cross! I love what A.W. Tozer said regarding this, he said: 'I'm not afraid of the devil, the devil can handle me that's for sure - he's got judo I never heard of - but he can't handle the

One to whom I'm joined. He can't handle the One to whom I'm united, he can't handle the One whose nature dwells in me'. Satan is always the same, his tactics are the same, he is doing today what he will do at this tribulation period on the earth. Verse 9 tells us: 'Then he will deceive the world', that's what he's doing now. Verse 11 says he will accuse the brethren, that's what he's doing now. But our strategy of overcoming him is the same as theirs then. Charles Ryrie sums it up very well when he says: 'The strategy for a believers defence is threefold: one, bank on the merits of Christ's death - they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb; two, be active in witnessing - the word of their testimony' - some people don't have victory over the devil because they never witness for Christ, they're not involved in evangelism. 'Third, be willing to make any sacrifice including death'. Some people are trusting in the cross, the merits of His blood; some people are evangelising - but how many of us are willing to make a sacrifice like we see in verse 11: 'they loved not their lives unto death'. Do you know what the message is? The devil can't do anything with someone who's not afraid of dying.

One day the victory will be realised, verse 10 speaks of it: 'I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night' - that is speaking of a future day when he will be cast to the earth. That will not be it all over, but eventually, very soon after that, he will be cast into hell's fire for ever. What a day that will be - but let's get back to the prophetic context of this history of chapter 12, because though the devil hates us today and would persecute us, he has a special hatred for the Jewish people. It is his power that has been behind all forms of anti-semitism from the days of Pharaoh in Egypt, to the days of Haman, who we read of in the book of Esther, that wished to exterminate the Jewish race, to the days of the Second World War, Adolf Hitler - and even today, the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, repeatedly demonises the nation of Israel, the state of Israel. He has openly called for the destruction of Israel at every opportunity he has. He has described Israel as a fake regime and, I quote, he said: 'it must be wiped off the map'. He has termed Zionists as 'the most detestable people in all humanity', and called for the extermination of the race. Indeed, he believes that the Holocaust - six million Jews eradicated in World War II - was, I quote, 'a myth'. He believes that the Jews have played upon Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust in a bid to extort sympathy from European governments for the nation of Israel.

As some of you will know, last week I was in Israel, and I had the privilege - although it was a most moving experience - of going to Yad Vashem, which is the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Six million Jews exterminated by Nazism, but one of the most moving experiences being there was to visit the children's memorial, and to realise that there were 1.5 million children under the age of 18 who were murdered during the Holocaust. It's very hard to relay that experience to you of being there, but the doors of that memorial opened to a darkened subterranean room under the ground. As you went through the entrance there were nine photographs of children, five boys and four girls. You walked into a darkened room, and at the centre of that room there was a glass case that contained five candles. Those five candles were reflected by mirrors on the walls, on the ceiling, and on the floor - and what it did was, it produced innumerable dots of light all around that whole building. It was reminiscent of looking into a starlit sky, and it was trying to depict 1.5 million young souls. As you walked through that, in the background was sombre music playing, and there were voices that read out in Hebrew, English and Yiddish the names, the ages, the places of origin of those 1.5 million children that perished in the Holocaust. If memory serves me correctly, my Jewish guide told us that it takes four and a half months to read them all out.

Now, in the mid-tribulation period, where we are now here in chapter 12, there's going to come a wave of anti-semitism such as this world has never seen. Verse 6, 'the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days' - that's 3 1/2 years, the second half of the tribulation period. But the worst Holocaust that the Jewish people has ever known is yet to come. It is estimated that during World War II one Jew in three died, but in the next Holocaust during this tribulation period is estimated that two in every three Jews will die. Now I'm not plucking that figure out of the air - if you turn with me to Zechariah's prophecy, Zechariah please, near the end again of your Old Testament. Chapter 13 verse 7: 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein', two parts, 'shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein' - two thirds, but a third shall be left therein, God will protect a remnant during those 3 1/2 years

That brings us to the third figure that we have of the seven. In verses 7 through to 9, read with me: 'There was war in heaven: Michael', the third figure, 'and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him'. Now what is this celestial conflict all about, in a future sense? Well, Michael the Archangel is identified in Scripture with the nation of Israel, Daniel 12 and verse 1 shows us that very clearly. You can turn with me to it if you want, let me read it to you: 'At that time', speaking of the same time, 'shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people', Daniel's people, 'and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book'.

Do you know what 'Michael' means? It means 'Who is like God', and what a challenge that is to the rant of the devil, who said 'I will be like the Most High'. Here stands Michael, who is like God, and this dragon is defeated by Michael and his heavenly host. The dragon and his angels are cast to the earth, and though there is victory in the war at heaven, as the dragon and his angels are cast to the earth he makes a final ditch attempt to destroy the nation of Israel - now why does he do that? For the same reason he has always done it, or attempted to do it, verses 12 and 13: 'Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child'.

Why is he persecuting the Jews in the tribulation? Well, he knows the Lord is going to return, and he knows this much: that when the Lord returns He will come to the Jews, as He did in His first advent, He is prophesied to come in the second advent - just read Zechariah 12, Zechariah 14, and even Revelation 1 and verse 7. Anti-semitism will increase before our Lord Jesus returns to the earth, and you can even see it increasing to a greater extent today.

But the fifth key figure is this remnant of Jews who will not be exterminated, and we find them in verses 14 to 17: 'And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time', 3 1/2 years, 'from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood'. Now what we have here is the remnant of her seed, it's called in verse 17 'the remnant

of the woman's seed'. Now apart from the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who God sealed and protected from death, there is a believing remnant of Jews that will survive this troublesome time in the second half of the tribulation period. What's going to happen is: when antichrist breaks his covenant that he made at the beginning of the seven years with the nation of Israel, he will desecrate the Temple, sitting on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and at that moment when he sets himself up to be God many of the Jews at that moment will reject him, and some will even turn to Christ.

In verse 6 we see that there will be a place prepared for them by God. Now, what is this place? Well, no one can know for sure, that is definite - but some Bible scholars believe that it will be a place in the desert of Edom. Some would be even more specific in saying that the ancient city of Petra, which is now found in modern Jordan, some believe that this ancient city in Jordan is the place where this remnant of Jews will be taken to on eagles wings, and it might be the place. Petra was a city that was hewn out of the rock, and it is only accessible through this gorge, you can only get to it on foot. Some believe that Bozrah, which is spoken of in prophetic Scripture, is in fact the same place as Petra. Now if it's not identical to it, it's certainly around the same vicinity. Daniel chapter 11 verse 41 says, speaking of antichrist: 'He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, even Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon'. So Edom is going to escape from antichrist at some point in the tribulation. Indeed, in Isaiah 63 and verse 1 we read of our Lord Jesus coming in His second coming, and it says: 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save'.

If you had time tonight to turn back to Micah 2 verse 12, you would read there: 'I will surely assemble, O Jacob', that's Israel, 'all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men'. Bozrah, a sheepfold, and from the sky Petra looks like a sheepfold - well, we don't want to suppose, but the fact of the matter is: God knows the exact geographical location of where this remnant of believing Jews will be taken. They will be fed supernaturally, just like the Israelites were 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Then Matthew 24 verses 15 to 21 will take on a special meaning for that remnant of Jews, now please turn to this, Matthew 24 - and in the light of all that we've heard tonight, historically and prophetically, about the nation of Israel, read these verses with that knowledge. Matthew 24 and verse 15: 'When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place', that is antichrist seeking worship as God, '(whoso readeth, let him understand:)'. The Lord says: 'Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be'.

Do you see it all fitting together? The first figure is this woman Israel; the second the manchild Jesus Christ; the third the dragon seeking to devour the Child, that is Satan; the fourth Michael the Archangel, standing up for Israel; the fifth the remnant of saved Israelites, believing after the abomination of desolation; the sixth figure is found in chapter 13 verses 1 to 10 - we'll not read all those verses - it is the first beast. Verse 1 of chapter 13, John says: 'I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven

heads', there it is again, 'and ten horns', reminiscent of the red dragon, 'and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy'. Now this beast came out of the sea, verse 1 says. Now 'sea' often symbolises the Gentile nations; 'the land' often speaks of Israel, the promised land, and 'the sea' often speaks of the Gentile peoples, maybe even the peoples of the Mediterranean. It would seem that this first beast may come from one of those nations, and Satan will bring him forth as his super leader.

This is the antichrist, verse 1 says that he had seven heads and ten horns - like Satan, as we have said, as he was described. Now seven is the number of perfection, but this time it speaks of perfect evil - if there can be such a phrase - and it speaks also of the seven world kingdoms that have existed right throughout human history: the great empire of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and then a revived Roman Empire which will be the end time government of antichrist - and that will be made up of ten horns, ten rulers, perhaps ten nations (Daniel 7, Daniel 8, Revelation 13, and further in the book, speaks of this). Irrespective of the details, this beast is going to embark upon a new career, he's going to be Satan's world dictator. He is marked by the name 'blasphemy' on each of his heads, which indicates the nature of this kingdom.

In verse 2 we're given another depiction of him: 'And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority'. This is reminiscent of what Daniel tells us of the nation of the empire of Greece, depicted as a leopard there in swiftness - how Alexander the Great took over the known world with such rapidity. Here is a bear, which spoke in Daniel of the empire of Medo-Persia, great power - and this new empire will have great power just like it. The lion's mouth speaks of greed, just like Babylon in all of its affluence. But this beast comprises all three of these past beasts: the leopard, the bear, and the lion - in other words, this new empire will be the embodiment of all beastly governments that have ever ruled. Satan's power is enthusing it and infusing it with energy. What all of these past empires had in common was: they were evil, they were anti-God, and this empire's soul will be indwelt by the dragon, that serpent the devil, Satan himself.

Verse 3 shows us that this beast became wounded to death, it was wounded in the head. We know that in the mid-tribulation period, 3 1/2 years into this seven-year period, antichrist will be killed, or at least appear to be killed, and there will be an imitation of the resurrection of Christ - he will be brought to life again! You can imagine what will happen then: he will earn the adulation of the nations, verse 4, 'And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?'. Verses 5 and 6 apparently would indicate that during this period, the second half of the tribulation, antichrist's power will be practically unrestrained. No one will be able to resist him. Verse 8: 'All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world'. Satan's authority on earth will be great, and almost everyone on earth will worship him except those who have trusted in Christ - and that is the very thing that Satan has desired from the beginning of all time! Is it not?

Now please remember, in chapter 6 when we first encountered antichrist, the first horse rider, he began his career as a peacemaker, didn't he? He's bringing in a covenant that we think will effectively settle the Arab-Israeli problem. He'll make a covenant with the Jews to protect them for seven years, and that will allow them the peace and protection to rebuild that Temple on the Temple Mount, and they'll be able to reinstitute their ritual sacrifices and offerings - but in the middle of those seven years, the time we're studying now here in

chapters 10 through to 14, antichrist will break that covenant. He'll stop the ceremonies, he'll set himself up as God in the Temple to be worshipped. Many Jews will be exterminated, but some will believe in Christ and the Lord will protect them.

That is the first beast, antichrist, the second - chapter 13 verse 11: 'And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon'. This is another beast, this time this one comes out of the earth. It may be that he is a Jew, he is also referred to in the rest of this book as the false prophet in chapter 16, chapter 19, chapter 20. If you like, he's the alter-ego of the antichrist, he's his lieutenant. Verse 12 tells us that he exercises all power of the first beast before him, so he is the second highest ranking world leader during this second half of the tribulation period. He will effectively force the whole world to worship the antichrist. He's got miraculous power: verse 13, he makes fire come down from heaven; verse 15, he has power to give life unto the image of the beast. Like the Babylonian Emperor, he will set up an image of himself to be worshipped, but he has power to give, it would seem, life, or at least the semblance of life to that image.

In verses 16 to 18 we see that he forces men to take the mark of the beast, which is the number 666. The false prophet will require everyone, all people - to bring an entire world economy together, to bring a world governmental system together, to bring world religious establishment together - he will require people to take this mark on their hand and on their forehead. Whatever it is, and I'm not going to surmise, it will be something very important to identify you as a disciple of antichrist in a future day that is yet to be: 666. Do you know that six is the number of man? It's one less than seven, which is the number of perfection, and teaches us that man - everyone, no difference between any of us - have fallen short of the glory of God. But this is a trinity of sixes, because what we are seeing here is a trinity of evil, a Satanic trinity. If you like, the dragon, this great red dragon that is the devil, Satan - he is the counterfeit Father, who said in the past: 'I will be like the Most High'. This first beast is a counterfeit Christ, the anti-Christ, taking the place of our Lord: death, resurrection. The second beast, the false prophet, is the counterfeit Holy Spirit. You know, don't you, that the Holy Spirit is the one who glorifies Christ, uplifts Him, leads people to trust in Him and worship Him - John 6. But here the false prophet will point people to antichrist, his image, and compel them, force them to worship Satan through the beast, just as we worship God the Father through the Son.

Now I have so much that I could share with you tonight, but time has beaten me. What can we take in application from this study here tonight? Well, surely it's obvious: pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray that dear Jewish souls will come to Christ, even out of their blindness, by the grace of God, before this awful tragic scene takes place. Do we not hear the heart's cry of the apostle Paul: 'I wish that I myself were accursed for my kinsmen, my brethren according to the flesh. My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they may be saved'. That's why the gospel is to the Jew first, and to the Greek. But you know, I was thinking today, through all of this that we have looked at this evening in these seven key characters: does it not bring new light to that carol that we very seldom sing, that goes as follows:

'O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel'.

Next week, God willing, we'll look at 'The Seven Bowl Judgements' in chapters 17, 18 and 19.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 16

"The Seven Bowl Judgements"

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Now do turn with me to chapter 14 of Revelation - we will be here next Monday night, as I said, but we have in total another four studies after this evening to get through the book, I think I'm correct in saying that. So do come and join us, and we take up our study tonight in chapters 14 through to 16 - but our chief consideration is really found in chapter 16, and that is our title this evening, the subject being 'The Seven Bowl', or as the Authorised Version puts it, 'Vial Judgements'. So we'll not read a passage in introduction tonight, due to the fact that there is so much to get through, but we will be looking closely at the Scriptures as we pass through verse by verse.

Now, if you look at the screen you will see a little cross-section of the chart that has been available right throughout this series, and if you haven't got one yet do get one on your way out. You will see where we have travelled from. Now, of course, the seven churches aren't included on this chart, nor the vision in chapter 4 of the Creator, or chapter 5 of the Lamb - we're starting here from chapter 6, what constitutes the tribulation period, which brings us through a period of seven years to the second coming of our Lord Jesus when He will return and set up His thousand year millennial kingdom upon the earth. So we have seen, in the first half of that seven-year period, the seven seals being opened - and as the seventh seal was opened we found that seven trumpets judgements, following the seven seals judgements, were further opened. That brought us really to the halfway period of the seven-year tribulation. We took a bit of a pause and found a parenthesis in chapters 12 and 13 last week, where we are given seven key figures, seven key characters in the book. We looked at those last Monday evening.

But tonight we are at just after the midpoint of the 3 1/2 years middle point of the seven-year tribulation period, where we find these seven bowl or vial judgements. As the seventh trumpet opens - the seventh seal opened up the seven trumpet judgements - and as the seventh trumpet judgement is opened, it opens up seven bowl judgements, or seven vial judgements that really go across the whole of the second 3 1/2 years of the seven-year tribulation period. Now the bowl judgements, as we will look at them tonight, when we compare them with the seal judgements and the trumpet judgements, they are quite similar - but they appear to be greater both in intensity and severity.

So these are the worst of the judgements to come upon the earth during the seven-year tribulation period. Now, you might be saying to me, if you were here in previous weeks: 'Well, it's hard to imagine anything getting worse than they have been already', but the fact of the matter is - it seems from reading this passage - that these bowls, these vials, have been gathering the judgemental wrath of God, so to speak, for as long as time has existed. Now when you put it in those terms, maybe you can imagine why things will be so difficult during this time of judgement when the seven bowls are poured out upon the earth. Now these bowls of God's wrath have been filled to the brim, to overflowing almost, and they are now ready to be poured out upon the earth. Now the seventh of these judgements, round about six or seven combined together of these bowl judgements, will actually in effect bring the Lord Jesus Christ back to the earth. So things don't get any worse than this, before Lord Jesus

returns.

Indeed, the imagery, I feel, that is being used here regarding these bowl judgements is that the seven angels who administer them are pictured as turning these bowls upside down upon the earth to ensure that every drop of God's wrath descends upon this world. Nothing is held back! Now all that being said, whilst we are at the darkest hour in human history, and God's wrath is poured as never before: again, yet again, before judgement God displays His grace. Staggering this - and we have noticed this right throughout our study, even in the tribulation period, that always in wrath God remembers mercy. We found this in chapter 14 in the first angelic announcement that we are given - and in chapter 14 there are three angelic announcements that we want to concentrate on initially.

The first is found in chapter 14 verses 6 and 7: 'I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel', or the eternal Gospel, 'to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'. Right to the very end, as God is exhausting His wrath against man's ungodliness and sin, right to the end God is a merciful God. Now, if you're unconverted, you're not a Christian, you're not a believer in Christ, you're not saved: you need to sit up and observe this. No one can shake their fist, or point their finger at God and say: 'God just wants to send everybody to hell. He's a sadistic God who wants to make people squirm in torment'. No, no, no: God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish. Even here He is sending an angel to preach the everlasting eternal Gospel as a witness to His mercy and His grace. It is the last call of grace to mankind. It is the last opportunity of a message of hope, just before the Lord Jesus returns to the earth in judgement. Do remember that: when He's coming, He's coming in judgement.

Another aspect to what I have just said is: never ever, believer in Christ, underestimate the incredible blessing of being born into the age of grace - to be born into a time where God's gospel is freely preached. Now I know things aren't the way they used to be, but nevertheless: thank God you can still get saved very easily, in a relative sense, when we look at the circumstances of this particular moment in the history of mankind that is yet to be. We've got our Bibles, we've got our gospel meetings, we've got our tracts, we've got our evangelism - but one day God's final call will be heard. Imagine it!

The subject matter of this everlasting eternal Gospel is found in verse 7, this angel is crying with a loud voice: 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'. Now of course, there's only one way of salvation, but the emphasis of the gospel at this particular time is to turn men and women away from worshipping the beast, and prepare them for the kingdom of Christ on the earth. So they have to turn from the worship of the antichrist, to Jesus Christ - because He's coming, very shortly, as we are here at this moment in the text, He's coming and they need to be ready for His return!

Now, incidentally, this seems to be a fulfilment of what we read in Matthew 24 and verse 14, which is often misunderstood in this day and age, particularly regarding its application to missionary endeavour, when the Lord Jesus said: 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come'. So this gospel is preached worldwide as a warning as announced by this angel, that's the first angelic announcement.

The second is found in verse 8 - the kingdom of man, Babylon the great, is fallen. We read in verse 8: 'And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'. Now this anticipates what we're going to find next week, God willing, in chapters 17 and 18 - I'm not going to go into it in any detail, but in chapter 17 Babylon seems to represent the false apostate religious system that will exist during the tribulation period. In chapter 18 Babylon seems to represent more of a political, commercial, economic aspect to man's rule. What we see here in verse 8 is that all nations will, at this point in human history, have become drunk with the wine of the wrath of the fornication of Babylon - but the angel's announcement is: the kingdom of Babylon the great has fallen. Now what does that mean? Well, summing it up, generally speaking, this is declaring that man's day is over! The political rule of man right throughout human existence, and often characterised in the government of the nations of this world in rebellion against God, it will be over! Imagine what that will be like! Democracy rules most of the world - Western anyway - then there are other governmental systems: dictatorship, totalitarian regimes. All of them are inspired in some shape or form by the principalities and powers that rule this world, the emissaries and minions of Satan - but one day their day will be over. The kingdom of man, Babylon the great, is fallen.

Then a third angelic announcement is found in verses 9 to 13, and it declares that all who receive the mark of the beast are destined for the lake of fire. Let's read those verses: 'The third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them'.

It's awful to think that everyone during this period of human history who has taken the mark of the beast, 666, will be destined for the lake of fire. Yet, that is very awful, but when we turn to chapter 20 and verse 15 we find there, ultimately, that everyone - whosoever - was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. It is a very sobering, indeed a tragic consideration, but those who are not worshippers of the Lamb are doomed to Gehenna. Yet in verse 12 we read that believers who endure during this period, knowing God, will be vindicated in their righteousness. Now that is very important: these believers, Jewish believers and Gentile believers who are converted during this period after the church has been taken away, tribulation saints, because of their righteous stand, those who are still living at this moment who have endured to this point, they have only done it because they believe that God is going to vindicate them, God is going to avenge their suffering and their persecution. In other words, God is going to make amends! So the message to them is: keep going, don't give up! It's coming soon!

Maybe someone here tonight needs to hear those words. One way or another we are all struggling - maybe not necessarily for our faith, but that may well be the case. The message is always: don't give up, the best is yet to come! God's saints who are faithful will be vindicated. The ungodly man says: 'Blessed are the living', but God pronounces here 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord' - it's better to be a dead Christian than a living unbeliever, it certainly will be during this period of time. It says that those dead tribulation saints, their

works shall follow them. Everything they have done for the Lord, especially in those most adverse circumstances, it will be rewarded! It will not be forgotten! It's the same for you, child of God - and remember, John is writing to a group of Christians in Asia Minor who are suffering for their faith under the iron heel of Roman emperors. The message is: God will ultimately prevail, God will ultimately vindicate you, especially in the hardest of times!

Now the Holy Spirit prepares John for the great harvesting of earth in judgement. He gives us, before we even enter chapter 15, a glimpse of the awful reaping that is about to take place on this planet. In verses 14 to 20 we read of it: 'And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe'. This is a tragic scene: 'And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs'.

Now verses 19 and 20 are a reference to Armageddon. Now we will see Armageddon in a few moments when we open the sixth bowl that is poured out upon the earth - it's found in chapter 16 verse 16, and later on we'll see it again when our Lord comes in chapter 19 verses 17 through to 19. But what is being seen here, as an anticipation of it, is that the Lord Jesus, as the Judge of this world, is being called to put in a sickle of judgement - and, like grapes that are being harvested and thrown into a winepress, God's wrath is going to be crushed upon all mankind. Now you would never have seen a winepress, I imagine. Recently I saw an authentic one in Israel itself, and it was just like a big barrel. The grapes would be thrown into a store, and they would ferment, and eventually the smell of their fermentation would come to the farmer, and they would take the grapes - all of them starting to rot - and they would throw them into this winepress. Now before that, those grapes had to be crushed; and little people, little children, the only ones who could fit through the door of the store of the grapes, would go in and they would have a great old time with bare feet just trodding down these grapes. After they were crushed, they were brought out and put into this barrel, this winepress, and there was a big screw on top of it; and when all the grapes were put in, it was screwed down to crush out the blood of the grape - the wine.

It's this exact same process that we have here, and John tells us in verse 20 that the blood from the slaughter of Armageddon will flow 180 miles, and be a depth of 4 1/2 feet - a horse bridle. I know that's very difficult to imagine, but you know: that distance - 180 miles, 1600 furlongs - is approximately the distance from Meggido, which you can see north just near Galilee there, Meggido right down to Edom in the south. As we will see later, that's the whole area where the final battle of the ages will take place. John is telling us that the blood will flow for 180 miles, 4 1/2 feet deep. Now that's only a glimpse of what's going to happen, and I only find in chapter 15 a prelude to the bowl judgements.

Now we find ourselves toward the end of the seven-year tribulation period, at the beginning of verse 3 we read that there is a great company of the redeemed, tribulation saints, faithful ones: 'And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb'. Now

this is a great company of people in heaven who refused to worship the beast, and first of all we read that they are singing the song of Moses - now that was a song that celebrated God's redemption of His ancient people Israel out of Egypt from slavery. You can read that song in Exodus 15 verse 1. They are also singing the song of the Lamb, and it's found in the second half of verse 3: 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest'.

This is a song of praise concerning God's final deliverance from Satan and from all the foes of the spiritual life of all God's people right throughout time. So, as A.T. Pierson so aptly pointed out, these two songs - the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb - mark the two bounds of redemption history, and between them lies the whole history of God's ransomed people. Here, as God's story, history, is coming to an end as far as man's rule and reign is concerned, we see that is coming to a God-glorifying conclusion. God is being praised even in the midst of all His judgement, because every loose end is going to be wrapped up once and for all! Does that not give you comfort? It ought to!

In verse 5: 'After that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened' - now what's that? Well, that's the Holy of Holies in heaven. You see, you've got to remember that the heavenly tabernacle and Temple, the Holy of Holies, is what the earthly tabernacle and Temple was modelled on. What is in heaven, that was the blueprint for it all. But what is being signified here is that these seven bowls are coming directly from God Himself, from the Holiest place of all. This is righteous, true, and just judgement! In verses 6 and 7 we read: 'And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials', bowls, 'full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever'. Verse 8: 'And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power', now mark this please, 'and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled'. Now the fact that no man was able to enter into the Temple till the seven plagues are completed may mean that no priestly intercessor is allowed to delay God's wrath any more. It's going to happen! Nothing is going to stop it! Imagine: no saviour now! Think of it!

In chapter 16 and verse 1 it begins: 'And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth'. So we come to these seven bowl judgements here in chapter 16, let's follow them through one by one. Remember please: we've had seven seals, then seven trumpets - the seventh seal opened up the seven trumpets, the seventh trumpet now opens up the seven bowls. Ultimately, as you look at this chart, you will see that we are now in the second half of the tribulation period, and the end of these seven bowls is going to bring the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the first is found in verse 2: 'The first went, and poured out his bowl upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image'. So the first bowl judgement was poured out into the earth, it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon those who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. That is the first judgement on the land - that signifies that it's aimed specifically at earth dwellers, those who have taken the mark of the beast. Now in some measure this is a fulfilment of one of those angelic pronouncements we heard in chapter 14, if you turn back to it just for a moment, verses 9 to 11. You remember it was said there

that: 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture upon the earth'. Here we see it happening: an affliction, a grievous malignant sore upon the body. It literally translates that it's a 'foul, evil sore' - probably a plague of some ulcer of kinds.

That's the first bowl judgement, then we have the second in verse 3: 'The second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea'. This is a bowl poured out into the sea, blood like that of a dead man, everything in the sea died - that is the second bowl judgement. Now imagine this: turning the water so that every living thing that was left alive - remember a lot of living things have already died during this tribulation period, but whatever has been left from previous judgements is now killed. Just try and conceive the stench and disease that will result, it's unimaginable!

Then the third bowl judgement, this time verses 4 to 7: 'And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy', or they deserve it. 'And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments'. This bowl is poured into the rivers and the springs of water. In other words, the fresh water that remains is now being contaminated and turned into blood. This is a judgement that avenges the saints of God - not just the tribulation saints, but every saint of God, every martyr and every prophet that has ever lived - but it is a direct answer to the prayer of the tribulation saints in chapter 6 and verse 10. You remember that they called out for vengeance and said: 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'. Verse 6 of chapter 15 says they are worthy of this, they deserve it because they shed the blood of Christ's saints and prophets.

In verses 8 and 9 we come to the fourth bowl judgement: 'And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory'. So this bowl is poured upon the sun, and there is an extraordinary heat that goes forth and it scorches people with fire - so it could be a severe sunburn or solar radiation - but we're told how the people respond from this bowl judgement. We read that the human response is: they blasphemed God's name and they did not repent, they did not give glory to God! Imagine this! Now remember, if you were to turn back to chapter 9 verse 21, when the sixth trumpet was blown, we saw the same reaction of men there. Chapter 9 verse 21, after that trumpet judgement: 'Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts'. Again we're going to see in chapter 16 verse 11, in just a moment or two, that from another of these bowls they 'blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds'. So these judgements do not bring mankind to repentance in any shape or manner, but in fact it settles men in their depraved hatred of Almighty God! God is showing us the depravity of man's heart, and that the judgement that is coming is only just.

The fifth bowl judgement is found in verses 10 and 11: 'And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven', there it is, as we read, 'because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds'. This bowl is poured upon the

throne of the beast, and so the kingdom of the beast is becoming dark - but again the human response, what is it? They gnawed their tongues because of pain, they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores - no repentance, blasphemy! The whole domain of darkness is blacked out. Now that's a similar darkness to one of the plagues that came upon Egypt in Exodus 10, it's an abnormal darkness accompanied by some type of agony in mankind that causes people to gnaw their tongues because of pain - but once again the response is blasphemy.

I'm telling you, it really is astounding, isn't it? If there is a lesson for believers in Christ tonight, it is that we need to make the most of the time that is left, while we are in an age of grace, while it is easier for men and women to repent of sin and believe the gospel. The sixth bowl judgement, verses 12 to 16: 'And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon'.

This sixth bowl judgement is poured out upon the great river Euphrates. It dries up the river and prepares the approach of the kings of the East. There is delusion, or miracles of some kind, out of the mouth of the Satanic trinity - that is the dragon, Satan; the beast, the antichrist; and the false prophet, that false prophet who will try to deceive the world into worshipping the antichrist, and therefore worshipping the devil. These three unclean frogs come - spirit demons - performing these signs in order to gather the world for a judgement at Armageddon in Israel. So think about this: the great river Euphrates is being dried up to prepare the approach of the kings of the East, from the East - and literally the word there is 'the kings from the rising sun'. So the kings of the Orient are going to approach toward Israel, down a dried up river Euphrates, supernaturally dried up for their approach. Verses 13 and 14 tell us that these frog-like spirits are going to achieve this through a satanic deception - it might be through miracles, it might be through some kind of anti-Semitic propaganda that will bring the kings of the East against Israel, and deceive other world rulers to lure them into this battle of Armageddon. But the whole point of the phraseology here is to give us the impression that God, God is clearly bringing these things together, and baiting the antichrist, and drawing him into a trap - because this is not called the battle of Armageddon, it is called 'the battle of that great day of God Almighty', this is God's battle!

We read of it, what's happening here, in Joel 3 verses 9 to 12 - listen carefully to it: 'Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about'. Now, verse 16 is what we often speak of as the battle of Armageddon, but the Bible never - not once - speaks of the battle of Armageddon. You see, Armageddon as a name comes from two Hebrew words: 'Har' and 'meggedon', which speaks, 'Har' speaks in Hebrew of 'hill' or 'mountain', and 'meggido' or 'meggedon' is the place where there is this hill or mountain, and 'meggido' or 'meggedon' means 'place of troops', 'place of slaughter'.

It's the plain of Esdraelon, that's another name for it, or the Valley of Jezreel. It's an area 14 miles wide and 20 miles long. Napoleon Bonaparte said it's the most natural battlefield of the whole earth. It was the scene of many Old Testament battles, Barak defeated the Canaanites there, Gideon the Midianites, King Saul lost his life in 1 Samuel 31. History shows it has been a battlefield: Titus in the Roman army used it as a natural corridor, as did the Crusaders in the Middle Ages approaching Palestine. Latterly the British General Allenby used it to defeat the Turks when Britain took over Palestine in 1917. Now when you're standing on Mount Carmel, that's the Mount where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal - and I've stood and looked exactly at that site - it is incredible. You can only see a certain distance, and it's not hard to imagine the armies of the world gathering there at Megiddo. Not for the battle of Armageddon - Megiddo is only the place where they will gather - it's better to talk about 'the campaign of Armageddon', because there's going to be a whole lot of battles that will compass the whole length of Israel.

We saw, didn't we, that 1600 furlongs, about 184 miles, is approximately the distance from Armageddon to Edom just down here in the South, where the blood will flow from the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Verse 14 tells us: 'For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty'. It's His battle! Now that war will consist of several battles, and those several battles will usher in the second coming of our Lord Jesus. Now, it all starts - I want you to follow with me slowly, because a lot of people don't know these facts - it all starts when the nations of the world assembled at Megiddo, and that's what we read. They will be deceived to come against Israel, and all the armies of the world will descend upon Megiddo.

Jeremiah 49:13-14 tells us of something else that is going to happen. Now follow with me: all the armies come to Megiddo, right? They start to move down towards Jerusalem, because - as we saw from chapter 12 last week - the devil's aim and objective has always been to wipe out the Jewish nation, and antichrist will want to bring a final solution to the Jewish problem, a bit like Adolf Hitler in the Second World War. So he wants to annihilate all the Jews, and we saw last week that two thirds of them will be annihilated during this period, and so he heads from Megiddo down to Jerusalem to that end: to destroy the Jews. But remember, we saw last week that a remnant would be saved - look at chapter 12 verse 16: 'And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth', and verse 14 of chapter 12, 'And to the woman were given two wings', this remnant of Israel, believing Israel, 'were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent'. Now we saw last week - and if you want to know more about it, get the tape - that many scholars believe that that place is called Bozrah. Whilst antichrist and the armies of the world are coming down from Megiddo to Jerusalem to wipe out the Jews, that remnant will flee to Bozrah - which may well be modern-day Petra - and they will be there for refuge. What will happen is: antichrist, after he sacks and destroys fallen Jerusalem, will then move from Jerusalem and chase them to Bozrah.

Now this is where we come to Jeremiah 49:13: 'For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes. I have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathen, saying, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle'. So the armies of antichrist and the world will come to Bozrah to wipe out the Jews once and for all - remember, he's doing that because he doesn't want Messiah to come,

because He will come to the Jews - but at that point, that remnant of Jews will be regenerated spiritually, they will realise that the Christ who they crucified is their Saviour. They will call unto the Lord - and, as Zechariah 12:10 says: 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn'. At that point, in Bozrah now, when Israel the remnant believes, Christ returns - and watch this, Micah 2:12-13: 'I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate' - watch - 'and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them'.

What that is saying is that when they cry upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as antichrist is coming from a destroyed Jerusalem toward them to wipe them out, the Saviour will come to them there! Isaiah 34 teaches that, Isaiah 63 teaches it - look at it: 'Who is this that cometh from Edom', that's modern-day Jordan, 'with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden', there's the imagery again, 'the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment', a picture of Christ coming in judgement to Bozrah. It teaches that He will deliver them in Bozrah, He will travel down the valley of Jehoshaphat and there He will defeat all the armies of the world - Joel 3:2: 'I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land', Joel 3:12, 'Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about'.

Then, after all that, the Lord's victory ascent of the Mount of Olives will take place, only then. We read of it in Zechariah 14: 'His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south'. We read of it here in our chapter, Revelation 16 - now I trust you'll give me the time to look at all this, we've only a few things to cover yet, but just let me deal with it with a bit of leisure. Verse 17 through to the end, and at the very end there is a great earthquake - a great earthquake, now we'll look at that in a moment - but that great earthquake splits Jerusalem in three, and we believe that this is happening in sequence with the return of the Lord Jesus.

Now, follow the progression - I know I'm blinding you with a lot of stuff here, but I imagine it's probably new to you, or some of you anyway. You see the progression: first of all the armies of antichrist and the world gather together at Megiddo, Armageddon. They then travel from Armageddon to Jerusalem to wipe out the Jews - but a remnant are not there, they have fled to Bozrah, Petra perhaps, Edom in Jordan. So he begins to follow them there, and when they realise that he's coming, they realise that all the nations of the world are about to exterminate them. They cry out to their Messiah: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord', they are regenerated, and at that moment of faith and life the Lord appears to them there, delivers them. Then He travels down the valley of Jehoshaphat, back to Jerusalem, where His victory ascent goes up the Mount of Olives - and as His feet land there, the city is

split in three.

Now I know it's a lot to take in, but it's important to realise, I think, that the Lord is going to first appear in Bozrah to His remnant believing people. But here's the point: all history, all military, political, spiritual history is moving toward Armageddon, moving toward this moment.

We come finally to the seventh bowl judgement, verses 17 to 21. The last bowl, if you look at it, verses 17 to 21 quickly, it's poured out upon the air. There is a voice from the heavenly Temple that says: 'It is done'. The end of verse 17, look at it: 'out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done'. There is a global earthquake - that earthquake we were talking about that shakes - Jerusalem is split into three parts. The cities of the nations, including Babylon, are destroyed. Every island is removed and mountain. One hundred pound hailstones fall from heaven upon men. Now Satan is called, in Ephesians 2, the prince of the power of the air, so this bowl is being poured upon the air with flashes of lightning, sounds of thunder, peals of thunder - and it is announcing the greatest earthquake in all of human history, Satan's domain is being defeated in the air, on the earth! All the cities of the earth destroyed, his system, his world system is being eradicated.

I believe this happens at the very moment our Lord appears in His second advent. This earthquake, as we will see when we look at the millennium in a few weeks time, will cause Jerusalem to split - that great city spoken of here as Jerusalem - into three sections, preparing the way for millennial changes that will happen in the second coming. We'll read about those in Zechariah 14 - but imagine it: global judgement that is taking place. Now listen: 100 pound hailstones falling on this world from heaven - it's reminiscent of Exodus 9, the seventh plague that came upon Egypt. Just as Pharaoh and the Egyptian leaders did not repent, once again the response of unbelievers is in verse 21: the people blasphemed God, imagine it!

Incidentally, do you know what the penalty of blasphemy is in the Old Testament law? Leviticus 24, it is to be stoned, stoned to death. Here God is stoning, with hundred pound hailstones from heaven, blasphemers to death. There is a voice, and it's the voice of God, verse 17, coming out of heaven itself, saying: 'It is done'. That could be best translated: 'It has been, and will remain, done'. Do you know what it's the same as? John 19:30: 'It is finished'. God's wrath being poured out upon His only begotten Son, and here we have God's wrath being poured out on an unbelieving world - and God will punctuate the completion of His wrath in this devastating earthquake; and then, think of it, it will all be over! All the injustice, all the wickedness, all man's rebelliousness - over!

Now, I've got to apply this in a couple of seconds - if I haven't done already - but here's three P's for you to think on your way home. One: what does this mean for us? We've got to preach! We have got to preach, knowing the terror of the Lord we need to persuade men, while repentance and faith is still possible - do you agree? Preach, secondly: persevere. Even in the most adverse suffering, even in persecution for our faith, there has always been a beast to oppress God's people throughout church history, there has always been a false prophet trying to lead God's people away and astray to worship others - but there is a day coming, as the Psalmist says, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision'.

Persevere, this shows us the devil can be overcome - but more, will be overcome! Hallelujah! The Lord can come to us in crisis even now by His Spirit, the way He will come to His remnant people at the very end. Preach, persevere, but thirdly and finally: be pure. Now I believe the church will not be on the earth at this point of time, but there will be Jewish and Gentile believers here who will have had to endure antichrist's rule. The admonition in verse 15 of chapter 16 to them also has an application to us: 'Behold, I come as a thief', they're not waiting for anything more to happen here at this moment, we're not now as the church, 'Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame'. Be pure, because the Lord could come for us at any time, and it behoves us to keep our lives clean: to watch, to wait, and to be faithful. Preach, persevere, be pure. Why? For the end draweth nigh.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 17

"The Seven Dooms On Babylon"

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Now turn with me to Revelation 17 please, and I think we'll take time - we're only looking at two chapters tonight, other nights we've been scanning three or more. We've only got two this evening, and they are not that long, so we'll just read them together beginning at verse 1 of chapter 17, through to the end of chapter 18.

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials", or the seven bowls, "and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth".

"And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her

delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth".

So tonight we look at 'The Seven Dooms On Babylon'. We have seen the beginning of the tribulation period, the seven seals, the seven trumpets - we took a week in parenthesis to look at the seven key figures of Revelation - and then we entered about the mid-period of the seven-year tribulation, about 3 1/2 years in, and looked at the seven bowl judgements which will bring us to the very point, at the end of the tribulation seven years, when the Lord Jesus Christ will return at that moment the seventh bowl judgement is poured out. Here we find somewhat of another parenthesis, where we are seeing something that has already been mentioned in the judgements that have already gone - but the Lord wants to give John further insight into it, because it's such an important subject: 'The Seven Dooms On Babylon'.

You've got to understand the significance of Babylon in the Bible to realise why the Lord has taken two chapters in the Apocalypse to go into great detail as to how this great city will be destroyed. So let me give you a bit of background regarding Babylon. The larger geographical

area of Babylon encompassed an area of about eight thousand square miles from the river Tigris, really between the river Tigris and the river Euphrates - so in between really comprised the whole area of Babylonia. Now Babylon, you may or may not know, is the second most mentioned city in the Bible after Jerusalem. There is an obvious reason for that: the history of Babylon in the scriptures essentially begins at creation, if we believe that the traditional site of creation where man was placed, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where the fall took place, was around this area of the river Euphrates. Therefore that was the place, essentially, where Satan first appeared as far as man was concerned, and Satan first lied to man about God - that's very important to remember. We believe that it was perhaps around this area in modern day Iraq.

Following the fall came the flood. The evil and wickedness of man was so great that God had to destroy him, and after the flood the settlement of the family of Noah, and civilisation and population after that, eventually got to the point in Genesis chapter 10 where they clubbed together and decided that they were going to found a city or a kingdom called 'Babel'. Incidentally, that took place in an area that was also known as 'Shinar'. Now the word 'Shinar' may be related to another word 'Shina', which can mean 'Shine', 'Year', or 'to repeat'. If you think of those ideas, you think of the yearly cycle of months, which could have a distant allusion to the fact that astrology originated and was first perfected as a wicked art in this area. Upon that discovery, gods were conceived of as the beings who ruled the heavens and the earth. So it's from this general area that essentially paganism began.

Now we encounter in Genesis chapter 10 a character by the name of Nimrod. Nimrod became the first king of Babylon. Nimrod's name means 'let us revolt' - and that is effectively what the kingdom of Babylon was. It was a manifestation of rebellion against God and His rule. Now the name 'Babel' is comprised of two words really: 'Bab' and 'El'. You have learned, I'm sure, from Sunday School, that anything with 'El' in it speaks of God - but 'Babel' means 'the gate of God'. In Genesis 11 we have the famous Tower of Babel which was an idolatrous attempt by the men and women of Babel to defy God. The idea was that they were reaching to heaven, but many believe that the actual top of this tower was like a temple that was meant to be heaven itself - but it was man's attempt at getting to his own gods.

Now you remember what happened: God sent judgement upon Babel. He did it by sending upon the builders, who all spoke one language, sending many languages - and therefore the name 'Babel' became synonymous with confusion. What I want you to remember is that right from the inception of this place called Babylon, it is seen to be the root of all paganism, all false approaches to God, all erroneous religion and faith. From Babylon, through art and culture, paganism was made fashionable.

The next time we encounter it, after the origin of this city Babylon, is the call of Abraham. Abraham was called by God - and we know from the New Testament that God revealed His glory to Abraham, he was converted supernaturally, born of God - but he was called out, did you know, of Babylon. Ur of the Chaldees is what it was called in those days, in Genesis 11. We really leave there and have to come to the period of the great empire after the exodus of the children of Israel in Egypt, we come to what we could call 'neo-Babylon', where Babylon comes forth as a great imperial power, and Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps, as the greatest personification of that. He becomes God's instrument to chastise Israel and destroy Jerusalem before Babylon is finally destroyed itself by Medo-Persia.

What I want you to understand - this is vital to these portions of Scripture that we're looking at from Revelation tonight - from the beginning of Babylon in Genesis 10 it was an insidiously anti-God civilisation. Now we get a glimpse of God's view of all this when we go to Isaiah 14.

You will be familiar with Isaiah 14 as a depiction of the fall of Satan, Lucifer - but you've got to remember that initially this was written as a taunting poem against the sovereign and the system of Babylon, the king of Babylon and his kingdom. You are right in believing that it is the fall of Lucifer that is depicted, because what is actually happening is: the King is being portrayed, and his kingdom, as the epitome in illustration of Satan himself. The idea was that Babylon and its king were the present-day personifications of Lucifer and his kingdom of darkness.

So you have seen a bit of the history of Babylon, and we could talk now in a general term about Babylonian or Babylonish influence upon societies throughout history - and it's even being felt today in our world, because chiefly Babylon speaks of the reign of man, man doing his own thing. It's synonymous with all in society that is opposed to God's truth - and it's present-day influences, I believe we will see as we go through our study tonight, can be found in all false religions and all political powers. What we have before us tonight in 17 and 18 of Revelation is a prophetic declaration that this Babylonish power will rise again in the seven-year tribulation period, and will ultimately be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes again.

John is given an insight into two aspects of Babylon in the tribulation period. First of all religious Babylon, and then secondly commercial Babylon. So let's look at them in that order. First of all religious Babylon - so we're turning to chapter 17 verses 3 to 6. John was carried away in the spirit into the wilderness and 'saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration' - I marvelled, or I was astonished.

Now look at verse 5, this name was written on her forehead: 'MYSTERY, BABYLON'. Now I believe that 'Mystery, Babylon' represents a system that has endured since ancient times, since the origination of Babylon as we have traced it in biblical history. You notice that this woman is not just 'a harlot', verse 5 gives her the title of being 'the mother of all harlots and abominations of the earth'. We know, historically speaking, that the ancient city of Babylon was the original seat of idolatry. Now I don't know how many of you were here when we went through the seven churches at the beginning of these studies, but you might remember that when we looked at the church of Pergamos we noted that Alexander Hislop in his book 'The Two Babylons' - which I would encourage you to read - shows that at the death of the Babylonian Emperor Belshazzar the headquarter of mystery Babylon, that is that pagan worship cult, moved to Pergamos or Pergamum. Then after Pergamos in Asia Minor, it moved to Rome, and Rome as the Imperial city became the seat of idolatry with her pagan mystery cults. Incidentally, that cult was often characterised by the cult of mother and child worship - and mother and child worship can be followed through many religions in the world, many pagan religions too - but we believe that that was possibly inspired by a suggested incestuous relationship that took place, a marriage in fact, between Nimrod and his mother. Semiramis, his mother, became his wife. Of course, we see that same mother and child worship in the Roman Catholic system, but we'll touch on that a little bit later.

Now during that study on Pergamos, I hope you can recall - and this is important to understand church history and interpret it - that Rome was the seat of pagan idolatry, and Constantine the Emperor had what we would call a 'spurious' conversion. In that moment,

324 AD, Christianity became the adopted religion of the Empire. Now this is what happened: pagans were baptised, called Christians, and entered, effectively, an established church to get into the Empire - paganism was christened, baptised, Christianised; and many pagan practices were adopted. We're taking somewhat of a quantum leap to today, but a lot of that can be seen in Roman Catholicism, and what became Roman Catholicism.

Now I believe that chapter 17 of Revelation very graphically depicts characteristics that we can see today in Roman Catholicism. If you want to do an in-depth study of that, Dave Hunt has a good book 'A Woman Rides the Beast', and he goes into great detail on these chapters in particular. This chapter cites much of the religious and political compromise that we see in the Roman Catholic system - how she, if you remember how we read, has sway over many of the Kings and Presidents of the earth, how she is drunk with the blood of the martyrs. But I want you to note this tonight: that Roman Catholicism is only one of the places where Mystery Babylon is manifest - it is the place, I grant you, where it is most obviously manifest, but it's not the only place. Mystery Babylon is reflected in all false religion. John is telling us that in the future it will be expressed, predominantly, in a religious system, this harlot that rides or controls the beast for a while. It is the domain of antichrist. We have learned in chapter 13 that this beast is antichrist, and the antichrist's kingdom, which we also learned - without going into too much detail - that we believe this will be a revived Roman Empire.

Again it's detailed for us in this chapter, in verse 7: 'And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel?', he gives an interpretation, an explanation of this scene, 'I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not'. You remember we saw how antichrist would be slain, it would appear he dies, perhaps literally dies, and it would appear that he is resurrected, perhaps literally resurrected by satanic power. So this describes him: 'He was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition'. The inference there is that he will be possessed by a demon, if not the devil himself, from the bottomless pit - but ultimately his end will be: he will go into perdition when the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. 'Then they that dwell on the earth shall wonder', and it is wonderful when we consider it.

Daniel gives us another clue regarding this - now we haven't got time to go into all the details of Daniel's prophecy, but right throughout the book of Daniel, Daniel is given insight into the times of the Gentiles. We've already looked at the 70 weeks, prophetic weeks of Daniel, but in chapter 2 of Daniel, Daniel interprets a vision for Nebuchadnezzar. Ultimately if you race from there right through to Daniel 8, you see all the pieces of this vision coming together to interpret the time of the Gentiles, the time of Gentile rule on this earth. We know from the testimony of Scripture that Babylon was that golden head, Nebuchadnezzar himself. The next great world empire was Medo-Persia - a gold head Babylon, the silver breast Medo-Persia - then the loins were of brass, speaking of the Grecian empire. The legs, Daniel insinuates, is this great empire of Rome, the empire of John the apostle's present day. But the interesting thing about this vision is that the feet of this great statute are made of iron and clay. Now Rome is depicted as being iron, and the feet - an empire that has not yet been seen, antichrist's empire - will be a mixture of iron and clay. So it will have something to do with the Roman Empire, and that's one of the reasons why we believe it will be a revived Roman Empire. Another indication of this in our passage here tonight is the fact in verse 12 that it speaks of 10 kings, and Daniel 7 speaks of 10 horns that were 10 kings - and so it's all fitting together, and we don't have time to look at all the jigsaw pieces - but that's your job, to go home and study the scriptures to see if these things are so.

Now in verse 9: 'Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains,

on which the woman sitteth'. Now traditional interpretation of that is that the harlot has her headquarters in Rome, for Rome was the city built on the seven hills - but of course there are other sevens in this passage as well, some of them depicting seven great world empires and so on, but we do know that of course John himself would have identified these seven hills with the seven hills of Rome because that was the empire of his day. Incidentally, we could identify it with papal Rome, where Mystery Babylon is manifest presently in our age. But we have to assume, therefore, as we look into the future - and remember this is chiefly about the future, the things which shall be hereafter - that Rome must, in some shape or form, become a religious centre of Mystery Babylon in the tribulation days. Of course, verse 18 would indicate that: 'And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth'.

Now we have to be careful that we don't read too much between the lines regarding prophetic Scriptures, so what I'm going to say is not dogmatic - and I want you to weigh up the facts as they are, and discern whether we are seeing prophetic Scripture fulfilled before our eyes today. If we are not, it is a sure fact that some force of some kind is trying to bring these things to pass in our day and age. It is very possible, and I think probable, that the revived Roman Empire has its embryo in the European Union. We have to go back to 1957 to the signing of the Treaty of Rome, incidentally, when the European Economic Community was established, the EEC. Later that Treaty was renamed 'the Maastricht Treaty', signed in the Netherlands in 1992, which effectively created a European Union. Europa Publications, the official publications of the European Parliament I think that is, their symbol is a woman riding a beast. Now I'll go into that in a moment or two.

Here you have the Louise Weiss Building, which is part of the European Parliament in Strasbourg in France. If you look at it, clearly it has the appearance of an unfinished tower. Now don't think I'm reading into this too much, and jumping off the deep end, because if you look at these two paintings that are beside one another on the screen - on the left you have a painting from 1563 of the Tower of Babel by Peter Bruegel, the Flemish Renaissance painter; and on the right is an official European Union publication. It is symbolically depicting their mission, and it combines, as you see, the twelve stars of the EU flag with the rebuilding of the Tower of Babel - it is the Tower of Babel, and it's based on Bruegel's painting. The motto underneath, if you can see clearly just at the far bottom right, is 'Europe, many tongues, one voice'.

Now some wise guy has put these two depictions together - a photograph of the parliament and Bruegel's painting - to show what it is based on, and that is accepted fact. Now come nearer to today, to 2004, the European Union constitution was signed. It was signed in the political and religious centre of ancient Rome, which is today the home for Rome's City Hall - but it was signed underneath the shadow of this gentleman, Pope Innocent X. Now that EU constitution fell through, because the French and the Dutch rejected it in their various referendums - but to bring you right up-to-date to December 2007, the end of last year, a reform of the EU constitution of 2004, called 'the Treaty of Lisbon' was agreed and signed, and also signed by Gordon Brown our Prime Minister, though he was a bit late signing it. It effectively alters the way the 27 nation body of Europe operates. One of the things that is enshrined within this Lisbon Treaty is a President of Europe, that is going to happen. Indeed, at the signing of that new constitution effectively, the Lisbon Treaty, Jose Manuel Barroso said - that's the European Commission President - listen carefully: 'From this old continent, a new Europe is born'.

Now, you saw this depiction of a woman riding the beast before in one of the slides, and this is on one of the Euro - the 2 Euro coin. Now this is meant to be a depiction of Europa - I

haven't got time to go into the story, but it's based on Greek mythology. If you were to suggest that this is an allusion to anything in Revelation 17 you would be completely pooh-poohed - but we believe that behind these forces of government and political establishment works the forces of Babylon, principalities and powers. Whether or not this originated from Greek mythology, it certainly seems to depict something of a more demonic intelligence and inspiration. Now let me clearly say: whilst Mystery Babylon obviously is manifest today in the Roman Catholic system, it is in other beliefs. In the end time, at this tribulation period, Mystery Babylon will, I believe, be manifest in an eclectic religious system which is, I think, in embryo today in ecumenism. It might well be based in Rome, and it might even be headed up by the Roman Catholic system, but it will be a spectrum, I believe, of all types of faiths.

Incidentally, Pope John Paul II, before he died, I think it was in the eighties, personally took the initiative to unite the leaders of world religions for a prayer summit in Assisi, Italy. It was 1986 actually. They came from all around the world: Roman Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Jews; Muslims from nine nations sang from the Koran; American Medicine Men called on the great spirit; Buddhism's Dalai Lama, traditionally regarded as a living deity, chanted rhythmically; Animists from the jungles of Africa; Hindus; Zoroastrians. They said: 'We will stand side-by-side asking God to give peace'. With a papal invitation 160 leaders from the religions of the world gathered to petition God for world peace. Now that was unprecedented in the whole history of Christendom - but something is going to happen during the first half of this tribulation period, this religious system is going to ride the beast; but halfway through - verse 16, look at it: 'The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire'. The revived Roman Empire and antichrist will turn on the harlot, probably at the midpoint of the tribulation. Now you remember that at the midpoint, antichrist will go into the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, set himself up as God; he will destroy this false religious system that he has breathed power into, set himself up as God, and set up the false prophet as the new religion of antichrist. Religious Babylon.

Now let's move on to chapter 18, because here we have commercial Babylon. Chapter 18 effectively is a funeral song or dirge, but it's not really a dirge because it's celebrating the fall of Babylon. Now some people see chapter 18 as a further judgement on the whore of chapter 17, and it may well be in many parts - and of course you remember that Babylon, the name 'Babylon' was code language for the apostle Peter, we believe, when he was writing his epistle - and John would have associated Babylon with Rome, but that was where it was manifested in John's day. The emphasis of chapter 18 does seem to be on the commercial side of Babylon, and you probably gathered that as we read through it. Ancient Babylon, right at the very beginning of her history, also gave birth to the idea of a city state. It was from Babylon that that idea of a city expanded to be a system of bureaucracies that eventually established control over populations. It all started in Babylon.

So this commercial Babylon, this Babylonish material greed and secularism, if you like, has infected and affected all the nations of the world from her inception. Now, having said that, and I think we can see that prevalent in our own cities and nations today, some prophetic students believe that if we're going to be consistent in interpreting the Bible - particularly prophetic Scripture - we have to conclude that Babylon will be the actual city of Babylon, Babylon as it was rebuilt and come to world prominence again. I don't know what you think about that. For 1700 years the city of Babylon remained hidden beneath the sands of time, but it is very interesting to note that in modern history Babylon has begun to rise again. Now we don't have time to look at these portions, but I encourage you to look at them when you get home. Read, when you get home, Isaiah 13 and 14. Read Jeremiah 50 and 51, and you will read there the description of the destruction of Babylon. It is said there that it will take

place at the time of the day of the Lord.

Now this is what we call, in prophetic Scripture, the law of the double mention - remember that. What it simply is, if you look at this chart, when prophets were given visions by God - apocalyptic visions often - there were mountaintops of prophecy, but they could only see one peak, one word from God, one fulfilment. There was the near fulfilment - so the prophecy in Isaiah 13 and 14, Jeremiah 50 and 51, would obviously have been relevant to those prophets to the Babylon of their day, to its destruction in the 70th year of Israel's captivity. But there is a far fulfilment - if you like, it's not identical, but the two advents of our Lord Jesus; His first coming to Bethlehem, and His second coming to the Mount of Olives. It's often not easy to see those two things separated in the Old Testament, but they are - they are different peaks of the mountain peaks of prophecy. That's what we have when the Bible speaks of the destruction of Babylon in the day of the Lord, and we know the day of the Lord ultimately is that day of judgement, tribulation at the end of time.

Now let me get you to turn to one verse in Isaiah 13, verse 20 please - Isaiah 13 verse 20 - this is speaking of Babylon, the city of Babylon, and the destruction that comes upon it will be so severe. The prophet says, inspired by God, verse 20 of chapter 13 of Isaiah: 'It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there'. Now that says Babylon will never be inhabited again. Now over the past 100 years Babylon has grown as a city, and houses 250,000 people as we speak. Of course, you know where Babylon is, don't you? Iraq. Now that is a satellite image of Babylon from 423 miles above the earth, and as you can see it is far from a city that is no longer inhabited, neither will ever be inhabited. You can see here in this old document which is about 21 years old, Saddam Hussein - the deceased dictator of Iraq - produced this document and founded the Babylon International Festival to celebrate the fact that Babylon as a city was undergoing a renaissance. Here you see a coin with a depiction of Nebuchadnezzar's head and Saddam Hussein's head, and underneath is a caption 'From Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein'. Well, we know he came a cropper, but nevertheless Babylon is still there. There are some of the walls that are extant, some of the buildings that have been newly erected in the city of Babylon - you can see what's going on. Now I'm not declaring anything dogmatic here tonight, but is it possible that Babylon as a city will literally become that powerful city that will be destroyed in a day, that will depict the whole of the Babylonish system right from the inception of the fall? Will it be there, in Babylon, that our Lord Jesus destroys that empire when He comes? Then will that place remain, as Scripture says, uninhabited for the whole thousand year millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ?

One thing is for sure, there is certainly a lot of world interest in Babylon today, isn't there? There's a lot of investment in the nation of Iraq. Now, however it's going to be fulfilled, the Babylon system has had a most harmful effect on all the cities of the world. We've got to get a grasp of this, because this is the real message for us, I think, today: all idolatrous religion, all greed based commerce, all secular government began there. Verses 5 to 8 of chapter 18 shows us that the righteous God of heaven has not overlooked man's sins. There's many a time, isn't there, that the prophets and the Psalmist cry out: 'Is God not looking and seeing men's sins?'. We can look through our own histories and see awful atrocities that men seem to have committed without any consequence or justice - but what we're seeing here is the sins of the elite powerbrokers of history who have used commerce and government for centuries to feed themselves, to live luxuriously at the expense of others, particularly the poor. The commercial, social and political systems of the world and of end time antichrist will receive double judgement from the Lord! 'Fallen, fallen'.

At the end of the tribulation, God, it says, in the pouring out of the seventh vial judgement, bowl judgement, will destroy all the great cities of this world. Staggering, isn't it? Seven dooms pronounced - we don't have time to look at them individually, but there are these: one, Babylon will be devoid of human life; two, it will be burned with fire; three, it will be destroyed in one hour; four, people will be afraid to enter; five, its riches will be brought to nothing; six, it will be violently overthrown; seven, all activity in it will cease. Verse 11 speaks of the merchants of the earth, chapter 18, weeping and mourning over 'for no man buyeth their merchandise any more'. You've got a great list of her produce and trade - but look at verse 13, it's interesting: this great empire traded in slaves and the souls of men. You know, ancient Rome, a third of her population was made up of slaves. It was not unusual for 10,000 human beings to be auctioned off in one day in the slave markets of the Roman Empire. Staggering, isn't it?

Verse 23 says that this empire has deceived the nations by her sorceries - the word for 'sorceries' there is the Greek word 'pharmakeia', it's used to describe a lifestyle of drug-induced occultic practice. What is being said is that this empire has traded in people, made slaves of people, it has deluded people, bewitched them by pleasure and material possession. That's what Babylon is and what Babylon does, and that's what the apostle Paul said people will be like in the end time: they will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Well, in verse 21 a mighty angel casts a millstone into the sea as an example of how the kingdom of antichrist will be destroyed in a moment.

Let me conclude tonight and sum everything up. One reason John, in this whole book and indeed in these two chapters, uses symbolism is that his message should encourage believers - Christians who lift up this book in any period of church history, whenever they have lived. It's bright hope for tomorrow, but it's strength for today - let's never forget that. So much of the time we lose the book of the Revelation because we look to a future day and forget there's an application and interpretation for today. Every age has had its Babylon, Mystery Babylon has been there from the fall of mankind: a religious Babylon, a political Babylon, an economic Babylon - systems of our world which have sought to control people's minds and their destinies. Because of that, there is a message for the church today - there is a message for you, Christian.

Let's take the message to the church first of all. Here it is from John: the church must protect her purity. She is a pure virgin. It's interesting, when we get into chapter 19, you'll see that she is the bride of Christ. In chapter 17 we have a harlot, in chapter 19 we have a bride - but the false religious system has abandoned the truth of God, gone man's way, prostituted herself for personal gain, for wealth and prestige. But the church has to keep itself pure, the church must beware of compromise with religious falsehood, with religious Babylon. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul, I think, is alluding to this in a sense when he says: 'For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ'. Those who were following after the world, James the apostle called them 'adulterers and adulteresses'. Of course, some in Corinth were going around the temple of idols and feasting at the cultural dinners in society - and Paul had to remind them: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?'

Earth dwellers give allegiance to Babylon, except those that are written in the Book of Life - but the believer in Christ gives allegiance to a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. Do you see what this message is even to us today? The church must protect her purity. Let

me bring it closer to home: throughout history political systems have used religion, and used religious bodies to further their political causes. You only need to turn your news on, maybe tonight, and see the presidential race in America - it's wonderful, you don't need to have any gospel campaigns any more, just have a presidential campaign and everybody gets converted to get elected! They all become Christians to get the born-again evangelical vote! They are using religion for their own ends. But the opposite of that is that at times religious groups have wrongly used politics to achieve their purpose - that is equally as wrong. I'm not saying Christians can't be involved in politics - you answer that question - I think it's very difficult to be, but one thing is sure: you can't Christianise politics. Someone put it well: 'The marriage of church and state is not a happy one. It has often spawned children that have created serious problems. When dictators are friendly with religion it is usually a sign that they want to make use of religious influence, and then destroy it' - just like the antichrist. He'll be friendly with religion, he'll use and abuse it, and then he'll destroy it. The church of Jesus Christ has been most influential in the world when it has maintained a separate position - in the world, not of the world. The church must protect her purity.

That's the message to the church, but there's a message to the individual Christian - and it's simply this: secondly, the Christian must beware of compromise with the world. Babylon, though it will be manifest in the tribulation period, is the epitome of everything in this world that is anti-God and anti-Christ. It is man's rebellion against God: religiously, economically, politically! Though, I grant you, it is tantalisingly attractive at times and intoxicating to the taste, we as believers in Christ must beware of its subtle influence. Listen to the apostle John as he writes in his epistle: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'. 'Hang in there!' is the message to the Christian. Don't compromise! Don't give in! It will be worth it.

Indeed, in verse 4 of chapter 18 there is a cry goes out: 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues'. Come out! Come out of religious Babylon! Come out of ungodly associations with political and economic Babylon! 'Come out, come out to Me!'. At the end of chapter 18, and indeed the beginning of chapter 19, there is a great song of praise where the prophets and the apostles, they cry praise to God and hallelujah. Now don't you think for one moment that God, or the host of heaven, is rejoicing over sinners being damned - that never happens. What is going on here is justice is being restored, righteousness is being established again, judgement is falling. Man's rebellion has ended - and all of us, surely, can say 'Hallelujah' to that. All false religion finished, false government finished, false economy finished - for Christ has come, and He will reign with a rod of righteousness. God will make His enemies the footstool of His feet.

Well, which kingdom are you in? Or should I say: which kingdom are you of? Babylon or the Lamb? The Lamb will have the victory, the Lamb will have all the glory. God willing, next week, we will look in chapter 19 at the return of Jesus Christ.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 18

"The Return Of Jesus Christ"

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Now we're going to turn to Revelation 19, and we're looking tonight at 'The Return of Jesus Christ'. We're going to read the whole chapter together, beginning at verse 1 - chapter 19:

"After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh".

'How will it all end?', is a question that has been key throughout the history of humankind. Of course, there is great debate as to where we all came from, there is dispute, philosophising,

about why we are here, what is the purpose of our lives? But of course, we've got here somehow, we're here for a reason - whatever it is - but perhaps the greatest question of all is: how will it all end? Chapters 19 and 20 really give to us those events that will take place before God wraps up human history according to His will, and ushers in a new heaven and a new earth. We'll be taking time in two weeks, three weeks skipping the holiday, to look at that great event when there will be seven new things that the Lord will bring into being.

But our Lord Jesus Christ, as we see in chapter 19, is going to return again - and His return will combine all the hopes and dreams of billions of people who have put their faith in God, from the first man Adam until the tribulation saints that we have seen already in the book of Revelation. This chapter 19, the events encapsulated within it, will be the most monumental event in human history to date. The Lord Jesus Christ returns to this earth and, as we have read, He will return in great power and glory to set up His kingdom - and as we will see in our next study in chapter 20, that kingdom will last for 1000 years.

Now, from a prophetic standpoint, this chapter is the culmination of all prophetic Scripture. Take them all in the Old and New Testament, and this is a great climax. There are approximately 8 times more prophecies concerning this second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture than there were regarding His first coming to Bethlehem's manger. There are about 325 prophecies concerning this event in chapter 19 of Revelation that guarantee that it will take place, and that will usher in the most ideal conditions the earth has ever seen since the garden of Eden.

So we have come this far, and if you're following in your chart, you will see that we have effectively passed through the seven years of tribulation - we've seen seven seals, seven trumpet judgements, seven key figures in the book, seven bowl judgements, seven dooms on spiritual and commercial Babylon - and the return of Christ is where we are tonight, that will end that seven-year tribulation period and usher in the new millennial age. So our chapter tonight begins in verse 1 with a hallelujah chorus, in effect - 'Hallelujah', which of course means 'Praise the Lord'.

It's interesting to note that this is the only time you find 'Hallelujah' in the whole of the New Testament, in this chapter. Now I don't want to build too much on that, but save to say that the reason for it - heaven's hallelujah chorus - is because the great whore of chapter 17, Mystery Babylon, has been destroyed. Now you remember that it wasn't destroyed directly by God's hand, though it was through God's sovereign direction, destroyed through the beast, the antichrist. You remember this great harlot rode the back of the beast, but that beast turned upon her, we believe round about the halfway period of the tribulation, and that will allow the beast to appoint a false prophet as the great religious leader; and the people who have taken the mark of the beast will begin to follow him. Also we saw in chapter 18 the destruction of commercial Babylon, which may literally be a revived city of Babylon in a future day - we can't be sure of that, but it might be - and this judgement, this second doom upon commercial Babylon may take place at a different time. Whatever is the case, heaven is rejoicing!

Now please, as I said last week, they are not rejoicing over souls that are being condemned to eternal judgement. God does not delight in the death of the wicked. But they are rejoicing and praising God that His justice is being meted out against rebellious mankind. In verse 6 we read: 'And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth', or literally that could read 'The Lord omnipotent has begun to reign'. Now of course,

that doesn't mean that He hasn't been reigning at some time in human history - but what the inference is is that: God has allowed Satan and man to have his hour; He has allowed, with certain restraints of course, Satan and man to do his will; but now the time has come when God omnipotent shall reign and show His reign to all the universe.

Of course Revelation, as we saw right at the very beginning of our study, is the book of the throne - 'throne' is mentioned more than any word in this particular book. Here we see that God in His sovereignty, who has allowed Satan and satanic forces and all mankind to have his way, is now having His will done on earth as it is in heaven. During the time John was on the Isle of Patmos and given this vision, Domitian was the Emperor of Rome. One of his assumed titles was 'Lord and God'. Four times at the beginning of this chapter, indeed in the first six verses, we find this word 'Alleluia', 'Praise the Lord Jehovah', to declare that truly only Jehovah is worthy of our worship and our praise - and He shall reign through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, and the setting up of His kingdom.

But before we come to John's depiction from this vision given by the Spirit in this chapter, there is an event that is given to us first in the chapter, and it appears that this must happen before our Lord comes. It is called the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb', and we find it in verses 7 to 10. Now let us just define who is who in this account. The bride here is obviously the church of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11 verse 2, Paul the apostle said to the Corinthians: 'For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you', or betrothed you, 'to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ'. Now we had, in chapter 17, a harlot; we had in chapter 12 a woman which was the wife of Jehovah, Israel; but here we have the bride. The bride of Christ is the church - Ephesians 5 bears that out: husbands should love their wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.

The Bridegroom here, of course, obviously then is the Lord Jesus Himself. You remember John the Baptist in John 3:39 declared the Lord Jesus to be the Bridegroom, and of course he was the friend of the Bridegroom, or we would call him the 'best man'. Now at the wedding, as we all know, it is customary to focus our attention on the bride - but here in verse 7 we see that it is the Groom that receives all the honour: 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him'. Now the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is one of the reasons why we believe that the rapture of the church is a separate and distinct event from what we find here later on in this chapter 19 - the second coming, or the return of our Lord Jesus. It's not the only reason, as we will see in a moment or two. Something that will precede the Marriage Supper is the 'bema', spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10, Paul said that we as believers would stand before the judgement seat of Christ, and our works would be judged. Those things that remained would be accredited to us in reward, and the wood, hay and stubble would be burnt up; and we would get into heaven just by the skin of our teeth, so to speak, because our souls are saved but we have perhaps nothing to offer to the Lord.

Now that has to take place before the Marriage Supper, because at the Marriage Supper the church, as we see from verses 7 to 10, is clothed, prepared to be wed to the Lord Jesus in order to return with Him to the earth. Verse 8, the second half, says that they were arrayed - the church, the bride - in 'fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints'. Now that's literally translated: 'righteous acts of the saints'. So the saints are being arrayed, having been rewarded at the judgement seat of Christ, with their righteous acts, according to what they have done on the earth for Jesus Christ. Now there is a warning for us all, and an incentive to be up and doing while it is yet day. But what I need you to see tonight is that this judgement seat and clothing and marriage is in preparation for the bride accompanying Jesus Christ when He returns to the earth.

We will see in a moment or two that He returns with His saints. Now if that is the case, and it seems to be from this passage and many others, it follows that the church must already be in heaven, completed. That's why, throughout this series, we have made a distinction between tribulation saints, believing Jews, the 144,000, and the church. Now if this is correct, there is an interval needed before the return of Christ - what we're looking at here tonight - so that there is a judgement seat, and there is a Marriage Supper, there is an interval needed for this to happen. Of course, the interval is possible - as you look at this chart - because of the rapture of the church. The church will be raptured, we believe, before this seven-year tribulation period. These things, in heaven, will take place - the Bema, the Marriage Supper - while the seven years of tribulation are going on down here on the earth. So we will be judged at the bema, and prepared and clothed for the Marriage Supper, to return with our Lord Jesus Christ in His second advent. So the bride, the church, we arrive in heaven at the rapture. We are judged at the judgement seat, and now the church is arrayed in radiant glory, 'made herself ready' - and there is the emphasis on what we do down here for Christ in the Spirit - 'made herself ready' to return with the Lord.

Now it's hard for us, at times, to understand all of this because we have inherited a Western culture, and the Jewish culture of the day - as far as weddings went - was quite unlike weddings here in 21st-century Western society. First of all, there was a betrothal - now that is equivalent, I suppose in a sense, to our engagement - but the betrothal was usually made by the parents of the couple, prospective bride and groom, when they were very young. That engagement was binding - that's the difference between our engagement and their betrothal: it could not be broken, only by a form of divorce, and that was only on the grounds of unfaithfulness during that engagement period. Now when the public ceremony was to be enacted, their betrothal period had ended and it was coming to the marriage, the groom would go to the bride's house - that's important - the groom would go to the bride's house, and there he would claim his bride, take her from that house for himself, and bring her to the wedding supper that would take place in his house, or his father's house...where all the celebrants, the guests, would join the happy couple; and that feast could last as long as a week.

Now, I hope you begin to see the similarities, because the church of Jesus Christ - as Paul has already told us from 2 Corinthians 11 as we read it - is engaged, betrothed to Christ. We, like that young prospective bride and groom, we love One whom we have never seen. Now this is exactly what the Lord Jesus was talking about when He spoke to His disciples in John chapter 14 - to understand this, I want us to look at it. Turn with me to this great chapter, you probably could quote it from memory - there's not enough pages turning, come on keep with me! It's important that you see this. The Lord Jesus, of course, before He goes to the cross, is speaking to His disciples and says in verse 1: 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'.

The Lord Jesus is telling His disciples that He will return, He will take them as His bride to His Father's house. Do you see it? It's based on the custom of the day. Now, when we turn to 1 Thessalonians 4 - do that - we come to a fundamental passage of Scripture concerning the doctrine of the rapture, and we find that this portion is identical in literary structure to John

14. I'll show you what we mean in a moment, but let's read it - verse 13 of 1 Thessalonians 4: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words'.

Those two passages that we have just read are speaking about the same event. Now maybe you have never seen this before - keep 1 Thessalonians 4 open please, because you probably know John 14 from memory. 'Let not your heart be troubled', Jesus told them in John 14; Paul says 'Ye sorrow not as others without hope'. 'Ye believe', the Lord said; verse 14 'If we believe'. Verse 1 'If ye believe in God', John 14, 'believe also in me'; verse 14 of 1 Thessalonians 'if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God' - Jesus and God. 'If it were not so', the Lord said, 'I would have told you'; verse 15 'We say unto you'. Verse 3 'I will come again'; verse 15 'We which are alive and remain unto the coming', there's the coming, 'of the Lord'. Verse 3 of John 14, 'If I come again, I will receive you'; verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up' - receiving. John 14 verse 3, 'I will receive you to myself'; verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4 'We will be caught up to meet the Lord'. 'To be where I am', the Lord said in verse 3 of John 14; verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4 'We will be ever with the Lord'.

I hope you see that the literary structure is identical, though the words are not exactly the same. We see that this is the same event that is being spoken of by the apostle Paul, that our Lord shared with the disciples in John 14. Now I have been asked over these Monday evenings about the distinction between the rapture of the church and the second coming of our Lord, and I have to say to you that there is no single Bible verse that teaches explicitly and comprehensively the rapture of the church. But if you look at this chart, you will see that there are examples of raptures in the Bible right from the beginning, after creation and the fall: Enoch in Genesis chapter 5 was taken to heaven without dying, effectively he was raptured. After the Exodus we have Elijah, and he was taken to heaven, you remember, in a chariot of fire without dying - 2 Kings 2. Now Isaiah, in Isaiah 6, received a vision of the throne of God - and whilst it wasn't a true rapture, it may have been, in effect, a rapture - although, of course, he came to again and lived his life and died on the earth. After the Old Testament period, there is our Lord Jesus Christ, and Acts 1 talks of His ascension; and indeed in Revelation 12, you remember this babe that was born of the woman with the twelve stars round her head, the dragon desired to devour the child, and the child was taken up into heaven - an ascension, but the ascension was effectively a rapture: taken up to glory.

Of course Philip, in Acts chapter 8, after leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, he was 'snatched away' - it's effectively a rapture. Paul the apostle, in 2 Corinthians 12, was taken up into the third heaven - and again it isn't technically a rapture, although he was taken into heaven probably in his spirit - whilst it was visionary, nevertheless it gives us this idea. John had a similar experience, you remember after the church age is outlined for us in chapters 2 and 3, in chapter 4, as he's about to see the things that are going to take place, he is taken up - and many believe he is a representative of the church there - at the beginning of the chapter.

Then we have the rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4, and we have seen already that after the church is taken to the Father's house, during the tribulation period in Revelation 11 there are two witnesses that are slain, and they are raised to life again, but they are raptured - they're taken up to glory. Now, though I've already said that there is not one single Bible verse that teaches explicitly and comprehensively on the rapture, there are many other doctrines in the Bible that don't have a single verse or a single passage that explicitly or comprehensively explain them. I can give you examples of that: the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, everything concerning His personhood as both God and man, cannot be encapsulated into one verse, we need the whole gamut of the New Testament for that. The doctrine of the Trinity: you may get aspects of the Trinity doctrine from one verse or one passage, but we need the whole of the Bible to really come to terms with a systematic conclusion - and that's how we come to many of our doctrines in New Testament Scriptures. We harmonise the word of God and its various facets and aspects, and we come up with a systematic, literal interpretation of the New Testament to get our doctrine.

Now, when you do that with regards to Scripture that relates to the second coming, you begin to see that there is a definite distinct separateness with this event which we call the rapture. I think it becomes clearer that it happens before the seven-year tribulation period, and is distinct from this event we are about to look at tonight in Revelation 19. Let me show how it is distinct. If you look at the screen, we will compare the two. The rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that Christ comes to the air. In Zechariah 14 and other passages concerning the second coming of Christ in judgement, He comes to the earth. The second difference: in the rapture He comes for His saints - we've seen that from 1 Thessalonians 4 - in the coming in judgement He comes with His saints, and we will see that again in 1 Thessalonians 3, Jude 14, but we see it in this chapter 19 of Revelation. The rapture from the passage 1 Corinthians 15 - which, incidentally, is also about the rapture - speaks of a 'translation of the saints', we will be changed as believers. But passages to do with the second coming in judgement speak nothing about a translation or a change of believers. Fourthly, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says concerning the rapture that he was speaking of a 'mystery'. Now a mystery in the Bible is something that had not been revealed until now, that point of revelation. So what he is saying is that the Old Testament doesn't know anything about a rapture - some people try to get it out of it, but it's not there - but the second coming in judgement is something that is right throughout many Old Testament prophecies.

Another four: the rapture is never said to be preceded by signs in heaven, it could happen at any time; but the second coming of Christ in judgement is heralded by celestial disturbances, Matthew 24:29 and 30. The rapture is presented as a time of blessing, therefore Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 'Comfort one another with these words'; but the emphasis on His second advent is judgement. Seventh: the rapture takes place in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, 1 Corinthians 15:52 - which is 1/50th of a second - but the second coming of Christ in judgement is visible worldwide, and it is ongoing as we will see tonight. Eighth and finally: the rapture involves the church primarily - John 14, 1 Corinthians 15 that we've looked at, 1 Thessalonians 4 - but Israel and the Gentile nations are primarily the emphasis of the second coming of Christ and what leads up to it. That's why, in chapter 6 through to 19 of Revelation, the church has not been mentioned once, but Israel on the earth and tribulation saints.

Now there are other reasons why we believe there's a difference between the rapture of the church before the tribulation and the second coming of Christ at the end of the seven years. We've already mentioned a time interval needs to be there for the bema judgement and the Marriage Supper, but also - as the fifth difference on the screen says - there is never said to be any signs preceding the rapture, any heavenly signs. You see, the New Testament teaches

the imminence of the return of the Lord Jesus for the believer. Now 'imminence' means that it could happen at any time, there is nothing that needs to precede it. That's why we're taught, as believers, concerning the Lord's return: to look, to watch, and to wait. Philippians 3:20: 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. 1 Thessalonians 1:10: 'To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come'. Titus 2:13, and also Hebrews 9:28 - we don't have time to read - 1 Peter 1:13, Jude 21.

Now what's my point? Well, if antichrist, the abomination of desolation in the Temple - a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem - or the tribulation must occur, then the command to watch, to wait, and to believers having a blessed hope in being snatched away, doesn't make sense...if we are looking for antichrist rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Bible tells us to look for Him, that is our blessed hope. So there is the imminence of the rapture as opposed to the second advent. Then there is the nature of the tribulation, we have looked these weeks at how the tribulation is a seven-year period of judgement, it's the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy and it is primarily a time of preparation, restoration and regeneration for Israel, the nation of Israel. You can read about that in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel - the church is never mentioned as participating in Israel's time of trouble, which includes the great tribulation, the day of the Lord, the wrath of God. Would it not be strange if the church was in Daniel's 70th week, when it has not featured in the 69 weeks up to that week that has all been to do with the history, prophetic history, of Israel?

Another reason: the nature of the church. It is a mystery as well. The church cannot be found in the Old Testament - of course, the things that were written aforetime are written for our learning, and there is allusion to how the gospel would bless other nations - but the mystery of the church, Jew and Gentile being united in the body of Christ, is not found there. That's why the Old Testament passages concerning the second coming of the Lord in judgement don't mention the church, because it doesn't relate to it. Then there is the work of the Holy Spirit, 2 Thessalonians 2 discusses the man of lawlessness - the man of lawlessness is the antichrist. Second Thessalonians 2 says that he is being held back by a restrainer. The restrainer of evil in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, it speaks of it like this: 'Now you know what is restraining that he', the antichrist, 'may be revealed in his own time'. So therefore something has to be removed before the antichrist can come on the scene, and before the tribulation can effectively start. What is that? It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the sense in which He is in the body of Christ, the church.

Now the Holy Spirit won't be completely removed, of course He won't: people will be being saved, a great work will be done - but as He came at Pentecost to the church, in that sense the church will be removed. But if you want something else, turn to Revelation 3 - you may or may not remember the church at Philadelphia, Revelation 3 and verse 10 - and my time is very quickly running away, bear with me. Remember that these seven letters have application to all churches down through all ages, and this particular verse has to do with us because the church at Philadelphia died before the Lord Jesus came: 'Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee' - keep them - 'from the hour of temptation', or the hour of trial, 'which shall come upon all the world, to try', test, 'them that dwell upon the earth'. Now, what more do we need to show us that there is this distinction?

So we turn our attention to the return of Jesus Christ, as opposed to the rapture of the church - and here in chapter 19 of Revelation we have the most graphic description of the second advent of our Lord. First of all John has described to him the Conqueror, and then His conquest. Let us read these verses, verses 11 to 16: 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a

white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS'.

In verse 11, you will note that the rider is seated on a white horse. Now in chapter 6 and verse 2 we saw a rider on a white horse, but that was the false Christ, the antichrist - but here we have the true. You notice He is coming from the air to the earth, He is not coming in the air to take His people home, as we have seen from 1 Thessalonians 4. He is coming to the earth with His people to conquer His enemies, and to establish His kingdom. His name is given: 'Faithful and True' - that is used previously of Him in chapter 1 and chapter 3. He is true to His own character, He is faithful to His own promises. Now remember: the people that are receiving this original letter of the book of Revelation are suffering saints, and they need to be reminded that God is faithful, He will not desert you, His promises are true.

I don't know where you are tonight, but maybe you need to hear that message as well. In the midst of your trial, your personal tribulation, you need to remember: God is faithful, He will not desert you, His promises are true - and where you are, He can come to rescue you just as He will come to rescue those remnant Jews in His second return. Verse 12 shows us His eyes, look into them: they were as a flame of fire. That shows that He is righteous to judge - at last, a righteous Judge who will wage just and right war upon evil! On His head are many crowns. The word used for 'crown' there is 'diadems', as opposed to 'stephanos' - that is the victory crown, but here He is wearing 'diadems' which are royal crowns. He has a right to rule, to conquer and to reign!

'The head that once was crowned with thorns,
Is crowned with glory now.
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow'.

It is said in verse 12 that He has a name written that no one knows. Now perhaps that is the same as the new name that will be written on the overcomers in chapter 2 and chapter 3. It's interesting when you ponder this for a moment or two: a name that no man knows. That could apply in two ways: it might be speaking to us of the mysteries that are connected with the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we in our human frailty will never ever be able to plumb the depths of. We can be very adept in our theology and our Christology, but at the end of the day there are depths of our Lord Jesus that will never be plumbed. Yet what it might also be indicating to us is the fact that there are new things that we cannot know now about our Lord, but we will learn then. One thing is for sure, even if this isn't referring to it, is that we will spend all of eternity getting to know Him deeper! Won't that be something else?

In verse 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped with blood. Now please note that this is not His own blood, this is the blood of His enemies whom He tramples - look at verse 15 - in the winepress of the wrath of God. Now remember I told you a week or two ago how little children in this culture would get into the store where the grapes were, and stamp on them, and have a great old time getting the blood out of the grape. This is what's going on here: it is judgement, and

it's the blood of His enemies. Now can I remind you, please, where we last read of the winepress of the wrath of God. Turn with me to chapter 14 and verse 20, in verse 19: 'And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs'. You remember that that related to the campaign of Armageddon. You remember when we looked at that, we said that this campaign of several battles would usher in the second coming of our Lord Jesus. You remember that verse taught us, chapter 14 verse 20, that that series of battles will encompass the length of the whole land of Israel, 1600 furlongs - that was about 184 miles - and that is the approximate distance from Meggido up in the North, where we get the name Armageddon, right down to Edom in the South.

Now that war, we are told, will start when the nations of the world assemble at Meggido there in the North. You remember I showed you a photograph of that great plain of Meggido - it's 14 miles wide and 20 miles long - and there the armies of the world gather to execute antichrist's solution on the Jewish problem. He wants to wipe out the Jews in order to prevent the return of our Lord Jesus. Now let me cast your mind back in chapter 16, when the sixth bowl was opened in verses 12 and 15. You remember we saw that the river Euphrates was going to be dried up, so that the Kings of the Orient, the East, should come to the battle. All these armies are joining together, as we saw in chapter 12, to annihilate the Jews. They move from Meggido, collectively together, down to Jerusalem, and they destroy many Jewish people - but there has been a remnant, remember it? In chapter 12 verse 14, look back at it: 'And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent'. Now that's half of the tribulation period - God has a remnant, and when antichrist and his armies come to Israel, they destroy what's there, Jerusalem falls, but there is a remnant that he still seeks.

So he comes to the place where they are hidden, and at that point he surrounds that little remnant of Jewish people. When the armies of the world are surrounding them, they are regenerated and they put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, their true Messiah whom they missed - and at that point, the Bible says, the Lord Jesus returns: Micah 2, Isaiah 34. But where does He return to? We've seen this before, but I need to remind you: He returns to where that remnant are. We believe that prophetic Scripture indicates that that is a place called Bozrah, it might well be modern day Petra which is an ancient city just down here in today's Jordan - ancient Edom. It is a city that is hewn out of the rock, it can only be gotten to through a crevice in the rock, a gorge, and you can only get there on foot. There's a picture of it: the armies will surround that place, Jeremiah 49 talks about it, Zechariah 12 says those Jews will call on the Lord, the Lord will return and He will judge the Jew's enemies there - that's where the blood on His garment comes from.

Isaiah 63 tells us specifically, look at it on the screen or in your Bible, 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment'. Then the Lord will defeat His enemies - now look at the progress, I want you to get this because I think a lot of believers don't understand this. I'm not being dogmatic - but this is, putting all the scriptures together, what we come up

with: the gathering of the armies of antichrist at Meggido. Now some believe that he will go from there to destroy commercial Babylon, that will be in Iraq, but that is disputable. He will travel then from Meggido, if he returns from Babylon, to Jerusalem to destroy the Jews, there will be the fall of Jerusalem. Then the armies of antichrist will pursue the remnant to Bozrah. Israel in Bozrah will be regenerated, all Israel will be saved - all that's left of them - and then the second coming of Christ to there. He will push the enemies back into the Valley of Jehoshaphat - that's what the prophet Joel tells us about - and there there will be the end of the fighting in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and our Lord Jesus will take His victory ascent from there up to the Mount of Olives where He will set up His earthly kingdom.

Now this is the greatest war that history will ever see, but I'm going to tell you something tonight: though it has been described as the greatest war ever, it's not really a war at all - do you know why that is? Well, look at verse 13, chapter 19 again, verse 13, the Lord is given a name: 'The Word of God'. In verse 15, 'Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron'. Now 'the Word', 'the logos', is a favourite term of John - he's the only one who uses it in his gospel and in his epistles. A 'word', for us, is an expression of thought; and for God 'the Word' is the expression of His mind and heart, the Lord Jesus has declared the Father to us - and Christ is now 'the Word' coming to execute God's will upon this world.

So imagine it: He was in the beginning with God, and was God, without Him nothing is made that has been made. He became flesh and dwelt among us, the One who was the Word and is the Word, who created the worlds with a word, will defeat the armies of the world with a word - imagine it! There's no warfare at all, really - and, as far as you're concerned, verse 14, look at what you'll be wearing: 'The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean'. Now, soldiers, have you ever seen one in a white outfit or uniform? Maybe the Marines, but that's when they're all dolled up for a dance or something - but when they go to war they're in camouflage, aren't they? But here there is no camouflage, why? This Commander-In-Chief of the heavenly forces is clothing His armies in white, it's a practice unheard of in all military warfare and history, because no member of this army will do battle! The battle will be carried out by the spoken word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself - and it will be done!

In verse 16 this is indicated again, He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name. Now, before we read that name, the thigh is where the ancient warrior had his sword - isn't that right? But there's no sword on His thigh, the sword is out of His mouth, the spoken word - Christ's sword will be what He says, imagine it! The Word of God who called this world into being, all that we know in creation, will call every human leader and the whole of the world's armies into subjection to Him. What He is and always has been will become, in man's experience, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS'. King above all kings, and Lord above all lords - as Zechariah put it in 14 and 9: 'The LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one'.

In verse 17 of chapter 19, and verse 18, look at it - there's an angel standing in the sun, and he cries out with a loud voice 'to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great'. So great will the slaughter be at Armageddon that an angel will call together the fowls of heaven to eat the flesh of those who have fallen in battle. Remember what chapter 14 verse 20 said? Do you remember? For that 180 miles or so, the blood will flow like a river, four feet or so in

depth. Now the battle of Armageddon is called in chapter 16 'the battle of the great day of God Almighty', but here this massacre is called 'the great supper of God' - all the carrion of the heavens coming to feed upon the carnage.

Picture the scene: people of every creed, class, colour in society - but that's not where it ends, thank God that's not where it ends. Verses 19 and 20: 'I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse', there will be a last-ditch attempt somewhere along the way here to get at the Lord Jesus Christ as He comes, 'And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone'. Antichrist and the false prophet will receive justice - 2 Thessalonians 2:8: 'The Lord shall consume that one with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming'.

In our next study, we will see that the same will happen to Satan, in chapter 20. Now listen, as I close: this started with an 'Alleluia', and for us it should end with an 'Alleluia' - all glory be to Jesus, the Lord and Christ, because this great event is going to usher in a millennial reign of glory. We will look at that next time in chapter 20, but in conclusion I want you to see one verse that we missed - it's verse 10, look at it. When John saw the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, he is so overwhelmed that he falls at the feet of an angel: 'I fell at his feet to worship him'. Now Colossians and the rest of the Bible tell us that it is forbidden to worship an angel, and the angel rebukes him, and tells him: 'Look, worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' - that should be our reaction to all that we have studied in this book, and what we have studied tonight. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy - that is the true purpose of prophecy: to bear testimony to the person and the work of our Lord. It's the Revelation of Jesus Christ, after all, isn't it?

It was C. C. Ryrie who said: 'Prophecy is designed to unfold the loveliness of Jesus'. Have you seen that tonight? Have you seen that throughout this series? For if you haven't, I have failed to do my job - but how can we not but worship Him, when we consider - think of it believer! - we will not be on earth waiting for all this, we will be in the Conqueror's train sharing in this victory! As the poet put it:

'Earth, what sorrows lie before thee,
Unlike it in the shadows past;
The sharpest throes that ever tore thee,
Though the briefest and the last!

I see the shadows of the sunset;
I see the dread avenger's form;
I see the Armageddon onset,
But I shall be above the storm.
There comes the mourning and the sighing,
There comes the heart tear's heavy fall,

The thousand agonies of dying -
But I shall be above them all!'

Can you not say 'Hallelujah'? You know, this is the only time we find 'Alleluia' in the whole of the New Testament - somebody said to me recently: 'We don't hear too many 'Hallelujahs' at

the meeting these days, we could do with a few more'. Should we not shout 'Hallelujah', for the Lord God omnipotent will begin to reign?

Father, we thank You that we have a confidence that the Lord Jesus is coming again. Whilst we confess to You that we don't attempt to give the impression that we have everything worked out, we're trying to be honest with Your word - and, Lord, forgive us where we have failed and misunderstood. Yet we thank You for the clarity that we have a blessed hope to look for as Your people. We thank You also that this world, eventually, will be put right; and Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth it's successive journeys run, His kingdom will stretch from shore to shore, till moon shall wax and wane no more. What a day that will be, Lord, and we look forward to it - even so, come Lord Jesus - but in the meantime: let us be up and doing, Lord. Let us be motivated for the Master, for at any time You could call us to Yourself and our work here would be ended and over, our opportunity to witness and serve You and win the lost. Lord, may many believe before it's too late, for we ask these things and Your blessing upon us until we meet again in this place, in that name of the One who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords - Jesus Christ, the Soon Coming King. Amen.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 19

"The Millennial Reign Of Christ"

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Let's turn to Revelation chapter 20 please, Revelation 20 verse 1: *"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades, "delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire".*

Now if you have your chart with you that we've been following throughout these weeks, you will see where we have come from - approximately 19 Monday nights ago, inclusive of this evening. We started off with a vision that John had, and then we looked at the messages to the seven churches. Then John has another heavenly vision of the Creator God, and then the Lamb who has alone the right, who is worthy to receive the book of human history from the Father and open it, and determine His will upon all of humanity. Then we looked at what we have called 'the tribulation period', seven years of judgements comprising of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. We also looked at the seven key figures, the seven dooms on Babylon, and in our last study we looked in chapter 19 at the return of our Lord Jesus. That brings us now to chapter 20, the millennial kingdom - as you can see, we're almost at the end of the book, and the end of the apocalypse that John has been given.

Now the expression 'millennium' - you may not know this - is really a combination of two

Latin words, 'mille' which means 1000, and 'annum' which of course means a year. It speaks of this 1000 year period that John has told us of in this chapter 20. Now, of course, if you've been a Christian any length of time you will know that there is a divergence of opinion regarding the millennium as John speaks of it here in Revelation 20. There, throughout church history, have really been three major views held concerning what is effectively the kingdom of God, the millennium.

Now, before we delve into an explanation of those, and even a critique of them, you might be sitting here thinking: 'Well, does all this really matter?'. Well, let me say categorically first of all: as it relates to salvation, it doesn't matter whatsoever what you believe concerning the millennium. You don't need to believe in a millennium, or not believe in a millennium, to be saved - but of course you do need to believe that the Lord is coming back again to be considered a Christian. Whilst it may not be a grounds of your salvation, if you name the name of Christ you have to really believe that, as He said He would come again, He will come again.

Does it really matter regarding spirituality, what you believe concerning the millennium? Well, of course, no it does not. I personally believe that perhaps the most blessed period of modern church history was a period when most Christians were post-millennial. Does it matter for fellowship among believers? Well, I believe from God's word that it is clear that it doesn't matter. We ought to be able to have fellowship with those who have a differing view regarding the millennium, the thousand years - because it is not a fundamental of Christian doctrine. The fundamental of Christian doctrine regarding the teaching on end times is that Jesus Christ is coming again. We must have fellowship on those grounds, whilst we may differ on the secondary issues regarding how and when He will come.

Now this is the only quote from Augustine tonight that I will agree with, but it was he who said: 'On essentials unity, nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity' - and it would be good to remember that tonight. I remember hearing the story of the long-lost cousin Joshua. Joshua had been away for a long time, but word had got home that he was going to return. His brother Johnny thought he was going to come by car, and Joe thought he was going to come by plane, and Jimmy said he was going to come by boat - and it wasn't long before they all got into a fight. In the midst of the brawl, the doorbell rang and Joshua had arrived. They had lost the joy of anticipating his return because they were all fighting about how he was going to get there. Let's not do that. Let's rejoice in the fact that, if we are Christians, New Testament believers, we believe that the Lord is coming again.

We must not allow - though we have gone into great detail in this series, and I'm sure several of you have disagreed on many things - we must not allow the issues surrounding Christ's return to divert our attention from the great personality involved. Remember: this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. As I quoted at the beginning of our series:

'If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him'

...we've missed the point. But, having said all that, if we conclude that it doesn't matter at all what we believe about the millennial reign of Christ - well, we've made a great error. It doesn't matter in relation to our salvation, it doesn't matter in relation to our spirituality, or Christian maturity, it shouldn't matter for fellowship - but there are two things I want you to consider where it does matter. First of all, I think it matters regarding church teaching. I pose the question: how can an individual assembly teach the truth of the second coming of Jesus

Christ if they don't follow a certain line as regards the millennial reign of Christ? I think that's the reason why it's so seldom taught and preached from pulpits in our land: because no one wants to commit themselves to a particular view of eschatology and the study of end things.

But there's another second, and perhaps more important, reason why it does matter: because often the particular type of interpretation that you use related to prophecy affects how you interpret other portions within the Scriptures. We will see that as we go through our study tonight. So let's say categorically that this issue is not all-important, but it is important - and hopefully that will come to be obvious as we travel through.

Now let's look at the millennium first of all, as John gives it to us in verses 1 through to 9. Now clearly John tells us of this period of 1000 years that is to come upon the earth. Let's do a comparison of the views that have been prevalent in Christianity down through our history. The first I want you to consider is a-millennialism. Now the prefix 'a-' before 'millennialism' simply means 'no' millennium. It doesn't mean these people don't believe in a millennium as such, but rather they don't believe it will be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth - so it means 'no thousand years'. This belief espouses that the future kingdom foretold in Daniel 2, Daniel 7 and other portions of the Old Testament in particular, is to be understood spiritually. It is spiritual in nature, and they believe it consists either of the church of Jesus Christ in this particular New Testament era, or Christ's present rule from heaven over the hearts of His believing people. So, as He is at the right hand of God now in heaven, He is having sway on the earth through the church and through individual believers.

There are other a-millennialists who believe that this thousand years is speaking of the eternal state, which we will deal with next week in chapters 21 and 22. So, along with what I've already said, a-millennialists also believe that when Christ returns to the earth there will be a general resurrection when all the dead will be raised, there will be a general judgement when everyone - saints and sinners alike - will be judged at the one time, and the end of this present earth will take place, and then there will be immediate beginning of a new future heaven and earth - the eternal state. Really a-millennialism, essentially, is a spiritualisation of prophetic Scripture.

The second most prevalent view throughout Christian history regarding the millennial reign is 'post-millennialism'. Now 'post' means 'after', of course, and so this belief is that the return of Christ will be after the thousand years. Now they do believe in a literal kingdom of God on earth, but they don't believe that this will be established in a supernatural intervention at the second advent of Jesus Christ, but rather it will come into being through human effort - such as man's expanding knowledge, and particularly the increasing influence of the church of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God today on the earth. Therefore, in post-millennialism, it is the church that chiefly has the responsibility of bringing Christ's rule worldwide through the preaching of the gospel, that people would own Him as King and bow the knee. When everybody gets persuaded of that, or at least a great majority of humanity gets persuaded of that, the crowning occasion will come of the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and that golden age will be crowned with His return.

The third prevalent view - and this is what we espouse to here in the Iron Hall - is pre-millennialism, and 'pre-' of course, just as 'post' means 'after', 'pre-' means 'before'. This is the view that Christ will return to the earth before the thousand year reign, or the kingdom of God on the earth, and He will return to the earth with the purpose of establishing His kingdom on earth. It takes a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, and indeed of all the passages, Old and New Testament, that relate to this time period and event. It will last 1000 literal years on

this literal earth - a literal, political kingdom with Christ ruling with a rod of iron worldwide as King, together with His saints. Therefore pre-millennialists see this church era that we're living in now as separate and distinct from a work that God is doing among His ancient covenant people Israel.

Now let's do an evaluation of these views very swiftly - and I haven't got time to go into it all. I have done this on occasions, but I think it's worthy of entering into tonight - I haven't done it as yet, except a little bit in introduction in our very first study. Let's look at history, as to how it evaluates these particular understandings of the millennium. Now many Christian and church historians have declared that pre-millennialism was the first view of the church, and it was indeed the predominant view among orthodox believers for the first three centuries. Now some would dispute this, but there are several well-respected scholars - one J.N.D. Kelly, whose writings you would study if you did A-Level Religious Studies, and even if you did Church History Studies at University. He is acknowledged internationally as an authority in patristic Christian thought, that's the early church fathers, and he is typical of the scholarly opinion when he says, I quote: 'The great theologians who followed the Apologists, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism'. This is what he goes on to say, and this is what you need to note: 'They are all exponents of millenarianism'. In other words, they all believed that Christ would come to reign for a thousand years on the earth - and you can find those words that he spoke, that is J.N.D. Kelly, in his book 'Early Christian Doctrines'.

So many historians, respected historians, have the view that pre-millennialism was not contradicted by a single orthodox church father until around the beginning of the third century. To name a few during the first century: Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp were pre-millennial. Incidentally, Polycarp was a disciple of John the apostle, who give us the Apocalypse. In the second century: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus were pre-millennial - and Irenaeus, incidentally, was under the tutelage of Polycarp, who was tutored by the apostle John - and Irenaeus warned against the allegorising, the spiritualising, of Old Testament kingdom prophecies and applying them to other things. Tertullian was another in the second century, and there are several others in the third century.

Pre-millennialism began to be rejected around the third century, particularly by the Greek church - and there's a number of reasons for that, but one of the main ones was the ascendancy of Alexandrian theology. Now that developed in the Greek church, and effectively took the view that physical things were evil. Therefore the idea of a physical kingdom of Christ became somewhat undesirable to them, and so they spiritualised the idea. Origen was one who developed an allegorical interpretation regarding prophecy, and this allegorical understanding of prophecy was brought to the west by Jerome and also prompted the great saint Augustine to develop thought into what we now know essentially as a-millennialism. In his book 'The City of God' - some of you may have seen it, you can still buy it in the bookshops today - he became the first to teach the idea that the organised catholic (meaning 'universal') church is the messianic kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament, the millennium that began with the first coming of Jesus Christ.

Now that view, that a-millennial view, remained dominant until about the 17th century, right throughout the middle dark ages. All of a sudden, during the industrial and intellectual revolution, when a better age came to be born upon the Western society, a more optimistic view developed which was 'post-millennialism'. It became the major view. People thought things were getting so much better, and the gospel is spreading right across the world with new missionary endeavour, pioneer modern missionary efforts, that it must be soon - the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of the greatest revivals and awakenings, many great men of God espoused post-millennialism.

Where did it all end? Well, World War I and World War II, where things ceased to get better, but got drastically worse - and, generally speaking, post-millennialism was really let go and a-millennialism was adopted by many previous post-millennialists. Now whilst there was a revival of pre-millennialism around the 19th century, mainly due to the Brethren movement, a-millennialism has remained predominant in the church for a number of reasons - particularly because it is present in Protestant Covenant theology, it is present in Eastern Orthodox theology and Roman Catholic theology. What I want you to note is - and this is my opinion, you may disagree with it - a-millennialism and post-millennialism, rather than developing out of biblical understanding of prophetic Scripture, has chiefly evolved out of the influence of historical factors on the church of Jesus Christ.

We want to ask what the Scriptures teach clearly, and so that means that hermeneutic is important. Now, what is that big word? Well, it simply means your method of interpreting the Scriptures - that will relate to what interpretation you come to. Now many accuse pre-millennialism of wooden literalism, and I believe that's true on some occasions - but that's not what I'm speaking about, I'm speaking about a plain normal understanding of how we read the Scriptures: that is, literally, historically and grammatically. We take it to mean what it says, unless it's obvious it can't mean that. We take it in its historical setting, and we take it to say what it actually does write grammatically in the original language - and that ought to be our method of interpretation. Now some a-millennialists have admitted that if you follow this method of interpretation, you will come to a pre-millennial understanding of this portion of Scripture and all prophetic Scripture. Indeed, Floyd E. Hamilton, an a-millennialist himself, writes, and I quote: 'Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as premillennialists picture'.

So we believe that this is a consistent method of interpretation that we use with every other portion of Scripture from Genesis right to the end of the Bible, and we believe it is - with a few qualifications and caveats - the way, generally, we should understand prophetic Scripture. Now when we come to that conclusion and look at the Old Testament, we see that it teaches a literal earthly kingdom of Messiah. Daniel 2:44 reads: 'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever'. Isaiah 11 verse 9 says that this is a kingdom that will be on the earth, not in heaven: 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea'.

So the Old Testament teaches in many places that the Lord, the Messiah, shall reign King over all the earth. Take Zechariah 14, after it speaks of the Lord ascending the Mount of Olives at His second coming, we read in verse 9: 'And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one'. Verse 16 of Zechariah 14: 'And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles'. I think it is very clear, unless you spiritualise those verses of course - but where do we end the spiritualising of Scripture if that is our method of interpretation? It's dangerous, to say the least.

The Old Testament also teaches that peace will finally come to this planet during the

millennial kingdom. Isaiah 2 verse 4 reads: 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. There will be other changes to this earth during the millennial reign of Christ if we understand these prophecies literally in the Old Testament. There will be an environmental transformation in creation. Isaiah 35 teaches that the deserts will blossom, there will be great productiveness in places that presently are barren. One of the most famous prophecies concerning the millennium is the fact that predatory instincts of animals will cease, and all creation will live in harmony. Isaiah 11 and verse 6 reads: 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them'.

There will also be physical conditions that will change for the better for human beings during the millennium. People will live much longer, and many physical infirmities that we have known so well throughout human history will be eradicated. You can read about that in Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 33. Another thing that is spoken of in the Old Testament is that Israel, as a land, shall finally and for the first time in her history receive a permanent return to her homeland, in the sense in which Abraham was promised by God what has been called 'his grant', that the Promised Land would be from the Mediterranean Sea right through to effectively the River Euphrates. This is, of course, to be read in Amos 9: 'And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God'. You see, there were unconditional covenants given to the patriarchs concerning Israel's right to the land. If you want to study it in more detail, look at Ezekiel 37 and Ezekiel 38 - and I studied these several years ago with you when we went through the great prophecy of Ezekiel - and the details of this screen just before you, of this slide of the various segments that will be given to each of the tribes during that period are given to us. Now that has never ever happened in the history of God's ancient people Israel, and it will happen during the millennium.

Something else the Old Testament teaches us: Messiah's government shall centre in Jerusalem, and there shall no longer be violence in the land. We are so familiar with violence in Palestine, aren't we? Isaiah 60 verse 18 reads: 'Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise'. There will also be a great transformation spiritually during the millennial kingdom. Daniel 9 and Daniel 12, along with Ezekiel 40-48, teach of a millennial temple. Now we studied this before, so I don't want to go into too much detail, but this is a temple that never ever existed in the history of Israel. It's completely different in many respects to temples that have gone before it. There are several differences about this temple - get the recording that I did dealing with it - but one of the great differences is that there is no veil before the Holy of Holies, because the veil has been rent in twain, and our Lord allows us admittance into the very presence of God. Some of the celebrations that the Jews had in the Old Testament will not be celebrated in the rites and ceremonies of this millennial temple.

Something else that is significant in our understanding of the millennial kingdom is that this is not just something that's found in the Old Testament, but the idea, the concept of the kingdom is carried unchanged into the New Testament. Matthew's gospel is a prime example of this, where it sets before us the King of the Jews and gives us the genealogy of the King, the Lord Jesus. In Luke chapter 1 it is pronounced to Mary concerning Jesus who would be born of her: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob', that is, Israel, 'for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'.

The Lord Himself supports the idea of an earthly kingdom when He taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6 verse 10: 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'. Of course, you might remember that the disciples had an argument one day concerning who would be the greatest in the kingdom. The Lord Jesus, when answering them, promised that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the kingdom, Luke 22:28-30. Now, of course, we do believe that there is a kingdom in men's hearts - but the Lord Jesus clearly speaks, and the New Testament and Old Testament together clearly set forth, a literal, future consummation of the kingdom that's already in our hearts that will be upon this earth; and it is chiefly taught here in Revelation chapter 20.

So let us look at it verse by verse. In verse 1 we read: 'And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand'. Now, before the millennial reign can take place, Satan must be restrained. We read of this great angel with the great chain, and in verses 2 and 3: 'He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan', four titles for the devil there, 'and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a short time'. Now there is a sense in which Satan has been bound by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember the Lord Jesus taught about how the strong man had to be bound before his goods could be spoiled; and when our Lord came, in a sense He did that. When He died on the cross and through His glorious resurrection, in a sense Satan is now a defeated foe - but I think it's quite clear, not only from New Testament Scripture but from our own everyday experience, that Satan is on the loose. He is far from bound, as we read of it here in Revelation chapter 20. Indeed, Peter the apostle speaks of him as a roaring lion seeking to devour members of the church. Paul also believes Satan is on the loose, therefore in chapter 6 of Ephesians he tells us to wear the armour of God that we might stand against him. Then in Revelation, the apostle John already in chapter 2 and chapter 3 has addressed the seven churches, and to two of them he spoke of the danger of Satan and his devices and his deceptiveness.

Now in chapter 12 of Revelation we read historically of how Satan was cast out of heaven, now in chapter 20 of Revelation we are reading of how Satan will be cast out of earth. Toward the end of Christ's reign, verses 7 to 10, he will again be released for a brief rebellion - and we'll look at that in a moment or two. Look at verse 4 just now: 'And I saw thrones', John says: 'and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them'. Now we believe that this is the church of Jesus Christ in heaven. You remember that Paul taught the Corinthians that they would judge, and that the saints would judge even angels. John goes on to say: 'and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands', that is, the tribulation saints, during this seven-year period, who realised that Christ is the true Saviour and Messiah and were martyred for their faith. Here they are as well pictured by John, and it says that these two groups: 'lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years'. Verse 5: 'But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection'.

Let's spend a moment or two to get this clear, what is being said. The beginning of verse 5, where it says 'But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished', is essentially a parenthesis - that means you could put brackets round it. You could put a bracket before the word 'but', and a bracket after the word 'finished'. Therefore, when you do that, it causes you to understand that the second part of verse 5, where it says 'This is the first resurrection', refers back to what has been said in verse 4. Speaking of these saints

sitting on the throne, and the tribulation saints who would all together live and reign with Christ 1000 years - this is the first resurrection. In verse 6 he goes on: 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power'

So the beginning of verse 5 is a parenthesis that tells us that the rest of the dead, the unbelieving wicked dead, were raised not until the thousand years were finished. We will see what happens to them as they stand before the great white throne after the thousand years. Now, that's all well and good, what does that matter? Well, it's teaching us that there is not one general resurrection of all men, whether just or unjust. This speaks of a first and second resurrection, now many a-millennialists and post-millennialists spiritualise the first resurrection to mean 'your salvation' - but I ask you: does that seem to be what it means here? Clearly not, it is a physical resurrection of some who had been martyred, physically, for their faith, for not taking a physical mark of the beast.

Well, the rest of the dead unbelievers were raised not until the end of the millennial period of the reign of Christ. Now, let me help you understand this, as far as we think we can understand it. When Revelation 20 speaks of a first resurrection, don't think that it's talking about one individual resurrection. You could perhaps paraphrase it 'a first type of resurrection', because this type of resurrection relates to the saints; the first resurrection relates to saints, the second resurrection relates to the second death, unbelievers.

Now you might be sceptical about that, but the Lord Jesus Christ was included in the first resurrection. First Corinthians 15 reads, verses 23 and 24: 'Every man in his own order', will be resurrected, 'Christ the firstfruits', He was the firstfruits of the first resurrection, 'afterward they that are Christ's', every man in his own order - first Christ, the firstfruits of the first resurrection, and then the saints. Paul says: 'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power' - and that will happen just after the great white throne, when unbelievers will be judged. So Christ is part of the first resurrection, but 1 Thessalonians 4 speaks of the translation of the saints - what we have called the rapture - and that is part of the first resurrection, it's believers. Then in Revelation chapter 11 we read of the two witnesses who were slain, and their bodies lay in the street, and they were taken up to heaven, resurrected - that is another addition to the first resurrection. So really the first resurrection is a type of resurrection that refers to believers.

The second resurrection refers to the second death: unbelievers who will be cast into the lake of fire - that's clear from verse 14. Look at it: 'And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death'. Now verse 6 says that those who are in the first resurrection are blessed - there's one of the beatitudes of Revelation. Why are they blessed? Because they are not included in the second death, which comes after the second resurrection.

Now let's move on. Verses 7 to 9 tell us that 'when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them'. Now Gog and Magog appear in prophetic Scripture in Ezekiel 38 and 39, but many scholars feel that this is different from that similar event, and there are reasons for that. We can't be dogmatic on it of course, but in Ezekiel the event that involves Gog and Magog appears to happen before the millennial reign of Christ, whereas this is obviously after it. Also, the armies of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel are travelling from the

North - but here in Revelation they're coming from the four corners of the earth. Now one thing is similar, and that is that they're all marching toward the one place, and that is Jerusalem - the beloved city.

But forgetting some of those little details, please notice that this is the reason why Satan was not cast into the lake of fire along with the beast and the false prophet, the antichrist. Now maybe you wondered why that was, a little while ago, why he wasn't cast in with those two. The reason is simply that God has a final task for Satan to fulfil - what is that? Well, He wants to prove once and for all - as if it was needed - categorically that the heart of man is desperately wicked and can only be changed by God's grace. 'Where do you get that from?', you say. Well, just imagine for a moment 1000 years of the righteous reign of the rod of iron of the pure Son of God. Imagine the tragedy of a revolt at the end of that period, when Satan is loosed and people who have been living for 1000 years in a near-perfect environment under the perfect government of God's Son, finally rebel against their King.

Now you might say: 'How is that possible?'. Well, you've got to understand that this millennial kingdom, we believe, is not only inhabited by glorified saints - whether members of the church, or tribulation saints resurrected - but it will be inhabited by citizens of the nations who bowed in submission to Christ, and survived the tribulation period and went into the millennium; some of whom, we believe from Matthew 25 and the Lord's teaching on the judgement between the sheep and goats, are the nations who favoured God's people, the Jews, and were merciful to them - 'Christ's brethren', as they are called there. Now in earth's ideal conditions during the millennial reign, we are led to believe - as we have said already - that people will live a lot longer in those more ideal conditions than they presently do. Indeed, Isaiah 65 verse 10 says a child will die at a hundred years of age. During that period these human beings will marry, they will bear children in all likelihood - and although the curse, generally speaking, has been rolled back in its effects, not all of the results of the fall will be completely removed. Some of those who have been born during this period will be unregenerate.

Now you imagine this: when Satan is loosed again, the depravity in those human unregenerate hearts will rise to the surface. Now it will not last, for as verse 9 at the end says: 'fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them'. Warren Wiersbe puts it like this, and I think he's right: 'There is a sense in which the millennial kingdom will sum up all that God has said about the heart of the man during the various periods of history. It will be', the millennial kingdom, 'a reign of law, a reign of a rod of iron; and yet law will not change man's sinful heart. Man will still revolt against God'. Boy, is there a lesson there! Even a perfect environment cannot produce a perfect heart. A man must be born again.

Now, we must move quickly - in verses 10 through to 15 we're brought to the judgement of Satan and all unbelievers. Let me just sum up before we move on to that - I hope you understand all of this - Christ's second coming, some believe through mathematics, looking at portions of Daniel, looking at the days that are prophesied, that there'll be a 75 or thereabouts day interval in which many things will happen after the tribulation, and the millennial temple may well come and so on. Christ will be on His Davidic throne on the earth, the beginning of the millennium, the removal of the curse, the millennial temple offerings and sacrifices - which, incidentally, will be only memorial; just as we with broken bread and poured out wine remember our Lord, these sacrifices will be pointing back to the original reason why they were ever given, which the Jews still have not entered into: Jesus Christ. Then at the end, Satan will be loosed - and that will be effectively, when those rebels are put down, the end of the millennial kingdom - and then the judgement of Satan and the

unbelievers.

Look at verse 10: 'The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever'. Now please note this: the beast and the false prophet are still in hell 1000 years after they were cast in. Do you know what that does? It rubbishes the doctrine of annihilation, that once you die your soul is just wiped out, you cease to exist. Here they are, and if further proof was needed it is found in this statement: 'they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever'.

Verse 11: 'And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it'. This is a great throne because of the issues that are involved. It is white because it is a pure, a just, a righteous, a holy throne - and the judgements that are passed down from it are just and perfect. Who is the Judge that is seated on the throne? Well, it is none other than our Lord Jesus Himself. In John 5:22 and 27 He said: 'For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man'. So these lost sinners who reject Christ on earth in life, must be judged by Christ in death.

Then we read in verse 12 that the unbelievers of all ages: 'the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works'. Now let me cast your eye back to verse 5, the beginning, that parenthesis: 'the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished'. This is them living again, even the sea gives up the dead that are in it. Two sets of books are opened, verse 12 tells us: the book of life, in which it would appear the redeemed's names are written. No one appears at the judgement, this judgement, the great white throne, whose name is in the book of life. The other book seems to contain a detailed record of the works of these unsaved, unregenerate people. Now the fact that their names are missing from the book of life condemns them, but it is this book of works - that depicts all that they have done in their life that has been unrighteous - that determines not whether or not they will be condemned, everyone before this great white throne is condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the Son of God! The book of works will show them that they are worthy of judgement, but also the degree of the judgement that they are worthy of.

Do you know that just as there are degrees of reward during the millennium and in heaven, there are degrees of punishment in hell? Our Lord, in Matthew 11, spoke of certain cities in which many of His mighty works were done, and He said it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the judgement than for them. The Lord is a just Judge. Verse 13 tells us: 'The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades', Hades was the realm of the dead, Luke 16 tells us about that. Really what is spoken of here, 'death and hell': 'death' is effectively the grave, the place where the body is laid; and 'Hades' speaks of the place where the soul resides, the unconverted soul. What it is saying here is that the grave will give up the body, and Hades will give up the soul, and both body and soul will be reunited to stand before this great white throne and the Judge.

Let me tell you: this is like nothing that our modern court system has ever seen, because here we have a Judge with no jury, a prosecution but no defence, a sentence with no appeal. No one is able to defend themselves, or accuse the righteous just God of unrighteousness or injustice. Verse 14, look at it: 'And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death'. When we read that death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire, it means

complete persons: body, soul and spirit will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. Friends, this message is clear: hell is real! It is a witness to the righteousness of God's character: He must judge sin. It is a witness to the responsibility of mankind, that we have been created in the image of God. He has put an understanding of His desires in our hearts, we have been created moral creatures with consciences - whilst we can abuse them and misuse them. We are not robots, we are answerable to Him for the choices that we make! It is also a witness to the awfulness of sin. All of us, believers or unbelievers, would do well to take note of this: that before God can usher in the new heavens and the new earth, all sin must be eradicated. It's that serious.

In verse 15: 'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'. Why does God send people to hell? Have you heard that question asked? Essentially God doesn't send people to hell, they send themselves to hell by rejecting Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men. The Lord Jesus Himself said in Matthew 25 and verse 41 that hell was created for the devil and his angels. The Lord Jesus said: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation', this is why people are judged, this is why they are sent to hell, 'that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God'.

The wonderful message of the gospel is that, though sin has separated man from God in time and potentially in eternity, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through His blessed cross all of us who trust in Him can escape judgement, can escape hell, if we know Him as our own and personal Saviour. My friend: if you do that, if you have done that, you will never be part of the second resurrection, you will never be a partaker of the second death or the lake of fire!

But there is an application for believers tonight, is there not? For if we believe what we have just received - you may not believe it in all the detail that I have delivered tonight - but if you believe there is an eternity, and you believe there is a great white throne, and you believe there is a judgement coming, and you believe that there is a place called the lake of fire, should you not be like Wesley, Charles - we sang his words yesterday morning:

'I want an even strong desire,
I want a calmly fervent zeal,
To save poor souls out of the fire,
To snatch them from the verge of hell,
And turn them to a pardoning God,
And quench the brands in Jesus' blood.

We ought to be fired by the truth of prophecy to win the lost, and to cry:

"Tis all my business here below,
To cry, 'Behold the Lamb!'

Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His name!

Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
'Behold! Behold the Lamb''

Christ has the answer, Christ is the answer, and we've got Him - but what a responsibility there is upon us to take Him, to save poor souls out of the fire, to snatch them from the verge of hell and turn them to a pardoning God, and quench the brands in Jesus' blood.

The Book Of The Revelation - Chapter 20

"The Seven New Things"

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Turn with me to Revelation 21 please, Revelation chapter 21. Now, it is an utter impossibility, as it has been week after week as we have scaled, at times, several chapters, but tried to go through the book systematically - which I think is the best way, because you can get bogged down in a lot of detail otherwise - and yet it's impossible to deal with everything in each of these portions that we've been reading each night, and tonight will be no exception. We'll not be able to look at everything regarding the eternal state, but we will try our best to get through as much as possible of the seven new things described in chapter 21 and the beginning of chapter 22, and John's farewell testimony as he ends the book.

Let's begin reading chapter 21: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a*

chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life".

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen".

We've come a long way from beginning the study of the book of Revelation, entitled 'Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow'. We began looking at the vision John had in chapter 1; and then we looked at the seven messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor; then we looked at the vision John was given of the Creator God; then we looked at the vision of the Lamb; then we looked at the tribulation period that comprised of the seven seal judgements, the seven trumpet judgements, the seven bowl judgements; we looked at the seven key figures of that time period; we saw at the end the seven dooms upon Babylon, religious

Babylon and commercial Babylon. Then we looked for a whole week at chapter 19 at the return of the Lord Jesus, compared it with the rapture of the church, and also saw what will transpire at that great cataclysmic event in prophetic Scripture. Then last week we looked at the millennial kingdom, that thousand year reign of Christ recorded in chapter 20 for us, when He will reign upon the earth a rule of righteousness.

But we're looking this evening at seven new things that God will bring in that we know as 'The Eternal State' - and if time allows us we will look briefly at John's farewell testimony. Now chapters 21 and 22 introduce us to God's future plan not only for His believing people, but for the whole universe. Enough is revealed within these two chapters, marrying them with other things in the scriptures - New and Old Testament - to show us that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has good reason to be excited, because we have an incredible future in store.

Now before we delve into this study tonight, let me make a very important distinction that I think is often misunderstood. The eternal state is different to the place where people go now when they die as believers - now that is important. It's not to disturb you in any way or alarm you, but what we're reading tonight in chapters 21 and 22 is after the resurrection, it's after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's after the millennial kingdom. Now when a believer dies now, of course, they go to be with the Lord - and the New Testament is clear on that - and the Lord, of course, is at the right hand of the Father in glory, in the third heaven, and therefore that's where believers go - but that is not the eternal state, the new heaven and the new earth that is depicted for us here in these two chapters. Therefore, when we tell our children: 'Well, Granny has died and she has gone to heaven', we can't mean heaven as it is written here in Revelation 21 and 22, for that does not exist yet.

Now, whilst the intermediate state that believers are in now may well compare in spirit to what we will enjoy in the eternal state, it is not the same place, nor the selfsame experience. This is a new creation John is bringing before us. God's statements recorded in chapter 21 verses 5 and 6 aptly summarise this fact: 'He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done'. 'Behold, I make all things new...It is done!'.

Seven new things, at least, are mentioned for us in this portion of Scripture. There is a new heaven, then there is a new earth; there is a new Jerusalem that comes out of heaven from God to the earth; there is a new universal order that has never been known before; there is a new temple; there is a new light; there is a new paradise - the garden of God. Verse 6 shows us that this is the climax of God's sovereign and eternal plan and purpose: 'I am the beginning and the end, I am Alpha and Omega'. God created everything, and this is how God will consummate and conclude everything.

Now, of course, human history began in a garden, the Garden of Eden. Here we see at the end of Revelation, the end of the Bible, that human history will not so much conclude as climax in a heavenly city that has a garden in it, like the paradise of God. So, what began way back at the beginning of Genesis will be brought to completion and fruition here in the book of Revelation. Incidentally - we don't have time to do this - but it's worthwhile comparing the book of Genesis with the book of Revelation; the book of beginnings, if you like, with the book of endings.

In the beginning the heaven and earth were created, in Revelation the heaven and earth are destroyed effectively, and a new heaven and a new earth are created. In the book of Genesis we see the start of the reign of Satan as the god of this world, and yet at the end - we've

already seen it - Satan is cast into the lake of fire and tormented for ever and ever. In Genesis we see the entrance of sin amongst mankind, but in Revelation sin is banished. In Genesis the judgement of sin was a curse pronounced upon all of creation, but here in Revelation the curse is removed. The right to the tree of life was forfeited by man's sin - you remember the angel with the fiery sword preventing them to enter into that place - but now, in this eternal state, access to the tree of life has now been restored. Man was evicted from Eden, the Garden of God, the place of fellowship and intimacy, but now man in Revelation is welcomed back into God's paradise. Entrance of death came into the world with sin right at the beginning, but we see tonight the removal of death, that great enemy of mankind. Way back in the beginning we have the first Adam getting married to his wife, and here we have in Revelation the last Adam marrying His bride, the church. Sorrow comes upon all mankind in Genesis, sorrow is eliminated in Revelation. Genesis, effectively, tells us the story of paradise lost; Revelation is paradise restored, regained to those who believe in the Lord Jesus.

Now, of course, hymn writers down through all the years have tried to grasp the wonder of what will be the new heaven and the new earth:

'I'm kind of homesick for a country
To which I've never been before
No sad goodbyes will there be spoken
And time won't matter anymore.

Beulah Land I'm longing for you,
And someday on thee I'll stand
There my home shall be eternal.
In Beulah Land, Sweet Beulah land'.

We sang it:

'There'll be no sorrow there,
No more burdens to bear;
No more sickness, no more pain,
No more parting over there;
And forever I will be,
With the One who died for me;
What a day, glorious day that will be'.

Wonderful words, and yet they don't come close to what we have here by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit given to us through John. So here it is, chapter 21 verses 1 and 2: 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'. A new heaven and a new earth! Now, first of all, before we look at the new heaven and the new earth, there is a question I hope that you are already asking, and it needs to be answered. That is: what happened to the old heaven and old earth?

Well, theologians talk about the destruction of the old heaven and earth, and I think that's warranted - although I prefer the description of the 'redemption', or the 'renewal', or the 'refining' of the old heaven and the old earth. You remember, going back again to Genesis, that the first time this earth was spoken of as being destroyed was with a great universal flood during the days of Noah. Only eight were saved, and one of the most famous promises

in the whole of Scripture was the one given to Noah and mankind after, that God would never ever destroy the earth with a flood - and of course the rainbow was given as a sign of that covenant. Now the second time, I believe, that the earth is spoken of as being destroyed, is spoken of in 2 Peter 3 - and you might want to turn to that just now. Second Peter chapter 3, and incidentally Peter refers to that first destruction of the earth in Genesis, the flood - 2 Peter 3 verse 4, and we'll read first of all through to verse 7, we'll skip a verse or two and read verse 10. Verse 4 of 2 Peter 3: '[Scoffers say] Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men'. Verse 10: 'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up'.

Now many believe this will happen at the Great White Throne Judgement, when the earth and the heavens are seen to flee from the face of God. But the point is, there is this idea of destruction - the Lord Jesus also spoke of it by inference when He said: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away', heaven and earth shall pass away. Now the question that I pose is: is this destruction in an absolute sense? I believe it is not, I believe it's better to talk of redemption - because if you think about it, the earth wasn't completely destroyed in the flood, it was the inhabitants of the earth and that which was on the face of the earth - life. I think it will be in a similar sense at the second destruction of the earth, it will be a redemption. It will be much greater than the flood of course, but if I can use an example of our bodies: the refining and renewal of this earth and the heavens will be just like the refining, renewal and redemption of our bodies. What I'm talking about is: our bodies are destroyed by sin, the wages of sin is - what? Death! So the reason why, when life leaves our bodies, they decay and corrupt and effectively rot - dust goes to dust, ashes to ashes - is because sin has been judged by death. Yet, though our bodies appear to be destroyed, the word of God would indicate that it is these present bodies that will be redeemed. In some mysterious way these old bodies that will decay if we die will, in effect, be the basis for the new glorious body that we will be given when our Lord Jesus comes.

So, understand that it's not that a completely new body is given to us that does not relate to the old one. It will be new in character and in kind, but it will be based on the bodies that God has redeemed. I believe it will be the same for the heavens and the earth. The old earth, the old heaven will be the basis for the new - because God, if you follow through the whole of Scripture, God is not in the business of replacing mistakes - not that He makes mistakes, we do. But God does not replace with a completely new thing and start with a clean slate, God redeems things - that is the glory of His character, that He can redeem that which is lost. Everything that God created in the beginning was good, and He's going to restore - I believe - this old heaven and earth. God has never given up on His original creation. As one author has said: 'He could have consigned us all to hell and started over again, but He is the ultimate salvage artist - ruined sinners to reclaim, hallelujah! What a Saviour!'.

Now you might also be asking another question: 'OK, I can understand destroying the earth just like the flood, but why destroy heaven?'. Another common misconception about this verse is that because heaven is in the singular here, that it's referring to the place where God's throne is. Now, first of all we need to remember that there are at least three heavens spoken of in the Bible. First of all there is the atmospheric heaven, that is the place where the

clouds and the birds are. Then there is the second heaven, which is the stellar or planetary heaven. Then there's the third heaven, which is the residence, dwellingplace of almighty God - that is the celestial heaven, if you like. You can think of it like three layers of a cake: first the atmosphere; then the stars, space; and then heaven itself - and that may be the way it is logistically as well as theoretically.

Now, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 speak of 'heavens' plural: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth', but here it appears in chapter 21 verse 1 in the singular. So I think that that means that it at least refers to one of those three heavens, and I believe it refers to the atmospheric heaven. Now, why do I believe that? Well, simply because the atmospheric heavens are filled with evil. Now I can see them just now, and they look beautiful - you can't, but I can see them through the roof - but the word of God teaches us that when Satan was cast out of the third heaven, he was cast to the atmospheric heaven and that became his abode. Ephesians tells us he is 'the prince of the power of the air', Ephesians 6 verse 12 says that as Christians 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high', the word is 'heavenly places', heavenly realms - that is the first atmospheric heaven, the realm of Satanic forces. It was Job, in fact - the first book of the Bible incidentally, probably the oldest character we know of in the Bible (apart from, obviously, the first parents in Eden) - who said that even the heavens are not clean in God's sight. Now, after Satan's final rebellion at the end of the millennial reign, God will renew not only this earth, but the heaven that has been so marred because of the curse of God against Satanic evil. He will renew the heaven to guarantee that all semblance of evil will be cleared away forever. That's comforting, isn't it?

So, that's what will happen to the old heaven and the old earth: destroyed, or better, redeemed, renewed. So let's look at the new heaven and the new earth. Now, of course our reading shows us, but our commonsense tells us that this must be something better than anything that this world has ever known hitherto, including the Garden of Eden. There will be many changes in this new heaven and new earth. Verse 1 tells us at the end 'there was no more sea'. Now that doesn't mean there will be no more water, as we will see later there is a river running through the new Jerusalem. It doesn't mean there will be no lakes, there may be. There may be a completely different water cycle - but what it's speaking of here is, in John's day the sea was communicative of danger, peril. It spoke of storms, and it also was very graphically communicating the idea of separation. John is telling us there will be no danger, storms, or parting in this place.

Verse 3 tells us: 'A great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. God's tabernacle, at that moment, may no longer be in the third heaven where it is now, but it would seem that God is moving His headquarters to the new heaven and earth in particular. Literally, God will take up His abode in the New Jerusalem! Staggering, isn't it? That therefore means that His own people, we, will enjoy communion with our Heavenly Father, with His Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, closer than we have ever known or dreamed of! Now, I hope and trust that all of us who name the name of Christ are cultivating communion down here on earth - and it is possible that our fellowship is with the Father and Jesus Christ His Son - but if you're honest, and I'm being honest, it's one of the hardest things to do in the Christian life: to just spend time alone with God, and try and get close to the Lord. But isn't it wonderful, though it's so difficult down here, it will be no problem when we get to the new earth!

Verse 7: 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son'. He will bless the overcomers in that day, and of course John has told us in his epistle: 'Whoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?'. The child of God who has believed in Christ, and is overcoming the world by faith, and all that the world means, will inherit this new world. 'There is a city bright', it's wonderful to think of a new intimacy that we will have with the Father and with the Son - but you know, the alternative to that great glory is very sobering, and John is faithful to give it to us right at the end of this book. Those who have not overcome the world as Christians through faith in Jesus Christ are spoken of in verse 8: 'The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death'. Yes, there is a city bright, but closed are its gates to sin: 'Naught that defileth, naught that defileth, shall ever enter in'.

That is why heaven is such a happy place - do you know why? It is a holy place. Now, happiness and holiness don't often go together in people's minds - but there's no happier place than heaven, and there is no holier place than the place where God will reside in the new heaven and the new earth. No more sin! That's the reason why there's no more death, that is the reason why there's no more pain, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more heartache, no more curse! Those are the fruits of sin, but the root that is sin will be dealt with once and for all!

What a happy place that will be. We've seen what happens to the old heaven and earth, we've been introduced to the new heaven and the new earth, but let's come closer: because John causes us to focus on the New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven from God. In chapter 21 verses 9 and 10 we read these words: 'And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues' - it's interesting, one of the angels that had delivered the bowl judgements of God - 'and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God', what we saw in verse 2.

Now in John's day Rome was the popular city, but of course we know that God likened Rome to a harlot - that's interesting, as Luke 16:15 says: 'That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God'. But the eternal city of God, the New Jerusalem, is spoken of as a bride, verse 9. The reason is that it's made up of God's people, it will be the eternal home of God's saints. As you read this portion, the dazzling glory of the city coming down from heaven, from God, it's beyond our ability to fully comprehend and conceive of. In verse 2, the fact that this city doesn't seem to land on the earth has led some to think that it hovers in some way - I think that's conjecture, because it also spoils the idea that there is a unification taking place here: heaven and earth are coming together, and God is making earth His habitation among men. It appears that this city comes to earth, and as it comes to earth it will be filled with people in their resurrected bodies - imagine it! People who have already been prepared to dwell with God for all eternity!

In our imaginations - and it's hard, I concur, it's difficult - but picture this city for a moment with its fantastically beautiful array of jewels and wonderful metals. Twelve is the number of expensive stones on the foundation of this place - twelve, incidentally, is the number of government and administration in the word of God. It's used 21 times in the book of Revelation, it's used seven times alone in chapter 21. But here there are twelve expensive

stones for the foundation of the city, and written on the stones - verse 14 shows us - are the names of the twelve Apostles. You remember Paul told us in Ephesians 2:20 that the apostles are the foundation of the church, here they are: the foundation of the New Jerusalem. As well, the twelve precious stones are similar to those that were on the breastplate of the High Priest - and they represented, of course, the twelve tribes of Israel, and that is probably their allusion here.

We also read of twelve gigantic gates that are pearls. Verse 25 tells us the gates do not shut by day, for there shall be no night there - so these great pearl gates are always open. Its streets, the New Jerusalem, are gold streets. John says they are like transparent glass, communicating untarnished glory and purity. Read some of these verses with me that describe this city, verse 11: 'Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high', verse 12, 'and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel'. Verse 21: 'And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass'. Verses 19 and 20 tell us: 'The foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysolite; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst'.

Now today, when we want to make a foundation, what do we do? We mix up some concrete, or get a few stones - and we select them not because of their beauty, but because of their durability, their commonality, and their low cost. But what we see here in this heavenly city is, literally, we will be walking on precious metal and stones that today are only used for the most precious jewellery. Do you know what that tells me? The value system of heaven is the opposite to earth, and earth's value system is upside down! What I mean is: the things that we value down here on earth, people walk on in the new earth in the new Jerusalem. It ought to make us think - shouldn't it - that we set our affections on heavenly things, and not on the things of the earth.

Look at the further description, verses 15 and 16, we see that this angel measured Jerusalem and found it to be 1400, or 1500 miles broad, long, high, deep. Now, because of that description some believe that the New Jerusalem will be a cuboid, some believe that because it will be equal length - foursquare, that's what that means - in every way, in every dimension, that it may be a three-dimensional triangle. Well, we'll never know until we actually see it - but that's not what's important: the measurements are reflecting the utter perfection of the city, its completeness, its balance and orderliness. A city that will reflect a society that has never been seen before, a society as God meant it.

Of course, as John tries to depict this for us he often uses negatives because it is very hard to describe what is actually there, so he tells us what isn't there. One of the significant things that isn't there, we see in chapter 21 verses 22 and 23, there is no temple: 'I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof'. Now, from creation God has always desired fellowship with mankind. Of course, it was in the garden in the cool of the day that God walked with Adam - but after the fall that communion was severed, Adam was cast out of the garden, sin and iniquity came between us and our God, and altars had to be erected on which sacrifices were slain in order to approach God in an imperfect manner. In the days of Moses God established

the Tabernacle, the tent in the wilderness, and He dwelt in the midst of His people in the Holy of Holies. Throughout biblical history God has dwelt with men in temples made with hands: Solomon's was the first, the Tabernacle presence of God was transferred to Solomon's Temple; but later on in the history of Israel their apostasy caused God to depart from the Temple. That Shekinah glory of God did not return to Israel until the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who would come to be the final and complete sacrifice for sins forever, rise again, ascend to heaven to intercede for us.

Then, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in the body of believers - and the church, we, became the Temple of the Holy Spirit. During the millennial reign, we saw last week, it's depicted in Ezekiel and other places: there will be a millennial memorial Temple that looks back to the sacrifice of Christ - but here in the eternal order there is no longer any need for a temple or, for that matter, any other dwellingplace for God; for God Himself will be there among His people in a way that He has never been before! The whole new heaven and new earth, in other words, will become God's Temple. For the first time the secular and the sacred will be indistinguishable - that's something to think about, isn't it?

We see in chapter 22 and verses 1 and 2 that John is given a glimpse further into this New Jerusalem: 'And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Verse 2, this clear crystal river was in the midst of the street, and 'on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations'. A pure river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the New Jerusalem! Now, back in Genesis there were four rivers that flowed in Eden, but there's only one river flowing in the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem. Ezekiel, in his prophecy, saw a purifying river flowing from the temple in the millennial scene - Ezekiel 47 - but that's not what this is. This is a river not flowing from the Temple, but flowing directly from God's throne - the very source of all purity.

John says that on either side of this river grows the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruits - no longer forbidden! It speaks of how God, forever, in the New Jerusalem will constantly provide during every season. The leaves of this tree, it says, are for the healing of the nations - that is a figurative way of saying that the people who will dwell in this city will enjoy perpetual health, that must mean something to some of you dear folk here tonight! Verses 3 to 5, what verses! 'There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever'.

A. T. Pierson summarises those verses, 3 to 5, as the following: 'There shall be no more curse - perfect sinlessness'. The Old Testament ended with the words in Malachi: 'Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse', here the New Testament is ending and the curse is gone - perfect sinlessness! 'But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it - perfect government' - at last, God is ruling in a true theocracy. 'His servants shall serve him - perfect service' - you'll not be idle in heaven, plucking some celestial harp forever, singing psalms; you're going to be doing works for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But what a great encouragement to servants of God today: then our service will be perfect, what about that! 'They shall see his face - perfect communion' - in the Tabernacle, in the Temple, there was a veil separating man from the immediate presence of God. When our Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross, cried 'It is finished!', that veil in the Temple was rent in two from top to bottom, and we have an access by the blood into the new and living way - but that's by faith, then it

will be by sight. We will see His face, perfect communion! 'And His name shall be on their foreheads' - do you know what that is? 'Perfect resemblance', we shall be like Him! 'And there shall be no night there - perfect blessedness. And they shall reign forever and ever - perfect glory' - reigning with God and Christ forever, 'O that will be, glory for me', will it not?

Now we haven't time to look at this farewell really in verses 6 to 21 - but the long and the short of it, really, is what Warren Weirsbe says: 'Heaven is more than a destination, it's a motivation' - it's more than a destination, it's a motivation. Bright hope for tomorrow must give us strength for today! That's what it did for the patriarchs: 'Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city'.

Even the Lord Jesus, knowing the He would return to His Father, it encouraged Him when He faced the cross. You know the verse, don't you? 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'. Yes, verse 10 says we ought not to seal up this prophecy of Revelation like Daniel was, we must declare it - and, praise God, we have done that these weeks. As verses 18 and 19 say, we must not add or subtract to this book, or indeed to the word of God, because this book speaks of what the whole Bible speaks of: there is a curse upon those who twist and abuse God's word. But remember: the assurance of heaven, the assurance of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, ought not to induce us into sleep - but John's farewell testimony to us is that it should inspire us, it should invigorate us to action.

Two things he cites in verses 12 and 14: it should invigorate and inspire obedience in us. 'Blessed are they that do his commandments', 'Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be'. Does the second coming of Christ, does the prospect of heaven motivate you to obedience? There's something else: it ought to motivate us to fulfil the great commission, not just to obey God's commands but to follow Christ's commission to go into all the world. Verse 17, surely that enshrines that: the Spirit, through the bride, is calling Christ to return, but we are to be calling sinners to come to Christ and take of the water of life freely. That is surely, if not the only reason, the main reason, why our Lord Jesus Christ is waiting to come: He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance.

Heaven is more than a destination, it is a motivation. You've heard people say, maybe you have said it: 'Heaven help us!' - it ought to help us! Does it not help you to think about what we've been thinking about tonight and these weeks? Can I end with a story I began this series with? In 1952 young Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island. She was determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. She had already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways, but on that morning the weather was very foggy and it was chilly. She could hardly see the boats accompanying her, and still she swam for 15 hours constantly. Eventually she became exhausted emotionally, mentally and physically, and she begged to be taken out of the water. Her mother was in a boat alongside her, and she told her mother that she wanted to finish - but her mother said: 'No, keep going, you're close, you're nearly at the end, you can make it'. Finally her physique,

her emotions just gave up, and she stopped swimming. She was pulled out of the water, and it wasn't until she was in the boat and the fog lifted a little that she saw that she was only half a mile away. At the news conference the next day, she said these words - now listen carefully: 'All I could see was the fog. I think if I could have seen the shore I would have made it'.

'All I could see was the fog, but I think if I could have seen the shore I could have made it' - that's what this book is about: strength for today, through bright hope for tomorrow. Just think of stepping on the shore and finding it heaven, of taking hold of a hand and finding it's God's hand, of breathing new air and finding it heavenly air, of feeling invigorated and finding it immortality, of passing from storm and tempest to an unbroken calm, of waking up and finding it home. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

O our Father, we thank You for that blessed hope that is ours. Not only of our Saviour's returning - and we would say 'Maranatha, even so, come, Lord Jesus Christ' - but Lord, what it will be for all eternity to be with Him, and with You as our Father with nothing between. Lord, may we have had a little bit more of heaven put into our hearts. May it lighten the load for dear souls that are struggling here tonight. May it motivate us to obey Your commands, and go forth with the commission that we may have reward when Jesus comes. Thank You for this people here in the Iron Hall, bless them abundantly now and evermore, till we meet again - whether on this earth or in that great congregation round the throne - to God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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*www.preachtheword.com
info@preachtheword.com*