

St. Matthew's Church
Thursday Night Bible Study
Revelation
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Session III | 11 October 2018 | The Letters to the Seven Churches

1. Liturgical Setting
 - a. Chapter 1 - Jesus Revealed - "On the Lord's Day"
 - b. Chapter 2-3 - Liturgy of the Word
 - i. Christ's epistle to each church (the seven churches)
 - ii. Christ's collective epistle to *the Church* (seven is a number of completion and so we can attribute a collective, ultimate sense to these letters).

2. The Letters to the Seven Churches
 - a. Textual Context:
 - i. The "Son of Man" and "the Lampstand" visions of 1:9-20
 - ii. The paradise visions of Chapters 19-22
 - iii. The lampstands (reference to image in Zechariah 4)
 - b. Fun Literary Notes
 - i. Our strange sense of time:
 1. The introductions to each church's letter mirror the opening salutations of Revelation, and the typical salutations for apostolic letters in the New Testament
 2. The endings of each church's letter mirror the close of Revelation
 3. The events depicted in the letters to the churches are occurring already during the time John is writing.
 4. The promises of Christ given in the letters have begun to be realized already at the time John is writing.
 5. The promises of Christ will be fulfilled in the New Heaven and New Earth.
 6. The churches are living with one foot in this age, and with one foot in the age to come
 - ii. The structure of each letter
 1. Christ presents Himself to the church
 2. Their situation/problems are assessed
 3. On the basis of (2), Christ encourages perseverance or issues a call to repent and avoid judgment.
 4. Christ exhorts them to heed (hear and obey) His counsel in (3)

5. Assuming their positive response in (3) and (4), Christ promises eternal life to those who endure.
- iii. The structure of the letters, as a group:
1. Three Categories of churches
 - a. Those who are in danger: Ephesus (1) and Laodicea (7)
 - b. Those varyingly on the fence: Pergamum (3), Thyatira (4), and Sardis (5)
 - c. Those who are doing well: Smyrna (2) and Philadelphia (6)
 2. Seen together, the churches and their conditions/exhortations become descriptive of the Church in all times.
 3. Among the problems: affluence, apathy, immorality, heresy, and persecution.
 4. This sets up a sort of irony: the church is mostly in poor condition, yet it is through repentance and perseverance, listening to what the Spirit has to teach the churches, that they will endure to receive eternal life from the hand of Jesus.

iv. Brief Historical Notes

1. “The Tribulation” (2:9-10) is probably the persecution that occurred during the reign of Caesar Domitian (Nero’s famous persecution in which Ss. Peter and Paul died reached its peak during the late-60s.
2. The Churches of Asia Minor



3. The Nicolaitans (2:6-14-16): a heretical cult characterized by introducing occasions for the faithful to fall away through sinful acts of eating and fornication (likely attached to religious rites).