

Week 3

A series in REVELATION

29 June Monday

Read Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis was about 30 miles south of Thyatira. Historically a wealthy and strategic place, by the 1st century luxurious living had given it a reputation for moral decadence, laziness, and, as one commentator puts it, 'the peace of the man whose dreams are dead and whose mind is asleep...' Quite fitting that one of their notable landmarks was the necropolis – a huge cemetery visible for miles! As a city, Sardis was no longer what it had once been.

Jesus sees the church as having the seeds of the city in them; they, too, were no longer what they once were. He says to them, 'wake up, strengthen what remains and is about to die...' and then clarifies what this 'waking up' is: to remember what you first heard and believed about Jesus – the 'joy of your salvation' – and then live it out. John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Movement, used to say, 'the way in is the way on'. Meaning, we must never stray from the first things of following Jesus. So, Jesus cautions and encourages the church, 'the faith that God is looking for is one that is living and active – fan into flame that which is going out.'

How easy it is for the fervour of early faith to slip, for the 'cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches to strangle it' – to use Jesus' parable of seed on thorny ground.

Can you think of areas in your own life and faith that you perhaps haven't tended to for a while, where Jesus might say, 'quick – this needs strengthening; don't let it die'?

30 June Tuesday

Read Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia was about 25 miles southeast of Sardis; it was known for being a key transport link east and, interestingly, for a high quantity of earthquakes. Jesus praises the church here, saying, 'I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and not denied my name...' Tensions between Jews who had received Jesus as the Messiah and Jews who had not were present and troubling. 'Christians' (the former group) were experiencing hardship at the hands of some of the latter group. But Jesus speaks of a time when they, and all, will see Jesus revealed as the true messiah (the 'Davidic' language is all about this). It's not unlike Paul's conviction in his letter to the Philippian church that one day 'at the name of Jesus every knee will bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.' Jesus speaks to this church of 'little strength' but great heart: 'well done and whatever hardship comes, hold on to what you have; I will keep you and I will reward you.' Often, after the earthquakes this city frequently experienced, it was the strong stone temple pillars that remained standing. And, at times, long serving priests' names would be inscribed upon them. Both are things that Jesus promises those who stay faithful: that they will be made strong and they will be honoured.

Can you think of times that 'little strength' would be a good descriptor of you? What does it look like to stay faithful when feeling weak and overwhelmed by circumstances around you?

01 July Wednesday

Read Revelation 3:14-18

Laodicea was about 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia. The great Roman road running from the coast to the in-land of Asia ran through it, making it important for trade and communication. Its great wealth and fame came through the production and sale of a unique and glossy black wool, and also that it boasted a medical school famed for its ointment cures for eyes and ears. Jesus speaks sternly to the church here. Laodicea did not have its own water supply, however, there were hot springs to the north of the city and cold springs to the south. This meant that the water had to be brought in via a 6-mile-long aqueduct. The issue was that by the time the water reached Laodicea it was neither hot nor cold. Jesus uses this language to challenge the church. This isn't a metaphor for spiritual temperature or fervour but, instead, of usefulness. Cold water was useful; hot water was useful. Luke- warm was neither. The church was so compromised by the culture of the city around them that they were no longer an effective light for the gospel. A compounding problem was that the church didn't realise it. They claimed to be rich; perhaps, in their eyes, they were enjoying the 'blessing of God', but instead Jesus says that they are poor and blind to it. He counsels them to depend on Him rather than compromising with the culture around them; to find pure gold, spiritual wealth, in Him, not in the surrounding city; white clothes from Him, to cover their shame, in contrast to the black wool of the city; ointment from Him to heal their blindness, contrasting the famed balm from the city. In short, he counsels them to come back to Him, to find their needs met in Him, not in compromise with the culture around them.

Perhaps invite the Lord to search you today: are there ways in which the world around has got into your heart? Perhaps in ways unrecognised? How could you be effective as a light for the gospel where you are?

02 July Thursday

Read Revelation 3:19-22

Today, we are still looking at Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea. After some stern words Jesus says, 'those whom I love I also rebuke and discipline' and that He is 'standing at the door knocking', ready to come in. The strength of Jesus' challenge to this church is representative of the strength of his love for them; His rebuke is the rebuke of love. He can see that they are on a path that is leading away from Him and, so, intervenes to steer them back. The role of a parent with a child regularly involves 'steering' children away from things that are dangerous and towards the good; 'steering' is an expression of care, of love. Jesus' desire is that they open the door to Him and restore relationship with Him. You may have noticed that each letter finishes with promises of good to those who 'overcome'. This is no different. The promise to this church is that when the Kingdom of God comes, they will sit with Him in it; that they will be part of the new that He is bringing.

Have you ever felt challenged by God? Either in prayer or His word? When you do, be encouraged, in that very moment He is loving you!

03 July Friday

Read Ezekiel 9

Take some time to notice the Old Testament backdrop to images and phrases that John uses in the book of Revelation. For those to whom it was originally written, these things would have been immediately clear; the images would have functioned like hyperlinks opening up a whole world of meaning. It reminds us, like John Bodily mentioned in talk 1, of the important principle: whilst this book is for us, it was not originally written to us. As you read today, notice the internal links and referencing within the Bible itself.