

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, July 21, 2024

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ...”¹ (Revelation 1:10-11)

Today, we are continuing our examination of this oracle that begins the Day of the Lord, within the writing of the Revelation. A quick reminder that the first eight verses of chapter one contain John’s introduction to the *subject* of Christ’s Revelation. Beginning in verse nine, we transition to the *opening* of Christ’s Revelation. In my last sermon, I indicated that this opening oracle – which lasts for the remainder of the first chapter – is written such that it is better examined in terms of subject matters, rather than verse-by-verse. I began with the subject matter of the gravity of the opening scene for those who would be edified and prepared to undertake the work of this Revelation ... as it impacts the Church of Revelation.

The next subject matter I want to take up, is to whom these solemn words of guidance and warning were written ... or, I believe more precisely, *for* whom the words were written. It is of great value, when consuming an important writing, to understand the author’s target audience. That context helps to sharpen the focus. When Daniel was guided by the eternal King to reveal great things in his prophecies, they were chiefly targeting the Jews ... Jerusalem ... Mount Zion and how things related to that narrow lens would be brought to pass in history and eschatology. Once you grasp that, you can read his words with a significantly enhanced understanding. Similarly, if we can better understand for whom John’s words were recorded, it will enhance our understanding ... our edification.

Expositions that are available on these particular words in the book of Revelation primarily focus on either those named churches, or more generally the Church entity throughout the New Testament dispensation that arose from Christ’s first advent. Since I read much from the expositor Joseph Seiss on *The Apocalypse*, I will share his words as an example to capture what I think is the most common view on the question of why these seven churches were named in this text: *“In other words, these seven Churches, in their names, in their graces, in their defects, in their relations to Christ, and in His promises and threatenings to them severally, comprehend everything found in the entire Church, as it then existed, or was to exist. ... I must, therefore, insist*

¹ The remainder of the oracle is found in verses 12-20: ***“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”***

that this doctrine of numbers [i.e., the number “seven”], if we had nothing else, settles upon these seven Churches as a representative comprehensiveness which embraces the entire fulness of the Church of all time.” That is a very broad – and therefore, I submit – relevantly unfocused lens.

I joyfully consent to the notion that the inclusion of seven churches in this writing makes it appropriately applicable to the whole of the *ecclesia* or the *called out assembly of saints* ... and most certainly of value to the New Testament Church. And if that was all there was to take from these sober words, it would be plenty to provide indisputable evidence of what God requires of the church members while in their militant state ... as well as what awaits those elect souls when the matter of Christ’s revelation is completed and they take possession of their heavenly inheritance. You have heard, and will continue hearing, many uses of the words of Revelation chapters two and three in the sermons presented by this church’s elders. The cautions and the blessings articulated in the letters John was directed to write and send to these churches are wholesome and relevant to our daily engagements and sufferings on the behalf of Christ.

Last week Ben, while speaking of the prayers of Paul respecting the relationship between Christ and His elect saints, addressed the language in Ephesians chapter one where God ***“hath put all things under [Christ’s] feet, and gave [Christ] to be the head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22)***. He said, after discussing the resplendent glories of Christ: *“Now, that is all glorious and a cause for us to worship and adore Him, but here is the most amazing part – God **“gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”** Why is Christ, our Mediator, exalted to this position of dominion? Why is He head over all things? It is for the sake of the church. God gave Him to the church, in His capacity as head over all things, for the benefit of the church.”* Within the writings of Scripture, the intimacy in relationship between Christ and His Bride the Church is a primary driving theme. The doctrine of the Church – with all of the directives and blessings described in poetry, history, and direct letters from the prophets and apostles – should joyfully occupy our attention and draw forth our most tender care.

Because this oracle lays the foundation upon which all of the next two chapters of this book stand, we will spend a significant number of sermons talking about the subject of the Church. There have been many already preached from this pulpit. There have been many engagements that we have had with people who have directly assaulted the doctrine of the Church ... where we have carefully heeded the directive to ***“believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1)***. We have wrestled through decades of sinewy and grievous matters that have put the very blood of this Bride on the table for disposal: Would we discern her precious body – she who we are told is the very Body of Christ – or would we capitulate and see her turned out to the streets of this vile world to join the other spiritual whores? Through all of these, I believe we have looked to the instructions given to John in the writings of this oracle and the two chapters that follow it, where we find guidance. That is a very good thing.

Having laid down that truth, though, there are things here that compel the conclusion that we are missing a significant – or I dare say *the most significant* – message of this book, when we put those letters into that analytical box. In conversations and in sermons I have communicated my view that it is critical for believers to understand that the writings of this opening section are

primarily aimed at the Church of Revelation. We are now much, much closer to the return of our Savior than was Seiss and those others who God appointed to write what could be understood of His blessed Word in their generation. We are instructed that our path ***“is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”*** (Proverbs 4:18). As an individual, that would show us that we grow in grace and knowledge until the day we are individually perfected in our change, to ***“depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”*** (Philippians 1:23). As a body of Christ’s called out elect, this passage shows us that the knowledge of Christ and His Revelation is incrementally increased until that day wherein the covenanted redemption of His people will be perfected in His return. So, today we will examine why I draw that conclusion. And more importantly, why it is so necessary for us to grasp and adore that conclusion.

When John introduces this aspect of the oracle, he begins by telling us in the plainest language the context of his vision: ***“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”*** (Revelation 1:10). So, if you were to ask the rhetorical question, *“John, where were you when you saw this tremendous vision of Christ standing in this glorious state among His churches?”* ... the answer would be *“I was on the Lord’s Day. I was present to see the condition and events as they were presented at the time and location when the Lord Jesus Christ is preparing His church and the world’s population to return in glory.”* That translation in his spirit – from the Isle of Patmos to the time of the return of Christ – colored the understanding that John had and expressed in this book. So, for a most direct example, when he next says ***“and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet”***, he did not hear that voice out across the island of Patmos. Rather, he heard Christ speaking to grab his attention and open up his understanding regarding this place he was taken in the spirit ... the Lord’s Day.

The weight of this truth, I submit to my friends in this house today, has its own significance. When God is determined to demonstrate things of import, related to ***“the mystery of the gospel”*** (Ephesians 6:19) to His children, it often has layered significance and has at least primary and secondary value. I will select just one example of this point, though we all know of so many upon which we have put our trust for comfort. When the prophet Jonah was called, it is simply declared thusly:

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” (Jonah 1:1-2)

What was the primary purpose of Jonah’s ambassadorship? Was it not to declare God’s wrath – then demonstrate God’s mercy – as it applied specifically to the national sins of that great capital of ancient Assyria? Yet, how many and varied are the applications to the saints of every generation, in the manner of their walk, the tone of their own preaching, the need for patience in the service of the King, etc. Indeed, Christ Himself makes use of the event of Jonah’s time in the whale’s belly as a type of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-41). Yet, the preaching of Jonah was appointed to Ninevah and for a very specific purpose in history. It resulted in that nation’s delay in deterioration until the iniquity of the northern kingdom of Israel was full, and their destruction was appointed at Assyria’s hand.

Similarly, the appointment of John to write what he witnessed while ***“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”*** and send to some then-existing churches in the western portion of Asia Minor, does not alter the truth that the events he was given witness to were prepared chiefly for a different audience. They were chiefly for those of God’s children who would directly wrestle with the weighty matters of the Day of the Lord.

A second basis for my conclusion that we must see this introduction, and the letters written, to be *chiefly* regarding the Church of Revelation is the use of the number seven in the identification. Before Christ enumerates the churches which were to receive the writings, he tells John: ***“What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches ...”*** The number is put before the enumeration. On November 13, 2022 I preached about the significance of the opening clause of Revelation 1:4; ***“John to the seven churches”***. In that sermon I provided a good analysis of the use of the word seven in these prophetic passages.² That would be a good thing to consume to be further edified on the significance of the term. The same Greek word *“hepta”* (*“hep-tah”*) is used in this commandment by Christ in verse 11. In addition to Christ referencing ***“seven”*** in this commandment to John, when our friend turns at the voice he heard, the very first thing he saw were ***“seven golden candlesticks”***. There’s that number again ... seven ... and it was not because John saw Christ walking specifically with the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The term, particularly as it pertains to its use in prophecy, indicates completeness or perfection. So we should ask ourselves what it means in this context for our edification.

In at least two senses, the reference to ***“seven”*** helps us to understand it to be a unique status for that Church of Revelation. First, in the sense that until the Church reaches her final iteration, it is incomplete. The Bride, until all of her members are called, is incomplete. In this sense, the Apostle Paul articulated the point at the close of his discussion of what has been oft referred to as the *great heroes of the faith*:

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”
(Hebrews 11:39-40)

In his commentary, expositor Matthew Poole articulates the point thusly: *“The ground of which perfection of all believers in all ages being in the last time, is from his choosing them all to be but one body of Christ, and him their Head; so as one member cannot be perfected but in the perfection of the whole. In which perfection of it, God is resolved to be all in all; not in one, or in some, but when Christ hath subdued all his enemies, and gathered all his members, then shall his body and kingdom be perfected, and God be all in all”*. So, in the sense of there being a last and final elect soul who will be called into that final iteration of the Church, by definition that will be the perfected Church, or the *church of seven*.

² Here is the link to the website where this sermon can be read: [Revelation 1, Verse 4 A \(godhatesfags.com\)](https://godhatesfags.com)

The second sense is in that the Church herself is not fully purged of the doctrinal and practical errors that have vexed her spirit through every generation since that first to be established when Christ said **“upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”** When you carefully read the multitude of passages making reference to the duties of New Testament church members, there is frequently an end-goal articulated that is always connected to the return of our Christ. For example, this passage in Paul’s first epistle to Timothy:

“¶ I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6:13-19)

There are other example passages referenced in a footnote below³. The Church is in a state of engagement with Satan and his **“Legion” (Mark 5:9)**, from the day of her betrothing until that time when it is said of her **“his wife hath made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7)**. That word **“wife”** here used is the Greek **“gune” (“goo-nay”)**, and speaks of **“a betrothed woman”**. It is the lot of this blessed betrothed Bride that she is **“troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.” (2 Corinthians 7:5)**. Because ... she is not yet **“seven”**. She is not complete. She is not perfected. As a body. Not until the appointed time when John sees her in her state prepared for the final showdown when her Husband takes His earthly throne with His newly married Wife at His side.

A third basis for my conclusion that these letters are chiefly written for the Church of Revelation is the manner in which the letters are introduced. When John turns to see the source of the voice, he sees Christ. By the time the initial engagement is fully described in this oracle, Christ is presented in exactly seven particulars.

1. His relationship with His Bride, the Church
2. His infinity, as a member of the Trinity
3. His status as the conquering Word
4. His omniscience and His sovereignty
5. His intimate relationship with the Holy Ghost in guiding the Church

³ Other sample passages of this point include: 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; Hebrews 3:14; 1 John 2:28;

6. His governance of providence
7. His status as Witness in the Covenant of Grace

The examination of these seven characteristics will be the subject of a future sermon on this opening oracle, Lord willing. Today we are considering what this truth provides us in the determination of who is chiefly the target audience in John's letters. If you look at the full oracle, you find these seven expressions sprinkled among the presentation of John's vision, including Christ's words:

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man [#1a], clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass [#4], as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars [#1b & #5]: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword [#3]: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength [#7a]. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, **Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore [#2 & #7b], Amen [#7c]; and have the keys of hell and of death [#6].”** (Revelation 1:12-18)

So, when John is transported forward to the Day of the Lord, in a spiritual state of awareness, he receives visions and directives. The vision is of Christ – in the Day of the Lord, preparing the earth for His return. The directives are about Christ – in the Day of the Lord, preparing the earth for His return. Then, when John is told to write the solemn words to the “seven” churches, each of those letters ties the writings to the churches to the vision and words of Christ – again, in the Day of the Lord, preparing the earth for His return. Look at the initiation of each of the seven letters:

1. Ephesus: ***“These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”.*** (Revelation 2:1)
2. Smyrna: ***“These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”.*** (Revelation 2:8)
3. Pergamos: ***“These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges”.*** (Revelation 2:12)
4. Thyatira: ***“These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass”.*** (Revelation 2:18)
5. Sardis: ***“These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars”.*** (Revelation 3:1)
6. Philadelphia: ***“These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”.*** (Revelation 3:7)
7. Laodicia: ***“These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God”.*** (Revelation 3:14)

This speaking Christ is not at the initiation of His New Testament Church dispensation, giving direction for the launching and management of the new earthly creation that was to be the local, visible church. This speaking Christ is preparing for His return in power and glory. He is addressing the final preparation of His Bride. He is speaking to that Church of Revelation that has to be fully purged of doctrinal and practical impurity so that she has made herself ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb ... which is then just a few short and violent years away. This is why the vision of Christ that was shown to John lines up perfectly with the presentation Christ orders him to give to the church. Whatever value the churches, within the intervening millennia, gain from the words – and no doubt there was (and is) much to be gained – the chief focus of the letters and the author is to get that church ready for the final push to the returning husband and the wedding supper. There is a clear point when the purging and preparation of the church is over.

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” (Matthew 25:10)

Having spent some time presenting thoughts on why we should conclude that the letters written to the **“seven”** churches are chiefly applicable to the Church of Revelation, I think what remains is to consider why the letters were written to the specific congregations that existed in the various cities within the western part of Asia Minor. Brent spent 11 sermons discussing these specific churches and the things written to them, giving a fairly in depth analysis regarding the conditions and situations each faced⁴ ... at least as far as can be discerned nearly two millennia later. My intention is not to revisit those examinations or really those locations, because any interested soul can drink themselves to full with those sermons.

There are a number of expository expressions about why these seven were selected, when at this early time of the dispensation there were a good number of churches springing up. Expositor John Trapp says the word here *“is directed to these seven Churches, because then the most famous and flourishing. There also this evangelist [i.e., John] had long time taught; and, as some say, was president over them”*. The historical record that provides support for this conclusion is not evident or included as reference.

Seiss, after spending a good deal of time with the significance of the number **“seven”** in the presentation of these churches, offers this on the discussion: *“But there were other Churches then existing, at Collosse, Antioch, Alexandria, Corinth, Rome, and elsewhere, some of them larger and more powerful than some of those named. Why, then, were these not taken into the account? Did they not need instruction, and rebuke, and encouragement, and warning, as well as the favoured seven? The only explanation is, that they were somehow included in the seven. They were not specifically and locally addressed, because what concerned their estate, and the mind of Christ with reference to it, are embraced and expressed in the seven.”*

⁴ Here is the link on www.godhatesfags.com website where this sermon series can be found: [Westboro Baptist Church Sermon Series - Seven Churches of the Revelation \(godhatesfags.com\)](http://www.godhatesfags.com)

Similar expressions can be found with expositors Barnes, Clarke, and Gill. The common theme among them is that the text was provided for the whole of the church entity throughout the dispensation of the New Testament Church, and the particular conditions that existed in these seven were prepared such that they were fit for the warnings and the encouragements received within the particular letters. As I previously suggested, this is not a bad view of the case; though I believe it is an incomplete one. Certainly God, who has so comprehensively written the providence of the creation to bring to pass all things for His glory, can prepare the conditions of any entity such that all is ripe for a clear expression of his commandments and blessings to pour out. But in that providential governance, we may also see that God has prepared a joyful addition for our edification and comfort.

The very *names* of the places where these little gatherings of saints were found – together with their doctrinal and practical strengths and weaknesses – present a picture of His Bride, as Christ sees her getting finally prepared for the wedding.

“¶ I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.” (Song 7:10-13)

This short oracle is from the Song of Solomon. Remember that Song of Solomon is a poetic expression of the love between Jesus Christ and His Bride. It is specifically related to the engagement between Christ and the Church at the Day of the Lord – when the redeemed Jews are called forth and the wedding supper of the Lamb is in the offing. This oracle presents just one of the expressions within the poem of the great affection Christ has for His Bride, as she is preparing to be wed.

The name ***“Ephesus”*** means “desirable”, a depiction of the radiant affect upon Christ when He sees His Bride in her perfected beauty. He has arranged things, it says in the book of Ephesians, that ***“he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:27)***. How glorious is that for symmetry? And having so cleansed His church that she evokes the greatest of His expressions of love, is it then any wonder that when He writes to this church, His most urgent warning to them is that they have cooled from their hottest affections for Him: ***“thou hast left thy first love” (Revelation 2:4)?***

And those graces that, when His Bride is saturated with them makes her so immensely desirable, are represented in the Song of Solomon within seven passages; with the use of the term ***“myrrh” (Song 1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 4) and ... “[Christ’s] cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.” (Song 5:13)***. The name of the second church location is ***“Smyrna”***, which name means “myrrh”. In her perfected state, the Church’s ***“hands dropped with myrrh and [her] fingers with sweet smelling myrrh” (Song 5:5)***, infusing her with the most glorious and desirable graces.

“My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.” (Song 2:16-17)

An interesting passage, this. It is a picture of Christ effortlessly moving upon the mountains. When considering what is intended by this contextual reference to “**mountains**”, Dr. Gill provides some rather unexpected discussion: “[in relation] to his second coming, the spacious heavens may be meant, in which Christ will appear, and which now interpose and separate from his bodily presence; and therefore the church importunately desires his coming with speed and swiftness, like a roe or a young hart, and be seen in them”. That is to say, Christ overcomes the great obstacles – here represented by terms intimating a great elevation or height – to present Himself to His Bride and take her to Him. The name of the city in which the third of these named churches was positioned in providence is “**Pergamos**” ... which means “height or elevation”. And distinct from this reference to the greatness of the obstacles to be faced and overcome in the Day of the Lord, there is the known sense in which the Church is seen at a great height or elevation, to wit:

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” (Psalm 48:1-2)

Either of these senses are of value when considering the Lord’s work in preparing providentially a little church in a little place south of the Black Sea named “**Pergamos**”.

The fourth church’s name is “**Thyatira**”, which elicits – along with the greatness of overcoming obstacles of great height or elevation – notions of affliction. The name means “odor of affliction”. Returning to our use of the love poem between Christ and His Bride, we find this wonderful expression:

“Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” (Song 4:6)

This jewel of a passage contains expressions of all the first four churches’ names ... the Church’s beauty, the graces of God, her mountainous situation and presentation, and now her afflictions. Dr. Gill, in discussing this language “**the shadows flee away**”, offers these instructive thoughts: “until the everlasting day breaks, and there will be no more night, nor any darkness of affliction, nor any more desertion, doubts, and fears”. Until the return of our Christ and the breaking of that blessed millennia of His glorious reign, the Church will be in affliction. The odors of which come up into His nostrils and are accounted with our tears kept in a bottle (Psalm 56:8). And we know that the prophecies instruct that there will be affliction in that time just before His return, like as never before seen in the affairs of men. How appropriate, then, is it to express this truth in the presentation of one of the seven churches.

The fifth church is ***“Sardis”***, which is the same word as is found later in the Revelation, when discussing the beauties of the throne of God (Revelation 4:3) (looks like a ***“sardine stone”***) and in describing the sixth foundation of the New Jerusalem, as ***“sardius”*** (Revelation 21:20). The sardius stone was one found on the breastplate of the High Priest (Exodus 39:10). The notable characteristic for the stone referenced is its ruby-red coloring. Whether this stands representative of the flaming zeal of the members of the true church of God, or it represents the fact that it is the only body of believers who are covered ***“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”*** (1 Peter 1:19) – both are valuable and critical depictions related to the church in the closing period of her warfare. Thus, it is a most appropriate name by which those believers were to be known in this vision.

“Philadelphia” we know well to be “brotherly love”. The desire of Christ toward His Bride is captured in the name of ***“Ephesus”***, whereas the love those saints have for each other is captured in this name, for ***“if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*** (1 John 4:11). This characteristic of that body of believers, who will face the wrath of the earth dwellers when they are under the rod of Christ’s great day, will be essential to their survival. Our love for one another is our single greatest hope that we will be properly perfected – spiritually mature – and ready to face a frowning world.

Finally, there is this name ***“Laodicea”***, which translates to “justice of the people”. That is, it expresses a person’s right and opportunity to have their case heard by an impartial judge that will ensure they receive justice. In two senses I see this name being particularly applicable to the interests of the Bride in her final state of readiness. First is her consuming duty to be looking closely at her doctrinal and practical purity.

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17-18)

There is no disputing that Peter’s writings were heavily focused on eschatology. Therefore, I submit that this verse has its strongest application to that time when the church dispensation is coming to close and it becomes the imperative to cleanse her of doctrinal and practical impurities as a body. Every member filled with fiery energy to joyfully and tirelessly maintain every doctrine and every practice to the plumbline. Searching the scriptures daily to see if these things promised to shortly come are true. Because they understand the time is short and if they will not be ***“condemned with the world”***, they must judge themselves continuously by those recorded standards (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). The other side of the judgment picture, I believe, is also fairly captured in this name ***“Laodicea”***.

“Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8)

Justice for the people of God at the coming again of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. Multiplying passages that repeat this solemn truth, would add nothing to these beautiful words. What a perfect expression for the Church of Revelation.

So, it is a comforting thing to see how our God has laid out so perfectly a description of the people of God, matured through doctrinal and practical error, prepared to usher in the Day of the Lord. What those perfected saints should do ... should believe ... should eschew ... are laid out in these blessed letters from our Christ. The energy that will be in that final church is dispositive. Let me suggest to you that there will be no removal of a candlestick at that hour. It will be a revival of doctrine and practice that sheds off every remaining hint of apostacy and error – ***because iniquity shall abound, the love of many [clinging on reprobates] shall wax cold (Matthew 24:12)*** – and the remaining saints will be bound tightly to one another with unified clarity of focus and purity of energy. Their love for their Christ, and His love for them will give them the capacity to receive the redeemed Jews, prepare them for service of the King, and to then to be taken up triumphantly to their Christ at the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

We will continue our examination of this opening oracle, Lord willing, when I next am allowed to speak with you. Then we will begin a closer look at the lessons to be taken from each of the individual letters. I love all of you who love the King, our Husband. Amen.