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# Entering the World of the 7 Churches...

To appreciate the setting in which Jesus gave His revelation to John (who was exiled on Patmos; Rev. 1:9), here is a very brief introduction of the world Jesus called His church to be witnesses in (Rev. 12:11)...



## THE WAR FROM WITHOUT: THE EMPIRE AND THE CHURCH (30-100 A.D.)

### 1. A hostile society and government

*“... nothing is more renowned than their (ancestors) decision to entrust the worship of gods and the highest interests of the state to the same men”*

(Cicero, De Natura Deorum, I:VI:14) (he would be assassinated by the state, 43BC)

*“They (Christians) are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred”*  
(Letter to Diognetus, 5:17)



It is worth noting that the Jews were the first to persecute Christians (as noted in Acts 8:1 onwards) and would continue to do so throughout the early church period. This reality is echoed in Revelation 2:9: *“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”*.

During the time of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius, the church was under the radar (a mere curiosity as we see in Acts). However, this changed when Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome. Being the scapegoat, Christians were being persecuted. According to tradition, Paul was executed as a Roman citizen and Peter was crucified upside down under Nero...

*“Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians.” They were convicted for “hatred of the human race”.*

*“... derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus” (Tacitus, Annales, 15:44)*

1 Clement 1:1 mentions that the church of Rome suffered, *“sudden and successive calamitous events”* and reminds the church that Paul and Peter were killed during this time as examples from *“our own generation”* of martyrdom (1 Clement 5).

Nero's bloody persecution was limited to Rome itself. Even so, the Roman Empire had noted Christianity through their martyrdoms (witness), but their judgment/estimation of Christians was very negative. Most Roman writers judged Christianity as an evil and deadly superstition (cf. Tacitus, Annales, 15:44; Seutonius, Nero, 16:2; Pliny, Letters, 10:96-97)

## 2. Emperor Worship

When Caesar Augustus took hold of the Roman Empire, he adopted the practice of Alexander the Great (the conquering goat of Daniel 8:1ff; 11:2-4) of the deification of emperors. Caesar Augustus was called, “*Lord and Saviour*”. The Emperor was seen as the “*pater patriae*” (father of the fatherland), the head of the state, but also the spiritual mediator between the gods and the empire. He was the “*auctoritas*” (the authority) and his dominion was enforced by the imperial cult (the burning of incense).

When Domitian became emperor (81-96 A.D.), he elevated the imperial cult, being honoured or flattered as “*dominus et deus*” (Lord and God) (Suetonius, *Life of Domitian*, 13; *Marial, Epigrams*, 10:72; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 45; Dio Cassius, *History of Rome, Epitome* 67.13). As the Jews faced their own beastly kingdoms and Babylon (Daniel 7), so the church will face the spirit of the beast and Babylon as well (cf. Rev. 13:4-8, 15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). This is the time when Jesus gave John His revelation to encourage the churches.

## 3. Worldliness: Wanting what the Empire offers...

The Empire and its gods used two prominent tools/levers to gain loyalty or devotion from its subjects: sex (lust) and money (greed). Both were major points of temptation for the churches.

**Wealth:** In 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, the church divided themselves along class lines during the Lord’s Supper (the wealthy receiving meals, while the poor go hungry). Moreover, they viewed leadership in a worldly way (following individuals instead of Christ, cf. 1 Cor. 1-4). Leadership was seen by some as a means for “*gain*” (1 Tim. 6:5) and espoused for the accumulation of wealth (cf. 1 Tim. 6:5-10, 17-19). James chastises the church for differentiating between the wealthy and the poor in their church gatherings (cf. James 2:1-13).

**Sexual immorality:** A common theme in all of Paul’s letters to the Gentiles was the command to refrain from sexual immorality (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:12-20; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3). To give you an idea what society was like, see the excerpt on the festival of Bacchus below...



*“To their religious performances were added the pleasures of wine and feasting, to allure a greater number of proselytes. When wine, lascivious discourse, night, and the intercourse of the sexes had extinguished every sentiment of modesty, then debaucheries of every kind began to be practised, as every person found at hand that sort of enjoyment to which he was disposed by the passion predominant in his nature. Nor were they confined to one species of vice – the promiscuous intercourse of free-born men and women” (Livy, History of Rome, Book 39:8)*

You will notice that the 7 churches wrestled with worldliness. They were tempted (like the rest of the world) to prostitute oneself to “Babylon” (Rev. 17:1-18) for personal gain, as the “kings”, “merchants” and “shipmasters” have, indulging in her “luxury” and “sexual immorality” (Rev. 18:1-24).

## **THE WAR WITHIN: HERESIES**

As the “tree of life” was presented in Genesis 2:9, so also the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was present as well (Gen. 2:17). In a similar fashion, as the truth of Jesus is proclaimed (the Vine or Tree of life, Jn. 15:1ff), so too does its counterpart emerge. The first examples are already present in Acts with Simon the Magician (Acts 8:9-24). The Apostles continually wrote against or mention false teachers in their letters (cf. Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Colossians; 1 & 2 Timothy; Jude; 1, 2, 3 John etc.).

When we read the 7 letters, we discover that heretics and heresies were within the church. Ephesus, “*tested those who claim to be apostles but are not*” (Rev. 2:2) and are resisting the “*Nicolaitans*” (Rev. 2:6). Pergamum and Thyatira have compromised the Gospel by embracing heresy: “*You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam... You tolerate that woman Jezebel*” (Rev. 2:15, 20-21).

Engaged in this battle, how did the church overcome? How did the church remain a faithful witness (Rev. 12:11)? This is what we will discover as we grapple with the 7 letters to the 7 churches. And, Lord-willing, we will be equipped to be faithful witnesses in Fish Hoek as well.

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 1:1-20**



Introduction  
and Overview

# Introduction and Overview



## STUDY 1

*“The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the church. But the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians! ‘You are the light of the world’”*

(Charles Spurgeon, 19th Century)

1. How are you doing in terms of being a light in the world?

## Investigate

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### Read Revelation 1:1-11

1. Who’s revelation is “The Book of Revelation”? (1:1-2)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is promised for those who take it seriously? (1:3)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. To whom is John passing on the revelation? (1:4, 11)  
What is his situation as he does this? (1:9)



4. From 1:4-8, list some of the things we are told about...

What Jesus is doing for us right now	
What Jesus has already achieved for us	
What Jesus will do in the future:	

**Read Revelation 1:12-20**

5. We'll return to these verses often (because they are referenced in the messages for each of the seven churches) but try to summarise in a few words what they convey about Jesus:

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6. The key symbols in the vision are explained in 1:19-20

- If Jesus holds the “seven stars” in his right hand (v. 16), what does this convey about his concern for the church?
  
- The churches are symbolised by lampstands, and Jesus is among them (v. 13). What does this convey about Jesus’ mission for the church?

## **In Summary...**

The imagery is of the exalted, all powerful Jesus as the High Priest serving within the Temple, “*among the lampstands*” (Rev. 1:12-13). The church is God’s temple on earth, with Jesus as our High Priest. We are the visible display of God’s presence – we “shine” the light of God in our world.

So, the central theme of the message to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 is the idea of being a lampstand... a light... a witness, to Jesus. Over the coming weeks, we’ll read some (very!) strong words from Him, commanding His church to reject worldliness and false teaching and to stand firm in the face of persecution and opposition.

**This “Dear Church...” series will help remind us (as a church and as individual Christians) how we need to carefully preserve our role as “lampstands” by the things we believe and the way we live.**

A key aspect of our witness is in our relationships with non-Christians. With this in mind, we’re launching a special campaign for the coming 12 months at Gracefields...

# who's your 1 ONE?

“Who’s your one?” is simply a campaign encouraging everyone at Gracefields to prioritise one non-Christian relationship over the coming 12 months. What that looks like will be different for everyone but, at the very least, we could all:

- Commit to pray for that person on a regular basis (see the prayer guide included with this pack).
- Prioritise growing closer to that person over the coming 12 months; being a more Christ-like friend to that person, without them feeling like they have become some kind of “project”.

Then see which doors God opens. You never know, you might be able....

- ...to invite them to church or church events at some point over the next 12 months.
- ...to share with them the difference that Jesus has made in your life.
- ...to share with them how and why you became a Christian.
- ...to explain the gospel to them.

## Why are we doing this?

With Revelation 1-3 in mind, we want to be a church that really is a lampstand. We want to be faithful witnesses so that others are forgiven and saved. By thinking of **one** particular person, we can sharpen our prayer lives and be more intentional about planning our diaries.

**But it starts with our hearts!** So let’s finish by considering some heart attitudes which have the potential to horribly stifle our efforts in this campaign. Which of the following is a problem for you?



<b>Heart Attitude</b>	<b>How it harms evangelism...</b>	<b>Some Bible verses which challenge this attitude</b>
<b>Pride</b>	We think we're morally superior to people and so distance ourselves from them.	Mark 2:15-17 1 Tim 1:15-17
<b>Fear</b>	We fear what people will think of us if we share our faith with them.	2 Cor 5:10-11 1 Peter 3:13-16
<b>Pessimism</b>	We forget God's power to open blind eyes, and so we start to think " <i>that person would never become Christian</i> ".	2 Cor 4:4-6 John 6:37-40
<b>Indifference</b>	We just don't love people enough.	John 3:16-18 1 Thess 2:7b-8

### What next?

- Think and pray about who your "one" will be.
- Share their name with your group and any prayer requests you may have.
- Think of some things you can do to connect with them over the coming 2 weeks.



## Homework

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### Over the coming week: Read through Rev. 2-3...

Each letter has a similar structure. As you read through, see if you can identify these different sections in each of them...

- "To the angel of..." followed by a reference to Rev. 1:9-20
- Diagnosis: Usually (but not always) a mixture of positive and negative. Make a note of any recurring problems that emerge in the diagnoses sections.
- A Warning (often with a reference to Rev. 1:9-20, Rev. 4-22)
- A General call and Promise/word of encouragement

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 2:1-7**



To the Church of Ephesus...



# Welcome to Ephesus!

We have ample historical information on the church of Ephesus from the Bible. The theme of false teaching will be prominent regarding the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. Love will also be an issue for Laodicea, though the lack of love will be expressed differently (complacency and worldliness). So, what we know of Ephesus is important for all the churches. And there are two things we need to keep in mind...

## THE WARNINGS ABOUT FALSE TEACHERS

In Acts 20:28-30, Paul commanded the Ephesian elders to “*pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock*” (v. 28) and to guard the church from “*fierce wolves*” (false teachers) that will come from within their own ranks (vv. 29-30). This remains a great concern for Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:14). They needed to realise that they are engaged in a spiritual war (cf. Eph. 6:11-12).

In 1 & 2 Timothy, we discover that false teachers have arisen and were challenging the Gospel in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3, 6-7; 4:1, 7; 5:11-16; 6:3-5). Hence the continual call for Timothy to remain faithful and fruitful in the Gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 4:6, 16; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2; 3:14-4:5). In a similar way, the Apostle John records that “*antichrists*” have arisen from within the church who deny Jesus (cf. 1 Jn. 2:18-19; 4:1-6; 3 Jn. 9).

## THE CALL TO LOVE

One of Paul’s greatest desires was that the church would, “*know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*” (Eph. 3:19) - filled with the fullness of God’s love described in Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2:1-22 (cf. 6:23-24). Yet, knowing God’s love, this fullness, should translate into “*bearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:2) and becoming “*imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*” (Eph. 5:1-2). This same call persists in 1 John (cf. 1 Jn. 2:10; 3:16-24; 4:7-5:5).

Our love for God and His people is also part of our witness to the world (cf. Jn. 13:35; 17:20-26). It is our love for God and His people that will motivate us as a church to be a witness or light to the world (as God sent His Son in love to the world, cf. Jn. 3:16-21).

# The Cosmic Theatre of our Witness

## (STARS AND LAMPSTANDS)

The church and its messengers/angels are described as “seven stars” and “seven lampstands” (Rev. 1:12-16, 20). What does it mean?

**STARS/ANGELS:** The imagery points to the celestial/heavenly identity of God’s people. In Daniel 12:1-3, God’s people have the angel “Michael” set over them. Moreover, those who are resurrected unto everlasting life, the “wise” of God (His people), are described as brightly shining as “*the stars forever and ever*” (12:3; cf. Matt. 13:43). The gathering of God’s people is not merely “earthly”, but “heavenly” as well (as represented by the 24 elders around God’s throne [cf. Rev. 4:4]). This theme is also found in Ephesians 1:19-23; 2:6; 3:10 and Hebrews 12:22-24. We are not just a witness to earth, but to the heavens as well.

**LAMPSTANDS:** The original symbol is found in Exodus 25:31-40; 27:20-21 (cf. Ex. 37:17-24; Lev. 24:2-4). The lamp had to burn “morning” and “evening” within the Tabernacle. As with the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-6), the fire at Sinai (Ex. 19:18) and the pillar of fire leading Israel (cf. Ex. 13:21-22; 14:24), the burning lampstand is a symbol of God’s presence (cf. 1 Sam. 3:3-4 – a Moses-like calling of Samuel). In Zech. 4:3-14, the image of the lampstand is applied to God’s “anointed ones” and **linked with God’s Spirit**. This imagery culminates with the Spirit of God descending upon the church as “*tongues of fire*” in Acts 2:1-3.

In summary, the church is the visible display and witness of God’s presence on earth. What the Lampstand was to the Tabernacle, the church is to the world (God’s light and presence). As stars, the church is the witness of God to the heavenly realms. As lampstands, the church is the witness of God to the earthly realms.

The book of Revelation will continually unveil that behind the “**visible**” emperors, governments, idols, false teachers, cities and “*those who dwell on the earth*” (Rev. 11:10; 13:8) are “**invisible**” spiritual forces at work. The Dragon (the devil) and his angels are at war with God and His people (Rev. 12:1ff). The Dragon is creating his own witnesses on earth (evil kingdoms represented by the Beasts; Rev. 13:1ff; cf. Dan. 7:1ff). He will use the world’s cities (Babylon) to lure people to compromise in idolatry and sexual immorality (Rev. 17-18).

Our witness is not just to the “visible”, but also to the “invisible”. It is “*through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*” (Eph. 3:10). So church, realise your cosmic audience and witness (visible and invisible). We are God’s heavenly stars and earthly lampstands.

# To the Church of Ephesus...



**STUDY 2**

- 1. Do you love Jesus? If so, how do you show your love for Him?

## Investigate

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**Read Revelation 2:1-7...**

- 1. Think back to last week. What did we learn in Revelation 1 that helps to explain the imagery in 2:1?
  
- 2. Jesus gives His diagnosis of the Church of Ephesus. List and discuss the positives and negatives (vv. 2-6)...

What is good?	What is bad?
How have they kept what they have been given? (cf. Acts 20:28-30)	What have they lost? (cf. Jn. 13:34-35; 17:21, 23) (hint: remember the image of the “lampstand” and notice who must see what they do and say)



3. What is Jesus' prescription for the church? (v. 5a)
4. What will happen if they fail to listen? (v. 5b)
5. What will happen if they "overcome" (v. 7; cf. Rev. 22:2-4)? How do you overcome (Rev. 12:11)?



## Thinking & Living

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*"We are light-bearers by bearing testimony to the Lord Jesus and His divine gospel"*  
(Charles Spurgeon, 19th Century)

1. What is encouraging about Jesus' description of Himself in v. 1? (cf. Jn. 10:28-29; Matt. 28:20)
2. How has Jesus' description of the church being a "lampstand" helped you...
  - Understand who we are in Jesus?
  - Our purpose on earth? (as a church family and each individually)
  - Why is being a "lampstand" not optional? What happens if we fail to be a "lampstand"?
3. How are **you** doing in terms of maintaining "*the love you had at first*" for Jesus, His people and His mission? Do you still have a zealous love to share Jesus with others? How will you rekindle that love?



Pray now for your “one” and share any update with your group.

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## **Points to Pray** (now and during the week)...



As you reflect on Ephesians and the call to “remember” and “repent” in Rev. 2:5, consider praying through the following each day...

### **Day 1**

Remember what “blessings” God the Father has given you in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-14). Notice Ephesians 1:3-14 is a song of praise. As you reflect on each “blessing” in Christ, praise God the Father for it. Also, praise God that this is not just for you, but for all who believe (for every believer at Gracefields).

### **Day 2**

Paul prays in Ephesians 1:15-23 that by the “Spirit of Wisdom” the church would truly know what they have in Jesus. We need God’s help to “remember” and “see” the reality of the Gospel. Pray that He would enlighten your heart to the truth of the Gospel. Pray that God would do this for every person at Gracefields as well.

### **Day 3**

Paul reminds the Gentile Christians that before knowing Jesus they were “dead” in their sins, enslaved by the world, their own passions, and the devil and destined for destruction (Eph. 2:1-3). Before knowing Jesus, they were alienated from God (2:11ff). It is only by God’s love and grace in Jesus that they have been made alive and brought into His family and presence (Eph. 2:1-22). Prayerfully reflect on this passage and praise God for His love in Jesus. Pray that every person at Gracefields would “remember” God’s love displayed in Jesus.

#### **Day 4**

Paul reminds the church that they are God's witness to the heavenly realms (Eph. 3:10). They are His citizens, household, and Temple on earth (Eph. 2:20-22). We have a tremendous privilege and responsibility. We are the stars and lampstands of God. Pray that we would understand and live in accordance with our incredible identity in Jesus.

#### **Day 5**

Paul prays that God the Father would *"grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Eph. 3:16-19). Let this prayer shape and guide how you pray for yourself and our church family.

#### **Day 6**

The Church of Ephesus was commended for their hard work and diligence in discerning false teaching. Pray for all the teaching ministries at Gracefields Church (from children's ministry to Fellowship Groups). Heresy will always attempt to eclipse the light of the Gospel. Pray that we will be found faithful and fruitful in the truth of the Gospel.

#### **Day 7**

Praise God for the beautiful promise of the feast of eating from the tree of life in the new creation (Rev. 2:7; 22:2-4). We have an incredible joy set before us. Pray that our future joy might encourage us to continue to persevere and to remain lovingly zealous every day.



# The “Nicolaitans” (Balaam and Jezebel)



In Revelation 2:6, 15, Jesus will mention the heretical group called the “Nicolaitans”. The church of Ephesus identified them as false (2:6), yet they managed to infiltrate Pergamum (2:15). Even so, the practices described in the church of Thyatira also match the Nicolaitans (cf. Rev. 2:20-21).

## WHAT DID THEY TEACH?

The association with the Old Testament figures of Balaam and Jezebel is important. Balaam enticed Israel through sexual immorality to participate in Baal worship (cf. Num. 25:1ff; 31:15-16). Balaam and those who participated in idolatry and sexual immorality were killed by the sword of judgment (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:22; cf. Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16). In a similar way, Jezebel led Israel into Baal and Ashtoreth/Asherah worship (a highly sexualised religion) (cf. 1 Kgs. 16:31-32; 18:4; 19:2). Her way was one of “sorceries” and “whorings” (2 Kgs. 9:22). Jezebel and all her followers were killed in judgment (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:30-10:27).

As Christians faced pressure to conform and submit to idol worship, some tempted and taught that participating in idol worship (festivals & meals, practices and sacrifices etc.) was OK for Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-20). This type of compromise would have been very appealing, since a refusal to participate in idol worship led to economic and social ostracism as well as persecution (cf. 1 Pet. 3:8-22; Heb. 10:32-36; 13:3, 13).

Compromise always seems sensible, politically astute, socially acceptable, and less painful. Yet, these practices were forbidden by the Apostles (Acts 15:20, 29). When you befriend the Dragon, Beasts (Rev. 12-13) and Babylon (Rev. 17-18), you do make Jesus your enemy (cf. Rev. 19:11-21). What seems “sensible” now is really folly in the light of eternity.

## WHY ARE THEY CALLED “NICOLAITANS”?

Early Church tradition identified the Nicolaitans with Nicolaus mentioned in Acts 6:5 (one of the seven appointed by the Apostles) (cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1:26:3; 3:11:1; Hippolytus, *Philos*, 7:36; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 1:29; *Preascriptione Haereticorum*, 33; *De Pudicia*, 19; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:29:1).

As the Apostle Paul warned, so it was: “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 2:8-11...**



To the Church  
in Smyrna...

# Welcome to Smyrna!



Smyrna is a city just north of Ephesus. It is described to be a thriving city, “*second only to Ephesus*”. It was a hub of wealth and prosperity. This is probably why poverty was mentioned as a trial because it would have been a big issue in a richer city to become poor. They would have been ostracised from work or any income because they were Christians.

Smyrna had a strong connection with Rome. It had built a temple in honour of emperor Tiberius. The patriotism to Rome meant that there could have been less patience with Christians who refused to pay homage to the deity of the emperor.

## **SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN (REV. 2:9; 3:9)**

Smyrna was home to a large Jewish population that was antagonistic to Christians. Jesus calls them a “*synagogue of Satan*”, for the Jews were slandering/persecuting Christians (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). It sounds harsh, but Jesus is unveiling the “invisible” spiritual force instigating the persecution/slander: Satan.

Revelation 12-13 shows a clearer picture of what the Christians are facing: the spiritual forces of the dragon and the beasts waging war against Jesus’ people (Rev. 12:17). The beasts blaspheme and slander God (Rev 13:6), exercising violence and deception (Rev. 13:14). The devil is the real enemy who is leading God’s people astray and persecuting them.

It is worth keeping Jesus’ words in mind when He spoke to the Jews who opposed Him: “*You are doing the works your father did... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies*” (John 8:41, 44).

## **10 DAYS OF TRIBULATION (REV. 2:10)**

Only 10 days of tribulation sounds nice and manageable... Though this is the book of Revelation where numbers are figurative. Although it does indicate brevity, the “*10 days*” echoes Daniel 1:12-16. Daniel and his friends were persecuted/tested for 10 days due to their witness. Nevertheless, when the 10 days came to an end, Daniel was healthier, and God was praised.

The church is called to consider Daniel’s persecution. Like Daniel, their persecution will be brief, come to an end and they will stand victorious. They will overcome the Dragon (Rev. 12:11).

# To the Church in Smyrna...



## STUDY 3

Between 60-313 A.D., the Roman Empire sporadically persecuted the church (whether by retrenchments, torture, or execution). Under Islam (7th Century onwards), Christians had to pay more taxes, dress differently (to be distinguished from Muslims) and suffer regular mob beatings/robbery (without legal protection). The Islamic Mongols and Turks massacred millions of Christians across Central Asia, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor between 1200-1400 A.D. All Christians who lived under the Ottoman Empire (1300-1922) had to pay the “blood tax” (give a son as tax to the emperor, forcing the child to become a Muslim). During WW1, the Turks massacred over a million Armenian Christians (1915-16). Within Communist countries, Christians were brutally persecuted during the 20th Century. Over 50 countries in the 21st Century actively persecute Christians. In 2022, World Watch listed 5600 martyrdoms.

1. Is it worth it? Why?

## Investigate

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### Read Revelation 2:8-11...

1. Jesus is described in two ways in v. 8. How are each of these descriptions an important (and encouraging!) reminder for a persecuted church, like Smyrna?
2. What is the church experiencing? What is the spiritual reality of their situation? (v. 9a)
3. Which group is causing them to suffer? What is the spiritual reality regarding that group? (v. 9b)

4. Look carefully through vv. 10-11...

What are the difficult things that still lie in the future for this church?	What things does Jesus want them know?	What does Jesus want them to do



## Thinking & Living

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*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”*  
(2 Timothy 3:12)

1. Discuss as a group how we endure hardship and persecution in our context. Do you think it is getting easier or harder to “live a godly life in Christ Jesus”, in Cape Town today? Why?
2. Are there any specific relationships or situations in which you face opposition and persecution? Share with your group and ask for prayer...
3. How has this passage helped you to understand what lies ahead for Christians, in this life?
4. How has this passage helped to give you hope? Look again at what is promised for those who remain faithful in this life (vv. 10-11). Is it worth it?





Pray now for your “one” and share any update with your group.

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## **Points to Pray** (now and during the week)...



Use Revelation 2:8-11 as the guide for your prayers. Spend time praying for the churches like Smyrna that are suffering persecution...

- 1.** Praise God that in Jesus we have the victory. He has “died and came to life” (Rev. 2:8) and offers to all His people the “crown of life” (2:10) and the promise that they will not suffer “the second death”. The Cross and Resurrection guarantees it!
- 2.** Pray for the persecuted church, missionaries and Christians witnessing to Jesus in our world. As a guide, look at: <https://www.barnabasaid.org/za/resources/prayer/>
- 3.** Pray for one another in your group. May we be found to be fearless (bold) and faithful witnesses in the Valley (Rev. 2:10).

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 2:12-17**



To the Church  
in Pergamum



## **Welcome to Pergamum! “Satan’s throne” (Rev. 2:13)**

Pergamum was a center for pagan cults for various deities in the region. The Cult of Asclepius (the serpent god of healing) was prominent in Pergamum. The serpent symbol of Asclepius was also one of the city of Pergamum’s emblems. Moreover, Zeus, Athene, Demeter, and Dionysus had cultic centers in Pergamum. On the conical hill outside of Pergamum were many temples; one being the throne-like altar to Zeus.

Furthermore, Pergamum was one of the first cities in Asia Minor to build a temple to a Roman emperor (Augustus) and was the capital for the cult of the emperor. The city proudly called itself “*the temple warden*” of the imperial cult. A failure to worship the emperor was seen as high treason by the state.

Given the symbolism and collective of gods worshipped here (Asclepius, Zeus, and the emperors), it is not hard to see why Jesus calls this place “*the throne of Satan*” (v. 13). The spiritual forces Pergamum was facing are described in Revelation 12-13 (the Dragon and the Beasts) (Beale 1999:246; Mounce 1998:78). In the words of Mounce, “*As Rome had become the center of Satan’s activity in the West (cf. 13:12; 16:10), so Pergamum had become his ‘throne’ in the East*” (1998:79).

### **THE SHARP TWO-EDGED SWORD (REV. 2:12)**

This image appears at the start (Rev. 1:12-20) and at the end of the book, when Jesus returns to destroy His enemies: “*From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty*” (Rev. 19:15).

The imagery of the mouth being a weapon (a two-edged sword) harkens back to the imagery found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea. In Isaiah, the Messiah or Servant of the Lord will judge the nations and the wicked with His mouth (His words). He will, “*strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked*” (Is. 11:4). Similarly, in Is. 49:2, “*He made my mouth like a sharp sword*”.

Jeremiah describes God's words as a destructive force: *"Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"* (Jer. 23:29). Hosea describes the prophets as God's mouthpiece to slay Israel and Judah in judgment: *"Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light"* (Hos. 6:5).

In the New Testament, Hebrews 4:12 describes God's Word as all penetrative in judgment/salvation: *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"*. It is not coincidental that Jesus is called "The Word" in John 1:1-18 (cf. Rev. 19:13).



# To the Church in Pergamum

**STUDY 4**

*“The nail that sticks out gets hammered down”*  
(Japanese proverb)

- 1. “Why is it harder to “stick out” in your witness than to compromise (fit in)?

## Investigate

**Read Revelation 2:12-17...**

- 1. What is the significance of Jesus’ word being “the sharp two-edged sword”? What should we remember about Jesus? (v. 12; cf. 1:16; 19:11-15)
  
- 2. Jesus gives His diagnosis of the Church of Pergamum. List and discuss the positives and negatives (vv. 13-15) ...

<b>What is good?</b>	<b>What is bad?</b>
How is Antipas a great example of a witness (Rev. 12:11)? Who was he imitating or identifying with (Rev. 1:5)?	Given what we know of Balaam (cf. Num. 25:1-2; 31:15) how is the church in Pergamum facing a temptation to compromise?

3. What should the church of Pergamum do? What will happen if they don't respond to Jesus' words? (v. 16; cf. Rev. 19:15-18)
  
4. What promise does Jesus give to encourage the church to "overcome" (v. 17; cf. Rev. 3:12; 19:7-9, 12)? What do you think this means?



## Thinking & Living

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Jesus mentions Antipas as a "faithful witness" (a true example of someone who overcomes, 12:11). Conversely, the Nicolaitans taught for compromise in idol worship, following Balaam's example (being a mouthpiece of the false prophetic beast of Rev. 13:11-12)...

1. We might not have the Nicolaitans' heresy today, but what they stood for still exists today (compromise by practising idolatry).
  - a. In what ways are you tempted by idolatry?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. In what ways are you tempted by sexual immorality?
  
2. Who are you really siding with if you compromise your faith? Who is behind the idol worship? (Cf. Rev. 2:13; 12:9; 13:4)

- 3.** Are money and materialism idols you struggle with? How does generous and joyful giving help to combat these idols? Look through the pledging information from Gracefields and prayerfully consider your giving plans for the coming year.
  
- 4.** How have Jesus' words to Pergamum encouraged faithfulness (v. 13) and underscored the severity of compromise (vv. 14-16)? In what relationships do you feel most tempted to just "fit in"? (At school/university, work, family or friends)
  
- 5.** It is hard to be excluded from the "party" of idolatry. How can the visions of the two feasts/suppers described in Revelation 19:8-9, 17 motivate you to remain faithful in your witness of Jesus?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...



Use Revelation 2:12-17 as a guide to your prayers this week...

- 1.** Praise God that Jesus intimately knows our situation (where we live and what challenges we might face). Jesus knew exactly where Pergamum was (“*I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is*” [v. 13]) and what they are going through witnessing to Him (v. 13).
- 2.** Praise God for the future hope of receiving “*hidden manna*” (eternal life with Jesus - Jn. 6:31-35), “*a white stone*” (a stone of acquittal and an invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb; Rev. 19:8-9) and a “*new name*” (Jesus’ name, the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem; cf. Rev. 3:12; 19:12). To those who overcome, they will be co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).
- 3.** Pray that the future hope we have in Jesus will shape our present lives of witness to Him. As 18th Century pastor Jonathan Edwards prayed, “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs”.
- 4.** Pray for the various ministries at Gracefields Church, Ubabalo neThemba, Southreach and our mission partners. Pray that we would be like Antipas: a “*faithful witness*” to Jesus and His Kingdom. Pray that we would not compromise our faith with false teaching, blending into the world in order to escape persecution, social or economic ostracisation.
- 5.** If you know someone who has listened and succumbed to false teaching, pray for wisdom and courage to approach and correct him or her. It is our responsibility as God’s family to help one another in showing error and pointing one another back to Jesus (cf. Matt. 18:15-20). We don’t want people to face Jesus as judge and be crushed in “*the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty*” (Rev. 19:15). God’s love in Christ compels us.



# TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PLEDGING

## 1. What is a pledge?

A pledge is simply a recognised commitment to give a **regular** amount each week or month.

We want this to be a means of expressing thanksgiving to our Lord for what he has blessed us with: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*  
2 Cor 8:9.

## 2. How does it actually work?

In the fourth term we outline some of the plans for the short and long term at Gracefields. Everyone who is part of Gracefields receives an information pack on all of this, including a “Commitment Card” which has all the detail you need to record your pledge. We ask everyone to return that card during Term 4. It starts with you prayerfully considering the amount that you can afford to commit cheerfully, generously and sacrificially.

## 3. Is this pledging different to my existing “tithing” / giving?

No. It’s just your regular giving being communicated to the church in advance, to assist us in setting realistic budgets that will be appropriate for the next year.

So, your pledge lasts twelve months... This gives us the chance each year to consider our ability to give and to make the appropriate changes.

## 4. Is this biblical?

God’s Word encourages Christians to decide, as individuals, what we are going to give: *“Everyone should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* (2 Cor 9:7). Considering your monthly/weekly pledging in advance will certainly help with this.

This verse also reminds us that no one should ever be forced to give but that it should emerge as a joyful obedience to his commands and a cheerful response to the God who has himself given so much.

## 5. What happens if my circumstances change and this affects my finances?

We understand that people’s situations can change in these uncertain times. If that happens it is appropriate that you reconsider your original commitment and if it cannot be met then you must feel free to change it. Also, some people’s income fluctuates from one month to the next so they prefer to pledge in quarterly or even annual amounts. (There’s place for you to specify this on the pledge card.)

## **6. I believe that my giving is between God and myself. Is the pledge amount tracked in any way and who knows what it is?**

The amount is counted by the Treasurer to achieve a total for the overall pledge given. He will be the only one who knows any individual details. The total figure is what we will use to help calculate our budget for the following year. Once this is done the details are not kept or tracked in any way. No one on the pastoral team will see the pledges. No one will be individually “tracked”.

## **7. What about giving to other Christian projects outside Gracefields?**

It is right to prioritise giving to the local church community at which you and your family are cared for spiritually. Over and above regular giving to the local church, some may also be in a position to give to other gospel initiatives and projects.

## **8. What if I can only pledge a small amount? Is it worth it?**

Every person who has Jesus as Lord is called in the Bible to give what they can. The issue of giving for every Christian is not ‘amount’ but ‘proportion’. We know of the widow in Luke 21:1-4 who gave much less in actual amounts than others but much more proportionally to what she had. That is, she gave out of her poverty.

God doesn’t ask us to give what we don’t have but to each give what we can, and then to examine whether that amount is both willing and sacrificial.

## **9. What happens if I decide not to pledge?**

We understand that this process is new to some and some might not be comfortable to make this change initially. However, the reality is the more in the congregation who pledge, the more accurate our financial planning will be for the following year.

## **10. Can’t I pledge my time and my spiritual gifts, instead of my money?**

Jesus calls all of his followers to join in his mission to reach the lost: “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt 28:19-20).

As part of this mission he wants us all to be serving him with our time, energy and money. Just like every Christian can play a serving role in the church, so every Christian can play a giving role, even if the amount is small.

### **IN A NUTSHELL:**

- **pledging helps each of us prayerfully plan our giving and...**
- **pledging helps us to understand more clearly what the financial capacity of the church is, and then budget accordingly.**

**Do please speak to our Church Treasurer (Craig French) with any questions or concerns you may have.**

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 2:18-29**



To the Church in  
Thyatira



# Welcome to Thyatira!

Biblically, Lydia (the first convert at Philippi) was “*from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God*” (Acts 16:14). How the church of Thyatira was planted is unknown to us, but it could have been through its trade connections with Philippi and through the Christians (like Lydia) who returned to the city of Thyatira (a trade hub).

Thyatira was between Pergamum and Sardis. What we do know is that it was founded by Seleucus I as a military outpost. It was later conquered by Rome in 190 BC. Under the security of *Pax Romana* (peace of Rome), the town’s identity shifted from a military outpost to a center of manufacturing and marketing. It hosted many trading guilds: “*woolworkers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers and bronze smiths*” (Mounce 1998:84-85).

**Important:** Trade guilds were not neutral spaces of work. They were inseparably intertwined with pagan religion (rituals and observances). The god Tryimnos (the Greek god Apollo) was the guardian of the city, the patron of the trade guilds and the god honoured at the city’s festivals. There would have been considerable pressure from society to conform to these practices.

If you rejected the “god” of the trade guild (you refused to participate in the pagan rituals or practices), then the risk was high that you would be retrenched/fired from your job.

# To the Church in Thyatira



**STUDY 5**

1. In the last couple of years, many “high profile” church leaders have been exposed for their involvement in various sexual scandals (Tullian Tchividjan, Carl Lentz, Ravi Zacharias, and Bill Hybels to name a few). How does this hurt/hinder/ruin our witness to the Gospel?

## Investigate

**Read Revelation 2:18-29...**

1. How does Jesus describe Himself (v. 18; cf. Rev. 1:14-15)? What do the symbols point to (cf. Rev. 2:23; 19:11-12) and the title “Son of God” (Psalm 2:7-9)?
2. Jesus diagnoses the church of Thyatira in vv. 19-20. List the positives and the negatives. Discuss...

The Good (v. 19)	The Bad (v. 20, 24)
	What did this person claim to be and have?
How are they the opposite of the church of Ephesus? (compare 2:4-5 with 2:19)	How is this the same as Pergamum? (compare 2:14-15 with 2:20)
What do we know of Jezebel? (read 1 Kings 16:31-33; 2 Kings 9:22)	

3. What will Jesus do to Jezebel and “her children” who follow her? (vv. 21-23)
  
4. To the faithful of v. 19, what does Jesus command them to do? (vv. 24-25)
  
5. Linked with v. 18, what does Jesus promise those who “conquer/overcome”? (vv. 26-29; cf. 19:11-14; 22:16)



## Thinking & Living

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1. Jezebel claims to be a “prophetess” (v. 20) and knows the “*deep things of Satan*” (v. 24) by her sexual immorality and idolatry. What “spirits” are behind her prophetic gift? What comes from the depths? (cf. Rev. 9:1-3, 20-21; 13:11-14; 16:13)
  
2. How do you distinguish between a false prophet (like Jezebel) and Jesus’ voice?
  
3. Can you think of contemporary “Jezebel” examples of false teachers/prophets who have infiltrated the church? How do they “affirm” and encourage Christians to participate in the idols of our time?

- 4.** Where have you possibly been tempted to dabble in “the deep things of Satan”? How have you possibly justified doing this? How does Jesus’ words to Thyatira serve as a correction and warning?
- Regarding sex (pornography, sex outside of heterosexual marriage, adultery etc.)
  - Regarding participating in the idols of our culture (greed, lust, power, pleasure etc.)
- 5.** How have you been encouraged by this passage to keep going in the Christian life?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...



Use Revelation 2:18-29 as the guide to your prayers.

- 1.** Praise Jesus for the incredible promises He has given us. As Jesus is the “*morning star*” (Rev. 22:16), so will we become like Him: “*I will give him the morning star*” (2:28). As Jesus received “*authority from my Father*”, so will we receive “*authority over the nations*” (vv. 26-27). Psalm 2 is not just about the Messiah, but His people as well!
- 2.** Praise Jesus that His judgments are perfect: “*I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works*” (Rev. 2:23). Nothing escapes Jesus’ “*eyes like a flame of fire*” (2:18). Praise Jesus that He will judge all evil and rid His creation (His Kingdom) of evil spiritual forces and rebellious human kingdoms (cf. Rev. 19-22).
- 3.** Pray for Gracefields Church, Ubabalo neThemba Church and Southreach. At no point should we be found tolerating false teaching as the church of Thyatira did. Pray that we would “hold onto” the true Gospel as revealed in Jesus and passed on by His Apostles. Pray for a discernment in the following teaching ministries...
  - Fellowship Groups
  - Children and Youth Ministry (Friday nights at Coolclub, Crew and Hood as well as Kids Church, GAP, and Double Click on Sundays)
  - Sunday Gatherings (in our singing and preaching)
  - Pastoral Care and Visiting (as we share God’s Word one-on-one)
  - LIFE, Joining-In and I Believe (as we seek to share the Gospel and teach the core beliefs of the church family)
- 4.** Confess and repent where you might have tolerated and followed false teaching in your own life. Pray that God would show you by His Spirit (through His Word and the fellowship with other believers) where you possibly might have succumbed to false teaching. Pray that unlike “Jezebel” you would have a heart of repentance (Rev. 2:21)



**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 3:1-6**



To the Church  
in Sardis...

# Welcome to Sardis!



Like Pergamum, Sardis is only mentioned in Revelation. East of Ephesus (80km), it was the main city of the Hermus Valley and one of the most powerful cities in the ancient world prior to Roman occupation. The capital of the Kingdom of Lydia, it would be conquered by Cyrus of Persia (546 BC), later by Alexander the Great and finally by Rome in 133 BC.

Twice in Sardis' history has the city been conquered due to a lack of vigilance (wakefulness) on the part of the defenders (first by Cyrus and later by Antiochus the Great). During the Roman period, Sardis was ruined by a tremendous earthquake in 17AD. Under the patronage of Caesar Tiberius (who funded it with 10 000 000 sesterces – 5 years' worth of tax remissions), Sardis was rebuilt. Nevertheless, it did not receive an imperial temple and the imperial cult did not take root here.

During this time, *“the greatness of Sardis under Roman rule was rotted in past history... a city of the past, which had no future before it”* (Ramsay, 1904:215). Even so, being close to Ephesus, Sardis had a 48m x 91m temple dedicated to Artemis built by Croesus and reconstructed by Alexander the Great in 499 BC (the image of Artemis was engraved on its coinage). But the temple was never completed – it remained incomplete (Mounce 1998:92-94; Ramsey, 1904:213).

## THE “SEVENFOLD SPIRIT” (REV. 3:1)

Unique to Sardis is the description of Jesus having *“the seven spirits”* (3:1). This description is introduced in Rev. 1:4 and re-introduced in Rev. 4:5 and 5:6. It can be translated as the “sevenfold spirit” and is a reference to God the Holy Spirit. The number 7 (as at creation in Genesis 1-2) is a symbol of completeness or fullness. As the 7 churches (though historical churches) represent the entire universal church, so the number 7 here refers to the universal work and presence of the Spirit among the churches (who is before the Throne and administers the rule of the Lamb; cf. Rev. 4:5; 5:6). Moreover, the Spirit is linked with lampstands in Zech. 4:1-6. **The church is a witness (lampstand), because of the indwelling presence of the Spirit.**

God the Holy Spirit is the One who *“gives life”* (Jn. 6:63) or Jesus' life-giving water (Jn. 7:38-39) to the one who believes in the Son (Jesus). The Apostle Paul explains that *“the Spirit is life”* (Rom. 8:10-11). It is through the New Covenant of Jesus that we receive the Spirit who *“gives life”* (2 Cor. 3:6). It is through the empowering presence of the Spirit that the church can comprehend God's love in Christ (Eph. 3:19-20) and so be the manifold witness of God's wisdom to the heavenly realms (Eph. 3:10). He is also the *“flame”* that causes the church to be a light to the nations (cf. Acts 2:3 and link it with the burning bush, Sinai, the pillar of fire and tabernacle in Exodus). Keep all of this in mind...

# To the Church in Sardis...



## STUDY 6

1. Why do churches die or become “dead”? What have we learned from Ephesus, Thyatira, and Pergamum so far?

## Investigate

Ephesus was warned to remember the Gospel and reignite “*the works you did at first*” (2:5) (their love for Jesus and people should move them to be witnesses: a lampstand). Thyatira and Pergamum had to rid themselves of heresy (that is ruining their witness). If the churches fail to do so, then Jesus will remove their “lampstand” and come in judgment (2:5, 16, 22-23). They will cease being His witness to the world (Rev. 12:11).

### Read Revelation 3:1-6...

1. How does Jesus describe Himself in v. 1? Why the reference to the “sevenfold spirit”? What does the Holy Spirit give? (cf. Jn. 6:63; 7:38-39; Zech. 4:1-9)
  
2. What is Jesus’ diagnosis of the church of Sardis? (vv. 1-2, 4)
  
3. Why would Jesus describe them like this? What have they done? Consider what is happening in Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira.

4. What should they do in response? What will happen if they fail to do so? (vv. 2-3)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If they are “dead”, then why does Jesus address them? Who is Jesus talking to? (v. 4)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What encouragement does Jesus give those who have not “soiled their garments”? (vv. 5-6) (cf. Rev. 7:9-10; 19:6-9; 20:15)



## Thinking & Living

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1. Why do churches die or continue to grow? What’s the difference? How do we see that in the 7 churches and today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What happens when churches stop witnessing to the outside world and compromise their faith by adopting the thinking of the world?

3. Jesus calls this church to “*wake up*” (be watchful like a soldier). What should we be “watchful” of as a church family? What are possible ways we can let our guard down...
  - When we witness among our work colleagues, friends at school/university, family or the local sports club?
  
  
  - When we are challenged on what we believe about Jesus (His identity and mission; His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return)?
  
4. How can we guard against Gracefields becoming a dead church? What role could you play in that?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. The change Jesus is calling for is impossible for us (from death to life). Yet, what is encouraging about v. 1? Who will help us change?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How are you doing in your witness? Are your garments “soiled” or are you walking “worthy” of Jesus? How do you receive “*white garments*”?  
**(Rev. 7:13-14; 12:11)**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Why is it important that you know where you stand? (v. 5)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How have you been encouraged by this passage to keep going, following Jesus?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...



Let Revelation 3:1-6 shape your prayers this week as you pray...

1. Praise God that even if a church gathering is “dead”, Jesus remains concerned for the “few names” that still follow Him in such a gathering. He does not quit on His people! Praise Him that He will empower His people to change by His Spirit (v. 1).
2. Pray for the “Sardis” churches of our age (who have forgotten/forsaken the Gospel, their role as a witness and completely compromised their Faith with false teaching). They are in sharp decline (see stats above). Pray for the Spirit of God to descend upon these churches and revive them (from death to life).  
**Earnestly pray for revival in North America, Europe, and South Africa.**
3. Pray for Gracefields (and churches in our Valley). We are called to be “watchful” and not “soil” our garments with compromise. Pray each of us would continue to “hold on” to the Gospel we have received. Specifically...
  - Pray for one another in your Fellowship Group. Don’t sleep in your responsibility to help one another remain faithful witnesses (Heb. 10:24-25)
  - Pray for everyone in teaching positions (FG Leaders, Kids Church leaders, our music teams, Friday Night ministries, our Missions partners, LIFE discussion leaders, our pastors). *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers”* (1 Tim. 4:16).
  - Write down and pray for people you know who possibly are compromising their faith by adopting heresies. Pray that they would “wake up” and see what is happening. Pray for courage and wisdom to be a watchman to the people you know: *“I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* (Acts 20:26-27)

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 3:7-13**



# To the Church in Philadelphia



# Welcome to Philadelphia!

The region came into possession of the Pergamene King Eumenes in 189 BC. Eumenes named the city after his brother Attalus II for his loyalty. Attalus II resisted Rome's encouragement to usurp his brother for the throne (he was called Philadelphus - "brother loving"). The city was built to promote Hellenism in Asia Minor. It was quite successful, since by 19 A.D. the entire region exclusively spoke Greek. It had an alliance with the city of Ephesus, regarding religious and festival arrangements. Ephesus introduced the worship of Artemis into Philadelphia. It would also be an important trade route, linking the Orient with the Greco-Roman world. It was the "gateway to the East" (Mounce, 1998:98-99; Ramsey 1904:233).

Like Sardis, Philadelphia was destroyed due to a severe earthquake in 17 A.D. (12 cities were destroyed in the greater Lydian valley). The area remained earthquake prone, so that by 20 A.D. Strabo records that the inhabitants of Philadelphia lived outside the city in huts and booths, deeming the city unsafe and in fear of a possible repeat of the disaster. Even so, under the patronage of the emperors, the city was rebuilt and adopted the imperial title "Flavia" along with the imperial cult (Mounce 1998:98; Ramsey 1904:233).

Although we do not know the exact origin of the church of Philadelphia, the letter has many similarities to Smyrna. Like Smyrna, the church of Philadelphia was persecuted by the Jews (cf. Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Both Smyrna and Philadelphia have no notes of disapproval or rebuke. Both are suffering severe persecution. Both are the targets of the Dragons' wrath (cf. Rev. 12:9-17).

## **"AN OPEN DOOR" (REV. 3:8)**

We know that Jesus has "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). In fact, in Ephesus, as Paul wrote, "a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8). Wherever Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, "a door was opened for me in the Lord" (2 Cor. 2:12). The Gentiles, who believe and follow Jesus, are now also, "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). They are included into God's people (Eph. 2:11-22) and are grafted into the Olive Tree (Rom. 12:11-24). This is the great door Jesus has opened to "all nations" (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Jn. 12:32; Eph. 3:6).

Nevertheless, as the Jews resisted Jesus, His Apostles and Paul, so the Jews in the region resisted this "door" and tried to shut it (cf. Acts 4:23-31; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12-17). Heretical groups, adopting Judaism, also tried to shut the door (cf. Acts 15:1; Gal. 1:6ff). Yet, if Jesus has opened the door, then can anyone shut it?



# To the Church in Philadelphia



**STUDY 7**

1. What are you most afraid of when you witness to Jesus in your relationships?

## Investigate

One of the great wonders of the Gospel era is that God has “*opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*” (Acts 14:25). We know that some Jews continually tried to shut that door by persecuting the church (cf. Acts 4:23-31; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12-17). The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia were both being persecuted by the Jewish community for their witness to Jesus...

### Read Revelation 3:7-13...

1. How does Jesus introduce Himself (v. 7)? What is the significance here?

“Holy one, the true one”	“The Key of David... who opens... who shuts”
Cf. Rev. 6:10 (who is Jesus?)	Cf. Rev. 1:18, 21:10, 27 (in Isaiah 22:15-25 God gives Eliakim the keys to Jerusalem to open and shut)

- 2.** The Church of Philadelphia is experiencing opposition, but what encouragements does Jesus give them regarding their witness? (vv. 8-9)

<b>Regarding judgment</b>	<b>Regarding salvation</b>
See also: Rev. 19:19-21	See also: Rev. 22:24-26

- 3.** To witness means to wage a spiritual war against the Dragon (Satan) (cf. Rev. 12:11). In that battle, what encouragement does Jesus give His people? (vv. 10-11)

- 4.** If they overcome, what does Jesus promise His people at the end of the race? (vv. 12-13)



# Thinking & Living

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1. How does Jesus' description of Himself in vv. 7-9, encourage you as you think about witnessing to your "one" as part of the "Who's your one?" campaign? When...
  - You feel "weak" in your witness.
  - You struggle to find the "right" words (as if there is a special key you need to use in your words to unlock another person's heart).
  - You experience resistance from your "one"
  - You are afraid you might fail to live distinctively as a Christian
2. Christians, like the church of Philadelphia, have often been ostracised (kicked out) by society because they witness to Jesus.
  - Have you possibly experienced this in some way? Tell the group...
  - How can v. 12 help you keep "risking it" to witness to Jesus?
3. In your witness, how can each of you in the group help one another...
  - Keep Jesus' Word and patiently endure?
  - Hold fast to the end?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...



Let Revelation 3:7-13 shape your prayers this week and as you pray for the one person you are reaching out to...

1. Praise God. Jesus holds the keys to death/Hades and the New Jerusalem. No one can shut it but Him. Praise Jesus that He has “set before you an open door” (Rev. 3:8) and that He will make His enemies bow down to Him (Rev. 3:9). Praise God that Jesus made you “bow down” to Him and join His people in salvation.
2. Pray for the one you are reaching out to...
  - Pray that Jesus would open the door of salvation for him or her through your witness (or whoever else might reach out to that person as followers of Jesus).
  - Pray that he/she would be open to your witness and that God would “write on him/her the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem” (Rev. 3:12).
  - Pray that if he/she begins to follow Jesus, that he/she would keep His word and hold onto Him. Pray that Jesus would empower by His Spirit to resist the Evil one, overcoming the many temptations and attacks he might launch against him/her.
3. Pray for the children, teenagers and young adults of our church family. It is hard to witness to Jesus and the fear of being ostracised for their faith by their friends is real.
  - Pray that their parents would model to their children what it means to keep Jesus’ Word and hold on to the Faith (witnessing to Jesus).
  - Pray for wisdom as parents disciple their children, teenagers and young adults in Rev. 3:7-13, having a biblical perspective in facing opposition.
  - Pray for boldness for our children and young adults as they stand out for Jesus at school, university or just starting in the workplace.

**REMEMBER:** [www.barnabasaid.org/za](http://www.barnabasaid.org/za)

**SERMON NOTES: REVELATION 3:14-22**



# To the Church in Laodicea



# Welcome to Laodicea!

## **SUPER WEALTHY!**

Established in the 3rd Century BC by Antiochus II (named after his wife Laodice), it became the wealthiest city in Phrygia during the Roman era. It was famous for its black wool and the tunics made from it (called *trimita*). Its agricultural wealth eventually led to a vibrant banking industry (used by famous statesman like Cicero). It was so wealthy, that unlike Sardis or Philadelphia, Laodicea did not need financial aid from Rome to rebuild the city after a devastating earthquake in 60 A.D. In Tacitus' words, "*Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us*" (Annales 14:27).

Laodicea was also known for its medical school, the development of an ointment from spice nard for ears and an eye-salve, which is a powder and oil mixture (Mounce 1998:107).

## **WATER PROBLEMS**

Laodicea had two prominent sister cities. 10km north of Laodicea was the city of Hierapolis. The city was famous for its hot springs with high concentrations of minerals. It had medicinal qualities (it was life-giving and useful). 16km up the Lycus River was Colossae that was blessed with ice cold and pure mountain streams (refreshing!). However, Laodicea did not possess proper water resources. It relied on water to be channeled by a pipe system. When the water finally reached Laodicea it was often lukewarm and caused nausea (Beale 1999:303; Mounce 1998:109).

## **THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA**

We know the church was around during the time of the Apostle Paul and has a link to Epaphras (cf. Col. 2:1; 4:12-13, 16). Even so, by the time Jesus addresses the church in Laodicea in Revelation, things are dire. As Sardis (3:1-6), Laodicea receives no positive diagnosis. In fact, it is worse than Sardis. Sardis has a remnant at least (3:4), yet no such remnant is mentioned in Laodicea (Beale 1999:302). In fact, Jesus is standing outside of the gathering knocking to come in (3:20)! This church needs resurrection life!

# To the Church in Laodicea



**STUDY 8**

*“Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that is ‘finding his place in it’, while really it is finding its place in him” (C.S. Lewis)*

1. Does material wealth = spiritual wealth? Can wealth aid or hinder our witness? Discuss...

## Investigate

*“The snow covers many a dunghill; so doth prosperity many a rotten heart”  
(Thomas Brooks)*

**Read Revelation 3:14-22...**

1. How does Jesus introduce Himself (v. 14)? What is the significance here?
2. Like Sardis (3:1-6), Jesus only gives a negative diagnosis of the church of Laodicea.
  - What is their witness like? (vv. 15-16)
  - How do they view themselves vs. what Jesus knows? (v. 17)

Why are they naked and blind?	How have they become wealthy?
Cf. Rev. 16:13-16 (cf. Ezk. 16:36)	Cf. Rev. 17:1-5; 18:3

3. What do they need to do? (vv. 18-19; cf. Rev. 3:4; 7:14)
  
4. Where is Jesus in His relationship with the church of Laodicea? What should they do? (v. 20)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What encouragement does Jesus give them to be faithful witnesses? (vv. 20-21)



## Thinking & Living

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Spurgeon once remarked that to “*live with the object (your purpose in life) of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian*”. The Apostle Paul warns that “*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*” (1 Tim. 6:10). Instead, the wealthy should be “*rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share*” (1 Tim. 6:18).

1. How is the church of Laodicea a corrective to the idea that material wealth = spiritual wealth or blessing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is Jesus against their wealth? What is Jesus really addressing? Discuss...



3. Laodicea’s witness was nauseating to Jesus. They testified to trusting in Babylon for security. When people meet you and get to know you, which of the following statements would they say matches you most?

You belong to the New Jerusalem	You belong to Babylon
<p>“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:14)</p> <p>“And they have conquered him (the dragon) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” (Rev. 12:11)</p>	<p>“I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” (Rev. 3:17)</p> <p>“For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living... she glorified herself and lived in luxury... ‘I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see’” (Rev. 18:3, 7)</p>
<p><b>Where does Jesus feature in your life? Is He outside your home knocking or inside having fellowship? (Rev. 3:20)</b></p>	

4. We can (and should) use our wealth in “service to the cause of God” (Spurgeon). How can you practically use your wealth to witness to Jesus in the following areas...
- You trust God the Father to provide everything you need to serve Him (Matt. 6:33)
  
  - You mirror Jesus’ self-sacrificial (cross-shaped) generosity to you (2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Tim. 6:17-18)

- You believe that living for God’s eternal kingdom now is the most important priority (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:18-19)
- You are content in Jesus, knowing He will empower you through every situation to serve Him (Phil. 4:10-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-9)

5. How can the future promise of ruling with Jesus on His throne (Rev. 3:21), combat our temptation to compromise and motivate us to witness?

## For you to prayerfully consider (on your own)

When you think of your witness, think in three areas...

- 1) **What you are doing as an individual in your day-to-day life.**  
Your work, home, relationships, hobbies and this Valley is your mission-field. Every day you are presented with small and big ways that you can witness to Jesus. Every day your decisions, words and actions are witnessing to something. All of these are normally “informal” opportunities God has given you. So prayerfully consider how you witness as an individual representative of Jesus. Who is the one person you will witness to?
- 2) **What we are doing as a church family (congregation).**  
We, as a church family, witness to Jesus as well. Gracefields (we as a collective) witness to Jesus in our Valley. We witness to our Valley through our various ministries that we do together. No ministry can happen without the church family being generous (in their time, energy, abilities [gifts] and money). Gospel generosity enables ministry. The ultimate goal of every ministry at Gracefields is to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:18-20). So prayerfully consider how you can be generous in enabling Gospel ministries to happen at Gracefields.

3) **Supporting others in Gospel ministry.**

At Gracefields we have a number of missionaries we support across Africa and Japan (see website). We have two church plants that we support (Ubabalo neThemba and Southreach). Moreover, we have many church families involved in local mercy ministries such as Ithemba School, Living Hope and U-turn. We have these missionaries, church plants and mercy ministries because of Gospel generosity. Prayerfully consider how you can generously partner.

These three areas often overlap. For example, generous giving at Gracefields enables local ministries, but also supports our missionaries and church plants; being involved in a ministry at Gracefields is also part of your personal witness to Jesus. Being involved in a mercy ministry is also part of your personal witness. Prayerfully consider how you can use your time, energy, gifts and money as a witness in these areas.

*“When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man when he gets all he can and saves all he can does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man!”*

(John Wesley)

*“God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving” (Randy Alcorn)*

## Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...



Use Revelation 3:14-21 as the guide of your prayers this week.

- 1.** Praise God. Although Laodicea is completely out of fellowship with Jesus, He is still knocking on the door (Rev. 3:20). Jesus does not quit on His people. To be reproved and disciplined by Jesus is a sign of His love: *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline”* (Rev. 3:19).
- 2.** Praise Jesus for the incredible promise of future rule with Him on His throne: *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Rev. 3:21). No king or emperor in the history of humanity has ever promised to do what Jesus is promising here to His people.
- 3.** Pray for your “one” person you are reaching out to. Pray that your witness (in your everyday life) would not be “lukewarm” (nauseating), but healing (hot) and refreshing (cold). Specifically, pray that through your life you would witness to the “riches” you have in Jesus (Rev. 3:18).
- 4.** Confess and repent. Where you possibly have left Jesus outside in your life. Instead of His being central, at the heart of your home and fellowship, you have pushed Him onto the periphery (prioritising the pursuit of wealth and earthly security). He is standing at the door and knocking. He assures us, *“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me”* (Rev. 3:20). Believe His promise, be zealous and repent (3:19).

5. Pray for our church family (Gracefields), church plants (Ubabalo neThemba and Southreach) and mission partners. Pray that we would not succumb to the allure of Babylon and blindly be gripped by the idols of greed. Pray that our collective witness will not be lukewarm (compromised and nauseating).
  
6. Pray for our Valley during Christmas time. Many parts of our community would say, “*I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing*” (Rev. 3:17). Many do not see their need of Jesus. Without Jesus, we are “*wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked*” (Rev. 3:17). No amount of earthly riches can mask our spiritual poverty. Pray that eyes would be opened in our Valley and that people would come to Jesus (Rev. 3:18).

