

02-08-18a Revelation

Let's continue our worship this morning by taking a few moments at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. We know that it's impossible for us with just our human brain to gain an understanding of the Word of God that helps us. A lot of scholars can study it, we can look and know stories and memorize verses, but if God's Spirit is not interpreting and if He is not teaching us in our soul, it doesn't do us any good.

It's just words, it's just concepts, and it isn't something that really gives us power to live as we should. The power of God comes into our life through God's Word and through God's Spirit, and if we only try for one of those, you see people running around just looking for the Spirit and without the knowledge of the Word of God, they go astray. If we get a lot of the Word of God, but we don't have God's Spirit in us to give us the power to do what it says and to understand what it means, it's in vain.

As I've said many times before, it reminds me of the two tubes of epoxy. If you're going to mix up good glue, you have to have equal parts of two things, and we need a balance in our souls of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. So when we begin our study of the Word, it's really important for us to go before God and claim His promise that God the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth.

We know that the carnal mind cannot understand the things of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned. So we'll pause here just for a moment to go before the Lord and acknowledge any sin that we may have in our heart and ask for God's blessing on us as we nourish our souls and feed our spirits in God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for the privilege we have of assembling together, of fellowshiping together in Your Word.

We thank You for the opportunity that You have given us through Jesus Christ to have a relationship with You, to have strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, as the hymn says. And we ask Your blessing on us now as we seek to understand Your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will let us rightly divide the Word of Truth so that we will understand it correctly, and then beyond that, that it will make a difference in the way we live, that it will change our priorities and change our goals and change our values in such a way that our lives will be pleasing in Your sight.

We pray for our government and those that have the rule over us. We pray for those in our military forces at home and around the world. We pray for those who protect our domestic freedoms through law enforcement and all of the other national blessings that You have given us that enable us as Christians to fellowship and worship in freedom and without persecution and without oppression.

We know that that's not true in many other countries of the world, and we pray for those believers that You'll grant them liberty and safety and opportunity to grow in grace and the knowledge of

our Savior. Again, we thank You and praise You for all You have done for us. In Jesus' name, amen.

For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Jeremiah. Jeremiah, a little bit more than halfway through the Old Testament. We're going to look for our reading at chapter 17, Jeremiah 17.

We are studying the seven churches in Revelation, the letters that Jesus sends, the seven churches in Revelation. We've already seen the first church at Ephesus. We're now looking at the second church in Smyrna.

We know that the name Smyrna is the Greek word for myrrh, the same substance that was given to Jesus at His birth, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That's what Smyrna means. We also know that after Jesus had died on the cross and they took Him to the tomb, Joseph of Arimathea brought great quantities of myrrh and other spices with which to anoint the body of the Lord.

So, it brackets His birth and His death. It was a valued perfume that was used by the rich and it was mixed with wine as an anesthetic to give to the criminals on the cross when they put the sponge on the stick and stuck it in Jesus' face. That was myrrh.

The verb in Greek says they myrrhized, if you will. They mixed myrrh into the wine as an anesthetic. So, once again, you see it first and last, highest and lowest, greatest and smallest.

And that's how Jesus presents Himself to the church at Smyrna. He is the first and the last. He is the one who was dead and is alive.

We're going to be looking at that a little bit more, but we noted in our study night before last that the issue is being faithful because inheritance, the right to the tree of life that Jesus promises the believers in Ephesus if they are overcomers, the not being hurt by the second death that is promised to the believers in Smyrna if they are faithful unto death. These are rewards and the rewards tell us this is the way to operate. This is what God approves.

This is what God is asking for of believers. There is going to be a difference in the eternal future depending on how we live our lives here. There is a widespread belief that there are trials and tribulations in this life and you can have a good life or a bad life, but because you are a Christian, once you get to the next life, everybody has pretty much got the same reward package, the same heaven package.

You are walking the streets of gold, you are inside the pearly gates, you see Jesus, you rule and reign, you have a white stone and a new name and a white robe and the angels are singing. Some people think you fly with wings and play a harp and they have it confused with being an angel. There is an old gospel song that says he spread his wings a time or two and learned how to fly when he got to heaven.

It is just a misconception. There are a lot of misconceptions about the eternal future. People think we are going to live in heaven for all eternity and the Bible does not say that.

We are wanting to find out what exactly is in store for us as believers and in particular, what opportunities, what has God called us to, what does He want to happen to us as a part of His plan and as a part of reflecting His glory in the future. This is the idea of inheritance. You may have heard stories and I have known personally several different cases where here is a person that was well off.

There was a very rich lady here in Dallas who had multiple millions and had different children. Some of the children are in the will and some of the children are not in the will because with some of the children the father or the mother was pleased and with others they are not. Based on approval or disapproval, a lot of the Perry Mason episodes start out with somebody being cut out of the will and being upset about it.

Before the will can be changed, why the party of the first part gets murdered. Inheritance is not necessarily automatic. The will of the one who has the goods determines who inherits and who does not.

Inheritance is a theme throughout the Bible. God tells Israel in the Old Testament, I have brought you out of the land of Egypt. You were slaves, you were in bondage, you were making mud bricks and being lashed for 400 years.

I am bringing you out. I have you slaughter the Passover lamb and you splash his blood on your door post. You come out of Egypt and you go through sort of like baptism, going through the Red Sea.

The Red Sea parts and there is Charlton Heston with a big stick in his hand and here it parts and they go through. The author of Hebrews talks about this and refers to the fact that they were all baptized with Moses in the sea. It is a picture of salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, leaving behind an old life and starting a new one.

Their promised inheritance is the land that is flowing with milk and honey. Where were they going when they left Egypt? They had a destination. They were supposed to cross the Jordan which also parted, just like the Red Sea did, to let them cross on dry ground.

God made this possible. It is God's work. God parts the sea.

God brings them across dry shod into the land of promise. But that is the inheritance. Well, guess what? Not everybody that left Egypt got the inheritance.

How many people that walked out of Egypt on that great day, how many of them walked into the land of inheritance? Two. Caleb and Joshua. This is, to me, a depressing statistic.

Six million people walked out, two people walked in. We call this attrition. When I went through the Naval Academy, we started out with 1,423 midshipmen in my class on July 7, 1975.

When I graduated four years later, we had just a shade under 900. We lost roughly 500 odd people during the course of those four years. That is called attrition.

The Bible says in one place, you were running well. You ran well. Who hindered you from getting to the finish line? Who hindered you from completing the race? Who tripped you? I will never forget that Zoe Budd lady that ran barefoot in that race and the other gal, Mary Decker.

She was like Tiger Woods. They were just expecting her to go in and achieve her lifelong dream of running this thing. Some barefoot gal from New Zealand or some far off tripped her.

Who tripped you and you didn't get to finish the race? The answer is you tripped yourself. You tangled up your own feet. You lost sight of the inheritance.

You lost sight of what it is that pleases the Father so that he includes you in his will. Believers think, I am a child of God so I am in the will. The Bible does not teach that.

So, what is the conclusion that we draw? It is exceedingly important to understand how to stay in the will. I want to be one of those people that crosses the second body of water and gets into the land of promise. I don't want to just go through the Red Sea and arrive in the desert and wander for 40 years.

I want to get to the Jordan and watch it part and get into the land of promise. Well, that is what the eternal future is. There are blessings and there are rewards.

There is a river of life. There is a tree of life. It is not just gimme, gimme, gimme.

I want all of the good stuff in heaven. These are things that please God. Why does the parent give things to his children? Because he loves them and it is a reflection on him.

His generosity reflects on him. It shows what he has achieved and what he has accumulated. In the earthly realm, the things you pass on to your children are the things that you have accomplished.

It is a reflection. When you read in the paper, here is somebody that inherited 4.5 billion dollars. The first question you say is, what business was he in? What did he do that he accumulated 4.5 billion dollars? You go to the person that accumulated that.

When we receive an inheritance in the eternal future, it is the glory of God. It reflects on God. People say, who is the God that did this? How did he take these measly, hopeless, helpless, useless, corrupted human beings who had no power to change themselves and how did he make them inheritors in glory? Make them perfect and higher than the angels? This is the question we

are asking ourselves this morning.

There is an answer to our New Testament question in Revelation in our Old Testament scripture reading in Jeremiah chapter 17. That is a long-winded introduction, but I want to be clear on why we are in Jeremiah 17 when we are studying Revelation. This is our promise in this chapter.

Both things are here. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron. These are the people of God, the same people that came out of Egypt, the same people that have been promised to be the people of God.

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron. With the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of your altars, while their children remember their altars and their wooden images by the green trees on the high hills. This looks like a really permanent engraving.

These are the failures and the sins of Judah. It says it has been written in stone with a diamond pointed pen. It has been scratched in.

That is a pretty permanent thing. You can't just take an art gum eraser and go up there and get rid of these sins. How long does this engraving endure? How long does it last? While their children remember their altars and their wooden images.

Verse 2 again, while their children remember. So long as would be another way to translate this. At first you say, boy these sins, this is forever engraving in the record.

You have a diamond pointed inscriber. Back then in the Old Testament days, if you were going to make something permanent, you write it on leather, it could dry up and blow away. They didn't have much by way of papyrus and that sort of thing, paper that was made out of reeds and so on.

If you walk into this other room in here, I've got a plaster cast of an engraving that was done in the days of Jeremiah on a rock wall. They dug a tunnel through Mount Zion because the spring Gihon was outside the walls and all the people were inside the walls. Here comes the Assyrians and here comes invaders that want to blockade a city.

It's not a blockade, it's a siege. You're locked in the city, it's like the Alamo. You can't just say, time out, I need to send my people with their water buckets to get the water.

That doesn't work. So what did they do? The source of water for the city was outside the walls. They didn't have time to go rebuild the whole city wall down there and close it, so they dug a tunnel through the rock.

They started one team on one end outside at the spring and another inside where the pool of Bethesda is now. It's an amazing engineering feat because they were tunneling these ancient primitive guys 2700 years ago and they tunneled toward each other through solid rock and they

met in the middle. This was a great achievement and it was a great celebration and feasting and rejoicing because the water flowed from the spring and filled up the pool of Bethesda inside the walls.

Then they camouflaged the spring, hoping that other people wouldn't find it and poison it, and they had water inside the walls. Well, it was a great celebration. At the opening of this tunnel inside the city, they smoothed out a flat place and they engraved the story of the tunnel.

They said, this is the story of the breaking through. I've got that engraving, a plaster cast of it, on the wall. You can look at it on the break.

Well, this is solid rock that they tunneled through, so they had to have an engraving tool to scratch this on. It has lasted, lo, these 2700 years. The original is in a museum over in Israel.

These sins of Judah, and you think, oh my gosh, I've sinned, I've failed. It's graven in stone with a pen of diamond point on the horns of the altars, but look at verse 2. So long as their children remember their altars and their wooden images, as long as you continue in that road, this is like something graven in stone with a pen of diamond. So long as you continue to value those, so long as you continue to pursue those, they are like a permanent engraving in rock.

He says in verse 3, oh my mountain in the field, I will give as plunder your wealth, all your treasures. It says my with a capital M. This is God speaking. What is God's mountain? It's Mount Zion.

Who's got the deed, the title deed to the top of Mount Zion right now? You know what's at the top of Mount Zion? The Dome of the Rock. Who owns the Dome of the Rock? The Jews? It's a Moslem thing, isn't it? It's one of the premier places of worship in Islam. It's an Arab place.

The enemies of Israel, the people, the Palestinians that are trying to get them thrown out of the land. Oh my mountain, this is Mount Zion in the field. I will give your wealth to somebody as their plunder.

They're going to come and conquer you and take all of your stuff away that should be your inheritance, all of your treasures, and your high places of sin. You've set up your own little mountains that you can worship on. Well, you're going to lose that.

You're going to lose what I had promised you. Everything is going away. You, even yourself, shall let go of what? In verse 4. You shall let go of your heritage which I gave you.

Your inheritance which I gave you. The things that you should have coming from God, you're going to lose. Why? Because you continue to remember your altars instead of my altar.

Your wooden images instead of my word and my presence among you. So, we choose. When we choose God, God gives us his inheritance.

When we choose something besides God, something in the place of God, all of that goes away. It's the choice between walking across the Jordan with Caleb and Joshua or dropping in the wilderness and never seeing the land of milk and honey. You will let go of your heritage which I gave you and I will cause you to serve your enemies in a land which you do not know.

This is not a bright outlook, serving your enemies in a strange place. It's unsettling enough just to go into a strange place. I went to a new job two different times in the last half a year.

And even when you know people and even when you have a good idea of what to expect, when you go into a new strange place, it's unsettling. Well, how much worse when you know you're going there to be a slave and you don't know how oppressive the masters are. Why does this happen? Look at the end of verse 4. You have kindled a fire in my anger which shall burn forever.

Why is God angry? Look at verse 5. Thus says the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength. This is what we talked about at the beginning of our worship. We can't do what God wants.

We can't please God in our own strength. We can decide to, we can want to, we can try to, we just don't have it. It's like somebody saying, please pick my house up and move it three feet to the left.

I don't really like quite where it's situated. Could you please just go outside and just push it down a little bit? Dad and I were talking last night about this man that's built what they call the Coral Castle. Is that in Florida? I think it's in Florida.

Huge, 22 ton blocks of solid coral and this little wispy man, 110 pounds, built this thing and nobody can figure out how he stacked up these blocks. Where did that power come from? Well, if you ask me to go build the Coral Castle, I don't know what he knew. I can't do that.

I can't lift up a 2200 pound block. Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. This is like Samson getting his hair shaved off.

Your heart departs from the Lord. The strength that the Lord gives you goes away. He shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when good comes.

I know Dan and Lori were recently out there near Barstow and you look at the little twisted shrubs in the desert. They're just clinging to life. The wind blows them over and they're dry and dusty and it's a parched looking land and it's so wonderful to get back where things are green.

A shrub in the desert and even when good comes, here's good that comes along and you can't see it. Have you ever seen this happen to people? People are busy and some good opportunity comes by and they just miss it. You can be a little kid playing in the mud and the ice cream crops right by and you missed it.

You missed the opportunity. What a tragic thing for good to be so near and you can't see it. But he shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness in a salt land which is not inhabited.

You remember when we've been looking at the tree of life and the river of life and in the millennial kingdom you've got the temple of God. Where's the temple? On Mount Zion where it belongs. The dome of the rock will be gone.

When Jesus comes back and the mountain splits there's going to be a river of fresh water that flows from the top of Mount Zion and where does it go? It goes to the east, it curves around to the south and goes where? Through the Arabah, through the desert. This is Ezekiel chapter 47. Ezekiel says God took me out there, this angel took me out there and he measured out a thousand cubits.

A cubit was the distance from your elbow to the end of your finger. It's about maybe two or three feet depending on which cubit you use, the royal cubit or the little mundane cubit. So he goes out a thousand cubits and he says it was ankle deep.

He goes out another thousand cubits and it's knee deep. He goes out another thousand cubits and it's waist deep or chest high and then he goes another thousand and no man can cross. It's a huge fresh water river flowing out of the mountain of God and it goes east through the Mount of Olives which has split and then it turns south and it goes through the Arabah.

The Arabah is this desert. What a terrible thing to be, if you've ever seen these you know they tell a story about how a guy was struggling through the desert and they found his little dried up corpse and if he had just gone over one more dune there was the oasis. You see the guy trudged through the icy snows and he was trying to get back.

He got iced in by the blizzard and he's just blinding and he's going and going and the next day it's all clear and they come out and they find him and he's only 50 feet from the doorway but it was so blinding. Good comes and you can't see it. You're so close and yet so far.

Here's the river of life flowing out from the mountain going down through the desert and somebody's going to be just over the dune living in the dry and parched place like a shrub. Look at verse 7 and notice the salt land. Remember even in the millennium that river is going to flow around through the Arabah.

It's going to empty into the Mediterranean Sea and instead of salt water coming in from the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar making that a salt sea, this river is going to flow in and it's going to freshen the entire Mediterranean Sea. Read Ezekiel 47. It's going to have new kinds of fish but it says it's not going to change the marshes and the swamps.

They will still be full of salt. So guess what? Some of these people who had the chance to live by the fresh river, live on the mountain, are going to be out there in the desert just over the dune or

they're going to be down in the salt marshes. That's the choice we make.

Look at verse 7. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord. The great old hymn, My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and His righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame.

What's that? That's something you built. It looks really great. Boy, look at the trusses and the braces and the foundation under this little house I've built here on the sand.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame. I have to wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand.

All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is salty marsh. All other ground is the araba.

All other ground is the shrub in the desert whose hope is the Lord. He shall be like a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots by the river. It will not fear when heat comes, but its leaf will be green.

It will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will it cease from yielding fruit. Well, how do we know where we stand? Are we going to be the shrub in the desert or are we going to be the tree by the river? We choose. We decide which one we're going to be.

The heart is deceitful above all things and who can know it? So the question is this. We can clearly see that there's a choice. You can be the shrub or you can be the tree.

But I'm not always sure which I am. What if I'm fooling myself? What an awful thing to think I'm lined up to be the tree and I'm lined up to inherit and I'm lined up to be by the river and I get there and surprise, surprise, well, Sam, we've got your spot in the Millennial Kingdom picked out and it's right over those three dunes. You cross those three dunes and you see that little withered up shrub there? That's your spot.

That's your dwelling place. Here's your shelter half. Just take this out there and pitch your tent.

How can I know? Because the heart is deceitful. We can fool ourselves and think that we have our foundation in one place and maybe it's on another. How many denominations are there in the United States? How many churches with different emphases and different views of what Scripture teaches? Are they all right? I would say, remember I counted up in my handbook of denominations in America and I counted 435 separate entries, this and that different brand of this and that different denomination, 435 different ones.

What I'm guessing is at best, 434 of them are wrong and one of them is right and it's possible that all 435 are fouled up. The heart is deceitful. Everybody thinks they're right.

Do you think there's any church here in the Metroplex that you go in there this morning and say,

people, we're gathered here because we all have followed the same wrong path. We're all here with the same wrong view of Scripture. We have the same misconception and that's what draws us together.

That's the feather that we all share as birds that flock to the wrong roost. Everybody thinks they've got it right. The heart is deceitful.

How can we know? Well, we have to go ask. We've got to ask God if we care. A lot of people are, you know, don't bother me with the facts.

My mind is made up. I like this view. It's comfortable for me.

It fits me like an old shoe and you know, I hear people talking about other shoes and other views. Well, I like this one so I'm not going to analyze it. I'm not going to look at it.

I don't really want to hear anything other than what I've found that I like. Well, the heart is deceitful. It is desperately wicked.

Who can understand it? The only way that we're going to find out where we belong and whether or not we're following the truth is to ask somebody that has an objective standard of measure. Somebody that knows. I don't know the truth in my soul.

I wasn't born with it. I can't figure it out on my own. This is why Jesus says, ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you will find. If you are content with the status quo, if you say, don't bother me with the facts, my mind is made up, you have chosen your path. You have chosen your inheritance and you get the shrub in the desert.

We will end up camped by the salt marsh. I, the Lord, look at verse 10. He asked the question in verse 9, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Who can understand it? Who can know it? Well, the answer is in verse 10. I, the Lord, search the heart. I'm the one that knows if your heart is squared away or not.

If you want to know about your heart, don't ask yourself, ask me, God says. I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind, even to do what? Even to give every man according to his ways.

Now this every man, we're not talking about saved and unsaved. This is Jeremiah, the prophet of God, talking to the people of God, about the things of God. God is searching out the hearts of us as believers.

I search the heart. I test the mind in order to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. We know this is not salvation because salvation is not by works.

You can establish that from a dozen passages. Salvation is not by works, so if God is giving people according to their works, we're talking about believers who have been called people who should be zealous of good works. God has created us unto good works, it says in the New Testament.

Because now that we're saved, we didn't just get recruited so we could put on the uniform and stand in formation. We recruit people in the military because we're going to send them to a duty station and say, I want you to shoot, I want you to guard, I want you to provide beans and bullets, I want you to type up the paperwork, I want you to go be a recruiter. We've got some that are recruiters to go get more people to sign up, but you listen to Christianity Today.

We've signed you up and we're going to give you a uniform. Now you're a recruiter. Everybody's a recruiter.

We're just like Amway. We just live to reproduce. We're a pyramid organization.

Now that we've got you, we want you to go get ten others. Get those ten to get ten more. Well, where's the mission? Where's the purpose? Where's the reason for which the organization exists? It's not just to self reproduce.

We're not just here to evangelize. There are things God wants us to accomplish. He wants us to learn and grow in grace and knowledge.

So he is going to reward those who hear and heed that plan and he is going to discipline and do like he did with Jonah. Remember when Jonah went to Nineveh? God had a hard enough time getting him to go there. He had to swallow him with a fish and vomit him up on a dry ground and send the bedraggled guy out there to give his message.

And then so Jonah does that and he says, well, you know, my message is one of destruction on these people who won't change their minds. And so then he sits up on the dune there. He goes outside the city and he waits for God to destroy it with fire and brimstone.

And he gets his little broom tree, his little shrub in the desert. This book, there's so much symbolism in Jonah because it's not addressed to Nineveh. God didn't send the book of Jonah to Nineveh, did he? He sent it to Israel because Israel is Jonah.

They are all ready to condemn the rest of the world and say, you godless pagan unbelievers, God's going to blow you away. They themselves are sitting under the broom tree that's going to grow up in a day and wilt in a day. And then they say, God, I don't understand you.

I test the heart and mind to give according to ways and according to deeds as a partridge that broods, but does not hatch. So is he who gets riches, but not by right. It will leave him in the midst of his days.

And at his end, he will be a fool. There are people who are rich in this life. You can look around and see there are churches that have got stained glass, have got solid wood, have got so much.

They've got people whose wallets are so heavy. They've got to have an assistant carry them coming in and out of church and tithing and going to the church. And it's rich and it's expensive and it's million dollar budgets.

God says, if you get these riches and not by right, if you claim to be the house of God and you're not, you tell people they're giving to God when they're not. They're giving to your program and your big idea of what your church ought to be doing and so forth. Why is it that everybody, when they pass the offering plates on Sunday, they say, well, bring your tithes into the storehouse so that the windows of heaven will open.

They have implied that giving to them is giving to God. Well, says who? I think this is a fact that needs checking. Who says? Can you go to any church in Dallas and when you write a check and give it to them, you've given to God? Has God subscribed to this intermediary process by which we give to him? I mean, it's a question worth asking.

Because he who gets riches but not by right is going to lose them at the end of his days. And it may not be in this life. This may be the judgment and going into the millennial kingdom and kingdom of the Father.

At his end he will be a fool. A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be ashamed.

Those who depart from me shall be written in the earth. Remember when Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground in the woman caught in adultery? They came up and then he ends up, you know, it says a couple different times he wrote in the ground. This is the passage they go back to.

Those who depart from me shall be written in the earth. And all of these that wanted to go cast the first stone or who were unwilling actually to cast the first stone, you know, that John doesn't say what it is that Jesus wrote on the ground. It says he stooped and wrote on the ground.

Well, what is it that gets written on the ground? All of those who depart from God, all of these people who are ready to cast stones at someone else and have her executed and come and make an issue out of it with Jesus. They have forsaken the Lord. And what is the Lord described as here in verse 13? The fountain of living waters.

That's been our study. How do we avoid this desert shrub fate? Jeremiah knows. Look at verse 14.

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed. Save me, and I shall be saved. For you are my praise.

Indeed, they say to me, where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now. As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows you, nor have I desired the woeful day. Jonah was up there desiring the woeful day.

I want to see the destruction of these pagan Ninevites. You know what came out of my lips. It was right there before you.

Do not be a terror to me. You are my hope in the day of doom. Let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame.

Let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom and destroy them with double destruction. Well, God is the fountain of living waters, and everything hinges on our attitude toward him.

When we look at these promises made to the overcomers, when we look at the commendations, and we look at the criticisms that Jesus gives to each of these seven churches, this is what's on the line. We will either be a tree that is planted by the river of waters spiritually now and more literally in the kingdoms that are to come, or we won't. And it is not predestined.

It is not foreordained by some act of God in eternity past. It is our choice. We choose.

We decide what's important to us now. And the daily decisions, the daily priorities that we set now, if we only knew, if we could only see, you know, how many times do people say, oh, if I had only knew then what I know now, well, there's going to be an awful lot of us saying that when we get to glory, because we have the chance to lay hold of an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for those who realize that it's important to please God and to live for him, and to ask him. We don't know.

We can't fix ourselves. We don't know what the answer is. We can even go to scripture.

We decide, well, I'm going to pray for this and pray for that and pray for the other. There are people who pray all the time. There's a whole song.

I saw an entire auditorium full of people on TV singing a song and raising their hands and praying and saying, God, use me, use me. I pray that you will use me. I pray that you will.

Guess what? Being used by God does not come through prayer. Being used by God comes through preparation. You can't, it'd be like a raw recruit.

He just signed up on the dotted line. You hand him his utilities. He goes into the changing room, changes into his camouflage utilities, and he goes and he says, where's an officer? Oh, look, there's a captain over there.

Captain, sir, use me. Send me someplace. Where are you going to send somebody that just now

put on his clothes? I wouldn't give him any ammunition.

He's liable to hurt himself or others. Just because you want to be used doesn't mean God can use you. Some things don't come by prayer.

Some things don't come by asking. The Bible tells us how some of these things come, and the fruit of the Spirit doesn't come by prayer. You don't say, God give me love, God give me peace, God give me patience, and expect that by that prayer alone, that we can pray for these things and bring it before the Lord, but that prayer alone isn't going to bring them into our life.

The Word of God tells us, without faith it is impossible to please God. It doesn't say without prayer. Just pray and God will be pleased.

It doesn't come by prayer. It comes by faith. What is faith? Faith sounds like an abstract concept.

Faith is looking at what God says and treating it as real. Claiming the promises and the principles, understanding the doctrines, getting with that program that says you have got to practice, you have got to do. God gave instructions to Israel all the way through the desert.

Did they listen? No. That's why they dropped. It wasn't that they didn't pray hard enough to get to the land.

So we have to know the means. What does Jeremiah do right after this rehearsal of the possibilities? Being a tree by the river of waters, being a shrub in the desert. He goes to God in prayer and says, Lord, I don't want to be a victim of my deceitful heart.

He does pray. Prayer is an important element. But he says, I have been one who follows.

I am not a shepherd who has departed from you. I have been faithful. I have followed your commands.

I know what you said and I have tried to do it. That's what we have to do as well. This all reflects very directly as we return now to our study in Revelation chapter 2. Turn back now with me to Revelation chapter 2. The chapter began with the letter to Ephesus.

We have reviewed that one quite extensively. Beginning in verse 8, we have the letter to the church at Smyrna. Jesus introduces himself to them, picking from that vision in chapter 1. He says, I am the first and the last, the one who was dead and who came to life.

Now that phrase, first and last, we talked about that the night before last, it is only used of Jesus. It is found three times in the New Testament and three times in the Old Testament. All six times it is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is found here in 1.17 and 2.8. We already saw 1.17 and he refers to that again here in chapter 2.8. It is also in chapter 22.13. If you just turn a few pages over, right click to Revelation 22.13.

Jesus is speaking. He says, Behold, I am coming quickly and my reward is with me. 22.12 of Revelation.

I am coming quickly. My reward is with me to give to everyone according to his work. Does it sound familiar? To give to everyone according to his work.

I am coming quickly. I am going to be dispensing the inheritances. Guess what? Every believer has an inheritance.

That much is true. But to assume that it is the same inheritance is a grievous, grievous mistake. He says, I am coming and my reward is with me to give to everyone according to his work.

I am the Alpha and the Omega. There is your eternal to eternal. Before Abraham was, I am.

I am the beginning and the end. I am the author and the finisher of salvation. And I am the first and the last.

And we saw last time about that Protos and Eschatos. Jesus taught his disciples over and over again, If any man would be great, let him be your servant. Many who are first shall be last.

Many people whose names we all know in the Christian world, they are authors, they are on TV and radio and they are well known, there is a possibility that they will be the last. Some people that are totally unknown and unheard of are going to be Protos, are going to be up in the first. Jesus has been raised, you read Ephesians chapter 1, and Paul says the one who came and was a servant to all, he wrapped the towel around his waist and washed the disciples' feet, which was the lowliest slave job in the household.

Washing people's feet, is this a job that you would stick your hand up and say, I would like to be the foot washer in a restaurant. We are going to start a new thing, everybody that comes into our restaurant gets their feet washed. So here it is the noon rush hour, everybody is coming in from work, or they are coming in for supper after a long hard day, and I get to take their shoes and socks off and wash their feet.

All these people walking around in sandals through the refuse and the awful in the streets of ancient cities, I am going to be the one to wash their feet. It was a horrible job, it was a lowly menial job. The Lord Jesus Christ pictures the fact that he took on the form of a servant by performing that for his disciples, and it was a picture.

You will notice Jesus did not do that as a regular thing, did he? He did not say every day he got up and washed the disciples' feet, he did it in the upper room because he was trying to make a point. It is not that you run around doing menial chores, it is that you have the attitude of service. I am willing to be last, I will set aside my agenda, I will set aside what I think is a great plan and what I think would be a great hope and a great outcome, and I am going to pursue what God

thinks is a great plan, what God thinks is a great hope, what God thinks is a great outcome.

I will serve that purpose in the same way that men in the military throw themselves on a grenade or sacrifice themselves in combat. They are willing because they are serving a higher cause. They have not devalued, but they have prioritized that over their wife and their children and their job and their family and their home and everything they left behind.

They are fighting for a higher cause. We call that noble. We call that self-sacrifice.

That is in keeping with the highest traditions of our national and military service. How much more so in the spiritual realm. That is what being last in this life means.

We do not have to grovel, we do not have to wear a hair shirt and sackcloth and ashes, but we do have to have the attitude that when it comes to the difference between what I think is great and what God thinks is great, we recognize that we are doloi, we are bond slaves of God. Being last in this life and serving, God is going to elevate us with Christ. We will sit with Him.

What a wonderful opportunity. He says, Behold, I am coming quickly. My reward is with me in 2212.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He was last in his life on this earth. He suffered a horrible death, a criminal's death, a shameful death.

Now he is Protos. He is the first. Blessed are those who do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life.

The very same promise that we have to the church at Ephesus. Right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are these who never left their altars, who let their sins continue to be inscribed with a pen of diamond on the granite stone.

Why are they called dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral? Because they never would leave it. They would never give it up. They could never set it aside and say the plan of God is more important than what I think is great.

Whoever loves and practices a lie. I, Jesus, have sent my angelos, my messenger, to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star.

This is not designed to depress us. It is not designed to discourage us and cause us to throw our hands and give up. He says, look, the spirit and the bride say come.

Let him who hears say come. Let him who thirsts come. The ones who are thirsty are the ones who are going to be given the water from the fountain of living waters, the river of life that flows from the temple of God and in the eternal kingdom of the Father.

It flows from the throne of God. We choose. We decide.

It is up to us. There is no reason why we cannot be those who, by faith and patience, inherit the promises. Let me quickly give you the note for the Old Testament passages.

You can look them up. If you look at context, you will see that these are statements by the Lord Jesus, by the second person of the Trinity. They are all in Isaiah.

Isaiah 41 verse 4, Isaiah 44 verse 6, and Isaiah 48 verse 12. Three Old Testament references where the Lord Christ in his days before he was Christ and before he was Jesus, the second person speaks as the Lord and says, I am the first and the last. We are going to stop here and take our break.

When we come back, we are going to move forward. We have a couple of things.