

# Jesus is Here

By Jess Arnds

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**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
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Good morning Province Church. As we open the word of God this morning, I think it's very important to recognize that we are not examining the word only but it is examining us, that as we come here this morning, we are here to be examined by the Scriptures, our hearts laid bare. We're not here to debate God. We're not here to learn some interesting facts. We're here for the word of God to lay us open and properly diagnose and expose our souls so that we can walk in a way that is honoring and pleasing to him so that we can believe the truth, so that when we stand before him, we will be able to stand with confidence when he comes.

And in reading and studying Revelation 1 through 3, I know it's an ambitious project and I'm not going to explain every detail in these three chapters, but this thing has been written to us to be taken in a broad chunk. I think the force of it hits us differently when we see it all at once and so I'm going to take it a little bit, we're going to go through it quickly but pondering its truths. Hopefully they will settle deep in our heart and I just have to confess that I am completely inadequate to convey to you the glory of Christ. I'm completely inadequate to explain it in a way that the impact of it will reach your heart and soul. The Spirit of God has to do that. It has to work through these weak human means and I'm definitely on the low end of the totem pole when it comes to preaching the word of God, but even the greatest preacher could never convey this truth for what it's worth. So as we come to the word, I pray and I would ask you to pray with me, that his Spirit would cause us to see Christ more fully and more accurately and that it would cause greater love for him, greater devotion. It's not just affection but loyalty and submission to our King, an admiration for him, an awe of him. So as we do that, as we turn to him in prayer, would you bow your heads with me and beg the Lord that we would see him clearly?

*Father, we desperately need your Spirit to work in our hearts. We desperately need your word to be understood and to be believed. Lord, I pray that your Spirit would examine us this morning, show us the truth. Lord, cause us this morning to repent of any harmful way, of any false notions, of any pride, of any lack of love. And Lord, I pray as we do that that we would be a humble but joyful people, pure and holy in your sight, striving together for your glory, for the sake of your Gospel and your kingdom. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So if you haven't already, please turn to Revelation 1 and there are basically two main things that I want to convey today: the first is that Jesus is awesome, and the second is that he is coming and we are accountable to him. So would you please read with me, starting in verse 1, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy," that's me right now, "and blessed are those who hear," that's you, "and who keep what is written in it," that may or may not be you, "for the time is near," the time is close to us, the things that he is about to say.

Verse 4, "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth." This is the source of this letter. It is revealed from God through Jesus Christ by his angel to his servant, John, and John wishes grace and peace from him who is, who was, and who is to come, that is referring to God the Father; and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, that comes from Zechariah 4:10, the seven spirits. It's a symbolic way of explaining the Holy Spirit, his complete knowledge of everything. The seven spirits of God moved to and fro through the earth. They are depicted in Zechariah as eyes, the eyes of God going through all of the earth. He sees everything. Grace to you from him and peace.

Verse 5, "and from Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is listed last here for the sake of emphasis. He is normally listed second in order of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but here he is listed last for the sake of emphasis and he wants to highlight some things about Jesus. The first is that he is the faithful witness. That goes back to Psalm 89. God put the sun in the sky as a witness, a faithful witness to the fact that he will keep his promises. As long as that sun keeps going on its orbit, you can count on the fact that God will keep his promise to establish the throne of David forever. Jesus Christ is that faithful witness. He, his coming sealed the deal. He is the Son. He is the faithful witness. What he says is true.

And he is "the firstborn of the dead." He is the first one to be resurrected to live forever, but many will follow. He's the firstborn but those of you who believe will follow him in that resurrection and will live forever with him, but he's our leader. He is the first one to do it. He is the one that opened the way to that resurrection. He went right through that door. Without him, there would be no resurrection to life for us, only condemnation. But he is the firstborn, the leader, the preeminent one. He is the first. He is high above all. He was resurrected and he is above all of us who are also going to be resurrected. The firstborn of the dead.

"And the ruler of the kings on earth." Isn't that amazing to consider that our Lord Jesus is the ruler of the kings on earth. Every single arrogant one of them, he is their ruler. He is above them. Donald Trump is a puny man in his eyes. The king in North Korea, Kim Jong Un, or whatever his name is. Who cares because Jesus Christ is King of all. He is

powerful and majestic. This is him. Everyone else is a drop in the bucket. This changes things for me knowing that, that my leader and my King is high above all, far above all. I don't need to cower in shame before anyone because my King is above you. We don't need to lack confidence. Our King is powerful and he will rule forever.

Jesus is awesome, guys. That's the first thing I want you to notice. He is awesome. He is awesome because of his witness, because he is the firstborn of the dead, because he is the ruler of the kings of the earth and there again in verse 5, look at what he has done. He loves us. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." This King who rules over all and will keep his promises, he is the one who loves you. He loves me. Romans 8 says that nothing can separate you from that love if you belong to him truly. He loves you and he demonstrated it by doing the best thing for us, freeing us from our sin. Sin is not some great thing that we have to abstain from and grit our teeth and through much pain and sorrow leave behind. We are not leaving behind some good thing when we leave our sin behind. We have been freed from a prison, the prison of our lust, and this is true of every single believer. You are free. You have been loosed, that word means, to be set free. To be free means to be loosed from its bonds. You're like a bird that has been untethered, you can fly. If you are a believer, you do not, you are not a slave to it anymore, Romans 6.

Our King is on our side and he has freed us and look at what he has done to do that, he did it by his blood. What love is this that Christ has died out of love to set us free?

Verse 6, he has not only freed us from our sins, no, he hasn't left us in prison, he has opened the door but he hasn't just done that, he has "made us a kingdom." We are a kingdom. We have our own country. We have our own citizens. We have a homeland that we are on our way to and we are doing that together. He has made us a kingdom. This is the great theme of Scripture, the kingdom of God. From the very beginning, God has a kingdom, he has been proclaiming his kingdom, he has been building his kingdom, and someday his kingdom will fully be here and we will experience the full benefits of that.

He has made us a kingdom collectively and individually, verse 6, he has "made us priests to his God and Father." The Old Testament priests, their portion, their inheritance was not land, their inheritance was God himself. "I will be your portion," he says to them. Guys, that's us. God is our inheritance. The one who spins the globes, who orbits and rotates those galaxies and keeps the stars burning by the word of his power, he is our inheritance. We are his priests. We serve him. Priests, did they have other jobs other than the service of God? No, they were dedicated, set apart completely unto service to Christ, to the Lord. That is what they did. That is what they were about. We are priests to God. Everything that we do is a service to him. Because of Christ's blood, freedom from sin, we are now entered into this kingdom and we serve God. We have turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. He has done this for us.

"To him be glory and dominion forever and ever." To him, not to us. Not to any man-made king. Not to any hero but to him be glory. This is the cry of our heart. This is what we battle for in our life is his glory. This is what we so often forget. This is what we are

so tempted away from. With all the accomplishments that we are working towards, whose glory is this for?

"To him be glory and dominion." You see, he has the authority and this is not just a statement of truth but a statement of desire. To him be glory. It's not just that he has glory and that he has dominion, but this is a statement of the fact that we desire that. We want his glory and we want his dominion. Psalm 2 talks about how the kings of the earth want to cast off God's bonds; they want to throw off his dominion; they want to rebel against his authority; they rage against him. Not so with us. We invite his dominion. We want God to dominate us. We want him and his way to be ours. We will submit our will to his. To him be glory, not to me. To him be dominion and rule and authority and power, not to me. May that be true of us in this church. Verse 6, "Amen."

Jesus is awesome. He is awesome. Number 2: he is coming. This is a reality and I want to remind us, we do not come to church to escape reality. We go to the movies to escape reality. We play video games to escape reality. We go fishing to escape reality. We don't come to church to escape reality, we come to church to be reminded of reality. We come to church to be reminded how this true and living God intersects with our life, with our day to day. And this reality that we often forget and that so many churches have rejected, so-called churches, is the reality that not only is Jesus admirable, they think he's admirable, but he is coming. He is on his way. He is setting everything up for his dramatic entrance. Everything right now is in the process. He wants to save his elect and then come at the proper time to save them, to pull them out and to bring judgment on the wicked. He is coming.

Look at this, verse 7, "he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." The word "behold," look; pay attention; wake up. Look to the sky, he is coming on the clouds and every eye will see him. That will be a moment in time. It will be a normal day when suddenly he appears and every eye will see him because the dead will come back to life. Every eye in history will see Jesus Christ. Those who have loved him will rise in joy, and those who have rejected him will rise to mourn. Look at what it says: and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. He is coming.

Look at verse 9 now. We have a little window into the setting into which this revelation was dropped. Verse 9, "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." John the apostle we know from early church history, that he was the one who received this revelation, that he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos and he was there because he preached Christ.

And notice the humility of John, the one who received the greatest revelation perhaps in the history of the world, he relates to the churches calling them, he says, "I am your brother and partner." He's on equal footing. He's a brother and partner "in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus." Paul says in Acts that through many tribulations we will enter the kingdom of God. During this time between

when Christ has saved you and now when he will come again, is a time in which we are a part of a kingdom that hasn't fully arrived yet. We don't experience the full benefit of it yet. It takes endurance. This is a life of endurance. This is a life of tribulation, of suffering to varying degrees. Every one of us in here has suffered to some degree because of the fall and the more faithful that we are to preach the word and to share the Gospel, to proclaim the Gospel, to command faith, the greater our tribulation will be. The darker that our country grows, the more that this will become a life to us.

We will be partners in tribulation of the kingdom of God and in the patient endurance that are in Jesus, and you start to see that this is the purpose for which God has written these letters to us, that God has delivered this revelation, is that there is tribulation, that there is suffering, and it's taking time. This is 60 years after Jesus ascended into heaven. That's almost a full adult lifetime, and Jesus had not come yet and yet they were being persecuted for him, and the temptation was to grow lax, to grow lazy, or even to give up. So, concerned for the churches, the Lord delivers this revelation to snap them back to focus, to call them to endurance, and you see it several times in Revelation: here is the call for the endurance of the saints. You see it repeated in chapter 2 and 3, that the one who conquers and overcomes will enter the kingdom of God.

The Christian life is one of endurance. The letter of Hebrews was written for this purpose. The letter of Galatians, hold onto your faith. Hold firm to Jesus. This endurance is not easy. It's something that only those who truly believe that this is the King, only those who truly believe that he is coming, only those that truly believe that he is bringing his reward with him, they will endure the trials and the tests and believers are called to do that though we are tempted through many things.

That is the setting in which this was written. Jesus is awesome, he is coming, and that makes a difference because we are all accountable to him. Ty read from 2 Corinthians 5 earlier, that we will all give an account of our life to Christ. 1 Corinthians 4 says that the purposes of our heart will be exposed on that last day. What kind of a day is that going to be for you when the purposes of your heart are exposed? Do you love Christ? Then let's purpose today to stand before him with a heart fully devoted to him. Let's lay off sin. Let's put away false motives and pride and slander and immorality.

And we'll see that in chapter 2 and 3. We're going to read through them with only a little bit of explanation, but I want the force of it to cause us to want to go back to Revelation to study it to be sure that we understand on our own, that we understand what is it that Christ requires of us, that he calls us to, that he values. So look at this, there is a third point that I want to make. I know I said two but there is a third one. He is coming, he is awesome, the last one is that he is here.

Look at this vision that John gets starting in verse 10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'" These are real churches in a real time and place, not symbolic. They are real and there are real issues going on

there and Jesus has a message for them. These churches would have known the Apostle John very well. At some point probably in the 60s A.D., he left Jerusalem and began to minister in Ephesus. This region had great influence from the apostles. Paul spent several years there and now John was the latest one.

He says, "I was in the Spirit." The voice behind him like a trumpet says, "Write this to these churches." Verse 12, "Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands." So can you imagine a trumpet blast of a voice behind you all of a sudden startling you? This is John saying, "Write these things," and almost like ducking and turning behind him to see what it was.

He sees someone among these golden lampstands, "in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength." So he turns around and he sees someone like the son of man, that harkens back to Daniel, a vision that Daniel had, showing one like a son of man with great power. And there are these seven golden lampstands, it's actually the menorah, it's one base with seven branches. Seven golden lampstands, it would be the menorah which was in the holy place in the temple giving light to the holy place, and these churches are depicted as a golden lampstand.

Verse 13, in the midst of the lampstands was the son of man. He is depicted like a priest tending to the furniture in the holy place. He's in the midst. It has this idea of him moving back and forth and tending to these things; making sure that there was the right amount of oil and that the wick was trimmed and it was clean. That's what the priest did in the holy place, maintaining these things. Jesus is depicted here like a priest tending to the churches. He walks in the midst of them, evaluating them. Jesus is here. He walks among his churches. For those who are sincere and following Christ, that's a joy and a comfort. And for those walking in rebellion, that is a terror.

Look at what he says, this idea that he is here among us. Verse 17, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.'" So John who had seen Jesus, lived with him for three years, even leaned up against him at dinner, the apostle whom Jesus loved, who even was there at his Transfiguration when he saw his face beaming like the sun, turns around to see Jesus with his eyes like a flame of fire, his feet glowing like bronze, his voice like a roar of many waters, and he falls down as though dead. He just faints. He is overwhelmed. He is overcome by the appearance of this Christ. You know, is this your picture of Jesus or is he still the baby in the manger?

Is he still the weak Rabbi, the meek and lowly? Because that is not who he is today. He is this Jesus. He is exalted and glorious. He died.

He is the living one and, "behold," he says, verse 18, "I am alive forever more and I have authority, the keys of Death and Hades." Remember Matthew 28 where he says, "All authority has been granted to me. All authority, in heaven and on earth." He even has authority over death and hell. That's not the devil's domain. Jesus has authority over that.

His eyes being as a flame of fire depict him as having a piercing gaze. You know, if your eyes are like flaming torches, you don't need a flashlight. Wherever you look, you see everything. His eyes see all. It's ominous. His feet being like burnished bronze, he is pure, he has been refined. And his voice is powerful and loud and it reaches far and wide. This Jesus walks among us.

And now let's turn to what he says to the churches. Chapter 2, verse 1, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus," now, who is this angel? It could be a messenger, I mean, there is this word that is translated "messenger, angel, envoy." I don't know what it is. It could be a pastor of that church but regardless, the message is the same.

He says, "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands." He has a specific thing to say to this church in Ephesus, and the fact that he walks among them means that he knows.

Verse 2, this is what he knows about Ephesus, "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false." This is a discerning church. This is a doctrinally sound church. They fight for doctrine and they are willing to separate themselves from evil and from false teachers and Jesus commends them for this.

Verse 3, "I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary." This is good.

Verse 4, "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." Isn't that interesting? They're working hard, they are enduring, they are fighting for truth and yet they have abandoned or left their first love, the love that they had at first. At some point in their past they had been characterized by love.

Now, who is this love for? Well, this doesn't exist in isolation from the rest of Scripture. The rest of Scripture informs us. What are the two great commandments? That you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and that you love your neighbor as yourself. 1 John says, "This is the will of God that you believe in Christ and love one another," particularly love for the saints. This isn't just love for mankind in general, although that is true, but we have a particular love for the saints. 1 John says, "How can if you see your brother," that's another believer, "if you see your brother in need and do not reach out to help him, how does the love of God abide in you?" He says that's how you

know you're a Christian if you have love for one another. And he says, "If you do not love your brother who you see, how can you love God who you do not see?" So this love applies to both. If you love God, you love people. If you truly love one another in truth, you love God. There is not a dichotomy there, there is not a division. You can't say, "Well, I love God but I'm really working on my love for people. I really struggle to love people." No, if you don't love people, you don't love God. Jesus says to this Ephesian church, "Hey, I'm really glad that you are doctrinally sound and that you are fighting for truth, but you have abandoned love."

Verse 5, "therefore remember from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." You see, love makes its way into action. True love makes its way into works. Not works of the law, works of love, of patience, of kindness, of reaching out to the needs of others for their good. 1 Corinthians, that's the big deal, right? That is what we will be judged on on the last day is the works that you did that were properly motivated. If you follow it all the way to 1 Corinthians 13, if it's in love, then you will receive commendation for that, meaning reward; you will be praised by God for that. But if you do all the stuff that you do, other people might grow, God can use it to save people and grow them up, but you having no love in your heart, will not receive the benefit of that. I don't know how that all works in the end but that's what he says. This church of Ephesus didn't have love and he calls them to repent.

"If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." I've got to be honest with you, I don't know what it means to remove your lampstand from its place but it doesn't sound good. I think I'd rather keep the lampstand in its place. It doesn't mean that those people are not saved maybe. Does it mean that that church will no longer, that he's going to shut down that church? Maybe. Does it mean that they will no longer have a witness for Christ in that area? Maybe. But it's not a pleasant thing.

"I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." What a gracious thing of Christ. They have the Scripture, they know what he calls them to do. These folks have been taught by Paul, by John for years. Do you remember the nickname for John, what is his nickname? The apostle of love. 1 John is all about love. They had this information available. This isn't new to them. How gracious of Christ to warn them, to tell them, to speak the truth in love to them. "Look, I love you. You are doing some good things but you have abandoned love. Without love, you're nothing. I'm going to remove your witness. I'm going to remove your lampstand. I'm going to do something that you don't want. Repent. Come back. Do what you did at first."

Verse 6, "Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Okay, I'm not going to get into all the details because we don't have time, but this is a repeated phrase. These two words "repent" and this "to the one who conquers," he calls most of these churches to repent and he calls all of them to overcome.



He says, "to the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." This is sort of a symbolic way of saying, "You're going to be in heaven with me. This will apply to every believer. Every believer will have the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God, to the one who overcomes, the one who conquers." Romans 8 says we are more than conquerors through Christ who saved us, who loves us. We are more than conquerors. And yet that's an active practice. Believers are overcomers. They will overcome the temptations and the trials of life and endure to the end following Christ.

Let's move on to the church of Smyrna in verse 8. "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty.'" So Jesus in Ephesus, he knew their works and he knew their doctrine, right? Their faithfulness and their endurance.

Look in verse 9, Jesus knows the church of Smyrna's tribulation and poverty, "and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." You see, God knows. Jesus knows your suffering. He is right here. He's here with us, among us. He knows your hardship. He knows your poverty. And he knows when you have been slandered by people. Jesus knows you.

Verse 10, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death." In this context, I think to conquer, to overcome, is to do what he said in verse 10, to be faithful unto death, to hold onto your faith through the tribulations, the trials. Not the great tribulation but the small tribulations that we will all face. And these ones, they're going to face a pretty tough test, being thrown into prison and he says, "Hold on. Be faithful." 1 Peter says that trials come to prove the genuineness of our faith; that when you endure the trial with your faith intact, you rejoice. You rejoice because your inheritance is secure. It's proof that, "Wow, I made it through that. God got me through. That means I belong to him." Jesus says in time of testing, many fall away. How many people do you know have fallen away either through the temptations towards immorality, towards greed or towards pride, not wanting to look foolish in front of the world? Or when someone that they loved died and they are bitter with God? Jesus says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer but be faithful unto death."

Let's move to the church of Pergamum in verse 12, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you dwell.'" You see, Jesus knows where you live. He knows the challenges of that.

"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual

immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." The Nicolaitans apparently were encouraging immorality. There was something about their doctrine. We don't know a whole lot about them but there is something about what they were teaching that lead people into immorality.

Verse 16, you have some there in your church who hold this, "Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth." So what is it that he has against them here? It's not that they were practicing immorality, they had people among them who were practicing immorality. It's not that they were teaching false doctrine, they had people among them teaching false doctrine. Apparently, his problem with them was that they were tolerating it; that they were putting up with it; that they weren't removing and purging the evil one from among them. He says repent of that. If we fear Christ, if we love Christ, then we must be willing to deal with false doctrine and we must be willing to deal with immorality. It's a big deal to Christ.

"Repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them. He who has an ear to hear," verse 17, "let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." Another reward given to all believers.

Verse 18, the church at Thyatira, "The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first." So he's saying they are growing in their works. They have love, they have faith, and they have endurance.

Verse 20, "But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works." Who is he talking about here? Who is he referring to? People that are involved in sexual immorality and not only involved in it but are teaching, they are teaching doctrines to set up and to support their immorality and that's really where heresy starts. It doesn't start with false doctrine, it starts with false desires. People heap teachers up in accordance with their desires. They don't want to listen to sound doctrine because it confronts their false desires. If you love sin, you will find a way to justify it, you will find a way to change what you think is true to support your desire. Hebrews says, "Be careful lest there be found in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God." He says, "Exhort one another daily lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The deceitfulness of sin leads to apostasy, to a hardness of heart. It doesn't just start with bad doctrine. Be careful of sin in your heart. 1 Timothy, Paul says, "For the elder who persists in sin, rebuke in the presence of all so that the rest may be fearful of

sinning." We need to fear sin. It is destructive. It is destructive to our soul. It wages war against our soul. And Jesus will judge the immoral. He says he's going to throw them into a sickbed. He's going to kill their children. He's going to deal with those hypocrites.

But now look at his grace toward the truly sincere, verse 24, "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." He has compassion on those poor people surrounded by immorality but who are holding fast to the truth.

Look at verse 25, "Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Chapter 3, almost there. "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.'" You look to other people as though you are alive but the truth is you are dead.

Verse 2, "Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you." When Jesus says that he comes as a thief in the night, it's usually in judgment. You don't know when he's going to come.

Verse 4, "Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Now verse 7, the church of Philadelphia. "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.'" Do you see that? He knows your weakness. He knows that you are weak, that you have little power.

Verse 9, "Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet." Apparently they had some kind of power over them. Apparently this synagogue of Satan had some kind of authority to oppress them and the table is going to be flipped and they will come and bow at their feet.

"And they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

And lastly, verse 14, "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.'" Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Here this church doesn't have any sense of need. They think they're rich. They think they've got it all.

Verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." Let me say that again, verse 19, we often misunderstand God's love. He says, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." You know, God's discipline is a sign of his grace because the people that he leaves alone are the ones that he has given over to judgment. His discipline is his love for you, his grace towards you. So be zealous and repent, repent of your pride and complacency. Repent of your self-satisfied self-righteousness. Repent of your lack of zeal for him.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." It signifies fellowship with the Lord. Let him in.

Verse 21, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

In closing, I want to consider this amazing Savior, the Son of God, the glorious ruler of the kings of the earth, the one who had a voice like a trumpet, who is pure and holy, who knows everything, Jesus, our awesome Savior, our coming Savior, and our Savior who is present here with us. He has shown us what he values, he has shown us what he hates, and he has called us to live a life of repentance and of faith in him and endurance. This is the purpose that we gather together, that we may stir one another up to love and good deeds, so that you may not grow cold, so that you may not be led away by false doctrine, so that you may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This is why we're here.

Remember that we are accountable to him. There will be a day when you stand before him and, remember, he's looking over your shoulder and if you love him, that's great, that's a wonderful thing. But if not, consider the end result of your rebellion and turn in repentance to our loving, gracious, terrifying Lord and exhort one another in these things. Don't come to church, don't sit next to each other and not care about what Jesus cares about. Take care of one another in these things and let's pray that the Lord would grow us up in the faith, that we would be like the church of Philadelphia, not Ephesus, not Thyatira, that we wouldn't be sound doctrinally, that we wouldn't put up with immorality, that we would be sound doctrinally but failing to love, that we would not put up with false doctrine, that we wouldn't be cold and lukewarm. May the presence of Christ and our accountability to him motivate us every moment to walk humbly and faithfully with him.

So let's pray that he would do that and that we would do that. Let's pray.

*Lord, you know where we are at. You know the condition of our heart. You know our suffering. You know where we are faithful. And you know our temptations. Father, please use a feeble effort like this to work in the heart of your people that we would love you, that we would be loyal to you, that we would stay true to you, and that you would hold us firm. We thank you, Lord, for your strength on our behalf, for your death. Thank you for your truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*