

3. God's People in Cities (1Q 2019—Revelation)

Biblical material: Rev. 2:8–11, 3:7–11, 2:12–17, 14:12, 2:18–29, 3:1–6, 3:14–22, Isa. 61:10.

Quotes

- The city is one of the highest priorities for Christian life and mission in the twenty-first century. *Tim Keller*
- God is sovereignly rebuilding the walls of our city, starting with the leadership of His churches. I believe that as we continue to meet, God will pour out revelation concerning His redemptive plans for the city. It was to the Jews living in the wicked city of Babylon that God spoke these words, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer. 29:11) *John Dawson*
- What is the city but the people? *William Shakespeare*
- What it takes to reach a city is a city-wide gospel movement, which means the number of Christians across the city is growing faster than the population, and therefore, a growing percentage of the people of that city are connecting with gospel-centered churches and are finding faith in Jesus Christ. That will eventually have an impact on the whole life of the city. That’s what I mean by a city-wide gospel movement. *Tim Keller*
- The modern city is ugly not because it is a city but because it is not enough of a city, because it is a jungle, because it is confused and anarchic, and surging with selfish and materialistic energies. *G.K. Chesterton*

Questions

How do we relate to these seven churches, and the message Jesus gave to each of them? We have viewed these churches as historical periods of the church—is there more we should be considering? What was Jesus mainly concerned to do in writing these message to the churches? What do we gain in our understanding of God from all of this?

Bible summary

The material from Revelation 2 and 3 should be re-read in its entirety as the basis for this week’s study. These chapters are God’s specific words and instructions to the seven churches, and each one is significant. The importance is emphasized by the text itself, which repeatedly states, “If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches.” As a result we can delight in the Lord (Isa. 61:10).

Comment

Note the different commendations and criticisms that while applicable historically can also be applied individually today to the wider church. Notice the differences especially. For example, Smyrna gets no criticism because this church is the one who suffers the most through persecution. Sardis is seen as being generally dead, with only some still faithful. Philadelphia receives much encouragement for what they have done. Laodicea is censured for being lukewarm, and thinking itself rich when in reality it’s poor, blind, and naked.

It's also interesting that the church is identified by the traits of those living in these cities. Most of the world's population now lives in cities, which is a real challenge to the gospel. However we are pointed to the eventual city, the New Jerusalem, where God himself will be with them and be their God. So cities are not totally bad!

Yet for the moment we have the task of trying to reach those who live in cities, surrounded by all the problems they cause. Families are fragmented, and people feel lonely and isolated. They face lives of hard work against a backdrop of crime and violence. All around they see only the work of humanity rather than God's creation, the concrete jungle rather than the Garden of Eden. We were not meant to live like this!

So as we apply the Lord's comments to the churches in the cities, let us remember that he is interested in helping, not hindering. While he speaks to the problems of laziness and compromise within the church, he wants to encourage reform and revival so that we can help others to live for God in the cities.

Once again we look to the issues of the great controversy, and see how Satan is trying to mar the image of God. In the city, it's hard to gain a positive picture of God. We need to look outside the cities to remind ourselves of God's creation, however damaged it may be. To surround ourselves with "this great Babylon which we have built" is to become entrapped in self-centeredness and reliance on human power. So we need to go back to God and ask for a new vision of who he is and how he will renew this earth, eradicating our blighted cities and replacing them with the new earth where righteousness dwells.

How does God look in all of this? Simply amazing! He is the one caring for the churches, helping them despite all their problems, and wanting them to be successful in their mission. What a wonderful picture of God we can all take to heart!

Ellen White Comments

The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world. {AA 585}

The Lord Jesus sent a mighty angel to make plain to John, by the use of symbols, the things that were to come to pass until the coming of Christ. He was bidden to write the instruction in a book for the benefit of the seven churches. This writing we now have preserved in the book of Revelation, but this book is understood by only a very few. It contains the message for the last days, and we are to dwell much upon these prophecies. {RH, February 14, 1907 par. 12}

It may seem wonderful to us that Christ should reveal Himself to John as He is, strange that He should thus address Himself to the churches. But we should remember that the church, enfeebled and defective though it is, is the object of Christ's supreme regard. Constantly He watches over it with tender solicitude, and strengthens it by His Holy Spirit. Will we, as members of His church, allow Him to impress our minds and to work through us to His glory? Will we heed the messages He addresses to the church? Let us determine to be among the number who shall meet Him with joy at His coming, and not among those who "shall wail because of Him." Let us make certain our redemption by obeying the messages that He gives to His church. {ST, February 4, 1903 par. 2}

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