



LIFEgroup Study Guide

July 11 - August 29

LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
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What the Spirit Says to the Churches

The book of Revelation begins with a powerful vision of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. He appears to the apostle John, who is on the Isle of Patmos (probably in exile), and he tells John to write down what he says. What eventually follows is a prophetic depiction of what will come in the future. But before this, Jesus addresses seven letters to churches that were in existence in the first century in Asia Minor.

John begins each letter by addressing it to the “angel” of the church. Some scholars believe that the angel is the local pastor of each church because the Greek word for angel can also be used to refer to a human messenger. Other scholars believe that each letter is addressed to a literal angel who has been charged with overseeing the church. There are pros and cons to both of these interpretations. We may gain some help by looking at the letters themselves. While they are addressed to the “angel”, they are transparently addressing the entire congregation. This is clear when he writes to Smyrna, that “the devil is about to put some of you in prison,” or when he writes to Pergamum, “There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam,” or when he says to Thyatira, “Now to the rest of you.” Regardless of who the “angel” is, the letter is to the whole church. Some scholars pose the possibility that the “angel” represents the overall spirit of the church as it currently is. The question of the “angel” will continue to be debated. The answer is not clear. What is clear is that these letters are written not only to a pastor or an angel, but to the whole congregation.

This brings up another question. Why these seven churches? Weren’t there many churches in Asia during this time? There certainly were. In his book, *Letters from Jesus*, Chris Palmer outlines three potential reasons for these seven churches being highlighted:

1. “These seven churches were parent churches, overseeing other, smaller churches.”
2. “The variety of issues and situations going on in these seven churches provide a microcosm of the church at large.”
3. “Seven is the number that represents completion and perfection. As a whole, these seven messages present a complete and perfect message from Christ to his church.”¹

These reasons give a likely rationale for why we have these seven letters.

But these were not written only to these seven churches, but to us today. Scholar N. T. Wright says, “We should not imagine that Christians in Ephesus only are promised the right to eat from the tree of life, or that those in Smyrna only are promised that they will escape a second death, and so on. All the promises, all the warnings, are for all the churches.”² These letters still speak to Jesus’ church thousands of years after they were written.

As stated earlier, the letters begin with an address to the angel. The letters end with a statement that is common to all seven of them: “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22). The Holy Spirit, through the Scripture, was speaking to the churches then. The Spirit is still speaking to churches today through these letters.

Are there churches that are loveless? Are there churches that are suffering? Are there churches that have compromised and been deceived? Are there churches that are lifeless or overly casual? Are there churches that are faithful? The answer to all of these questions is, “Yes, of course!” The Spirit is speaking to all of these churches. The only question is, will those of us who have ears to hear listen to what he is saying?

1 Chris Palmer, *Letters from Jesus (Greek for the Week)*, page 26.

2 N.T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, page 12.

WHAT THE Spirit SAYS TO THE CHURCHES

REVELATION 2-3

All Things in Common

Lesson 1 • July 11 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Christians are called to use their personal resources for the good of the church.

Introduction

Revelation 2-3 contains a series of seven letters that Jesus wrote to First Century churches in Asia. Before we delve into those letters in the next seven lessons, we will take time to remember the identity of the church. This passage in Acts 2:42-47 gives a beautiful picture of the church in it's infancy, devoting herself to her original calling.

Earlier in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers who were meeting together after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. After the Spirit indwells them, Peter gives a speech, announcing the lordship and the resurrection of Jesus. Thousands of people respond, and the church is birthed. The church is not a building or a non-profit organization. The church is the people of God, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

These early believers all devote themselves to their new identity as believers in Jesus and as members of the family of God. Specifically, they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching (Scripture), fellowship (building one another up), the breaking of bread (communion, and perhaps also eating meals together), and prayer (lifting their requests and praises to God). And they were awestruck over how God was working in their midst, doing signs and wonders and showing off his power through his apostles.

Then we are told that the believers had everything in common. This does not mean that they all liked the same music or the same recreational activities. The idea of having all things in common

is explained in verse 45. They all considered their resources to be used for the common good of the church. Their homes were not their homes, but homes to be used for the church. Their money was not their money, but money to be used for helping church members who were in need. Their spiritual gifts were not their gifts, but gifts that belonged to the church so that believers would be built up.

We are then told that the believers were meeting constantly, both in public and in private. They were rejoicing and the Lord was continually growing their numbers as more people placed their faith in Jesus.

This passage is a stark contrast to the consumerist way that many of us approach church in the U.S. in the 21st Century. We think that the church—as an organization—should service our needs and our families. And when this doesn't happen, we take our business elsewhere. We see church involvement as a transaction, whereas these early believers saw it as a family. If we truly embrace God's calling for us as members of his church, we will begin to see the resources that “belong” to us as resources that truly belong to the church. This includes our gifts, our possessions, our time, and our money. We will begin to live more and more as if we have “all things in common.”

Getting Started

1. What are your expectations for a church that you would choose to be a part of?

2. In what ways do you feel obligated to the church?

5. Verses 44 and 45 describe believers using their resources for the common good. What kind of mindset would have driven them to do this?

Digging In

Read Acts 2:42-47.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What stands out to you in the four things to which verse 42 tells us the early believers were “devoted”?

6. What kinds of resources do believers use today in order to benefit not just themselves, but the church as a whole?

7. Verses 46-47 talk about the believers constantly meeting together. Why do you think believers today aren't together as much as these early believers?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Some people point to this passage as evidence that believers are supposed to oppose the idea of private property or that they should support the idea of socialism. What are your thoughts on this?

Taking It To Heart

9. If believers at LBF Church more fully embraced the idea that we have “all things in common,” what would be some practical changes?

10. What resources of yours have you been using only for yourself? What resources do you believe that God is calling you to offer for the good of the church as a whole?

The Loveless Church

Lesson 2 • July 18 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to put love on display.

Introduction

Ephesus was an important city in the New Testament. Paul spent time there, as did Timothy, not to mention Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. The letter that Jesus here addresses to the church in Ephesus starts—as all the letters do—with his self-identification. He is the one who holds the seven stars (the angels of the seven churches, Rev. 1:20) and walks among the seven lampstands (the seven churches, Rev. 1:20). This means that these churches are not distant or disconnected from him. Jesus is among his people and he sees all that is happening (for better or for worse).

He initially gives them some compliments. He commends them for their diligence, their moral purity, their endurance, and their commitment to the truth. This church, in many ways, would seem to be an ideal example for churches today. Their doctrine is right on the money, they reject false teachers, they discipline sinning members, and they don't fall away under persecution. Jesus had only one thing against them. But it is a big one.

Jesus says that they have forsaken the love they had at first. This probably refers to their love for one another as the family of God, but Scripture makes clear that love for one another is connected to love for God. So, by forsaking their love for one another, they are forsaking their love for God. He calls them to repent and to return to their initial lives of love. If they don't repent, Jesus says that he will remove their lampstand. This means that Jesus is threatening to close down this church. The stakes are high.

At the end, Jesus gives a final commendation that they rejected the Nicolaitans, who were a heretical group who taught that obedience and purity were not necessary or important. The Ephesians saw through this false teaching, and Jesus compliments them for it. In fact he says that he hates (rejects) them, just as the Ephesians do.

Jesus ends the letter—and all letters—with a promise to the one who is victorious. He is calling for perseverance. To be victorious is to overcome temptations and trials and to remain faithful to Jesus, clinging to his grace and strength. Jesus promises that those who are victorious will be able to eat from the tree of life. This is an evocative way of saying that they will live forever in paradise with God.

Getting Started

1. If Jesus wrote a letter to Life Bible Fellowship Church, what compliments and criticisms do you think he would give?
2. What would be some marks of a church that is fully living out Jesus' command to love others?

Digging In

Read Revelation 2:1-7.

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 lampstands. 2 I 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. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider 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. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 Whoever 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.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Verse 1 says that Jesus is walking among the seven lampstands (which, according to Revelation 1:20 represent the seven churches). What significance do you see in Jesus walking among the churches?

5. Jesus commends the church in verses 2-3. What positive trait about the church stands out to you, and why?

6. According to verse 4, the Ephesian church had forsaken either their love for God, their love for others, or both (Matthew 22:37-40). What do you think are some practical implications of a church that has forsaken love?

7. What stands out to you about the contrast between Jesus' warning of what will happen if they don't repent (verse 5) and his promise of what will happen if they are victorious (verse 7)?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Certain people will automatically call a church "unloving" if they are rebuked about their sinful behavior. What do you think is the best way to engage with people who think that loving others means never bringing rebuke or correction?

Taking It To Heart

9. In what ways are you personally vulnerable to forsaking love for others within the church?

10. In verse 5 Jesus says, “Repent and do the things you did at first.” Relating to your relationship with Jesus, what is something you have stopped doing that you need to start doing again?

The Suffering Church

Lesson 3 • July 25 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to endure suffering.

Introduction

Only two of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 escape a rebuke from Jesus. Sardis is one of those two churches. It is a church that is suffering, and Jesus brings words of hope and encouragement.

Jesus begins the letter by identifying himself as the “First and the Last, who died and came to life again.” Jesus is not just an impressive human being. He is the divine Son of God. He has no beginning and no end. And yet he took on flesh, was born, died, and was raised. The eternal and victorious identity of Jesus would have brought great comfort to this suffering congregation.

Jesus makes sure that those in the church know that he sees their afflictions and poverty. But then he surprises them by telling them that his view of them is different from the view of the world. Others see them as poor, but Jesus sees them as rich. They may be poor for a little while, but they are precious to Jesus and, through their suffering, they are laying up treasures in heaven.

Jesus also says that they are slandered by the synagogue of Satan. This is most likely a reference to ethnic Jews who were persecuting Christians. Thinking they were doing the work of God, they were in fact doing the work of Satan. Jesus warns the church that their suffering will continue because the devil will put some of them in prison. He says that they will suffer for ten days. This is almost certainly a symbolic number, meaning that their testing would last a limited amount of time. He wants them to know that difficulty is coming, but that relief is also coming.

He calls them to be faithful, promising to crown them and reward them after they have persevered.

As always, Jesus ends with a promise. The promise here is that those who are victorious—who hold on to Jesus instead of abandoning him—will not be hurt by the second death. The second death refers to condemnation after the final judgment. Some of these believers may die in the persecution, but they are not in any danger in the end. Instead of being poor victims, they will be rich victors.

Getting Started

1. What are some ways that Christians suffer in the United States?
2. Give an honest description of how you typically respond when you encounter suffering.

Digging In

Read Revelation 2:8-11.

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. 9 I 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. 10 Do 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.

11 Whoever 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.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. How do you think the way that Jesus is described in verse 8 connects to this passage's theme of enduring suffering?

5. In what ways do you think the church at Smyrna, despite being poor and afflicted, was rich?

6. Jesus is the First and the Last, and yet instead of telling this church that he will stop their suffering, he tells them that they are about to suffer more. What do you conclude from this?

7. Jesus tells the church to be faithful to the point of death. How can you prepare now to be willing to die for Jesus?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Throughout these opening chapters of Revelation, Jesus has been claiming to have complete power. Yet he says in verse 10 that Satan will put some believers in prison. How does Jesus' ultimate power coexist with the idea of Satan causing suffering?

Taking It To Heart

9. Jesus' instruction for how to endure suffering is to be faithful (verse 10). How can you cultivate faithfulness to Jesus now so that you will be prepared to be faithful in times of suffering?

10. Identify any suffering that you are currently experiencing. What good results do you think God intends through that suffering?

The Deceived Church

Lesson 4 • August 1 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to stay faithful to Scripture.

Introduction

The church at Pergamum stands out as a church that was led astray by false teaching but, before Jesus reveals this, he affirms them in what they are doing well.

Jesus—after identifying himself as the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword—says that those in Pergamum live where Satan has his throne. This is probably because it was a major site for the Roman Empire and emperor worship. Despite being surrounded by these pagan activities, he says that the church remains true to Jesus' name. They have not abandoned him in favor of the Roman gods. Not even when a man named Antipas—perhaps a one-time Bishop of the church—was put to death. They remained faithful to Jesus despite outside pressure.

But it is not all good news. Jesus says that some of them hold to the teaching of Balaam. This is a reference to Numbers 22-25 when a prophet named Balaam was summoned by a Moabite king to curse Israel. God did not allow Balaam to do this, but—apparently—Balaam came up with the idea of seducing the Israelites so that they committed sexual immorality and idolatry. A plague that claimed 24,000 Israelites came as a result of this. The idea here in this letter is not that some of the church members literally ascribe to the teaching of Balaam, but rather that they live in a way that leads God's people into disobedience and impurity. Jesus also says that some of them hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, who taught that obedience to God was unimportant. Because of this, many church members were living in disobedience and impurity. Jesus calls them to

repent. If they don't repent, they will be choosing to oppose him and he will end up fighting against them. These are sobering words.

In the midst of these harsh warnings, Jesus tells the church that if they persevere and are victorious he will give them two things: hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it. The white stone may refer to a first century practice of such stones being used as tickets to enter into festivals. Along with the hidden manna, this may be a way of Jesus saying that they will feast together with him.

Getting Started

1. Are you more likely to be overly trusting or overly skeptical?
2. What sorts of lies do you think Christians today are most likely to believe?

Digging In

Read Revelation 2:12-17.

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 word 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.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In verse 13 Jesus says twice that those in Pergamum live where Satan lives. What do you think was meant to be the impact of him saying this?

5. This church has been deceived by some false teaching. According to verses 14-15, what do you think might have been the appeal of the false teaching?

6. Look at verse 16. What do you think it means to repent, and what are the consequences if we don't repent?

7. In the ancient Near East, names had great significance in showing a person's identity. What is your response to the idea of Jesus giving you a new name (verse 17)?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. On the one hand, the church in Pergamum stayed true to Jesus, despite seeing persecution that even led to the death of a Christian they knew (verse 13). On the other hand, some of them embraced false teachings (verses 14-16). How do you think it is possible for a church to have such an amazing victory while also having such glaring faults?

Taking It To Heart

9. In what ways are you protecting yourself so that you reject the lies of Satan and stay faithful to God's Word?

10. How can you personally help LBF Church to remain faithful to God and his Word?

The Compromised Church

Lesson 5 • August 8 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to obey God's commands.

Introduction

Jesus identifies himself to Thyatira as “the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” This matches the description of him back in Revelation 1:14-15. It is both powerful and frightening.

After a quick affirmation of the church for general good works and love, he launches into a rebuke. His rebuke mainly surrounds the fact that they “tolerate” a woman he calls Jezebel. It is almost certain that he is not referring to a woman who is actually named Jezebel, but rather that he is nicknaming her this after the wicked queen who led Israel into idolatry and immorality (1 Kings 16:31). He gives her this nickname because she is doing something similar. She is leading people into sexual immorality and idolatry. And the church—instead of exposing and rejecting her—is putting up with her. Sometimes “tolerance” is not appropriate. Jesus refers later on to the idea of “Satan’s so-called deep secrets.” This is probably connected to “Jezebel’s” teaching. She has led the church into compromise.

Jesus says that he himself will take care of judging this false teacher, and he comforts those who have not compromised by telling them that the only burden they need to bear is to hold onto what he has said until he returns. Even in a compromised church, there are those who are remaining faithful.

Jesus’ promise to those who are victorious is that they will have authority over the nations and that they will rule them. This is a constant theme in Revelation; that believers will rule alongside Christ. He also says

that he will give them the morning star, which may be a reference to Jesus himself (Revelation 22:16).

Getting Started

1. In what areas does the modern American church fall short in obedience to Jesus? Be specific.

2. Despite the fact that the Bible is easily accessible to Americans, there is good evidence that we are less biblically literate than at any other time in our history as a nation. Why do you think this is the case?

Digging In

Read Revelation 2:18-29.

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 that 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 scepter 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.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Jesus rebukes the church for tolerating a false teacher (Jezebel). Instead of tolerating her, what should they have done?

5. What is the purpose behind the harsh consequences that Jesus talks about for those who embrace the false teaching of “Jezebel” (verses 22-23)?

6. To those who are being faithful (verse 24), Jesus imposes no other burden than for them to stay true to him. What does this statement tell you about the way that Jesus relates to his people?

7. In Revelation, many believers find themselves oppressed and marginalized. What hope does Jesus give to these believers in verses 26-27?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Jesus is clearly angry at what is going on in Thyatira. Jesus shows anger at other times in the gospels (John 2:13-17, Matthew 23:13-16, John 11:33). Give some examples about times when it is godly to be angry.

Taking It To Heart

9. Share about one area in which you are falling short in obedience. What needs to change so that you can walk more closely in the joy of obedience?

10. Think again of Jesus' words in verses 24-25: "I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come." How can you actively live out this (unburdensome) command to hold onto your faith in Jesus until his victorious return?

The Sleeping Church

Lesson 6 • August 15 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to spiritual sobriety.

Introduction

To Sardis, Jesus introduces himself as the one who holds the seven spirits and the seven stars. The seven stars are clearly identified in Revelation 1:20 as the seven angels of the churches. The “angels” may be pastors or may be angelic beings. Either way, they represent the church itself, so Jesus is showing his closeness and sovereignty over the churches. The “seven spirits” are a bit more confusing. It may be a reference to the Holy Spirit and his seven-fold ministry (as described in Isaiah 11:2) or it may be a reference to some heavenly group of angels, just as is the case with the 4 living creatures or 24 elders (Revelation 4:4-6).

With the church at Smyrna, Jesus said that they were in poverty and yet he considered them rich. By way of contrast, the church at Sardis is purported to be alive, but Jesus sees them as dead. Twice he tells them to wake up and to get back to what God has called them to be. Their deadness seems related to the idea of a person being asleep on the job. They are spiritually dull and unaware. If they don’t wake up, Jesus will visit them suddenly (like a thief) and the result will not be good.

Despite these harsh words, Jesus acknowledges that some of them have lived in purity (not soiled their clothes). To these he gives beautiful promises, that they will walk with him, dressed in white (symbolizing purity). On top of this, he promises that their names will never be removed from the book of life, which is a symbolic record of those who will receive eternal life. By holding out these promises he not only comforts those who are faithful, but he also invites those who

are “asleep” to pursue lives that will result in them receiving these same rewards.

Getting Started

1. What are some qualities of a church that you would describe as “lifeless”?
2. What are some signs that a church is full of life and vitality?

Digging In

Read Revelation 3:1-6.

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. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, 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.

4 Yet 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. 5 The 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. 6 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In light of verses 2-3, what do you think Jesus means when he refers to the church as “dead” (verse 1)?

5. Write out each command that you see in verses 2-3, and write briefly what you think Jesus means by each of them.

6. Though the church in Sardis was “dead,” there were a “few” (verse 4) who were remaining faithful. What practical implications do you take from this fact?

7. Look at Jesus’ three promises in verse 5. How does each of them bring you hope?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. In verse 4, Jesus says that those who have not soiled their garments are “worthy.” None of us is ultimately worthy of the eternal life we receive through Jesus. How then should we think about the idea of being called to live lives worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27)?

Taking It To Heart

9. What dangers currently threaten to steal the vitality and alertness of American churches?

10. How can you help LBF Church to foster an awareness and responsiveness of God’s presence and God’s work?

The Faithful Church

Lesson 7 • August 22 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to desperate trust.

Introduction

Jesus begins this letter by revealing himself to be the one who holds the key of David. This is an allusion to Isaiah 22:22, when it was prophesied that a righteous leader would come and bring a reckoning with the evil religious leaders. Jesus is that righteous man, and he will sort things out. Any door he opens can't be shut and any door he shuts can't be opened. He is the all-powerful judge.

Like Smyrna, the church at Philadelphia receives no rebuke from Jesus. While he says that they have little strength, this is not an insult. It is a recognition of their desperation and suffering, and yet he affirms them for not denying his name. Despite these difficulties, they have remained faithful to him.

On the other hand, Jesus acknowledges the reality of the "synagogue of Satan." This is almost certainly a reference to Jewish leaders who are persecuting the church. They claim to be Jews, but they are not living out true Jewishness because they have rejected God's Messiah, and they are assaulting those who truly belong to God. Jesus will sort this out in a unique way. He says that he will make these persecutors fall at the feet of the Christians in Philadelphia and "acknowledge that I have loved you." In other words, the persecutors are saying that the Christians are cursed by God, but in the end, Jesus will force them to admit that the Philadelphia Christians are loved by God. This will be vindication, whether it happens in this life or in the final judgment.

Jesus also says that he will keep them from the hour of trial that is coming, and that no one will take away

their crown (reward) because he—Jesus—is coming back soon. Christians debate whether Jesus is saying in verse 10 that he will remove believers from the tribulation by rapturing them or whether he is saying that he will sustain believers through trials or whether he is saying that he will keep these specific believers from some specific trial. What is clear is that the specific believers in Philadelphia weren't raptured, and what is also clear is that all believers are called to expect to suffer and also to have God empower them to suffer well. Christians can agree to disagree on questions surrounding a rapture, but all Christians should be prepared to suffer well.

Finally, Jesus promises to make the victors a pillar in the temple of God. This is a figurative way of saying that they will fully belong in God's presence. In fact as a mark of their belonging, Jesus will write on them the name of the new Jerusalem, the name of God, and his name. A little like a child labeling his favorite toys to show that they are precious to him, Jesus will make sure that we clearly belong to him for all eternity.

Getting Started

1. Share about a time that you felt like you were out of strength and yet you experienced God empowering you with what you needed to carry on.
2. What do you see as the biggest threat to the church in America remaining faithful to Jesus?

Digging In

Read Revelation 3:7-13.

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.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. If Jesus opens a door, no one can shut it. What kind of hope do you think this church would find in Jesus telling them that he has placed an open door before them?

5. How do you think the church stayed true to Jesus despite the fact that they have “little strength”?

6. Jesus says that he will make their enemies admit that he has loved them (the believers). Why would the enemies admitting this be a point of vindication for the believers?

7. Jesus speaks of writing names on the believers, which has to do with the idea of them belonging to God, to God’s city, and to Jesus himself. Share one practical way that you benefit from belonging to Jesus.

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. In verse 10, Jesus speaks of keeping them “from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world.” Some people take this to be a reference to God rapturing the church and removing them for the period of suffering described in the rest of Revelation. Other people take this to mean that God will—as he did before—protect and sustain them through the trials and suffering to come. Reading the verse in the overall context, what do you think it means?

Taking It To Heart

9. What are the biggest threats to you personally remaining faithful to Jesus during this season of your life?

10. What can you do today to prepare for the trials and difficulties that you will face in the future?

The Independent Church

Lesson 8 • August 29 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The church is called to humble dependence.

Introduction

After identifying himself as the true witness, Jesus calls himself the “ruler” of God’s creation. Some translations instead have the word “beginning” of God’s creation. This creates controversy because Jesus is an uncreated eternal being. Back in Revelation 1:17 he calls himself the First and the Last. But even if “beginning” is the correct translation, this would not mean that Jesus is calling himself a created being. It would be more like Jesus calling himself the source—the starting point—of all that God created. As John 1:3 says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

Jesus then says that the Christians at Laodicea are neither hot nor cold. This has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that “hot” means passionate about Jesus and “cold” means totally opposed to Jesus. This is not the case. Laodicea did not have a reliable water supply in their city, so it relied on surrounding cities to provide their water. By the time any hot water got to them, it was often not hot enough to be used for purposes of cleaning and healing, and by the time any cold water got to them, it was not cold enough for refreshment and drinking. The fact that the Laodiceans are lukewarm means that they were not useful for anything. Therefore, Jesus would spit them out of his mouth. Judgment was coming.

Jesus then tells them that their self-assessment is dramatically different than his assessment of them. They see themselves as self-sufficient. This makes sense because Laodicea was full of rich people, serving as the banking capital of Asia Minor. But

Jesus saw them as “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” In other words, they thought they didn’t need Jesus, but Jesus tells them that they are desperately lost and needy without him.

What’s the solution? The solution is for them to realize that Jesus is their only hope. Instead of buying luxuries to meet their whims, they need to buy gold from Jesus, so that they won’t be poor. They need to buy clothes from Jesus, so that they won’t be naked. They need to buy salve from Jesus, so that they won’t be blind. They need to recognize that only through humbling themselves and desperately coming to Jesus can they be rescued from their helplessness.

In case this seems harsh, Jesus reminds them that he rebukes and disciplines those he loves. Then he tells them to open the door for him. He is standing at the door and knocking. This is less of a call to personal salvation—although it might be applicable there as well—and more of a call for the church to invite Jesus in so that he can be central. At the moment, instead of being the focus of the church, Jesus is being kept outside.

Finally, Jesus promises a seat on a throne to those who are victors. Just as Adam and Eve were originally created to have dominion over the world, the final destiny of believers is to rule alongside God, fulfilling our original calling.

Getting Started

1. What are some ways that American Christians show a casual attitude toward God?

2. Many of us in the United States are rich by the world's standard. With that said, what are some ways in which we are poor spiritually?

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

Digging In

Read Revelation 3:14-22.

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 that 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.

4. Jesus describes the church as lukewarm. What do you think this means about the church's overall attitude toward Jesus?

5. Despite the church's glowing self-assessment, Jesus harshly describes them as wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Why do you think Jesus believed it was important to tell them this?

6. Jesus invites them to buy gold and clothing and salve from him. How do you think a person can "buy" these from Jesus?

7. Jesus is knocking at the door of the church (verse 20), which—sadly—indicates that he is currently on the outside. What do you think is involved with a church opening the door to Jesus?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Jesus says that he rebukes and disciplines those he loves. How can you discern the difference between an inappropriate attack and an appropriate rebuke?

Taking It To Heart

9. In what areas do you need to repent of treating Jesus too casually?

10. Name one area in which you can “buy” what you need from Jesus instead of thinking that you are self-sufficient.