

**Sermon Series:** "The Bible and The Social Issues Today"

**Sermon 1:** "The Unchanging Truth in a Relativistic World"

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**Where:** St John UMC

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**Scripture:** - John 14:6 - Jesus declares Himself as the way, the truth, and the life.

**Focus:** The Revelation of Jesus Christ as the Foundation of Absolute Truth for the Church.

### **Introduction:**

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, let us reflect on the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation and the messages that Jesus had for each of them. These messages are not just historical accounts, but they are relevant and important for the Church today. The Lord has words of correction, encouragement, and exhortation for us to heed and apply to our lives and the life of our faith community.

## **7 Churches of Revelation Rev 1-3**

## **7 Letters of Truth to the 7 Churches**

Jesus As The Unchanging Nature of Truth:

- Psalm 119:160 (NIV)
- "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal."
- Proverbs 30:5
- Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
- 2 Timothy 3:16 - Scripture is inspired by God and is our guide for truth.

### **Biblical Context:**

The Apostle John is traditionally believed to have died of natural causes in Ephesus, modern-day Turkey, at an old age. According to early church tradition, John lived to a very old age and was the only twelve apostles not martyred for his faith.

As for why he was on the island, it is believed that during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, around 95 AD, John was exiled to the island of Patmos as a punishment for his Christian faith and preaching of the Gospel. On this island, he received the visions that led to the writing of the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. John's exile to

Patmos ultimately resulted in the powerful apocalyptic visions he recorded and shared with the early Christian churches.

The context of the chapters in the Book of Revelation that include the messages to the seven churches is set in the first three chapters of the book. These chapters provide specific messages from Jesus to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor: Philadelphia, Smyrna, Laodicea, Sardis, Pergamum, Ephesus, Thyatira.

The messages to these churches address their spiritual conditions, commendations, rebukes, and exhortations. They serve as both warnings and encouragements to the early Christian communities in those cities. These messages are believed to have been relevant not only to the specific churches at the time but also to the Church as a whole throughout history.

Overall, the context of these chapters in Revelation underscores the importance of faithfulness, repentance, perseverance, and staying true to the teachings of Jesus amidst various challenges and temptations faced by the early Christian communities.

**Good Churches:** Philadelphia, Smyrna

**Bad Churches:** Laodicea, Sardis

**Ugly Churches:** Pergamum, Ephesus, Thyatira

The first message is to the church in **Ephesus**, which had forsaken its first love. Jesus reminds them to repent and return to the love they had at first. This message is a call to the Church today to remember our love for God and for one another, and to live out that love in our actions and relationships.

The second message is to the church in **Smyrna**, which was facing persecution and suffering. Jesus encourages them to be faithful unto death and promises them a crown of life. This message reminds us that as a Church, we may face trials and tribulations, but God is with us and will reward our faithfulness.

The third message is to the church in **Pergamum**, which had allowed false teachings and practices to enter their midst. Jesus warns them to repent or face consequences. This message is a call for the Church today to guard against false teachings and to remain steadfast in the truth of God's word.

The fourth message is to the church in **Thyatira**, which tolerated immorality and idolatry. Jesus calls them to repent and turn away from their sinful practices. This message reminds us that as a Church, we are called to live lives of holiness and purity and to stand firm against the temptations of the world.

The fifth message is to the church in **Sardis**, which had a reputation for being alive but was actually dead. Jesus challenges them to wake up and strengthen what remains before it dies out completely. This message reminds the Church today to not just go through the motions but to live out our faith authentically and vibrantly.

The sixth message is to the church in **Philadelphia**, which had kept God's word and remained faithful despite facing hardships. Jesus commends their perseverance and promises them an open door that no one can shut. This message encourages us to remain steadfast in our faith and to trust in God's promises even in the midst of challenges.

The seventh message is to the church in **Laodicea**, which was lukewarm and indifferent in its faith. Jesus warns them to repent and invites them to have fellowship with Him. This message warns the Church today not to become complacent or indifferent in its faith but to remain zealous and passionate about the things of God.

The summary of the messages of Jesus to each of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation:

1. **Philadelphia:** Jesus commends their faithfulness, perseverance, and keeping His word. He promises to protect them from the hour of trial.

Revelation 3:10 (NIV) - "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."

2. **Smyrna:** Despite facing suffering and poverty, Jesus encourages them to remain faithful and promises them the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10 (NIV) - "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."

3. **Laodicea:** Jesus rebukes them for being lukewarm in their faith and encourages them to repent and seek true riches from Him.

Revelation 3:16 (NIV) - "So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

4. **Sardis:** They are warned to wake up and strengthen what remains, as their deeds are incomplete before God.

Revelation 3:2 (NIV) - "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God."

5. Pergamum: Jesus commends their faith but warns them against following false teachings and immorality.

Revelation 2:14-16 (NIV) - "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The teaching of Balaam involves attempting to curse the Israelites at the request of Balak, the king of Moab. Balaam eventually blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them. Despite this, he advised Balak on how to lead the Israelites astray by enticing them to sin through idolatry and immorality.

6. Ephesus: They are reminded to return to their first love and repent from their loss of passion for God.

Revelation 2:4-6 (NIV) - " <sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: **You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

<sup>15</sup> Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Repent, therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

The Nicolaitans are mentioned in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. While their beliefs and practices are not extensively outlined in the text, a few interpretations based on historical context and other early Christian writings exist.

One common interpretation is that the Nicolaitans were a group or sect within the early Christian church that embraced practices of compromise with pagan culture. Some scholars suggest they promoted an early form of Gnosticism, emphasizing special knowledge or mysticism over **orthodox Christian teachings**.

The name "Nicolaitans" is thought to be derived from the Greek words "nikao" (to conquer) and "laos" (people), possibly suggesting a group that sought to dominate or wield power over the rest of the Christian community.

Overall, the teaching of the Nicolaitans is often associated with a warning against compromising foundational Christian beliefs and practices for the sake of societal acceptance or convenience. It serves as a reminder to remain faithful to the core teachings of Christianity and to resist any influences that may lead believers astray.

7. Thyatira: Jesus commends their love, faith, service, and perseverance but warns them against tolerating false teachings and immorality.

Revelation 2:19-20 (NIV) - "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet."

The Bible references Jezebel in the Old Testament, particularly in the Books of 1 and 2 Kings. Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Israel and is known for promoting idol worship and other practices contrary to the worship of Yahweh. Her actions led to conflict with the prophet Elijah and the eventual downfall of the dynasty of Ahab. Jezebel's story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of turning away from God and the consequences of living a life of disobedience.

These messages serve as both encouragement and warning for the various churches in different situations.

**Quote:**

Athanasius of Alexandria - "The Bible is called the Word of God because the Holy Spirit speaks through the words of Scripture."

**Call to Action:**

In light of these messages to the seven churches, let us consider three tangible applications for the Church today:

**1. We must examine our hearts and relationships to see if we have truly kept our first love for God and for one another.** Let us repent of any complacency or apathy in our faith, and seek to love and serve others as Christ has loved and served us.

**2. We must be vigilant against false teachings and practices that may creep into our midst.** Let us be discerning and grounded in the truth of God's word and be willing to stand firm against the pressures of the world.

**3. We must remain faithful and persevere despite trials and challenges.** Let us trust in God's promises and rely on His strength to carry us through difficult times, knowing He is with us and will reward our faithfulness.

Embrace the absolute truth of God's Word and apply it to our lives and understanding of contemporary issues as disciples of Christ and members of the True Church.

### **Conclusion:**

In a world that values relative truth, we must anchor ourselves in the unchanging truths of Scripture.

May we heed these messages from Jesus to the seven churches of Revelation, and may we apply them to our lives and the life of our faith community. Let us remain steadfast in our love and commitment to God, and may we be a shining light for Him in the world.

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, grant us discernment to recognize and embrace Your absolute truth. Help us to navigate the complexities of contemporary issues with wisdom and compassion. Amen.

### **Benediction:**

May the truth of God's Word guide you, and may His Spirit empower you to stand firm in a world that constantly changes.