**Session 3**

***Revelation,* Week 2**

**Revelation 2-3**

**23-24 September 2024**

**Satan’s Tools –** Satan has basically three tools he can use against us: seduction, deception, and persecution, although seduction and deception usually go hand-in-hand. Seduction is *making sin beautiful;* deception is *declaring something true that is really a lie*, and Satan makes sin appear beautiful by lying about it!

**The Letters to the Seven Churches: Ephesus –** Smyrna and Philadelphia were doing well, while the others had areas where they struggled. The church at **Ephesus** received praise from the Lord for some things, one of which was that they hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. This group of ungodly people was also mentioned in the letter to Pergamum. The Nicolaitans were characterized by the sin of *licentiousness*, a sin that they not only practiced themselves, but encouraged others to indulge in as well. They were linked to “those who follow the teaching of Balaam” in the letter to Pergamum. Both of these groups basically told people that they could live however they wanted, no matter how unholy it might be. If we were to describe the church at Ephesus in just one word, that word would be ***forgetful***. They had forgotten their first love for the Lord and for each other; one of the signs of the end of the age is that “the love of many will grow cold.”

**The Church at Smyrna –** This group of believers was a bright spot, described by the Lord as “rich” even though their outer circumstances were difficult. One of the things they dealt with was slander from the “synagogue of Satan.” The most likely explanation for what this meant is that these were groups of practicing Jews who accused the Christians of wrong-doing so that they themselves would not come under persecution from the governing authorities. They call themselves children of Abraham, but they are effectively in the employment of Satan to cause harm to the followers of Christ. Jesus warned His people in Smyrna that some of them would be afflicted “for ten days”. This doesn’t sound too bad, but remember that numbers are used symbolically in Revelation. The number 10 represents a complete period of time, i.e. the affliction will only last so long and then will come to a complete end. Using “ten days” is reminiscent of what Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians 4:17 when he said that “this *light momentary* affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Another example of how “10” is used in scripture is the ten plagues of Egypt: there will be a testing, but it will only last so long, and then it will not last any longer. Notice that nowhere does Jesus promise that His followers will be spared physical death—but He *does* promise that they will have eternal life.

**The Church at Pergamum –** If Ephesus was the forgetful church, the church at Pergamum is the ***compromised*** church. Jesus says that His people in Pergamum live “where Satan’s throne is,” i.e. that there is a great deal of ungodly activity and influence in the area where Pergamum is. Part of this was “sexual immorality”, which in Revelation includes the worship of idols as well as the literal sin of immorality. Jesus says He will fight against these immoral people with “the sword of My mouth”. What is this sword? Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God…is sharper than any two-edged sword.”

**The Church at Thyatira –** The one-word description for this church is that it is ***immoral***. Although the Lord commends them for their love, faithfulness, service and endurance, He warns them that they “tolerate the woman Jezebel.” Jesus wants them to know that there is no more wicked influence than the one in this church that drags people away into all forms of immorality. He is appalled that people *in your own church* love the world and everything in it! When Jesus says He will “strike her children dead,” He means that He will wipe out any ability for her to continue her ungodly influence on those around her. Jesus also acknowledges the fact that there is a remnant of people in Thyatira who have remained faithful…but it seems like the number of the faithful few is getting smaller and smaller as we progress through these seven letters.

**The Church at Sardis –** Sadly, the church at Sardis is ***false***: “you have a reputation for being alive…but you are *dead*.” Their reputation did not fit the actual facts. There *are* a handful of people there who have remained faithful, and Jesus tells them that they will walk with Him in white; i.e. they will be clothed in white priestly robes just like Jesus Himself wears. So the one who conquers receives what Christ already has!

**The Church at Philadelphia –** We finally encounter a church whose one-word description is ***faithful***, despite the fact that there is another “synagogue of Satan” causing them trouble. Jesus tells this group of faithful followers that because they have kept His command to endure, *they will be spared the final judgment* that is coming on the entire earth. ***This is one of the key passages that gives believers great assurance that when the final judgment comes upon the world, we will be robed in white and standing with Christ!***

**The Church at Laodicea –** If the church at Ephesus is forgetful, the church at Pergamum is compromised, the church at Thyatira is immoral, and the church at Sardis is false, then the church at Laodicea is ***dead***. There is a strong contrast between the church at Philadelphia that will receive the white robe, and the one at Laodicea who believes that it already has such a robe—and *should!*—for its own glory in this life. This is a church that believes that while Christ was crowned with a crown of thorns, they should be crowned with roses and glory. They believe that they “inherit the kingdom” right here on earth. Jesus warns them, “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline.” He lets them know that judgment begins at the house of God. We will never receive the terrible judgment that will come upon unbelievers, but it is merciful of God to correct us when we behave as the unbeliever behaves!

**Thoughts About the Laodicean Church –** The letter to Laodicea contains one of the most familiar verses in Scripture: “See, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with Me.” It is sobering to think that *Jesus makes this statement in the context of impending judgment on this church*. This letter is also the one that is most familiar to us in the West. Why? Probably because they—and we—are not enduring great *persecution*, but are dealing with great *seduction!*

**Promises to the Overcomer –** What is the link that ties together all of these promises to the overcomer in these letters? Jesus said that the overcomer:

* Will eat from the tree of life in paradise.
* Will never be harmed by the second death.
* Will be given hidden manna and a white stone with a new secret name on it.
* Will be given authority over nations to rule them with an iron scepter, and will be given the morning star.
* Will be dressed in white clothes, and his name will be remembered before God and written in the book of life.
* Will be made a pillar in the temple forever with the name of God and the new Jerusalem and Christ’s new name written on him.
* Will be given the right to sit with Christ on His throne just as Christ sits with His Father on His throne.

So all the things that the overcomers—the saints—the faithful—will receive are the things that Christ will be given by the Father! Because we have union with Christ, we will receive all that Christ receives from the Father. **The inheritance that is His—is ours!**

**A Chilling Thought –** Here is a chilling thought for the church of all ages to consider. Why is it that we see so little persecution in our churches here? Could it be that Satan is so successful in defeating us with his two weapons of seduction and deception that he doesn’t *need* to add persecution to the mix? We need to ask ourselves, “Does no one ever get rattled by me because nothing about me stands out? Have I been seduced? Have I been deceived?” May God give US ears to hear!

 **A Comforting Thought –** Just as Revelation portrays Christ as standing in the midst of the churches, so John in his gospel told us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt *among us*.” He is here to help us resist the snares of the devil and to help us stand faithful to the end.