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Lesson Outline  
Revelation 2 & 3  
June 8, 2008

1. Introduction
  1. Five Interpretations of Revelation
    - i. We are taking the Eclectic Interpretation
  2. Proposition of chapters 2-3
    - i. Be holy and faithful unto Jesus, as Jesus was holy and faithful unto death on the cross.
      1. Note evangelism as primary area of faithfulness
      2. Perseverance
2. Context
  1. Chapters 2-3 consist of 7 letters to 7 churches within Asia Minor
    - i. Three Types of Churches
      1. Losing identity
        1. Lack of Evangelism
      2. Faithful
        1. Endurance in suffering
        2. Purging unsound doctrine
      3. Compromising
        1. With pagan culture and idolatrous worship
  2. The order of the 7 Letters in the two chapters form a Chiastic structure
    - i. ABCCCB`A`
      1. A—Losing Identity (Ephesus & Laodicea)
      2. B—Faithful (Smyrna and Philadelphia)
      3. C—Compromising with pagan culture through idolatry (Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis)
        1. This emphasizes the lack of spiritual health within the church
          - i. Eclectic view: represents the church then and throughout history up to the present
  3. Structure of the Letters
    - i. Same for each letter
      1. Command to write to the angel of the church
      2. Christ's self description and the prophetic formula ("the words of..." OR "these things say the Lord Almighty"
        1. Intros. Prophecy (eclectic view)
      3. Strengths of Church
      4. Weaknesses of Church
      5. Exhortation to repent with a warning of judgment or and encouragement
      6. Exhortation to discern the truth of the message ("He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches...")
      7. Promise to those who conquer
        1. Not all 7 letters will contain every element of this structure

- i. Example...Philadelphia: there are no weaknesses mentioned, so there is no exhortation to repent

### 3. Individual Churches

#### 1. Ephesus

- i. (v.1) Seven Lampstands—refer to seven churches
  - 1. Lampstand is used in Revelation to symbolize out witness
    - 1. “Light of the world”
- ii. (v.1) Seven Stars—refer to seven messengers (Angels) of the seven churches
  - 1. Emphasizes the importance of the message
- iii. (v.2) Commends them for their theological fervor
  - 1. They are defending the church from false doctrine
    - 1. These churches are similar to Fundamentalists
- iv. (v.4) “abandoned the love you had at first”
  - 1. Love, here, specifically means evangelism
- v. In their theological fervor, the Ephesians had neglected their call to be witnesses in their culture.
- vi. Evidenced by threat of Judgment (v.5)
  - 1. He will remove their lamp stand (essentially snuff out their light)
- vii. Nicolaitians (v.6)
  - 1. Taught it permissible to participate in idolatrous temple worship
- viii. (v.7) Tree of Life
  - 1. Reference to tabernacle in Old Testament—Lampstand in tabernacle represented the tree of life
    - 1. Further emphasizes call to witness
  - 2. Symbolizes restoration and God’s intimate presence
- ix. Conclusion
  - 1. As a church and as individuals, we must place proper weight upon our intellectual pursuit of knowledge and the command to be a light in the darkness. A Christian who studies in his room but is never a witness to the world has forgotten his first love.

#### 2. Smyrna—No sin mentioned

- i. (v.8) “first and last...died and came to life”
  - 1. Jesus is source of eternal life
  - 2. Escape of second death
    - 1. Pertains to their future suffering (provides assurance)
- ii. (v.9) Commended for enduring suffering and poverty
  - 1. economy and trades tied to temple worship—they could not participate
- iii. (v.9) “slander of Jews”
  - 1. Christianity had been lumped in with Judaism
    - 1. Jews began to distinguish between themselves and Christians...resulted in Christians’ persecution
  - 2. “synagogue of Satan”
    - 1. Only God’s people are the true jews
      - i. These jews were not truly God’s people and doing Satan’s work

- iv. (v.10) “ten days”
  - 1. Reference to OT: Daniel abstained from food for 10 days
  - 2. Symbolic of trial period
    - 1. Call to remember that God is faithful
    - 2. “God was faithful to Daniel...he will be faithful to you”
- v. Irony of Conquering—As a proof of loss of salvation
  - 1. “Conquering” could very well mean death for these believers. To the world this would seem like the ultimate defeat. In the ultimate act of “dying to this world,” these Christians experience victory over the second death, the spiritual death. In this we see the irony of death and suffering as means of victory for the Christian.
- vi. Conclusion
  - 1. Although we are blessed to live in America where we do not have to fear death because of our beliefs, we must still be intentional in letting our light shine, and there is still suffering. People will label us, make fun of us, call us intolerant or stupid. If Christ is not our reason for persevering, we will fail. We must find our hope, as Smyrna was encouraged to do, in the promise of eternity with Christ.

### 3. Pergamum

- i. (v.12) “two edged sword”
  - 1. Symbolizes Christ as judge—will address their tolerance of false teaching
- ii. Commended for their faithful witness and willingness to suffer
- iii. Opposite problem of Ephesus
  - 1. Evangelistic fervor but no commitment to sound doctrine
- iv. (v.13) “Satan’s throne” and “where Satan dwells”
  - 1. Honored as temple warden of the imperial worship
    - 1. city noted for their worship of Caesar
  - 2. Emperor worship linked to civic loyalty and patriotism
    - 1. resulted in poverty and alienation for outspoken Christians
- v. (v.14 &15) Balaam and Nicolaitians
  - 1. Baalam--Prophet hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israelites (but God caused him to bless instead)
    - 1. “Balaam” used as a metaphor for false teachers who encourage compromise with pagan, idolatrous culture
    - 2. Specific teaching: participation in idol feasts was permissible for Christians
      - i. Paul was talking about meat sold in market place (1 Cor.8)...not meat eaten while partaking in the idol worship
- vi. (v.16) “Sword of my mouth”
  - 1. Symbolizes judgment
- vii. (v.17) “white stone”
  - 1. “name” refers to name of God
    - 1. Intimacy with Christ
    - 2. We will know his name...we will know him fully

#### 4. Thyatira

- i. (v.18) “eyes like a flame of fire”
  1. judgment for tolerance of false teaching
- ii. (v.19) “latter works exceed the first”
  1. growing in their love, faith, and endurance that make up their persevering witness
- iii. (v.20) Jezebel
  1. Queen to King Ahab (King of Israel; encouraged him to worship Baal)
  2. spiritual adultery against God
  3. “her children”= her followers
- iv. (v. 24) “deep things of Satan”
  1. Sarcastic reference of the false teacher’s claims to know the “deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10)
- v. (v.28) “Morning star”
  1. messianic symbol (Rev 22:16)
    1. We will know Christ intimately

#### 5. Sardis

- i. (v.1) “has seven spirits and seven stars”
  1. God possesses the churches and knows them well
- ii. (v.2) “wake up”
  1. The church had become complacent
    1. “Still work to do
- iii. (v.3) “thief”
  1. they must wake up immediately or God will bring punishment
- iv. 3-fold promise
  1. (v.4-5) “garments”
    1. Soiled= compromise with the culture and tolerance of idol worship
    2. white= purity, no spiritual adultery
  2. (v.5) “never blot out his name”—does not mean it is possible to lose salvation
    1. if they are genuine believers then their name is in the book...it will not be blotted out because it cannot be
  3. (v.5) “confess his name”
    1. Lk 12:8—“And I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.”
      - i. Confess my name and I will confess you—call to witness
- v. Conclusion for all 3 churches
  1. So we see in these three churches, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, a tendency for a variety of reasons to compromise with the culture. Perhaps it is economic pressure, or maybe just a result of a simple lack of spiritual discernment. Regardless we see that a compromising with the culture is

sinful and serious. We should consider what ways we as a church and we as individuals have made similar compromises.

vi. Philadelphia—No sin mentioned

1. (v.7) “Key of David”
  1. C.f. Is 22:22—“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.
2. (v.7) “Open door” imagery
  1. Jesus has opened the door to salvation for all believers, Jew and Gentile
    - i. This church is faithful...the door cannot be shut
3. (v.9) “synagogue of Satan”
  1. Reference back to church of Smyrna
    - i. True Jews are those believe that Jesus was the Messiah
      1. these Jews do not...they are not part of God’s people...they will be judged as unbelievers
4. (v.10) “keep you from the trial”
  1. There is no need to worry about the judgment
  2. They are persevering and enduring
5. (v.12) “pillar of the temple”
  1. Eternity in the presence of Christ (temple)
6. Names = intimacy with Christ in his presence
7. “New Jerusalem”
  1. Heaven— presence of God
    - i. In Jerusalem in the Old Testament (Old Jerusalem) the temple emphasized the presence of God
  2. New Jerusalem is everlasting...it will not fall...we will be in Christ’s presence forever
8. Conclusion
  1. Find hope in the promises of Christ in the midst of suffering. What exists in the outside is not necessarily evidence of what is in their heart.

vii. Laodicea

1. (v.14) “Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation”
  1. Highlights Jesus’ role as a faithful witness to the Father on earth and in heaven...indeed for all of history
    - i. Laodicea must be faithful and true...especially true
2. No remnant mentioned (like Sardis)
3. (v.16) Lukewarm metaphor
  1. Reference Laodicea water source
    - i. when Laodicea piped in its water it did not have enough time to cool in the aqueducts—it arrived lukewarm
      1. “lukewarm” refers to their barren works (lack of witness)

4. (v.17) took material wealth to indicate spiritual wealth as well
5. (v.18) 3-fold condition with 3-fold solution
  1. Spiritual poverty
    - i. They need refined gold—spiritual purity
  2. Nakedness (shame)
    - i. White Garments
      1. Need to purge idolatry and repent
  3. Blindness
    - i. Salve to anoint eyes
      1. Spiritual discernment
6. (v.19) “those whom I love I discipline”
  1. Christ conveys his love for the church...he is not punishing them yet...they can still repent
7. (v.20) “stand at door and knock”
  1. Reference to renewed relationship with Christ; not salvation
8. (v.21) “sit with me on my throne”
  1. Eternal throne where the saints will reign
  2. Sets the transition for chapters 4-5 (throne room vision)
9. Application
  1. Being prosperous and wealthy is not evidence of spiritual healthy. The message of health, wealth, and prosperity is not the gospel. Like the church in Ephesus, this church was losing its identity because it found its meaning in the culture that surrounded it. They were not focusing on pursuing sound doctrine or obeying the command of Christ to be a light. Essentially they were letting their wealth speak for itself when it came to the condition of their hearts. This is not the message of the gospel.

#### 4. Application

1. Two poles: Emergent vs. Fundamentalism (here Fundamentalism is meant in the popular way; it does not refer to an individual/church body who holds to specific doctrines as central to their faith)
2. Two Hand Analogy
  - i. Emergent
    1. Like church of Sardis—open handed with doctrine/open hand to the world
      1. Pursued love of their neighbor and faithful, good work in their society at the expense of sound doctrine and true teaching
        - i. The Emergent church cries for tolerance and social justice
          1. These are not bad things
          2. But when their emphasis leads to the neglect of sound doctrine on the grounds that it is arrogant to pretend to have obtained certainty, it becomes an idol.
  - ii. Fundamentalism
    1. Like church of Ephesus—close hand to doctrine/close hand to the world

1. Focused inward, only within the church body
  2. Lost their desire to witness...lost their love for the lost
  3. Pursued sound doctrine and purged the church of false teaching
    - i. The Fundamentalist church engages in popular issues (abortion, homosexuality) with protesting and public outcries
      1. Letting your voice be heard is not a bad thing.
      2. But when greater emphasis is placed upon doctrine and public issues than on the command of God to “love one another,” the pursuit and battle over truth becomes an idol
- iii. Where does the balance lie?
1. In the Gospel—if we are not trusting the gospel, in its truth and its power, and therefore trusting Christ, then we are trusting something else, we have made something an idol (specifically love, good deeds (social justice), or knowledge and sound doctrine)
    1. We make our friends’ perceptions of us an idol when we water down the gospel out of fear of offending them or hurting their feelings.
      - i. The message of the gospel is that Christ died for us. He is the one, true way to a relationship with the Father. The gospel is the means by which God saves people. When we trust the gospel, we do not water it down to make it easier to stomach. We present it in its entirety, and in its truth, and trust the Holy Spirit to use the power of the gospel to change the person.
    2. We make good works an idol when we trust in our good deeds for salvation or right standing with God.(social justice?)
      - i. The message of the gospel is that Christ paid the full price on the cross. Through his death we are justified. No good work on our part can accomplish what he did on the cross. We cannot earn our salvation. Christ accomplished this on the cross. When we trust the gospel, we do good deeds in response to the love of Christ, not in order to be accepted by him.
    3. We make our pursuit of truth or knowledge an idol when we place our trust and delight in knowledge rather than in the truth of the gospel.
      - i. When we trust the gospel, intellectual pursuits become a means of delight in Christ, as we get to know him better, we will understand the gospel better. We will see the gospel as the one, true act of ultimate love by Christ. As a response to Christ’s love for us, we will not let our pursuit of knowledge cause us to selfishly hide this love.

We will seek to build relationships that we may share the love of Christ with others.

The message of the gospel is that we can be faithful and holy only because Christ was faithful and holy unto death on the cross. Trusting in this alone will enable us to remain faithful to Christ, and so conquer, and inherit the same promises John makes to these seven churches.