

October 17th, 2021 "Revelation- The Unveiling #7"

Partners in Prayer

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Revelation 3:22 NIV

"Here I am! I [Jesus] stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me."

Revelation 3:20 (NIV)



"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." 2 Timothy 3:3-4 (NIV)

Dear Pastor John of Patmos [the Revelator],

John, which of these seven churches really is like my church today? When I look at them, I have no problem finding which of these churches is like mine. I can see some of all of them at their worst as how my church is. My church is judgy and smug. My church is not very loving, and especially lukewarm. Some of these seven churches kept closer to the gospel than others, but honestly as Jesus gave each one a short "report card" I don't see any who made the grade of being a good church. Many modern Christian churches have wandered from biblical truth, such as those that teach the prosperity gospel or do not believe in the Trinity. Others have grown lukewarm, their members just going through the motions with no passion for God. Many churches in Asia and the Middle East face persecution. Increasingly popular are "progressive" churches that base their theology more on current culture than solid doctrine found in the Bible. All I can say is, these seven churches don't encourage me to even be in church. Why must we even go to church with the conveniences of social media? I don't need a church to grow in Jesus! The huge number of denominations proves thousands of churches have been founded on little more than the stubbornness of their leaders. While these Revelation letters are not as strongly prophetic as other parts of that book, they warn today's drifting churches that discipline will come to those who do not repent. Why should I even go to church today? Why not just sit home and enjoy the watching of my favorite teachers on social media? Why would the presence of my being in church even make a difference?

Signed Never Going to Church Again!

Dear Never,

I would caution you with your harsh words. If you think about it, your words are harsher than Jesus was on the seven churches. Yes, those churches had difficulties. Let's review them one more time:

- Ephesus had "abandoned the love it had at first," (Revelation 2:4, ESV). They lost their first love for Christ, which in turn affected the love they had for others.
- Smyrna was warned it was about to face persecution. Jesus encouraged them to be faithful unto death and he would give them the crown of life—eternal life.
- Pergamum was told to repent. It had fallen prey to a cult called the Nicolaitans, heretics who taught that since their bodies were evil, only what they did with their spirit counted. This led to sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. Jesus said those who conquered such temptations would receive "hidden manna" and a "white stone," symbols of special blessings.
- Thyatira had a false prophetess who was leading people astray. Jesus promised to give Himself (the morning star) to those who resisted her evil ways.
- Sardis had the reputation of being dead, or asleep. Jesus told them to wake up and repent. Those who did would receive white garments, have their name listed in the book of life, and would be proclaimed before God the Father.
- Philadelphia endured patiently. Jesus pledged to stand with them in future trials, granting special honors in heaven, the New Jerusalem.
- Laodicea had lukewarm faith. Its members had grown complacent because of the riches of the city. To those who returned to their former zeal, Jesus vowed to share his ruling authority.

Even though the Holy Spirit wrote these warnings nearly 2,000 years ago, they still apply to Christian churches today. Christ remains the head of the worldwide Church, lovingly overseeing it. Just as the Old Testament trials of the nation of Israel are a metaphor for the individual's relationship with God, the warnings in the Book of Revelation speak to every Christ-follower today. These letters act as a gauge to reveal each believer's faithfulness.

But the point is this: "Jesus has a plan and His greatest plan for us is His church!" He loves His church! He is committed to His church (Ephesians 5:25-32)! The church is the best and only plan He has for us while we grow in His family. And while we wait for Jesus to return, He didn't give us an alternative plan. If we pull away from His church, then we are actually declaring that Jesus was really all wrong about what is best for us and our love for Him. Just pause a moment. Ask yourself: "Can I really love Jesus, but not love His wife?" Maybe that is true to your experience in friendships in life. I've had a friend that I just loved so much, but his wife was terrible to be around. I just couldn't enjoy ever being with my friend, so I grew distant from him through the years.

You know there is an adage I learned while working on marriage counseling, “If you don’t love my wife, how can you claim to be my friend?” I believe Jesus has that same message today for those who claim to be “Christians” but do not want to be in a church. He loves His bride! He is committed to care for her! He is committed to purify her! Even though we may not like the way churches today operate, don’t fall for one of Satan’s greatest end-time lies: “I don’t need church and church doesn’t need me, I can just love Jesus!” Since each of the 7 postcards ends with the same “exhortation” I want to emphasize three things we should get from these churches which are in all the church messages:

1. Repentance is more than important!

We should understand that the more we avoid the personal getting together, we can’t truly find the areas of our lives we need to “repent” and improve upon. Being impersonal may improve our chances for getting hurt or offended, but then it limits our ability to gain personal touches. I read the following story from a recent *Fishwrapper*:

“I spent an hour in the bank with my dad, as he had to transfer some money. I couldn’t resist myself and asked, ‘Dad, why don’t we activate your internet banking?’ ‘Why would I do that?’ he asked. ‘Well’, I answered with smugness, ‘You are so old-fashioned! You need to get with the times. Then you won’t have to spend an hour here for things like this. You can even do your shopping online. Everything will be easier and will save you time! Don’t you want to save time, dad?’ I was excited about initiating him into the world of online banking. He asked, ‘If I do that, I won’t have to step out of the house?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘That’s right! You can even have Amazon deliver everything! You can get your food through Door-Dash and not prepare it. Even groceries can be delivered to your door now.’ His answer left me tongue-tied. ‘But son, since I entered this bank today, I have met four of my dearest friends. They know me quite well by now and I find it refreshing to chat a while with them. You know, I am alone... this is company that I need. I also know they are praying for me. I like to get ready and come to the bank. I always have enough time. It is the personal touch that I crave. Two years ago, I got sick. The store owner from whom I buy my fruits and vegetables came to see me, and sat by my bedside and cried. When your mom fell, our Pastor saw her fall, and got his car and brought her home. Would I have that “human” touch if everything was done online? What would I do with all that time I saved if I didn’t have it for time for others? Does Amazon deliver that? I like to know the person I’m dealing with. This way you know when someone is sick, hospitalized, or when a new member is added to the household, Amazon can’t deliver that kind of relationship, and neither can being online all the time. Spend time with people, not with devices.” (Time Well Spent, September 7, 2021, Fishwrapper, pg. 6)

I think you can get the direction I am going. Time with people in church helps us find and improve in areas where we need repentance and prayer. Time with God is enjoyed more with others, than just alone. When people look at a device, they can’t tell the real you. How many times have you looked at a picture of some other family and wondered why your own isn’t so perfect? When you are with God’s family, you always keep a ground on closeness with others. Isn’t it worth the time to be with God’s family?

Each of the churches had something to repent of. That itself should remind us to be open to repentance in our lives. So are we repenting? Listen to what Jesus said: “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent” (Revelation

3:19). Do you love Him? Then don't move away from the best way to repent. Maybe the first step towards growing in Christ is repenting from not being faithful to get involved in your church.

2. Being “overcomers” will never happen unless we get together!

We will never be true “overcomers” in our faith if we keep ourselves outside the door of a church. So are we really overcoming? Do you realize that when I talk about “overcomers” we don't all automatically as believers receive an “overcomer” reward, much like our schools today giving participation trophies? One of my favorite Christian songs to listen to when facing the trials and tribulations of life is "Overcomer" by Mandisa. In the chorus it says, “You're an overcomer. Stay in the fight 'til the final round. You're not going under 'cause God is holding you right now. You might be down for a moment feeling like it is hopeless. That's when He reminds you that you're an overcomer.” I like to keep these lyrics on my mind at all times especially when I'm having a rough day. They help remind me that no matter what I'm going through that day, God is always right beside me and helping me become an overcomer. But we as believers must choose to be “overcomers!”

Each of the churches had something that would make them overcomers. Go back and look at the Scriptures here in Revelation; that is what Jesus meant in these letters when he mentions it seven times (2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21). If you repeat something two or three times, it is important; but Jesus repeated it to us seven times. So it really must be important. So do you want to be an overcomer? Listen to what Jesus said: “To the one who is victorious [an overcomer], I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

3. Listen up and test your hearing!

Really, I mean listen to what Jesus is really saying! Having hearing and listening ears is very important! We are not listening or hearing God clearly if we remove ourselves from a church. I don't know where the old saying came from: “Are your ears ringing or burning? Someone is talking about you!” But I do understand how often I've been hurt by people who talked meanly about me. Who wants to hang around with people who constantly disagree with things I do or even don't support me in what I believe is a healthy spiritual growth? We can tend to “dull” our hearing if we are around negative people all the time. True, but I just want to point out what brother Paul once warned us about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Here is the caution: “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

I very much appreciate the clearness and certainty of the J.B. Phillips translation: “For the time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires.” The kind of teaching we are looking for says a lot about us. Do we want to hear teaching that we like to hear, or do we actually, even if it hurts us, want to hear what God says? That is why we always emphasize regular expository preaching as a staple diet of a healthy church. I guarantee I can take you anywhere in this world, in whatever church, in whatever city and I guarantee you will find faithful teaching of the Bible in a healthy church.

The challenge we face is that there are people whose whole mindset is that they don't like the way someone preaches, or his style, so we gather up more and spicier preaching. The whole emphasis of "itching" that Paul used in his passage was "gathering and stacking up piles" of teachers upon teachers. These people just worry about stacking up those who preach to them and who will tell them what makes them feel better, and not what they lack or don't do well. So that causes people to boast about how much they are learning from "this guy on social media" or this guy from the radio, and don't realize their ears are tuned to their 'curiosity and pleasure' than to 'seriousness' of truth. They want to accumulate teachers to assure their own passions rather than actually challenge them when they are not gaining any true change. When Isaiah's preaching made the people of Israel uncomfortable, this is what God said: "For these are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction. They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things; prophesy illusions... stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel'" (Isaiah 30:9-12). Who would believe that true people of God would be unhearing to what God says? I believe one of Satan's greatest deceptions is convincing people that are doing just fine without others in the church.

So are we really hearing? What is that knocking sound? Do you hear someone knocking at the door of your heart? What should we do, dear "Never," if we hear someone knocking at the door of our heart? Should we answer it? Yes, of course. Look again at the words that Jesus ended these letters with: "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:22).

Just take a moment and count again how many times Jesus said to listen:

- ✓ "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches, to the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).
- ✓ "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death" (Rev. 2:11).
- ✓ "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (Rev. 2:17).
- ✓ "I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2: 29).
- ✓ "I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3: 6)
- ✓ "I will write on them the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from My God; and I will also write on them My new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:12-13).
- ✓ "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with My Father on His throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:21-22).

That is seven times! Must mean we need to have our “ears on!”

I don't remember if you ever had a hard time passing those hearing tests in elementary school, but I always was unsure. I was frazzled by trying to raise my hand when I didn't quite hear the sound. I remember telling my friend Paul once about it. He said, “What do you mean raise your hand? I just sat there and when it was done, I said, yup, I heard it all.” He didn't really hear the instructions did he?

One last encouragement, as I finish up through all these seven churches, I tried to get a feel for which of these churches depicted us at Palisades Community Bible Church. Certainly my church in Iowa was an “Ephesus” church. All business and profit and no love! I pictured them as one of those dress-for-success car salesmen at the age of 45. The first church I pastored in Vintondale was a Sardis church, certainly the picture of an elderly person in a wheelchair and on life support. I even had a pastor friend who preached through this same series said: “Corvin, my church is a Thyatira church!” Honestly I had never encountered such a church, myself, so I was shocked. He said that when he came to church, there was a Jezebel-like woman who was the previous pastor's widow who controlled the church leaders and everything that happened in that church. So when I came to these last two churches, I was convinced that Palisades was none of the first five churches when I took it on 16 years ago, but I had a sinking feeling, “What if our church is like the lukewarm church of Laodicea?” But after studying these passages, I truly have come to believe that our church was and still is a “Philadelphia-like-church.” Not perfect, but always burdened for souls. We are a church of open opportunities, open message, and open hearts! What does that mean?

1. We are a church that doesn't keep people out. We are not a locked door to truth and Jesus. We create openings for others. God says He has set before us an open door, but sometimes I've tried to find another door, or another way. I've tried to work things out on my own. It's like my small grandchildren. We try to protect them but they're always finding ways to escape and climb over the safe boundaries we give them. They try to get things that are out of their reach or go somewhere dangerous. We can see the danger, but they can't. Isn't that like the way we are with God?

2. We are a church that shows people how to get to Jesus. We are a church that has always had a mission and evangelistic heart. We pray for openings for others. Jesus is the door. He said ‘I am the door, if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture’ (John 10:7.) He's a very safe door. He has opened doors into everything that we need in life. There's a door of answered prayer, a door into Heaven, into God's presence, and a door into His love and mercy. There's a door into a closer walk with our Shepherd, a door of comfort and peace and a door of Hope.

3. We are a church that brings blessings to brokenness of others. We are ready at all times. We never are shut on “Sundays or holidays”. We are 24/7, convenience-like store for Jesus to bring hope at all hours. And we have always sent out young people and even our very own missionaries to touch people's lives. An open-door church is a praying church and a missionary-sending church, and a ministry-supporting church. Jesus has also opened a door into this broken world where we can bring life and blessing to those who have no hope. They need to see what God, in His love, has

provided for them. It's a door of escape from the ravages of evil and sin. As a child I used to sing this song:

"There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, there's a door that is open and all may go in. At Calvary's cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus."

But there's another door that belongs to us. Jesus stands knocking on the door of our hearts and promises that if we open it, and invite Him in, He will come in and be our guest (Revelation 3:20).

So dear "Never", let's open our hearing today and open our hearts so we never are people who would never attend a church again. The Lord promises that He will transform the Valley of Trouble into a Door of Hope (Hosea 2:15). This can be a wonderful door to restoration – so come, let's go through!

Will you pray with me?

"Thank You our Precious Father and Lord, for the open door, and all that it means. May we never miss any of the good things that You have planned for us and the blessings that we can share with others. And Jesus, forgive us for being lukewarm in our hearts. For not having any desire to be excited for Your workings in this world. If we sense that our hearts are cold or far from passionless for the things of You, please forgive us for living in Laodicea. We do hear Your knocking at hearts today! Holy Spirit, give us a joyful confidence and may our love for Jesus compel us to face a needy world with real power to help. We do say now, 'Jesus come in.' In Jesus' Name, Amen."

**Praying open doors,
Pastor Corvin**

Quote: "Christ has the keys and He opens the doors. Then let us not barge our way unceremoniously through doors which are still closed. We must wait for Him to make openings for us. Damage is continually being done to the cause of Christ by rude or blatant testimony. It is indeed right to seek to win for Christ our friends and relatives at home and at work, but we are sometimes in a greater hurry than God is. Be patient, pray hard, love much, and wait expectantly for the opportunity of witness. More mistakes are probably made by speed than by sloth, by impatience than by deleteriousness. God's purposes often ripen slowly and if the door is shut, don't put your shoulder to it. Wait will Christ takes out the key and opens it up." ... John Stott (on evangelism).

Quote: "What concerns do I have for the church going into the next century? Lukewarmness- Religion will be without the Holy Spirit. Christianity will be without Christ. Forgiveness will be without repentance. Salvation will be without regeneration. Politics will be without God. And everyone will want to preach heaven without a hell." ... General William Booth, (Founder of Salvation Army).