

Lesson 82

11.4. Messages to the Seven Churches ⇒ Revelation 2~3

- We studied Chapter 1 of Revelation, a masterful chapter of God's Word. In this chapter, God signs His name as the author of the book. The Trinity introduces itself, making it clear that the message is from the Triune God. We also examined the description of Jesus Christ as the sovereign Lord and judge of all the earth. We ended the last class with the general division of the Book of Revelation described in **V.19**.
 - ***the things which you have seen*** (⇒ **Revelation 1**): John had just seen the figure of Jesus as Judge and Sovereign Lord.
 - ***the things which are*** (⇒ **Revelation 2 and 3**): This is what we will begin to study in this lesson: the Church and its era. It is the era that was present for John and is still present for us.
 - ***the things which will take place after this*** (⇒ **Revelation 4~22**): Everything that lies in the future: tribulation, the Millennium, the Final Judgment, and the New Heavens and New Earth.
- **'The things which are'**
It is the Church. Was the Church present for John? Yes. Did John belong to the Church? Yes, the Church was present for him. That is why the verb is in the present tense. Do we belong to the Church? Yes, and therefore, we are still in the things that are. Let us begin studying this part of the Book of Revelation: **'the things which are.'**
- Chapters 2 and 3 contain seven letters to seven Churches. These letters are the only complete prophecy about the Church from its beginning until the Rapture. These letters offer a comprehensive exhortation for our time. It is the most profound and serious exhortation in the Bible for the Church. Studying these letters is fundamental, penetrating, and healing. The exhortation contained therein relates entirely to the doctrine for the Church and for our personal lives as Christians.
- In these letters, we will find all kinds of mistakes that we can make in our Christian lives, both individually and as a Church. We will see how errors enter the Church and the *'remedy'* for each one. We will learn how God judges the Church and what he expects from it. We will also learn what pleases and displeases God. The letters also reveal the rewards God gives to those who overcome in the Church. These topics alone demonstrate the importance of studying these two chapters.
- In each letter, God writes His name twice. At the beginning of each letter, God states that He is the author, and at the end, He reiterates this. As we saw in Chapter 1, God's emphasis shows the importance of these things. It is as if God were saying to us, *'Pay attention to these things because they come directly from me.'* In each letter, we will see God imprint His name twice.

- What is God's primary intention for his people in these letters? The letters were addressed to the Churches, and God intends to expose possible errors and show the remedy for each error. He also intends to show how He judges the final intention. God's intention is for His people to become victorious. At the end of each letter, God says, '*To the victor I will do this,*' '*To the victor I will do that,*' and so on. If we analyze the prizes for the victors, we will want to go to Heaven immediately because they are beautiful and pure things reserved for us.
- God does not intend to discourage us by showing us the possible mistakes we can make. By showing us our mistakes, God also provides solutions for each one. When we are sick, we go to the doctor. After diagnosing the illness, (*even if it is serious*), the doctor gives us medicine – '*the solution*' for curing the illness. We should understand these letters from God in the same way.

First, we must recognize the problem. Then, we must acknowledge it. Finally, we must follow the solution that God provides. If we think everything is fine, we are deceiving ourselves. God exposes possible mistakes and their '*remedies*' so that we may find solutions and become victorious.

- We have already seen that the number seven symbolizes perfection and completeness in the Bible. Seven is the number of divinity and the symbol of God. What, then, can we conclude when we see Jesus sending letters to seven Churches? Were these letters only for those seven Churches? No, because the number seven represents completeness. These letters were written to all Churches. Do you know what makes us so sure of this? Are we from Smyrna, Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Laodicea, Sardis, or Philadelphia? No, we don't belong to any of them, yet we receive the message. That is the proof. We are reading the letters because they were sent to all Churches throughout time. That is why there are seven letters to seven Churches.
- Now, why did God choose these seven Churches and not others? By the time these letters were written, Christianity had already spread widely. The Book of Revelation was written around 95 CE, almost at the end of the first century. In Asia, where these Churches (*cities*) were located in what is now Turkey, there were many other Churches. Why, then, did God choose these seven? Did God have a preference for them? Of course not, because God does not show partiality. God wrote to these seven Churches because their experiences at that time (*their problems and successes*) served as a prophetic picture of how the Church would develop throughout history. Do you understand?
- The reality of each of those Churches – the reality of Ephesus, for example – is revealed in the letters (*we will see this when we read the letters*). When the leader of Ephesus received the letter, everything written in it was happening in Ephesus at that time. It was the reality of Ephesus at that time. However, that reality served as a prophecy of how the Church would develop throughout history. The order of the letters is not alphabetical or based on preference, but rather on the historical sequence of the Church.

- Also, these Churches represent the different types of believers in Jesus Christ and Churches. These letters list all the types of Christians and local Churches we encounter. As you read and study them in detail, you may find yourself asking: What kind of believer am I? Am I from Ephesus or Thyatira? Am I from Pergamum or Laodicea? What kind of believer am I? As we study the letters, let's focus on identifying ourselves, not our brothers. Participate in the study with a hoe, not a shovel. With a hoe, we bring to ourselves, but with a shovel, we throw to others.
- These letters serve as God's exhortation to all Churches and believers from that time until the end. In them, we clearly see the history of the Church: its beginning, development, and end. We also see something unpleasant (*which we discuss a lot throughout the course*): Satan's actions. What happened during the periods we studied? God reveals his plan and will, and immediately Satan reveals a counterfeit copy. Who do most people follow? Satan. When the end of each period arrives and God does not intervene, it seems that everything will be lost. However, no one can thwart God's plans. God intervenes, and His plan of redemption continues until the end – **HALLELUJAH!**
- Do you think it's different with the Church? Of course not. God revealed his will and his entire plan for the Church, including everything He wants and expects from it. However, Satan created a counterfeit copy, and unfortunately, the vast majority of so-called '*Christians*' follow it. By studying these letters, we can clearly see apostasy from the faith and the will of God penetrating the true Church of Jesus Christ. This is evident when we see that, at the beginning of the Church, Jesus walks among the Church, but, due to apostasy from the faith, at the end of the Church period, Jesus is outside the Church.

⇒ **Revelation 2:1**

- Jesus is at the beginning of the history of the Church. He is walking in the midst of the Church. He has the leaders in his hands.

⇒ **Revelation 3:20**

- But where is Jesus when the history of the Church ends? He is at the door – that is, outside. The name Laodicea (*of this Church*) can be translated as 'voice of the people.' The voice of the people is so loud that it is almost impossible to hear Jesus's voice. He is outside the Church, no longer appealing to the Church 'as a group', but to individuals within the Church.

- Throughout the history of the Church, we see this pattern repeated: a remnant of believers who overcome. What overcomes? Our faith ⇒ **1 John 5:4**. The false has mixed with the true. Remember when we studied the parables in Matthew 13? We said those parables prophesied a time called: **The Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven**. This period would unfold from the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah until his return. Therefore, the Kingdom would not continue to develop during this time (*although we belong to the Kingdom, it would be hidden*). Jesus came the first time to establish the Kingdom, but he was rejected, so he postponed its establishment.

In Matthew 13, the first seven parables are similar to the letters to the seven Churches. However, the parables speak of a time that includes and goes beyond the Church, whereas ⇒ **Revelation 2 and 3** only speak of the Church. In those parables, Jesus talks about wheat and weeds and says they shouldn't be separated before the end of time. He also says that a net was cast, bringing in good and bad fish, which were separated only at the end of time.

- What are we seeing in the Church of Jesus Christ today? We see the tares mixed with the wheat and the true believers (*in Jesus Christ*) mixed with the false. The false are mixed with the true! Even worse, true believers begin to see so much apostasy in the Churches' doctrines, customs, and practices that they become accustomed to it and follow the majority. True believers have become so accustomed to false doctrines that it is often difficult to distinguish them from the true ones, just as it is difficult to distinguish wheat from chaff. Am I speaking untruth?

We see Churches where the people seem '*asleep*,' numb, and apathy perpetuates from Sunday to Sunday. The Churches are dead, dry, ritualistic, and hard. When someone tries to shake them, they seem to see a ghost.

⇒ **Ephesians 5:14**; Paul's warning: '*Awake, you who sleep...*'

- My brothers and sisters, apostasy is entering. Do you know how powerful it is? Do you know why we are all '*swallowing*' apostasy – including the children of God – and accepting doctrines of men? It is because of our lack of absolute knowledge of the Word of God. Without knowledge of the Word and the Power of God, apostasy enters. When our knowledge of God's word is directed as God wants, with the right heavenly motivation, our lives must move toward one goal and one result: a restored relationship with God. Jesus uses the image of the yoke (⇒ **Matthew 11:28-30**). Have you ever seen two oxen walking with a yoke?

There is no way to leave alone; wherever one goes, the other must go too. We must walk this path alongside Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The purpose of Bible study is not to display biblical wisdom or knowledge of doctrine; rather, it is to develop a relationship with God. This is why God says that '*my people perish for lack of knowledge.*'

⇒ **Acts 2:37~47**

➤ **V.42**: '*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*'

- No one can believe incorrectly and act correctly. We must understand doctrine, but not just to satisfy our intellect or win a Bible quiz. Doctrine is meant to help us live correctly. I must ask myself: What does God want from me now that I have accepted Jesus? I came from Egypt. How am I going to live in the Promised Land now? How does God want me to live from now on? That is why I study the Bible; otherwise, I will be lost because the winds of doctrine blow from all sides (⇒ **Ephesians 4:11~16**). One person says, '*You have to do this,*' and another says, '*You have to do that.*' Without knowledge of the Bible, we will be deceived.

- The seven letters provide an overview of the history of the Church and are naturally divided into two parts. The first three letters form one part, and the last four letters form the other. The first three letters end with a call for the Church to listen to the Spirit, followed by a promise to the victor, ⇒ **Revelation 2:7, 2:11, and 2:17**. In the first three letters, the order is first the call to listen to the Spirit and then the promise to the victor. In the last four letters, the order is reversed, signifying a division. We must read the Bible carefully. Compare this with ⇒ **Revelation 2:26~29, 3:5~6, 3:12~13, and 3:21~22**. Did you notice the reversal? First comes the promise to the victor, followed by the call to listen to the voice of the Spirit. As history unfolded, apostasy and the doctrines of men entered the true Church of Jesus Christ.
- So, God changed the way he dealt with the Church. During the first three periods, from 30 to 606 CE, the Church had a collective consciousness, and God could speak to the Church as a whole. However, from 606 until the end, the situation of the Church became so critical that God no longer expected to be heard by the entire Church. Therefore, he spoke to individuals first and called on them to listen to what the Spirit said to the Churches.
In the last four letters, God speaks to the victors because the Church as a whole does not listen.
- Another aspect of the division is that the first three letters represent the historical Church. You might ask, '*How can we say that?*' It's because history has almost entirely unfolded. We are at the end of the period, and you will come to the same conclusion. The last four letters describe the contemporary Church. They are still alive today and will continue until the end.
- The letter to the Ephesians describes the Apostolic Church, which was founded and led by the apostles. The Church in Smyrna represents the suffering Church. It was brutally persecuted by the Roman Empire from 100 to 312.
Pergamum represents the time when paganism invaded Christianity, when Satan changed his tactics and began introducing paganism into the true Church. However, it was still a Church that could hear.
- However, after 606 CE, when paganism became the official religion, God no longer spoke to the Church as a whole. Everyone talks about the Christian world. Until then, the Christian world was completely separate. Does '*the Christian world*' mean anything to you today? It makes me want to say: I don't belong to the world you're talking about. Such country is a Christian one. Isn't that how it's classified? But is it really Christian when 75% of its population practices '*spiritism, and strange spiritual practices*'? But it is a Christian country. That's what I'm trying to say.
- Christianity became a shapeless mass (⇒ **Matthew 13:31~32, the parable of the mustard seed**), and both false and true elements emerged within it. Therefore, beginning in 606 AD, God could no longer treat the Church as a whole, so he began speaking to the victors.
The last four Churches form the contemporary Church; they are still alive today and will continue until the end with the characteristics described in each letter.

- The Church in Thyatira represents the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Sardis represents Protestantism, the Church of Philadelphia represents the true Church that will be raptured, and the Church of Laodicea represents the false, lukewarm Church of the end times. These distinctions will continue until the end.
- All Churches represent different types of local Churches and believers. One clear example of this is the Church of Smyrna, the suffering Church. The Church of Smyrna is a suffering Church. Is there a Smyrna among us today? Consider the Churches in communist countries, such as China and Albania. In these countries, simply being a Christian is a crime. Therefore, they are suffering Churches of the Smyrna type.
- So, in terms of types of Churches and believers, all seven Churches are relevant. From a historical perspective, however, the first three represent historical Churches, while the last four represent contemporary Churches that will exist until the Rapture.

⇒ In the next class, we will start our in-depth study of the seven letters.