

## *Session 2: Keeping the Lamps Burning*

### *Questions to begin*

- What images of Jesus in religious art (paintings, icons, statues, stained-glass windows) are particularly meaningful for you? Why?
- What is your attitude toward reading & reflecting on the book of Revelation?
  - Maybe I'll find out what 666 stands for.
  - Isn't this the most difficult book in the Bible?
  - I've always wanted to read Revelation for myself.
  - I just hope no one in the group is going to try to preach their pet theories about the end of the world.
  - With all the judgements & weirdness, is this really a book that Christians can benefit from reading.
  - This promises to be really interesting!

### **The Reading: Rev 1 - 3**

#### *Introduction & Salutation*

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God & to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, & blessed are those who hear & who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you & peace from him who is & who was & who is to come, & from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup> & from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, & the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us & freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> & made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God & Father, to him be glory & dominion for ever & ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

& on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

8 'I am the Alpha & the Omega', says the Lord God, who is & who was & who is to come, the Almighty.

### *A Vision of Christ*

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution & the kingdom & the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God & the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, & I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup>saying, 'Write in a book what you see & send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, & to Laodicea.'

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, & on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>& in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe & with a golden sash across his chest. <sup>14</sup>His head & his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup>his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, & his voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, & from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, & his face was like the sun shining with full force.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first & the last, <sup>18</sup>& the living one. I was dead, & see, I am alive for ever & ever; & I have the keys of Death & of Hades. <sup>19</sup>Now write what you have seen, what is, & what is to take place after this. <sup>20</sup>As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, & the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, & the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

### *The Message to Ephesus*

2 'To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 'I know your works, your toil & your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, & have found them to be false. <sup>3</sup>I also know that you are enduring patiently & bearing up for the sake of my name, & that you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, & do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you & remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup>Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

### *The Message to Smyrna*

8 '& to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first & the last, who was dead & came to life:

9 'I know your affliction & your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews & are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup>Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, & for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, & I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

### ***The Message to Pergamum***

12 ‘& to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 ‘I know where you are living, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, & you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup>But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols & practise fornication. <sup>15</sup>So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon & make war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, & I will give a white stone, & on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

### ***The Message to Thyatira***

18 ‘& to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, & whose feet are like burnished bronze:

19 ‘I know your works—your love, faith, service, & patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. <sup>20</sup>But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet & is teaching & beguiling my servants to practise fornication & to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. <sup>22</sup>Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, & those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; <sup>23</sup>& I will strike her children dead. & all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds & hearts, & I will give to each of you as your works deserve. <sup>24</sup>But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call “the deep things of Satan”, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; <sup>25</sup>only hold fast to what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup>To everyone who conquers & continues to do my works to the end,

I will give authority over the nations;

<sup>27</sup> to rule them with an iron rod,

as when clay pots are shattered—

<sup>28</sup>even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. <sup>29</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

### ***The Message to Sardis***

3 ‘& to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God & the seven stars:

‘I know your works; you have a name for being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up, & strengthen what remains & is at the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember then what you received & heard; obey it, & repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, & you will not know at what hour I will come to

you. <sup>4</sup>Yet you have still a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, & I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father & before his angels. <sup>6</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

### ***The Message to Philadelphia***

7 ‘& to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one,  
 who has the key of David,  
 who opens & no one will shut,  
 who shuts & no one opens:

8 ‘I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, & yet you have kept my word & have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup>I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews & are not, but are lying—I will make them come & bow down before your feet, & they will learn that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. <sup>11</sup>I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. <sup>12</sup>If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, & the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, & my own new name. <sup>13</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

### ***The Message to Laodicea***

14 ‘& to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful & true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

15 ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm, & neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>For you say, “I am rich, I have prospered, & I need nothing.” You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, & naked. <sup>18</sup>Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; & white robes to clothe you & to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; & salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup>I reprove & discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, & repent. <sup>20</sup>Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice & open the door, I will come in to you & eat with you, & you with me. <sup>21</sup>To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered & sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’

***After reading the text, you may wish to consider the following:***

- Why does John make a point of referring to himself as “*I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution & the kingdom & the patient endurance*” (1:19)?
- What phrases or images from John’s vision of Jesus in 1:9-20 re-appear in the message to Thyatira (2:18-29)?
- John of Patmos was an exile for the truth. Can you think of any comparable “exiles” in today’s world?

***Reflections on Ephesus (2:1-7)***

- Conversion can be understood in a number of ways. What is the biblical understanding?
- How can we deal with opposition & differences in charity?
- In what ways is there room for constant & patient endurance in your daily life?
- How could it be said today: “You have lost the love you had at first”?

***Reflections on Smyrna (2:8-11)***

- In the midst of war, death & destruction, people sometimes ask “Where is God?” How do you reply?
- How did we become rich through Christ’s becoming poor?
- Reflect on the importance of personal fidelity in a very unstable age.

***Reflections on Pergamum (2:12-17)***

- Compromise can be seen in a positive or negative way. How would you explain these two aspects?
- Christ is the “faithful witness.” Can you think of anyone in modern times who might be identified in a similar way?
- Read the story of Balaam in the Book of Numbers in the light of its use in Revelation.
- We all need positive role models. Who stands out as a role model in your life?

***Reflections on Thyatira (2:18-29)***

- Who is “Jezebel” in today’s world? In our culture?
- What implications does Jesus’ act of foot-washing have for your life? For your understanding of God?
- What examples of faithful endurance have you known?

### ***Reflections on Sardis*** (3:1-6)

- In what way is prosperity a danger?
- Why is repentance more important than good works?
- What does it mean to “put on” the Lord Jesus? How would you apply this to your life?

### ***Reflections on Philadelphia*** (3:7-13)

- The NT version of the Lord’s Prayer reads: “Do not bring us to the trial.” What meaning has that for you?
- Do you know people of “limited strength” who nevertheless struggle mightily?
- The Book of Revelation uses derogatory terms like “the assembly of Satan” for the Jews in Smyrna. How do we understand expressions like this in our time of more positive relations between Christians & Jews?

### ***Reflections on Laodicea*** (3:14-22)

- Do you see a fair amount of tepid Christianity with us today?
- In Laodicea there was gold, clothing & eye-ointments. Can these be useful metaphors for aspects of our life today?
- How do you experience “lukewarmness” in your own life? How do you deal with it?

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

- Read aloud the following blessing, adapted from Rev 1:3, slowly & reflectively:

*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, & blessed are those who hear & who keep what is written in it..... Blessed are those who listen for God’s voice & respond to his words to them.*

Then read out loud Rev 1:17-18:

*‘Do not be afraid; I am the first & the last, & the living one. I was dead, & see, I am alive for ever & ever.’*

Picture Jesus in the way that comes most naturally to you. Picture yourself with Jesus. Ask him to let you look at his evaluation of you, which he holds in his hand. Then talk to him about this for a few moments.

Allow some moments for silent reflection.

End by praying the *Our Father*.