

# Lessons Learned from the Letters to the Seven Churches

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## Lessons Learned from the Letters to the Seven Churches

### The Purpose of the Seven Letters

“... Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. (Revelation 1:11/ESV)

The letters to the angels of the seven churches provide a transition to the rest of the Book of Revelation. Their purpose is to prepare the reader to be able to hear the message of Revelation that begins in Chapter 4. It reinforces the messages to His Church that Jesus reigns as the Son of Man and will return to judge and to save. We are to repent and trust in His promise.<sup>1</sup> It sets the stage for the scenes of God’s Heavenly Kingdom, His angels, His saints, and His final conquest of evil in the subsequent chapters of Revelation.<sup>2</sup>

### What We Learn about Jesus

We learn about Jesus by understanding the meaning of His titles.<sup>3</sup>

*John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:4-8/ESV)*

### The Son of God - The Son of Man

*The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. (Revelation 1:14-15)*

*“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire ...’ (Revelation 2:18/ESV)*

Jesus is the master of all Creation including the oppressive earthly powers that make His Church suffer. As the “*the Son of God*”, He has supreme authority and power. God promised His Son the rule over everything (Psalm 2:7-8, 12).

In the Son of God the church has her true champion, irresistibly arrayed in armor flashing like the refined metal from the furnaces of the city. He is the true patron of our work. His keen eyes discern the good from the bad. He rejects the badness of Jezebel’s teaching.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999) pp. 61-64, 102.

<sup>2</sup> J. Vernon McGee, “Christ’s Letter to the Church In Laodicea”, Revelation 3, *Revelation Chapters 1 - 5 (Thru the Bible)* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995). Downloaded May 9, 2016. from Mantis Software Mobile Phone App. <http://mantisbible.com/Support/AboutMantisBibleStudy/tabid/140/Default.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> See “Supplemental Reading - Scriptural Images and Themes in Revelation and the Rest of Scripture” for information about Jesus’ appellations.

<sup>4</sup> Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) p. 117. Paraphrase by Jim MacGregor.

Jesus has infinite, penetrating, infallible knowledge (Exodus 2:3-5).<sup>5</sup> His fire can also be a destructive weapon that destroys everything that opposes His Church (Exodus 9:23-24)<sup>6</sup> such as the sea of fire into which He will cast Satan and his followers (Revelation 20:14).<sup>7</sup> Jesus brings life and protection as he had for Israel (Exodus 13:21-22),<sup>8</sup> for His disciples when He sent the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire at Pentecost to prepare them for their mission. (Acts 2:1-4),<sup>9</sup> and he does to us when we are baptized. Instead of fearing the fires of hell, we can welcome God's all-consuming fire that purifies us, cleanses us, and brings us into a new relationship with Him.

Jesus' has strength and purity - the strength of brass and the purity of it when refined by fire. Jesus is able to tread in the midst of evil and not be contaminated by it. Jesus cleanses us of our sin by His suffering atonement. He has infinite, penetrating, infallible knowledge. God appeared to Moses as fire (Exodus 2:3-5).<sup>10</sup> Jesus' character is pure and eternal as described by Daniel (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22).<sup>11</sup>

Jesus is all-knowing and speaks to us through His Word. We are compelled to listen. The psalmist's, Jeremiah's, and Ezekiel's characterization of His voice "... *like the roar of many waters*" (Revelation 1:15; c.f., Revelation 19:6; Psalm 93:4; Ezekiel 43:2)<sup>12</sup> may be compared to the experience we could have while standing next to a roaring cascade (e.g.,

<sup>5</sup> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning; yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." (Exodus 2:3-5/ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. (Exodus 9:23-24/ESV)

<sup>7</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14/ESV)

<sup>8</sup> And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Exodus 13:21-22/ESV)

<sup>9</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4/ESV) Note the parallel between God giving Moses the Law in the midst of fire (Exodus 19:16 and 24:17) and God sending the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. (Exodus 19:16/ESV)

<sup>10</sup> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning; yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." (Exodus 2:3-5/ESV)

<sup>11</sup> As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. ... I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ... until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22/ESV)

<sup>12</sup> Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. (Revelation 19:6/ESV) Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty! (Psalm 93:4/ESV) When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (Jeremiah 10:13/ESV) And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. (Ezekiel 43:2/ESV)

Niagara Falls). There is an overall noise. The noise has discernable sounds that comprise it. We can have inner calm just being surrounded by the sounds of the waterfall. Perhaps we can have peace when God speaks to us loudly or softly. Perhaps the many sounds could be heard as pertaining to all knowledge about everything (God's omniscience) about whatever we experience in His creation: art, science, language, music, and anything.

### **Authority and Power**

*In his right hand he held seven stars ... As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.* (Revelation 1:16, 20/ESV)

*"The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands."* (Revelation 2:1/ESV)

*"The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."* (Revelation 3:1/ESV)

Jesus has total knowledge, wisdom and power. Nothing is hidden from Him. Scripture attests to that (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 139:1-4; Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 14:24-27; Luke 1:37; Luke 8:17-18; Hebrews 4:13).<sup>13</sup> He has total knowledge and power and can follow up on His condemnation and punish His Church and its enemies should they refuse to repent and follow His counsel.

Jesus has unrestricted power over His entire Church.<sup>14</sup> He has in His hands the authority and power to rule over, teach, and protect His Church and its members. He is the unifying center and ruler of His Church. His authority is unquestioned and of cosmic significance. He is the Living God dwelling among us, His people (Revelation 2:1; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13; c.f., Leviticus 26:11-12; Matthew 28:20).<sup>15</sup> Jesus dwells among his people.

### **Eternal God**

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne ... "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* (Revelation 1:4, 8/ESV)

<sup>13</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1/ESV) O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4/ESV) Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. (Psalm 147:5/ESV) The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder." This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Isaiah 14:24-27/ESV) "... For nothing will be impossible with God." (Luke 1:37/ESV) "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." (Luke 8:17-18/ESV) Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. (Hebrews 4:13/ESV)

<sup>14</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John, Volume One*. Rev. Patrick Fairbairn., trans. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> "I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." (Leviticus 26:11-12/ESV) "... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20/ESV)

*"... Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18/ESV)*

*"The words of ... the beginning of God's creation." (Revelation 3:14/ESV)*

Jesus, God, is eternal. By His Resurrection He overcame sin, death, and the world. His Church will not be defeated, and we come into eternal life by believing Him and His Father (John 16:33; Matthew 16:18; John 5:24). <sup>16</sup>

We can rely on Jesus forever for everything. Jesus was the origination, the primary source, of all creation. By Him all things were made (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-18) <sup>17</sup>. By Him creation began. In short, we understand the word "beginning" in an active sense. He has originating power, and His rule over all creation is forever (Daniel 4:3, 34; Daniel 7:14; Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:13). <sup>18</sup>

### **Judge and Protector**

*... from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Revelation 1:16/ESV)*

*"The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword." (Revelation 2:12/ESV)*

Jesus Himself declares the Word of the Gospel to us just as previously God declared the Law through Moses (John 1:17). <sup>19</sup> God declares Law and Gospel to the whole world. Just as a soldier armed with the sword slays the enemy and punishes the deserter, so Jesus, the Word, slays the enemy of God's Law and Gospel and punishes the deserter from God's Law and Gospel. Jesus executes God's judgment under the Father's authority. The Church is also under Him as Judge and Defender. His judgment reveals us for who we are. <sup>20</sup> He is the defender of the Church as He judges enemies who afflict His people.

<sup>16</sup> "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18/ESV) "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24/ESV) "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33/ESV)

<sup>17</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1/ESV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3/ESV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preminent. (Colossians 1:15-18/ESV) But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. (Acts 3:14-15/ESV)

<sup>18</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. ... At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. (Daniel 4:3, 34/ESV) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14/ESV) ... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:21/ESV) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. (Colossians 1:13/ESV)

<sup>19</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17/ESV)

<sup>20</sup> He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. (Isaiah 49:2/ESV) "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain

Those who hold fast to His name and do not deny His faith do not have to fear His sword. However, our confidence must be supported by steady, prayerful obedience. Jesus sees all the advantages and opportunities we have for obedience, and He also sees our temptations and discouragements.<sup>21</sup> Jesus will deal with those who are false teachers.

“... and his face was like the sun shining in full strength” is nearly a summary of all Jesus’ other characteristics. Jesus is “complete”. God is a sun of light and glory, shining in strength. King David sang of God as his sun and shield (Psalm 84:11).<sup>22</sup>

### **The Holy One and King**

*“... from Jesus Christ ... the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ... and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* (Revelation 1:5, 6/ESV)

*“The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.”* (Revelation 3:7/ESV)

*“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one ...’* (Revelation 3:7/ESV)

Jesus is King of His Church and all creation by act of God, and He administers all Creation justly. He is holy. All the hosts of Heaven, Israel, and the Church praise God as holy, because holiness sets him apart from everything else. Holiness is what God is. “The reality is that the Lord never calls the qualified; He qualifies the called.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Rescuer from Punishment**

*... and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ...* (Revelation 1:5/ESV)

*“... Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades..* (Revelation 1:17-18/ESV)

Jesus, as “*the firstborn of the dead*” loves us and has freed us from our sins by his death and Resurrection.

### **The “Faithful and True Witness”**

*... and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness ...* (Revelation 1:5/ESV)

*“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.”* (Revelation 3:14/ESV)

them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.” (Hosea 5:6/ESV) 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. (Hebrews 4:12/ESV)

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Henry, Revelation 2, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Concise)*, The Bible Study Tools Staff, ed. Accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/revelation/2.html>.

<sup>22</sup> For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11/ESV)

<sup>23</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, “Quotes”, Accessed April 29, 2016, [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/21025.Henry\\_T\\_Blackaby](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/21025.Henry_T_Blackaby).

Jesus, as God, can produce what He predicts (Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 65:16; Jeremiah 4:2).<sup>24</sup> His testimony to every situation is trustworthy. People are often notorious for saying and doing whatever is necessary to preserve their own wellbeing. In contrast, Jesus speaks the truth.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus is true. He is completely right in His actions, and His truth and righteousness breed our trust (i.e., faith) and loyalty. Jesus brings us to Him by God's Word of truth. He rules with justice and truth over His Church and all Creation. Jesus gives His Church "*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" - the Office of the Keys (Matthew 16:17-19).<sup>26</sup> The Office of the Keys is a peculiar, special, unique, spiritual power given by Jesus to His Church. It is spiritual and includes all spiritual rights, duties, and privileges necessary for the welfare of the Church on earth such as the conveying of grace to mankind through preaching, administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and through mutual conversation and consolation. The Office of the Keys gives power to forgive and retain sins (loosing and binding), not merely to announce and to declare to men the remission or retention of sins, but actually to give forgiveness to penitent sinners and to deny forgiveness to impenitent sinners.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus' title, "*the Amen*" means that His position is absolute relative to all creation. He is the absolute ruler, controller, and judge of all Creation from "*everlasting to everlasting*".<sup>28</sup> He is steady and unchangeable in all his purposes and promises. His absolute position makes Him the truth of everything. All things were created in Him - in Heaven and earth, visible and invisible. He is the source of life - engaged and loving - whereas His Church may often be lifeless, indifferent, and cool.<sup>29</sup> Jesus is the way to the Father. He is both the sacrifice for our sins and the Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:24).<sup>30</sup> He is

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<sup>24</sup> The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4/ESV) So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes. (Isaiah 65:16/ESV) "... and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory." (Jeremiah 4:2/ESV)

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Constable, "Revelation 3", *Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable*, Accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/revelation-3.html>.

<sup>26</sup> 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. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19/ESV)

<sup>27</sup> *The Christian Cyclopedia*, "Keys, Office of", Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Accessed May 9, 2016, <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=k&word=KEYS.OFFICEOFTHE>.

<sup>28</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:1-2/ESV) But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children ... (Psalm 103:17/ESV) Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord! (Psalm 106:48/ESV)

<sup>29</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) p. 189-196.

<sup>30</sup> ... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:24/ESV)

the King whom the Father has already installed in Zion (Psalm 2:6) and the ruler over the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5).<sup>31</sup>

### What Jesus Warns Us About

In the letters to the angels of the seven churches, Jesus warns of the most important sins and failings of churches throughout time. Dr. Brighton suggests that they are sins that can be experienced in all churches at all times. He suggests a progression of fall into sin in which each temptation, when encountered, and each sin when committed, leads to the next temptation and subsequent sin.

Each sin or failing not only endangers one's faith, it also, unless repented of, can lead to the other sins; thus all the more is the Christian's faith and life put at terrible risk. Awareness of this is necessary for repentance, a godly repentance which prepares the heart to receive the message of Revelation.<sup>32</sup>

The progression of temptation and sin, relative to both churches and individuals, is outlined in the following paragraphs:<sup>33</sup>

When Christians abandon the love they had at first, their "first love" for Christ (Revelation 2:4, Ephesus) ...

*"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."*  
(Revelation 2:4/ESV)

Then, there can follow the sin, or at least the temptation, of fear (Revelation 2:10, Smyrna).

*"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."* (Revelation 2:10/ESV)

Fear can then give way to the sin of attempting to serve both God and mammon, and thus the danger of idolatry (Revelation 2:14, Pergamum).

*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.* (Revelation 2:14/ESV)

Idolatry can lead into the error of denying the uniqueness of Christianity (Revelation 2:20, Thyatira).

*"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."* (Revelation 2:20/ESV)

Denying the uniqueness of Christianity, in turn, gives way to a deadness of faith and heart (Revelation 3:1, Sardis).

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<sup>31</sup> Bryan Chapell, Ed. Notes on John 14, *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), pp. 1434-1435, Accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.esvbible.org/John+14/>. The verses from Hebrews, Revelation, and Psalms relate also to Jesus having the last word in the sense of His kingship and being the "Amen".

<sup>32</sup> Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999) pp. 61-63.

<sup>33</sup> Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999) pp. 61-63. The gist of this progression is from Brighton.

*“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”* (Revelation 3:1/ESV)

Once faith is dead there is no longer the desire to take full advantage of opportunities to serve others in proclaiming the Gospel, and opportunity that the church at Philadelphia took (Revelation 3:8, Philadelphia).

*“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.”* (Revelation 3:8/ESV)

The final sin which resulting from the others is that of being “lukewarm” in one’s relationship with Jesus and being separated from the Him by removal from His holy presence (Revelation 3:16, Laodicea).

*“So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”* (Revelation 3:16/ESV)

### Jesus’ Promises to “*the One who Conquers*”

Jesus makes promises to “*the one who conquers*” to each church (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; Revelation 3:5, 12, 21). In each instance we are to understand His promise “*To the one who conquers*” at the churches, and to us in this way. Jesus is the one who conquers, and He will give to those who believe in Him a share with Him in the victory that the Father promised Him. “*To the one who conquers*” also refers to Christians who prayerfully, with God’s help, resist the subtle temptation to adhere to non-scriptural societal values and ethics. The life that Jesus offers is a stark contrast to the sham of a church that does not live the belief he wants us to confess. The promise is both individually for us who will have “*conquered*” at our deaths, and also for the Entire Church that will have “*conquered*” when Jesus comes in Final Judgment.<sup>34</sup> Jesus made this promise to all seven cities and added some specifics. We discussed the specific promises as we read about the individual churches. John also wrote elsewhere about overcoming the World: *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (1 John 5:4-5/ESV)

We understand that Jesus’ promises refer to all times during and subsequent to the writing. That is, they are promises for us now. We are reminded that Jesus’ final victory will be in the presence of God in eternal life. “*The one who conquers*” is each of us who endures temptation and suffering and remains faithful until the end of earthly life. Jesus’ Church is not yet in eternal glory. We are still in suffering as we are sustained by faith and carry out the mission which our Lord has given us. The message of Revelation, which begins with chapter 4, is our guide, instruction, comfort, and inspiration to succeed in the Church’s mission.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John, Volume One*, Rev. Patrick Fairbairn, trans. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999) pp. 63-64.

### ***The Tree of Life, the Paradise of God***

“... To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7/ESV)

Jesus promises his Church eternal life as the reward for our steadfast faith (Revelation 2:7). His promise reminds us of the paradise, later lost, that Adam and Eve were created into (Genesis 2:9).<sup>36</sup> We gain Wisdom and the “*tree of life*” through steadfast hope and the control of our words (Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 15:4).<sup>37</sup> By our faithful obedience we bear fruit to the glory of God’s Holy Name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ promise of paradise is no longer just an anticipatory condition awaiting His Second Coming at the end of the age. Jesus promises us the reality of being with Him in His Heavenly Kingdom. The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus’ words to Martha at Lazarus’ tomb and to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43; John 11:23-26) indicate.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus instructs us to pray for the presence and growth of His Kingdom now. “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:10/ESV) Jesus reigns among us when we voluntarily devote and submit ourselves to His governance by controlling our sinful and evil thoughts, emotions, feelings, passions, desires, and moods. We want Him to instill in us those thoughts, emotions, feelings, passions, desires, and moods that he wants for us and to use them to the glory of His Holy Name. We are to pray for the removal of hindrances that obstruct and disturb his reign, and for Him to bring us under His dominion that he may draw us to Himself now and forever.<sup>39</sup>

### ***The Crown of Life***

“*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ... The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.*” (Revelation 2:10, 11/ESV)

Jesus promises a certain reward from His own hands - “*I will give you*”. The “*crown of life*” is perfectly suited to reward an earthly life worn out in His service or laid down in His cause. It is a much better life than we have now, and it is eternal.<sup>40</sup> More specifically, He rewards us for the following: leading a disciplined life (1 Corinthians

<sup>36</sup> And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9/ESV)

<sup>37</sup> She [Wisdom] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed. (Proverbs 3:18/ESV) The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise. (Proverbs 11:30/ESV) A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4/ESV)

<sup>38</sup> *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, “Paradise”, Walter A. Elwell, ed. Accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/paradise/>. And he said to him [the thief on the cross who confessed Him], “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43/ESV) Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:23-26/ESV)

<sup>39</sup> The gist of this discussion is from John Calvin, “Matthew 6:9-13”, *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*, Accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc31/cc31062.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Henry, Revelation 2, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Concise)*, The Bible Study Tools Staff, ed. Accessed February 20, 2016. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/revelation/2.html>.

9:25); <sup>41</sup> evangelism and discipleship (1 Thessalonians 2:19); <sup>42</sup> looking forward lovingly to the Lord's appearing when He comes again (2 Timothy 4:8); <sup>43</sup> enduring trials (James 1:12); <sup>44</sup> and, shepherding God's flock faithfully (1 Peter 5:4). <sup>45</sup>

Jesus teaches us that our faith in Him saves us from the “*second death*” that is orders of magnitude worse than the first death. Our faith saves us from conscious unending punishment, an eternal agony. God helps us to patiently endure whatever pain we encounter in this world to keep us from the second death and wrath to come. <sup>46</sup> Jesus teaches us elsewhere that: ... *everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (1 John 5:4-5/ESV)

### **Hidden Manna, a New Name, and a White Stone**

*To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*” (Revelation 2:17/ESV)

Jesus' promises to “*give some of the hidden manna*” - His Divine sustenance. Historically, manna was Divinely supplied and humanly gathered. Hidden manna is the Word of God upon which we live. It contrasts with a false “manna” provided by conformity to the World. The promise to “*give some of the hidden manna*” goes to the very heart of the World's false religions, in which people attempt to feed upon “secret mysteries of life” provided by human sources (i.e., other than by God). Jesus promises those who overcome the subtle temptations to false teaching that they shall feed upon His true “*hidden manna*”. <sup>47</sup> The true bread is the bread of life (John 6:25-59). <sup>48</sup> In Jesus, God, satisfies our spiritual hunger and quenches our spiritual thirst.

Jesus' promise of a “*white stone, with a new name written on the stone*” bequeathed to us is a promise of His continuing friendship since His earthly ministry. It includes our individual justification by His atoning work and our sanctification and response to the freedom He has given us. It includes the idea of passing the faith we have on to others

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<sup>41</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Corinthians 9:25/ESV)

<sup>42</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (1 Thessalonians 2:19/ESV)

<sup>43</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8/ESV)

<sup>44</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12/ESV)

<sup>45</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4/ESV)

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Constable, “Revelation 2”, *Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable*, Accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/view.cgi?bk=65&ch=2>. Matthew Henry, *Revelation 2, Commentary on the Whole Bible (Concise)*, The Bible Study Tools Staff, ed. Accessed February 20, 2016. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/revelation/2.html>.

<sup>47</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> Here is an excerpt from Jesus' statement about His being the bread of life. Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35/ESV)

and to succeeding generations. <sup>49</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20/ESV)

The “new name” is reminiscent of God’s promise to Isaiah and to His people (Isaiah 56:5-6) <sup>50</sup> Jesus gives us a “new name” in our baptism and enters us <sup>51</sup> in the “Book of Life”. We have the promise that one day Jesus will greet us and take away our suffering. He will make us all new, not just with a new name, but also with a new body - completely new (Psalm 32:2; Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 43:18-19; Isaiah 51:11; Isaiah 65:17, 19; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Revelation 21:4-7).

### Sharing Jesus’ Throne

“... even as I myself have received authority from my Father.” (Revelation 2:26-27/ESV)

“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:21-22/ESV)

Jesus makes glorious promises to even the least pleasing of all the congregations and members of His Church. God meets the despondency we can have after the sudden collapse of self-satisfied lives by offering love, hope, and faith. We remember what David prayed to God after his sins of adultery and murder: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* (Psalm 51:17/ESV) Even when a Christian community’s belief is empty, Jesus offered hope that will drive away despair as the following verses illustrate. <sup>52</sup> “The highest place is within the reach of the lowest of us; the faintest spark of grace may be fanned into the mightiest flame of divine love.” <sup>53</sup> Paul wrote that Jesus ... *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...* (Ephesians 2:6/ESV)

We who persist in our faith will share Jesus’ throne just as Jesus shared His Father’s throne - the power of divine majesty. He shares His throne with glorified saints who sit with Him. Jesus will share His throne with glorified saints (i.e., with us when He receives us) who sit with Him. The promise of sharing His throne climaxes the promises of sharing the throne in an ascending series of glorious promises, which carry the thought from the Garden of Eden to the end times as illustrated below:

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<sup>49</sup> James Strong, “leukos”, Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary, English Standard Version Bible, Accessed July 8, 2016. <http://biblehub.com/greek/3022.htm>. The Greek word can mean “light”, “bright”, or “brilliant”. Those terms move us to accept the fourth explanation, the stone of hospitality, as Jesus employing us to spread His Gospel. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John, Volume One*, Rev. Patrick Fairbairn, trans. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) p. 143.

<sup>50</sup> “I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant ...” (Isaiah 56:5-6/ESV)

<sup>51</sup> That is, the ones who conquer.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Ellicott, “Revelation 3”, *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Accessed May 10, 2016, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/ebc/revelation-3.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Ellicott, “Revelation 3”, *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Accessed May 10, 2016, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/ebc/revelation-3.html>.

From the Garden of Eden (“*To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*”, Revelation 2:7; c.f., Genesis 2:9); <sup>54</sup>

Through the wilderness (“*I will give some of the hidden manna*”, Revelation 2:17; c.f., Exodus 16:35); <sup>55</sup>

Through the temple (“*a pillar in the temple of my God*”, Revelation 3:12; c.f., 1 Kings 7); <sup>56</sup>

To the throne (“*sit with me on my throne*”, Revelation 3:21; c.f., Acts 15:14-16). <sup>57</sup>

This is a glorious promise, and it made to even the least pleasing of God’s people. God meets the despondency many can have after the sudden collapse of self-satisfied lives by offering love, hope, and faith. We remember what David prayed to God after his sins of adultery and murder (Psalm 51:17/ESV). <sup>58</sup> Jesus offers us hope that will drive away despair. <sup>59</sup> Paul wrote that Jesus raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-7/ESV; c.f., Hebrews 4:16). <sup>60</sup>

### **Relief from Burden**

*“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, ... to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.”* (Revelation 2:24/ESV)

Jesus invites us to bring our burdens to Him and that He will lighten our load. We are to have a daily walk with Him and to love others as He first loved us. For animals an easy yoke is one that does not injure the back of the animal on which it is fitted. Jesus referred to the “yoke” He Himself wore - the yoke of a perfect surrender and absolute submission to the will of God. Any burden is light when we force ourselves to bear it, but forcing ourselves may be difficult or impossible (Matthew 11:28-30). <sup>61</sup> Some things are easy to do, once we make up our minds to do them. It is making up the mind that is the burdensome thing. Jesus expects us to give up stubbornness and pride and trust Him for

<sup>54</sup> And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9/ESV)

<sup>55</sup> The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (Exodus 16:35/ESV)

<sup>56</sup> 1 Kings 7 relates the story of Solomon building the Temple.

<sup>57</sup> “Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,’” (Acts 15:14-16/ESV; c.f., Amos 9:11) “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old ...” (Amos 9:11/ESV)

<sup>58</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:17/ESV)

<sup>59</sup> Charles Ellicott, “Revelation 3”, *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Accessed May 10, 2016, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/ebc/revelation-3.html>.

<sup>60</sup> ... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:5-7/ESV) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16/ESV)

<sup>61</sup> “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30/ESV)

our needs. <sup>62</sup> It is in that context that Jesus promises His Church “*I do not lay on you any other burden.*”

### **Help with Perseverance in Faith in Jesus**

“*Only hold fast what you have until I come.*” (Revelation 2:25/ESV)

“*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*” (Revelation 3:19/ESV)

We are to “*hold fast*” to what we have - Jesus’ burden - until He comes to eliminate the burdens that the World would load onto us. Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to help us and teach us all that we need to know with the authority of the Father (John 14:15-17). <sup>63</sup>

We are not to look back with nostalgic sentiment for where we had been before He saved us as had Lot’s wife (Genesis 19:24-26). <sup>64</sup> Jesus teaches us to have faith and not waver by looking back to what we used to be. Jesus’ teaching was echoed by the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 10:38-39). <sup>65</sup>

### **The Morning Star**

“*And I will give him the morning star.*” (Revelation 2:28/ESV)

“*I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*” (Revelation 22:16/ESV)

Jesus’ promise pertains to the glory of His dominion over all creation, and to His beautiful appearance now and how we shall see Him when He comes again. <sup>66</sup> Jesus Himself, the “*morning star*”, is the ultimate gift to us. “Among the stars of the spiritual firmament, He is the brightest in the whole galaxy, the Light that enlightens everyone by its coming into the world.” <sup>67</sup>

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. With Him we have the light of life. He declares that when we closely, humbly, and steadily follow Him, we shall have God’s light, “*the morning star*”, continually shining upon us, gifting us with knowledge, holiness, and joy, and guiding us to life everlasting - and being with us forever. He continues to cast His light upon us by the doctrine of the Gospel and by the secret power of the Holy Spirit. This means that we have no true definition of this light unless the Spirit of Christ

<sup>62</sup> Charles Ellicott, “Matthew 11”, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, Accessed April 13, 2016, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/ebc/matthew-11.html>. See the earlier item “Love of God and Neighbor”.

<sup>63</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will beg in you.” (John 14:15-17/ESV)

<sup>64</sup> Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. (Genesis 19:24-26/ESV)

<sup>65</sup> “... but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Hebrews 10:38-39/ESV)

<sup>66</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John, Volume One*, Rev. Patrick Fairbairn, trans. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) p. 166.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1907) p. 310.

illuminates us by the Gospel to know that the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom is hidden in Him.

By giving us “*the morning star*”, Jesus is giving us not only Himself to be among us spiritually as promised (Matthew 28:20).<sup>68</sup> but also giving us the life that He brings and giving it to us in His visible presence eternally. He says that those of us who join Him as disciples will have understanding of the spiritual truth that brings eternal life.

In this life we cannot see the Father and Heavenly Kingdom on our own. Jesus gives us light to see the Father and God’s Heavenly Kingdom through our “seeing” Him - as His words are recorded in the Gospel of John - believing in Him and living with Him. Jesus tells us that He and the Father dwell in each other, and when we see Him we see the Father. (John 12:45; John 14:9-11)<sup>69</sup>

The brightness of God’s light grows through teaching, preaching, and the sacraments. When we use this light God no longer remains hidden from us. We should reach for the Bible when we are confronted by disaster, when we are overwhelmed by darkness, when things seem so dark that we can even doubt that we are part of the Church or pleasing to God at all. Without the Bible we cannot understand ourselves, other people, or our surroundings. We are not to let people who fall away from the faith distract us. Instead, we must remember that we live in a dark world and that we can see only when the light of God’s Word shines brightly in our lives.

### **White Clothing of Salvation**

*“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. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments ...”* (Revelation 3:5/ESV)

Jesus’ promise is more than any reward we can imagine. It is the ultimate reward for putting the Gospel, not our own desires, into practice. The joy we shall experience at receiving His reward is greater heavenly joy that we can imagine. We can only scrape at its surface by learning what Paul and John tell us about the unimaginable joys of life before the Throne of God and in the presence of Jesus as our Ruler (1 Corinthians 2:9; c.f., Isaiah 64:4)<sup>70</sup>

If we are abiding in Him, then at His coming we shall have boldness. If, when thinking of Jesus’ coming, it is a happy thought and music to our souls, then we are fulfilling our works before God.<sup>71</sup> If on the other hand, when thinking of Jesus’ coming, we wish for the postponement of His coming, it is because our relation to Him is only overt and formal

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<sup>68</sup> “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20/ESV)

<sup>69</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. (John 12:45/ESV) Jesus said to him [Philip], “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” (John 14:9-11/ESV)

<sup>70</sup> But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him ...” (1 Corinthians 2:9/ESV; c.f., Isaiah 64:4) From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. (Isaiah 64:4/ESV)

<sup>71</sup> And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. (1 John 2:28/ESV)

rather than spiritual and living.<sup>72</sup> Jesus teaches us that He will acknowledge us if we believe and trust in Him (Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26-27).<sup>73</sup>

Jesus' promise to walk with Him in white also presents us the challenge to understand what evidence we might give of our responding according to Jesus' will.<sup>74</sup>

We may be joyful at the prospect of our appearing in Heaven, clothed with splendor, as Jesus, Moses, and Elijah did once on earth in His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3). The psalmist and Daniel also wrote of God's splendid appearance (Psalm 104:1-2; Daniel 7:9). King Solomon taught us to bask in the pleasure of God's love (Ecclesiastes 9:8). *Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.* (Ecclesiastes 9:8/ESV) The angel spoke to Zechariah of pure vestments in his vision of Joshua, the High Priest (Zechariah 3:4).<sup>75</sup> The joy here described, is the gladness of heart that springs from a sense of the Divine favor.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) pp. 146-147.

<sup>73</sup> "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33/ESV) "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38/ESV) "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:26-27/ESV) "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8-9/ESV) Luke 9:26 is a difficult passage that has been interpreted variously as foretelling that members of His audience would live until His Transfiguration, until His Resurrection, until Pentecost, and until the destruction of Jerusalem. One reasonable interpretation would be to relate this verse to: Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25/ESV).

Calvin interpreted this idea to mean two things. First, Jesus was instructing Peter, and us, to tend to His work for them and not be concerned about what he has in mind for others. Second, we are to want to know what God wants us to do and "watch and pray" as Jesus told us (Matthew 26:41; Luke 21:36). John Calvin, John Chapter 21, *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*. Internet Sacred Text Archive (ISTA), Accessed March 15, 2016. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc35/cc35010.htm>.

Earlier in this paper we expressed wonder about whether or not the meaning of Jesus' words, when he spoke to Peter about John on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, could be interpreted in retrospect as pertaining to John's vision. *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:20-23/ESV)

One commentator interprets these ideas of "will not taste death" and "If it is my will that he remain until I come" to mean that one of the apostles, like John, lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem, and thus became witnesses of the truth of Christ's words and of the inexorable punishment that comes upon those that deny Him. Paul E. Kretzmann, Luke Chapter 9, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, Accessed July 23, 2016, [http://www.orthodoxlutheran.org/kretzmann/nt\\_vol1/LUK/LUK\\_9.htm](http://www.orthodoxlutheran.org/kretzmann/nt_vol1/LUK/LUK_9.htm).

<sup>74</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) p. 151.

<sup>75</sup> And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. (Matthew 17:1-3/ESV) The story of the Transfiguration in Matthew 7:1-3 is repeated in Mark 9:2-4 and Luke 9:28-31. Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. (Psalm 104:1-2/ESV) As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its

**Our Names in the Book of Life**

*“The one who conquers ... I will never blot his name out of the book of life. ...”*  
(Revelation 3:5/ESV)

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.* (Revelation 20:12/ESV)

When we prayerfully, with God’s help, resist the temptation to adhere to non-scriptural societal values and ethics we receive the life that Jesus gives, and our names are written in the “Book of Life”, a list of those who are saved; those whom the Lord, by name, will accept into His heavenly Kingdom. Jesus wants us to live, teach, and confess our belief in Him.

**Our Names Confessed before the Father**

*“The one who conquers ... I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.”* (Revelation 3:5/ESV)

Jesus also promised to confess the name of the “one who conquers” before His “Father and before his angels”. Jesus says, *“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32-33/ESV; c.f., Luke 12:8-9; c.f., Romans 10:9)<sup>77</sup>

**Safety from the Hour of Trial**

*“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.”* (Revelation 3:10/ESV)

Jesus rewards our faithfulness with safety from the future horrors of Hell. He promises relief from tribulation in eternity for those who obey Him. His promise is reminiscent of God’s promise to the Israelites, (Deuteronomy 30:3)<sup>78</sup> of King David’s song about God’s promise of protection for His people (Psalm 23),<sup>79</sup> and of Jesus’ words, recorded in Matthew, *“But the one who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 24:13/ESV). He encourages us, just as he once encouraged His disciples to have peace in the face of

wheels were burning fire. (Daniel 7:9/ESV) “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” (Zechariah 3:4/ESV)

<sup>76</sup> Matthew Henry, “Ecclesiastes 9”, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Concise)*, Accessed September 26, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/ecclesiastes/9.html>. The eastern people of the best sort, used white garments, especially in times of rejoicing. Ointment - Which upon joyful occasions was poured upon men’s heads.

<sup>77</sup> “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8-9/ESV) ... because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9/ESV)

<sup>78</sup> ... then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. (Deuteronomy 30:3/ESV)

<sup>79</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:4-6/ESV)

tribulation because he had overcome the World. *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33/ESV) We who remain loyal to His word and to His name when He gathers us out of the World at His Second Coming will realize the final fulfillment of His words.<sup>80</sup>

### **A Crown**

*“I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”*  
(Revelation 3:11/ESV)

Jesus promises His church what He has promised and done for the Church repeatedly. He directs our attention to His Second Advent as the victorious event that we should all be waiting for. We should always be waiting for Him with the sound of His words, *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done”* (Revelation 22:12/ESV), continually in our ears. Then we have the greatest need to *“watch and pray, so that we do not walk into temptation. When we “watch and pray”, our Lord whom we love, and who loves us more than we love ourselves, will deliver us. As Jesus tells us: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (Matthew 26:41/ESV)

### **Pillars of God’s Temple**

*“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it ...”* (Revelation 3:12/ESV)

Jesus makes us, His followers, pillars of His temple. We are to provide a stable foundation for the Church, the rock of faith and the apostles upon which it was built. We “pillars” are firm and rest on the foundation of Jesus and the apostles. We are the support of the Temple of God - God’s Church, the body of Christ fitted together in brotherly love.

As “pillars” we play a double role. We have a personal relationship between ourselves and the Church. We also have a personal relationship with Jesus within His Church.<sup>81</sup> They also point to ourselves as Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) p. 172.

<sup>81</sup> *Jewish Virtual Library*, “Jachin and Boaz”, Accessed May 2, 2016, [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0011\\_0\\_09825.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_09825.html).

<sup>82</sup> Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17/ESV) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (1 Corinthians 6:19/ESV) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22/ESV) ... you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:5, 9/ESV)

**God's Name, a New Name, the New Jerusalem**

*“The one who conquers, ... and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”* (Revelation 3:12/ESV)

The name of our God whom we serve, and whose favor and friendship we enjoy, is conspicuously recorded on each of us in Baptism to show that we belong to God. That honor is great now, in the future, and forever. Each of us so rewarded is now and will be known and recognized as belonging to God.<sup>83</sup> Jesus helps His Church to conquer the evil forces around it. We do not yet know all the honors that Jesus has for us. It is breathtaking to think that we shall share Jesus' honors with Him someday. He promises us the final victory at His Second Coming (Matthew 24:29-31; c.f., Revelation 20:14).<sup>84</sup> Each of us who “conquers” will be one with our King (Proverbs 30:4; Isaiah 62:2; 65:15; Revelation 19:11-12).<sup>85</sup>

The Holy Incarnation, the birth from a virgin, the death of the Son of God for us, His resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, the forgiveness of sins, the day of judgment, and the resurrection of the body, are not merely believed, when the eternity of the Trinity and the mutability of created things are known. They are also judged to be part and parcel of the mercy of the most high God, which he has shown towards the human race.<sup>86</sup>

We realize that the “New Creation”<sup>87</sup> is difficult to understand. We can only have a very dim, general understanding. We must remember what Paul wrote, *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* (1 Corinthians 13:12/ESV). *Just as creation followed fallen man*

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<sup>83</sup> Albert Barnes, Revelation 3, *Barnes' Notes*, Accessed June 10, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/revelation/3.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matthew 24:29-31/ESV) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14/ESV)

<sup>85</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *A First-Century Message to Twentieth-Century Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1902) p. 176. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know! (Proverbs 30:4/ESV) The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. (Isaiah 62:2/ESV) You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name. (Isaiah 65:15/ESV) Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. (Revelation 19:11-12/ESV)

<sup>86</sup> Augustine of Hippo (354-430), citing Revelation 21:1. “Of True Religion”, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, John H. S. Burleigh, trans. (Louisville, KY: *The Library Of Christian Classics*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.) pp. 233, 246. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5/ESV)

<sup>87</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17/ESV)

into corruption, so will a new creation follow redeemed man into glory (Romans 8:19-21; Philippians 3:20-21).<sup>88</sup>

### **Jesus' Fellowship and Companionship**

*“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.”* (Revelation 3:20/ESV)

Jesus tells us, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”* It is startling to realize that Christian churches can exclude Jesus, having everything they want except Jesus. What a promise! Under the Old Testament, the sinner had to make certain sacrifices to get in to God; he did the knocking. Now the Lord Jesus stands outside of our individual hearts and knocks. Then, a sinner had to be brought to God; now, God comes to each of us.<sup>89</sup> Note that Jesus tells us to knock. The idea seems to be that He has already come to each one of us, and that we only need to knock to let Him in (Matthew 7:7-8; c.f., Luke 11:9-10; 12:36).<sup>90</sup>

Jesus' words, *“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me”* reminds us of His earlier promise:

*Jesus said to them [the crowd of five thousand], “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” ... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:35-37, 44/ESV)

In Jesus, God satisfies our spiritual hunger and quenches our spiritual thirst. He is the living water that will satisfy our spiritual needs. As with the manna of the Exodus, we all get an amount of the Bread of Life - of God's grace - sufficient for our salvation. None of us is lacking His grace, and none of His grace is wasted. By coming to Jesus we never lack anything we need - either spiritually or physically. We are to work with greater care for that which brings eternal life, and not to let the things of the world capture and enslave us so that we are working for them and not they for us.

Jesus is at work in our daily lives. Once we have the Holy Spirit, to provide spiritual fulfillment, we start to grow in the Spirit of the Lord, and we never need any other spiritual sustenance. By His statement *“I am the bread of life”*, Jesus tells us that the manna of Exodus 16 was a type pointing to Him as the Messiah; that He is God and is the provider of sustenance for His people. However, unlike Israel's experience in the

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<sup>88</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21/ESV) But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20-21/ESV)

<sup>89</sup> This thought is from Dr. J. Vernon McGee, *“The Tabernacle: God's Portrait of Christ”* (Pasadena, CA: Bible Radio Network, 2002) pp. 33-34, Accessed July 24, 2013, <http://www.thruthebible.org/www.thruthebible.org/atf/cf/%7B91e2424c-636c-40c2-9c55-890588e90ece%7D/The%20Tabernacle.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8/ESV) Luke 11:9-10 contains the same promise. “... and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.”* (Luke 12:36/ESV)

wilderness where God provided food for the stomach, whoever partakes of Jesus as the Bread of Life will never again know spiritual hunger. Jesus invites us to go after Him for His own sake and not for any worldly benefit or advantage - not for food or drink, not for an improved lifestyle, not for improvements in one's business. We must come to Jesus and believe in Him to be saved.

Jesus' words, "*If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me*" address not only God's Law but also unmerited grace through Christ. The Sermon on the Mount shows us how we are to live. It instructs us who are already following Jesus, or are ready to follow Him (c.f., Matthew 4:18-22 and 5:1),<sup>91</sup> that we are called to demonstrate the character of God and his kingdom through the character of their lives.<sup>92</sup> Just as reading the sermon does not judge us; however, we are nevertheless compelled to judge ourselves while reading it.<sup>93</sup> Those teachings are a description of what life looks like for us as followers of Jesus as we try to be faithful to Him and to the values of God's kingdom in this untransformed world. By prayerfully asking Jesus to help us live as He describes, we receive His unmerited grace. The perfection that Jesus demands (Matthew 5:48)<sup>94</sup> is our heartfelt devotion to God, finding satisfaction only in Him and in nobody or nothing else. Christian discipleship is genuine when it arises from a heart and mind transformed by God's grace - by repentance.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22/ESV)

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. (Matthew 5:1/ESV)

<sup>92</sup> Bryan Chapell,, Editor, Notes on the Sermon on the Mount, *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2013) p. 1275.

<sup>93</sup> Rev. Edward A. Engelbrecht, Ed. *The Lutheran Study Bible* (English Standard Version) (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009) p. 1577.

<sup>94</sup> "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48/ESV)

<sup>95</sup> Bryan Chapell. Ed. Notes on the Sermon on the Mount, *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2013) pp. 1274, 1277, 1279.