

The key to Revelation

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I would like to begin with reading a few verses from the first chapter of the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 1 and verse 1.

The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass. And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John who bear record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all [00:01:06] things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written therein for the time is at hand. John to the seven churches which are in Asia grace be unto you and peace from him which is and which was and which is to come and from the seven spirits which are before his throne and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead and the prince of the kings of the earth unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us a kings or kingdom and priests unto God and his father to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Behold he [00:02:06] cometh with clouds and every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him and all kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of him even so amen. And verse 18 I am the I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I'm alive forevermore amen and have the keys of hell and of death. Right the things which thou hast seen and the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Chapter 2 verse 1 unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write [00:03:08] these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his hands and walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks I know thy works thy labor and thy patience and thou canst not bear them which are evil and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars and has borne and has patience and for my name's sake has labored and has not fainted nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love. And the last chapter of Revelation chapter 22 and verse 16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the [00:04:09] churches I am the root and offspring of David and the bright and morning star.

I suppose of all the books in the Bible which has been disputed and which is disagreed amongst the Christian profession the book of Revelation would come fairly well at the top. But I was told when I was young that the key to understanding any book the key to the door is always near the [00:05:04] door and as we open the book of Revelation the key to understanding the book of Revelation is near the beginning. And I refer you to verse 19 here John is instructed to write the things which thou has seen the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter. Three distinct groups perhaps to

most people here what am I about to say is quite common knowledge but it's good to once again hear what Scripture has to say in the introduction to the book of Revelation. John [00:06:01] is told to write the things which he has seen and I don't think that any of us here would have any doubt as to what were the things which John had at that moment seen. They were the very things which we get in chapter 1. He was on the Isle of Patmos and there he saw this vision and John writes down chapter 1 the things which he has seen. For the next reference we're going to leave for a moment the things which are and then we come to that statement the things which shall be after these. And the wonderful thing is is that we're not left to any doubt as to where and to when the things which are after these will take place because if we read turn over to chapter 4. Chapter 4 says in [00:07:05] verse 1 and after this I looked and behold a door was opened in heaven and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me which said come up hither and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And so we have absolute certainty that the third one of these groups the things which must be hereafter begins in chapter 4. And therefore we can say that the things which are have come in chapters 2 and 3. Again in chapter 4 the Apostle is called to come up hither. I think if you read through the Revelation you will find that John is in [00:08:03] five different positions. He begins on Patmos and he is seen in chapter 4 as taken up into heaven. And I think there we get a picture of the rapture of when the Saints will be called up before the judgments will come along in the remainder of the book of Revelation. Chapter 13 John stands beside the seashore and there are two other occasions where John is in a different location. And so if we can agree tonight that what we have in chapter 2 and chapter 3 is a little picture of the present day in which we live. These seven churches are representative of the whole period from the days of the Apostle or the Apostles until the time that the Lord [00:09:04] Jesus returns to this earth. And I can confirm that by one word in the third verse of our chapter.

There the writer speaks of the prophecy of this book. We may all agree that chapters 5 and 6 onwards, 4, 5, 6 onwards are a prophecy, are a prophetic picture of what is going to happen. But I also agree as many do here that what we get in the story of the seven churches is a wonderful picture of what is going to happen in Christendom and what has happened. Now you like me will have been in many meetings and you will hear the brethren talk about certain things. And very often they say there are five references in this chapter and someone else will say but I [00:10:05] found six. And then finally a brother will say but I've got seven. He's achieved the wonderful seven. But you know as I read through the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 we don't have to fiddle them to fit them in with the time. It is so accurate that the Spirit of God told John what to write. He picked these seven churches because they gave a grand picture of what was going to happen. He began with Ephesus. There was a church that had lost their first love and that is a picture no doubt of that early church in the apostolic times where they went out after the things of the Lord and then there was a decline, there was a giving up. And then we have Smyrna and in that church where we know historically there was the time of persecution. And it says in Smyrna they shall [00:11:09] have persecution ten days. And we hear of ten particular Roman emperors, Roman Nero's which persecuted the people of God. We come to Pergamos. We find there 316 Constantine. He comes to the throne. He establishes Christianity. We see them settle down in this world. Thyatira. They bring it into the Christian testimony of the evils of Rome as we see typically in Jezebel.

And then of course we come to Sardis. The wonderful time when the Reformation began. And the wonderful men that stood for justification but we know they didn't go far enough. [00:12:06] And then we come to Philadelphia. What a tremendous time it was as recorded in Philadelphia. What a tremendous assembly Philadelphia must have been to be in that assembly. A picture no doubt of the revivals in the late 1700s, 1800s. Wycliffe and the Moody brothers. And then we come on to some of

those that we know very well, some of the brethren that have taught us the truth. And then sadly we find the condition in which we live in today clearly marked by Laodicea, a giving up of the things of God. And we can look at these chapters in a prophetic point of view. And how much profit I'm sure that we can gain as we read through it [00:13:05] with that object in view. But there's another way we can look at these two chapters. And that is I've called an historical view. We all know that there was a church at Ephesus because the Apostle Paul went there. The Apostle Paul wrote to them. But there are churches here that if we hadn't Revelation 2 and 3 we would have no idea that they existed. And yet they did as individual assemblies. These seven companies existed. And they had their difficulties. And they had their problems. And there were at Smyrna tremendous persecution. And we can look at these chapters and look at these churches, historical. But tonight I want to pick out one or two points [00:14:01] and apply them practically to our lives today. That that word which the Lord Jesus said to these seven churches, what would he say to us here tonight at Kepford? What would he say to us as individuals? We know as we read through these churches, and if we had time it would be good to just read through them, the seven. We find that the Lord has much to commend in a number of assemblies. And yet sad to say there are assemblies which there is nothing that the Lord has to commend. Then there are assemblies in which the Lord has nothing to criticize. Smyrna and Philadelphia.

I want to challenge ourselves tonight, not only the young ones, [00:15:03] but those of us who are in the middle ages and those of us who are old, because each one of us can let these things slip. And I simply got five negative things which the Lord said to these seven churches, or to the individual churches, and five positive things which the Lord said to them. Now you will have noticed in these churches that the Lord brings out that which is positive first. He says to the church at Ephesus, I know thy works, I know what you're doing. And he is very positive at the beginning, before he mentions they had left their first love. But tonight I would like to finish on a positive note. So what I'm going to say now, you may think it's critical, but I trust that it will challenge each one of us as to our Christian [00:16:06] life. It will challenge us as to how am I living in this scene. That if each one of us had to set an exam at the end of the week, how would we fare as we apply these scriptures to ourselves? The first point that I want to bring out in Ephesus is they had left their first love. In Pergamos we have two. The doctrine of Balaam was accepted, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was accepted.

In Sardis they had a name that they lived but was dead. And in Laodicea they were neither cold nor hot. And you know perhaps one of these conditions [00:17:01] fits you, and perhaps all five fits me. But we begin with this statement to the Ephesians, they had left their first love. And the challenge I give to everyone here this evening is do you today love the Lord more than you did yesterday? Do you love the Lord more today than you did last year? Or have the things of God been so washed over our heads that we just take them for granted? We know the scriptures, or we think we know the scriptures, and we just carry on without being challenged by God's word. The company at Ephesus, they had the truth, the letter Paul wrote to them, and yet somehow they had forgot they had left their first love. It reminds me of the nation of Israel. There's a wonderful verse, Jeremiah 2.2, you can always remember that. I remember [00:18:04] the love of thy espousals, the Lord says, when they wentest after me in the wilderness. In other words he says to the nation of Israel, there was a time when you were all out for what I said. There was a time, no doubt, when the children of Israel said, I think it's Exodus 19, all that the Lord God has said, we will do it. And yet we know how much they failed. And in our Christian lives, dear friends, are we loving the Lord the same way as we did a year ago? There are ups and downs, no doubt, but if we were to take a general condition of your health in relation to the things of the Lord, would we be better today than we were a year ago? Because the

more we hear, and the more we are attracted to the person of the Lord, the more we should be loving him. [00:19:03] And I say a special word to those, myself included, that have spent the last few days at the conference at Canterbury. God holds us responsible for the ministry that we hear. If we hear ministry that is exalted in the Lord Jesus, he holds us responsible to act accordingly. And I've got three little indicators as to whether you love the Lord today the same as last year. The first one is, do you pray as much today as you did last year?

You may say, well, there's so much in my life. I find I have so many difficulties. I ask you the question again, how much time do you spend in prayer? Because I believe that if [00:20:03] you want a thermometer of Christian living and of Christian love to the Lord Jesus, it will be marked to a large extent by your prayer life. Each one of us, you know, will at times need to pray when there is a great burden upon us, when something happens and we need to, we don't know what to do. And we often think of Nehemiah when he was before the king, and the king says, why are you sad? And Nehemiah says, so I prayed unto the Lord and I asked the king. It was a split moment. He had an opportunity to pray and we love to be able to pray. And we love to be able to pray when we have difficulties. But you know, if you read in chapter one of Nehemiah, when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, he wept, he fast and he prayed. And I believe that Nehemiah prayed for four whole months [00:21:07] before the opportunity arose for him to be before the king. You know, our prayer lives, I find myself very weak. We pray when we feel the need. But you know, when you don't feel the need to pray, that's the time when you ought to pray. When you come in from college or from your work, and there's a prayer meeting on at that night and the devil says to you, you're tired, you'll fall asleep. What do you do? You go out and you attend the assembly prayer meeting. Nobody who is serious about Christian living should miss an assembly prayer meeting unless they have very, very good reasons. And so beloved, we need to pray as a good indication as to how [00:22:01] we measure up to our first love. Secondly, is the reading of the word of God. Young people need to know the Bible. We need to be like the apostle Paul said to Timothy, have an outline of sound words. You need to know what's in this book. But when you get to my age, you can soon forget and you don't retain it. And we too need to read the word of God. Many years ago, when I was a young, very young, I remember an older sister saying, there are some portions of the Bible that I've never read. And I wonder if there's anybody here tonight that will have to say, yes, some of those Old Testament scriptures I've never read. Well, I give you a challenge tonight to read three chapters every day and four at the weekend. And by next year at this time, should the Lord tarry, you'll have read through the scriptures. [00:23:01] And when you read through them once, read them again. And our appreciation of the word of God is a good indication of how much we love the Lord. And then of course, our fellowship with other believers. If we really love the Lord and we want his honor in this scene, and we've got an opportunity to meet together with other believers for fellowship, meet together and enjoy the fellowship of the Lord's people. And I believe that this will be an indication of our love for the Lord Jesus. We may be thinking, well, I fall down on two of these things. Well, it's high time to pick up. And if you fall down on praying, get down and pray more. And if you fall down on reading the scriptures, read the scriptures more and our appreciation and our affection for Christ will grow. [00:24:03] When we come to Pergamos, we start with the difficulties because there was a company that had accepted the doctrine of Balaam. What was this doctrine of Balaam? Well, I suppose one of the easiest things to do would be to read a verse in 2 Peter 2, which speaks about it. 2 Peter 2 verse 14, having eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls and heart that has exercised with covetous practices, cursed children, which has forsaken the right way and have gone astray following the way of Balaam, the son of Besor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. And in our own chapter, [00:25:02] we read those words to eat things, sacrifice to idols and to commit fornication.

When we read in numbers of the story of Balaam, I'm sure each one of us here are well acquainted with the story of Balaam. He sought to stop the children of Israel in their tracks.

And we all know the story of Balaam with the ass. And here the ass spoke to Balaam. And yet Balaam gave three, four parables. And in the very first parable, this is what he says.

I'll just quote what, I see the people of God as separated people. And you know, I believe that one of the principal aims of Satan today is to stop God's people being a separate people.

[00:26:03] Balaam's object was to get them to mingle with the world. And to a large extent, the doctrines of Balaam have been successful in the company of the believers. What I want to ask you tonight is, are you separated from this world? This world is coming under the judgment of God.

I know that you know that once you are born again, once you are the Lord's, whether you go into the world or not, you will be saved, take a knife and fight fire. But that's not the point. As a responsible person, are you separated from this world? This world, which is going to come under the judgment of God. And I'm just going to give you two illustrations where we can be separated from the world. The first one, I think we could [00:27:05] perhaps just look, it's in Exodus, Exodus chapter 3.

So it's Exodus chapter 2 and verse 19.

Moses brought up in the house of Pharaoh.

He leaves Egypt and he goes to Midian and there he goes to the well. And at the well, these maidens come up to them and they see Moses.

And they go back to their father and they say, an Egyptian met us. It's in chapter 2 and verse 19. Egyptian delivered us out of the hands of the shepherd. You know, Moses wasn't an Egyptian.

[00:28:03] Moses was an Israelite. They got it wrong. But you know the reason why they got it wrong? Was because Moses, in the outward appearance, was just like the Egyptians. He dressed like the Egyptians. He talked like the Egyptians. And the whole manner of his life was like the Egyptians. And you know, it's very easy. As we grow up in a world which is attractive to us as young, to you young people, that we can become just like Moses.

And I feel that it's one of the fundamental things that Satan is seeking in this world, to have Christians the same as the rest of them. We don't want you to be different. [00:29:01] We want you to get on with the rest of the people. And you know the cry is, we don't want to stand out at school or at college. We don't want to be any different. Is that not the doctrine of Baal? And then we could have gone back into Genesis. Another way in which Satan will try is in the question of Joseph. We know that this world has adopted its own moral code. It's adopted its own sexual practices. You as young people, you can do what you want, as long as you take precautions. That's what the world says. But Joseph says, how can I do this great sin and sin against God? The Bible is very clear. There should be a distinct difference between how we live our lives and how the world lives their lives. Hebrews tells us, [00:30:12] fornicators and adulterers, God will judge. Marriage is honourable in all. Fornicators and adulterers, God will judge. There is this tendency coming into our own hearts. And if it's coming to our hearts, it comes into our assemblies of not being separated from this world. When we come to this next little point of the Nicolaitans, where we could spend all night telling you what other people have

wrote about this difficult world. Some may think that it was the teaching of a man called Nicholas, but I just like to simply take it as it comes in the Greek. Nico, to conquer the people. And I think that what I'm going to suggest [00:31:07] is that this is a question of having one man in control of the church. Now, we all may pat ourselves on the back and say, but we go to a church, we go to an assembly where we don't have a pastor. And it's very nice to be in an assembly where there are plenty of brothers who will take the platform. There are plenty of brothers who will give the hymn out. There are plenty of brothers that will pray and we don't have to do anything. I want to suggest to you, dear friends tonight, the brothers here, that if I go to an assembly and I expect somebody to give the hymn out and to pray and to do all the speaking, I'm acting in the same principle. Every one of us are priests and every one of us have the privilege, but also the responsibility [00:32:05] to bring the things of God to each one of us and to worship the Lord himself. So we can slip, although outwardly we may have nothing to do with the idea of one man ministry, we can slip in our own thoughts to allowing there to be a one man ministry. But there is a danger, I suppose, and we should mention it, of seeking to be a one man ministry within our own assemblies. And we read of a man in John chapter 3, John's epistle, sorry, the third epistle of John. His name was Deotrophes and it says of him, he sought to have the preeminence.

He sought to have the preeminence. He wanted to be the one that had all the same. [00:33:02] It's interesting that there's a man in the Bible called Sosthenes, Acts chapter 20.

He means the second. He was no doubt a slave. There's another man called Terterus. He means the third. And then there's Quartus, a brother. He means the fourth. But we don't read of a man called number one, because there's only one man who's number one, and that's the one who's in glory. But Deotrophes, he sought to be number one. And what a bad thing if we seek the position of number one in the assembly. When we come to Sardis, a name that thou livest and art dead. And you know, perhaps this is something that will hit each one of us. Are we got a name that we live and yet there's no real life in us? Are we the type that can [00:34:07] come along and can do all the things which are right and are proper, and yet inwardly we're dead? Inwardly, we have no real affection for the Lord Jesus. Inwardly, we're not real. We read of a couple, you know, in Acts chapter 5. Barnabas, chapter 4, he had land. He sold it. He brought the money. He laid it at the apostles' feet. And Ananias and Sapphira said, what a good thing it would be if we could do the same. And they sold their land, and they brought it to the apostles, and they kept back part, and they lied to the Holy Spirit, and they lied to the apostle. They sought to have a name. They wanted everybody to think what a good couple this people are. You know, if we like to be thought well of, [00:35:03] every one of us do. We like to be thought well of by our brethren. We like to be thought well of by those around us. And yet, is it just a show? These things should challenge each one of us.

And then we come to the last one, Laodicea. What a sad condition the assembly at Laodicea was. You know, I don't believe when the brother stood up on Lord's Day morning to give out the notices. At Laodicea, they didn't bother about the prayer meeting. Why? They were rich and increased in goods. They had need of nothing. And the Lord looks at that assembly, and he says, you're neither cold nor hot. I'm going to spew you out of my mouth. Now, I know some commentators have said the Lord would [00:36:05] have rather have had them hot, meaning all out for him, or cold. Not a Christian at all. But I believe that the point is, is the Lord is saying he would either have had them hot or cold. You know, when we were at Canterbury, there were two tables for drink at the coffee break. There was one that had cold drink, and there was one that had hot drink. And those that took the cold drink were refreshed by it. And those that took the hot drink sometimes complained because the coffee was cold. It was lukewarm. It was nothing there to refresh them. And as the Lord looks at our assemblies,

and as the Lord looks at us as individuals, is there that which we are producing which brings refreshment to his heart? We think of the many scriptures that we have [00:37:03] in relation to bearing fruit for the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus was here, as he walked through this scene, every step that he walked brought honour to his God and his Father. And we here, if we are to bear fruit, that would bring honour to God. And the challenge to each one of us is, are we bearing fruit that will bring honour to the name of God? Am I, in my daily life, doing that which will bring fruit to God? And it's quite easy to see what that fruit would be. It would be a reproduction of the life of Christ in each one of us. In other words, it would be Matthew, Mark, Luke and John lived out in Catford, in your life and in my life. And it would be the Lord Jesus living publicly in the village, in the town, in the job in which [00:38:04] each one of us live. And so sad to say Laodicea is spewed out of his mouth. It's something that the Lord couldn't go along with. And dear friends, we need to have that positive approach. We need to be really in for the things of the Lord. But you know, there are some things that the Lord Jesus commends. We shouldn't always criticise the brethren. We shouldn't always criticise our families. It's a good time to stop and to think of some of the qualities that they have. And it's remarkable, you know, as we read through these seven churches, that to each one the Lord Jesus says, I know. In the authorised version on every church, it says, I know, I know, I know, I know.

But if you read Mr Darby, one or two are not there. But in Ephesians, or the church to Ephesians, [00:39:06] in chapter two, the apostle says, I know thy works. You know, I want to give you a word of encouragement. If you're doing something for the Lord Jesus, and nobody else seems to know, you're going out and you're giving out of food tracts, and nobody knows. There's no reason why they should know. And yet you feel that you're not getting any praise. The Lord Jesus, he knows.

You may be in an assembly that is very small, and you've got to do all the work. And nobody seems to bother. Nobody seems to come and help. The Lord Jesus, he knows. A sister said to me some while ago, when she was young, she's now an aged sister, she says, when I was young, I used to go to the hall on the Lord's Day morning at six o'clock, [00:40:02] to light the fire, the coal fires. And she said, nobody really bothered. Nobody ever said thank you. They just expected it. But I say, the Lord knows, and he values it. And the verse in Galatians 6 says, don't be weary with well-doing. And we know that the Lord will give a reward to each one of us for the service that we have done for him. As far as Myrna is concerned, the Lord has nothing to criticize them. But he speaks to them, I know thy tribulation. And you know, the Lord knows the difficulties that we have as young people and as old people. The Lord knows that if you're being rigged at school for your Christianity, we're not in this country under the persecution, as some of our dear brothers and sisters are in lands like China and the Middle Eastern countries. [00:41:04] But in this free world as it is, in these free countries, if we stand up for the things of the Lord in our school or in our work, we are bound to be criticized. I tell you tonight, the Lord knows if you're under persecution, perhaps from your friends, but even harder from your own family, the Lord Jesus knows and how he values the saints that are prepared to stand and be criticized for their stand for him. In Pergamos, you know, we have there a faithful martyr. As far as I know, the term, the faithful martyr, or as the new translation recalls, my faithful witness is only recorded of Antipas and the Lord himself.

[00:42:03] You know, if we are being persecuted for our faith in Christ, remember what the Lord Jesus endured for us. And yet in Pergamos, you know, it says of them, they had not denied my name. And you know, we ought never to deny the Lord's name. All around us are people who will not just deny his name, but they think of that name and they'll deny his person and his work. And we ought to be like those at Pergamos that stood firm for the authority of the word of God and the name of the Lord Jesus. A very quick reference, we find in John chapter 8, the Lord Jesus said, I do always those

things which please the Father. How could he possibly say such a statement? [00:43:02] Do you do everything that pleases your wife or pleases your mother? No, none of us do everything that pleases our partners, our wives or our families in this life. But the Lord Jesus could say, I do always those things which please the Father. Why could he say it? He could say it because he was always in the bosom of the Father and he knew exactly what the Father wanted. And there's a wonderful verse that proves to my heart that the Lord Jesus was equal with God. And as the Son of God, he came into this scene and he did everything that was pleasing to the Father. And we don't need just to take the words of the Lord Jesus, although they are enough, but the words of the Father could be said to the Lord, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

They had not denied his name. As far as Sardis is concerned, [00:44:05] they're told to strengthen the things which remain. And you know, if we think positively, there are things in our assemblies which are worth holding on to. And I'll just mention very briefly what I consider these things to be. The first thing is, the Lord says to the rejected and to the despised company in Haggai, they look around and they say, we remember what the building was like, the temple. What is it now? And the Lord says to them, I am with you. And you know, beloved brethren, we should cling to the morning meeting as the time when we can gather together with the Lord in our midst, strengthen the things that remain. How many people have left the assemblies? And their comment is, we miss the morning meeting. [00:45:05] And then he speaks in Haggai of the word. Let us get to grips with the word of God. Let us read it. We have a tremendous heritage. And the final thing in Haggai is my spirit remains among you.

What a privilege it is to go along to a meeting where there is no leader and yet the only leader is the spirit of God. And when we come to Philadelphia, we find there, and I will just quote that verse, time is gone. Verse 10 of chapter 3, because thou has kept the word of my patience.

You know, we don't read this because we are patient, but the Lord Jesus at this very moment is the patient one. He is the one that is waiting to take his bride to be with him for all eternity. [00:46:04] And I wonder if each one of us here are waiting for the Lord Jesus to come. What a wonderful day it will be for us to be with the Lord. We could spend all evening, we spent all week talking about this wonderful day when we will be taken to be with the Lord. But you know, let us think for a moment what a day it will be for the Lord when there will be with him his bride, which he had died for upon Calvary's cross. What a joy it will be for the Lord Jesus when he is exalted, when he is the one that is universally acclaimed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Well, may we say hasten that day. And just these little points I bring before us, first of all, to challenge our hearts as to how we're living for the Lord Jesus, but then to encourage us, as you see these two [00:47:09] points which are mentioned in relation to the churches, and finally Philadelphia, to wait for the Lord Jesus to come. I think we'll just close with singing that hymn, O Patient Spotless One. 174 Thank you. 174 O Patient Spotless One, our hearts in meekness train, to bear thy yoke and learn of thee, that we may rest, obtain Jesus, thou art enough. 174