

Youth Weekly Devotion



Revelation 1-3 *Letters to the Church*

Monday, 6th May – Sunday, 12th May 2024



Overview of the Letters.

As you read each passage or letter you will see that at the beginning an aspect of Jesus is written and is linked to Johns vision in revelation 1. This identifies a different part of Christ that the specific church would understand or is linked to the rest of the letter. It also highlights the authenticity that it is not John speaking to the church but Jesus speaking to the church with the Apostle John being the messenger.

We can also note that all of the letters will encourage and celebrate what the churches are doing in some way but some also challenge the churches and are warning them of things that will happen in the future. We also need to remember when reading the passages that for the early church Jesus second coming was immanent. So when he speaks of himself coming again, they would see that as soon.



From the map above we can see the location of these seven churches in what was known as Asia Minor. They would have known of each other and would have potentially passed the letters between them. You can still find ruins of the cities, in which the churches were located, today in modern day Turkey.

There are a few names to keep in mind when reading the letters. These are 'Nicolatians', 'Balaam', 'Balak' and 'Jezebel', When these names are put this isn't about a specific group or person but more used as symbolism for teaching that was trying to influence the churches and cause them to fall away from their faith in Christ but turn to the Pagan rituals and immoral worship of the time.

As you read the letters remember that they are to specific churches but also like all of scripture we can apply it to our lives today and be asking the question of whether God is speaking to us about something specific through the scripture.



The Church in Ephesus - Revelation 2:1-7 (NIV)

¹"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Where is the church today: [Selçuk in İzmir Province, Turkey.](#)

What are the key things to Know:

The church in Ephesus is the same church that Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians to.

It was one of the most influential churches in the early church and was seen as a church that was doing everything well, other churches may have even looked to be taught by them to do church well.

The city of Ephesus was seen as the capital city of the area, if we put it into today's thinking we would think of places like London, Manchester or Birmingham. It was a Greek city and saw a massive amount of Greeks choose to move there.

What can we see from the letter:

Jesus is encourage all they have done. Saying that they stick to the truth and have managed to stop anyone false getting in, but this has also stopped them from showing love to people properly. This love is both a love for God but also one another, which we can see from the comparison to the evil practices being done. So we can see this is more about the love for people.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Smyrna- Revelation 2:8-11 (NIV)

⁸“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.

¹⁰Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

¹¹Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Where is the church today: The City of Izmir, Turkey.

What are the key things to Know:

The city of Smyrna was similar to that of Ephesus and was trying to have a prominent place within the province at the time.

So we can imagine that within the city the church was, had a lot of people in it but also a mixture of different people there.

What can we see from the letter:

The afflictions that the church faced would have been similar to other churches in terms of the everyday persecution against the church. This is the persecution that Jesus warns of in the gospels. The reference to being in poverty but rich is talking about the physical poverty that the Christians would have lived in but that they are rich in their faith even though they are surrounded by poverty.

This letter is one of encouragement and warning to the church to continue to be faithful even when harm may come to them. It is also an encouragement to us as the church today to remain faithful even to our last breath.

This doesn’t mean that everyone will die because of their beliefs but that Christ knows what we will go through at times and so is encouraging us to remain faithful just as he was.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Pergamum - Revelation 2:12-17 (NIV)

¹² "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

Where is the church today: Near the city of Bergama, Turkey.

What are the key things to know:

Pergamum was a city known to have 120,000 to 200,000 people living there. It was known for different idols and acts of worship to other gods.

It was also a city that was in connection with the Roman empire and had a temple for Augustus which would have been a Roman Emperor and this meant that they were a city known for worshiping emperors and so the Christian church would have been persecuted by cults and idol worship.

What we can see from the letter:

The church are celebrated for their resilience in faith to not conform to the society around them and give up their faith. But they have begun to listen to wrong teaching. Balaam's teaching that is referred to is that of having food given to idols or pagan gods. So if we put it into today's context we would think of Halal meat. The main charge to them is to not be following wrong teachings or to be swept up into teachings of the culture.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Thyatira - Revelation 2:18-29 (NIV)

¹⁸ "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

²⁰ Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

²⁴ Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, ²⁵ except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

²⁶ To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— ²⁷ that one 'will rule them with an iron sceptre and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ I will also give that one the morning star. ²⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Where is the church today: Akhisar, Manisa Province, Turkey

What are the key things to know:

The city of Thyatira was in the same area as Ephesus but wasn't a very important city. In fact some people would say that it was insignificant but it surprises scholars that this letter is the longest letter written. It was seen as a centre for trade and especially slave trade. Because of this it was a mix of cultures and religious practices, including Pagan worship, which would have been on show a lot.

What we can see from the letter:

This is the longest letter and can in parts be difficult to understand or see what is really meant.

The introduction of Jesus as the Son of God highlights the true power of who He is and the reality of Him being God. This then being followed by Him saying that He knows what they are doing and essentially what they have done. Shows that he knows the motive of their hearts as well as their actions. He does recognise that as believers they have grown and developed in showing love to others and doing more, which highlights a growth in discipleship.

However the challenge He puts before them of tolerating the woman Jezebel, shows that they are showing love to the world and accepting them but possibly too much and allowing themselves to be taken in by the society around them. This can also be referring to a person who has begun to teach in the church that maybe mis-leading believers to think that food offered to gods and even Pagan worship involving sexual acts is ok for believers to participate in. We also know from Kings that this could be referring to the Jezebel who led Israel astray from Elijah's prophecies. Which ever it is, Jesus is warning them remove themselves from that teaching and practices by informing them of what will happen to those that follow this teaching or her leading.

Jesus then is saying to those that have remained faithful that they will be rewarded in the future. He is reminding them not to conform to the wrong teaching around them but to be staying true to the faith that they have entered into.

His word of knowing their hearts also is to remind them that its not just about outward actions but a matter of the heart just as we see in other bits of the New testament. So the reminder there is that we shouldn't be one way in public and another way in secret but allowing Him to search and examine our hearts and actions, so that both them and us may live as true believers being changed fully by the Gospel.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Sardis - Revelation 3:1-6 (NIV)

1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ²Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

⁴Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ⁶Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Where is the church today: located in modern day Turkey, in Manisa Province near the town of *Sart*.

What are the key things to know: Sardis was seen to be a wealthy city and a nice place to live with people living there constantly through out its history. Although the city was attacked and taken twice when armies managed to sneak into the city while its residence slept.

What can we learn from the text: Jesus telling the church to wake up is both linked to the church being asleep instead of alive. In fact the church at the time saw themselves as alive spiritually but had become dead spiritually. Jesus is warning them to become alive again to the spirit to not be caught off guard just like the city was. He also refers to coming like a thief which could either be a reference to his second coming that they would be alter to it, or that when he does come they will be caught off guard not living in a righteous way. In this sudden coming he will then judge them for what they have done. However we also have to not that he does commend those that are living correctly and haven't been 'solied' by the world around them. This letter then becomes an encouragement that those who live righteously will be made Holy and seen as Holy in the end times.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Philadelphia - Revelation 3:7-13 (NIV)

⁷ "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. ¹³ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Where is the church today: in the city of Alasehir. in turkey.

What are the key things to know: The city of Philadelphia was a young city that had only been existence for possibly 90-100 years. (Not vey long compared to others). It had a lot of farms around it and relied a lot on the growth of produce and the farm lands. There was a large community of Jews there which bought in Christians as well.

What we can learn from the text:

Jesus speaking about him holding the key of David refers to King David and that Jesus holds the authority and kingship, that David had as ordained by God. This means that he has the authority to open the door to the presence of God and heavenly realms, hence no one being able to shut the door. This is an encouragement to the church that in going through the trials that they will face there is a promise to them that as they hold onto their faith they will have a place in heaven.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?



The Church in Laodicea - Revelation 3:7-13 (NIV)

¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

²¹ To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Where is the church today: Eskihisar, provenance of Denizli, Turkey.

What are the key things to know: This city was known for its banking and money handling. It didn't have a big population but due to its location, which was on a communication route and the farm land around it they generated wealth. It is thought that the church there wasn't very old. In fact only 30 / 40 years before the letter was written, a Christian community was recorded to be there.

What we can learn from the text:

Jesus speaking to the church about being lukewarm can be seen to refer to the springs that city would have got its water. Some springs are either hot or cold but for this city it was lukewarm and due to that couldn't be used for cleaning and to drink it someone would often spit it out. If you imagine running the tap and accidentally filling your glass with warm water. His challenge regarding wealth also links to the city not wanting help from outsiders, in a similar way he is challenging them not to depend on themselves but on him. Hence Him saying about coming into their lives that they may live a life of faith and dependence on Him.

What do you think God is saying to you and us today about this text?