

The Letters to the Churches

Ephesus with Love (Revelation 2:1-7)

Welcome (10 mins)

Who was your 'first love' in primary school and what were they like?!

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [Jesus we love you](#) (Chords)

Word (30 mins)

At the beginning of Revelation, John has a remarkable encounter with the risen Jesus that sets the scene for the rest of the book. As John records the words and visions that Jesus reveals to him it is like having the curtain pulled back on the reality of the spiritual realm. Revelation falls under the 'apocalyptic genre' of literature which uses rich imagery and metaphor to communicate these spiritual realities.

1. Read John's description of the risen Jesus in chapter 1v9-20. What particular imagery strikes you from these verses?

In 1v11, Jesus gives John instructions to record what he sees and send the letters to seven of the early churches of the time (c. 95AD). Each of the letters follows the same rough format:

- A description of Jesus linked to Chapter 1
- A commendation
- A rebuke
- A warning/promise/exhortation

2. Who is the 'him', the 'seven stars' and the 'seven golden lampstands' in 2v1? Use 1v20 to help you 'decode' what Jesus is saying. Read it out loud again, replacing these pronouns or symbols with what they represent.
3. What qualities does Jesus commend and rebuke in the Ephesian church?
4. Using Jesus' description, how would *you* describe or characterise a typical Ephesian churchgoer?
5. What does it mean to have 'forsaken their first love'?
6. What does it show about Jesus' heart for his church that hard work and perseverance alone doesn't satisfy him? What more does he want from us and how do we get there (v5)?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Have you ever slipped into a pattern of faithful service but a love for Jesus that has grown dull?

Jesus gives clear instructions that the path back to 'your first love' (Him) is through repentance - an invitation to turn from our old ways and return to our first love. Take some time doing this together in prayer.

Witness (5-10 mins)

This week is St John's Parish annual 'Soccer Camp', a week long holiday club reaching children in grades R-7 through the fun of football. Lots of our staff and church members are involved either as leaders or members. Pray for all involved that it would be a week of fun, friendships, and encounter with Jesus.

*We will be unpacking the significance of the practice of the Nicolaitans (v6) in the coming weeks.

The Letters to the Churches: Smyrna with Suffering (Revelation 2:8-11)

Welcome (10 mins)

What's one interesting or unusual thing about you that most people wouldn't guess?

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [Way maker](#) ([Chords](#))

Word (30 mins)

1. How might the church in Smyrna be encouraged and comforted by Jesus' description of himself in vs 8?
2. What hardships does the church of Smyrna have to endure?
3. In our world of tolerance and acceptance the words describing the Jewish population in Smyrna are abrasive and confronting. How do the words "satan-synagogue" and "blasphemous self-styled Jews" describe the treatment of the Christians in Smyrna? How do these compare to treatments of Christians today?
4. Jesus gives a command with a promise at the end of verse 10. What does it mean to be faithful all the way to death? How is the believer called to suffer differently to the rest of the world?
5. What is the second death referring to? How might the church of Smyrna have been conquerors?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

In the face of quite severe persecution and suffering Jesus reveals to the church that He intimately knows the struggles that they are going through. He reminds them that this world is not the end but there is life to come and that they will not be harmed in judgment.

As a group, take some time to bring the hardships and challenges that you are facing to Jesus. He knows and cares for you. Pray for each other and ask the Holy Spirit to come and comfort and strengthen you for what is to come.

Witness (5-10 mins)

We are fortunate to live in an environment where we are not being systematically persecuted for our faith. But there are many places in the world where this is not the case. The following stats released by open doors and Gordon-Conwell Resources show us some of the circumstances believers face today.

- Almost 400 Christians are killed for their faith every month. 13 every day.
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed every month.
- 772 forms of violence (beatings, kidnappings, rape, arrest, etc.) are committed against Christians every month.
- Around 40-80 million Christians have been martyred in the course of history. More than half were martyred in the 20th century.

How might we as a church be able to help and encourage the persecuted church?

The Letters to the Churches

Pergamum with truth (Revelation 2:12-17)

Welcome (10 mins)

Can you think of something that you always thought was true but only found out later was false?

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [New wine \(Chords\)](#)

Word (30 mins)

1. To each Church Jesus gives a different and specific description of himself. What attribute does he highlight for the church in Pergamum (v12) and why is this significant?
2. The City of Pergamum was one where idol worship and false gods were prominent. How does Jesus commend His followers living in this place (v13)?
3. We read the story of Balaam the prophet and Balak the king in Numbers 22. How did they conspire against the Israelites to draw them away from God according to v14?
4. Rather than a healthy understanding of the importance of holiness, the Nicolaitans promoted a life of unrestrained indulgence. How is this lifestyle a similar temptation to Balaam and Balak's teaching? In what ways can this kind of worldly thinking be a temptation to the church today?
5. What counsel and serious warning does Jesus give to the church (v16)? Do we take the importance of holiness this seriously?
6. Jesus promises a 'hidden manna' to those who hold fast to his teachings and a life of holiness (see John 6:35). How does the language of this hidden 'food' that satisfies

eternally contrast to the other 'hungers' that we are tempted to chase?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any area of your life where you have not been taking the holiness of God seriously. Choose now to repent from it, turning away from things that don't really satisfy and turning to the 'hidden manna' of Christ, the only one who truly satisfies.

Witness (5-10 mins)

Our outreach partner this month is CMJ, Church's Ministry among the Jewish people. Set aside some time particularly to pray for the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza using the prayers below (taken from the Lectio365 devotional app in their entry dated Tuesday 10th October).

Prince of Peace, we cry out to You today for the people of Israel and Gaza, these very lands you know so well. First, we pray with all our hearts for those who are grieving the sudden loss of loved ones, those who've been captured and those whose homes have been destroyed, (Matthew 2:18). Lord, we pray for a miraculous de-escalation of this dangerous conflict. (...) Violence is provoking violence, but we pray for reason to prevail over rage and revenge. Finally Lord, we pray for active and effective peacemaking at an international political level. May the measured voices of diplomacy constrain violence on every side.

The Letters to the Churches: Thyatira with Holiness (Revelation 2:18-29)

Welcome (10 mins)

What is the most precious object that you own, why is it so important to you?

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [Holy Forever \(Chords\)](#)

Word (30 mins)

1. What does Jesus commend and criticise the church of Thyatira for?
2. Jezebel was a notoriously wicked Old Testament figure, who seduced Israel into extreme idolatry and immorality (1 Kings 21). How is the Jezebel figure in the church in Thyatira seducing them?
3. Her seduction is similar to that of the Nicolaitans in the previous passage, and yet this time the problem seems to be coming from within the church. What is Jesus going to do if there is no repentance (v21-23)?
4. Time and again, scandals within the church seem to come from issues surrounding money, power and sex. Where does their acceptance of Jezebel and her teachings start and where does it end up? How does an understanding of this slippery slope help us to heed the seriousness of Jesus' warning?
5. What counsel does Jesus offer the faithful believers in this church (v24-25)?
6. What does Jesus promise to those who are 'victorious'? (v26-29)?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

In the context of Jesus' cautions and guidance to the church, His primary message is for them to 'persevere' in their faith by holding onto their knowledge of Him. Let's take a moment to reflect on and write down a quality of God or a specific Bible verse that has helped you maintain your faith steadfastly. Share your reflections with one another as a source of mutual encouragement. As you listen to others, you might discover new aspects to add to your own list. Use these attributes and verses as fuel for a collective time of prayer and worship. Praying in this way is an act of 'holding on' together!

Witness (5-10 mins)

This month our outreach partner is the Children's library.

The Letters to the Churches

Sardis with Reality (Revelation 3:1-6)

Welcome (10 mins)

Have you ever had an experience of something turning out to be completely the opposite of what you expected?

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [Fall afresh \(chords\)](#)

Word (30 mins)

1. In a break from the pattern so far, Jesus has nothing to commend about the church in Sardis' deeds. What is his shocking judgment of their situation in verse 1?
2. What do you think it practically means to have a reputation of being alive, but actually being spiritually dead? What are things we can mistake for signs of spiritual life? What are true markers of spiritual life?
3. In verse 2-3 Jesus' call to spiritual life contains five clear steps. What are these five instructions/commands?
4. What does it mean to strengthen what remains, and to remember/hold fast to what they received?
5. How does the warning at the end of verse 3 drive home the importance of not being complacent?
6. Given Jesus' criticism of this church as 'dead', what is the significance of the promise in verse 5?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Like the church in Sardis, it's all too easy to rest upon an outward reputation as proof of our spiritual life. Everything in the list below are good things to do. Which items however are **true** signs of

spiritual life? Which items could you be practicing outwardly whilst inside being spiritually dead?

- Attending church
- Pursue holiness
- Loving God
- Taking communion
- Having good fruit
- Baptism
- Having the Holy Spirit
- Tithing
- Walking in the light
- Confessing sin
- Singing worship songs
- Prayer
- Calling oneself a Christian
- Reading the Bible
- Keeping His commandments
- Loving God's family

Witness (5-10 mins)

In this 'witness' section we think about people and ministries outside our own four walls. We all know specific people who are involved in Christian ministry and witness in one way or another and it's great to pray for the work they do. However, like the church in Sardis, it's also vital that we pray for and encourage these people to be engaged not just in outward markers of success or fruitfulness, but to have a deep and active personal walk with Jesus. Bring to the group any particular people on your heart involved in Christian work or ministry, and pray for the health and vitality of their inner spiritual lives.

The Letters to the Churches Philadelphia with Opportunity (Revelation 3:7-13)

Welcome (10 mins)

If you went to a tattoo studio and God was the tattoo artist, what would you want him to inscribe on you?

Worship (10 mins)

Sing: [Trust in God \(Chords\)](#)

Word (30 mins)

The church in Philadelphia is one of only two (along with Smyrna) that received no criticism from Jesus. They weren't immune from opposition, however, as we will see in v.9-10.

1. How is Jesus described in this passage (v7-8)? What does Jesus do with this key (v8)?
2. What situation is this church in and what did Jesus commend them for (v8)?
3. If the 'open door' of verse 8 is the door of salvation, why was this specific description of Jesus important for this church to hear? What does it teach us about Jesus' character?
4. How does knowing this about Jesus help them in their specific situation of 'little strength', facing persecution?
5. Read verses 10-12 again. It speaks of an end time before Christ returns. What implied pressures should Christians expect in this time?
6. Knowing that Jesus' return is imminent, what should they do (v10-11)? What should you do?

7. What does the promise of a crown (v.11), a pillar (v.12), and having God's name tattooed on them (v.12b) show us about the relationship of believers with God?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

What is the Holy Spirit leading you to do in response to this letter? Is it a call to persevere and endure in trial?

- Is it a comfort to remember Jesus' promise that his open door cannot be shut?
- It is to rejoice at the promises of our heavenly inheritance?
- Is it a call to keep Jesus' word and not deny his name?
- It is a call to approach the open door that Jesus has for you?

Spend time in quiet, listening and asking the Holy Spirit what He wants to say to you. Share this with the group and pray for each other.

Witness (5-10 mins)

This month's outreach partner focus is Seung Young and Joy Jung, who lead the Children's Library in Jim se Bos. You can learn more about their work [here](#). The encouragement and promises Jesus gives in this passage are particularly relevant to Joy and Seung Young's work. Verse by verse, go through the passage and pray these promises and comforts of scripture for Joy and Seung Young. For context, some of the specific challenges they are facing are: vandalism on the campus, theft of vehicles, healing from traumatic experiences (both them personally and the children they work with).

The Letters to the Churches Laodicea with Wholeheartedness (Revelation 3:14-22)

Welcome (10 mins)

Have you ever eaten something particularly disgusting that you had to spit out? What was it and what did you do?!

Worship (10 mins)

The risen Jesus reveals Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, and the Amen "God's Yes". As a group, each person could choose one of these names to praise Him for, acknowledging His lordship over our lives.

Word (30 mins)

1. How does Jesus describe himself in verse 14? What characteristics are these descriptions emphasizing?
2. What are Jesus' criticisms of the Laodicean church? Does he have any commendations for them?
3. How does verse 17 reveal their true spiritual condition? What attitude seems to be present?
4. The city of Laodicea sat between the cold springs of Colossae and the hot springs of Hierapolis, meaning their drinking water was lukewarm, considered good for nothing. What might being a 'lukewarm' apathetic church look like in practice?
5. How does Jesus counsel the church in verse 18? What might this look like practically?
6. How would their attitude need to change in order to follow Jesus' counsel?

7. What promise does Jesus make in verse 19 and 20? What do these words reveal of his heart for his people?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

This week we're going to use the practice of 'Lectio Divina'. Do each step's reading as a group, then leave time for private prayer and reflection after each step.

1. Read (*lectio*) - slowly and meditatively read the passage out loud. Is there a particular word or phrase that jumps out?
2. Meditate (*mediatio*) - Read the passage a second time. Let that word/phrase permeate your thoughts and feelings and become your invitation to dialogue with God.
3. Pray (*oratio*) - Read the text a third time and consider: what is God saying to you in these words? What do you want to say to God?
4. Contemplate (*contemplatio*) - Read the text a final time. What gift has God given you to take away from this prayer? To what action might God be inviting you?

Witness (5-10 mins)

We have a number of Christmas events coming up - these are a unique opportunity to reach out to our communities, invite them to church and share the good news of Jesus. As a small group, is there anything you could do socially before or after one of the carol services or Christmas events, to invite your friends and community and to make the most of this season? Some ideas:

- Christmas drinks & nibbles before the Traditional Carol Service at 8pm on Sunday 10th Dec
- Children's tea before the Roadtrip to Christmas crib service at 4pm on the 24th Dec
- Or why not invite your whole road to join for Picnic Carols at 4pm on Sunday 10th Dec?!