

THE CHURCH AT THE END OF THE AGE

1. Introduction

- a. In this session we will concentrate on how the church will need to transition from where she is today to where she will need to be as a pure spotless bride that will walk in partnership with him in the days to come.
- b. First, we need to establish what we mean by the church; much of what is referred to as church today is far removed from what Jesus set in motion in Matthew 16.

- i Ex-U.S. Army Chaplain (Col.) David Giammona, who has spent over 32 years ministering to US army units on active service in many parts of the world, says: "We're about to face the most difficult days in the history of mankind and if we're not prepared we could be swept away with all the propaganda and all the politics of the world. Unless we're prepared, unless we're awakened from our sleep, unless we're ready to encounter God, then we're not going to be able to fully engage in the ministry and warfare that God has for us.

The church, in its current state, is not ready or prepared for the end times. We have been paralyzed with fear of what man may do to us. If we are not prepared, we're going to falter, or even worse, reject our faith and succumb to the world system and the worship of the Antichrist. Whether you know it or not, we're at war right now. The forces of light and darkness are lined up in battle array. You're either on one side or the other; there is no neutral ground."

- ii "My view is this: we do not need any more training on reaching across cultural boundaries, relevancy in a postmodern era, and the newest musical wave of great sounding harmonic interventions called worship. We need an army of supernatural, Bible believing, hard hitting, powerful people of God that are willing to turn a generation upside down for Christ."
- c. To be the church that is necessary for the end times, we have to first of all understand what that church looks like. A church that will thrive and have great impact, moving in power and spiritual authority like it has never done before. A church that looks very different to what we see today.
 - i Much of the New Testament is about how the church is to function under Jesus as its leader; if we don't know what the purpose of the church was in the first place, we will not know how to apply what Paul and the other apostles have written so extensively about.

Matthew 16:15-19 *He [Jesus] said to them [the disciples], "But who do you say that I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church [ekklesia], and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

- d. Jesus tells the disciples what he is going to build. He uses a word to describe it that is familiar to those disciples, but which is alien to us because we do not live in that 1st century culture. The word that Jesus used – **ekklesia** – refers to a governing body that every town and village had in those days. It was a local council that had legislative powers over the governance of that community.
 - i That word "church" in the text is incorrect, as it is everywhere else it appears in your bibles. It is not a translation of **ekklesia**, neither does it mean the same thing. It is there because of some political manipulation by King James 1, which unfortunately has been perpetuated by bible translators ever since.

- ii There is a lot more behind our understanding of *ekklesia*. For a more detailed exposition please listen to my message “**Ekklesia Rising**” in which I go into much more detail about the background to this word and what it means for us today. You can find it here:
<https://www.nfhop.org/audioplayer.php?id=66>
- iii I use the word “church” in these notes, simply because it’s the word that we’re all familiar with, but just understand that it’s not the word that Jesus used to describe what he was going to build.
- e. Our understanding is that the church is a ruling assembly that has real power and authority. Verse 19 outlines the kind of authority we have to engage in spiritual warfare. It functions through partnership with God. We agree with what God has bound or loosed in heaven, then we can exercise that same authority here on earth.
 - i What Jesus was establishing was a new dynamic, life-changing company of believers who would govern the earth through intimate relationship with and ongoing revelation from God.
 - ii On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Spirit, Jesus demonstrated the power and authority that backed up this new *ekklesia*, and gave it the equipping that it needed establish God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.
- f. When we look at the 21st century church we must face up to the reality that things are going to get a lot worse before Jesus returns. Man’s depravity and the expressions of his wickedness will increase in ways we cannot imagine.
 - i Satan’s works of darkness will increase. Demonic activity and strongholds will increase as society embraces and celebrates evil in unparalleled ways. Perversion and deception will run rampant through the nations causing many to fall away from the faith.
 - ii Paul warns us that before the Antichrist is revealed, there will be a great falling away in the church: through offence, loss of faith, the lure of worldliness, fear and persecution.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 *Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction...*

- iii Light and darkness will increase as we get closer to the end of the age. To counter this falling away, God has promised the greatest harvest of souls that has ever been.

2. The promise of glory

- a. The purpose of this session is to explore what God has to say about how he is going to help us to become the victorious church that he promises we will at the end of the age.

Ephesians 5:25-27 *...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he [Jesus] might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

- b. Jesus states that by the end of the age he will have a church that is going to be without blemish, with nothing to defile it or deface its beauty.
 - i He tells us how he is going to achieve this – by washing us with water with the word. The cleansing and sanctifying work that Jesus is going to do is mostly going to be done by His Word – the word of God.
 - ii What must let that word permeate us so that it becomes the living word within us, transforming us, and changing us from the inside out. This process is very important for us.

2 Peter 1:3 *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence...*

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

- iii God has given us everything we need to be successful and victorious in living a godly life. He has not left us to try and figure things out for ourselves, we have his word and we have his Spirit, which is sufficient for every one of us to navigate our way through the minefield of life's challenges.
- iv We must give ourselves to that which Jesus has given us. We have to take this word seriously, which means we must study it, meditate on it, ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and revelation so that we rightly understand and receive it.
- c. Jesus is coming back for a prepared bride, and he won't come back until his bride is ready. So that means there is going to be a period of preparation in which the bride becomes mature.
- d. Part of the maturing and refining process has to do with the greater measure of power that Jesus will need to entrust to the church in the end times.

Revelation 8:3-5 *And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*

- e. It is the response to prayer that is released in a devastating display of God's power on the earth as the fire of God is released. Here is another incident that illustrates why we have to be properly prepared before Jesus will entrust us with that level of power.

Luke 9: 51-55 *When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. ⁵³ But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them.*

- f. James and John had touched a little power, and they wanted to call fire down from heaven, but they had the wrong spirit. They were betrayed by their immaturity.

Luke 21:25-36 *"There will be...on the earth distress of nations...²⁶men's hearts failing them from fear... ²⁸When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near...³²this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place...³⁴But **take heed to yourselves**, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.³⁵For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on...the whole earth. ³⁶**Watch...pray always** that you may be counted worthy [have strength] to escape all these things...to **stand** before the Son of Man."*

- g. This is just the edited highlights of this passage. Jesus speaks boldly as a prophet. He also speaks tenderly as a pastor. He describes two different responses. One group of people: many who are overcome with fear in that hour. Another company of people: a multitude filled with faith. They understand where things are going and who is in leadership over the nations.
- i He urges the people not to be overcome with fear, but he calls them to prioritize doing what is necessary to be strengthened. Strength is available in the grace of God, but it has to be accessed.
- h. Jesus has given us three chapters that will give us great insight into how we can prepare, both as individuals and as the corporate body of Christ.

- i Firstly, a revelation of Jesus as he is now in his risen glory, which will give us confidence in his leadership. Then we will look at seven practical examples of how Jesus addresses the pressures and pitfalls that will confront the church at the end of the age.

3. The glory of Jesus revealed (Revelation 1)

- a. One of the fundamental issues facing the early apostles when establishing the church was the truth of Jesus' identity. This same issue will be emphasised by the Holy Spirit again as he brings the body of Christ to maturity and fullness in the end times. In Revelation 1 we have a picture of the resurrected Jesus in the fullness of his glory, power and authority. We must be convinced in our own hearts that it is this Jesus that we love and serve.
 - i Jesus that is a stumbling-block for many today. There is a generic idea of "God" that is acceptable in today's culture. The generic idea of God has no stigma in society as a whole.
 - ii The God people love to thank on television is safe, inoffensive and non-judgmental. He is a one-size-fits-any-religion God, friendly and harmless. The cultural leaders of today don't mind if you mention God, just so long as you don't mean Jesus. As soon as you mention Jesus it becomes personal, because he is a stumbling-block that causes offence to so many, today.

Matthew 16:18-19 *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church [ekklesia], and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

Matthew 18:18-19 *Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*

- b. Peter understood by revelation that Jesus, as the "Son of Man", is both the Christ and the Son of God. It is upon this revelation of truth that the church will ultimately prevail openly against the kingdom of darkness, driving it off of the planet forever.
 - i **Matthew 16:18-19** focuses on the authority and height of power that the end-time church will operate in against the works of darkness, as we mature in the knowledge of God (John 14:12; Ephesians 4:11-13). In a similar way to which Moses was instrumental in releasing the plagues in Egypt, in partnership with Jesus we will also be instrumental in the release of the judgments during the Tribulation.
 - ii **Matthew 18:18-19** emphasizes the unity necessary for the end-time church to be entrusted with that power and remain in a place of unified safety while sustaining the manifest presence of God (Revelation 2-3). The Holy Spirit will bring about a global unity in the church across the world on an unprecedented scale.
- c. Without the revelation of Jesus in these three chapters, the church will never be properly prepared. It is this revelation that will sustain the church and enable her to pray those "global, unified, eschatological prayers of faith", that will bind Satan or loose God's power in fullness.
- d. Revelation 1 is one of the most important chapters for us because it gives us a glimpse of Jesus as he is right now in his risen and ascended glory. We need to see Jesus in this present reality because it will anchor us in relationship with him.
 - i John needed this revelation of Jesus in order to prepare him to interpret correctly what he was about to be shown.

- ii The problem for John was that his only frame of reference was the Jesus he knew from the days of his youth. Jesus knew that wasn't enough if John was to record accurately what he was about to be shown. He had to see and experience at first hand the Jesus that was going to come back to planet earth at the end of the age.
- iii That is why Jesus arranges this encounter with John, and his main purpose in it was to give John confidence.

Revelation 1:12-18 *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."*

- e. Everything about Jesus' appearance, His apparel, His actions and His words in these verses has a message in it. None of it is accidental. He dressed for the occasion with purpose and intentionality.
- f. The first thing we must take note of is where Jesus is standing: in the midst of seven golden lampstands. Jesus tells John the meaning of those lampstands – they are seven churches. He has positioned himself at the centre of the church.
 - i The church must take note of what is happening here. Jesus is revealing himself in a way that he has never been seen before, shining in the brightness of his glory. As with John, his purpose is to give us courage and confidence both in him and in his leadership.
- g. We must take note of his apparel. Jesus is wearing a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. This is clothing that is similar to the description of the clothing of the Son of Man in Daniel 7.
 - i This is similar to the priestly attire of the old covenant, specifically clothes that were worn by the high priest. Jesus is pictured with authority in the midst of these seven churches. He knows what they are going through and he is with them in every circumstance.
- h. Jesus' physical appearance has a great impact upon John.
 - i Hair white as wool – his eternal nature
 - ii Eyes like flame of fire and feet of burnished bronze – judgment and fiery righteous wrath
 - iii Voice like many waters – power, rule, authority
- i. In Jesus' right hand he is holding seven stars. Coming from his mouth is a sharp, two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at full strength. We cannot stand the heat or the brightness of the sun at its full strength.. John sees Jesus and his face is shining in the full strength of his glory and it is blinding.
 - i Out of Jesus' mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword, symbolizing the power and the force of his message. His words of judgment are as sharp as any sword. Jesus will destroy his enemies with one breath of his mouth.

Isaiah 11:3-4 *And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

- ii The seven stars are the leaders of the church. They are held in Jesus' right hand, which depicts strength and might and power. The right hand is the strong hand. Jesus is holding them in his strong right hand, in a place of protection and love.
- j. As the blinding glory and power and authority of Jesus fills his vision, John falls to the ground. This is a dimension of the nature of Jesus that we do not commonly encounter in the church.
 - i What John sees here is the Jesus who is terribly beautiful and beautifully terrible. The message Jesus is giving to John is "you need a bigger vision of me."
 - ii It is important that we know what Jesus looks like now. We need to see Jesus as John saw him, this view that will change our lives.
 - iii It's not enough just to know the Jesus of the gospels. We need this dynamic encounter of the Jesus of Revelation, because it will give us confidence and help prepare us for what lies ahead.
- k. He is the first and the last and the living one. He died and is alive for evermore. He is the eternal God, the living God. And he has the keys to death and Hades.
 - i He's the first and the last – the beginning and end. He is from before the beginning and there is no end, and he is everything in between. We can only understand these truths about Jesus in the context of eternity. This is a challenge to us because our minds are rooted in the natural, so we need the help of the Holy Spirit to bring revelation.
 - ii If we remain rooted in the natural, we will not correctly interpret the scriptures that touch upon the eternal. Revelation 1-3 will help us make the transition from living only for the here and now, to living with an eternal perspective.
- l. In these chapters we find thirty distinct descriptions of the glory of Jesus. He reveals his glory in a way that cannot be found elsewhere in the Bible. He takes the truths of the Old Testament, the truths of the Gospel, the truths of the letters of Paul, Peter, James and so on, then he adds another dimension to them.
 - i John's encounter with Jesus is necessary to prepare John, to give him personally a right perspective of Jesus in his risen glory. In the next two chapters we go from Jesus standing before John to Jesus standing before the church.

4. A church built on the revelation of Jesus

- a. In Revelation 2-3 Jesus describes the church after his own heart, the church that he wants to come back for. He identifies the issues that will challenge the end-times church. They were real issues 2,000 years ago in those actual seven churches. The reason they were selected by Jesus strategically was because they would represent the major challenges of the end-time church worldwide.
 - i When we answer those challenges and overcome, the composite of the seven churches describes the church that will be mature in faith, in love, that is after His own heart that is prepared to release His glory in the earth.
- b. The end-times church must be the church built on the revelation of Jesus in these three chapters. This will then be the church as described in Revelation 19:7 as "the church that has made herself ready."
 - i Jesus has made it clear that he is not coming back until the church is prepared. No-one is a better church-builder than Jesus. He stands before the church and he tells them what he wants to be different, what needs to change if they are to persevere and endure and be victorious.

- ii That's the purpose of these letters to the churches. They are Jesus' action plan for the end-time church. They highlight the pressures, the issues, the good, the bad, the right, the wrong, things he encourages us with, and errors he counsels us to avoid.
- c. Jesus is looking for a church that will mature in the areas of faithfulness that he is emphasising. This is what he considers will be necessary to stand against the very specific challenges that he identifies.
 - i It is about being wholehearted, making these themes our priority to be areas where the Holy Spirit can bring us the strengthening that we need in our hour of testing.

5. Ephesus – return to your first love

Revelation 2: 2-6 *I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

- a. The three words that epitomise the positive attitude of this church are “endurance, patience and forbearance”, and these are characteristics that will need to be at the heart of the end-times church. For Ephesus in the 1st century they were facing the pressures of paganism, idolatry, Greek ideology and philosophy, Roman imperialism and hedonism.
 - i New-age is based on pagan roots, and with idolatry and hedonism, is alive and well in the 21st century, and much of Western culture is still built on the foundation of Greek philosophy.
- b. The end-times church will face these pressures and more, brought about by the seductive attraction of the Harlot Babylon, and the brutal oppression of the Antichrist regime. Jesus commends them for standing firm under such pressure. Endurance like this comes from an inner strength that is derived from an unshakeable faith, or confidence in the leadership of Jesus.
- c. They had also been targeted by some false teachers who had come in like wolves among the flock, who wanted to bring their message of impurity into the heart of the church. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24 that there would be many who would come in his name and attempt to lead his people astray.
 - i The Ephesian church had persevered and exposed these false teachers, not afraid to confront their distorted teaching. Many came with eloquent words, but they were betrayed by their ungodly character.
 - ii The end-times church must learn to discern these false teachers, not just their unbiblical doctrines, but also the ungodly lifestyle they are promoting, seeking to deceive and lead many astray.
- d. The Nicolaitans taught an early form of antinomianism, which teaches grace in a way that allows people to continue in sin without repenting. Sadly, a form of this teaching has become popular and widespread in parts of the church today.
 - i Hyper-grace teaches that grace covers your sin, and once you have been saved by grace, all sin, past, present, and future, has already been forgiven, so there is no need for a believer to ever confess it. The conclusion of hyper-grace teaching is that we are not bound by Jesus' teaching, even as we are not under the Law; that believers are not responsible for their sin. In short, hyper-grace teachers “pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality.”

- ii This is a serious doctrinal error, and like the church in Ephesus we must hate it, and allow it no place in the end-times church.
- e. Jesus highlights one negative element that we must beware of – they have lost their first love. They had left, or neglected, their original heart of devotion for Jesus that had birthed the greatest revival that the world had yet seen.
 - i They had put the work of growing their ministry before cultivating their heart of love for Jesus. Service and doctrinal purity had become more important than worship and prayer.
 - ii The place of prayer is so important; it helps to keep us anchored in our relationship with Jesus. The end-times church must become a community of lovesick worshipers, devoting ourselves to worship and prayer, allowing God to tenderise our hearts in that place of intimacy with him.

6. Smyrna – faithful in persecution even unto death

Revelation 2:9-10 *I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

- a. Jesus affirms their faithfulness in the face of ongoing tribulation, poverty and persecution. Persecution, for the end-times church, will be part of their everyday experience. Revelation 13 tells us that the church will suffer significantly at the hand of the Antichrist.
 - i Of all the 7 churches it appears to be the one that suffered the most at the hands of the Romans. While the church worldwide will suffer under the hand of the Antichrist at the end of the age, there will undoubtedly be some parts that suffer more than others.
 - ii Right at the outset, Jesus affirms Smyrna’s faithfulness with the comforting words “I know.” This will be our great assurance at the end of the age – Jesus knows.
 - iii And Jesus’ exhortation is to be faithful, even if this persecution ultimately leads to death. His promise is that he will be with us, that he will give us strength to face the testing. Jesus gives us two words that will help to carry us through – fearless and faithful. Do not fear, but be faithful.
- b. In this message Jesus highlights what lies ahead for the church. He tells us there will be suffering ahead and that the church will be tested. But this is Jesus’ kindness to the church – he clearly states that trouble is coming, and it will be tough, but that the crown of life to be won will be worth the fight.
 - i What Jesus promises is that he will take us through the pain, and give us his grace to see us through, and then we will come out the other side with a bigger heart in God.

7. Pergamos – resist immorality and idolatry

Revelation 2:13-16 *I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

- a. First of all, Jesus commends this church for remaining faithful to his name. In the end times the very name of Jesus will divide people. The name of Jesus will be hated – Jesus says it in Matthew 24, “...you will be hated by all nations because of my name.”

- i All the hatred of the world toward Jesus is now also directed at you, because you speak his words and you bear his name. The battleground for the church in Pergamos was over the lordship of Jesus. The requirement under Roman law was to affirm “Caesar is Lord”, but those in the church refused to bow the knee to Caesar. Many were imprisoned and tortured because of it.
- ii It will be the same for the end-time church who will face the demands of the Antichrist to bow the knee in worship to him and to the image of the Beast. Even to speak the name of Jesus will be an offence, punishable by death.
- b. Secondly, Antipas was praised as a faithful witness. Antipas was a great intercessor and man of prayer, and he became a target of the pagan priests. They went to the Roman governor and complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out of the city and hindering the worship of their gods! This is the kind of impact the church at the end of the age must have, and it’s this kind of effective prayer that we need to be cultivating and growing in right now.
 - i For Antipas it came at great cost as he was put to a horrifying death on the Altar of Zeus. For the end-times church, there will be a cost in terms of lives lost because of the rage of Satan against the power of God being released on the earth through prayer.
- c. We’ve already mentioned the Nicolaitans, and it seems that they also had a foothold in this church. The false grace teaching, comforting and popular as it may sound, is a satanic deception and must have no place in the end-times church.
- d. The teaching of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22. Its relevance to the end times church is the sexual immorality and other significant areas of compromise that it lures people into. Sexual immorality and pornography will be widespread at the end of the age, but Jesus’ call is for the church to be pure and spotless, not giving itself in any way to the pressures and practices of the world.
 - i This doctrine of Balaam is a constant threat to the church today, and will increase in the future as the pressure to conform to the world’s ways presses in. Anything that pulls the church away from wholehearted devotion to Jesus and into areas of compromise is a doctrine of Balaam.
 - ii We must be vigilant, deal with the little foxes before they become big foxes or ravening wolves seeking to destroy us.

8. Thyatira – resist compromise and hold fast

Revelation 2:19-25 *I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come.*

- a. Thyatira was facing a similar problem to Pergamos – compromise with society and friendship with the world. The church must be in the world, but the world must not be in the church.
- b. Thyatira’s problem was a woman that Jesus calls Jezebel and the influence she was having in the church. The influence she carried in this church had skewed it way off course. She called herself a prophetess, and spoke with an air of authority.

- c. What she taught was based on a form of Greek philosophy called philosophical dualism, which said that the body is material, it's earthly, it's sinful. But the spirit is good and holy and righteous – so if you're committed to God in your spirit, it doesn't matter what you do with your body.
 - i This is similar to the false grace teaching which also gives people licence to do whatever they like with their bodies. This kind of dualistic approach to life is prevalent in society today and is very appealing – spirituality is often seen as a way of appeasing the misdemeanours committed in the body.
 - ii Scripture says the opposite. We are spirit, soul and body, functioning as one identity in a harmonious whole with no separation.
- d. This error had come into the church through prophecy. The end time church must give time to weighing the prophetic words to see if they are genuinely from God. Are they completely in accord with scripture? Do they bear the hallmark of the wisdom and the ways of God? Does the Holy Spirit witness to these words with a resounding YES?
- e. Then Jesus speaks some encouraging words to those who have not fallen under Jezebel's seductive teaching. He says "Hold fast what you have until I come." This is a banner that should fly over the end time church.
 - i He doesn't promise it's going to be easy or that things are going to get better before he comes. The church will need to hold on against the opposition and against the ever-stronger pull of the world.
 - ii He says the same to the end times church – hold on – I am coming soon, but you need to remain faithful through the pressures that are coming. The world, the flesh and the devil are all seeking to pull you down, so be watchful, be sober.

9. Sardis – wake up, watch and pray

Revelation 3:1-4 *I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*

- a. Outwardly in this church there seemed to be a lot going on, with well-attended meetings, and lots of noise, but spiritually the church was barren. It was a dead church with no living power of the Holy Spirit, there was no manifestation of the life and power of God in their midst.
 - i This church was contaminated with the world. This church was defiled. This church was characterized by inward decay and spiritual disintegration.
- b. What caused this church to decline? Complacency – they settled down. They forgot what they were there for. Instead of pressing in they lay back, put their feet up and went to sleep.
 - i What does the end time church need to learn from Sardis? Jesus highlighted it when he admonished the disciples at Gethsemane because they fell asleep instead of persevering in prayer. "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." The end times church must watch, man the prayer walls, stay vigilant, stay awake. Stay connected so you hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

10. Philadelphia – persevere in faithfulness

Revelation 3:8-11 *I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie---behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

- a. Jesus' opening statement highlights how he is going to help the church in the end times. He will open doors for us that no-one can shut.
- b. When Jesus opens a door it's because he wants and expects us to go through it. To pursue him in all that lies behind that door. You can't see everything that lies behind it. It's not until you walk through the door that you begin to see everything that lies beyond.
 - i Jesus is encouraging us, that the end times church will have opportunities to be bold in the spirit to enter new territory, engage in new experiences, and see things that we have never seen before.
- c. Secondly he says "I know you have but a little power..." " You have a little **dunamis** – that's the Greek word for power. You may only have a little stick of dynamite but it's powerful.
 - i He's not saying you have a little power and you ought to have a lot of power. He's saying you've got power even in your smallness, you have spiritual power.
 - ii God can do more with a dozen people who have a little power than a room full of people, or a large church with no power. The end times church is going to be just like this, little groups gathered in homes here and there, all with a little power.
- d. There's a promise for the end time church in verse 10 – "I will keep you from [or in] the hour of trial..." This is a promise of protection, that although we will face much hardship and opposition, there will be a shield of protection that God will raise over the church.

11. Laodicea – lukewarm makes Jesus sick

Revelation 3:15-20 *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

- a. First they were lukewarm to the point of making Jesus sick, and second he addresses their pride.
- b. John Stott once wrote, "*The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anaemic; we appear to have taken a lukewarm bath.*"
- c. This church made Jesus sick. How should we understand this? Cold means spiritually cold, open outright rejection of Jesus, repudiating the gospel. He says you're not cold, you're not totally rejecting me.

- i Hot means zealous, spiritually alive and awake and eager and fired up for the Lord. Pressing in regardless of the cost, fasting and praying, moving in the power of the Spirit. He says you're not that either.
 - ii For the end time church, the warning is to beware of spiritual apathy. Do not let yourself become spiritually lukewarm, spiritually useless, indifferent toward the Lord. Rekindle the flame, relight the fire.
- d. Even worse than being lukewarm was their self-deception which led to becoming puffed up with pride. *"I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing."*
- e. The words Jesus uses to describe this church tell their own story – lukewarm, wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.
- i This church was in a state of spiritual pride – they thought they had become spiritually wealthy.
 - ii This is a very clear warning to the end time church. Pride of any kind in the church will weaken effectiveness and render it powerless. Yes, we have the favour of God, and through the power of the Spirit working in us the church will see some remarkable victories, but in all of this we must not take our eyes off Jesus or we will fall.
- f. Jesus flags pride up as one of the most destructive ways in which the church will be attacked in the end times. But in these verses he offers several ways in which he will help us to be overcomers, not just from spiritual pride, but from many of the other ways in which we will be opposed as God's people in the end times.