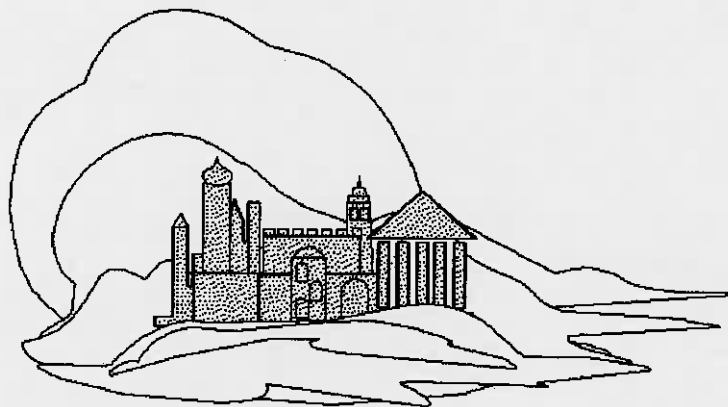


Notes on the Book of Revelation



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1988-89



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EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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1988-89

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OUTLINE for the Book of the Revelation

- I. PROLOGUE: Christ communicating (1:1-8)
 - A. The title
 - B. The agent
 - C. The blessing
 - D. The destination
 - E. The greeting
 - F. The motto
 - G. The authorization

- II. VISION 1: Christ & the churches (1:9-3:22)
 - A. The portrait (1:9-20)
 - B. The letters (2:1-3:22)
 - 1. To Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - 2. To Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - 3. To Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - 4. To Thyatira (2:18-29)
 - 5. To Sardis (3:1-6)
 - 6. To Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - 7. To Laodicea (3:14-22)

- III. VISION 2: Christ & the cosmos (4:1-16:21)
 - A. The scene in heaven (4:1-11:19)
 - 1. The worship before the throne (4:1-11)
 - 2. The commission of the Lamb (5:1-14)
 - 3. The opening of the SEALS (6:1-8:5)
 - a. Seal 1: conquest (6:1,2)
 - b. Seal 2: war (6:3,4)
 - c. Seal 3: famine (6:5,6)
 - d. Seal 4: death (6:7,8)
 - e. Seal 5: martyrdom (6:9-11)
 - f. Seal 6: cosmic calamity (12-17)
 - g. <Interlude: bondservants> (7:1-17)
 - h. Seal 7: silence (8:1-5)
 - 4. The seven TRUMPETS (8:6-11:19)
 - a. Judgement on earth (8:6,7)
 - b. Judgement on sea (8:8,9)
 - c. Judgement on rivers (8:10,11)
 - d. Judgement on heavens (8:12)
Announcement of woe (8:13)
 - e. Judgement on men (9:1-11)
Announcement of woe (9:12)
 - f. Demoniactal horsemen (9:13-21)

- PARENTHESIS: The angel and the seer (10:1-11:14)
 - (The Little Book, 10:1-11)
 - (Measuring the Temple, 11:1-13)
 - (Announcement of woe, 11:14)

 - g. The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

- B. The SIGNS (12:1-16:21)
 - 1. The woman, the man-child, the dragon (12:1-17)
 - 2. The beast from the sea (13:1-10)
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 - 4. The Lamb on Mt. Zion (14:1-5)
 - 5. The angelic messengers (14:6-13)
 - a. The announcement of the Gospel
 - b. The fall of Babylon
 - c. The announcement of retribution
 - d. The announcement of the blessed dead
 - 6. The reaper on the cloud (14:14-16)
 - 7. The vine of the earth (14:17-20)

- C. The BOWLS (15:1-16:21)
 - 1. The song of triumph (15:1-4)
 - 2. The presentation (15:5-16:1)
 - 3. The 1st bowl: sores (16:2)
 - 4. The 2nd bowl: sea turned to blood (16:3)
 - 5. The 3rd bowl: rivers turned to blood (16:4-7)
 - 6. The 4th bowl: heat of sun (16:8,9)
 - 7. The 5th bowl: darkness (16:10,11)
 - 8. The 6th bowl: Armageddon (16:12-16)
 - 9. The 7th bowl: earthquake (16:17-21)

- IV. VISION III: Christ in conquest (17:1-21:8)
 - A. The judgement of Babylon (17:1-18:24)
 - 1. The judgement of the culture (17:1-18)
 - 2. The judgement of the city (18:1-24)
 - B. The response of heaven (19:1-10)
 - C. The conquest of evil (19:11-20:24)
 - 1. The conquering Christ (19:11-16)
 - 2. The destruction of Antichrist (19:17-21)
 - 3. The binding of Satan (20:1-3)
 - 4. The millennial reign (20:4-6)
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- V. VISION IV: Christ in the City of God (21:9-22:5)
 - A. The appearance of the city (21:9-21)
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- VI. EPILOGUE: Christ challenging (22:6-21)
 - A. To obedience (22:6-9)
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 - C. To vigilance (22:16-21)

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 1:1-3

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 1 Oct. 9, 1988

THE CAPSTONE OF GOD'S WORD

Introduction Thus far in 1988 we have emphasized the role in our lives played by the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit (through the pulpit series on the fruit of the Spirit, and I Cor.12-14). Now we shall turn to a book in which the emphasis is on the second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ. The Gospels deal with Jesus' humiliation and death, and this book, written by John the Apostle near the end of his long life, testifies to the GLORIFIED Jesus--the One who has yet to come again to this world; the One who will yet put this world aright and who will rule this old world that we know--and let me encourage you: the Christian's belief that there IS a plan for the world, is not an irrational belief...

The Book of Revelation has much to say to us about the plan for the world. We are going to go through this book together, as the Lord permits, and I will be praying that you will receive two things. They are the two things that sum up the reason the Revelation was given to John: encouragement and challenge. That two-fold purpose is really no different than in any other N.T. writing, except that in order to enable John to encourage and challenge the churches, God allows him to look *behind the scenes*. Revelation is an "unveiling" of the future, and yet written from within old John's real-life circumstances.

My approach will be characterized in several ways:

1. We shall examine every chapter of the book, and go through each carefully and systematically, seeking to discover its meaning and relevance for us. In some places we shall look at particular verses in great detail and in others we shall only look at the broad sweep of the chapter.
2. We shall be conservative in our interpretation and not look for sensational interpretations at every turn. Our charge is to preach the Word, and God's Word is not written to entertain us. It is written to encourage and to challenge us. Revelation is the most unique book in the N.T. and, unfortunately, it has been mishandled all too often in history. It is not an easy book to understand, but it IS understandable! The understanding I hope to give you will be of a straight-forward and conservative nature.
3. We shall be "futurist" in our interpretation since I am convinced that is the correct way to handle the Revelation.

There are a great many fine Christians who do not understand the Revelation as describing the future, but rather the past. While I respect their viewpoint, (and you should too), I want you to understand the assumption of this exposition.

A Little Background...

The Revelation is an exciting book. And to fully appreciate its contents, it is helpful to see a few facts about the book. It was written about 96 A.D. (the end of the first century). Jesus had ascended about 60 years earlier and the Gospel message about Jesus had spread all over the Roman empire. However, all the Apostles were dead except one: John. John was an old man and probably wrote his Gospel, his three letters and the Revelation right near the end of his life.

The Revelation is an unusual piece of literature. It is not a "history" (like the Gospel and Acts). It is not just a simple letter (like most of the rest of the N.T.). It is what we call an "apocalyptic" writing. It is a disclosure of things that previously could not be learned or figured out. God has taken the initiative, in the last months of the life of the last living apostle, to divulge things about the end of the age--but remember: God did it not just to give us something to know, but to ENCOURAGE and to CHALLENGE the churches.

Pondering the Book

The Revelation is the O'Hare Airport of Biblical prophecy. All the strands of the Word of God tie together in this last book. Sixty-five books was not enough. Sixty-six books pulled it together! (S. Lewis Johnson, taped sermon, 1965)

The connections between Revelation and GENESIS are important, too!

Genesis shows the world created. Revelation shows the world passing away.

Genesis shows man's first rebellion. Revelation speaks of his final rebellion.

Genesis reveals how sin entered the world. Revelation tells how it will be banished.

Genesis records the coming of the curse into creation. Revelation tells us when it will be lifted.

Genesis records the coming of death into creation. In Revelation, death is banished.

Genesis tells how MAN was banished from the garden. Revelation promises that redeemed men will be brought back into a garden.

In Genesis, man lost his dominion over creation. In Revelation man's dominion is restored, under the man, Jesus Christ.

The Revelation ties together the Old and the New Testaments like no other N.T. book! Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 allude to the O.T. (though not one direct citation is actually quoted). For example, phrases like (7:17) "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" is a creative adaptation from Isaiah 25:8. Also, numbers like "forty-two months" are used symbolically as they are in the O.T. (see Daniel 9:27).

In Revelation, we will see several themes coming out at us again and again:

1. No human empire can endure--not fascism, not socialism, not even democracy. Only God's government can ultimately endure. His government knows no defect, no corruption, no unfairness.
2. Christ's Kingdom is the only medicine, the only disinfectant for this world!
3. Our future role in His Kingdom should deeply affect our lives in this age, even though His sovereign rule is not fully visible yet.

Revelation 1:1

Notice at the outset that the book is "the Revelation", singular. It was one unit, both FROM and ABOUT Jesus Christ. That is the subject of the book; Jesus Christ. The Father alone has kept the day of Christ's return to Himself (Mark 13:33). And in some marvelous way--which we do not fully comprehend--Jesus received this revelation for the purpose of revealing it to His bond-servants. It is not that Jesus is anything less than all-knowing, for He is surely that.

Do you see whom it is that will appreciate this book? The Spirit inspired John in such a way that he wrote "bond-servants." John was a bond-servant of Rome, we read from some early church fathers; but he viewed himself more importantly as a servant of Jesus Christ. He had committed his life to the ministry of the Gospel. Do you perceive yourself in this way, as a slave of Christ? Many, many people have read the book over the past two thousand years--I venture to say that not many have loved it! It is those people who are bound permanently in their hearts to Jesus, who really receive this book and love it. The deepest things about Scripture seem to be loved only by those who are enslaved by their love for God. The world may speculate all kinds of interpretations of this book. But it is the redeemed who keep its verses close to their hearts, and who appreciate the behind-the-scenes look which the book offers.

The events of the book "must shortly take place," John says. How can that be? It has been almost nineteen centuries since they were put down on parchment or papyrus? Surely then John meant that the events he saw were symbols of FIRST CENTURY happenings, pertaining to Israel... But we know that for the Lord, who is the GIVER of this revelation,

"...a thousand years [is] as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

For God it's only two days ago that He gave this revelation to the servants of His Son. It is a short time indeed, and for Him, the end of the age is right around the corner! It may be only a "moment or two" before Christ comes for us.

Revelation 1: 2,3

John loved this expression "bore witness." I think he lived to see and hear people question whether Jesus really existed. It probably did not take too long for the rumor to start that there really wasn't a Jesus of Nazareth--He was mythical!

That is why John wrote also around this time: *"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life..."* (I Jn.1:1)

John knew what he knew. He longed for others to believe him, to be convinced that what he spoke of, and of Whom he spoke, was real. I can relate to that. I tire, and get angry too, when I hear and read so often that Jesus Christ is not ultimately and truly who the Bible says He is.

And John was a faithful bond-servant, because he repeated all that he saw in this revelation, not only his favorite, or only the pleasant parts. Paul said something similar when he testified to the Ephesian elders,

"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

The servant of Christ needs to have the courage to publicly tell folks ALL that God has revealed. It may not be popular. It may not make money. But it is what owning Jesus as my Lord compels me to do.

In verse 3 we read the first of seven "beatitudes" (blessings) in the book. Again, "the time is near", John says. When we find ourselves in the next age, we will look back, I think, and reflect, "Man! The Kingdom was so close."

A special encouragement is promised for those of John's readers who do three things: those who READ IT, who HEAR IT and who HEED IT--that is, to decide to make daily decisions in light of what you've read and heard. It's not enough just to know the contents of this book. It needs to grip you and I. It needs to impress you deeply, so that you go away from it touched by what you have read, and determined to live as though the things you read may start happening TOMORROW!

What would you do this afternoon if somehow you knew that Christ was going to rapture out the Church from this world at 11:35 a.m., say, tomorrow?

As we begin to unfold this last book of the Bible, let's ask Jesus to burden us to dwell on it--not just for an hour on Sundays, but each day of the weeks we are in this book.

Ultimately, if you have given your life to Christ, you are not a citizen of this world. This society is going to pass. Your membership cards are all going to disintegrate; but if you are depending on the Lamb to be YOUR sacrificial Lamb, your citizenship in heaven is just around the corner. Blessed are all who love the Lamb and who love His Word.

The Seven "Beatitudes" in Revelation

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (1:3).

"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (14:13).

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (16:15).

"Then the angel said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"' And he added, 'These are the true words of God'" (19:9).

"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (20:6).

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book" (22:7).

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city" (22:14).

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 1:4-8

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 Oct. 16, 1988

WHAT THE REVELATION IS ALL ABOUT

Introduction One thing that has always interested me about the Book of Revelation, is the unique language that we read there. When you open your Bibles to Revelation, you read things that appear only there! It is such a fresh book--and in today's portion of the book, there are some exciting things John has written with which we can refresh our hearts and minds.

In verses 4 through 8 of the first chapter, John is going to tell us a few things about US. He's also going to tell us something about the world of the future--specifically, something about the civilizations that are living on the day of Christ's second return.

But MOSTLY what we read about, is some things about God. Specifically, we read *eleven descriptions* about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...

By the way, I believe that Jesus' deity is inescapable in this first chapter. This doxology, or PRAISE, shows Jesus as on an equal standing with the Father. Their praise is interwoven together. To believe that Jesus was NOT God, as many cultists do, and then to read Revelation, is to force yourself to deny what is so plain!

This chapter is about more than just DESCRIBING God though. It is about praising Him. Dear ones, when you struggle to know what to praise God for; when you feel at a loss for words, even though your heart is full of love for Him, then turn to this chapter. It will say the words for you! And praise is good medicine too! It soothes the troubled spirit and mind to dwell on the words that John the Apostle penned so many centuries ago. It is a real encouragement to my spirit to pull back for a few minutes, and to read these words of praise penned by John, but inspired by the very Holy Spirit of God!

The "Envelope" of the Revelation (verse 4, 5a)

We said last week that Revelation is "apocalyptic" (unveiling) literature. Apocalyptic literature is a distinct kind of ancient writing that was very popular in the time of the early church. But Revelation is interesting because it is also an epistle--a letter. And, every letter needs an ENVELOPE, right? Well, what's on the outside of an envelope? The envelope says who the letter is from and to whom it is written. The

"letter" of the Revelation (actually it includes seven different letters: those are what we shall read in chapters two and three) was written by John the Apostle, as we've already noted. It is written TO seven young Christian assemblies in western Asia Minor. These were not the only assemblies in the region, and it is not that Christ had nothing to say to the many other fledgling churches. Probably the seven were representative of all the churches. For instance the assembly of Christ-followers in the port city of Smyrna were being severely persecuted for their allegiance to Christ. But they were not the only church which felt persecution. The letter to them represents what God wanted to communicate at that time to all churches which found themselves in similar circumstances.

The "stamp" on the envelope--that which PAYS for the letter to get to the reader--the thing which MOTIVATES the author--is the greeting, "grace and peace." Grace and peace is a typical early Christian greeting. Paul used it often. Grace comes first. Then, when a person has experienced unmerited kindness from God, he can experience real peace. It is a greeting that is an encapsulating of all our theology. The Bible teaches grace, my friends. It does not teach a theology of earning God's favor by being good, religious or anything else. It preaches a free offer of redemption. Then, and only then can a person--any age, by the way, find peace of mind, peace of heart and spiritual peace with God Himself. It is a good greeting to use!

The return address is simple and fascinating! Three descriptions of God the Father, three of the Son and one of the Spirit. When someone tells you they don't believe in the Trinity, take them here!

This book is from God. The Greek here is unusual and interesting. Literally it reads, "*from the being One, from the was-One [the One Who was] and the coming One*" These are proper names! It sounds so much like when Moses asked God what to tell the sons of Israel when they ask who sent him, and "*God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the Sons of Israel, 'I AM' has sent me to you'*" (Exodus 3:14). And it sounds so much like what Jesus said to the Jews, "*I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless that you believe that I am [literally] you shall die in your sins*" (John 8:24). "I AM" is the name of God. It is a divine name that Jesus often applied to Himself.

Revelation was written by a God who IS... He is the very essence of existence and life--He never grows old. He never becomes out of date or obsolete or used up. As He is now, He always was. As He is now, He will always BE in the future. It is so hard to envision a God who does not grow old. We do not know anything which does not grow old! It's almost like Bob Dylan put his finger on it when he wrote the song, "Forever Young." (Old Bobbie didn't know it, but he was writing some excellent theology, at least in the title of the song!)

God is also coming, He says. The world doesn't think He is around now. But He is coming. He is coming... Verse 7 will say more on this.

The expression "the seven spirits" at the end of verse 4 probably is a reference to Isaiah 11:1,2, wherein the Holy Spirit is described:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord--"

The seven Spirits who are before the throne of the Father would be a reference, in symbolic form, to the different kinds of functions performed by the Holy Spirit.

Then John describes Jesus Christ in three ways, "the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." You know, John lived in days when there was doubting as to whether Jesus really WAS whom the Apostles said He was. Was He really as good as His reputation? Did He really rise from the dead? Is He really more powerful than even Rome? Yes, on all three counts. And the same is true today...

If you have placed your trust in Christ as your Savior, your Lord, your hope, your reason to live, your motto, your first love--and if you sometimes doubt whether your trust in Christ will turn out to have been the right decision...do not fear! He spoke the truth when He first walked the earth and He is the truth now as well, and you will surely ENJOY a vindication of your spirit when you see Him coming again--"Ah yes! My Savior cometh; praise His Name, He was faithful!" This verse has been of special comfort to those saints, some of whom we shall read about in chapters 2 and 3, who have and are suffering for their faith.

The "Doxology" of the Passage (verses 5b-6)

To God and the Lord Jesus Christ be glory and dominion forever! When we received Christ into our hearts--which occurred the instant you trusted Christ personally--you also received Him as your Lord, whether you fully realized it or not. Your life is HIS kingdom. You do not belong to you, did you know that? You belong to your Redeemer, to the One who has bought you with a price, if you have trusted in what He did on the cross by His blood.

Sometimes it is hard to praise God in the way that these two verses do. I do not always want to say, "To you, O Lord, I render the control of my life. To You be dominion--RULE." Nevertheless, because of what He has DONE for us--if we really grasp the significance of what He has done for us--we will desire His rule!

Notice please the PLAN OF SALVATION outlined in these two verses: 1) God's love--present tense; 2) God's plan for release from sin (How? By the transaction which occurred when Jesus spilled out His own precious blood on the Roman crucifixion cross) 3) God's molding us into a domain of priests.

That last part of salvation fascinates me, and it is important that each of you let it get hold of you! You are, each and every true Christian here, a priest of the Living God. You have *direct access* to God the Father. And, you have the priestly function of *interceding* on behalf of others and yourself. This is not because you are not as bad as the next guy, or because you've have done enough "good" deeds to outweigh your bad deeds. It is because through a release from your sins, and the debt you owed, and the guilt they incurred, you have become one of His much-loved children! So, you are a New Covenant priest! Praise God, why would anyone ever want to go back and live like they lived in the Old Testament, with only certain people ordained to be priests and then, their functioning AS priests is imperfect???

What's Going to Happen, and Who's Going to See It (verses 7 & 8)

In this verse, John makes his first (of 278, you will remember) allusion to the Old Testament (Daniel 7:13). Acts 1:9 tells us that when Jesus *ascended* He was received into a cloud. The two angels told those whob looked on that Jesus would return to earth "in just the same way," and here in Rev.1:7 John predicts that fulfillment (as did Daniel some six centuries before).

When Jesus returns physically to the earth everyone will see Him at once. I do not know how that will happen, with half the world's population sleeping at any given time, and many inside buildings or under the sea or underground. But it will be such a startling event, that in some wonderful way the entire population will witness it.

John says that even those who put Him on the cross will witness the second coming of Christ. They will mourn their evil, too--as will everyone when they come "face to face" with the great tragedy of sin, and the need for it to be atoned for...

But the Jews were not the only "Christ-killers"...

My favorite old painting is one done by Rembrandt in 1625. It is called the raising of the cross, and the unusual and moving thing about it is that one of the men raising Jesus' cross up, with the Savior nailed to it, is a self-portrait of Rembrandt himself! Rembrandt saw himself as a Christ-killer. Do you? You are.

John uses a "double-emphasizer" "*Even so. Amen.*" It's as if the old Apostle wants is saying, "It is so, It is so, It is so...and that's the name of that tune!"

John's introduction to the Revelation concludes with a "thus saith the Lord": God is the beginning (*the first letter in the Greek alphabet is "alpha"*) and the end (*the last letter in the Greek alphabet is "omega"*)--why do you suppose that God didn't say, "I am the aleph and the Tav?" Those are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Well, the Revelation isn't primarily addressed to Jews, is it? It is addressed

to Greek-speaking Asians. God knows what He is doing; it's as simple as that. Why are we so often *surprised* though, to find out the Lord knows what He is doing? If He were writing this directly to us, He would say, "Americans, I am (notice the "I AM" again, by the way)...I AM the A to Z."

Again, He is, He was, and He is to come. He is the Almighty. Dear ones, if the Bible is true He is mighty enough to strengthen you. If you have trusted in the One who makes ALL His children priests, then you have access to the throne of grace and find grace to help there in time of need. What are your needs? Go to Christ. Seek Him diligently. He does not ever grow obsolete or tired. He is always fresh, alive. He is evermore the Almighty.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: An Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 1: 9-20

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 Oct. 30, 1988

GETTING READY TO MEET YOUR MAKER

Introduction There's an old timey saying that you don't hear too much on the streets any more: "Are you ready to meet your Maker?" In one sense old St. John was ready, and in another sense he wasn't, when he received the Revelation. He was prepared, and *longing* for the day when either Jesus would return or he would be called home to be with Him. But I don't think he was really ready on that particular Lord's Day so long ago, to see all that he saw...

John was startled! And he is an old man, remember... But young or old, any man would be startled at what John tells us he saw! John was meeting his Maker, but it wasn't for the first time. He had known Jesus so well, and enjoyed an especially close friendship with the Savior. Now, some sixty years later, near the end of his long life, he sees the Lord Jesus once again.

As we get into the remainder of chapter one, I would like you to ponder a simple thought: WHAT IS IT GOING TO BE LIKE FOR ME WHEN I MEET MY MAKER? The Bible states *unequivocally* that everyone human soul in history WILL meet the Lord, whether they all believed in Him or not... Ask yourself today, "WHEN I AM WITH HIM, REALLY WITH HIM--WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE FOR ME?"

The Setting of the Revelation (vss.9-11) John tells us first of all something about himself and where he was, and about the late first century church...

Notice the absence of the title, "apostle." Rather, John calls himself, "your brother..." Though John was an apostle, and, in fact, the last living apostle, he just wants to identify himself simply as a brother. His readers from the Western Asian churches *knew* him and they no doubt knew him well. It is fascinating to me to read the writings of those "church fathers" who lived in the second century. They speak much of John, and one particular leader, named Irenaeus, wrote of his friendship with a man named POLYCARP, bishop of Smyrna, who was a disciple of John's. (We will say some more about Polycarp when we look at the letter to the church at Smyrna--the second letter in chapter two). At any rate, John did not need to defend his apostleship among them at this late date in his life. By 95 A.D., everyone knew who John was.

He tells his readers that he received this unveiling from Jesus Christ when he was on "the island called Patmos." Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea, about 10 miles long and six miles wide. The Romans often used these little islands to incarcerate political prisoners, and quite possibly John was a political prisoner of Rome and banished for a time to Patmos. He tells us that, whatever the particular reason for his residency there, ultimately it was because "of the word of God," (which so often seems to get us into trouble, doesn't it?) and "the testimony of (about) Jesus."

Have you ever noticed how people quite often have trouble saying the name of Jesus without it being a swear word? I'm thinking of one non-believer I know who uses Jesus' name frequently as an expletive, but who cannot seem to bring himself to utter the name of Christ in any other kind of rational discussion. The testimony about Jesus is something that gets Christians in hot water whatever age they live in...

But we sing, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there's just something about that Name...", don't we?

Now, John also tells us something about the Christian life. He says, "Brethren, I'm a fellow partaker, a comrade-in-arms in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance (or *steadfastness*) which we all have as members of the Body of Christ." The Christian life involved trouble, folks, don't let anyone tell you otherwise. When you trust Christ, in a sense, you sign up for trouble. All of a sudden you've got three big and bad enemies that you hadn't necessarily bargained for: the world system, the devil, and your own still-present sin nature. At the end of John's long life, he identified with his readers as comrades-in-arms against some common tribulations--as Christians, we are also subjects of a King. We are not footloose and fancy free, happy-go-lucky, do-your-own-thing free-spirits, if we have truly become disciples of Christ. We have been bought with a price and we are owned by our Redeemer.

But allow, if you will, Jesus' words from another of John's writings to encourage you... "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer [take courage] for I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33)

Dear ones, we are also brothers in steadfastness. I feel a little of this with some of you who have been here in this fellowship as long, or longer than I have. You have persevered for the ministry of the Gospel in Dartmouth. There's some glue between us. We've been through some up times and some down times, and, as Bob said recently, some "side-ways" times... I feel the glue of "fellow-perseverance" with some other brothers whom I have known longer than I have known you. Sandy Young in Culpeper, Virginia; Jimmy Warren in Dallas, Texas; Lorenzo Bean, in Washington, D.C. are men with whom I came to Christ in 1972, and I still enjoy their friendship. There's some stiff glue between us and I value those friendships very much. Even closer yet is the "fellow-perseverance" that I share with that person who is by far my BEST friend, my

wife Renee. She has had to persevere with me and I with her and both of us together for fourteen years so far. The bonds there run deep, my friends.

John had some deep bonds with the men and women to whom he was sending this document--among his first readers, no doubt WAS Polycarp over in Smyrna. He says to them, "You're getting this letter from John, your bro', a brother whom you know well, and with whom you have gone through much together over the years..."

Now in verse 10, John says he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." I think this was probably some especially spiritual frame of mind that he achieved from time to time, perhaps very often. I do not believe it was a trance, or some form of temporary perfection--I think it was a state of spirituality much more normative than that. I think you and I can be in the Spirit just as well today as part of the NORMAL Christian life...

My dear brethren, what a delight it is too, to be in the Spirit, walking closely with Christ ON THE LORD'S DAY. When you're doing well spiritually, and it just happens to hit on Sunday, I think that's great. That would mean that you're in a good frame of mind, prepared to worship, eager to encourage and lift up, of a servant-heart when you come to be with your brothers and sisters here at 52 Morton Avenue!

Well, John, was having a Quiet Time on a Sunday so long ago, and he is startled by something behind him...

Notice a little word that comes up nine times in the next eight verses--and, we're going to see it a lot in later on in this book. It is the word, "like." Behind John, he heard a loud voice that sounded to him like a trumpet--it wasn't a trumpet, but it struck HIM that way.

Now, what does a trumpet sound like? It's loud, clear and a single tone. When the Risen Christ started speaking to old John, He spoke loudly, clearly and distinctly.

In verse 11 John gets his commission: "What you see, John, write it down in a book and send it to these seven churches that I'm going to mention." What Jesus was going to reveal to John, Jesus wanted recorded and understood in the churches. The book would be read IN the churches and, I feel certain, then copied BY the seven churches and preserved.

The sentiment of verse 11 is this: John, get ready. Get comfortable because I, the Beginning and the End, am going to show you some things that will change history. And, I want it remembered by my people.

John Meets His Maker (vss.12-20) Then John wrote that he turned around to see Who was speaking to him. In short, it blew him away. At first, he was terrified (vs. 16). I think John was feeling some things he had not felt for over sixty years. I think his mind went back to that storm on the Sea of Galilee, to the Mount of Transfiguration, to the Resurrection. Each scene at first scared the disciples. And in each instance the Sovereign Christ DISPELS the 'fear and comforts His child.

Dear ones, I want you to know, that when you meet your Maker--the Lord Jesus Christ--if you have depended on His payment on the cross solely, for your redemption, you need not fear Him. Although He is fearsome--He is surely that...

(C.S. Lewis describes the Lord Jesus, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as a Lion who is kind and gentle--BUT, Lewis says, He is not a tame lion...)

To see the Risen Christ face to face will be truly awesome. You will never have felt so alive IN YOUR BEST MOMENTS in this world, as you will feel in the presence of your Maker, face to face. But I feel so reassured by John's realness--I would react no better, no more composed. And I am greatly reassured by Jesus' response to John's terror!

Jesus reassures John with some incredible statements that we read in verses 17 and 18...Jesus conquered death and therefore has the "keys of death and of Hades." My friends, notice two things here: 1) death is a reality from which none escape, but second 2) Hades (Hell) need only be faced by those who have not known Christ personally. Hell is a kind of terrible holding place for the lost. Jesus reigns even there though, since in His resurrection He defeated everything that is terrible about death! Look with me for a moment at something else--something extraordinary--that Jesus said in John's Gospel:

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17,18)

The sovereignty of God, while a terror to non-believers, is the whole basis of comfort to the Christian. When you meet your Maker, you will meet a sovereign Christ Who comforts you even then, because He is alive!

Finally, John describes the Risen Christ and uses what I'm going to call "resurrection language" to address the beginning of the seven letters. Jesus, when we see Him face to face, will not be as any of us imagine, I think. But remember, John himself was still in a mortal state. When you and I see Him for the first time, it will either be in the air or in death. It will be different. I cannot tell you what He will look like exactly for I do not know. But I believe somehow, in the wonder of the Resurrection, we will immediately know Him. There is none like Him.

Verse 19 is a summary of what the whole Book is about--the past, the present, and the future. The world is not now, nor ever has been too attracted to the Christian viewpoint on time. Today, the world would like to immunize itself against a personal God running things and just hold to an *impersonal* Big Bang setting it all up--or, even worse, some would rather serve a knowable devil than seek hopelessly after an UN-knowable or disinterested God (which is the package that liberal Protestantism is selling).

For Christians, we live here in 1988 and until Christ returns, knowing that history is His tool. He is involved in history, indeed ruling it, and everyone shall meet Him--sooner, or later...

Dear ones, Christianity is summed up in this section of Revelation. The faith, in a nutshell, is this: encountering Christ. It is walking with Him daily. It is getting to know His face. It is understanding His will for your life, what He desires to do with you. It is a personal relationship with the Risen Messiah, which does not, should not, and is NEVER intended to grow stagnant or boring! Do you know Him? Have you trusted Him? Have you fled to the cross, by faith alone, and sought His forgiveness for sin? You will meet Him, dear ones. John met Him and received the Revelation. Jesus intended the Revelation to be taken by the angel of each church and expounded--not to "wow" the people, but to serve as a communiqué with His sheep. Praise Jesus, the Living One, the first and the last, the conqueror of death, that He cares so much for us and WANTS us to hear His voice.



LOCATIONS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 4 Nov. 13, 1988

THE EPHESIAN PROBLEM: DEAD ORTHODOXY

Introduction I believe that everyone here today would like to have a joyful walk with Christ. I do not think that, since you are here with us this morning in this room, you WANT a cold or dry Christian experience--I think you want a warm and vibrant relationship with Christ; one in which you find real joy whenever you talk with Him, and where you know--you have confidence that you are pleasing Him and being used BY Him. Isn't that what you desire?

My friends, if you want a vibrant relationship with the Lord, let me assure you on the authority of the Bible that He wants that too! And if you desire it, He will meet you there and fill your cup!

As we turn to Revelation 2 we encounter a striking thing right off the bat! Most people are aware that the Apostle Paul wrote 13 letters to the churches, and that the Apostle John wrote three letters, and the Apostle Peter wrote 2 letters and James and Jude wrote one letter each. But not too many people are aware that there are also seven epistles from Jesus in the Bible. Revelation 2 and 3 contain these seven epistles. They are just as much real letters as those written to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, etc.

Another striking thing about these epistles of Jesus, is that in the Gospels there is only one single mention of Jesus ever writing anything: when He wrote in the sand, and even there we don't know what He wrote...

The seven epistles of Jesus in Rev.2 & 3 were not penned by our Lord however; He dictated them and old John the Apostle wrote them down. Now, on your bulletin back today is a look at how the letters compare. Each letter, with a couple of empty spots, includes six features: An Address, a Commendation, a Complaint, a Command, a Threat and an Invitation and/or Promise.

Just a quick observation, by the way: You will note that two of the churches, the assemblies in Smyrna and in Philadelphia, received no complaint from Jesus and also, therefore, received no warning. This suggests to us that it is possible for a Christian assembly to be doing well in the eyes of the Lord, even if that assembly suffers persecution or other internal trial.

Now, who the angels are, to whom the epistles are specifically addressed (2:1), there is a lot of uncertainty. The Greek word, *angellos* really means simply "messenger". It is possible then, that these letters are addressed first of all to the couriers from each church who delivered copies of the Revelation to their own churches. It might also be a figurative reference to the church at large. It also may be something of a mystifying reference to a guardian angel of each church, although nowhere else in the New Testament are such angels acknowledged. Personally, I think the reference is to the pastor or bishop of each church, although even that option is hard to prove.

At any rate, the first letter is addressed to the church in the large city of Ephesus. In some ways Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor--commercially it was the New York of that part of the world. Politically, it was the Washington D.C. Religiously, it was the Mecca for Diana-worship (also called Artemis, who was a goddess of fertility and greatly worshipped by the pagan majority). Ephesus was an extremely important city and an extremely evil one. John himself lived there most of his life, and Paul lived there three years, more than in any other city.

The Lord Jesus addresses each church a little different. To the Ephesian Christians He spoke as the One who holds the angels in His hand, and the One who walks among the churches. Two applications come out of this, folks:

1. The leaders of a local church are both accountable and protected by the Lord Himself. Being a messenger of the Lord is a serious work and very close to the Lord.

2. Do you think of the Lord as the One who walks in the midst of Dartmouth Bible, Calvary Bible, Hixville, Mullen Hill, 1st Naz., Int.Naz., Hope Evangelical and Crossroads Bible Chapel? (And there are other good churches around too!) He doesn't go from one service to another and He doesn't give preference to one denomination or another. He walks in the midst of all those churches who teach His Word and honor it. He is the Head of the Church and He is right here watching, receiving our joint worship, building His work in Bristol County just as He watched the work of the seven Asian churches, received their worship and built His work there.

Now the Lord said a lot by way of commendation to the Ephesian Christians. In verses 2, 3 and 6 He lays out the good things they had as a church--in short, they were doctrinally pure. Its interesting that Jesus equates *false apostleship*, which is a kind of pretended authority, with evil. The Ephesians were careful to not just accept someone as an apostle just because they said they were. They were also a church who hung in there and didn't give up. They had "stick-to-it-iveness" and possessed backbone and determination to endure for the Name of "Y'Shua messiah".

Also, they hated the deeds of this group of people called the "Nicolaitans." Unfortunately, we are not certain exactly what the deeds or teaching of the Nicolaitans were. It may be that they were *followers*

of Nicolaus, who was one of the first "deacons" of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5), who twisted Nicolaus' influence and became a "denomination" of sorts, and they would use Christian liberty "as an occasion for the flesh," against such Paul had warned (Gal.5:13). This is the idea that since I know Christ, I can live like I please--it was also common to think like this in those early centuries: the human body was evil anyway and only the spirit was good. A Christian, therefore, could do whatever he desired. They had compromised with their pagan society and whether through Nicolaus himself, or his followers, they were infecting other assemblies too. The upshot of it all is what the Risen Christ thought of their deeds--He hated those practices, and the Ephesian Christians stood right there too.

It is noteworthy that Christ says He hates something. Too often Christians get sleepy about matters of holiness. In the Lord's mind, there are no gray areas. A practice, a "deed" is either clean and good, or it is evil. Jesus commended the Ephesian church for its doctrinal purity. Unfortunately, the First Christian Church of Ephesus is just the kind of church that Judas Iscariot would have felt comfortable in. He would probably have found nothing wrong with that church. Doctrinal correctness was their strong suit, and that is very important.

But dear ones, the complaint made by Christ against His sheep in Ephesus is stinging. Compared to the negative critique He made of some of the other churches, this complaint is brief--it's one short sentence. The early love the Ephesians had for Christ, had cooled off. Isn't it a terrible thing that the Lord has to find out that some of His people, whom He had redeemed with His own blood, didn't love Him any more?

My friends, I cannot think of a sadder thing. After all, the Lord just wants us to love Him back since He loves us so much. In his first epistle, John wrote, "*We love, because He first loved us.*" He doesn't ask us to do unreasonable things. He is never arbitrary or mean to us. He is never unfair. He is never stingy and He always delights to meet our needs, whatever they may be. He just longs for us to love Him back.

Do you love Jesus? Do you enjoy spending time with Him? Are you committed to making daily decisions that are pleasing and honoring to Him?

We may be talking about issues of discipline like eating, drinking, and other ways you treat your body.

We may be talking about how you choose to spend your time.

We may be talking about how you choose to spend at your money.

We may be talking about how you speak to your family, and what you decide to do for them, without keeping score.

We may be talking about whether you will take some risks for Him in sharing your faith.

We may be talking about loving Him to the degree that you cheerfully take up some ministry in the assembly here at Dartmouth.

The decisions you make, each day, in all these areas reflect how much you love Him. Many times we are called upon to obey Him with no other enticement than to obey Him out of love for Him.

Loving God cuts across the grain of selfishness. It cuts across the grain of the hurried, frenzied schedules we insist on keeping. It cuts across the grain of our pride. It cuts across the grain of the "right to privacy" that we have come to believe is "inalienable." Loving Christ on a daily basis calls for us to work on our walk with Him. Dear ones, I am here to tell you--contrary to some preachers, I am afraid--there is no easy, magical formula to employ that will automatically make you on fire for Jesus. It comes by developing it, by nurturing your relationship with Him, by setting priorities and remaining committed to them--priorities like having a daily Quiet Time, coming to church every Sunday and preparing your heart for worship. Priorities like giving Him the first fruits, not the last fruits of your time, money and energy. That's the person whom it sure looks like they love their Savior!

Dear ones, I long for this for you. Too many in DBC over the past 20 years left their first love. Many have not, but too many have.

The Lord then told the Ephesians what to do to get back to being on fire for Him like they were as new Christians:

1. Remember. Ponder, even write down some things about how you felt, what you did as a new Christian; the kinds of activity that you took a new delight in!

I can remember as a new Christian a lot of special and new things that were going on in Neil Damgaard's life in 1972. I can remember the first person I witnessed to. I can remember learning new songs. I can remember the first song I ever sung with a guitar in hand as a new Christian--(a black brother named Bill Bolling encouraged me to try "Pass It On.") I can remember those first times around an open Bible with some other brothers on Tuesday night. How we delighted to study Scripture together!

2. Repent. That means "turn around", "change your mind." You may say, "Hey--it's not so easy to change my mind." Sure it is. You just change it. You are a free agent in the universe. Even people who are demon-possessed still have the ability to make some decisions! Change it, turn around.

3. Do the things you did as a new Christian again. What are those things? Do them again. You may say, "I don't have time any more. I'm a busy person, after all. I can't go around spending precious time--and time is money, you know, Neil--on going to Bible studies and making evangelistic visits and visiting the needy and attending church and helping in the church and praying..." You had better go

back to doing the things you delighted in in the beginning.

My friends, when Jesus dictated this letter to the Ephesians, He wasn't dictating it to some monolithic, nebulous, vague organization. Churches are made up of individual church members. The health of a church is nothing more than the sum total of the health of the individuals who worship together as a church. If the individuals are doing well, and on fire, for Christ, then the church is doing well. If most of the people are not, then the church is cold, even if their doctrinal orthodoxy is impeccable.

Look finally please, at verse 7. This is both an invitation and a promise. Jesus invited anyone (who has an ear--that's most people, don't you think?) to listen to God's voice, and to hear His words given directly to the churches. To me, it is nothing short of amazing that the Spirit of the Living God actually spoke to these specific assemblies. Also, I am completely persuaded that He still speaks to His assemblies today through various Biblical means.

The promise is for a banquet from the tree of life in the Paradise of God. The promise is for those who "hang in there" and overcome the tendency to *lose one's first affection and devotion* for Christ. I must say, I do not know really what that is. But the Spirit promised it, and I can only vaguely imagine how incredible it must be!

Do you love Christ? Do you want to really love Him more, say, in the next year? Will you put off the decision to invite the Holy Spirit to perform revival in your heart for another year or two...?

You cannot love Christ if you have not yet trusted in what He did for you on the cross. If you have, then you are His and He longs for your love. Dear ones, loving Him isn't hard. His yoke is easy and He is not one to rub your nose in your defeats. But He wants you to love Him. May the Lord make us a church of individual people who love Him dearly, and who seek His face.

**SEVEN LETTERS
FROM JESUS
IN REVELATION**

E P H E S U S	S M Y R N A	P E R G A M U M	T H Y A T I R A	S A R D I S	P H I L L Y	L A O D I C E A
2:1	2:8	2:12	2:18	3:1	3:7	3:14
<i>An Address</i>						
A C o m m e n d a t i o n	2,3,6	9	13	19	4	8
A C o m p l a i n t	4	14,15	20,21	2		16a,17
A C o m m a n d	5a	10	16a	25	3a	11
A T h r e a t	5b	16b	22,23	3b		16b
An I n v i t a t i o n/ P r o m i s e	7	10,11	17	24-29	5,6	9,10
						20-22
						12,13

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2:8-11

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 5 11-20-88

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Introduction I'm a believer that you can never have too much encouragement for living the Christian life. The enemies that we face; the world, the flesh and the devil, do not go on vacation from their vocation of trying to undo our faith and service to Jesus. I find myself looking for sources of encouragement each day!

The word "encourage" is something of a Christian "buzz word" among us. The word means *to inspire with courage; to put courage into someone else!* There are many occasions when you and I need courage. Courage is not just something that is needed to face a physical enemy. It is also needed to face depression, poverty, illness and loneliness. There are times when a job change, or even LOSS is imminent. Courage is needed then. There are times when people you assumed were friends and loyal to you, *desert* you. Courage is needed then. Teenagers need great doses of courage to stand against peer pressure, and we should be looking for ways to encourage our young people, NOT viewing them as a source of irritation in the church. And dear ones, I do not wish this at all, but there are times, perhaps some coming upon the American Church, when non-Christians, even religious ones, turn fiercely against the community of believers, and courage is needed then especially! I do find myself looking for sources of courage each day. It is delightful to enjoy someone else's encouragement towards me, and to see it go on as a ministry within the Body too!

Well, when we read the second epistle of Jesus in Revelation 2, we are reading a model of encouragement. The Smyrnan Church needed a lot of courage and it must have been a tremendous "analgesic" for them to receive this epistle directly from the Lord Jesus!

Background of the Epistle Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a port city on the western coast of Asia Minor. It was an old city that had been destroyed by neighbors from Lydia in 600 B.C. and then lay desolate until about 300 B.C. when it was rebuilt and began to flourish again. Today modern Izmir (Smyrna) is one of the strongest cities in Turkey. Smyrna became the center for the worship of Caesar in that region. Remember, Ephesus worshipped Diana, the supposed goddess of fertility. Smyrna worshipped Caesar and so the city was thought of less as a cultic religious center and more of a political/patriotic center. It was less of a Jerusalem and more of a Boston! The Smyrnans were fiercely loyal to Rome and at one point, when they heard during a citizens' assembly about one Roman army under a certain General Sulla that found itself in

imminent peril from bitter weather and scarcity of clothes, all present stripped off their garments and sent them right then and there to the legions. Later they won a competition to have the right to build a Temple to the deity of Rome. This was the kind of patriotism to Rome that was known in Smyrna and the kind of city that the young church there had to come to grips with. We shall see how it became a source of great trouble for the Smyrnan Christians...

The Address (2:8) Jesus described himself to the Smyrnans in two ways: as *"the first and the last"* and as the One *"who was dead and has come to life."* The Lord Jesus is the most important Being in the universe. He is more important than the Governor of the State. He is more important than the President of the United States. He is more important than the General Secretary of the United Nations. He is the Winner, the Victor, the Boss and the King. Many people do not acknowledge this. Sometimes even believers are unsure if it is true. Is He the beginning and the ending of your life? There is also the sense here of timelessness. He was around when time itself began. He will still be the timeless Lord of the universe when God draws time, as we know it, to a close.

One of science fiction's biggest fantasies is time travel. Writers have often dreamed about what it might be like if we could conquer time; if we could suspend it somehow, or compress it, or travel *between* various ages in time... But it shouldn't surprise us (although it might), that the Bible addresses the issue of time. The Lord Jesus is the Lord of time. All creatures are subject to the cruelty of time, but He is not. He is the first and the last. The value of Him calling Himself this to the Christians at Smyrna will become more clear in a moment.

Jesus also calls Himself to the Smyrnans, and rather bluntly, I think, the One *"who was dead, and has come to life."* The Greek here is a little more specific than you have in your translations: it is in what we call an aorist-middle and reads, *"He became dead."* Jesus performed His death. It was not taken from Him. He chose to die that you and I might have the opportunity to live forever, clean from the guilt and penalty of sin. Again, we read that the glorious thing, and the thing which I return to when I have doubts, is that He didn't stay dead. He rose from a very dead state! To the Smyrnans this would have been significant for a couple of reasons: 1) Smyrna itself was called "the City that rose from the grave," because it had been "reborn" in 290 B.C. after its destruction three centuries before. The idea of resurrection was not so foreign to a citizen of Smyrna. 2) Because the Smyrnan Christians needed some very REAL assurance that if they had to die because they followed Christ, it wasn't the end of them. Jesus says to those who face death: "I was there, and I came back."

My friends, what is the worst thing that can happen to you? Is it not losing your life? Some of you may say, "No, what would be worse yet would be torture or seeing a loved one tortured." But you or they can recover from torture. There is something very permanent about death. I submit that death is the worse thing that can happen to you. And Jesus has met and defeated the worst thing that can happen to you.

Jesus Understands... (vs.9) In my counseling experience, and in my own life too, I find that one of the greatest emotional NEEDS people have, is to be understood. Many times a crisis going on in a family, say, *passes* once the people at odds come to UNDERSTAND each other. I also see that many times people who are ill do not want other people to pronounce various pious cliché's in their face--what they want is someone to be with them WHO UNDERSTANDS and LISTENS to them talk through their feelings. It is encouraging to me to read that JESUS UNDERSTANDS and *plays back to the Smyrnan Christians* their own trials. The Lord Jesus comprehends the gravity of their situation. He knows the facts of their predicament under persecution, and He knows the feelings they are struggling with. Now Jesus tells the Christians *three things* that He understands about their troubles:

1. *Their tribulation.* He understood their persecution is probably what Jesus means. Persecution is rooted in MISunderstanding. The Gospel message itself is not bad news, it is good news. It is not the sort of thing that should be persecuted. But all too often Christians come under persecution because the Gospel for which they stand, or which they are testifying to has become garbled in the ears of the hearer.

Because they refused to worship Caesar, even by just burning a pinch of incense to his name, Christians in Smyrna were called *atheists*. It is the epitome of misunderstanding and the Lord Jesus understands the tribulation that Christians undergo because they are persecuted and hurt.

2. *Their poverty.* Even though Smyrna was a prosperous town, it appears that the Christians had lost their livelihoods and even their very possessions because of following Christ. Jesus knew it and understood it. This point stands in contrast to what was true of another ancient church (in Laodicea). Cf. Rev.3:17. Some Christians, even some *whole churches* have no concept of what it means to be poor or destitute. But there is blessing there too.

Jesus said, "But Smyrnans, you are rich." Why would He say that? Because the Smyrnan Christians had wealth in the close and mature walk they had with the Savior. What they lacked in possessions or sophistication, they made up for ten times over in the bank account that *really* matters: love of Christ. I do not wish to be part of a church again which is affluent... I find the Christian walk much easier when we must depend solely on Jesus for our needs.

3. *Their foes.* Jesus also understood what the Smyrnan Christians were up against. They had to stand not only against the pagan culture, but against the hostile Jewish community also. Apparently, the Jewish community in Smyrna formed something of an alliance with the secular authorities against the Christians. But this is no reflection on Judaism, as Jesus shows, because those Jews who joined in on the persecution were not really Jews at all. Cf. Romans 2:28,29

The Encouragement (vs.10) Jesus warns them that the persecution had not yet come to an end. Some of them, probably the leaders and the most effective witnesses were going to the devil's jail--probably a reference to real jail, and Satan's conspiracy to hurt them. The "ten days" should probably not be taken literally, but rather as a symbol of a *short time*. Remember, Jesus addressed them as "the First and the Last." Even though time can be cruel--especially when you're hurting, Jesus is waiting for you on the other end of the tunnel. When you're with Him, the time you spent suffering here will have lost its sting. If you stand by your love for Christ, and your trust in Him, He will give to you the crown of life. When we are with Him, eternal life will be our most prized possession, and we will wear it in unspeakable joy!

Its interesting that Jesus encouraged the Smyrnan Christians with the phrase He used so often with His own disciples, "Do not fear." Dear ones, what troubles do you face? Do not be afraid. Is it finances? Don't be afraid. Is it misunderstanding? Is it persecution? Is it fear of being alone and not having anyone who understands you? Do not be afraid. If you have trusted Christ as your own Savior, you are not alone. He is not one to terrify you, and neither should your circumstances be a source of fear. Perfect love, John wrote, casts out fear, and a perfect love is the kind of love for you that Jesus has already proven by dying on the tree!

Finally, Jesus told them that those who persevere will escape the final judgement. He calls it "the second death." From other places in Scripture we know this to be a place called the lake of fire (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8; Daniel 12:3; John 5:29). The second death is not just annihilation. It is an eternal punishment. But the faithful followers of the Lamb need have no fear even of that.

The pastor of the church at Smyrna, in the years just after this letter was written, was a fellow named Polycarp. Polycarp had been a disciple of John himself, and served as the pastor (or *bishop*) of the church at Smyrna for over 50 years. When he was 86 (in about the year 156 A.D.) he was arrested by the authorities for atheism and insurrection against the State. The Church at Smyrna wrote a letter to the church in a city called Philomelium, telling of the affair...

Polycarp died an overcomer. He died a hard death. Many others in church history have died for Christ. Some were no doubt a little afraid at the time. But dear ones, what is the alternative to tribulation for a Christian? Giving in? Compromise? Giving up the faith, that you have cherished for years? No. Safety is not so valuable. May the Lord give each of you, and myself, the courage to face what we face. It is but a little that we face, really, compared to the crown of life.

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

	Christ	Commendation	Rebuke	Exhortation	Promise
<i>Ephesus</i> (2:1-7)	Holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.	Deeds, hard work, perseverance. Does not tolerate wicked men. Endures hardships. Hates the practices of the Nicolaitans.	Has forsaken her first love.	Remember; repent; do the things you did at first.	Will eat from the tree of life.
<i>Smyrna</i> (2:8-11)	The First and the Last, who died and came to life again.	Suffers persecution and poverty.	—	Do not be afraid. Be faithful, even to the point of death.	Will receive a crown of life; will not be hurt by the second death.
<i>Pergamum</i> (2:12-17)	Has the sharp, double-edged sword.	Remains true to Christ; does not renounce her faith.	People there hold the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans.	Repent.	Will receive hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it.
<i>Thyatira</i> (2:18-29)	The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished brass.	Deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance, doing more than at first.	Tolerates Jezebel with her immorality and idolatry.	Repent; hold on to what you have.	Will have authority over the nations; the morning star.
<i>Sardis</i> (3:1-6)					
<i>Philadelphia</i> (3:7-13)					
<i>Laodicea</i> (3:14-22)					

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2:12-17

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 6 11-27-88

PERGAMUM: "LICENSE WITHIN AN ORTHODOX CHURCH"

Introduction A study of Revelation, chapters 2 & 3, necessarily puts us in contact with the ancient world--not through "channeling" but through the study of history. One thing you learn real quick when you study history is that folks back then were not all that much different than folks are today. Today our country includes metropololises as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston and Washington D.C. There are assemblies of the followers of Jesus Christ in each metropolis. The same was true in ancient Asia Minor. In many of the cities there were assemblies of the followers of Jesus Christ. Its interesting to compare our churches to each other today. In Chicago, evangelical Christians have some things they do that may seem a little strange to us. In a southern church there might be some peculiarities too. And to them, they might look on some of our practices as *different* as well... But all churches who love Jesus and His Word are united by the same faith; indeed, one Lord, one faith and one baptism.

The churches of Asia Minor were all evangelical churches too. And they also had regional peculiarities. And, each church had its own problems just like churches today. We have read about the Christian assembly at Ephesus and that at Smyrna. Today we read the epistle (or, letter) that the Lord Jesus dictated to the church in the city of Pergamum. That church had some good features to it and it also had one big problem. Pergamum's Christian assembly was a church that maintained a pure form of doctrine. Their teachings were faithful to the truth they had learned from the Apostles and to the Word of God. Their error however, was in condoning license on the part of some of their members to sin, even though they believed correct doctrine. We hear the opposite error often today: "the person's life is what counts, not what they believe." It seems that churches will often go one way or the other; emphasizing leading good lives, or emphasizing right doctrine. But the New Testament calls us to BOTH! The N.T. calls us to a right creed AND to a right conduct; not one or the other.

Striking a healthy BALANCE between developing right and Biblical *thinking* and making daily *choices* is sort of a what the Christian life is about in a nutshell. For example, I desire to have the right idea about what a Christian home is. I desire to have my thinking straight so that I have good expectations, a proper understanding of everyone's roles, etc. AND I desire to be making choices each day and each week and each month which are pleasing to Jesus Christ and pleasing to my wife and daughters. The choices, after all, really reflect to what my true thinking is committed.

Some Brief Background "If Ephesus was the New York of Asia, Pergamum was its Washington" (Wilcock's Commentary), for that is where the Roman imperial power had its seat of government. They had the earliest temple on the continent for state-sponsored worship of the Emperor. They also had an enormous library (some 200,000 volumes) and a university for medical study. There was a large temple to Athena and a centrally located altar to Zeus (who was called "Zeus the Savior"). There was also a fraternity of cultic priests, centered around a fellow called Aesculapius, whose ministry of miraculous healings was widely known.

By the way, the symbol of Aesculapius was the *serpent*...

So the Pergamene Christians faced a city famous for ministering to the body, the mind and the spirit, as well as adamant in its demand for patriotism to the Roman Emperor. It was a city which beckoned its little Christian assembly to compromise their life-styles in many ways. Unlike our society, where there are everywhere, at least, monuments to the worship of Jesus (hundreds of churches), Pergamum had hundreds of institutions and organizations ULTIMATELY dedicated to the worship of Satan. It is no wonder that Jesus acknowledged that they dwelt near Satan's throne.

The Commendation (vs.13) I can only imagine the fear that would grip a Christian if his church came under severe persecution. How would you feel if one of our members was actually murdered right during some DBC gathering, and just because he was bold in proclaiming Jesus? Imagine what your personal reaction might be...

The One Whose Word is a sharp, two-edged sword, commended the Pergamene Christians for standing the line! They had held firm in their testimony and had exercised courage. It had cost them. Antipas, their brother, lay dead someplace (although surely with Jesus in spirit!).

The Complaint (vss. 14,15) Satanism never ceases to amaze me. People today, too many, have had their thinking clouded to the point that they think Satan is neat. They are even enthusiastic for their witchcraft or magic. They do not see that all Satan is, is one thing. He is a destroyer. There is nothing "cool" or "hip" about Him. He may deceive folks but what He does is kills; and where he dwells there is really nothing but sorrow and despair and tragedy. He had a throne in Pergamum and while he could not defeat the little assembly by persecution or by doctrinal deception, he could get at them through the back-door. Dear ones, that is some of how he works... You and I may be fooled into thinking that as long as our doctrinal beliefs are correct, then it's OK to adopt a worldly life-style in some ways. "Where is the harm in it? Everyone ELSE does it. Why shouldn't I?"

I believe that Jesus is both fully man and fully God. So there's nothing wrong with watching "Night Court..."

I believe that salvation comes only through a complete turning over of my reliance from self to His atonement. So there's nothing wrong with sliding a few bucks by the IRS...

I believe that the Bible is inerrant and wholly sufficient as the Word of God in matters of faith and practice. So it's OK to sneak an extended peak at a foxy girl...

This is precisely the error of Balaam, whom we read about in the O.T. Book of Numbers. Turn once again please, to 2 Peter 2. Here we read the Apostle Peter's commentary on the MISTAKE of following this error.

The Lord Jesus says in Rev. 2:15, "THUS..." and he equates the sin of Balaam, which is licentiousness, with this group, the Nicolaitans. No church is immune from falling into compromise. You and I live in such a sexually and financially decadent society, that we too are prone to compromise if we are not careful. Little jokes with sexual overtones, adopting a cynical attitude about money, gluttony, tobacco, careless use of alcohol, not to mention more overt sins like pornography or drugs--these are the kinds of things that many évangélical churches allow compromise over.

Dear ones, when you pray, do you pray that the Lord would give you a desire for holiness?

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6)

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance" (Is. 55:1,2).

"...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life...I am the bread of life...If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 4:14; 6:48; 7:37b).

Beloved, if the point of this message is not yet clear to you, let me make it clear now. This is a message about holiness. And the lesson is that the Body of Christ, the church, must not tolerate anyone who would lower the standards of truth. It is not that any of us have arrived yet. None of us has. But the standards to which we are committed must remain nothing less than what Scripture spells out. And in this letter to the church of Pergamum, we read the hard words that they had compromised themselves with their secular city. Let it not be so of us.

This doesn't mean that we are to watchdog each other. It *does* mean that we are to EACH INDIVIDUALLY be seeking Christ about matters of personal holiness. If we do that, then our church will have the balance of creed and conduct that the Lord Jesus longs to see in us.

The warning and invitation in verses 16 and 17 we shall look at next week, Lord willing. May the Lord have here in Dartmouth Bible Church a people who are pliable, soft and sensitive to His will. May we be a church that is careful in our thinking, and careful in the daily choices we make as individual Christians.

Arthur W. May

Question: When you are with Christ in heaven, how do you envision that He will address you?

Intro. The letter to the Christian assembly at the city of Pergamum (now in NW Turkey) is the third of seven letters that the Apostle John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 2:14 & 15 the Lord Jesus rebukes some members of the Pergamum church, for various doctrinal aberrations. Then He gives the warning that repentance from these doctrinal errors is all that will preserve them from "war...with the sword of my mouth." Now in verse 17, Jesus extends an INVITATION, which is phrased in such a way as to apply to US as well. We are not in danger of the exact same doctrinal mistakes as the Pergamum church had toyed with, but we can *rely on the same promises* that were given them!

Note: Actually, all modern doctrinal errors are just redressings of ancient doctrinal errors. The truth never changes, and really, neither do the distortions of the truth...

The verse has four parts: a CONDITION, two PROMISES, and a brief description of the second of the two promises:

1. The CONDITION: "*To him who overcomes...*" This is ultimately the definition of a genuine Christian. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Never are we overcomers, but we overcome by His shed blood. We know that the victory was won already by Christ and not by ourselves. In context, the overcoming means remaining true to Christ and resisting false teaching. POINT: Those who are truly Christ's will overcome, and inherit many promises--but sometimes the process of persevering involves real trial.

2. The First PROMISE: receiving of "*the hidden manna...*" To better understand what Jesus is referring to, let's look at John 6:32-35. In our day, as in ancient days around Pergamum, Christ is hidden--He is and was misunderstood and misrepresented. When you and I fellowship with Him, through His Spirit, we are feeding on Him, enjoying the influences and comforts of the Spirit, letting us "taste something of how saints and angels live in heaven" (*Matthew Henry*).

? What are some of the benefits (spiritual food) of fellowshiping with Jesus Christ?

3. The Second PROMISE: "*a white stone...*" There are many, many suggestions in the commentaries as to what Jesus means here (I counted nine interpretations). Perhaps the most likely explanation is as follows:

The people of Asia Minor, to whom John was writing, had a custom of giving to intimate friends a *tessera*, a cube or rectangular block of stone or ivory with words or symbols on it--it was a private and personal possession of the recipient, and indicated the friends abiding affection. Here, it indicates the overcoming believer's ACCEPTANCE and being favored by Christ, a wonderful assurance, especially for those rejected or persecuted outside.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2:16,17

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson ~~B~~ Dec. 4, 1988

THE HAPPINESS OF OVERCOMING

Introduction Do you find saying "No" to temptation or sin difficult? For the past couple of years there has been a national anti-drug campaign and the slogan has been, "Just Say No." Now I go along with that in theory. Taking drugs is not forced on hardly anyone. It is a *choice* that people make. It may be induced by peer pressure or some other reason, but still it is a choice. So, to exhort people, "Just say No" seems pretty good, because its so simple. But actually the most basic underlying reason people compromise themselves (be it with drugs or drink or lust or anger, etc.) is because they are sinful--they have a "breeding problem": they were born with a sin nature, and they can't seem to rid themselves of it.

When a person flees to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, he is given a NEW nature and the ability--FOR THE FIRST TIME--to not sin, if he chooses not to. But even after coming to Christ and being born again, the fight with various sinful tendencies is still there, is it not?

Personally, I do not believe that there is any special incantation you can invoke, any series of church meetings you can go to, or any magical prayers (by yourself, or by anyone else) that will "zip-zap" free you up from a sin. Freedom comes by consistently seeking the Lord and by REPLACING the habit with a greater love for Jesus than your love for that sin...

Well, the church at Pergamum was being warned by Christ to stop compromising with sin. They were doctrinally sound, which is good. They were courageous and faithful to their stand for Christ, and that is very important. But they were letting the devil and sin slip "in the back door" by a growing number of members who were compromising themselves. "Everyone's doing it, what's the harm in it?" In short, God's people are to look and BE different than the society in which they live. They are to be a group of people who are making daily choices that are honoring to Christ, whether or not they meet with society's approval.

Jesus sent a warning to Pergamum. Verse 16 is that warning. Notice to whom Jesus directs the threat--"them". It is not too much fun to contemplate finding one's self fighting against the Risen Christ. But he has enemies even in churches, and the Pergamene church leadership needed to somehow root out this church-wide compromising with sin, and effect a church-wide repentance.

There IS GRACE in the patience of the Lord. Obviously a fair amount of compromising had gone on already, and the Lord has waited...weeks, months perhaps. But He doesn't wait forever. He told them, "I am coming to you quickly..." Most churches, unfortunately, unless they are very, very careful, lose their effectiveness eventually. People get tired of fighting against sin; folks grow impatient with each other; they get bored with the business of ministry. Unless the members of a church are working to enjoy a FRESH WALK WITH JESUS, daily, the church walls will fall in sooner or later.

But this letter does not end with the warning. It ends with an incredible promise. Verse 17 is the promise, dear ones.

Again, I ask you, do you find saying "No" to temptation or sin difficult? What motivation do you need, beloved, to choose tomorrow NOT to verbally lash out at your mate? What motivation do you require this Friday evening NOT to watch three hours of network garbage? What motivation do you need next Saturday morning to spend a few minutes in prayer and Bible reading?

The fight against sin is just that--a fight. You may come out feeling bruised or cut up sometimes. Fighting against sin takes effort, although, if you are not yet a Christian you can't defeat it anyway--only through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit can you even MEET the dragon of sin-habits on the battlefield... But in fighting compromise with sin, I want you to remember these words of Jesus in verse 17!

First, He directs the promise "To him who overcomes." Overcoming is an idea that the Apostle John mentions a lot. PAUL mentions faith a lot. John mentions VICTORY, or, "overcoming" a lot.

Jesus stated His own VICTORY over the world in John 16:33.

John acknowledged various VICTORIES to some of the younger Christian men he knew in I John 2:13 and 14.

And then John says what the cause of Christian OVERCOMING is anyway...in I John 4:4--the One who dwells right inside of Christians, God's Holy Spirit, is MORE POWERFUL than the evil one who dwells in the world, who desires to devour us and see our defeat.

Dear ones, now this: overcoming IS possible. Complete victory over ALL sin will not happen until you are in the Savior's presence; but SOME victories can be yours here. As you grow in Christ, you will see some change. You will notice, if you look hard enough, OVERCOMING in some areas.

You may not be satisfied yet. You may not have dealt with all the areas yet, that you think should have been squared away--you may STILL fall into that carnal trap from time to time. And I need to say to you, "cut it out." But dear ones, know that all true Christians are *in the process* of learning to make right choices, and gradually overcoming more and more.

Verse 17 holds a striking promise. First Jesus says the overcomer, the VICTOR will receive from Him "of the hidden manna."

In the first century it was believed by many that Jeremiah the prophet had actually taken the ark of the covenant and hidden it just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians six centuries before. Since the ark of the covenant had within it a pot with some of the original manna from heaven from Moses' day, it may be that idea that Jesus is playing on here. In John 6:32-35 Jesus said that HE is the true bread from heaven.

Dear ones, which would you rather have: a bowl of lemon Jello, or a bag ol' slab of chocolate cake with a side of say, Rocky Road ice cream?

Overcomers enjoy knowing Christ, walking with Him, feasting on HIS goodness. Overcomers, who long after the mysteries of Christ, will delight themselves in nourishment that FAR OUTSHINES the temporary pleasures of the flesh. Overcomers will enjoy nourishment that is hidden from the world, too.

There are many benefits we enjoy through walking closely with Jesus. There is FREEDOM from guilt. There is freedom from the FEAR OF DEATH. There is the knowledge that each morning when I wake up, the Lord's MERCIES ARE NEW AGAIN FOR ME. There is JOY. There is PEACE OF MIND AND CONSCIENCE. There are all the benefits of the ASSEMBLY WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. There is RENEWED COURAGE when I need it, from walking closely with the Creator Himself. There is WISDOM FOR DECISION MAKING, and the grace of seeing the world from GOD'S PERSPECTIVE...

There is something *else* here to make overcomers happy. It is "a *white stone*..." There are many, many suggestions in the commentaries as to what Jesus meant here (I counted nine interpretations). Perhaps the most likely explanation is as follows:

The people of Asia Minor, to whom John was writing, had a custom of giving to intimate friends a *tessara*, a cube or rectangular block of stone or ivory with words or symbols on it--it was a private and personal possession of the recipient, and indicated his or her friend's abiding affection. As Jesus promised it to those who overcome, it indicates the believer's full ACCEPTANCE and being FAVORED by Jesus--that is a wonderful assurance! The stone is WHITE, the color of heaven.

The NAME on the stone testifies that we are a "peculiar inheritance" throughout eternity. The Lord Himself will give us new names: what an *exquisite* thing--on believers who overcome. With the new name, the stone is like a "surety" of entrance to the Messianic banquet yet to come.

As we gather around His Table to remember His death for us, and His resurrection which is the bedrock of victory, let us REJOICE. Let's enjoy this morning the goodness of the Lord, and determine out of love for Him who first loved us, to overcome what confronts us.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 2:18-29

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 7 Dec. 11, 1983

TOLERANCE IN THYATIRA

Introduction A friend of mine told me this week that he was recently driving on Route 1 between Portland and Bangor, Maine. He said he counted seven large, beautiful old churches in that distance--none of which were still operating as churches. One was an office building, another a condominium, another karate studio, and so forth. What do you suppose happened to those congregations? I do not know for sure, but I suspect that as with hundreds of churches which USED TO be alive and vibrant with the ministry of the Lord Jesus, they died. Their people grew cold, or just old, and they ceased bringing new souls into their assemblies, and they got tired and just died.

Another way that some churches die is when they begin to tolerate teaching within their midst which is contrary to God's will. False teaching is sometimes morally related, sometimes doctrinal, but it will always kill a church if it is not checked. It is not that we should become paranoid about false teaching. But we need to be sober-minded and realize that when truth is twisted, even subtly, it is a cancer in a church. The Church of Jesus Christ thrives on the good meat of the pure Word of God. But the Body grows diseased when that good meat is poisoned by false teaching. There are many, many kinds of false teaching that can creep into a good church. One that has rotted out many New England churches is called rationalism. Rationalism is basically the idea that REASON is the basis of knowing what is right and what is not right. Rationalists are not much interested in a supernatural God who intervenes in creation, or who speaks through Scriptures. They view man not generally as fallen but as unenlightened. Rationalism sounded pretty good to many American preachers 150 years ago, and so began a long slide of the church. As seminaries and preachers went, so eventually went the people in the pews. They slowly came to tolerate false teaching...

In the ancient church, the same process was taking place, even only 50 years after Jesus' ascension. The Apostles had planted churches everywhere, and the message of redemption and grace was spreading like wild-fire! But many pagan ideas were seeping into the Asian churches almost as fast as they were growing. The tendency in churches seems to be this: UNLESS THE MEMBERS ARE VERY, VERY CAREFUL; SOONER OR LATER THE CHURCH WILL MUTATE, AND THE MUTATION WILL NOT BE PLEASING TO CHRIST.

Thyatira was a textile city (Acts 16:14,15). It was not the most important city on the Asian sub-continent, but strangely this letter to the church there from the Risen Christ is the LONGEST of the seven letters. He has more words for this assembly than for any of the other churches. Let's begin to examine Jesus' assessment of this church.

Now the letter is like the others: it has a description of Christ, a Commendation, a Rebuke, an Exhortation and a Promise.

The Description of Christ (2:18) Three things, Jesus says about Himself to the Thyatirans. First of all is His deity. Let us not never forget Who our Savior is. He is God. He is not, partly God. He did not represent God. He did not become God. He IS God. Period. Many of the cults of our day dispute this fact. But Jesus identifies Himself to this Church as the Son of God. That title could belong to no one if they were not of the same nature as God the Father.

Second, when Jesus Christ fixes His gaze on the world, it is with a dazzling holiness and power that no created being can dispute His judgments. There is now, and we shall see in the age to come with our eyes, a brightness and purity in Jesus that I believe we have all longed to experience with our own eyes. We walk by faith in this age, not by sight. But just because we don't yet see Him with our optic nerves, or hear Him with our ears, doubt not that He is glorious!

The Commendation (2:19) Christ LISTS what He enjoys and approves of in the assembly at Thyatira. They were a good church, and I am sure that you would have enjoyed being a member there. Good works, love, faith, serving one another, stick-to-it-ive-ness and hanging in there, were all present in that assembly. Its the sort of *resume* we would like to be able to present to the Lord, right?

Before we consider the rebuke, let's dwell for a moment on this positive note--Nearly every Christian church has some good things about her. And these good things in Thyatira are not "small change." These are all qualities that receive much space in the New Testament. In fact, whole great sections of Paul's letters were devoted to showing the NEED of one or another of these qualities in various churches. The Church at Corinth struggled with love and service. The churches in Galatia struggled with understanding the sufficiency of faith. The Hebrews were considering tossing in the towel altogether and going back to Judaism, and so they received a letter filled with material on perseverance. And here in Thyatira is a church that had ALL OF THESE qualities in measure! It was a good church.

The Rebuke (2:20-24) The problem was that this assembly had a blind spot. They tolerated a woman, and I think it was an actual person, whom Jesus called Jezebel. Now according to I Kings in the O.T. Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, a king of Israel. She was one of the most evil characters in the O.T. who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal. She also killed many prophets and tried her best to kill Elijah. She was the epitome of subtle corruption and a symbol of immorality and idolatry.

The "Jezebel" of Thyatira had the same kind of influence on the church there. She broke down all boundaries of moral separation from the wicked world, and EVEN THEN, Jesus said, He gave her time to change her mind and turn around.

My friends, churches today often compromise on moral issues. It is true that some issues take time to wrestle with and come to clear convictions. But most things we fight against are not fuzzy; they are clearly right or wrong. It is God's calling to us to be a light in North Dartmouth for what is right. Our sphere of influence may be yet small, but people should think of 52 Morton Avenue as a place where 1) the true God is worshipped and 2) where RIGHT is upheld.

A Note on Idolatry: Does the idea of idol-worship seem foreign and far removed to you? Remember that idolatry is nothing more than ANYTHING which comes between you and God. Anything which becomes more important to you than the Lord becomes as idol...

Another aspect of Jezebelism is the move to MODIFY the truth. Again, this is why a cult is a cult. A cult has rejected some significant aspect of Truth, and substituted another novel idea.

Dear ones, BE suspicious of anything new. I hear new ideas all the time and when they come out of a religious organization I immediately grow suspicious. YOU AND I need to be fresh and full of the Spirit, but that does not mean that we are constantly figuring out new TRUTH.

Dr. Charles Hodge was a Presbyterian theologian at Princeton Seminary for many years in the last century. He is one of the greatest systematic theologians of our era. Dr. Hodge said something near the end of his life that has stuck with me. He said, "I am thankful that in 50 years of teaching the Bible, I have never taught one single new idea--I just keep teaching the same old ideas over and over again..."

Notice at the end of verse 23 there is a principle that we want to forget maybe, but we must try to remember: we sow what we reap. We are going to realize that the kinds of seeds we put in the soil of our day to day lives are going to bear fruit. That has both good and happy implications, and it has sad ones...

The Exhortation and The Promise (2:25-29) Hold on to what you have, Christians. You may feel like you don't have enough maturity yet, but look at what you DO have--hold on to it. Mark your progress in the Christian life so far, and maintain that! Are you strong in the LOVE and SERVING department? Stay strong in those ways. Maybe you're not too loving all the time, but man, you're FAITHFUL--true blue! Hold on to that! Don't go backwards in 1989 and 1990--maintain your ground and maybe even GROW, STRETCH and mature further as a disciple of Jesus!

The promises in these letters are exciting. In some way, Christians will rule in the age to come. Jesus didn't reveal a job description, but a role in ruling is coming. Also, there is this wonderful verse 28!

The reward for overcoming is HIMSELF! Let us never lose sight of what its all about, dear ones. Its not pie in the sky that we're looking forward to-- its being with the morning star personally, in reality, by SIGHT! Even so, amen!

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 3:1-6

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 9 Jan. 8, 1988

SOUND? OR SOUND ASLEEP?

(The Letter to the Church at Sardis)

Introduction Most public organizations have some kind of reputation. The Police Department in each town has its reputation. Our local supermarkets guard their reputations carefully. When I say "Stop And Shop" some of you immediately think "Yo!" while others probably think "No!" Its reputation either makes or breaks a restaurant, right? I say to you "Davey's Locker" and what is your reaction? Or, "Freestones"; or "McDonald's--State Road..." Churches have various reputations too. If I say to you, "Calvary Bible Church," what is your reaction? If I say, "Hixville?" If I say, "St. Julie's" If I say, "Smith Mills Congregational?"

Every church has a certain reputation--they are known in the outside world for certain things. If you lived in Dartmouth and heard "Dartmouth Bible Church," what would you think? What do we look like to the community and what do we look like to the OTHER churches in the area. Churches are known for several kinds of things: their activities, their pastors, what their buildings and grounds look like, their value in the neighborhood, what they do in Christian Education, their creativity, and their doctrine. Another criteria that folks often discuss, is how much LIFE there seems to be in a church.

About a year ago I was talking with a nearby resident who doesn't attend this church. It was interesting to me that he made the comment that he knew we were really "trying". He told me that he saw a lot more cars coming (and parking) and that there seemed to be much more life here. I made a mental note of that, because I very much want us to have a reputation for being an ALIVE church. Conversely, another outsider flatly commented, about a year and a half ago, "Well, the Holy Spirit sure isn't here." And that hurt.

Now reputations are not what make or break a church. We aren't selling anything, and we don't need the approval of the community. We are here, together, to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, to understand His Word, the Bible, and to comfort and encourage one another. Those are the reasons why there IS a 52 Morton Avenue, and those are the only reasons!

But reputations usually are built on some mixture of fact and fiction. A church might look ALIVE, and truly BE alive. (I'm going to show what I mean by "alive" shortly...) Or, it might look alive and NOT really be alive; or, it might look alive and still be breathing, but is really dying. Which of those are we?

Two thousand years ago there was a Christian assembly in the Asia Minor city of Sardis. Sardis was a very old Asian city, famous for its high standard of living, a city of "softness and luxury" (A.T. Robertson). It was what we might think of as an "Old World" city--a "contrast of past splendour and present unresting decline" (ATR). The Christians in Sardis were not persecuted and as far as we know their church was not struggling with internal heresy. Today all that is left of Sardis is the village Sart, amidst the Sardis ruins--it is interesting to note however, that the remains of a very early, post-apostolic Christian church building have been found, and that it is known that the church there lasted until the 1300s, although it was never considered of much importance. Compared to Sardis' sister churches, the Sardinian church lived in relative ease. And yet along with the assembly over in the city of Laodicea (letter No.7), it was blamed most of ALL the seven churches.

Now in verse 1 we have Jesus' ADDRESS to these Christians. Again He identifies Himself with the Holy Spirit--the "seven Spirits of God" (Cf. Isaiah 11:1,2) He also mentions, in symbolic language once again, that He is sovereign OVER the seven Asian churches--over their "stars", whether this refers to the churches or to their pastors we cannot be sure. He says,

"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

My friends, the Sardinian Church had a reputation for being alive. Other PEOPLE thought of them as a vibrant, growing Christian assembly. Maybe even some of the apostles thought so--but the Head of the Church says that, in fact, their reputation did not match REALITY. The Head of the Church, their very REASON for existing, assessed them as being DEAD.

Now what IS a dead church? Is it a church in which there is no activity? Is it a church where there is no preaching from the Word of God? Is it a church that just has a few people in the pews? We tend to think of a "dead church" as one with those characteristics. But a "dead" church and an "apostate" church are two different things. An apostate church is one where they have rejected the basic truths of Scripture that God has revealed, where they have turned away from Christ. A church may have fully orthodox doctrine, lots of people attending and a whole array of activities. It may have several functioning boards and committees. It may have a delightful music program. It may have a beautiful facility. It may have ALL those things, and be dead.

A dead church is one where Jesus Christ is no longer sought after by the individuals IN the church, or not sought by MOST of the members. It is a church where the individual people have, one by one usually, made spiritual and moral compromises--probably not DRAMATIC at first--and have slowly fallen out of daily fellowship with Jesus. The CUMULATIVE EFFECT is to kill the church. The individual people might each and every one have fool-proof excuses for no longer personally walking with the Savior, but the effect is to slowly kill the church. Regardless of its reputation, regardless of its outward appearances, regardless of its financial solvency, as the Head of the Church calls it, it is a lifeless form, a corpse.

Evangelicals sometimes like to point at liberal churches and say, "See?? Dead." But we must look at ourselves today. Are we alive? Are MOST of our people walking closely with Christ on a daily basis, making specific decisions which are pleasing and honoring to Christ?

Jesus told the Sardinians to do two things in verse 2: to WAKE UP. That's pretty clear, isn't it? It is possible to be sound, but to also be *sound asleep!* Wake up. Open your eyes. Wake up. Come out of the dream-world of sin, Jesus says to that's church's members. Wake up! And then He told them to "*strengthen the things that remain.*" What did He mean by that?

He said that the GOOD THINGS they DID have, were about to get swallowed up by the bad things--the good things that WERE GOING ON in the Sardis assembly were "*about to die...*"

If you can imagine with me, a church which has been sick for a long time... They still hold a weekly prayer meeting, but it is attended by only a handful. OTHER church activities are well attended! The Church Supper Committee has lots of organizers and helpers. The Building Committee has all the smart and wealthy folks participating. But that weekly prayer meeting--the one meeting that is probably most precious to the Head of the Church Himself, has just a few, struggling, maybe discouraged saints who are faithful to it... That prayer meeting is being swallowed up by all the other church activities.

Its the things that GOD SAYS ARE PRIORITY, that YOU should be the most committed to! We should be working to PROP UP. Outreach, Body-Life, Worship, Christian Education and Prayer. Those are the business of the church. Let's have an UNofficial but church-wide DBC campaign to *strengthen the important things!* Will you join up? Are you interested in being truly alive?

Dear ones, sometimes we're kind of wobbly. We need YOU to prop us up. "If you have some REALITY and some VITALITY, come on in!" (S. Lewis Johnson)

In verse 3 the Lord Jesus commands three other actions of this dead church, if they want to escape oblivion--

1. "*Remember therefore what you have received and heard...*"
2. "*keep it...*"
3. "*repent.*"

The path to revival from deadness is to "remember." It is to sit down someplace and PONDER what the core of Christianity is all about. It isn't THIS PLACE. It isn't one kind of religious activity or another... It is JESUS CHRIST and His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. It is the power of the resurrection that you felt for the first time when you first trusted Him. Do you remember that? Do you remember the time when in your heart you reached up a filthy hand to receive eternal life from Jesus?

Then Jesus told them to HOLD ON TO THOSE THINGS--they were NOT imaginary. You didn't make them up. Dartmouth Bible Church didn't invent them.

Then Jesus told them to TURN AT ONCE! In Greek, "repent" is the aorist active imperative of the word, *metanoēō*. It means TURN AT ONCE. Act on your remembrance of the past. Don't say, "Well, I'll think on it." The Athenian philosophers "thought on it," to their destruction!

Its interesting to me that Jesus then acknowledged that there were in Sardis a FEW Christians who had not compromised morally "who have not soiled their garments." In fact He says, "You have a few names in Sardis..." (verse 4). They will not just walk in white, which would be neat enough--but the promise gives to those specific people, is that they will walk WITH HIM in white.

Real Christians will be forever WITH the Savior, white LIKE Him, bathed in His righteousness and love. This is not hallucination. It is the promise of Scripture, and as you know, we have put the whole bankroll, as it were, on the conviction that the Bible is worthy of belief--it is reliable in its promises!

The reference in verse 5 to "white garments" is probably an illusion to the resurrection bodies we will receive from the Savior.

I'm not going to press this illustration--but think on this for a second: When you see the color BLACK, really what is happening is that you are looking at something which ABSORBS all other wavelengths of light--it sucks all light in. But in WHITE LIGHT what is happening is that the object you're looking at is REFLECTING all wavelengths of light. Our resurrection bodies will fully reflect all the beauty and wonder of heaven, the land of the Lamb!

Finally dear ones, that there IS such a thing as a divine register of names, I have no doubt. It first occurs in Exodus 32:32, is frequently mentioned in the O.T. and is also in Luke 10:20; Phil.4:3; Rev.13:8; 20:15 and 21:27. I cannot articulate the answers to all the philosophical and theological questions folks HAVE ABOUT that "book of life." What is important to see here--the person who hangs in there is promised that his name will not be erased. Whatever else can cause erasure, PERSEVERANCE absolutely immunizes against erasure.

Sometimes Christians get a little weary of the battle. Don't get too weary, dear ones. Don't get TOO discouraged so that you toss in the towel and say, "I'm gonna go do that..." Dear ones, remain faithful to the Lamb. Seek Him. Strive after pleasing Him. Enjoy His faithfulness to you, because He will confess your name before the Father Himself.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Series: Exposition of Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 3: 7,8

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 10 Jan. 15, '89

"AN OPEN DOOR AND A LITTLE POWER" (The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia)

Introduction Ask yourself this question: "Have I truly been born again and have I truly met Christ in my heart?" Now, ask yourself this question: "Do I feel good about being a Christian--do I feel positive about this way of life?"

For Christians today, I feel a great trend at work in American society to make us feel ASHAMED and depressed about being followers of Jesus. Let me illustrate:

- the *resistance* many of us face from family members and work associates, because you believe the Bible (and try to live for Christ).
- grief over *misunderstanding* by non-Christians (we "seem" to them narrow-minded, weak-minded,
- the *mistakes and scandals* entered into by prominent Christian celebrities.
- the EXCESSES/LOP-SIDEDNESS that characterize some ministries, that you feel apologetic about.
- a loss of the *joy of the Lord*, and seeing Him work daily in your life.

These are just some of the reasons why Christians seem to feel BAD about being Christians. Also there are other kinds of set-backs which can get you down...

Even looking at most of these letters to the churches in Revelation can be kind of depressing, because they spell out so many pitfalls that churches are capable of wandering off into.

But today we're going to look at a letter from Jesus to a church that was DOING WELL. I want you to feel good about being a Christian, about the things the Lord is doing and the things He PROMISES. I hope you'll leave here today encouraged about your future as a disciple of Jesus and about being part God's work at this assembly. First of all, as in all the letters, Jesus describes something about Himself:

Who Jesus Is (verse 7) Jesus is preeminently qualified to call us to live for Him, because He is the holy One, and the One who is always true. Know this dear ones, the Head of the Church is always righteous in what He does. If He ends the lives of some (as we read about in the Old Testament), it is righteous. If He elects some to salvation and passes others by, it is righteous. If He disciplines you or I to get our eyes back on Him, it is righteous. As you follow Him and seek to discover His plan for your life, it may not run according to all YOUR expectations or desires, but He is still righteous. Folks, let God be God!

Also He is true. What He says is true. If He says He specially created the world, He's being honest. If He says the love of money is the root of all evil, He's right. If He says there's only one way to get to heaven, through trust in His sacrifice on the cross, then's that's the ONLY way to reach heaven with your sins paid for.

"As the One who is true, Christ is the Author of truth in contrast to all error or false doctrine. In the midst of so much that is false and perverted [in 1989], Jesus Christ stands alone as the One who is completely true" (John Walvoord, *The Revelation*, p.84)

You and I must commit ourselves to both holiness and to truth. I regularly hear people advocate one without the other. "Let's go be monks and escape the pollution in the world"-- that's an attempted holiness, devoid of the truth that God calls us to stay IN this world and become its salt and light. Or, "Let's study theology, and never mind whether it transforms our hearts and renews our minds or not." That's truth devoid of holiness. The One who addresses the churches, the churches' Head, is both holy AND true.

There is a verse in the Book of John that I think is one of the most crucial things Jesus said in all four Gospels. He said it to the woman at the well in John 4 (23,24): "*But an hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*"

He is also Israel's Messiah, having the "key of David," and a SOVEREIGN Messiah at that! When He opens a country, a city, a church, an individual HEART for the truth, no one can shut it. And the reverse is true too!

Perseverance Breeding Opportunity (verse 8) Jesus knows all about the Philadelphian Christians. He knows that they kept His word, that they maintained the system of doctrine delivered unto them by the apostles; and that they didn't deny His name.

Can you imagine yourself denying that you are a Christian? Probably not. But how often do we use His very name in public? His names are real important in Scripture. He mentions it here in verse 8 and again in verse 12. Do you actually speak openly of His Name in public? There are two words we *might* use and neither is a name, they are titles: "God" and "Lord"; both of which could be used by a good Moslem! The Philadelphians, in a society much more explosively against the name of Jesus of Nazareth (especially around the Jews), were not ashamed of the name "Jesus."

Billy Graham recently told this story: "We met an American woman teaching English in China. She told us of taking a little holiday in the mountains of southern China. As she went up the mountains to the place they were going, she passed an older man sitting alongside the road. 'The Lord spoke to me about speaking to him,' she said, 'but I didn't do it.' She prayed the whole time she was up on the mountain on holiday that the old man might be there when she came back. She felt guilty. So on the way down she saw him. She went over and told him about [Jesus] Christ. The old man said, 'You know, I've prayed to him all my life, but I didn't know his name.'" *Christianity Today*, 11/18/88, p.20

Now verse 8 was powerful medicine for the Philadelphian Christians and I feel strongly that it is for us too! The Philadelphians found themselves standing in front of an "open door" that Jesus had placed there; or rather, that in His sovereignty they were placed in front of!

What was the "open door?" Was it just a vague, general expression for "opportunity?" I think there was more, and I think the explanation is geographical.

Philadelphia lay at the upper [end] of a long valley, which opens back from the sea. After passing P. the road along this valley ascends to [Phrygia] and the Great Central Plateau, the main mass of central Asia Minor. P. was the keeper of the gateway to the plateau...It is significant that the testimony of this church continued through the centuries, and as far as we know, lasted longer than any of the other six churches--until the 13th century, in fact, when the Seljuk Turks swept in and brutally murdered all the believers who were left. It was also a missionary church. It is the belief now that Christianity penetrated into India as early as it did because this church had sent out missionaries. (Wm. Ramsay; John Walvoord; Vernon McGee)

Dear ones, what is the open door before us? Is there one? Let's look at it from the other side--what hindrances do we face? Are we persecuted? Are our movements monitored or restricted? Are there geographical barriers? Are most of our neighbors already saved? Are we all sick and old and burnt out or tired out? Is the church treasury empty for spreading the Gospel? Is there a "yes" to any of these questions? There is not. Each question receives a "no."

In fact, I feel that the door is so wide open right now, and we have such a fantastic potential to reach the lost, see many converted, follow them up and get THEM reaching the lost, that to IGNORE the potential and not PLAN AND PRAY to realize our opportunities is tragic; yea, it is sinful. I don't know about you, but I am not ashamed of Dartmouth Bible Church. I am not pessimistic about how we are going to grow in the coming years. I can't stand defeatism when we are talking about what the Holy Spirit can do--Is He able to do abundantly above all that we can ask or think? Indeed He is, and SHALL, because the door is open, right now. I feel good about calling myself a Christian, and I feel good about what we can see the Lord do through us.

Perseverance Generating Power It is exciting to me that the Lord Jesus promises so much to this little assembly in Philadelphia, to a church which has "a little power." They didn't have A LOT of power. THEY were not at full maturity as a church, but they did have a little power.

Have you ever felt just a little intimidated by someone who seems to possess such a close walk with the Lord that they seem to exude His power manifestly? They're always having a great Quiet Time... They have no trouble being bold in witnessing... They have the perfect marriage... Their kids never do anything stupid... They read every "hot" Christian book; they give 30% to their church; and they pray 2 hours each morning! (Of course REAL spiritual power is HUMBLE, self-effacing and doesn't talk about all these things.)

The Philadelphian Christians weren't spiritual giants; they only had a LITTLE power. They didn't have impressive numbers, buildings or programs. They weren't like their brethren down in Corinth, "dripping" with

supernatural gifts. They were faithful with what they HAD, though, and they stood by the truth and by the Name they bore on their hearts, and in their reputation--we are the people of Jesus, we give witness to the Way, We are simply Christians.

I want to share two applications, dear ones:

First, we are not a powerful church. Like the Philadelphian assembly, we do have a little power though. What shall we do with it? We do not have armies of trained and experienced workers. We do not have an established and seasoned board of elders. (It is my plan that we SHALL have it; but we just aren't there quite yet). We don't have a beautiful, classy facility. We have some rough edges here and there... But I love what we do have. What do we have?

We have a teachable flock--not just teachable by me, but more importantly by the Holy Spirit, in general. We have a witnessing people. We have a financially giving people. We have a kindhearted people. We have a sincere people--they're REAL, that's for sure. We have some people who are committing themselves to pray. We have some people who are committed to evangelism. We have some people who are burdened to teach. We have a few others who are burdened to visit and reach out.

Dartmouth Bible Church isn't the biggest, the richest, the prettiest or the smartest church by the sea--but I think you're the BEST church, and I look forward to seeing God work mightily in you and through you this year.

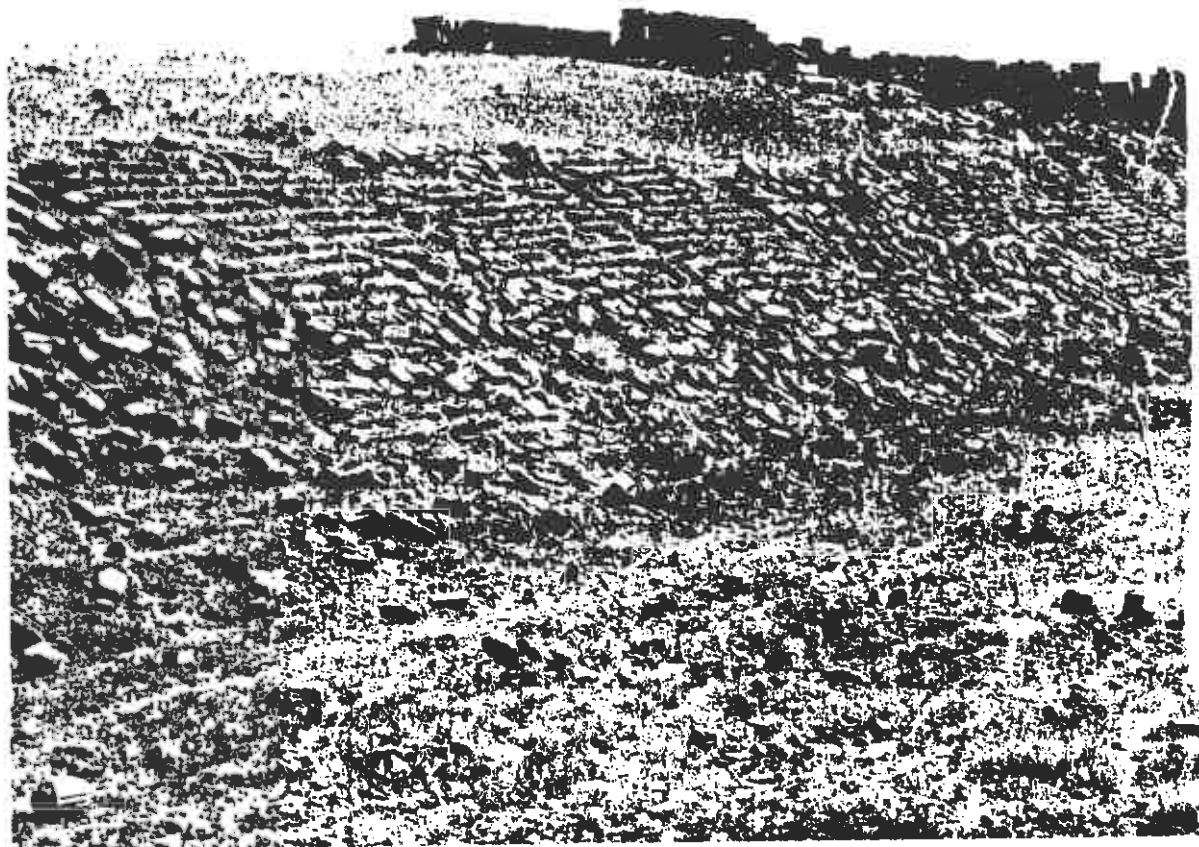
Second, sanctification does not seem to be an all or nothing deal with the Lord. Some people struggle with being perfectionistic, by nature. So, they're never joyful about their own spiritual growth (nor probably about anyone else's...). Well, my friends, me and the Scriptures are here to tell you that the Lord is the Lord of GRACE. To the extent that you have grown SO FAR--a little or more than a little--you have a LITTLE POWER. And evidently that is a joy to Christ--He commended the Philadelphians for the little power that they did have!

May the Lord of Grace encourage you today. May you feel good about the open door before us this year, and about the modest but genuine evidences of spiritual power that exist within the company of saints here at 52 Morton Avenue.



Above: A view of the ruins of Laodicea. © V.E.

Below: Ruins of Roman stadium (dedicated to Vespasian in A.D. 79) at Laodicea. View to the southwest, showing some tiers of seats that remain. Ruins at upper right are probably the gymnasium and baths, built in the time of Hadrian. © Lev.



DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 3:7 - 22

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 11 1-29-89

"A TALE OF TWO CITIES"

(The Contrasting Letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea)

Introduction Has it ever been this way for you? One day you feel so close to the Lord, full of His peace and really committed to seek His will--and the very next day you find yourself cold to Him; no fervor to seek Him, sluggish, spiritually lifeless. What a paradox-- how can we feel so close to Jesus one day and couldn't care less the next?

It is one of the great contradictions in life, isn't it? The Lord Jesus doesn't change from one day to the next. But we seem to. (I might put in here, that once in while you will meet someone whose love for Christ is much more consistent than that. Sure, that person too may have an occasional day of indifference to the Holy Spirit, but they may go whole weeks walking closely to Him. That's the person to make your friend!)

Churches can be like this too, though. One year (or month) an assembly is experiencing some revival and the next they find themselves just "doing church." The contradiction exists BETWEEN churches too. One church might be full of the Spirit, laden with all the fruits that the Spirit produces, and another church--of the same doctrine, people from the same city and walk of life--is cold; lifeless; lukewarm. Now if you were to travel today to a little village in Turkey called *Eski Hissar* you would find all that remains of the ancient city of Laodicea. Its a quiet place--about all you would hear would be the chirping of the lizards, sunning themselves on the stones... (I remember hearing Pastor Don Emerson say that, in one of the first sermons I ever heard as a Christian, in Alleghany Baptist Church, Blacksburg, Virginia, 5/72).

This then is what we have in Revelation 3. In that chapter we have the message from Christ to the church in ancient Philadelphia and that from our Lord to the church in a city called Laodicea. You could not ask for two more different churches. But first let's look at their SIMILARITIES:

- * Both churches were evangelical. They both held to the same doctrinal standards that the apostles had delivered.
- * Both churches were free of infiltrating heresies. There is no evidence of false teaching, as there is in several of the other ancient churches.

- * Both churches faced the same Roman and pagan cultural entrapments. Temptations for Christians abounded in both cities.
- * Both churches were loved by their mutual-Head, Jesus Christ. (Rev.3:9, 19)

But the contrasts are striking. Revelation 3:7-22 is truly a "tale of two cities." The Christian assembly at Philadelphia is the only one TO which the Lord Jesus Himself sent no rebuke. The assembly at Laodicea (which was about as far from Philly as we are from Braintree) received NO commendation.

As to Philadelphia, let's consider some of the other things Jesus said to those Christians, other than what we read in verses 7 and 8, (upon which we spent some time in our last exposition). Apparently the Philadelphian Christians had experienced some kind of harassment from their Jewish neighbors. Not only had they maintained the name of Jesus against the prevailing secular culture, but they testified to Jesus being the fulfillment of world-Judaism. As usual, this met with stiff resistance at best, and outright persecution at worst from the established Jewish community. The Apostle Paul summed the problem up well in his letter to the Christians in Rome: Romans 2:28,29.

It was the promise of the Risen Jesus that these Christians would find these Jews honoring THEM at some future point.

Verse 10 is an extremely important verse. It is a pivotal verse upon which the pretribulational rapture theory is based. The pretribulational rapture theory is as follows--and, I might add, it is the view of Dartmouth Bible Church--Jesus Christ will physically rapture OUT from this world His people, at some point BEFORE the terrible time that is coming to the whole earth, which the Bible calls "the tribulation." Jesus spoke at length about the great tribulation (Matthew 24), and most of this Book of Revelation (chapters 6 through 19) describe it. In these words to the ancient Christians in the city of Philadelphia, Jesus promised that they (and by implication WE) would be "kept" not only through general troubles, but THROUGH the Great Trouble, because of their faithfulness (and ours, if we prove so) to Him.

NOTE: It is not insignificant that the word "church", or "assembly", (Greek, *ecclesia*) does not occur after chapter 3, vs.22 UNTIL the very end of the Book (22:16). Where IS the church in all that time? I suggest to you that it is not on the earth; not suffering that terrible time of trouble. The church will be ADDED TO, however, during that time--there shall be people saved DURING that time, as we shall see in coming weeks as we unfold Revelation more.

A pretribulation rapture is not just "fire insurance". It would be ignorant to NOT realize that Christians have suffered for believing in Jesus, and for following Him, ALL of the church's two thousand years of history. We do not believe in a pretribulational rapture just because we cannot *imagine* God allowing the church to experience the Great Tribulation. It is because the Scripture teaches it, when all of the Bible is taken into consideration.

Verse 12 includes a number of future blessings for overcoming Christians. They are so wonderful that they are almost hard to imagine, living in the materialistic society that we do. But they offer a glimpse into your future, if you have really fled to Christ to be your Lord and Savior...

Let me say something about "overcoming." You and I still wrestle with things in our hearts and minds which need overcoming. If you listen to the voices in the world's way of thinking, at best you'll hear, "Self improvement, self-improvement, self-improvement." At worst you'll hear, "If it feels good, go ahead and do it." But as Christians we are charged with making a life-long commitment to OVERCOMING. And dear ones, you *will* overcome if you will set your minds and determine to keep looking to the risen Christ for the *desire*, the *wisdom* and most importantly the POWER to overcome whatever "ails ye." You WILL overcome, and you will do it by GRACE--by God's grace not by putting yourself under some legalistic system. Salvation is by grace; by God's gift of love, and sanctification is also by grace.

All of these ideas were read by the Philadelphian Christians and no doubt with great encouragement. But down in Laodicea, another letter was being read. It was not encouraging, although by no means *despairing*.

The church in Laodicea was apparently planted by Epaphras who also planted the church at Colossae. (He is not the same fellow as Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian church). These Christians lived in a well-to-do town, famous for its *banking* community, its *woolen* industry and interestingly, its production of Aesculapian eye ointments. (Cf. Lesson 6, mention of the Aesculapian academy at Pergamum). Remember, this church was an evangelical, fundamental, Bible-believing church. She is our sister church. I'm sure they were concerned about right doctrine and making sure they maintained order and respectfulness.

Now let's summarize the Lord's message to the Christians there. The Philadelphians received commendation. The Laodiceans received rebuke. Why? In verse 15 we see the problem: they were nauseating to Christ. Literally, verse 16 reads, "I will vomit you out of my mouth..." They were neither on fire for Christ, nor frigid or dead. They were tepid. They were lukewarm.

There used to be a Scottish preacher by the name of John MacNeill. One day he went to preach in the historic church of St. George's in Edinburgh. Mr. MacNeill was a little bit of an unorthodox preacher; the elders of St. George's knew this and took him aside and told him, "Now Mr. MacNeill, this is a dignified church, and we have lovely people in the community who come here, and we don't want to see them offended in any way, would you try to be careful about the things that you say?" So when Mr. MacNeill got up to preach, he asked the congregation to turn to Revelation, chapter 3 and he began reading in verse 1, and when he got to vs. 16, he read, "So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will..." and he stopped. He said we must begin over... And then he began again...

and then a third time. And then he closed the Bible and said, "I'm sorry, we can't use this kind of language in a church like St. George's." The people of that church never forgot that message, and I hope they recovered as a church from their lukewarm albeit "dignified" state...

How do you KNOW if you're lukewarm? I think verse 17 shows us. You're a Christian, but you don't feel needy. Lukewarmness is present when there is a blindness, an *ignorance* about your REAL spiritual condition. Its when you are quite content with staying right where you are in your Christian life. "I pray enough. I get enough Bible. I spend enough time seeking the Lord--and, after all, I'm not as bad off as THAT fellow..." It's just like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18).

This is especially true of wealthy Christianity. Wealthy Christians can lose sight of their daily need of the Lord. They are surrounded by material comfort and security, and it can easily lull them into a sleepy state. Laodicea was a wealthy city and the Christians there may have been the most well off Christians in the empire. It went to their heads, Jesus said.

Jesus' INVITATION to the lukewarm Laodiceans is wonderful, though. He FEELS like vomiting them out of His mouth. But if they would take His words to heart, He invites them to do a couple of things:

- 1) to seek Him for priceless kindnesses, and
- 2) to invite Him BACK into their hearts for fellowship.

The Laodiceans were basically in a state where they had EXCOMMUNICATED Jesus from THEIR fellowship. Where else do you ever read about Jesus being on the *outside* wanting in? But He makes a fantastic invitation--and remember, this invitation is to a group of CHRISTIANS. A man can be rich in two ways. He can be rich in money and possessions and he can be rich spiritually.

The solution to lukewarmness, apathy, indifference, sluggishness is to SEEK CHRIST. Is this you? Maybe not. Maybe. Seek Him. Look for Him. Sit down someplace private and quiet--raise your eyes to heaven and ask Jesus Christ to minister to you. ASK Him to DINE with you. Unless the Bible is all a pipedream (and it is not!), He will respond. Seek Him. He will bring joy back into your life, if you're sleepy and sluggish like the Laodiceans. I long for ALL of you to be seeing His hand at work in your lives, THIS year. There is nothing more valuable, more precious, more fascinating than knowing the Lord Jesus Christ personally. May we take the example of the Philadelphians. May we take the WARNING of the Laodiceans.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 4

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 12 2-12-89

WORSHIPING THE SOVEREIGN CREATOR

Introduction As evangelical Christians we are continually seeking to govern our experience by what we read in the New Testament. We are striving to understand God's will for our individual lives, and we're striving to understand it for our church. As we're gradually coming to understand what God wants for us, we usually rely on the Book of Acts, Paul's epistles to the various churches, and maybe occasionally, we look to the words of Jesus Himself in the Gospels (in practice--although we should never elevate one portion of God's Word above another--to a lesser degree do we turn to other places in the New Testament...) And, as we're trying to bring our lives into alignment with what we think is God's will we are most often LOOKING BACK (to the apostles, to the first century believers, to those early churches), and striving to RECOVER their fervor in evangelism, their rudimentary priorities as disciples and their simple love of Christ. Seldom do we govern our Christian lives on some vision of the FUTURE. Jesus told His disciples to live in light of His actual return; not only His return from the dead (in His physical resurrection), but His return to earth from heaven, at the end of this age. He told them,

"...be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be SURE of this that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be burgled. For this reason, you be ready too, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

(Matthew 24:42-44)

But today, we need to see that it isn't only His physical return to earth that should temper our lives, but the ACTIVITY OF HEAVEN also! For Revelation 4 and 5 truly give us a vision of what is going on in heaven, and what WILL go on there immediately prior to the last of the last days! I am getting at this: when we worship God today, we are practicing an activity from our FUTURE. When we worship, and when we use the Book of Revelation in an appropriate fashion to help us understand worship, we are, in a sense, taking a step "back to the future." We cast our gaze away from the ancient church, as we are so accustomed to peering, and into the future of the church--into your own future, if you're a Christian! And in these fourth and fifth chapters, there is something really timeless, for worship is the activity of eternity, so worthy is the Lord.

As I thought about this passage this week I was overwhelmed, and David's words came to me,

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it." (Psalm 139:6)

As the Scriptures were written, there were no chapter or verse divisions. Those were all added by monks and scribes hundreds of years later. Revelation 4 and 5 really form one unit. Today we are considering "Part 1" of that unit (Rev.4) and next week we will consider "Part 2" of that unit of thought (Rev.5). And because *worship* is such an important subject I am planning, as the Lord helps, to bring a short "mini-series" of three or four messages, concerning worship. It is a good thing to shoot for this year, that DBC should continue to become a church which understands worship well, and more importantly that LOVES to worship our Lord.

Now before we begin to consider Chapter 4 we need to look at one verse again from chapter 1. Verse 19 in that chapter gives us the outline of the whole book. John was told by Jesus to write down the things which he had seen (which he surely did in his Gospel, his three letters and in chapter 1 of the Revelation). He is told then to write down the seven letters, which make up chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. THEN he is told to record, *"the things which shall take place after these things."* My understanding of this is that chapters 4-22 then, make up a vision of the future--the distant future for John, although maybe not so for us.

We are going to read a great many interesting details about the end times in the chapters to come. But it is important to not get LOST in those details and miss the main lesson from each chapter. Again, today I am driving at this: *when we worship God today, we are in fact practicing for the future!*

The Scene in Heaven (4:1-4) Have you ever wondered what heaven looks like? And what the inhabitants of heaven look like? These verses give us something of a glimpse--but I want you to see something important in the text: certain details are stated plainly and we should interpret literally. For instance in these verses, John says he looked and saw,

1. an open door,
2. and then he literally heard a voice,
3. and then he literally found himself caught up in a marvelous prophetic ecstasy by the Holy Spirit,
4. and he really saw a group of actual thrones,
5. and the central throne was surrounded by a full rainbow,
6. and also actual, literal beings on those thrones.

These are not details we should try to re-interpret or read other meanings into. These details are not metaphors for other spiritual realities. They are facts from the vision John was seeing, recorded by him as literal realities in heaven.

But there are also some things that John says that ARE metaphorical, for instance,

- a. the voice he heard was LIKE a trumpet,
- b. the One on the central throne LOOKED LIKE jewels,
- c. the rainbow also LOOKED LIKE a jewel.

NOTE: Apparently heaven is not in black and white! I believe that we cannot even imagine the beauty and splendor of the abode of the living God. In short, it could only have blown old John's mind...

Where John is at a loss for words to describe heaven, just as you or I would do, he relates what he is looking at to something with which he is familiar. If Christians would keep this in mind, and realize that John was a real person, just like you and me, it will keep the Revelation much more REAL to us.

But dear ones, while the scene in heaven is very real, it is not of *this* world! There, there is no *sin*. There, there is no *confusion*. There, there is no *darkness*--nor even any *dimness*!

Briefly Identifying the Details There are many interpretive questions we can ask about some of the details of John's vision. Much time could be spent debating them. Because of *our* time limitations, I am simply going to suggest my understanding of a few of them. Upon your own study you may come up with some different understanding of some of them, but what I am going to offer you is the fruit of my own wrestling with the various suggestions by evangelical scholars.

1. The COMPLETE rainbow (the like which, by the way, neither you nor I have ever seen) is a picture of God's complete FAITHFULNESS. He never goes back on His Word; not to Israel and not to the Church. He is *robed*, as it were, in faithfulness. And so, since He wants us to be like Him, He commissions His own Spirit to cultivate faithfulness in US too.
2. The twenty-four elders are twenty-four literal angelic beings.
3. The four living creatures are also four literal angelic beings, although of a different, probably higher order. I believe these are the seraphim which in the entire Bible, only Isaiah mentions by "species" (Isaiah 6:1).
4. The crowns are badges of office, which indicate in some awesome way the occupation of the creatures, which is the work of praise and heralding to any invited on-looker (like John).

Worshipping the Sovereign Creator I think that we really know very little about worship yet. I believe that we have only the smallest inkling of how WORTHY and PURE our God is. I might add that I don't think our worship in the here and now is odious to the Lord, because we are not worshipping Him at ALL except through the blood of His Son, and that is well-pleasing to Him. I think when we prepare our hearts, confess our sins and give Him full attention, He delights in the worship believers give Him, from here in 1989. Nevertheless, I think we have much to learn about how worthy of our full praise and faithful worship He is.

Two things stand out from God's Word in this chapter for you and I to take to heart: one is His holiness, and the other is His indisputable function as the One who created all things. On the first thing, His holiness, do you notice that the four living creatures state it *thrice*? No other attribute of God is repeated like this--THREE TIMES. Hence it has come to be known as the "*tris-hagion*" (*hagios* in Greek meaning "holy"). We read nowhere, "love, love, love," or "wrath, wrath, wrath." It is God's PERFECTION, His absolute purity and loveliness and beauty that boggles the minds of even His closest creatures, that they should say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come," (verse 8b).

Secondly, the Holy God has the, sovereign right to govern this world (and indeed, the entire universe) because by His throne-room associates' own declaration, HE is the One who created it all. Now I know what many today say... It all evolved by chance. To that fanciful theory I simply offer this reply, "those who know best (the elders and living creatures, --who, I am sure, are at least smart as we are--) declare that all that is, is, because the sovereign God specially WILLED IT, and specially CREATED it all. HE does not need man's ratification of the fact. But He delights in man's PRAISE of the fact.

Finally brethren, what of it all? Just this: when we gather for worship, we need to be conscious that it is a wonderful activity. We are doing something that creatures far more intelligent and aged than we delight themselves in undertaking! WORSHIP deserves serious thought, careful structuring and devoted attention. It is the business of the church, and while the world may find little or no interest in it, the living God is interested in it, and I find THAT fact greatly motivating.

Let me leave you with this final thought--the elders and living creatures praise the Creator more fully than we do. But they do not praise Him as redeemed creatures. They have not been redeemed. They have not needed it. If you are a true Christian; if you have *personally* and *consciously* trusted in Jesus' offer of forgiveness, then you have by that faith alone been redeemed. Your worship NOW, and in the age to come is worship of the REDEEMER by the redeemed. A God who has rescued us--how can we not love Him? May we all in Dartmouth Bible Church be truly moved THIS YEAR by a new love for worshipping the sovereign Creator.

14 Doxologies in the Book of Revelation

References	The One(s) Giving the Praise	The One(s) Receiving the Praise
4:8	4 living creatures	God the Father
4:11	24 elders	God the Father
5:9-10	24 elders and 4 living creatures	The Lamb (Christ)
5:12	Many angels	The Lamb
5:13	Every creature	God the Father and the Lamb
7:10	Tribulation martyrs	God the Father and the Lamb
7:12	Angels, 24 elders, and 4 living creatures	God the Father
11:16-18	24 elders	God the Father
15:3-4	Tribulation saints	God the Father and the Lamb
16:5-6	Angel	God the Father
16:7	"The altar"	God the Father
19:1-3	A great multitude	God the Father
19:4	24 elders and 4 living creatures	God the Father
19:6-8	A great multitude	God the Father

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 5

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 13 2-19-89

WORSHIPING THE SOVEREIGN REDEEMER

Introduction After my conversion to Christ halfway through college, I attended a little church that was located on the edge of the college campus. Each summer the church hosted a bus-load of deaf children for an overnight stay, as they were travelling from New Jersey to a Christian camp in Tennessee. A couple of us from the church would stay there overnight with the deaf kids and their leaders, and on the two occasions that I personally did this, I learned a lot. Being half deaf-myself (or so it seems), my heart went out to these kids who though deaf, were very adept at communicating through sign, facial expression and in some cases yelling! But the thing that really grabbed me was the approach used by the CAMP to which they were travelling, in ministering the Gospel to these kids... For the first three days of the week-long camp, the kids would hear about nothing save what the Bible teaches about the sinfulness of man--sin, sin, sin. That was it, for three days. That would be enough to depress even the most cheerful person! But then on the fourth day, the counselors and speakers would unfold for the kids what the Bible says about the SOLUTION for the sin problem--that for all who trust in Messiah, there is complete REDEMPTION from the debt, the guilt and the dread of sin. God has defeated evil, those kids were told on day four, and the victory is for THEM TOO if they would turn towards it!

Dear ones, *redemption* is what life is all about. You and I may log a lot of hours on career, earning a living, entertainment, family activities and hobbies. But *God's plan of redemption* is the highest reality! A man or woman may be successful in all those areas I mentioned, and they are all good things--but if he or she is not REDEEMED, it counts for nothing; so indicates the Scripture. Redemption is what the church is all about. The church is nothing more than an odd collection of all kinds of people who have one thing (if nothing else) in common: redemption.

Once you've come face to face with your natural lost state--

(not that everyone is absolutely ruined in sin; but the Bible clearly demonstrates that everyone is TOTALLY ruined by sin; that is, every part of us is stained/ my mind has failed God's Law/ my body has surely failed to measure up to God's Law/ my emotions and my will also have been ruined by rebellion--I was born with it and I have consistently practiced rebellion...)

You must face the facts about yourself. You and I are lost without the REDEEMER. But, praise be to God, He did provide a Redeemer; a Redeemer in the person of His only Son. (My favorite all time name for a church is that taken by a church in Dallas, Texas. The church is called "Redeemer's Fellowship.")

It is this Redeemer that we are going to learn some things about today. We are located at chapter five in our exposition of the final book in the Bible: John's *Revelation*. We have noted that chapter 4 should never really have been split apart from chapter five. They form a single theme--in fact, chapters 4 & 5 are sort of "the calm before the storm." John is about to view some very disturbing things in the chapters which follow; but we are not there yet. We still find ourselves with old John in heaven, in the very throne room of the Lord.

Now here is the reason these chapters are here: they both are saying that the Lord Jesus Christ HAS THE RIGHT to reign on the earth, and that He has the right to be our King. Chapter 4 says He has the right because He is the CREATOR. Chapter 5 says He has the right because He is the REDEEMER.

The Seven Sealed Book (Rev.5:1-4) Here is one of the most marvelous pictures in the Bible: the seven-sealed book that only the slain Lamb had both the RIGHT and the ABILITY to open!

The image of a book (*biblion* in Greek) is important. It was probably not a book like we use. It was probably rather a scroll, common in that culture, and like the Roman *will and last testament*, it had seven seals on it. I am not sure that John understood all that he was seeing, but at least he understood that great judgements on the earth were forthcoming. He longed to see the inside of the book, and since no angel could open it, he was left bewildered and greatly saddened.

Verse 1 says this book was written "both inside and on the back." That makes this a very unusual book, by Roman standards. Usually scrolls were written on one side only. If it had writing on BOTH sides it was a very important document and it was called an "*opisthograph*." The use of opisthographs was reserved for only those documents that were considered the *weightiest* and most important. The writer was saying that he had a FULL message to give in a single document--more than he could just say on the one side! John knew that God had much to say about the judgement of this world, and he perceived that this book was the final word; the last chapter.

Here is what I think the book is: it is the whole plan of redemption, initiated, carried out and consummated by God. It is the overthrow of evil, and the gathering of a redeemed people to enjoy the blessings of God's rule (George E. Ladd, *Commentary on Revelation*). It is the whole picture of how the Lord is going to conclude the age; time in fact.

The fact that no one could open the book is also important. No one can understand the meaning of human history without understanding God's plan for redemption. That means understanding who Christ is, and why He came. History is a fascinating subject. Its study grips many people and holds them almost in a trance (and I'm one of them!) Why is that? I believe it is because way down deep inside all of us, is this innate longing to UNDERSTAND "WHY"? Without Christ, and His role as the Redeemer of men from sin, there can be no answer--there is only confusion. There is no coherence or cohesion to human history without the Lamb!

Now before we go further, let me ask you, does this all seem kind of psychedelic or overly mystical to you? Many skeptics shake their heads at these things because they seem too "other-worldly" to be real. But I would like to appeal to your sense of logic and to your sense of observation. Logically there is no reason to believe that this material world around us is all there is. Just because my optic nerve and memory and brain do not physically experience the spiritual side of things, do not mean they do not exist. And, by observation, what of all this OTHER interest in today's society in the spiritual. Why are people captive to the occult, to eastern philosophies and to other religions, if this is truly all there is? It seems not the least bit psychedelic to me, that John was given a brief glimpse of a dimension actually more real than THIS one, because the spiritual realm is eternal!

The Lion-Lamb (vss.5-7) John receives comfort from one of the 24 elders. The Lion of Judah, who is also the Lamb is the unfold of the ages. He brings meaning to history. He brought meaning to my life. Has He brought meaning to yours yet? Do you know the Lion-Lamb yet?

The word John used for "lamb" is interesting. It is the Greek word arnion and it isn't the usual word for "sheep." Arnion is used 28 times in the New Testament, once at the end of John's Gospel ("feed my lambs") and 27 times in the Revelation. Why the word is significant is this: the judge of all the earth is *He who died for us*, and even as sovereign Lord, He still bears the marks of His suffering. John saw "the Lamb standing, as if slain." Jesus Christ, even though resurrected and glorified, still wore the badge of having given Himself up for His people. There are no placards ascribing honor to Him; no "name in lights"; just the slain Lamb of God, who is in fact at the same time, a lion!

Do you see also in verse 5 that the Lion has "overcome?" The word is best translated, "has won a victory." Jesus Christ has defeated the great enemies of God's people: Satan, sin and death. It is because He beat those enemies, that He has every right to be worshipped and loved.

An Extraordinary Detail (verse 8c) When this taking of the book occurs at the end of the age, do you see that our prayers have some part to play? The "saints" mentioned are none other than you and I and all the people who have trusted in Christ over the ages!

What prayers are in view here? Is it just ALL of your and my prayers? I think something more specific is the answer. These prayers are in some wonderful way assisted by the throne-room angels, and they represent those prayers that we (and ALL the saints) uttered, "Lord, may your Kingdom COME to this world." When we have prayed that request which most pleases the Lord--that His will should be accomplished in one way or another--those prayers are very special indeed to Him. They, in fact, are like pleasant incense to Him.

Worshipping the Sovereign Redeemer, HEAVEN Style (vss.9-14)

The Book of Revelation is full of new things: a new name for the redeemed (2:17; 3:12), the new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), new heavens and a new earth (21:1), and, all things made new (21:5). When in the Lord's presence, there isn't any such thing as *old*! Everything is always new! Here, the song that is sung is NEW.

When we worship the Lord, it should never be with oldness. We should be renewed daily by walking closely with Him, and by seeing fresh evidences of His hand at work in our lives. Christian worship music should reflect the fact that we are NEW, and being made new (2 Cor.5:17). It ought to be fresh, pleasant and edifying--just like this song in heaven will be! And, for you music lovers--wouldn't you love to see the score for this song?

If we're taking our cue about HOW to worship from the FUTURE--from the fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation--then there is some instruction for us about worship here. It should be REDEEMER-centered. It should concentrate on what the plan of redemption has accomplished: the PURCHASE of a new nation of PRIESTS--that includes you and me--whose destiny, dear ones, is no less than co-rulership with Christ Himself!

Now I know that this picture of destiny for Christians is foreign to what many of you were raised with. Many of you were in fact raised with a dreadful picture of the future, where you yourself must yet face paying for SOME of your sins; or at least, a future "purging" of sorts, of leftover sin. Nothing could be further from what the Bible teaches. The saints--those who have truly met and trusted Christ--will reign with Christ and will be full of joy and praise. Thus saith the Scripture.

Do you also see in verses 12 and 13 that the worship is given directly TO the Redeemer? HE is worthy. If ever you were going to risk all and follow someone or something, Jesus Christ is worth any risk. And it is good to hear it from your lips, brethren. Worship is NOT you sitting there watching me and Cheryl and Maureen and Audie do all the talking. Praise and declaration should come from your lips.

You say, "Well, I'm a quiet person, you know--I don't like people to hear my voice; they may not approve of it." To that I say SO WHAT? Take the risk, dear ones. Testify publicly to what Jesus has done for you. Hang what so and so thinks and whether they approve of your public speaking or not! The only one whose approval you need is the One who was SLAIN for you; Who is worthy of your taking a risk; Who is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and might, and your public declaration as well, I might add!

Well, to all this those four living creatures simply say, "Amen" and the elders fell down and worshiped. You and I shall fall down and worship too. In fact ALL creatures who ever live will worship the sovereign Redeemer. They will worship Him as *their* Redeemer or as their Judge. May it be as precious Savior for each one of you here today.

Hymn Number 206 (written by Melody Green, by the way) says,

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son; Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One. Jesus my Redeemer, name above all names; Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, O for sinners slain. When I stand in glory, I will see His face, there I'll serve my King forever, in that holy place.

Thank you, oh my Father, for giving us Your Son, and leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

(A Paranthetic Mini-series
Given Between
Revelation 5 and 6)

Winter 1989

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES
FROM THE
SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP
Scripture:

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 1 (of 3) 2-26-89

PREPARING THE HEART FOR WORSHIP

Introduction We have been looking at Revelation & recently, and seeing Jesus Christ being worshipped not by humans, but by His heavenly "associates". This brings us to a place in our pulpit ministry, where it is good that we spend a little time talking more about worship. Worship is an important subject. It is something all of us are interested in (or you wouldn't be here), and something that God Himself is vitally interested in. And anything that you spend as much time at as you do in worship, it seems to me to be worth talking about how to do it right.

There are many ways in which people worship the Lord. Some churches use liturgy, which is a SET FORM OF SPOKEN TEXTS. Many people are comfortable worshipping in this way, while others are resistant to it. Other churches use a more spontaneous approach, relying on the individual members of the Body to come up with expressions of worship. Other groups are more mystical, gravitating towards ecstatic utterances, emotional outbursts, something called "singing in the Spirit," and so forth.

I personally do not believe there is only FORM for New Testament Christians to worship the Lord. I also believe that FORMS are more a matter of personal choice than they are discernible from the New Testament. There are definitely some "bottom-line" things that should always be present, and some which should be avoided--but actually, I think the Lord is looking for something from us that is much simpler, much less complicated than we tend to make it.

One of the things He is definitely looking for, is a prepared heart. This is what we are going to consider today. Lord-willing, next week we shall say something about having a prepared *mind*, and the week after we will look at what it means to have a prepared *body*. PREPARATION for worship is an important key to learning how to worship God. But there are a few even more basic facets to worship that we need to look at here at the beginning of this "mini-series."

Preliminary Considerations:

1. Worshipping the Living God is expressed by INDIVIDUALS and by the CORPORATE BODY. Both are necessary for living a balanced Christian life. HEBREWS 10:19-25
2. CORPORATE WORSHIP is only the "sum" of individual worship. MALACHI 1: 6-14

3. Worship is *for God*. Even in Dartmouth Bible Church, so much of what we plan is FOR OURSELVES. But worship should be thought of first, middle and last as something which we do *for the enjoyment of the Lord*. On Sundays the first thing you should say to yourself when you get up in the morning is, "What can I give God in the service today?" PSALM 145 ; REVELATION 5:8c
4. Worship is *spiritual*. This is hard to grasp sometimes, because we live in a highly rationalistic society. "If I can't see it, smell it or hear it, it's not there." Other societies are more naturally mystical than ours and therefore people in those cultures struggle with this less. God can be worshipped in a building or NOT in a building. He can be worshipped with a tie on or with a T-shirt on. It is *with our spirits* that we honor and praise and worship the Lord. The non-Christian cannot worship the Lord in an acceptable way, because his spirit is still in bondage to sin. Christians worship God spiritually though, and do not depend on *outward* crutches. JOHN 4:24 ; PHIL. 3:3

It is this last facet of worship that I want to concentrate on today. Worship is a spiritual activity. It does involve our minds and our bodies. But first and foremost it is an action of the HEART. And as such, the heart needs to be properly prepared in order for us to really worship God acceptably.

What IS the Heart? We talk much about our "hearts" without knowing fully what we're speaking about. We say things like,

"That really broke my heart." "Something is on my heart today."
 "My heart is full of praise."

What do we mean by these expressions? I think we are speaking of the deepest part of our persons--the seat of the emotions, the central core of WHO I AM. Your heart is the CENTER--the FOCUS OF YOUR INNER PERSONAL LIFE. We all seem know this intuitively, because when some- one uses an expression like "that really broke my heart," or, "this is what's on my heart," the rest of us seem to sit up and take notice. When you hear someone speak of the heart, doesn't something inside you whisper, "Better listen to this--it's significant." Animals do not have hearts in this sense. They do not have spirit, soul, personality; HEART.

When a person first becomes a Christian their HEART is wonderfully made new! (II Cor.4:6) The core of who that person is, is regenerated and given a fresh start. When a person first becomes a Christian, he doesn't usually look different on the outside and every bit of the way he THINKS doesn't necessarily change right away; but the Bible says the new Christian has been "born again." That takes place in the HEART.

So when we come together for corporate worship of the One who made salvation possible, it needs to be with hearts that are prepared to worship Him.

For those of you who are married--I'll bet that on the days before your wedding day, you spent a great deal of time THINKING about the wedding. You *longed* for the day. You daydreamed about it. You made plans and set up all the particulars. When the day came, you didn't decide to go to work instead. You didn't say, "I think I'll watch football instead." No, you were anxious and highly EXPECTANT. You were preparing your heart.

Worship of the Living God is like that. In fact, the church is called the Bride of Christ at the end of John's Book of Revelation. When we worship the Lord, it should be expectantly. We are not here only to enjoy one another. We are not here just to sharpen our musical skills or to keep the kids off the street or for any other utilitarian purposes. We are here to give praise to our Redeemer--personally, individually and, as a chorus of individuals, corporately. Just like your wedding day, each Sunday (or any other time of worship) should be exciting. If you are a Christian, your God actually hears you and wants to hear what you have to say to Him! So with such a prospect, it's good that we adequately prepare, is it not?

Preparing Your Heart for Worship Here are several suggestions that will help in getting yourself ready each week to join with other Christians to jointly praise the Lord.

1. Have a quiet time before church. Even if you miss it on another day, don't miss it on Sunday. Read some Scripture and pray for a while before you come. Ask the Lord to meet you there so that you can join with the other saints (to whom you have chosen to attached yourself) and honor your Creator and Redeemer.
2. Expect God to bless you in return for your worship. While worship is for God, He is a gracious and giving God, and when we bless Him with prepared hearts, He delights to return favor and blessing to us (Isaiah 55:1-3; Rev. 3:18). Worship is not some GRUDGING DUTY that must be performed by rote, over and over until you, me and the Lord are bored stiff! It should be a creative fellowship with all the fun that your relationship with your best friend entails! If your heart is prepared, you won't MISS this giving from Him to you. It may come in the form of a quiet assurance from Him, a new understanding about His nature, about yourself or about your brother in the pew next to you. It may come just in the fulfillment of knowing, "Hey, it was good to worship God. That's why man was created after all!"
3. Release all grudges from the week. Give them up--do this as part of that prayer time in the morning. Come with a clean slate, with no criticisms, and no looking for faults. This isn't just inter-family but intra-family. Parents don't come mad at your kids! Spouse: don't come mad at your spouse. Take your worship of your Redeemer seriously enough to prepare your heart before you get to 52 Morton Avenue.

4. As part of this, RESIST THE DEVIL on Sunday mornings. I know of no one time of the week when he MORE seeks to defeat Christians. You get a whole church full of down-in-the-mouth Christians, each of them mad or bitter at *somebody*, unprepared to worship, and you have a flat-out DEAD worship service; I don't care HOW WELL the liturgy came off!

5. Do an inventory of God's blessings to you last week. If we would covenant to do this together each week, we would never have long periods of silence in sharing times. Each Christian--the person who is truly saved--ought to have no trouble at all in thinking of at least ONE thing that they have seen the Lord do for them in the last week! Especially since there are always so many.

6. *Praise music* 7. *Pray in the car*

Once again, dear ones: I don't think the Lord is nearly so hung up about FORMS as we are. He wants to meet with the group of us here, as He also meets with all gatherings of His people, to receive our love and to tangibly love us in return.

If you are with us, and you feel lost during worship--with nothing to say to the Lord, is it because He is not your SAVIOR yet? The person who has been rescued is forever grateful to the rescuer. The person who watches a rescue may understand it intellectually. But he has not personally trusted IN the rescuer himself. Have you been rescued from the debt of sin, from the guilt and dread of it? That is why Jesus came and that is why we worship Him with hearts sprinkled clean.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES FROM THE SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP
Scripture: Various

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 (of 3) 3-5-89

PREPARING THE MIND FOR WORSHIP

Introduction When I was in college there was a saying we used very often which sort of applied to a lot of situations in life. We would say, "Get your head ready." We might have talking about getting your head ready for a big exam or for a big date, but the sentiment was the same--you've got to prepare your thinking for this big event!

Now we all thought we were pretty hip in those days--little did we know that the idea of "getting your head ready" did not originate during the sixties, but goes all the way back to the Bible.

One of our goals here at Dartmouth Bible Church is to become a family of people who LOVE TO WORSHIP the Lord. I think we are there to a certain extent. We have come a long way in running a worship service that is both biblically based and edifying to the saints. Those two ingredients are necessary if the people are going to love their worship services. So now we are talking these three Sundays about a further step we need to take in moving towards *loving corporate worship*. This is a step that the church cannot "legislate" or perform for you. It is a step only you can decide to undertake. I am talking about PREPARATION for worship. Last Sunday I tried to say something about preparing the heart for worship. I suggested several practical steps you can take to predispose your affections, your emotions and your feelings for the worship of God. I have included a little list of those things again in your bulletin today.

Let me encourage you too: worship is much more enjoyable and fulfilling when it has been prepared for. Last week we said that worship is FOR GOD, not just for us. But there are many dividends that come from the privilege of offering up acceptable worship. One of them is that when you exercise the discipline and foresight to PREPARE for it, you tend to enjoy it more!

Today I would like to try to stimulate you about another aspect of preparation for worship. We are not just creatures of emotion. It is wonderful that we are emotional beings--(that's what makes life fun, isn't it?)--but we are not ONLY emotion. We are also creatures of intellect. Where emotion ends and the mind begins; and all the details of how it all works, I'm not sure any person fully understands. But it is clear that a big part of us is found IN OUR MINDS. Just as the way we FEEL about things is influenced by many factors, so, how we THINK about things is also influenced by many factors--past experiences, how you were raised,

what the Bible says about it, what your spouse says about it, what you've read on the subject, what some educator said about it or what Walter Cronkite said about it...

If I asked how many of you have an opinion about our Governor, some would offer theirs and others would probably say, "Well, I don't really have any opinion about him." But if I asked you for your opinion about something more personal, like say what is the best way to spend \$100, most of you would offer some long-held convictions. (And if I asked you about something even more important--like how you feel about the differences between Shaw's, Stop-And-Shop and Heartland--we would likely be here all day!)

We come to worship with our minds intact too, hopefully. This is the place where we can use the minds God has given us for the highest and most valuable honoring of the Lord. When we come for corporate worship, it is at least worth as much trouble to prepare our minds as it is when we are getting ready for some examination. When we are worshipping we are participating in something that is eternal (as we saw in Revelation 4 & 5). We are participating in something that is PART OF OUR FUTURE. It is at least as worthy of "getting our heads ready" as is using foresight and planning in the raising of your children...(Consider *MATTHEW 22:37,38*)

Often Sunday morning is thought of as Sabbath-time. Time to let down and just put the mind "on cruise." I agree that each Christian absolutely needs regular times of Sabbath-rest. (And I would add that almost all of you have two days per week available, off from your jobs). But corporate worship is not a time that we should approach haphazardly. It is a blessed truth that we are NOT under the Law and so we can enjoy a lot of freedom in *how* we worship, and at what times. But sitting together before the throne of grace--and I am convinced that this is the REALITY that is occurring when you and I get together for worship in this room-- this is not a time to just "go with the flow" and sloppily endure "whatever might happen." No, dear ones, we need to "get our heads ready"; to prepare our minds for worship.

I want to suggest to you today that a prepared mind includes three characteristics. You have before you a Scripture reference sheet which includes all the verses I want to bring to bear on these three characteristics of having a PREPARED MIND.

First of all, a prepared mind is a RENEWED mind. When you read the word "renew" in the New Testament, it basically means to renovate. When you renovate something, you're not tearing the whole thing down and starting over. But you may tear all the *insides* out, or part of them, right? Then you build afresh, and re-decorate, update. Listen to how the New Testament uses this idea: *Romans 12:2 ; 2 Cor.4:16-18a ; Eph.4:22-24a*

In these verses, Paul likens renewing the mind basically to saying NO to the world and to the flesh, even if it means some suffering or physical anguish. Disciplining our thinking and our affections is not necessarily easy all the time; but it sets us up for a purer, more joyful worship.

But if we come to worship with UNrenewed minds, I can't help but wonder what we think we're accomplishing? If I come with the songs of the world, or the concerns of the things the world says are important, **PRESSING** on my mind, how can I enjoy the truths that God offers? How can I effectively concentrate on His goodness, on heaven and on His exquisite nature, if I take no time to prepare my thought-life **BEFORE 11 AM?**

Renée's grandfather was a fine Christian gentleman from Iowa. I was privileged to know him briefly before the Lord called him home. But he had a peculiarity about him, that in my younger years seemed funny to me. I'm not so sure it was all that strange now. Ray would abstain from reading the Sunday paper until after he had been to church. The Sunday paper is a funny thing, now that I think about renewing my mind for worship: it is full of sale-flyers (which taunt me to forget about church and take advantage of Sunday sale-start-ups), sports news (which really grabs me, personally), bad news about national and world events, the comics (which I tend to love, but admittedly are full of cynical points of view). My mind doesn't need that kind of input as I "get my head ready" to worship the Living God. Maybe Ray had something there...

Secondly, a prepared mind is a **HUMBLED MIND**. To have a humble mind really means that your *self-image* is tuned correctly. It does NOT mean that you're down on yourself; that you demean and belittle yourself. It DOES mean that you have an accurate view of yourself, from God's perspective and with the angle on it that Christ had **ON HIMSELF!** *Romans 12:3 ; Acts 20:18b,19a ; Phil.2:3,5 ; Col.3:12,13*

Coming to worship with a humbled mind, means that you don't view your needs as more important than your those of your brother or sister. We may be talking about choice of seating or use of our time for testimony or sharing about the Word. It has to do with whom you choose to talk to and be friendly with. It has to do with growing impatient with some aspect of our gathering.

Third, a prepared mind is one which is **OF THE SAME MIND**. This means that you come *consciously* prepared to be part of the whole. God desires His people to be in harmony, to be unified. Being in harmony does not mean we eliminate all diversity--we are rather like a quilt of various colors and patterns. But if a Christian comes to worship with division or bitterness or some kind of cynicism about his brethren on his mind, how can he offer up pleasing worship to the Lord Jesus? There are many references in the New Testament to this mind-set. Here are some: *Rom.12:16; 15:6; I Cor.1:10; 2 Cor.13:11; Phil.1:27; 2:2; 3:16; 4:2; I Peter 3:8; 4:1.*

Finally dear ones, of **ALL** times when our hearts and minds should be fully prepared for worship, are those times when we gather around His Table, jointly making the statement that Jesus is real and that He lives in me. May the Lord burden us to prepare our hearts as we seek to become a people who love to worship our Lord Jesus Christ.

FURTHER ASPECTS OF PREPARING THE MIND FOR WORSHIP...

1. It is incorrect to think of worship as something done only on Sunday mornings. Corporate worship occurs then, but since corporate worship is the *sum* of individual worship (by individual worshippers), it simply REFLECTS how much individual worship has gone on *during the week*. In other words, Monday through Saturday have an effect on Sunday. If fifty worshippers have been reading their Bibles and spending time in prayer during the week, those same fifty worshippers will anticipate their corporate worship with greater excitement.
2. Having *control* of our minds indicates a "blossoming" of the fruit of the Spirit of self-control (Gal.5:23). This is contrary to the trance-like worship experiences of some pagan religions and even some Christian approaches to worship.
3. Having an *expectant* outlook towards worship indicates a "blossoming" of faith in a person's life (I Cor.13:7,13). This runs counter to the worldly attitudes of skepticism and doubt.
4. Being *positive* about OUR worship experiences and services reflects how much we love one another--and that is something Scripture indicates is a "bottom-line" matter when it comes to how acceptable our worship is to the Lord.
5. I Cor.11:31 indicates that *self-examination* (and repentance) is a very big part of preparing the mind for worship. Holding on to carnal attitudes or prejudices can be dangerous (vs. 30).
6. Mental preparation for worship should begin on Saturday evening. This does not mean that we become legalistic about Sat. evening activities or entertainments. It means that we recognize that evening attitudes, feelings, joy or trauma can carry over to the next day. And so we attempt to control the "input-factors" that influence our thinking.
7. All of this admittedly calls us to a *simpler* life-style. If we find ourselves trying to concentrate on too many things, we invite what psychologists call "burn-out" and then we nullify our contribution to corporate worship. Burn-out might even strip us of any desire to participate in corporate worship...
8. Being perfectionistic with ourselves (and with others--notably, with other *family* members) can really distract us from the proper attitude and mind-set for worship. We need to realize that "God is not finished with me yet," nor has He finished the work of sanctification in my spouse, child, parent, neighbor, pastor, etc.
9. Not all mental preparation for worship can be done on a daily or weekly basis. There is a "cummulative measure" that each Christian needs to undertake too--that is done on a periodic (annual, or so) basis. It is "taking time out" to change your surroundings and just get away from the same "four walls" and the same church for a while. Mental refreshment is important and we see that Jesus recognized this by how He treated the twelve disciples in Mark 6.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

SERMON NOTES FROM THE SUNDAY MESSAGES

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Avenue No. Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: Preparation for Worship
Scripture: Various

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 (of 3) 3-12-89

PREPARING THE BODY FOR WORSHIP

Introduction Today we are going to think about the matter of "preparing our bodies for worship." We have considered the preparation of our hearts and the preparation of our minds--I hope you will not just let those two messages "slip, slide away." In fact, I know of no more important topics that I have treated from this pulpit than these matters... Getting ourselves prepared for worship together as a Body is vital to our really pleasing God. We spend a lot of time talking and praying about HOW TO WORSHIP in itself. But little time is given to preparation.

Now it seems like every time someone in the Bible encounters God, they are affected physically in some very noticeable way. Let me walk you through some examples:

Exodus 3:1-6; Leviticus 21:10-12; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; Nehemiah 9:1-3

Now if you know your Bible, you know that all those events occurred in the Old Testament, and you may be thinking, "Well, things were different back then..." Look with me then at something the Apostle Paul wrote to the urban Christians at Corinth... 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Earlier, Paul wrote these words to those same believers:

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are... [Then, in dealing with the problem of sexual sin, Paul then asked them,] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, [and please note these next words!] and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20)

Now these are warning passages, and sound pretty gloomy, since we DO struggle with various ways of wasting our bodies. But let's remember all the good things we enjoy because we have the Holy Spirit! If you are a real Christian, you enjoy things like love, joy, peace, new strength to endure suffering, gentleness-- that the Lord is producing gradually in your life. The Spirit of God also quietly assures us that by our faith alone, we stand adopted into God's family. (study Romans 8 on this!)

I want to tell you a trend I see in American Christianity, especially in American Christianity of the evangelical sort (which we are). It is the tendency for our religion to occupy our intellect, but to stay there! Evangelicals (myself included) love to concentrate on correct Biblical doctrine. This we should do. But we are in danger of becoming just like the Pharisees! The Lord

Jesus never intends for the truths of Scripture to just occupy our minds, without taking hold of our hearts too! And here is where we are today, dear ones: it should also impact our PHYSICAL being.

Also: Romans 12:1 (... "worship", NIV)

Now I discover a bit of a danger in preaching this matter of preparation for worship as preparation of heart, mind and body in separate messages. Our hearts, minds and bodies are not separate entities. We are each of us, one integrated person. My heart, my mind and my body all constantly interact with one another. It is a mistake to think that somehow I can glorify God with my body (sit in a church pew on Sunday) and neglect Him with my mind. It is a mistake to think that I can sing good Christian hymns with my mind, and maintain a rotten heart towards someone. It is also a mistake to think that since I am saved by faith (which is a decision of the mind), and since I desire to serve Him with my emotions and feelings, I can get away with the neglect of my body.

God is not fooled. He knows each of us intimately. He knows what you're thinking (although no one else may). He understands your feelings and passions (although no one else may). And He also considers how you and I treat the temple --our bodies.

Now your personal worship goes on all the time, with varying degrees of effectiveness. So for me to say that you need to physically prepare for worship just one morning a week would not be right. As the Holy Spirit takes control of each aspect of your life, you will enter into more and more of a CONTINUAL process of physically preparing for worship. But today I would like to suggest several things you can do, to physically prepare for CORPORATE worship. In corporate worship, we are gathering for a special reason. We are approximating the future. We are running through a "mock" version of a future gathering, spoken of in Revelation. It is not that these worship services are only practice; for they are very real. And we are worshipping under conditions here that are unique. When we are with Him we will no longer have the opportunity to glorify Him as we do now, still living in a fallen world; still beset with a lingering sin nature.

And yet, corporate worship is special and unique. It isn't just a man-made, imaginary situation. When we sing and pray and read His Word, we are not just fantasizing. Upon the authority of the Word of God, I tell you Jesus Christ is listening. The Spirit is relating our feelings and praises--sometimes we don't fully understand our own hearts--to God for us! This time together here is profoundly important!

And my friends, if the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of the world is interested in what we're doing here, we need to get ourselves ready for the event, don't you think?

Here then, are some ideas for you to consider as you get ready to attend worship--they may apply to Sunday mornings or evenings. They may apply to a mid-week group where you spend time in worship. They may apply to some special event you plan to go to...

1. Get plenty of rest. Its hard to concentrate on worshipping the Lord, when you're exhausted. This may involve some adjustment in how you spend your time BEFORE worship; but sacrifices we make for the Lord are a pleasure to Him. Sacrifices of personal pleasure (which as Americans, we seem to think is an inalienable right!) are in themselves an act of worship. When Mary broke the vial of

costly perfume in order to anoint Jesus, she was making a great personal sacrifice. She could have used the perfume on herself--for her own pleasure--for many months. But she sacrificed it to anoint her Savior, as an act of love; as an act of worship. You, dear ones, do whatever it takes to get the rest you need to be physically fresh to worship the Lord with your brothers and sisters.

2. Crucify the abuse-factors in your life at least before you come to worship!

Sometimes I think Lent was not such a bad idea, when it was originally invented in the fourth century. We look at it as somewhat ridiculous when we see things like "all the pancakes you can eat" specials on the day before Lent. And we also reject the notion that fasting buys any grace whatsoever from God. But the idea of "getting ready", and minimizing the abuse-factors before we worship is commendable, I think.

What abuse factors? There are many. What we eat and how we eat. Now eating is a very personal thing with people. There are also a lot of funny emotions involved with eating behavior. But in that we over-eat, and eat or drink things that we KNOW are destructive we abuse the temple of God's precious Spirit. It is an awesome MIRACLE that God has implanted us with His very presence in this dispensation. We need to acknowledge that spiritual truth and reality by guarding what we put INTO the temple.

Quite a few, too many I believe, of you are smokers. You know that this is poison. You know that it is decay of the temple. Why not give it up at least before and during the times when the Body is together? You say, "impossible." You are also saying then, "Lord, I am forced to abuse your temple--and I am forced to do it all the time, I cannot even quit abusing the temple for a few hours. Lord, you are simply not powerful enough in my life to help me quit."

Sexual abuse rarely gets attention from "good Christian pulpits." But in that we lust, and allow lust, even when we're together for worship, we allow abuse of our bodies.

I am not saying that we should just view abstinence as a scheduled thing--they're not so bad at certain times as they are hurtful to your worship... But I am saying that worship is important enough to simplify your life as you are prepare.

Scripture tells us to "crucify the deeds of the flesh" continually. And as part of getting ready to worship, you and I need to put the sinful tendencies that plague us physically TO DEATH, before we come together to offer up the sacrifice of praise.

Now if you are yet a non-Christian, I am not talking to you. You cannot crucify the flesh for you are still in bondage to it.

No amount of preparation for worship by a non-Christian, no matter HOW sincere or extreme it is, will result in God being pleased! No non-Christian ever tried harder to prepare for

worship than Martin Luther! And for all his ascetic measures, it only resulted in frustration and misery for him. No; a person must first invite Jesus Christ to take control of his or her life; to BE his/her Savior, before worship can mean anything.

3. Sanctify your concept of dress. By this I mainly mean that we should not let our attire interfere with "getting our heads ready" for worship. If you say, "I can't worship" because my hair isn't just the way I want it, or because you don't have a new suit or dress, you do grieve the Lord. Be at peace and content with what you have, and the way you look with some simple preparation.

"And let not your adornment be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." (I Peter 3:3,4) *Consider also, Matthew 10:9,10*

This comes up as we consider also the problem of head-coverings for women, that our friends in the Plymouth Brethren churches insist upon. But I Cor.11, where Paul addresses this issue is not teaching that head-coverings are a necessary preparation for worship for our women. It is teaching that worship should be accompanied by acknowledging the subordination of women to men in worship. The sexes are differentiated when it comes to God's creative order, and our worship services are intended to reflect that fact.

Another aspect of "getting dressed" to go to church is in how *distracting* I might be. It is not my goal to attract your attention by looking stunning, or by looking weird. The saints are here to worship the Lord. Worship is FOR HIM. It is not just what we might derive out of gathering! Those of us who come out of the counter-culture movement need to learn that there is nothing noble about looking strange or unkempt. As I prepare for worship, I desire to appear in such a way as edifies you, not "blows your mind." (I might add that preachers are sometimes the greatest violators of this...)

I hope you will take a fresh look at your routine of Saturday night and Sunday morning in particular. Make sure that your physical habits do not contradict your theology. And finally, let me end with one theological note of great importance! We are still under grace. We have weak points, and lessons yet to learn. He is very, very patient. We should not become (and I'm certainly not attempting to *invoke* this) terrorized about worship. Paul did say that for him, "*all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.*" We enjoy much freedom as Christians. We are not under bondage to ecclesiastical law; Moses' or anyone else's! All the more reason Paul's benediction to the Roman Christians is so precious:

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5,6)

Series: Exposition of the Revelation
Scripture: Revelation 6

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 14 3-19-89

THE BEGINNING OF THE END
(An Outline of the Great Tribulation)

Introduction There are a lot of theories about how the world could end. The most popular these days seems to be through a nuclear holocaust. Another scenario predicts the end of life on plant earth as we know it through a the destruction of the ecology. And some suggest that since a nuclear holocaust would precipitate ecological disaster (through a nuclear winter), civilization will end that way. Others fantasize (and no small amount of Hollywood dollars have supported it) that aliens will visit and then invade us, and dispose of us in all kinds of mean, nasty ways.

But at the risk of sounding old-fashioned and unsophisticated, I must tell you that the Bible tells us that the world will end in quite a different way. As we begin the third (and largest) section in John's Book of the Revelation, we are given a picture--a "panorama", if you will, of the final chapter of man in this age. Revelation 6 is a panoramic view of the Great Tribulation. Most of the whole book deals with the end of the age, and this sixth chapter will outline for us some of the events of those days.

I might add, that it is entirely possible that nuclear fission may indeed be part of the picture. Undoubtedly the environment will be dramatically affected (as we shall see). And if you consider angels and demons and living creatures and anti-Christ (to be) aliens, well, then they'll be around too.

The 1st Six Seals First of all, let me say something about the attitude we take concerning the end times. I am well aware that the Revelation is an unsettling piece of Scripture. Since most of us live with nice peaceful and prosperous life-styles, we're not so sure that we want a big shake-up of things. I think many of us would rather just have it all stay the same, since we're really pretty comfortable right now... (Though a few saints echo the Biblical sigh, "*Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus...*") But I remind you it wasn't so long ago that the whole world was at war. It wasn't so long ago that entire populations could be wiped out by a single plague. No, we're only in a little, probably brief envelope in time. We shouldn't be lulled to sleep by our love of "personal peace and affluence" (as Dr. Francis Schaeffer called it). Let's be wiser than that. Let's have courage to look into Scripture and understand what God has revealed about the end days. Let's receive the same invitation that one of those living creatures gave old John... "*Come.*"

Now one doesn't read very far in the Revelation before he encounters quite a few apocalyptic symbols, and since we're going to see so many, I want to briefly suggest several clues to help us understand these symbols...

Clue #1 - the context of the verse within a chapter, within the the whole Book and within John's whole collection of inspired writings.

Clue #2 - the Old Testament; for instance, Zechariah's use of the symbol of horses, which we see also in this chapter.

Clue #3 - John's own circumstances, the events, customs and culture of his day.

Now the Lamb, who is the only one qualified to do so, has taken hold of the seven-sealed book. I suggested to you when we dealt with the previous chapter what this book is: the final wrap-up of God's plan of the ages; a sort of history-book-in-advance that John longed to peer into. The book has been fastened closed with seven seals, and Jesus Christ now begins to break each of those seals.

The first seal that was opened revealed a rider on a white horse. Who is this rider? Some have said it is the same Rider as we read about in chapter 19, verse 11, whose name is "the Word of God." I do not think so, because the two riders have nothing in common beyond the white horse. Others say this rider is symbolic for the Gospel message, riding forth to conquer the world. But the Gospel is never pictured this way in Scripture and indeed, does not have the character of a warrior. No, I believe this rider shown in the opening of the first seal is the Anti-Christ, looking for his own dominion at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. The Anti-Christ is the final world ruler before Christ's second coming. His rule is described further in Rev.13. During the Tribulation this Anti-Christ will be loosed on the world as a judgement on the world.

The second seal (vss.3,4) pictures the judgement of God on the earth through a "red horse". This judgement will involve international warfare between men. It will also involve internal strife within nations. There is much of this today. Few nations are without it. There are also something on the order of five wars going on in the world today. While we are not in the Tribulation yet, let's not be lulled into thinking that because we can enjoy peace, this is the state of the whole world. The stage is being set.

The third scene of judgement in those days is "a black horse." The black horse in Jeremiah was a picture of famine, and so it is here. During the Tribulation, a day's wages will be what it takes to buy food. How much do you make in a day today? That's what it will cost just for minimal food in those days; never mind other expenses! There will be true famine conditions.

The end of verse 6 is interesting. It seems that during the Tribulation, the poor will get poorer BUT the rich will get richer. Oil and wine, when put up against wheat and barley, are symbols

of luxury. The judgement on the world will compound because the rich will of the world be tested, not by their riches being ruined or confiscated, but by their being preserved for a time. It is the *greatest* test to see how we handle PROSPERITY; not just how we handle poverty...

Lest you be tempted to think that the Lamb is uncaring about the poor, remember that He Himself was poor, in His incarnation. He fed the poor. He healed the poor. He was the poor man's Preacher! He even equated ministry by His disciples to poor people, as ministry UNTO HIM. The Lord Jesus is full of compassion for the hurting, disadvantaged and impoverished in this world. But remember, we are reading in Revelation 6 of the last days of this dispensation. All stops will be pulled out, as the wrath of the Lamb is unveiled. It will be a time, as Jesus said, "*such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall*" (Matthew 24:21).

The fourth seal speaks of the death of many at this early stage of the Tribulation. Many people will simply lose their lives during this time. The "ashen" horse is literally a pale yellow-green, with sort of a cadaverous hue. The Death-horse has a jaundiced look. The plague of death will not come to the whole earth, only to one fourth of it. Which fourth will that be? We do not know. But this is the aftermath of war and famine. With war and famine people fall victim to plague and even wild beasts will recover some vengeance.

With the fifth seal (vss.9-11), John turns his gaze back to heaven. There the souls of people who are saved and born-again, and yet martyred, from all the centuries. Several things about these souls are of interest.

- a. They are conscious. They are not asleep.
- b. They are aware of what is transpiring on the earth.
- c. They are resting in heaven, "underneath the altar." This is a symbol from Leviticus 4:7, of the altar of sacrifice. Under the altar was where the blood of the sacrifices was poured. These martyred souls sacrificed their own lives because of the word of God, and their lives were bought also by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb...
- d. Even in heaven, these souls long for final justice. They are bewildered, yet believing. They are also comforted and told to rest "for a little while longer."

At the end of verse 9, we read it was their testimonies that cost them their lives. What is your testimony? Can you articulate what Christ means to you? Can you actually verbalize, and are you *willing* to do so, what Jesus Christ has performed on your behalf? You must accept, dear ones, that God's Word will always meet opposition. When many of the people to whom you are trying to witness throw it back in your face, know that this is a common and predictable experience.

The sixth seal (vss.12-17) speaks of ecological upheaval and its effects on most people yet alive. They would rather perish in earthquakes and have the mountains fall on them than face the wrath of the Lamb. This picture of a blackened sun, a bloody moon and falling stars may be the

ffects of some kind of atomic fission. It may be John's way of describing what nuclear holocaust looked like, and that it might play a role during the Tribulation.

Sinful man has always instinctively hidden from God. Apart from Christ, men are like roaches in the night, under a switched on lamp. And man, left to himself, will not repent.

Notice that the Lamb does vent His wrath at this time. He is not only kind and gentle and meek. He will set creation aright, and He has many enemies who oppose His sovereign rule. To them, He is wrathful, and they would rather perish insanely in an earthquake, than to repent and bow down before Him, "who sits on the throne."

Concluding Applications:

1. I hope that you can see that with the clues of context, the Old Testament and John's own circumstances, that Revelation isn't hard to understand. The blessing for us is this: there is a Plan for the world, and there is a PLANNER. Christianity is not the servant of civilization, as some skeptics think. Rather, "civilization is the arena through which God glorifies Himself", as the Redeemer of men and also as the Judge of men through our Lord Jesus Christ" (S. Lewis Johnson). History is His-story. Find comfort in this dear ones, when you read the newspaper, when you hear about nuclear testing, when you worry about acid rain and the ozone layer, when you get news of war.
2. In His plan, the Lord withholds justice for a season. Do not be surprised if God doesn't always right a situation immediately. He bides His time in keeping with His overall plan. Just because He does not immediately avenge injustice, doesn't mean He has abandoned us or does not care.
3. We should expect poverty to increase when the last days unfold. We should support social programs with every ounce of energy we can muster now, but social programs are not the final answer to your problems or mine, or to this country's. Poverty characterizes the Tribulation. Man will simply not find the answer to his difficulties within himself. His whole history, even at its end is too pockmarked by the drive to make selfishness a success.
4. Although Rev. 6 is caped in the black robe of death, the true disciple of Christ need not fear death. First of all, because you will probably not have to live through the Tribulation-- even if it were to begin soon. It appears that the Church is nowhere to be found on the earth as the Tribulation begins. But even if you were called upon to forfeit your life for the sake of Christ, God would give you the courage and the determination at that time to experience it. I also remind you of Paul's "credo," "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

Resources: taped message on Rev. 6 by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson (1965); The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Walvoord & Zuck); Word Pictures in the New Testament (A.T. Robertson).