

Study Guide, Term 1/2017



“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”

(Revelation 1:3 ESV)



Westminster Presbyterian Church
in Australia

Grace Community Groups

Each week across the Sunshine Coast, small groups from Grace Christian Church meet to

- study the Bible,
- pray together,
- worship God,
- encourage each other,
- care for one-another,
- grow together as followers of Jesus,
- laugh, cry, discuss life's big questions,
- and build lasting friendships!

If you're not part of a group yet, why not? It might take courage to join a group, or it might take a bit of personal rescheduling, but we promise that you won't regret it!



Area/Group Focus	Meeting time	Contact	Phone
Bli Bli	Sunday, 2.00pm	John Baird	(07) 5448 4040
Buderim	Monday, 7.00pm	Colin Weston	(07) 5476 9648
Day-time Mixed	Tuesday 10.00am	John Amos	0421 417 999
Kawana/Wurtulla	Monday (fortnightly), 7.00pm	Tim Richards	(07) 5438 2201
Ladies	Thursday, 10.00am	Janne Evans	(07) 5445 8933
Caloundra	Wednesday, 7.15pm	Roger Anderson	(07) 5491 9442
Mountain Creek	<i>to be confirmed...</i>	Rick Zylstra	0407 725 899
Palmwoods	Wednesday, 7pm	Brad Joyce	0403 199 394
Sippy Downs	Thursday, 7.00pm	Clint Lombard	0478 578 152
Woombye	Tuesday, 7.00pm	Cameron Blue	(07) 5442 3103
Woombye	Thursday, 7.00pm	Brian Hendy	(07) 5476 3892
Young Mums	Tuesday, 10:30am	Jean Bowen-Jones	0402 746 533

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Introduction to this Study Guide

Welcome!

A new year, and a new study series! Over the next eight weeks, in our morning services and in our weekly Grace Community Groups, we will be studying the first three chapters of the book of Revelation.

These chapters consist of one chapter which sets the scene, followed in the next two chapters by seven letters dictated by Jesus himself, to seven churches in the old Roman province of Asia.

John Stott once wrote a book on these letters called *What Christ Thinks of The Church*. As we explore what Jesus thought of these churches, we'll be challenged to ask the same question of our own church and our own selves. What does Christ think of us?

Introducing Revelation

Revelation, (or, more properly, *The Revelation to John*), ranks as one of the strangest, scariest, most confusing, most misread and misunderstood books in the whole Bible.

Could we safely ignore it, then? Because it's hard to understand, scary and confusing, it's worth asking whether or not we actually lose anything in our understanding of the Bible's story if we just put it in the 'too hard' box, and pretend it's not there.

But *Revelation* is part of the Bible, and was written by an Apostle, a close disciple and friend of Jesus himself, who also wrote other parts of the New Testament, including a very important gospel. Revelation must matter then, and we should expect it to tell us very important and necessary things about God's salvation plan. It might take extra effort to read and interpret, but we can expect this extra effort to be rewarded.

John's Vision

You probably know John from his appearances in the gospels as one of Jesus' first disciples (Mark 1:19), and one who was particularly close to Jesus. (Mark 5:37, John 13:23).



He also wrote a gospel, which we have named after him. His gospel is unique in many ways, but especially for the large section of teaching John recorded when Jesus was alone with his disciples the night before he died (John 13-17).

John wrote three letters too. All of his writing seems to have as a key theme the identity of Jesus.

John had an interesting life. Jesus called him from his fishing business with his brother James to follow as a disciple (Mark 1:19-20). Jesus entrusted him with special information (John . Jesus even entrusted his own mother to John at his death (John 19:26).

John remained a fervent follower of Jesus all his life. Tradition holds that, after being arrested as part of a persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D 81-96), he was sentenced to death by being boiled in oil. When John was unharmed by the oil, a frustrated and humiliated emperor banished him to a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea, between modern Turkey and Greece.

It was here that John received an amazing vision, which he was commanded by Jesus himself to write down. This is the book of Revelation.

What's it about?

Simply, the book of Revelation is about Jesus. The first three verses make this very clear. Specifically, it is a revelation about Jesus, to encourage those who are waiting for Jesus to return.

This is clear from the first verses:

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”

(Revelation 1:1–3 ESV)

and it is confirmed in the last verses:

“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”

(Revelation 22:20–21 ESV)

How to read it

Having this big picture in mind will also help us make sense of much of what is in the book.

The book of Revelation has a reputation for being full of cryptic codes and mysteries. But if we remember how the book starts and ends, we can rest easy that anything else we read will serve that big message.

Of course, the chaos, destruction, tyranny and persecution that dominates much of the book is really scary. But we must remember that in the end, Jesus wins.

There is much to say about reading Revelation as a whole. As we're dealing with just the first three chapters (essentially the first of the two visions John received), there are some important things to keep in mind to get the most out of reading them.

- History: the book of Revelation was written by a real person, to real people, in real churches, in a real time in world history. What is written here would have made sense to the people reading these letters for the first time. We should avoid making historical leaps of interpretation, finding in Revelation a prediction for the rise of militant Islam in the 20th century, or the presidency of Donald Trump in the 21st! It is actually through the original context that we will discover the true meaning.

- Structure: each of the letters follows the same basic structure:
 1. Jesus reveals himself as the author of the letter
 2. Jesus commends certain things in the church
 3. Jesus condemns certain things in the church
 4. Jesus commands certain things to the church
 5. Jesus declares a reward for 'those who overcome'.

- Issues: The issues facing these churches (which also provide context for the whole book) may be summed up as follows:
 1. Jewish hostility against Christians
 2. Roman hostility against Christians
 3. False teaching infiltrating the church

I hope that as you join us for these studies, you will be encouraged to look to Christ despite the challenges of the present time, and that you will also echoed that cry of, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

- Clint Lombard
Thursday, 26 January 2017

How to use this study guide

Each weekly study in this guide is divided into two major sections:

Sermon

Sermon Notes

The first section of each study is based around the Sunday sermon. There is a section for you to write notes during the sermon. When you're listening to the message, it's really useful to have your Bible open (either in book form or on a phone or tablet), so you can follow along, as well as something to take notes on. This helps you to remember what you learn.

You might want to write down

- The major points of the message
- Things that interested you
- Important verses and other verse references

This will help you follow what is being taught, but it will also help you remember what you learnt when you look over your notes later.

The Big Idea

This block is where you can write the one Big Idea of the message. Every message should have one simple, clear '**Big Idea**' which you can take away.

Questions

It's normal to go away from a Bible message still having questions. This section is for you to write down those things, so that you can try to find out later, maybe by asking the pastor or your group leader, or discussing it with your group.



Group Bible Study

You can do these studies in your own, but to get the most out of them, you should try and attend a weekly group Bible study - a Grace Community Group. Not only is it a great place to learn more about the Bible by reading and talking about it with others, it's also a great place to build solid Christian relationships to encourage one another and care for one another on the road to heaven.

COMA Framework

The studies in this guide are designed using an easy framework called '**COMA**'. And don't worry, it's got nothing to do with rendering you unconscious! You can use this framework to study any part of the Bible, so it's worth getting to know. (For more info on COMA, see David Helm's book *One to One Bible Reading*).

The COMA framework looks like this:

Context: These questions help you understand where the text fits into the big picture. It's about asking, "What's been happening up to this point?"

Observation: These questions help you to orientate yourself in the text by looking at what it says. It's about asking, "What ideas come up in the text?" and "What surprises are there?"

Meaning: These questions help you try to uncover what the author means. It's about asking, "What does this section tell me about God, about Jesus, and about myself?"

Application: These questions help you to work out how to respond to the Bible's message. It's about asking, "How does this passage challenge or confirm my understanding?", "Is there something in my life that needs to change?", or "What does this passage teach me about being a follower of Jesus?"

Prayer Points

Finally, after each study, there is a section to write prayer points. This way you can remember to pray for each other during and after the group meeting, and also keep track of prayers answered.

Prayer and praying for each other is a very important part of Christians meeting together.



Map of Asia Minor, around A.D. 90



This map is taken from the ESV Study Bible,
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29 January 2017

1. Introduction: Seeing Jesus

Revelation 1:1-20

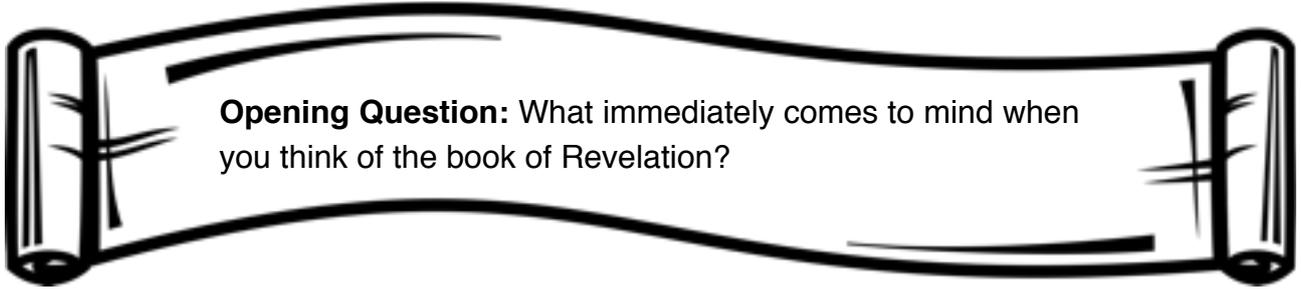
Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

(take these questions to your group and try to find some answers)

Group Bible Study - Week 1



 Read Revelation 1:1-20

Context

1. What does John call his book? (v1)

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

2. Who is John writing to? (v4)

John is writing to the seven churches in Asia. These churches would have been on a circular mail route in the western part of modern Turkey.

3. Where was John when he received the revelation, and why was he there? (v9)

John was on the Greek island of Patmos (see map on p.9), where he had been banished during the persecution of Christians (the ‘tribulation’ of v9), for preaching the word of God and the message of Jesus.

Observation

4. How did this revelation get from God to the churches in Asia? (v1-2, 11, 19)

God revealed these things to John by sending an angel as a messenger. John was to write down everything that he saw, and send it to the seven churches in Asia.

5. How does John describe the one who was speaking to him in v10-16?

He had a loud voice like a trumpet (v10). He looked like a man, and had a long robe and a sash, like a priest, a king or a judge (v13). He had snow-white hair, and eyes that blazed like fire (v14). His feet looked like refined bronze, and his voice also thundered like great river rapids (v15). In his right hand he held seven stars, out of his mouth came a two-edged sword, and his face shone like the sun at midday (v16).

6. How do we know this is a vision of Jesus himself? (v17-18)

The figure identifies himself as “the living one”, who died and is now alive forever (compare 1:5, also Colossians 1:18).

6. How does Jesus explain the ‘mystery’ of the stars and the lampstands in v20?

He says that they are the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and that the lampstands are the seven churches.

Meaning

8. When John says “the time is near” (v3), what is he referring to (see v7)

John is talking about Jesus’ promised second coming (see Acts 1:9-11)

9. What will this event mean for humanity? Compare v3 with v7.

To those who keep Jesus’ words, they will be blessed (v3). These are those who have been freed from their sins by his blood and made to be a kingdom of priests to God forever (v5-6). For the rest, those who have literally or figuratively “pierced him” (v7), it will be a day of terror and judgement.

10. Why does John react the way he does in v17? Read Exodus 33:20.

John is terrified at being in the presence of Jesus. Just like Moses at Mt Sinai, God’s holiness cannot tolerate human unholiness. The amazing thing here is how Jesus takes hold of John, and tells him not to be afraid, because he has himself died and been raised to eternal life, having been crushed by God’s holiness for the unholiness of man. He has stood in John’s place.

Application

11. How does the image of Jesus in Revelation 1 compare with how you usually think of Jesus?

12. Do you think much about Jesus' second coming? Why/Why not?

13. How might a clear vision of who Jesus is, along with the knowledge of his imminent return, affect the way we live?

Prayer Points:

05 February 2017

2. First Love Lost

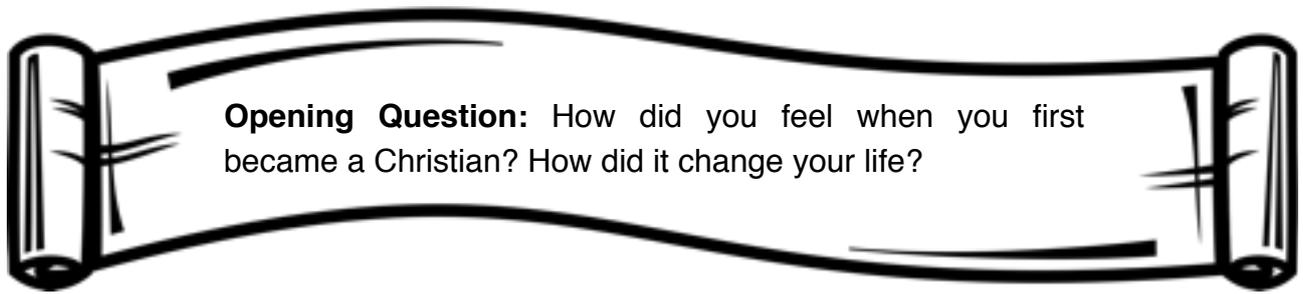
Revelation 2:1-7

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 2



 Read Revelation 2:1-7.

Context

1. What do you know about the church at Ephesus? Read Acts 19:1, 8-10, 17-20 and 1 Timothy 1:3.

Paul spent much a lot of time in Ephesus during his missionary journeys, and many people turned to Jesus. Many also publicly rejected their old faith in black magic and sorcery. Later, Timothy was sent by Paul to pastor the church at Ephesus (approx. A.D. 64)

Observation

2. How is Jesus described in v1?

As the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven lamp stands (see 1:12-16)

3. What does Jesus commend about the church at Ephesus? (v2-3, 6)

Jesus commends their work, their endurance for the sake of Jesus, and their Biblical standards. Jesus also commends their hatred of false teaching, like that of the Nicolaitans.

(Note: it isn't possible to properly identify who the 'Nicolaitans' were. This is the only time they are mentioned in the Bible! However, the original readers would obviously have understood who they were. The best we can do is look at the context, and this suggest that they were a kind of sect, teaching false doctrine under Christian pretences, like we see in 1:2)

4. What does Jesus condemn in the church at Ephesus? (v4)

They had abandoned their first love.

5. With this in mind, what does Jesus command them to do? (v5)

Remember from where they have fallen, repent, and do the works they did at first.

Meaning

6. How do you think it is possible for a church to be working hard for the name of Jesus, enduring patiently, pursuing righteousness, upholding true Biblical faith, and still have lost their first love?

(Open question - it would be interesting to hear what the group thinks at this point)

There are a few possibilities here. One is that the church at Ephesus had gotten so caught up in 'doing' church, that they had neglected to 'be' the church. They did all the right things, but they were not motivated by a love for Jesus or one another (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Another possibility is that a new generation had arisen at the church which lacked the passion and first-hand experience of their parents. (see Judges 2:7, 10-11)

7. What would it mean, in reality for Jesus to “remove their lamp stand from it’s place” (v7)?

This would mean that Jesus would not longer use them as a witness to the gospel, and the light of truth would no longer shine out from them.

8. What does it mean to ‘conquer’? Read 3:21, 21:6-7 and 1 John 5:1-5.

This is a very important theme in these letters, and in the book of Revelation as a whole. To conquer means to have overcome the world through faith in Jesus Christ - particularly, faith that endures to the very end.

Application

9. Do you find that you have the same passion for Jesus now as when you first became a Christian? Why/Why not?

(open question)

10. How can we encourage one another, as the church, not to abandon the love we had at first?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

12 February 2016

3. Facing Prison

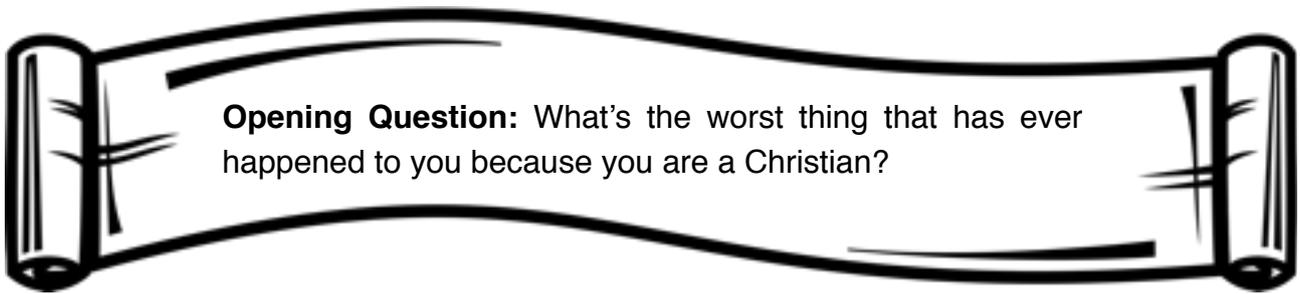
Revelation 2:8-11

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 3



 Read Revelation 2:8-11

Context

1. What verses in chapter 1 are referenced in v8?

v8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

v17-18: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,"

Observation

2. What does Jesus commend about the church at Smyrna? (v9-10)

Jesus commends their faith in suffering and persecution.

3. What does Jesus condemn about this church? (Hint: this may be a trick question!)

Nothing! This is one of only two churches (with Philadelphia, 3:7-13) against which Jesus has nothing to say in rebuke.

4. What two things does Jesus command this church? (v10)

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer”, and “Be faithful unto death”.

5. What is the church at Smyrna about to suffer? (v10)

The devil will throw some of them into prison for testing, and they will face tribulation for “10 days”.

(Note: the period of ‘ten days’ here may not be literal, but might rather indicate a clearly-defined short period. This kind of description of short-term suffering is often used in the Bible as a way to encourage endurance, e.g. 1 Peter 1:6-7.)

6. What is ‘the second death’ (v11)? Read Revelation 21:6-8 for more info.

The second death is eternal punishment in Hell, to which all those who don’t trust in Jesus are sentenced.

Meaning

7. Why might these Christians be facing poverty as well as persecution? (v9)

It is highly likely that believers in Smyrna lost their livelihood because of the intense nature of the persecution. However, Jesus reminds them briefly that what they lack on earth they have in abundance in heaven (see Mark 10:28-31).

8. How might Jesus' description of himself in v8 and his declaration in v11 be an encouragement to the suffering Christians at Smyrna?

If Jesus has been raised to life, then those who trust in him can be sure that they too will be raised to life. Also, physical pain and suffering is a small price to pay to avoid eternal pain and suffering.

Application

9. Read Luke 12:4-5. How do these truths affect the way you live?

(open question)

10. In your time of prayer, pray for the persecuted church around the world (find info at <https://www.opendoors.org.au> or <https://vom.com.au>), and thank God for the peace and freedom we enjoy.

Prayer Points:

19 February 2017

4. Where The Devil Dwells

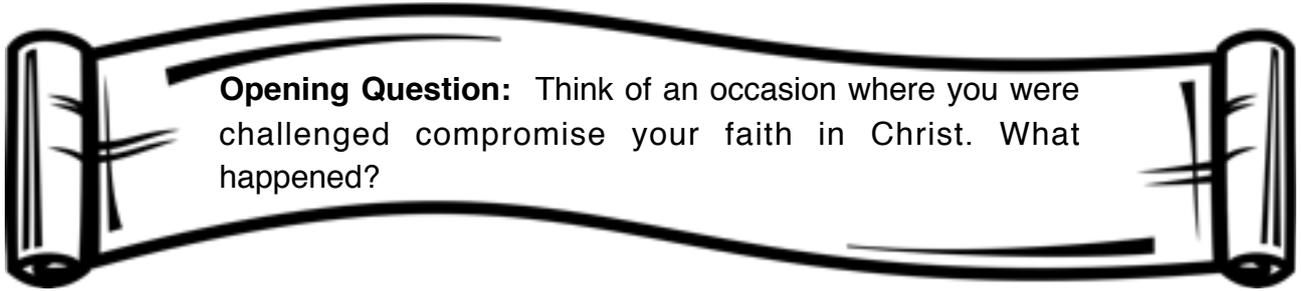
Revelation 2:12-17

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 4



 Read Revelation 2:12-17

Context

Pergamum was the capital of the province of Asia. Here's what one commentator has written:

“...Pergamum was the capital of the province and, as such, also the centre of emperor worship. Here the government was carried on and here were the temples dedicated to the worship of Caesar. Here believers were asked to offer incense to the image of the emperors and to say, ‘Caesar is Lord.’ Here Satan has his throne; here he has free reign.”

- **FROM MORE THAN CONQUERORS: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION, BY WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN**

Observation

1. What does Jesus commend in the church at Pergamum? (v13)

They have held fast to Jesus' name (identifying as his followers), and did not deny the faith of Jesus, even when they faced violent persecution.

2. What does Jesus condemn in the church at Pergamum? (v14-15)

A few things: they hold to 'the teaching of Balaam', leading to idolatry and sexual immorality, and some hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (see 2:6)

3. What does Jesus command the church at Pergamum to do? (v16)

He commands them to repent (see also Acts 26:20).

4. What is the consequence for not obeying this command? (v16)

Jesus will go to war with them, 'with the sword of [his] mouth'. (the meaning of this phrase is explored in Q6.)

5. What is the consequence for those who do obey (i.e. those who overcome)? (v17)

They will receive the hidden manna, and will receive a white stone with a new name that no one knows except those who receive it.

Meaning

6. What does the sword make you think of? How does the rest of the New Testament talk about swords? Read Matthew 10:34, Romans 13:4 and Hebrews 4:12. Refer back also to Revelation 1:16.

The Bible talks about 'the sword' in the context of judgement, both man's judgement and God's. The Bible also talks about the Word of God being a sword. The sword coming out of Jesus' mouth (1:16, 2:16) seems to mean

that Jesus will judge by his powerful word.

7. What is the 'the teaching of Balaam' (v14)? Read Numbers 25:1-5 and 31:15-16.

The teaching of Balaam is simply to say that someone can belong to God in name, but behave in a way that doesn't reflect it. (e.g. by practicing idolatry — wrong worship — and immorality — wrong living.)

8. What is 'manna' (v17)? Read Exodus 16:1-5, 14-15 and 31, and Deuteronomy 8:3.

Manna (literally, 'What is it?') was the food that God gave the Israelites in the desert when they had nothing else. It was a symbol of God's provision for his people, and his people's need for exclusive dependence on him.

9. It has been suggested that the 'hidden manna' is a symbol of God's provision to satisfy his people, and that the "white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it" is a symbol of intimacy between God and his people. Why might these be important things for the church at Pergamum to hope for? (see v14)

It seems that the Christians at Pergamum were bold enough to identify with Jesus, but where supplementing God's provision with idol worship, and supplementing intimacy with God with sexual immorality. They needed to remember that God demands total worship, but offers total satisfaction. (See Revelation 21:6-7.)

Application

12. Read James 4:4. What practical steps could you take to avoid making yourself a 'friend of the world' and an 'enemy of God'?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

26 February 2017

5. Tolerating Jezebel

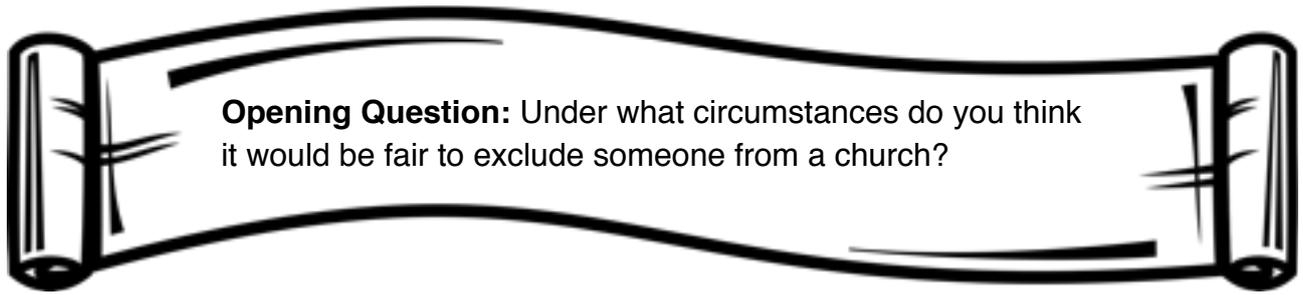
Revelation 2:18-29

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 5



 Read Revelation 2:18-29

Context

1. Who came from Thyatira? Read Acts 16:14.

Lydia came from Thyatira. (Note that she was living in Philippi, in Macedonia, when she heard Paul and became a Christian. The Philippian church appears to have started meeting in her house).

2. What similarities are there between the church at Pergamum (2:12-17, especially v14) and the church at Thyatira (2:18-29, especially v20)?

Both churches were becoming victims to false teaching, and were giving in to sexual immorality and idolatry.

Observation

3. How does Jesus describe himself in v18?

He describes himself as having eyes like flames of fire, and feet like burnished bronze.

4. What does Jesus commend in this church? (v19)

Jesus commends the believers' works, love, faith, service and patient endurance. Also that they have shown growth in these areas ("your latter works exceed the first").

5. What does Jesus condemn in the church at Thyatira? (v20-21)

Jesus condemns the church's tolerance of 'Jezebel', who claims to be a false prophetess and is teaching and encouraging sin in the church. Also he condemns 'Jezebel's' lack of repentance despite his patience with her.

6. There seem to be two groups of people in the church at Thyatira. Who are they, and what does Jesus say about each group? (v20-23 and v24-28)

The first group are those who tolerate and follow 'Jezebel'. Jesus will reveal himself to them in righteous and just judgement, unless they repent.

The second group are those who have not followed 'Jezebel' and her teaching. To them Jesus commands them to do nothing other than 'hold fast' until the end. To these 'conquerors', Jesus will give authority and power to execute justice on earth.

Meaning

7. What do you think the image of Jesus' flaming eyes and bronze feet mean? (v18)

Jesus' flaming eyes probably means that he sees everything, burning away any cover or disguise to expose what is hidden beneath. His burnished (polished) bronze feet may indicate purity (see Revelation 1:15), or they may indicate crushing judgement (see Daniel 7:9, Micah 4:13)

8. Who was the original Jezebel? Read 1 Kings 16:30-31 and 21:25.

Jezebel was the foreign wife of the evil king Ahab. She manipulated Ahab and encouraged some of the worst idolatry in Israel that had ever been seen.

Application

9. Read Matthew 18:15-20. How are we all to be involved in maintaining the purity of Jesus' church?

We have a responsibility to lovingly, humbly and discreetly make each other aware of our sins, and encourage one another towards repentance. The aim of this is to 'gain' each other, not discourage or push each other away, or even worse, to puff ourselves up with self-righteousness.

When this is done well and according to Jesus' instruction and spirit, most offences need never be addressed publicly, and it will safeguard against a church ever descending to the level of licentiousness of church at Thyatira.

(For more on this, I highly recommend Jamie Dunlop and Mark Dever's recent book, The Compelling Community, especially chapter 10: 'Addressing Sin in the Church.')

Prayer Points:

05 March 2017

6. Dead Church Walking

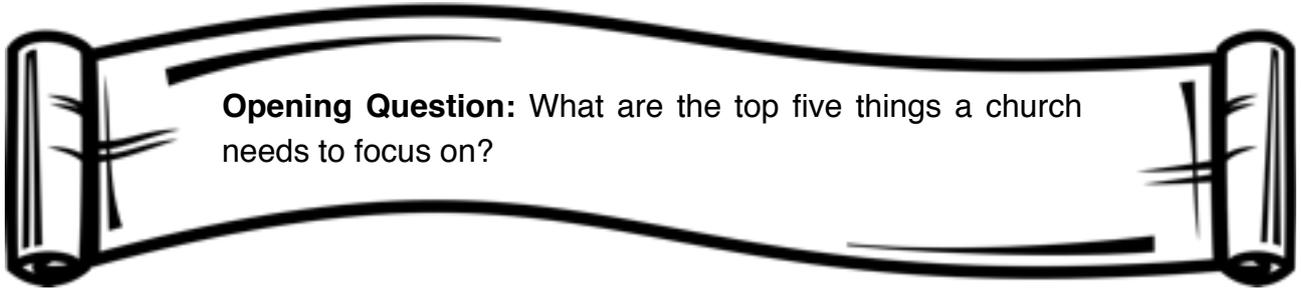
Revelation 3:1-6

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 6



Opening Question: What are the top five things a church needs to focus on?

 Read Revelation 3:1-6.

Context

1. What problem, clearly faced by most of the churches so far, doesn't seem to have affected the church at Sardis? (see 2:2, 2:6, 2:14-15, 2:20.)

False teaching doesn't seem to have been a problem in the church at Sardis.

2. How would you describe a church that has a reputation of being 'alive'?

(open question)

Observation

3. How does Jesus describe himself in v1?

Jesus describes himself as the one who has the seven spirits of God and seven stars.

4. What does Jesus commend in the church at Sardis? (v4)

Almost nothing! Only that there are a few who are worthy of 'walking with Jesus'.

5. What does Jesus condemn in the church at Sardis? (v1-2)

Jesus condemns their dead state, though they appear alive, as well as their 'incomplete' works. These may have been 'good church activities' which lacked gospel-purpose and direction.

6. What does Jesus command the church to do? (v3)

Jesus commands the church to remember what they had received and heard (e.g. God's word, the ministry of the apostles and others), to keep it and repent.

7. What will the consequences be for disobeying this command? (v4, see also Matthew 24:42-44, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 and Revelation 16:15)

Jesus appear to judge them when they least expect it.

Meaning

8. What does the image of the white garments mean? (v4-5, see also Revelation 7:13-17)

The white garments indicate purity, specifically, those who have been made pure through faith in Jesus Christ. It appears that many of these have 'soiled their garments', while only a few remain pure.

9. Why would returning to “what you have received and heard” (v3), help the church to “wake up” and “strengthen what remains and is about to die” (v2)?

Returning to the Word of God is the only hope for this church because any church must be built on the foundation of God’s Word. (see Ephesians 2:18-22). A church that doesn’t have a healthy diet of solid Bible teaching will eventually starve to death.

Application

10. Paul once wrote, “...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Is it possible for a church to have a good reputation on the outside *and* keep what they received and heard, and remain unstained? If so, how?

(open question)

note: this question is meant to open a practical discussion on how a church might both have a good reputation with those outside the church, and remain healthy and Bible-focussed on the inside. Some may feel that it is impossible to do both. Try and think of Bible verses, especially from the New Testament, that may give insight into this issue (e.g. 1 Peter 2:11-12, 1 Timothy 3:7, etc.)

Prayer Points:

12 March 2017

7. The Open Door

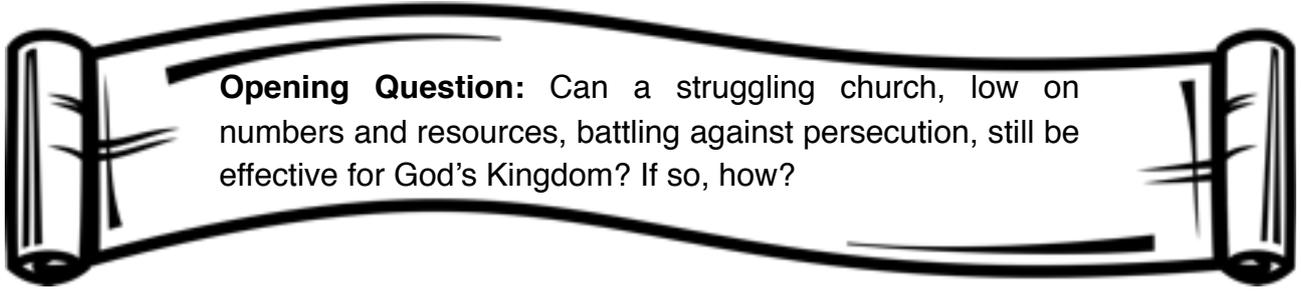
Revelation 3:7-13

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 7



 Read Revelation 3:7-13.

Context

1. What else does the Bible say about the 'key of David'? Read Isaiah 22:15-22.

Isaiah prophesied against Shebna, who was King Hezekiah's household manager. Because Shebna had over-stepped his authority, God would remove him from his place, and give his responsibilities over to Eliakim. As the king's 'Chief Executive Officer' he would then have authority and responsibility over the kingdom of Israel, having the 'key of the house of David' who was the archetypal king of Israel.

Observation

2. What do you think the open door (v8) symbolises? (Compare 1 Corinthians 16:9, and 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 and Colossians 4:3)

The door seems to symbolise an opportunity for gospel ministry.

3. How does Jesus describe the church in Philadelphia? (v8-10)

Jesus says that they have little power, but they have kept his word, specifically his word about patient endurance, and have not denied his name. Also, that Jesus loves them.

4. Who seems to be the major problem for this church? (v9)

Some Jewish people who seem to be persecuting Christians.

5. What present encouragement does Jesus give them? (v9-11)

That their enemies will recognise that they are loved by God and will bow down before them, and that Jesus will protect them from the coming trial.

Also, Jesus encourages them that he is coming soon, and that their reward (their 'crown', see Revelation 2:10, also James 1:12 and 1 Peter 5:4)

6. What is the reward for those who conquer? (v12-13)

(a.) He will be made a pillar in God's temple, (b.) he will never leave it, (c.) he will have God's name, the name of the city of God, and Jesus' new name written on him — see 2:17

Meaning

7. What do you think the issue was between the Jews and the Christians at Philadelphia? (v9, compare Acts 17:1-9)

It appears that the Jews at Philadelphia mounted a violent persecution against the Christians, rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, and rejecting the Christians as being part of God's people.

Note: a lot of the imagery in this letter concerns the question of who is the 'true Israel'. Jesus having the keys of David (v7) means that he has authority over the kingdom of Israel, to declare who belongs and who does not. The synagogue of Satan (v9) might be a Jewish place of worship on the outside, but by rejection God's promised king, they have inadvertently chosen to worship Satan. They claim Jewish heritage and status (v9), but it is false, because of their rejection of the Messiah. God loves his church (v9), rather than national Israel (see Exodus 15:13). The language of 'temple', 'Jerusalem' and 'God's revealed name (v12) is applied no longer to the nation of Israel as a political, geographical or historical entity, but rather to the people who belong to Jesus, whom God has redeemed through his Messiah (Revelation 1:5-6).

If you wish to discuss this question further, refer to Romans 9:6, and 11:25-36. Chapter 11:25-26 may help to explain the open door of opportunity that Jesus had provided for the church in Philadelphia in the face of Jewish persecution.

Application

8. Sometimes we can feel that we are ill-equipped to take the opportunities for kingdom-building that God gives us right now. What opportunities for gospel ministry has God provided for you, or Grace Community Group, or the church as a whole, that we could take now? What is holding us back? How do we get started?

(Open question. Try to steer your group away from critical observations and towards constructive discussion. It would also be really good to get everyone as individuals or as a group to committing to taking hold of a present opportunity for gospel service, e.g. bringing non-Christian friends to church, hosting a social event as a Grace Community Group to make contact with neighbours, etc.)

Prayer Points:

19 March 2017

8. Lukewarm

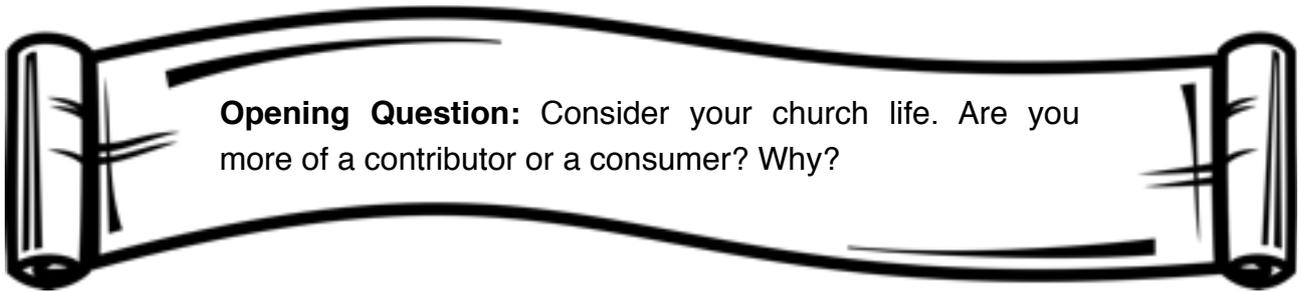
Revelation 3:14-22

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 8



 Read Revelation 3:14-22.

Context

1. What was Paul's relationship with the church at Laodicea? Read Colossians 2:1-3 and 4:15-16

Paul had a much love for those at Laodicean (and Colossae), even though it appears he had never met them. He had a great desire for them to grow in their love and faith.

2. Where has Jesus been called a 'faithful witness' before? When you find it, read it again.

Revelation 1:4-5 — "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."

Observation

3. What does Jesus commend in the church at Laodicea?

Nothing!

4. How does Jesus describe the church at Laodicea? (v15-17)

Neither hot nor cold - lukewarm; they believe themselves to be rich, prosperous and needing nothing, but rather they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

5. What does Jesus command this church to do? (v18-19)

They are to buy from Jesus gold refined by fire so that they may truly prosper, white garments to cover their nakedness, and salve (ointment) so they can see. Also, they are to zealously (eagerly) pursue repentance.

6. What promises does Jesus make in v20-22?

If anyone opens the door to Jesus, he will enjoy fellowship with them (see John 14:23-24); and the one who conquers will be granted to sit with Jesus on his throne, just like Jesus did with his own Father.

Meaning

7. How would you describe the issue in the church at Laodicea?

The basic problem is one of spiritual 'self-sufficiency'. They had reached the point where they feel like they need nothing more from Jesus (v17). They had lost their dependency on him (see Matthew 6:11).

The practical upshot of this was a pervasive apathy in the life of the church. They were 'going through the motions', so long as they could keep being comfortable and contented consumers.

8. How would you describe Jesus' attitude towards this church?

He is disgusted by them! A body of believers, who claim to belong to Jesus, even if to us they seem just harmless and impotent, is deeply offensive to Jesus.

However, Jesus is gracious towards them and continues pursuing them, calling them to repent, to find true wealth in him, to renew their dependance on him. This letter itself may even be the knock at the door, and the voice of Jesus calling those inside.

9. v20 is often quoted in the context of sharing the gospel and inviting a response. How might we understand and apply it differently in this context, where Jesus addresses the church (supposedly made up of believers)?

Jesus is presenting the church with a choice, to either continue in self-reliance and exclude him (which will invite his judgement), or to open the door to him and allow him to 'provide the meal', meeting the true needs of the church. There is a tension between Jesus' sovereignty and human responsibility here. Jesus could just barge into the church and do what he will. But he is graciously patient with this church, knocking and calling out to them. Of course, if they continue to exclude Jesus after all this, their punishment will be on their own heads.

Application

10. How can we guard against self-sufficiency, and exercise total dependence on Jesus?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

