

02-10-18a Revelation

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study of the Word of God this evening to compose our souls and lay aside the freight and baggage that has accumulated through the week and avail ourselves of the grace of God and the opportunity to spend time in fellowship together and under the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, shall we pray? Father, it never ceases to be a privilege to come before your throne and to express our thanksgiving for your grace and faithfulness toward us, the love that you expressed in sending the Lord Jesus to die on our behalf, and the status that we enjoy because of his work on the cross. We thank you that we have access to you through him and that we can make our requests known to you, we can express our praise to you and our thankfulness and our gratitude, and also ask for your blessings and ask for your continued mercies upon us. And we do that this evening in asking that you'll be with us as we study your Word together.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will find our hearts ready and teachable, that we can perceive the deeper truths of your Word, that we can grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pick up tonight in once again studying the sixth of seven letters to the churches in Revelation chapter two and three. This letter is to the church at Philadelphia. We are close to concluding our study of this letter.

I want to pick up where we left off last time with a minimum of review. I know that will no doubt please some and astonish others, but we have a lot to cover and I would like to pick up in Revelation chapter three verse eleven. Having said in verse ten, because you have kept the word of my perseverance, my endurance, my hupomone, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, the hour of perazzo, the hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

And I want to elaborate a little bit on the difference between judgment and testing. Testing is where the determination is made of what judgment is appropriate. There are judgments that result in life and reward and blessing.

There are judgments that result in discipline and loss and death. Judgment is krima, k-r-i-m-a in Greek. It comes from the Greek verb krino, k-r-i-n-o.

And judgment is mentioned frequently in the New Testament. And I would love to diverge for a while and go through the different judgments, but stop and think. We are in the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The seven years that culminate in the return of Christ, especially the last three and a half years of that seventieth week of Daniel, are nothing but judgment. God is not testing anyone. There is no testing language anywhere in that.

So when Jesus says this hour, and again we are swimming upstream as we occasionally do in trying to be faithful to what the word of God actually says. I sometimes think people are just trying to be perverse or contrary. But it is important to pay attention to what scripture says and what it does not say.

And to use our common sense. God gave us common sense even though it is increasingly an uncommon virtue. You look at what scripture says.

He says the hour of testing is about to come on the whole earth and is going to test the people who dwell on the whole earth. Well, here is my question. If that is the tribulation, which it is almost universally said to be, how many people in the Philadelphia church were in danger of facing the judgment of the tribulation? None.

Why would Jesus write a letter to Philadelphia and say, I have placed before you an open door because you have been faithful. I am going to keep you. I am going to make sure you all die before the tribulation comes.

What sort of a tribulational preservation promise can Christ be making to a church full of people who are 2,000 years removed from the tribulation? There are applications. We know that there are overtones of future things in these letters. We know that they apply not only to their immediate audience but also to us.

But keep in mind that these are letters to the church and I will give you a first-class condition if. You remember the three classes, right? In Greek you have if expressed grammatically in ways that tell you what the author is trying to say. The first-class condition is if and it is true.

If I am a red-blooded American, then I am willing to fight when called upon in the armed forces of my country. Well, that is a first-class condition. I am a red-blooded American and I am of course ready to go.

The second-class condition in Greek is if and it is supposed, for the sake of argument, to not be true. If Christ is not raised, then we are of all men most miserable. You are yet in your sins.

If you go back to Paul's arguments in Corinthians about the resurrection of Christ, if the dead are not raised, then Christ is not raised. If Christ is not raised, you are yet in your sins. And if in this life only we hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

That whole chapter is second-class conditions if. If this were the case, but it is not. Then you have the third-class condition if, maybe yes, maybe no.

And there are Greek grammatical constructions associated with each of those depending on what is the mood of the verb, what is the particle, the I may, and various other things that are used. And I won't test your patience with all of that. But my point here is if and it is not true.

If this were talking about the tribulation for the Philadelphian believers, what on earth is he saying? Is he putting something in the Philadelphian letter that has no reference to anybody in that church? He hasn't done that in any of the preceding five letters. If our eschatology is correct, and this is my if statement, if and it is true, it is a first-class condition, our eschatology is correct. If the entire church is going to be resurrected and raptured and removed from the earth prior to the tribulation, then it is a pretty doggone meaningless promise to say I am going to keep you from the tribulation.

Why would anybody say that if it is automatic just by virtue of being a Christian? You can be dead and you are still going to be off of the earth from the, that was my computer talking. I got a little, I should explain, you may occasionally hear strange noises coming out of my computer. I use this when I am working on sermons.

I edit sermons for a living and sometimes I need to be able to hear one copy read while I read a second copy so I don't have to keep looking back and forth and tearing up my eyes. So I have a text to speech engine on my computer and I pull it up and read the sermon transcript and it starts reading along and I check another version and make sure they match. You do this if you scan one.

Some of Dr. Criswell's sermons were printed in newspapers and magazines and that is the only copy we have. So I scan it and use optical character recognition to convert that to text. Then I need to compare what the computer now has with what is in the original and these old yellowing newspapers with the tiny print, trying to focus on that and then look at a screen and go back and forth.

So I have this thing there and if I forget to turn it off why it just keeps talking to me and tells me the time and tells me how smart I am and all kinds of things. Anyway, I have put it to sleep. My point is this would be an empty promise if it were talking simply about the tribulation because that is automatic for all believers, all church age believers.

No one who is body of Christ is going to be on the planet for the seven years of the 70th week of Daniel, loosely referred to as the great tribulation, technically the last three and a half years of the great tribulation. But we're not going to be here so it's kind of like having somebody, well if you do your homework I'll let you eat your supper. Well, you're not going to deny your child their supper under normal circumstances and you're promising something that they're sure to get anyway and it would be sort of an empty promise.

The other clue we've already mentioned is that it says it's the hour of Perazzo. Most of the references to the end times are the day, the day of the Lord, in that day, in that day, in that day. In both Old Testament and New, day is typically used to refer for chunks of time, large and small, referring to the end time.

This is an hour of trial. So my question is this, if it's not the tribulation, and that's another first-

class condition, if and it's true, it's not the tribulation, what is it? Well, what does Jesus say about it? He says it is an hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world. And that's a little bit different sounding in English than it is in Greek.

This word that is translated about to be is from, it's melusase in Greek and mello, m-e-l-l-o in Greek means something that is near at hand, something that is, and because it's near at hand, it's inevitable. I think in this context a good translation would be the inevitable hour of testing or the hour of testing the inevitable one which is coming on the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. Everyone on earth gets a test.

This isn't even restricted to believers. Everyone gets tested. These believers have already been tested.

We talked about their micron of ability. He says you have little ability. If you are in a very small room, you have little ability to decorate it because you're just too restricted.

If you're the account of Monte Cristo and you're in a very small cell and there's no way out, you have limited abilities, you have limited opportunities, you have limited capabilities. Your ability to do something when you're hemmed in on every side is very limited. What a wonderful thing when the Lord comes and says that was your test.

How did you do when your options were limited? How did you do when your abilities were limited, when your options were limited, when your capabilities were few? How did you do? Did you persevere or did you get impatient? Did you run out of endurance? Did you get frustrated? Did you get bitter? Did you get angry? Did you lash out? Did you go into some kind of reaction or did you patiently stick with it? My first biblical thought in this regard is Joseph. Joseph who was in line for great favor from his father is instead mercilessly torn from his family, torn from his father, sold into slavery, serves as well as he possibly can in the house of Potiphar, is falsely accused, is thrown into prison. Every place he goes his options are more and more limited.

He finally finds himself in prison where he has micron, very little power, very little ability, but he's faithful. He's faithful in that which is great, he's faithful in that which is least, and pretty soon God opens the door. God opens the door and he becomes second highest in the land of Egypt.

That's the open door that the Lord Jesus Christ places in front of the believers in Philadelphia. He says, you have kept the word of my patience. I will keep you from the hour of testing that's about to come on everyone that's dwelling on the earth.

You have validated, you get a get out of jail free card, get out of test free card. I'm not going to test you. He doesn't say this to any of the other six churches does he? What does that mean? They are going to continue to be tested, but there is a point at which we are not in line for testing.

God will test us in different areas. We've talked about the fact that each of these different

churches and situations is a different aspect of our lives. There are areas in our lives where we may undergo testing for a period of time measured in hours, in days, in weeks, even in years.

Then we struggle in that test, we have little ability in that test, but we try to stay faithful to the Lord. We don't deny his name. We try to keep the word of his patience.

Patience is the biggest requirement when you are hemmed in, when you are limited, when you are pressed on every side. He says, okay, test is over, here is your open door. Any further testing I'm going to bring on the earth, I'm not going to put you through it.

You've already shown what you are made of. That's what you have there. He says, I am coming suddenly.

In every place you see quickly in these two chapters, it should be suddenly. I will come suddenly. What is the essence of a sudden event? Why do we say something is sudden? It's unexpected, right? The essence of suddenness is unexpectedness.

A thunderstorm suddenly blew up, but nobody was looking for it. They weren't all sitting on the fence saying, I know there's going to be a big cloud come over the horizon any minute. We wouldn't call that sudden.

Sudden is the same, it's a virtual synonym for unexpected. Behold, I come unexpectedly. Hold fast what you have.

The verb there for hold fast is krate, krateo. It's another word for strength. These believers have not had a chance to demonstrate their power, their ability.

They've been hemmed in. They haven't been able to build big churches. They haven't been able to send out big missionary forces.

They haven't been able to show the world or show much of anybody what they can do, but the Lord has seen it. And he says, now he uses a different word for power. Another one of the five words for power.

And this is from krateo. And he says, hold on. Remember that we talked about dunamis and exousia and iskuos and energeon and krateo or kratous last time.

Kratous is supremacy. It means maintain your supremacy over what you have. Keep control of it.

Exert authority over it. Keep it in line. Don't let it escape.

Don't let it get out from under you. Pantokrator is the word that's translated almighty of God. And so you've got to subdue what it is you have.

If you have self-control, hang on to it. If you have patience, hang on to it. Hold fast to what you

have so that no one will take your crown.

Now crowns are a fascinating subject, but notice he doesn't say hold fast and I will give you a crown, does he? Crowns are given as a result of testing, being faithful in a test. He doesn't say hold fast and I will give you a crown. He says you've already got a crown.

You don't have to be tested anymore. Your test is over. You've got the open door.

You have a crown. Don't lose it. Don't forfeit your crown.

And this is a fascinating subject to contemplate because it reminds us that we cannot ever rest on our laurels. You can't look back and say well I was a mighty man of God and I've got an inheritance eternal and undefiled in the heavens because when I was in my prime, I was really hitting on all eight cylinders for the Lord. You can lose what you have gained by faithlessness, by apathy, by letting go of what you have.

Our spiritual struggle is not in the realm of accomplishments. It's not in the realm of what we do and what we create. It's in the realm of what we become.

The measure of our progress and the measure of our success as believers is our spiritual growth. It's what we become. Where are we on the Christ likeness scale? Now I was looking at the real interesting story that I probably don't have time to tell you but it was an artifact from a famous person with whom I'm associated that has been floating around and it's made of gold and there's a story behind it that it was a gold nugget and this famous person had walked in somewhere and and the guy said oh that's a neat nugget I can make something out of that for you and he says can you make a moose and he said sure so he went to the back room and worked on it for 15-20 minutes came back out and out of this raw gold nugget you've seen those raw gold nuggets they're just lumpy and ugly looking here was this moose head coming out almost as ugly as the original nugget but it was a moose head he said oh that's great so he went on and and now this because of the story and who it belonged to and all that many people are wanting it because of course Dr. Criswell has passed on so they took it down and had it appraised thinking well solid gold nugget thing is going to be worth a lot well as it turns out it's it is not worth a lot it's not worth hardly anything and which came as a great shock and surprise to those involved and the the thing is people are anyway I got up on the web to see well what's the price of gold knowing the year that this thing was made and was there some reason why people thought it was so valuable back when so I pulled up the 25-year chart of gold prices from 1975 through the end of 2001 that is an astonishing thing there's a kitco.com or something up on the web if you look at the chart that the charts gold prices from 1975 through 2001 because it was down at a low in like 1977 just before I had to buy my class ring of like a hundred dollars an ounce and then about the time I had to buy my ring why it went way up and went up and up and it spiked in December of 1979 and if you think about it hostage crisis Jimmy Carter waning days presidency president Reagan was on the way in the price of gold spiked in December of 1979 at \$850 an ounce from

77 to 79 it went up like \$700 an ounce some \$600 an ounce some outrageous amount and you can see this on the graph and then it came back down and leveled out and was in the \$600s and the \$700s and the \$500s and then it kind of tailed gradually off but you can see this so there was this spike well if you look at the value you say I've got this gold well if you look at the chart in December of 79 my gold is worth a lot if you look at it in 77 it's worth a hundred dollars it's worth one eighth of what it was worth later on there's this spike in the graph well it got me to thinking about graphs and if there was a graph of our spiritual life and a graph of our treasure in heaven in terms of you know treasure we tend to think of possessions are the greatest treasure there is is the approval of God what is God looking for and what does he approve he is looking for growth he is looking for the developing of Christ-like character we're going to see the scriptures for that here in a minute that's what he's looking for he's not looking for accomplishments he's not looking for scalps on the belt how many did you lead to the Lord did you bring your Bible to church how much offering did you give what have you done he's looking for what have you become well we can learn and grow and sometimes some for some people right after they're saved for other people you get a flash of insight and at some time in the later part of your life you suddenly catch fire and we we get an enthusiasm and we dig into the word of and we think about the Lord all the time and pray and grow and learn and get excited enthusiastic and we really are warmed up and hitting on all eight cylinders in our spiritual life and we grow and we start overcoming some are besetting sin and we develop patience that we didn't have and we have a a non-self-centered view of the world where we start considering others better than ourselves and looking out for their interests and we're really doing well well if you plot that on the graph your your spiritual capital is is going up you're you're doing well but if you sort of lose the bubble and begin to get occupied you know maybe God blesses and you start to have possessions or you start to have influence or you start to have standing with people or you start getting distracted and you kind of begin to let things slide and you don't really you're not as dedicated on learning the word of God and spending time in prayer and meditating and examining yourself to see if you're in the faith and and doing those things that you did when you were really on the mark and and sprinting down the narrow road well unbeknownst to us our our spot on the graph starts to decline and we can lose our progress and the final accounting is where we are when we get there it's not where you started and it's not what you did five years ago it's not what you did two years ago where are you when you show up at the throne you might have peeked out and been God's gift to the fruit of the spirit at some point but if you tailed off and got apathetic and indifferent and self-centered and worried about other things you can lose your crown you can lose your inheritance you can have your name blotted out of the book of life the book of fruitfulness I wish of course you know who am I to wish but I think it would be clearer sometimes for us in English because our word fruit doesn't carry the same baggage that Karpos and Karpus did in Greek in the ancient day people that's why they talk about the fruit of the womb you know children are a gift what's that verse I made a card out at once children are a heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward and I was teasing Patty we made that card that I had underwear by that brand you know fruit of the womb but the fruit of the womb why do we say that it's life from the womb it's a living

thing that came from the womb in Greek and in Hebrew before it fruit meant something was alive and well you knew the tree was healthy because it had fruit Jesus cursed the olive tree the fig tree rather it's the second time I've said olive tree Jesus cursed the fig tree because it didn't have fruit it looked like it was alive but it was not you have a name that you were alive but you are dead remember that fruit means life the book of life I would submit is the book of fruit it's the book of the fruitful it's the book of the producing ones imagine the man that had an orchard full of trees he's got 50 rows in one direction and 100 rows in the other he's got 5000 trees right and he keeps them on a chart and he's looking which of these trees are producing fruit and which ones do I need to root up and plant a fresh tree and so he's got a chart he's got a grid there he can pull it up and he says well in column 3 row 7 I've got a tree that it's just every look at that another branch is withered up and I'm not getting any fruit I'm going to cut that tree down and plant one that's going to produce fruit from that soil I'm spending a lot of money watering and fertilizing got to have fruitful trees so his chart is the book of the fruitful the book of life that's what the book of life is you can have a tree maybe the first year this tree is just popping fruit out all over the place but then for the next two years there's no fruit what do you think the man's going to do on his orchard chart well that was great two years ago but these past two years remember the parable Jesus told let me dig around the vineyard one more time and if it doesn't produce then you can cut it down remember that the husbandman the parable of the husbandman that's the book of life can you have your name blotted out of the book of life yes you can why because you're not fruitful God's going to uproot you and plant somebody else that is going to be a son of the kingdom and bear the fruit thereof so this is what's in view and that's why it is so important to understand when he says I am coming unexpectedly why is that why does he put that in in connection with this other idea of the crown in verse 11 do you ever wonder about that why are those two ideas juxtaposed why is the suddenness of Christ's coming got anything to do with not losing your crown because you don't know when he's going to come you can't afford to have a sleep if you knew that Christ was going to come in the year 2009 March of 2009 the Lord is returning well I can coast from now till 2008 and then I'll have a great revival and I'll get with the word and I'll listen to two tapes a day and underline in my bible and pray and get down on my knees and by the time he comes back in March of 2009 well I'll be I'll be up on the graph Jesus says sorry you can't do that no man knows the day or the hour I'm coming unexpectedly and this is like the CEO saying you know this month we're having surprise inspections through all the barracks on the base so just wanted you to know well what day are you going to let the squad bay go slack what day are you going to let the troops leave all their gear laying around if the if the CEO says I'm coming sometime but I'm not going to tell you when you've got to be ready all the time you've got to say it it can be any moment I cannot say my master delays his coming and start eating and drinking and my fellow servants right that's why these are put together I am coming suddenly so you better hold on to what you have you've got an accommodation here but don't let it go to your head because if you loosen your grip you can lose your crown you've been hanging on and hanging on well that same grip that helps you to hang on through those trials in that narrow place you've been living you just keep that same level of intensity because you don't know when the Lord is coming back and even

though yes there are prophecies and and we know that there are eras and there are things shaping up in history that define the end times this is where our understanding of the way death works is so helpful because our death is the coming of the Lord this the time of your departure from this life is the time of the coming of the Lord for you every believer that has ever died their last conscious waking thought was here on this earth and there and they may have had some period of unconsciousness and then they died but their next conscious waking thought is face to face with the Lord when our church age believers face to face with the Lord it is at the rapture there is not a scripture in the Bible that says anything about being face to face with the Lord anytime other than at the rapture for a church age believer and I challenge anybody to show me any New Testament scripture that says anything about a church age believer being face to face with the Lord outside of his appearance to John on Patmos and Paul on the road to Damascus but in this age if you are absent from the body and face to face with the Lord you're at the rapture and you leave this body and you go to the rapture that's what the scripture teaches you don't have to be a Trekkie to understand it it just means God doesn't have to do things in a human time bound linear fashion he can send people straight forward to their next assignment it reminds me I was looking at a we've got a swimming pool vacuum hose that you stick on the skimmer and you know the pump is pulling water through and you've got this great long hose and on the other end of course there's a suction if you want to get leaves and dirt and stuff out of your pool you stick one end in the skimmer and you stick the other end in the pool and so a leaf that's going to get sucked up out of the pool gets sucked into one end of that tube and then it's got to travel all the way down that tube through all of its little twists and turns and it finally arrives at the skimmer well if I pick up a leaf that's near me and I just stick it straight in the skimmer it didn't have to go through the tube it started out in the same pool it might have been right next to a leaf that had to go all the way through the tube to get to the skimmer death is bypassing the tube you just go straight to the skimmer that's how it works it's just that simple and and it's not really rocket science but that's why Jesus says I am coming unexpectedly this lady that was at Home Depot loading up her car you don't think her life ended unexpectedly these other eight people that have been shot by that guy or guys out in on the east coast and people that die in traffic accidents people that have aneurysms people that check out of this life I've told you this before but it always strikes me you look at someone's shoes I've seen a number of deceased personages and I always end up looking at their shoes because they're you see their body lying there and you see their shoes and they got up and they laced up their shoes this morning just like I did and you look at the bow that they tied in their shoes and I think you know this morning when that person put on their shoes and socks and tied that knot they had no earthly idea that was the last time they would ever do it and that they wouldn't be taking their own shoes off and it I don't know why their shoes put me in such a philosophic mood but it always does you look at those laces and you think that person didn't have an inkling that this was going to be their last day and their last walk and the last bow that they would ever tie in those laces but it was behold I come unexpectedly for believers that's not a dreadful thing it may be unexpected and it may create some grief in its wake some some separation loss and sorrow but it's a whole lot better than the alternative to have

Christ come suddenly and you're at the great white throne Christ to come suddenly and you're at his judgment seat naked and ashamed we have the opportunity when Christ comes suddenly whether it's our death or the rapture of being found ready of being found clothed of having maintained our place in the book of life in the book of fruitfulness because we treat it every day as though this might be the last one people used to base that on the imminency of the rapture they used to teach this doctrine the imminency of the rapture he could come any day he can't come any day the Lord Jesus Christ cannot come just any day there are certain things that have to be in place the bible says so it is the day that the father names and that's the only day that Christ can come back there is no such thing as an any day rapture don't let anybody tell you there is there is a designated day known only to the father when Christ has come back and he can come back on no other day the imminency is the imminency of our being face to face with him that can happen at any day at any time i could burst a blood vessel in my brain and be gone before i complete my next sentence and it's the same with all of us if you want to death is what's imminent being face to face with the Lord is what's imminent and that's not a scary thing but it ought to caution us about being apathetic or being indifferent or being uh slack in our commitment to be well-pleasing to the Lord in all things i am coming suddenly hold fast what you have so that no one will take your crown well what is this crown we've if you've uh looked in the past you've probably seen some of the crowns that are mentioned in scripture we're going to take a quick survey of of the ones that are named i think that there are several crowns that are not named that are known at this point only to God but there are some we get just a glimpse of some of the crown rewards that God is going to give to believers at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and so we'll pick up at that point when we come back from our break