

Revelation and Personal Holiness

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Revelation

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Sunday morning, two days ago, we devoted our entire service to simply reading the book of Revelation. God in the beginning of the book promises a blessing upon those that read and upon those that hear Revelation. I don't assume anything these days in ministry. I don't assume that everyone has read Revelation cover to cover in a single sitting or even consecutively, and that's a little bit of a challenge in terms of the way that we approach Scripture and so I believe that what is ahead of us in the months ahead in Revelation will prove to be a crucial study for our times and for our church.

I've been preparing this for a very long time. I'm looking forward to letting some of it out after taking so many things in and there are some preliminary comments that I want to make as we get into it. This great book, the 66th book of the 66 books of the Bible, is about Jesus Christ and the eternal purpose of God, and it excites curiosity very broadly with its symbolism and its seeming mysteries that are woven throughout the text, but there's something preliminary that is so greatly overlooked that we're going to start with this here tonight. The title of tonight's message is "Revelation and Personal Holiness." Revelation and personal holiness. There are answers, satisfying answers to the seeming mysteries in the book of Revelation, but the answers are withheld from hard and sinful hearts; stated differently, the riches of Revelation are only for those who love the glory of God, who have been born again and who are walking in the Spirit. And whether someone is a Christian or not, I want to say upfront that Revelation is not for those who are looking for and eager for red meat on eschatology. That's an entirely wrong view, an entirely wrong way to approach the book of Revelation and unless we start there, we're going to go astray from the very beginning.

I've been approached by many interested in the study, knowing that this was coming, and while I'm glad for the interest, even the questions that have been asked and the statements that have been made have emphasized to me the importance of where we are starting here this evening, and let me just start it this way with looking at a couple of other Scriptures to prepare our way for it. The Bible, when it speaks about end times, repeatedly calls us to holy living in light of coming future events and it is only the deliberately obstinate and misguided that could miss that theme. Long ago, decades ago, 20, 30 years ago, you might say, I received a promotional flyer for a prophecy conference, and I'm sure it had the leading dispensational figures teaching at the conference. And there were 12, 14, 15,

16 different sessions all about all kinds of different aspects of eschatology, and eschatology is a word that means the study of last things, if that's a new word to you. And I wish, somewhere along the line, I lost track of that, I wish that I still had it, but I remember very clearly going through the themes and the topics and the text, and not a single one of them addressed the ethical consequences of studying end times, and so I knew from the beginning that that conference was off track and was going to mislead people badly.

Scripture repeatedly calls us to holy living. It speaks of end times, then it draws out implications for the pursuit of your sanctification and so I want you to turn to 2 Peter chapter 3, and then we'll be looking at a brief passage in 1 John 3. This is just illustrative. And those are books right at the end of the Bible, just before Revelation and you'll see what I mean by what I have just said, and in saying these things and in pointing to these texts here this evening, I am laying down a marker for what will mark the spirit of the way that we study the book of Revelation. And as I said in my "Building a Christian Mind" series, so I'll say again here, laying down this marker may mean that people aren't that interested in it. That's okay. We have to let the Bible speak for itself and not pander to interests that are not thoroughly biblical in their approach. We just can't.

So 2 Peter 3:10 opens a discussion about eschatology, about end times, it's looking to the future prophetically, and in 2 Peter 3:10 we read this, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar," notice the future tense, "and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." That is a statement of eschatology about how God will bring the present heaven and earth to a conclusion. So it's looking forward and saying this is how things will come to an end. Now look what the inspired writer of Scripture says in response to that. Look at what he draws out for the church of Jesus Christ to pay heed to as a result of a clear statement of eschatology. In verse 11 he says, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Verse 14, "Therefore," as a consequence of what I've just been saying as the logical implication of a clear statement of eschatology he says, "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace." Holiness, godliness, being found in peace without spot or blemish, those are the present implications, the present consequences of studying eschatology. And you cannot divorce the two. You cannot separate them from each other. They are joined together like the head and tails of a coin.

And I am quite confident coming from dispensational circles that this emphasis is often neglected. I'd say that not to be combative or controversial, I'm simply stating facts and uttering sober words of truth. This aspect of this biblical implication of the study of last things is greatly neglected when these matters come into consideration, and even more if you go and you see discussions about it on social media and people, you know, somebody wants to roast the a-mill position or roast the pre-mill position or roast the

post-mill position, you know, all of these things get lost in the love for controversy and the love for combativeness, which is completely, completely contrary to the spirit in which Scripture says we are to contemplate these things. You cannot divorce the spirit with which you approach them from a right understanding of them.

Now, with that in mind, turn to the next book in the Bible, 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3, we read in verse 2 the following, which again looks forward to matters of eschatology, to the end times, what happens after this age comes to a conclusion. Verse 2, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him," again, notice the future tense. It's looking ahead prophetically, looking to what is to come, "when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." What we will be, we shall be, we shall see him as he is; these are things yet to come that are not part of present Christian experience but are embedded in the outcome of our salvation. Okay, so eschatology. What's the next verse say? "Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." And so there is this longing, there is this looking ahead to seeing Christ face to face, our blessed hope. There is this looking forward to being transformed and glorified in his presence, which is going to be wonderful. It's what we've been saved for to be delivered finally and completely from every aspect of sin, and you flash forward and then you come back to present reality and informed by what's going to happen in the future, you say, "Ah, this means that I must pursue my sanctification. I must grow in personal holiness."

When we do membership classes, those of you that have been in membership classes with us, you've heard us use the term informed consent. We try to be as forthcoming as possible about the nature of our church, the doctrine of our church, the practice of our church, so that when somebody pursues membership, they know what we stand for and there aren't any surprises, at least there shouldn't be, on the other side. We seek to avoid that. We want everybody to know up front where we're coming from and we do that diligently, at least we try to. Well, here with our study of Revelation, I'm giving you what is necessary for informed consent if you want to pursue the study with us. Those that would come to a study like this and say, "Let's hurry up and get to the prophecy, get to the eschatology, get to these controversial issues." Beloved, I say it to help you and to encourage you and to help you grow in grace, that spirit is wrong from the beginning. That spirit cannot possibly lead to a right understanding of the book of Revelation. It can't possibly be because it bypasses, it bypasses the very emphasis, the very outworking of eschatology, and contradicts the very outworking of eschatology that the Bible calls us to. And, you know, my recent book stands for that very point, and I encourage you to read it.

And so with that said, beloved, I'm kind of clearing the decks here, kind of rinsing off the deck before we set up the chairs and watch the scenery as it goes by, and I say this to help and to encourage you, those whose pressing questions are like this, "Is the beast Jewish or Gentile? Can you be saved if you take the mark of the beast? What is the meaning of 666? How can I dispute a different view of the millennium on social media?" If that's the pressing questions, then I don't know how else to say this, I don't want this result, but people that have that motivation for a study in Revelation, they won't stay with us long

term. They won't because there's not at the heart a desire for what Scripture says should be the product of a study of eschatology. And so I am not catering this upcoming study of Revelation to those kinds of tertiary, not even secondary, those kinds of tertiary questions and catering to the spirit that asks those kinds of questions at the start, just looking for ways to fuel the controversies that surround the study of eschatology. That's not what we're after here. We're after a consecutive study through the book of Revelation that takes it on its terms and gleans the spiritual rebukes and encouragements that are woven throughout the study of Revelation, and so I trust that many of you, if not most of you, like the sound of that and that you'll be with us long term. I'm glad for that, but I just want to lay out the groundwork and kind of clarify and blow away some of the fog before we even get started so that, you know, there's no objection later that, "Well, you didn't tell me it was going to be like this." And so, beloved, we are not embarking on this study in order to pursue carnal debate on peripheral issues. We're not. That's not what this is about. We seek the glory of God and our sanctification through a proper understanding and application of the word as we teach through this book in the weeks and months to come.

Now, having said that, I want you to see this plainly from the text of the book of Revelation itself and you can see this from different themes that come up repeatedly as you read through the book. And tonight I just want to lay out four of those themes before you, central themes to the impact that it should have on our hearts, and as we study these central themes, we're going to come back to them repeatedly throughout the time. And so I don't want you to miss the point. I'm telling you what the point is up front so that you can get the point as we go along. And so four points, four themes for tonight that all relate to our personal holiness, four themes that expose the affections and the aspirations of our heart and lay them out before us and cause us to examine ourselves and say, "Is that where I stand today spiritually in my walk with God? Are these the things that are important and uppermost in my mind?" Because they have to be, as you see these four themes, they have to be and if you find yourself lacking in these areas, these themes, these heart affections, then these are the affections to be pursuing before you ever begin to concern yourself with the kinds of questions that I was asking earlier.

What are these themes? First of all, the glory of Christ. The glory of Christ. If you're taking notes, this is the first theme that we want to see and you see it right from the beginning. The glory of Christ is the entrance way into the book of Revelation. Do not miss that central point. The glory of Christ is the entrance way into the book of Revelation and someone who bypasses the glory of Christ to get to matters in Revelation 12 or 13 or 14 is not handling the book of Revelation properly. We can't avoid this. The book is of and from and to the glory of Jesus Christ. Look at Revelation chapter 1, verse 1 where it says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." This is a book from Christ about Christ. It is the testimony of Christ and so if you're going to read a book, you need to know who the author is, what the subject matter is, and the central focus of Revelation is Jesus Christ

himself. Not the beast. Not the mark of the beast. We start with Christ and the opening focus as you continue reading on in Revelation is all about him.

So look at verse 4, "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Do you see it, my friends? Right from the start, Christ is elevated, put front and center, his resurrection as the firstborn of the dead, his sovereignty over all things on earth as the ruler of kings on earth, his redemptive, atoning work on the cross, his love for his people. He's delivered us from our sins by his shed blood. He's made us priests. John says, "to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." This is the starting point for entering into the message of the book of Revelation, is seeing the centrality of Jesus Christ and giving him glory. It's not at all too much to say that this is a book that's given to the church, to the true people of God, those who have truly been born again, as it emphasizes the nature of salvation and belonging to him and deliverance from our sins. And so this is the starting point in Revelation, and this is the beginning of cultivating a heart that is prepared to learn what Revelation has to teach you, the glory of Christ.

As you go on, and I'm only going to look at chapter 1. I did have, at one point, I had multiple paragraphs to lay this out, but I thought, well, you know, I can't start out with a six-week series on this; we'll get to it as we go through verse by verse. Look at verse 17 as John describes his vision of Christ. In verse 17, we see that it is Christ who searches the churches. It's Christ who searches and judges his people, who rebukes them and encourages them. Verse 17, John says, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.'" Now, here is Christ, John falls at his feet. Christ declares himself as the first and the last, he's the beginning and the end. He says, "I am alive. I was dead, but I'm alive forevermore. I have sovereign authority over death and Hades." You see, I trust, why I say that the glory of Christ, the person of Christ, is the entrance way through which you must go in order to obtain any right understanding of the book of Revelation.

And then immediately following this statement at the end of chapter 1, you go into Revelation 2 and 3 where Christ is standing and judging and evaluating the seven churches of Asia, which we'll talk about at great length in the coming exposition and a little bit more here this evening. But the glory of Christ, it is the exclusive entrance way into Revelation. If I could put it this way, I'm drawing upon Scripture from a different context that says broad is the way that leads to destruction, narrow is the way that leads to life, Matthew 7:13 and 14, well, when it comes to the book of Revelation, there is a narrow entrance way. the presupposition, the beginning point, the starting point without which the journey does not even take place, is a recognition of the person and work of Christ and a love for him and a submission to him that seeks his glory and that as the

uppermost aspiration of the human heart. That's the starting point, is the glory of Christ and so, beloved, we're immediately confronted with the question whether that is the aspiration that brings us here this evening or not and I say this sympathetically, I truly do, but immediately contrast what we've just said about the glory of Christ with what I know that you have seen, if you've not promulgated yourself, that contentious attitude toward matters of eschatology that's just itching for a fight, that's just itching for controversy, that's just consumed with curiosities that aren't even explained in the book of Revelation, compare the two and choose for yourself how you would approach the book of Revelation. As for me and my house, we want to focus on the glory of Christ as the starting point here.

Now secondly, a second theme, all of these themes related, they orbit around each other, they orbit around the glory of Christ, I should say. Secondly, I want you to see that the fear of God is one of the critical themes in Revelation. The fear of God and Revelation is a book that speaks much about the coming wrath of God to be poured out on our wicked world, and throughout the declarations of this wrath to come is a call to men to fear God and frequently in that call to fear God is the refusal of men to repent even in the face of the outpouring of his wrath upon them. And so Revelation warns of God's wrath so that men would fear him and for that, I'll take you to four texts, I guess. Look at Revelation chapter 11, we see a couple of them there in the context of the ministry of the two witnesses who are central end times figures. But in Revelation chapter 11, oh, let's start at verse 7, "when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them," the "them" is the two witnesses that have been testifying to God and to his testimony during the course of their brief ministry. Verse 8, "their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth." They did not like the ministry of the two witnesses. They were glad when they died. They were happy to see them disgraced, laying dead in the street and no one collecting their body to bury them. But watch what happens in verse 11, "But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them." Great fear fell on them as they saw the power of God in resurrecting these two witnesses who had been dead and are now alive. Later on in chapter 11, verse 18, we read this, "The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name." The focus of final judgment, the judging of the dead, the rewarding of the saints is going to center around the fear of the name of God.

The fear of God. Central theme. As we contemplate future wrath, future judgment, we see that there is to be an element of fear. This is, beloved, this contemplation of judgment is not at all something to be viewed in a remote, distant, speculative kind of way. It's not at all something to be a matter of banter, theological banter, or whatever. It should be informed by a sense of fear that every one of us is going to stand before Christ in one

manner or another and give an account to him, and we will be standing before the one who is the firstborn from the dead, the beginning and the end, the Lord of the church, the Savior on the cross, the one who is sovereign over kings and nations, we're going to have to personally appear before him. This is not a matter for contentious discussion. This is a matter for each one of you to step back, to draw back, and to humble yourselves before God afresh and say, "O God, this is consequential. O God, help me to fear your name and to live rightly in light of coming eschatological events. I'm going to stand before God and give an account. I'm going to stand before Christ and give an account. Lord, I fear your name. I tremble at the thought of that. I love you, I trust Christ, I know my sins are forgiven, but there is a sobriety to this that needs to inform the way I think about everything else, the way I think about all of life, the way that I think about studying the book of Revelation." The fear of God, the glory of Christ, the fear of God.

Revelation 14:7, we'll start in verse 6. Revelation 14:6, and I realize I'm not giving you the context for all of these things. We're just seeing themes right now. Revelation 14:6, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." The application of this is universal. This is another indication that truth is absolute, objective, and not tied to the subjective feelings of people; there's truth outside that applies to every nation, tribe, and tongue. Okay, verse 7, this angel flying directly overhead "said with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.'" You see, this can't possibly, a right study of Revelation can't possibly be something that focuses on contentious details in light of present theological studies or anything like that. This expands out to the fullness of who God is, the Creator of heaven and earth, the fullness of the requirement to worship him, the fullness of the coming hour of his judgment, and calls upon the hearts of everyone to fear him and give him glory.

One more in Revelation 19. Revelation 19, as we see the final triumph of Christ, he's conquered his enemies. We read in chapter 19, let's say verse 1, we'll read a little longer section here. "After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.' Once more they cried out, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.'" The outcome of the fall of Babylon is going to be the servants of God ascribing worship and fear to him, small people, great people, all points in between.

And so, beloved, if I could draw upon a familiar text from Proverbs, Proverbs tells us repeatedly that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Well, when it comes to studying the book of Revelation, the fear of God is also the beginning of wisdom to study this book. We seek the glory of Christ. We realize that we're reading about sober matters of universal judgment and matters of salvation and the wrath and judgment of God and

we realize that this is something to be taken seriously, not to be trifled with. That's just so very, very important. And we'll move on to point number three as we look at this and we'll see that Revelation, again, these points kind of flow into one another, Revelation is a book that calls us to the worship of God. The worship of God, a loving, reverential response to this God who makes himself known in this final book of the Bible. This third point could and should be a message all of its own.

Revelation calls us repeatedly to worship God, as it were it transports us into the throne room of heaven and we are allowed to witness the worship of God taking place there, and for this there are three key texts on this in the book of Revelation, and for this I want you to turn back to Revelation 4. Revelation 4. After Jesus has addressed the seven churches, the book obviously pivots away from the church and into other realms, other matters, and in Revelation 4:1, John says this, "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne." And the vision that he saw that being there in heaven was just too beautiful for words, he does the best that he can to describe it in language we can understand, "he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal." And what's happening there in that magnificent setting, verse 8, "the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!' And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne." So you see, there's just this magnificent display of glorious, sober worship at the throne of God. Here in chapter 4, the theme of the worship is God's position as Creator. Verse 11, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power," why, "for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." The worship given to God in his position as the Creator of heaven and earth and it's stunning, compelling worship, resounding worship, because God is the Creator of heaven and earth.

Well, you read on in chapter 5 and you find another aspect of worship taking place in verse 8, "when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb," a reference to Christ. Once again, we see the glory of Christ on display and being a preeminent aspect of that to which we are to respond. They "fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,'" now watch why they ascribe worship, the reason, the ground for their worship, "[you are worthy] for you were slain, and by your blood you

ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." In chapter 4, God's being worshiped as the Creator. In chapter 5, Christ is being worshiped in his role as the Redeemer of his people. And so we read in verse 11, I can't skip over this, "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped."

Do you see how profound this is? God worshiped as Creator, Christ worshiped as the Redeemer, and later in the book of Revelation, Revelation 16, you can turn there with me, we see God worshiped as the final Judge. Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Revelation 16:5, "I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, 'Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they,'" meaning the wicked, "'have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!' And I heard the altar saying, 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!'" The worship of God. God worshiped as Creator. Christ worshiped as Redeemer. God worshiped as Judge, even as the wicked are suffering the just effects of their wickedness at the hands of the wrath of God out-poured.

Now, beloved, you know, I just want us as a church body to approach the book of Revelation in the spirit with which the book of Revelation ascribes glory to Christ as it calls men to fear God, as it calls us to worship God and to recognize the different grounds upon which we worship him. We are here tonight because God created us and has sustained our breath since the moment of our birth. If you are in Christ, you are here because a glorious Redeemer loved you and shed his blood to wash away your sins. We worship God in fear and reverence in the knowledge that he is the Judge of every nation, every aspect of mankind. I have no interest in a study of Revelation whatsoever that neglects these things for the sake of satisfying the carnal curiosity of people who do not have these affections in their heart. I don't have any interest in that at all.

The glory of Christ, the fear of God, the worship of God. There's a final aspect to this and let me give you the fourth point here, Revelation brings an emphasis on repentance from sin. Repentance from sin, and it could be no other way. You know, there's such a glorious vertical focus to the first few things that we've seen, the glory of Christ vertical, the fear of God vertical, the worship of God vertical, well, anyone who.... think about it this way. Think about it this way, what we have seen just in very, very quick and hurried form here, we have seen the multifaceted glory of God on display already here this evening, just in 45 minutes, give or take. It reminds me of how in a much more limited context of the Apostle Peter, you remember when Peter was with the Lord, they'd been fishing all night, they didn't find anything, the Lord said, "Cast your net on the other side of the boat, you'll have a great haul of fish." Peter said, "Lord, we've been fishing all night.

We're professional fishermen here. But at your bidding, we'll do this." And there was such a great haul of fish that Peter recognized that he was in the presence of deity and it frightened him so much so that he said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Well, how much more, not seeing a haul of fish out of the water but being transported by the word of God, enlightened in our minds by the Holy Spirit, how much more to see the glory of Christ, the fear of God, the worship of God as Creator, as Redeemer, as Judge, then how much more, if we get any understanding of those themes at all, must it be necessary for us to reflect on our cold indifference to our Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, and pour ourselves out in a spirit of repentance before him that says, "These glories are so magnificent that there must be a profound repentance from sin in my life as a response."

We're going to see this in just a moment but, beloved, one of the things that's just really, really important to rightly understanding the Bible is to see the big picture, to see great, big, general principles before you get to the details, and in the book of Revelation like no other, people want to run to the details, satisfy their curiosity and walk away unchanged. In the language of James, they look at the mirror and they walk away and they've immediately forgotten what they saw because it's not driven by the glory of Christ, the fear of God, and the worship of God. In a broad way, what Revelation teaches us is that the church and the world fall short of what God requires, fall short of his glory. And as you read, especially in Revelation 2 and 3, what we're going to see, and I can't wait to get there, I'm just going to have to not rush through the introductory messages in chapter 1 out of my hurry to get to Revelation 2 and 3, but what we're going to see as we study those initial chapters is this, is that the repentance that the book of Revelation calls the church of Christ to is not simply for behavior. It's not simply a matter of some casual, superficial matters of, you know, you did a little bit wrong for a little while, but, you know, it's not that serious. No, the repentance that Revelation calls the church of Christ to, in particular, is repentance from its false doctrine, repentance from its lack of love for Christ, its toleration of false teachers, and other matters that we will see as we go along. And again, we're going to look at this in just a moment here. I'm just giving you the outline so you can recognize it when you see it that it's not simply about matters of outward immorality, that's true, and there's certainly plenty of that going around for us to repent of as the church of Christ, but Christ makes it clear that the matters of truth and doctrine are to be matters of highest preeminent priority to the church and, you know, the church is cold on these things and in love for the Savior, we should look at this.

We see the call to repentance given to the church itself, given to the church itself, and beloved, I'm glad I'm not a strong man because I would pick up this 500-pound pulpit and shake it in order to make my point here. There are seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3. Can't wait to tell you about it. In five of those churches, Christ makes a call to repentance. In one of the other churches, it's a little church of inconsequential power from an earthly perspective. In another church, it's a church going through tribulation and difficulty and he commends them, he loves them, he doesn't call them to repentance. There is no place for affirmation of mega churches devoid of doctrine, oriented toward men, having no love for Christ, there's no way that they can get through the seven churches and what Christ says to the seven churches without a searing call to repentance upon them. It's impossible when you see what Christ says to the seven

churches. We'll cover that in due time, I guess if the Lord gives me life and strength. But all I want you to see for this evening is that in five of the seven churches, Christ calls them, commands them, counsels them to repent of various aspects of error in doctrine, failure in ethics, and a lack of love for him.

So we read in the first church that he addresses, the church in Ephesus, he commends them for a few things. You know, some of these churches are mixed, they get some commendation, some rebuke. Christ says in Revelation 2:4 to the church in Ephesus, "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." He calls them to repent. He calls a church of Jesus Christ to repentance.

In verse 16, the church at Pergamum, he says in verse 14, "I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam." Look at that. He rebukes them for their teaching. In our day and age when doctrine is diminished and people have so little interest in teaching and churches are more than happy to cater to their lack of interest in biblical doctrine, please understand that this rebuke over doctrine applies to the modern church today without a doubt. Christ says, "I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." The teaching, beloved! They had to repent of their teaching because he says in verse 16, "Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth." He calls the church to repent.

In the church in Thyatira, verses 18 through 29, we read in verse 20, "I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works." Repentance, repentance, repentance.

Doesn't stop there. Revelation 3:3, the church at Sardis, he says at the end of verse 1, "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."

And then famously in the final church that's addressed, Laodicea, we read what Christ says in verse 15. He says, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." This is in the Bible, beloved, and when do churches say things like this to the tares that are gathered in front of them? When do you hear things

like this? It's in the Bible. It's Christ speaking to the churches. It seems to me like that might be kind of important to let people know as a theme.

Verse 17, "you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing," look at the self-satisfaction in them, "I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." You assess yourself as being in a good position and Christ says, "I assess you as being in a poor, pitiable, wretched, naked, blind condition." This church completely misunderstood itself, completely failed at self-examination and Christ brings an inerrant, accurate view from his omniscience and rebukes them and calls them, ie says in verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."

Five of the seven churches, literal churches that existed there in the first century when this was written. And we see the call in the world to repent. I'm just going to read one text. I've got three in my notes, but for the sake of time, we'll get to all of this eventually. Revelation 9:20. The church is called to repent in the book of Revelation. The world is called to repent in the book of Revelation. And as the judgments of God are being poured out in Revelation 9, we read this in verse 20, "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Beloved, I trust that you see from the consideration of these four themes, one, just how magnificent this book is and we've just bounced on a couple of high point waves here. We haven't even gotten into anything yet. How magnificent this book is, how transcendent and glorious its themes are, and that you will understand why I issue this caution and even warning, this is not a book for self-satisfied, self-righteous people. It's not. Self-righteous, self-satisfied people wanting to argue debatable points and with keeping in mind, passing over the glory of Christ, passing over the fear of God, passing over the worship of God, passing over repentance from sin in order to discuss and debate these little interesting issues that articles get written about, you know, about the mark of the beast and things like that. People like that, that pass over these issues without regard to the condition of their own soul, they have much greater, much higher, much more urgent issues to address than to shore up their personal views on eschatology through a study of Revelation. These things are primary. What happens with eschatology flows from that but is not apart from it and it is not prior to it. It is not more important to it, more important than those themes that we've discussed here tonight.

If repentance is so important and so central, what does it mean? If you want to think about it this way and think about the spirit of repentance in your own life, beloved, I ask you gently, softly, despite the animated nature of my demeanor and tone of voice here as I speak here, is the spirit of repentance an active part of your life, of your heart? When

did you last spend any time confessing sin to God whatsoever? When did you last say, "Lord, those desires in my heart were wrong. Those words that I said were sinful. What I did was contrary to what you would have had me to do." Jesus said, you know, in the Lord's prayer that, you know, we're to confess our sins. Is that a part of your life? Do you realize that if it's not, that there's a prior issue of dealing with repentance before we ever get to the text of Revelation for you to deal with?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines repentance in this way, and I quote, "Repentance means you realize you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath of God and that you are hell-bound. You begin to realize this thing called sin is in you and you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world, whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may say you have religious mania, you may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference to you. That is repentance."

So, my dear friends, the glory of Christ, the fear of God, the worship of God, repentance from sin. Will you study Revelation for the sake of those themes and to repent of all known sin in your life in order to take seriously the coming return of Christ, the coming judgment of God, the certain coming appointment you have to give an account before your Holy Creator, your Holy Redeemer, the Holy Judge? My friends, I'll say it this one last time tonight, and then I'll probably say it 5,000 times before we get through Revelation, you cannot bypass these primary themes for the sake of carnal curiosity about incidental details that tend to occupy much greater time in discussions about the book of Revelation. So here at Truth Community Church, God helping us, we begin this study in Revelation for the glory of God and for the pursuit of personal holiness. Let each one examine himself accordingly, and may God send his blessing through his Spirit upon us as we do.

Let us pray.

Father, may your Spirit search us as it says seven times in Revelation 2 and 3, "Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches." Father, give Truth Community Church an ear to hear. Give member and attender alike an ear to hear. Give us this spirit of love and worship and fear of the great Triune God that would preoccupy our minds and set the proper context in our hearts for whatever details we may encounter along the way. And Father, I pray that you would grant us great discernment to discern truth from error, to discern our own hearts. I pray, Father, that during the course of this exposition in the coming of months that you would expose to people that they have been self-deceived, never born again at all, and that you would use this study to convict men and women like that and bring them to true repentance. I pray that you would strengthen us and protect us and help us as we undertake this work and I pray that it would all be to the glory of God, to the glory of the Son, with the help of the Spirit. May we study the book of Revelation and grow greatly in our personal holiness. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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