



Discussion question: What processes do you use to evaluate your spiritual life? Why?

Context: Revelation 1:4-20

The revealing begins with John's introduction of himself as the brother and partner of the seven churches as well as the means by which he received the message: Jesus Christ.

Part 3: Revelation 2-3

Summary: Jesus gives John specific messages for the angels of the seven churches to deliver to the churches in Asia Minor. These messages are recorded to both encourage and exhort followers of Jesus to examine their lives and their futures.

Observations:

Overall:

Jesus had John write to each church's angel to convey the message to that church.

- The angels (from 1:20) could refer to human beings, actual angels (*angelos* used over 60 times in Revelation), or the "prevailing spirit of the church itself." It seems most likely that Jesus is instructing angels in the spiritual realm to communicate with the people of each church.

Jesus exhorted the people of each church to listen to his messages through the Holy Spirit ("He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.")

Jesus will reward those who obey Him and "conquer" (also translated "overcome") their present circumstances with:

- Eternal life
- Supernatural food (manna refers to the Exodus)
- New identity in Christ
- Authority to rule (literally "shepherd") the nations
- Morning Star (possibly victory over Satan)
- Clothed in white garments
- Confirmed by the book of life
- A pillar in the temple of God
- Give new names and identified as Christ's own (Rev 7:3, 14:1, 22:4)
- Being with Jesus on the throne

Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7):

The church was working well with endurance

The church was able to keep evildoers away

The church tested teachers and rejected fake ones

The church was patient and steadfast for Jesus' sake

The church had lost its passion for Jesus

The church should repent and return to their previous heartfelt obedience

Their place in the Kingdom was at risk

The church had rejected the Nicolaitans – a pagan sect who practice idolatry and syncretism

Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11):

The church was afflicted and poor

The church was rich in character

The church was being slandered by the Jewish community

The church should not fear their suffering

The church will be attacked by the devil

The church should be prepared to die for their faith

Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17):

The church is located very near a stronghold of Satan's (home to temples of emperor worship)

The church is holding fast to Jesus despite the martyrdom of Antipas

The church has some who believed in sinful false teaching (Balaam, Numbers 22 & Nicolaitans)

The church must repent of their belief in false teaching.

Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29):

The church has expressed loving and faithful service with endurance

The church has increasingly improved their service to Jesus

The church allows a false prophetess (Jezebel)

The church will see Jezebel and her family punished because of their sin

Jezebel will be an example to the churches if she doesn't repent from her sexual immorality

The church should hold fast to the true Gospel until Jesus returns

Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6):

The church has a good reputation that hides a dead faith

The church's works have not gone far enough in obedience to God

The church should remember and keep the Gospel

The church is in danger of being judged by Jesus if they don't "wake up"

The church has some within it who have obeyed and pursued purity, and they will "conquer"

Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13):

The church has access to God through Christ

The church has obeyed Jesus despite their weakness

The church has stayed true to Jesus

The church will see those who claim to be Jews come to a saving knowledge of Christ

The church will be protected by God during trials to come because of their obedience

Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22):

The church will be punished for failing to be effective in their works

The church is failing to examine themselves accurately

The church needs to seek true spiritual value from Jesus by changing their actions

The church should embrace Jesus' correction as he "stands at the door and knocks"

Interpretation:

The messages to the churches are intended to be a "wake-up call" from Jesus in order to correct "works" that were not in alignment with God's will and Jesus' teaching.

Each church found themselves in a different context, but all were struggling with vastly increased persecution under Emperor Domitian. The commands that Jesus give to the churches are to be understood in light of the opposition that their culture provided.

Jesus describes Himself to each church using different images which all conform to a different aspect of His character and referred to in his introduction to John in chapter 1. There is no doubt as to the identity of the messenger.

Jesus describes His goal for the churches in responding to His commands and challenges using the word "conquer" (nikao, also translated as "overcome"). It is clear that Jesus expects the churches to make specific changes to their beliefs, behaviors, and practices without delay.

Application:

Jesus wants the seven influential churches he is addressing to make changes that will benefit the churches and their cities. He calls them to examine their beliefs, their passions, and their works. All three are vital for us to do the same today. We should be intentional about looking at ourselves, specifically our beliefs, our passions, and our works.

One author calls these letters a "comprehensive warning" to the church against losing our first love (Ephesus), fear of suffering (Smyrna), doctrinal compromise (Pergamum), moral compromise (Thyatira), spiritual deadness (Sardis), failure to endure (Philadelphia), and lukewarmness (Laodicea).

Fun challenges regarding eschatology:

2:10 – what are the "10 days" referring to?

3:10 – how are the Philadelphians are to be "kept" from the tribulation that is to come?