

Rev 25-10-19a

Good morning fellow enthusiasts for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, our wonderful fellowship with the Father through Him, our fellowship together here at Grace and Truth Bible Church on this 19th day of October 2025. We continue prosecuting our study of the revelation. We are in chapter two.

We are looking at the first four churches together. We've seen in detail Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and we're moving into Thyatira and establishing this groundwork moving through the last three in Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea is going to be informed by those churches. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin.

Father, what a wonderful privilege it is to be sustained by your grace to know that if we are, as is inevitably the case, dragged down by the sin that is in our nature or sin in the world, we have the cleansing grace available to us through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to renew us and restore us, to qualify us for your presence and for the full ministry of your Spirit and your Word in our hearts and souls. We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word together, that God the Holy Spirit will bless it to each of us in our understanding, in our ability to see its pertinence and application in our lives so that we can live in the time that remains to us in a way that pleases you and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name.

Amen. Looking at our passage together, we have most recently looked at the overcomer promises together with the other implicit promises that the Lord Jesus makes to believers in these seven churches. The explicit promises, total 17.

The total promises, which are included in the body of the letters, as well as in the overcomer labeled category, total 27. Three times three times three. And it is important to understand both the beginning and the conclusion of each of these letters, as well as the content in the middle.

Just like a good chiasm, you have things on the outside that bracket what is most important in the center. And obviously, the commendations and the critiques that the Lord Jesus offers to each of these groups and the individuals within them are very important. But equally important, and especially for our understanding, is the introduction by the Lord Jesus, the attributes from the chapter one vision that he chooses to emphasize about himself, and the concluding exhortation to hear and to find motivation and encouragement in the promise to those who overcome in these specific areas.

So there are many commentaries on Revelation. When I was canvassing the available scholarship and interpretation that's already been done, there's a lot. You can just go to Amazon and type in Revelation and you'll get pages of books, commentaries, opinions, approaches, and so on.

I think that the word of God is its own best commentary, but there are certainly wonderful

insights and helpful observations from elsewhere. There are also those, particularly in recent decades, that have decided to use this book as a means of supporting a preconceived notion about what the church needs to hear. Instead of letting Jesus decide what we need to hear, they decided that we have problems with rapturitis and insensitivity to the world, and Revelation will fix that.

We're too much involved in national life, in cultural life. We've been co-opted by the empire or whatever, and that needs to be fixed. Taking nothing away from the legitimacy of noting that there are problems in the modern-day church, we want to find the remedy, both the diagnosis and the prognosis, the remedy in Scripture, not figure out what it is ahead of time and then try to get Scripture to fit the parameters of that particular stick to beat people with.

So we want to listen to the Lord Jesus, and we're going to look at something this morning that is very thought-provoking, and it is not my intention to unsettle anyone, but I think it has been given less attention than it deserves. We saw, for example, in the first letter to the messenger of the church at Ephesus, that Jesus introduces himself as the one who holds the stars and who walks among the lampstands. And this is designed to emphasize Jesus' presence, his personal oversight, and his qualification to make judgments about the churches.

He is present. He told us, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst. Think of this anytime we have a conversation with a fellow believer, and this includes typing back and forth on a phone, chatting online or on a discussion board.

If there is dialogue, if there is interchange between two or more believers, the Lord Jesus, who walks among the lampstands and holds those who deliver messages in his hands, we should be aware. Paul says toward the close of one of his letters, let your moderation be known to all. The Lord is at hand.

He didn't say the coming of the Lord is at hand. The Lord is at hand. We should be moderate.

We should be temperate. We should be considerate and sensitive. When I say this, I feel like a hypocrite because this is one of my problems, is I have had a lifelong challenge in being temperate, in being patient, in not sucking all the air out of the room when I am presenting my view.

It is partly due to, I think, being assigned a communication gift and loving to talk and hear the sound of your own voice. But with anything that you are given comes the ability for it to malfunction. You cannot crash a car if you don't own one, but if you do, you can.

So I tell you this, wincing at myself, that we need to be considerate, temperate, moderate, because the Lord is at hand. And the way to be that way is to consciously remind ourselves the Lord Jesus is present here, listening as I speak. Is he pleased with me or is he grimacing at my inability to approach things with a spirit of grace, speaking the truth in love, kindness, knowing when to be quiet and let another person with whom we perhaps have a disagreement or a

difference of opinion, let them speak.

Do them the courtesy of expressing themselves. It is hard when you are very convinced that you're right. And some of the things we're convinced that we are right about at least revisiting.

But we should hold these views with grace and not use them as a hammer to pound on things. So this is what we are reminded of when the Lord Jesus says, I am he who holds your messengers in my hand. They are accountable to the Lord Jesus for what they communicate.

And that has consequences that we are going to look at this morning, not just for them, but as we saw in the letters to Timothy and Titus, by extension, they apply to all of us. So that was the opening part of the bracket for Ephesus. And think about this, the messages that the Lord Jesus delivers to each of these churches, don't begin with, remember the promises.

Sometimes when we are in duress, oppression, persecution, suffering, whether it is circumstantial, whether it is physical, whether it is emotional, psychological, social pressure, relationship pressure, financial pressure, political pressure. And we want to sustain ourselves by going to the word of God and finding there the balm of Gilead, the solace, the peace that we've been promised from the Lord Jesus, the sustenance, the sustaining grace and the strength. This is what we want.

We are all here to experience tribulation. You don't have to wait for the time of Jacob's trouble. Jesus promised in this world, you will have tribulation.

So a study of the tribulation property gives us wonderful insights and tools for our mini tribulations, if you will. And it's important for us to remember the resources that are provided in God's word. And what a great model in these letters, because Jesus doesn't lead with now, before I stress you with my negative critiques, let me give you some promises.

These things could have been written any way the Lord Jesus chose to do so. He could have led with to the messenger of the church in Ephesus, right? For those of you that I approve, you're going to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God. However, you know, lead with something positive.

This is one of those personnel management things, you know, try to say something positive before you offer a critique. The Lord Jesus says, this is who I am and this is what I do. And this is important for us.

As we look at these letters, when we come to evaluating ourselves, judging ourselves to see if we are in the faith, the best starting place is the character of God, the personal presence and the personal attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in him. And as we want to evaluate ourselves, judge ourselves, lest we be judged.

And when we're busy judging others, to the extent that we judge them, that's how we will be judged. Start with the Lord Jesus. Start with, you know, it wasn't a bad idea when they had the

WWJD bracelets in this situation.

It's not so much what would Jesus do? What does Jesus think of what I am doing or planning to do or considering doing? What is the evaluation of the Lord Jesus? And each of these letters leads with the presence of Jesus Christ, the attributes of Jesus Christ. We are his body. We are in him.

What does he think of how we are speaking? What does he think of what we are attempting to do with our stewardship of time or of resources or of opportunities to be a blessing in ways that comport with our particular spiritual gift, our particular circumstances, the relationships, the situation into which God has put us. Start with not so much, what would Jesus do? If I was going make some bracelets and hand them out, they would be WWJT. What does Jesus think of my words, my thoughts, my approach? What does Jesus think? Let your moderation be known to all, Paul says, the Lord is at hand.

So that's how each of these letters begins. Think about the Lord Jesus. He introduces himself.

Here I am. This is the part of my nature you can think about in terms of your particular situation. So in Ephesus, it's his relationship to the churches and to their messengers.

That's how he begins. What is on the line in not only having doctrinal purity and rejecting heresy, false teaching, misleading and deceptive words, fending that off, but doing what we do heartily as unto the Lord out of love for him and love for one another, not to lose our love. The active cultivation, this is something you can write down, something we all can try to remember.

The active cultivation and expression of love for God and love for one another is foremost. To lose it puts access to the tree of life in the paradise of God on the line. That can be lost or gained.

That's what's on the table. With love for God and love for one another as the driving definitional attribute of what we do in a day. I am doing this because I love those who depend on me, those that I support when I do it, whether they are internal or external.

I love God. I love the fact that he gave me this opportunity, whether it is blessed be the Lord who gives seed to the sower, bread for the eater, the ability to both sow, cultivate and harvest. Blessed be the Lord who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight, whether that is literal or metaphorical.

There are those who are gifted with answering those who want to discredit Christ and Christian faith. There are some that have that gift, perimeter defense. Others are doctors who look at attack from within.

We see in these letters and we are going to continue to see that some attacks are from within. False prophets, that's an inside job. That is someone within the fellowship that we accept, that we break bread with, that we consider one of us who then begins to spread falsehood.

Jesus commends the folks in Ephesus because you have tested those who say they are apostles, but they are not. False representation is starting to be a theme here, isn't it? You've got the ones who say they are apostles or not. You've got in the next church, those who say they are Jews and are not.

So some say they are spiritual leaders. They've got the answer. They've got this one great trick that is going to fix what's wrong, like you see in these clickbait ads all the time.

Oh, look, someone shreds grapefruit peels and smears it on their face and all of their age spots go away. Grandma's old trick. Somebody's got this overlooked secret that's going to fix everything.

And this has led to fads and viral ideas that go around. Oh, it's the prayer of Jabez. It's Moses experiencing God, or it's the purpose-driven life, or it's this, or it's that, or it's the other.

I've got the next formula. This is the thing. Jesus says, look to me.

I walk among the lampstands. My messengers are held in my hand. And you've got to be able to discern truth from error.

Let no one deceive you. How many times? The two great encouragements in scripture are don't be deceived and fear thou not. I saw somewhere, I haven't done a personal count, but the most common command in the Bible is fear not.

Fear is our problem. Fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of being ill-considered, fear of falling out of favor, fear of being canceled, fear of losing something that we value, fear of pain, fear of hardship, fear of persecution. Oh, thanks.

Fear is one of our problems. Each of these attributes that Jesus emphasizes about himself, among other things, gives us confidence that he is present, that he is powerful. He is definitional for us.

We are in him. This is who we are. Don't let anyone define us differently.

So that's what we saw in Ephesus. And when you get to Smyrna, he says, I am the first and the last, something only said of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, who became dead and came to life again. This is the best way to translate, if you go to the Greek with the grammatical construction and so on, who became dead, looking at a historical fact in the past, became dead and came to life.

These are both in the past. This is an accomplishment. It is finished work.

And it is given to the Smyrnans as their encouragement, looking at the Lord Jesus, death had no power to hold him. He became dead. No one took his life from him.

He gave it willingly. He stated specifically, no one takes my life from me. I lay down my life.

I take it again. Jesus has power over death and he is greater and more glorified in his resurrection than he was during his earthly ministry. This is an encouragement to those who are facing death, whether from the outside or from the inside.

In the case of the people in Smyrna, it is an outside threat. The devil is about to throw some of you into prison. I was thinking about our justicism and the years that people spend in appeals and in incarceration.

And as you well know, there were no prisons in Israel, in God's economy. You didn't, you get charged with something wrong. You go to the judges, they judge it sometimes that same day and it's over.

But prison in the ancient world, especially in the Roman empire was most often a prelude to death. More often than not, if you go to prison, there's a better than even chance you're going to be executed not long thereafter. So Jesus says in verse 10, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

Jesus doesn't say, I'm going to remove them. He says, you are going to suffer some harsh things. Don't be afraid.

How many times have we really feared a procedure or an impending dark day only to find that it wasn't near as bad as we thought? One of my favorite ways of approaching upcoming situations is to remind myself not to borrow trouble from one of many possible futures. There are a number of different ways that things can happen or turn out in prospect. And we tend to fixate on the worst and it ruins our day.

We think, well, look at what could potentially happen. And we import the trouble from the future into our present. And we don't need to.

Jesus says, do not fear. So instead of taking the worst of several potential futures and bringing this at present imaginary unknown trouble into the present and having it throw us, focus instead first on the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, on our place in his body and in the plan and purpose of God, and on his promise that we do not need to be afraid. The disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee during the storm, terribly afraid that they, lifelong veteran fishermen, many of them would drown.

Jesus said, what are you afraid of? I'm in the boat. I am coming to you on the water. You don't need to be afraid.

Fear thou not for I am with thee. Be not afraid. I am your God.

The presence, the love of God should be returned by our love and confidence in him. That if he loves us, just as we love our children, sometimes we have to put our children through scary things. And we just, you see this over and over again.

People want to reassure their children. It's okay. It's going to be all right.

I'm here. I'm with you. I'm holding your hand.

Trust me. This is going to be okay. Don't let yourself be overcome by fear.

And in a larger and more mature sense, this is what God is doing with us. And to fear what is coming is inversely proportional to how much we trust God. The more we fear, the less we really trust him.

And the more we trust him, the less we fear. So the Lord Jesus leads with his own presence and his own ability to deal with what's coming. And you see that in Smyrna.

And then in Pergamos, he who has the sharp, two-edged sword. The sharp, two-edged sword. This was introduced in chapter one, verse 16.

In his right hand, he has stars out of his mouth when a sharp two-edged sword. That which proceeds from the mouth is typically words. These are the words of truth.

The word of God is alive and powerful. The Lord Jesus himself is called the word, capital W, John 1, 1 and following. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

But his power to judge, to slice open and to reveal what is inside is in his words. And this is given to those in Pergamos, you dwell where Satan's throne is. You hold fast to my name.

You do not deny my faith. Even the days in which Antipas, my faithful martyr, my faithful witness, martyr of course means witness. It has come to mean someone who dies for that witness.

But martyros means one who testifies. Antipas testified. He didn't abandon that testimony.

John is on Patmos for the testimony of Jesus Christ, the word of God and the testimony. He was killed in your midst where Satan dwells. The devil wants to throw you into prison.

Jesus told those in Smyrna. Satan dwells and has his throne. He is enthroned, meaning he seems to be in charge in Pergamos.

It's his base of operations, if you will. I have a few things against you because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, those who hold. And we saw the comparison to Ephesus where you have those who practice the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

And when you get to Thyatira, you find that you have there those who allow that woman Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants. In the church are those. He doesn't accuse the people he's talking to directly in these cases.

You have there those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. You have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam. And the critique is you have not separated from them.

You have not pushed them out. They hold this doctrine. In other words, they are promulgating this doctrine.

They are infecting other believers who maybe aren't as strong as you. You have not been seduced or co-opted by them, but you have not identified them, identified their egregious error and pushed them out. You have there these who are practicing and promulgating error.

This is your big tent Christianity, your big tent relationship pool as an individual believer. We have the opportunity to speak the truth. We have the opportunity if someone has ought against us, even if it is our Christian faith that they have against us, to try to be reconciled, to try to defend and communicate what is true, to identify what is wrong in the doctrine of the Nicolaitans or the doctrine of Balaam or the practices of Jezebel.

That association with idolatry, which is that which takes the place of God, something has assumed that place. There's nothing wrong with food and drink, but if they become an end in themselves and that gratification takes the place of our work and our witness and our desire to please God, they are suddenly a problem. Social life to excess taking the place of our times of worship and fellowship with the body of Christ and with the head of that body and with our Father in heaven.

If we are too much in the world, that's basically idolatry because now we have something that is before God. Wake up in the morning, is my first thought I need to check my social feed or is my first thought I need to thank God for granting me a new day and ask him to guide me through it and to remind me of what I know, who I am, and why I'm here. What is our first thought when we wake up, when we have a spare moment in this current situation we find ourselves in? When people have a spare moment, they reach for their phone.

Nothing intrinsically wrong with a phone, nothing intrinsically wrong with the internet, but what motivates us, what interests us, what propels us through the day? I want to go back and check on the progress of that discussion I'm following. I want to see what the latest news is on this particular issue. I want to hear what was decided or what was said or what was done.

I want to see if my bid in an auction is still number one or somebody has outbid me. Anything, if we don't stop during the day when we have a moment and do a spiritual gut check and pray without ceasing, go to our Father and remind ourselves that all of this is story problem. All of this is the movie.

You're sitting on the couch with a bowl of popcorn and a couple of friends or relatives. If you get too much in the movie, somebody slams the door and you jump because you are completely absorbed and you're in that moment and that's your reality. Okay, a few minutes for entertainment in a movie is one thing, but if we live our lives like that and circumstances and information age input defines our reality instead of our spiritual responsibilities, our spiritual opportunities, our spiritual exercise of faith and hope and love, what is our go-to when we can pause in a task? I'm going to sit down and take a break.

I've been going, going, going. I'm going to get a glass of iced tea or whatever. I'm going to sit down for a minute and do something different.

I'm going to take a break at work. I'm going to take a break from my daily chores, my daily investment in doing what I do heartily and as unto the Lord, I'm going to take a break. Do our thoughts go to the Lord Jesus Christ? His thoughts go to us.

He's not off in the Bible. It doesn't say, and behold, I was in a different galaxy, populating another planet and creating other. The Lord Jesus is focused on us.

He died for us. He is invested in us. He is interested in us.

He is present with us and we are in Him. We have been bought with a price. We belong to Him.

So how important is that to us? That's what these letters emphasize. If you tolerate people who are preaching the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the practices of Jezebel, which leads to sin, and a great component of sin is it disregards God and His Word and His desires for us, His commands to us, His challenge to us to be people of faith and to reflect His glory in every area of our life. Here's the gut check.

When you have a moment and you're ready to just take a break, what's the first thing that comes to our mind? Hopefully it is evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud. He will hear my voice. I want to dedicate my thoughts.

I want to dedicate my efforts. I want to dedicate my coping with what is being thrown at me, handed to me, required of me. I want to dedicate that to the Lord Jesus who died for me.

To the Heavenly Father who loved me enough to send His only Son to die on my behalf. I have been purchased. I am not my own.

And to assume that I can do whatever I want with my time and my resources without any thought of those facts disqualifies me, disqualifies us from future opportunity and blessing. And rightfully so. Why would God grant privileges, protections, fulfillment of promises, wonderful privileges to those who don't consider being in Christ and being saved by grace and being given a whole new life in and through those sacrificial acts worth thinking about, worth living for, worth dying for? You don't tend to want to be generous and thoughtful and invest yourself in people who are completely unappreciative and oblivious.

We get that from God. That's how God feels. I will honor those who honor me.

Those who dishonor me, I will esteem lightly. We're going to see this in our second session. And it is very important.

It is very important for us to take this seriously. None of us has much time left. The rapture could be 100, 200, 500 years away.

We don't have much time. Our rapture is coming up here in the next few years. All of us.

We are going to be raptured in no more time than it takes to live the rest of our life. It may happen while we're still walking around, or it will happen as soon as we stop participating in this life. That is the rapture.

So the imminency of the rapture is the imminency of the end of our opportunity here on earth to redeem the time. So how important are these letters? Very important. Now we are going to look at something in the second session that is sobering to say the least.

It is encouraging in some ways, and it is challenging to think about in others. This is something we have never talked about in Bible class in the last 30 years. We've never talked about this, but it's in our passage, and we'll look at it when we come back from the break.