



THE REVELATION OF JESUS' CHURCH

Part 3 of Revelation

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Revelation 2-3 | October 05, 2003

Good evening. Welcome to Mars Hill. My name is Mark, one of the pastors here. Good to see you guys. We're gonna be in the book of Revelation tonight. If you've got a Bible, go there. We'll be in Chapters 2 and 3. I will blow through two chapters as quickly as I can, and then we'll have breakfast together. Thanks for coming. It's actually our seventh anniversary at this season. We are now a seven-year-old church. God has been very gracious to us over the years, from a simple core of 12 people, to, I don't know what we'll have today, 1,500, something of that nature, so it's good to see you all.

A couple quick announcements I wanted to make. This building that we're in tonight, if you're not aware, is a newer home for us. In seven years, we've met in seven different locations. We hope to be here for a good long while. It's big enough to finally accommodate us. This building total is about 40,000 square feet. We're presently using about 2/3 of that space. There's an additional – roughly 13,000-14,000 square feet that we are not using and that is located on the other side of that wall, and the other side of this wall.

We're in the midst of a \$600,000 construction phase to finish that final 1/3 of the square footage of the building. Kids will be over there in a 300-400 seat concert venue, and a kitchen and a classroom will be on the back side. And so, it's about a \$600,000 project. We've got about a \$.5 million of that, and we're raising the final \$100,000, it's actually down to about \$85,000, and there'll be an update on that, as well as the regular giving on your notes, so if you'd like to contribute to that, we would sure appreciate it. Love to get that project buttoned up. Some of the things that we're trying to do is upgrade our projectors and get a baptismal in, and some of those kind of things that are very practical.

And so, this is a great book. You read this, you get to go to Heaven; I promise. It's wonderful. If you're heavy, you'll lose weight if you read that. If you don't have hair, you'll grow hair. If your car's not running, just put that under the hood, it'll fix it. It's really a wonderful piece of work. It'll help you with everything. So, I'll pray, and then we'll get to work here in this great book.

Father God, we thank you for giving us this space, for making us your people. God, we know that as we study the text tonight that hard words produce soft people, and that soft words produce hard people. God, we would rather hear hard words and be soft people, than hear soft words and be hard people. And so, God, please speak to us those words of encouragement that we need to hear. Please speak to us those words of rebuke that we need to heed. Please speak to us those words of command that we must obey. And please, most importantly, reveal to us the Lord Jesus, so that we could see him in his glory. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would come now to us, corporately and individually, that you would open our hearts to love the Lord, who we serve. That you would open our minds to understand the Scriptures that you have written, and that you would open our ears and give us ears to hear. And we ask that in Jesus' good name. Amen.

As we're studying this theme of worship through the book of Revelation, last week we looked at Jesus in unveiled exalted glory. This is gonna be very important for you through Revelation. When you think of Jesus in the book of Revelation, don't think of the humble, simple, Galilean peasant. Jesus Christ is King of Kings, Lord of Lords. He is eternal God who is maker and creator, and he exists in glory to be worshiped by angels. And as we sing, we are participating with the angels in the adoration of God. God, the Lord Jesus Christ, humbled himself for a season, was born on the earth, was in a humble state; simple, poor, common. But, that was only for a season. His humility has now ended. He has died for sin. He has risen in conquest of death, and he has ascended back into glory.

And so the season of humility is at an end, and now Jesus is back to his exalted place of glory. John, the great pastor in the beginning of Revelation 1, he sees Jesus in all of his majesty and glory, and he individually responds in worship by falling prostrate, face down, prostrating himself before the Lord Jesus, and worshipping him as God. What we see, then, is that the object of our worship is Jesus, and that we each individually are supposed to respond to him as worshipers, as John did. What we see, though in Chapters 2-3, is something that is far less glorious. In Chapter 1, we see the exalted Jesus. In Chapter 2-3 we see the church. Jesus is perfect and glorified and good, and the church is a work in progress. It's made up of people who some love God; some don't. Some love him a little bit; some love him a lot. Some are very faithful; some are very unfaithful. Some claim to love him; some don't at all. Some are struggling; need encouragement. Some are sinning; need rebuke. Some have a complete misunderstanding of Jesus and need instruction. And some are disobedient and they need correction.

And some of you come here tonight frustrated with the church. You should be. It's not perfect. We don't need to pretend that this is the Kingdom of God. We don't need to pretend that we are God. Jesus is God and the Kingdom is coming, and he prayed that it would come, and the church is the outpost in the beginning, and that the end breaking of that Kingdom. But you and I, quite frankly, we're a work in progress. As we go through these seven historical churches that John is writing to in Revelation 2 and 3, a couple of them are great. A couple of them stink. And a couple of them are somewhere in the middle, not that unlike our own day. Some churches great. Some churches suck. Some churches, well, the jury's still out; could go

either way. Depends upon what they do.

And so, we go from this exaltation and this picture in Heaven to earth and church and reality, and it starts with a letter to the church in Ephesus. And in each of these letters, what happens is that first there's a portrait of Jesus. Who's Jesus? That's the most important thing. The most important thing is not the church. The most important thing is Jesus. The church are the people that he has gathered together to worship him and to walk with him and to be loved by him and transformed by him. Worship is not just what we do individually, it's also what we do corporately, and God sees you as an individual and also as a part of this church. And the most important thing for us all is to get a clear picture of Jesus, then he gives encouragement. Here's where things are going great for particular churches; some churches, he has nothing kind to say about. Other churches receive encouragement. Not all. Some receive encouragement. Some then receive rebuke. "This is a problem. I'm unhappy with this. This needs to change." Jesus, encouragement, rebuke, and then a command, "Obey me and get it together – obey me and get it together."

So, the first church that he writes to is to this church in Ephesus. He says in Chapter 2:1, Jesus actually says, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write," and I'd simply say this; each church has an angel that's designated to it. There are angels that work here at Mars Hill. Spiritual beings created by God to serve him and to serve us, and to be messengers from him to us. We don't worship angels, we worship God. But, we believe that there is a supernatural, invisible, and spiritual realm that surrounds everything that we do as a church, and that we have a real enemy, Satan, we have real enemies, demons, and we have real advocates, angels, working on behalf of God. It's where Paul says to the Ephesians' church, elsewhere, that our warfare is not just against flesh and blood, but principalities, powers, and spirits. So he says to the angel – God works through the angel, the messenger, to communicate to John, the pastor, who then preaches to the church; these are the words of him, and here's the picture of Jesus who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Jesus is shown as the one who rules and reigns in all of the supernatural realms, the angels and the stars, all of the witchcraft, and astrology, and sorcery, and demonization, and spiritism, and mediumism that exist in the culture; Jesus holds in his hand and he rules over it all. And it's important, because this church doesn't know that. This church thinks it's in charge, not Jesus. They believe that they rule and reign in his place, and he is reminding them that he is an ultimate authority, and he is in final control of all that is happening, both in the physical and in the Spiritual realm. And we're told that Jesus, here, is the one who walks among the lampstands. John is in exile. He's been boiled alive. He's been exiled off to this island of Patmos, which is modern day Turkey. It's Sunday, the Lord's Day. He told us in Chapter 1, he's there in the Spirit worshiping Jesus. He can't be with his church and he's worried. As a pastor he's worried about the condition of these churches that he oversees, but what he sees is that Jesus walks among the lampstands.

At the end of Revelation 1, we learn that the lampstands are churches. That Jesus Christ is in the church, that Jesus Christ actually attends church. He humbles himself and he comes to church. Now, we may not see him, but he is indeed here. He is here with you. He's here to meet with you, to encourage you, to rebuke you, to instruct you, to comfort you. And truly, what church is about is about God's people getting together with Jesus who is their God. And the portrait of what we are is not unlike this. There's seven churches, each of which is called to be a bit of a lampstand, like a Jewish Menorah, kind of like these candles that we have here tonight. And that's what we're supposed to be; a very simple and common object that exists for one purpose and that is illumination that is to bring light into darkness. And in the world that we live in that is incredibly dark, what people need is the light of Christ. And what Jesus told us to do, is to so let our light shine before men, that they see our good deeds and praise our Father who is in Heaven. That you and I are a lamp, and that Jesus Christ walks with and among us. And so wherever we are, it's a sacred place, because Jesus goes with his church.

He then encourages them; there are some good things at this church. It says, "I know your deeds," this is one thing that Jesus says to each church, that he knows. Jesus knows everything. "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary." Jesus says, here's my compliment toward you as a church. And again, many of you think you have an exclusively personal relationship with Jesus. You have two relationships with Jesus; one that is personal and one that is corporate. One that is exclusively vertical. One that is horizontal. And your relationship with Jesus is between you and Jesus. It also involves the rest of us. Paul says to the Corinthians that, "If one of you suffers, we all suffer." That we're really in this thing together and the New Testament metaphor of the church is that we're a family. And so when Jesus Christ compliments the church, he does so in total. When he rebukes the church, he does so in total.

Here, he compliments them. He says you work hard. Hard working church, that's good. You persevere when trial and difficulty come. That's good. And you have great sound doctrine. You avoid false teachers, heretics, nut jobs, weirdoes, bad authors, freaks; you push them out and you don't pay attention. It's great. This is sort of the beginning fundamentalism. These are the Bible believing, hard working, honest, hang in there kind of folk. Some of you come from these kind of churches; Bible believing, Bible teaching, hard working, enduring churches. But then there's also a rebuke for this particular congregation in Verse 4, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." How many churches are theologically orthodox, correct? Could answer Bible trivia questions all day, right. Any heretic shows up, no problem. Argue with him, defeat him, humiliate him, make him cry, give him the right foot of fellowship; no problem, okay. But those churches have a propensity to be filled with jerks; people that are unpleasant, unkind. They are like a roofing hammer to the frontal lobe. There is nothing enjoyable about them. "Our doctrine is in order." Did you miss all the love verses? Did you miss all those? Jesus says that good theology is this; to love the Lord, dear God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. If you consider yourself to be a Bible scholar and you're a jerk, you're a bad theologian.

I mean – but, how many of you – really – this is your propensity? You read books. You sit in your room. You get a little Kaczynski. You're into all your theology. You got it all figured out. You work hard. You persevere. You're real serious. You could translate vicarious substitutionary atonement from the Greek text; but you're a jerk. Some of you young guys, you need to pay special attention to the church at Ephesus. You're just not any fun.

You need to bake cookies and hug people. You need to lighten up. Get your meds sorted out and be happy. There is a propensity for churches that are so strenuous with theology to lack in loving relationship. Okay, are we a church that strives for sound doctrine and theology? We are. Okay, I yell for an hour, we go through books of the Bible, we go to seminary classes; I was thinking about it today, our introductory theology class, we've run over a thousand people through it. We have over 30 Bible studies, groups, classes, Wednesday night – we are an academic theological church. But, you guys got to be baking cookies and hugging people; you got to be nice – you got to be nice. Jesus is a loving God. It says in 1 John 4, that God is love, and if we're not loving we've missed the whole point. That's what Paul says to the Corinthians. You know what. You can have all kinds of gifts and abilities and theology, and you can argue all day, but if you're not nice, you're really a bad representation of God. Amen.

Okay, so here's what else he has to say. Here's what they need to do; "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." God says this, "Here's what you need to do. Knock it off. Stop being a jerk. Don't look for every opportunity to argue. Don't pick your little pet doctrines and then go beat the heck out of people. Develop a loving relationship." Even if you consider yourself to be an academician and a scholar and a theologian, if you're nice to people, you're gonna have probably a better chance of teaching them something because they'll listen to you. Maintain the illusion that you care. That's what I'm saying.

And what he says is you got to go back and do the things you did at first. When you're a brand new Christian, what do you do? You love Jesus. You read your Bible. You're nice to people. You pray. And then all of the sudden, you start reading dead white guys and you just turn into a total jerk that's impossible to deal with. So fine, read the dead white guys, but make sure that you go back and do the things you did as a brand new Christian; love people, read your Bible, pray, be nice. It's okay. In addition, what he says is this; "One thing I do have going for you, though," he says, "you hate the Nicolaitans." We don't know who the Nicolaitans are; some heretical nut job group like our own day Seattle. Just pick up the phone book under Churches/Spirituality, throw a dart, you'll probably hit one of these groups; they're everywhere. And he says, "You hate them. That's great." We read that and we go, "Oh, is it okay for churches to hate other groups?" Of course, if they're lying and leading people astray, and teaching false doctrine and heresy, and put white tennis shoes on you and mix the Kool-Aid and wait for the comet; yeah. Fine. There's certain teams we're not on and that's okay.

And so what he tells them is, "Your doctrine's good, you're refusing the right guys, you're standing your ground, you're working hard; I appreciate that. Just be nice." How many of you come to the church, nobody even says hello and you're first indication is, "Well, this is a very theological, biblical church, and nobody here's very nice." Be nice. "Hi. How are you doing?" Don't be like a stalker, but be nice. He goes on to say, Verse 7, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The one thing that's repeated to every single church is that the Spirit of God is communicating and that the church needs to listen. We see this in Chapter 1; John listens to Jesus. Chapters 2 and 3; the church listens to Jesus. One of the most important acts that a church undertakes is listening – is listening to God. God is alive. God speaks, and if we have ears to hear, the Spirit can communicate to us.

He goes on, "To him who overcomes," here's the promise – overcomes this propensity to be so difficult – "I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God," as promised. It's a promise. God keeps giving promises as incentive. It's like when your mom would tell you clean your room and you get a cookie; it's incentive. It's to get you moving in the right direction. The tree of life was in the garden of Genesis. We would eat of it and we would live forever. When we sin, God forbade us from eating, not because he hated us but because he loved us, and he didn't want us to live forever, separated from him in sin. The first two chapters of the Bible have the tree of life. The last two chapters have the Bible have the tree of life. Those who overcome this propensity to be an unkind, unpleasant, mean spirited jerk for Jesus get to go to Heaven. And when they get there, they get to be eating from the tree of life which gives them nourishment and sustenance for their existence.

The second church, Smyrna, this is a great church. Some of you are leery. You don't like church. You're burned out. You're frustrated. You're critical. You say, "I don't like church. I can't find any good churches. There's no good churches." Actually, there are some good churches. Smyrna, it's a good church. Jesus has no unkind thing to say. We'll read their report card. "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:" – Verse 8 – "These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life." It's important Jesus portrays himself to this church as the one who was dead, buried, resurrected, alive conquering sin and death. That's important because this is a persecuted church. These are Christians that are getting murdered. Upwards of six million Christians were killed in the early church; it was slaughter. It was like the holocaust, just an absolute attack on a people. And Jesus says I know they're gonna kill you, but here's the deal. They killed me too, and I rose. And you love me; you're gonna rise too. I've been there. Follow me.

He says, "I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!" They're poor because in their affluent city, to become a Christian meant you'd probably lose your job or you'd get demoted. Some of you have had that, and there's certain jobs you can't take because you're a Christian, or when you take them, you are forced to compromise your ethic, and so you end up getting fired or having to quit. These people, financially, in a prosperous time in a prosperous city were suffering because of their love for God. He says, you know what, you're spiritually rich, even though you're financially poor. "I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

What he says is this, people who claim to worship the same God as you are slandering you. They don't. They work for Satan. There are leaders in churches that I am convinced work for Satan. Don't think that just because somebody's a clergy or somebody's got a degree or an initial after their name or they wear a robe or they're professional, don't think so. Don't think that all the scandals in the news about people who claim to be servants of God molesting kids and doing deplorable things are necessarily people working for Jesus. Satan sends people into leadership just like he did Judas Iscariot. And just because someone's in a position of leadership doesn't mean that they're working for God. These leaders and these false groups are

working for Satan, and they're slandering God's people, they're attacking them, they're harming them, and Jesus says, "I know. I know what it's like. You're suffering, persecuted; times are hard, but if you endure you'll get the crown of life." It's a gift that's given. It's an accomplishment that's endowed to those who participate in athletic competition. At the end you get a crown.

Jesus is saying, "I know it's a hard road, but run the life that is set out before you," right. Run it to the bitter end. Run it 'till you die, either by natural causes or murder, and you will receive a crown at the end. There will be recognition for that. Are we that? Are we a persecuted church? Nope. We're not dying. There's not bodies stacked up in the street. We don't have it like Smyrna. Some of you complain because the parking's far away; that's not persecution. That's exercise. You'll be all right. Stretch out so you don't pull a hamstring, but no, it's not persecution. If you complain, we may persecute you. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." In Christianity you're born twice and you – there's two births and two deaths. The first is a physical birth. The second is a Spiritual birth where you meet God. That's what Jesus tells Nicodemus is being born again.

There's two deaths. There's a physical death where your body gives up its spirit, and then there's a Spiritual death where you're separated from God forever. Everyone undergoes the first death. You die. Not everyone undergoes the second death; separation from God and the torments of Hell. What he says is this, "You're Christians. You love me. I know life is hard. Many of you will die, but the second death is not gonna be for you." To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, is what the apostle Paul says, and that's what he's talking about here.

Some churches like Ephesus, good and bad. Churches like Smyrna, good. This other church here, Pergamum, this is a good and bad church. Maybe that'd be a new denomination we should start; the good and bad Bible church. "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." The portrait of Jesus here is as the truth teller. Hebrews 4 and Ephesians 6 say, "That the Scriptures are living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating to the joints and marrow." The Scriptures are a sword. They come to slay God's enemies, to deliver God's people, to cut out sin and folly and death.

And it shows Jesus here, as bringing the word of God, bringing the Scriptures to bear in this church, because this is a church that doesn't use the Bible. How many of you have been to this church? There's no Bible. Maybe they read one verse at the beginning like the Pledge of Allegiance and then get it out of the way, and from there, there's nothing. No one even says the name of Jesus until they get cut off in the parking lot. It's just like he's not even there. That's this church. Here's what he has to say as far as encouragement. "I know where you live," – doesn't that sound a little scary? Think about that. I wonder if he didn't say it like this, [whispering sinisterly] "I know where you live!" "I know where you live." – and here's the bad deal – "where Satan has his throne." That's not good. "Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives." Satan is an angel, a created being that rebelled against God and was cast out of Heaven. Revelation tells us elsewhere that a third of the Heavenly Host was cast down with him; those are demons.

Satan though, isn't like God. He's not all knowing and he's not all present, so Satan has to work from somewhere like a military General. I don't know where he works from today. In that day he worked from Pergamum. Seattle's the least churchd city in the country. Maybe he set up shop here. Maybe he moves down for Mardi gras, down to the French Quarter in New Orleans. I don't know where he's at. But this city – Jesus says Satan set up headquarters there, and because of that you've been persecuted, and here's what I have going for you. You still call yourselves Christians and you haven't given up yet, but – Verse 14, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:" and here comes the laundry list, alright. How would you like this? Jesus came to your house, "We're gonna have a report card." Can't really argue, can you. "Well, who do you think you are?" You kind of just got to put your cup on and take it, is really what you got to do.

"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." These guys apparently are a big deal. "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." What he says is this. "You guys love heretics. You're a non-judgmental church." Now, Christians shouldn't be judging non-Christians. Paul says, "What business is it of mine to judge those who aren't in the church?" We're not to be judging non-Christians or people outside of the church, but in the church, we have to judge; it's called discernment. It's the same reason you don't just elect people at random to babysit your kids. There is a sense of judgmentalism that's very good. "Oh, you like taking pictures of kids? Well, I got kids. Would you like my kids?" No, discernment – no, discernment is very good. In this culture we call it judgmentalism; you're very judgmental. Yes. Yes I am. I am judgmental, particularly of the people of God.

Paul says to the Corinthians, stop thinking like children, and make a right judgment. We have to make judgments. We can't let everybody teach and spout their opinion like some big, mushy democracy. But, the Kingdom of God is a benevolent dictatorship; God speaks, we obey. God doesn't speak and then we vote and negotiate it. That's not how it works. Because of that, he tells these people, "You have got to be more discerning. You let this person come in and teach and lead a Bible study, and lead worship, and teach the kids, and write curriculum, and do all this nonsense, but here's the deal; it's in the legacy of Balaam, one of the most famous false prophets of the Old Testament who led God's people astray. And I'll tell you what. Theology does lead the biography. What you believe does implicate how you live. Here he says you've let in false teachers, weirdoes, nut jobs, and now you're all perverts.

You'll notice that wherever heresy comes, sexual sin quickly follows. You see, when we worship the real God, we're humbled and we're repentant. When we worship a false God with false teaching, it elevates people and it reduces God, and then people invariably chase their base worst nature; they chase their sin and they become perverted. That's what's happened in this church; bad Bible teachers and sexual perversion. It matters who you listen to. It matters what books you read. It matters what teachers you sit under. You've got to be judging and discerning. He goes on to say you'd better deal with them, otherwise, I'm going to come and I'll deal with them myself. The church is given an opportunity to clean up its mess, and the leaders in the

church are particularly held accountable for that, and if not, Jesus will come and he will deal with them harshly.

Verse 17, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna." That's what sustained God's people in the wilderness. "I will also give him a white stone," – that's a ticket to Heaven, literally – "with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it." "You get to go to Heaven. You get to eat with me." You get your ticket with your new name on it, because you're a new creation in Christ. You see, when we become Christians, we're not just cleaning up who we are, we're becoming someone else. Paul says old things passed away. All things are becoming new. We're different people – new creations. Because of that we often get different names. Abram becomes Abraham. Cephas becomes Peter. Saul becomes Paul. You and I become Christians, which means little Christ. You get a new name because you're a new person with a new heart.

He goes on, to the church of Thyatira. This church is also a good and bad church. "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." The picture of Jesus is this enduring foundation. I told you last week, bronze is the enduring strength of iron mixed with the enduring nature of copper. That's bronze. Jesus is immovable, impenetrable, and enduring. And then his eyes are like blazing fire. He doesn't look at you, he looks in you, he looks through you. Jesus sees, knows everything; your motives, your intentions, your deeds, your words, your thoughts, your dreams, your fears. Jesus knows it all. That's the picture of Jesus. Here's the encouragement. "I know your deeds, your love," – this is a nice church. They give you a muffin and a hug. They should swap some people with the Ephesians. "Your service," – everybody works hard and has a job description. Everybody who comes to church actually is doing something. No consumers. No observers. All participants. "And your perseverance and now you're doing more than you did at first." Ministries are growing. Church is growing. Things are going good. Looks pretty good.

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel," – okay, that's not good. If you have a daughter, don't name her Jezebel. If you have a son, don't name him Judas. Don't. Jezebel is one of the classic whores of the Old Testament. – "Did he say whore?" "Yes he said whore." – She's one of the classic whores of the Old Testament. Jezebel was a woman who – she was married to a king. She was a politically active woman. She had 900 false prophets. False prophets, by the way, you always know who they are because you like what they have to say. The real prophets all get killed. The false prophets all get dental plans. That's how it works. People love the false prophets, because the false prophets tell you what you want to hear. Basically, the false prophet will come and say, "What would you like God to think?" "I wish God thinks this." "Well, I'll tell you what. That's what he thinks." "Well, great. You get a raise. You're brilliant. You get to be on Oprah. You're a genius." The real prophets come and we murder them because they tell us that we stink and they want us to repent.

Jezebel had 900 false prophets who would all speak lies. And she was a sexually loose, immoral woman who led God's people into idolatry and to sexual perversion. It doesn't just take a guy to ruin a church. A woman can do it too. Satan is equal opportunity in that way. In this event, there is a woman who's working in the spirit of Jezebel. Jezebel's long since dead, but apparently, this woman is like one of her kids – one of her daughters. Some woman who's risen up in the church, she's sort of nominated herself to be very important. She called a meeting. She showed up. She voted. It was unanimous; one to nothing. She's very important, kind of like that move The Apostle, where the guy baptizes himself, she does that and decides she's gonna get everybody together and they're all gonna be heretics and have sex. It happens. "She calls herself a prophetess." You notice God doesn't, but she does.

"By her teachings, she misleads my servants into sexual immorality," – Ladies, I'm telling you right now, keep your theology straight, otherwise, you're gonna create a lot of trouble for me, all right. Amen. "And the eating of food sacrificed to idols." "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." God says, "I'm waiting. I've been nice and gracious and kind. I keep telling this woman, stop being a heretic and keep your skirt on," but not gonna do it. "So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of their ways. I will strike her children," – those are her followers – "dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

Is sexual immorality a problem in the church? Yes. It is. Leaders in the church that are sexually impure and perverted are great dangers to the overall health of the church. I have gotten a long list of calls over my seven years of tenure at this church, from young pastors who've committed adultery. I know of a few churches, even in the Seattle area, where the pastors have a wife and a girlfriend, and the church knows it and won't do anything, because the people are doing the exact same thing. If you ever wonder why some churches have terrible leadership, it's because the people are terrible people, and they want someone who won't meddle in their affairs, so they elect someone just like them. That's what's going on at this church in Thyatira. Everybody's nice, hard working, loving, non-judgmental, tolerant, perverted, heretical, and adulterous. And they mutually agree to not get into one another's business. There's a propensity in the church, if we are sinning, to allow others to sin as well, rather than repenting and then encouraging others to do as well.

So, he speaks then, here's the command. It's very serious. "Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets," – these people pretend to have special insight – "(I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations," – he quotes Psalm 2:4, "He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery. Just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." It's this – he says you need to overcome your temptations. And I know some of you have friends who claim to be Christians and you're single, and they're single, and they're looking at pornography, and they're messing around with their boyfriend or girlfriend. They're saying they're going to get married. They say they really love each other. I know some of you flirt with co-workers. Some of you flirt with other people. Some of you flirt with other people in the church. Overcome that. It's very important that you overcome that.

The church here has gotten to this propensity of saying, "Well, that's what they're doing. We can yield to that and give into that, and we could participate in that." Jesus is saying, "No, you need to overcome that. You need to resist that." Many of you have come from bad churches, be they legalists, or fundamentalists, or liberals; whatever it might be, and there's a propensity for you to excuse and blame a lot of your conduct on the church tradition from which you come. "Well, I'm this way because I came from this. It's either part of my DNA, or I've rebelled against it. I've either accepted it or rejected it." And Jesus is saying, "No, whatever your tradition is, you need to overcome that and walk with me – walk with me." When sexuality creeps into a church in a perverted way, it ruins the brother/sister relationship that the New Testament talks of, where men and women can love each other without it being sexual. It can be familial and kind and tender and gracious. And when it's not that way, everything gets inverted and the families get destroyed and the perversion runs consistent and deep, and it is a cancer that gets into a church. And like Paul says elsewhere, all it takes is somebody's yeast to get into this loaf. The next thing you know, everybody's infected.

The next church is Sardis, the fifth church. Chapter 3. Sardis stinks. Does that bother you that Jesus has not a kind thing to say about this church? Some of you are the eternal optimist. "Well, they could be worse." Everyone could be worse. Everything could be worse. There are terrible churches. There are terrible denominations of churches. There are churches and denominations that Jesus has nothing nice to say to them, about them. You and I need not be defenders of Christianity. I'll say that clearly. We need to be defenders of Jesus. And sometimes, Christianity does things that are inconsistent with Jesus. Somebody says, "Well, I went to this church and they all stink." Maybe so. You think you're upset, how would you like to be God? They're waving his flag. What about the Crusades? What about the Salem Witch Trials? Yeah. That's wrong. Just because people claim to be Christians, even if they were Christians, doesn't mean we need to defend them. It is okay for us to say, "That was a sin. That is wrong. We don't defend the church. We defend Jesus." The church is filled with sinners who are works in progress. Jesus Christ is perfect God. If you want to spend your time looking at somebody, look at him. He's not done with us yet. We're still a work in progress.

This is a terrible church, and I know you're not supposed to say this, but the fact of the matter is, we live in a city with some terrible churches. We live in a country, in a world with some terrible churches. Three-and-a-half thousand churches die and close every year in the United States of America. Some people say, "That's terrible." No, it's not. It's God saying, "No more – no more." Personally, I know a few pastors that are either pedophiles or permitting pedophiles to operate in their church. Should the church be shut down? Yes. Because it's sick and it dishonors God, and there's nothing good to say. And we don't want to play plank-speck and run around saying we're the good guys, they're the bad guys, but there's certain things you just go, "You know what. Either that changes or the whole thing should just be laid to rest because it's doing more harm than good. It's damaging more people than it's helping, and it's just wrong." There is no perfect church, but there are good churches and there are bad churches. Sardis is a bad church.

Here's what he has to say, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write," – Chapter 3, Verse 1 – "These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." He rules over the angels. He rules over the demons. That Jesus is in ultimate control. "I know your deeds;" – there's no encouragement. He runs right to the rebuke – "you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." Jesus says, "I heard this nasty rumor. This nasty rumor got out that you guys were alive. There's this terrible, half-truth floating around that you're Christians. I just came here to clear it up. I want to get everything straight. You're not Christians, and you're terrible, and I'm sick of you." "Well, what about the nice things? You said nice things about all the other churches." "Not you. Not you. Nothing nice to say."

You say, "Well, that's terrible. Everybody needs encouragement." Nope. No, not really. Some people need to stop. Other people need to die. Some people need to be encouraged. You start with encouragement. That doesn't work. You stop them. That doesn't work. Jesus just kills them. Does that bother you? I think it's beautiful. I seriously do. If you claim to love Jesus, and you're ruining people's lives and devastating families, and messing around with kids, and pilfering the money, be told to stop. You don't stop, be forced to stop. You don't stop, well, stand before Jesus and give an account. The church is the people of God, and the people that run the church don't run the church, it's Jesus who runs the church. That's why every single letter starts with a picture of Jesus. You guys got to look at Jesus and then live your lives. You can't look to one another and your leadership, because occasionally your leadership gets astray, particularly in sick churches like this. They have a reputation of being alive. Maybe they have post cards and those silly reader boards outside that, you know, they're giving the illusion that stuff's happening. It's not.

I go to Pastor's Conference and hear this all the time. "What are you guys doing?" "Da- da- da- da- da- da- da-." I know they're not doing anything – some churches rock, and they're doing great. Some churches aren't doing anything, and the pastors will use big words like, "Well, you know, the Lord is really doing stuff." No, he's not. Is anybody coming to Christ? Are any lives being transformed? Are any families getting put back – is anything happening? I don't know about you, I think it is important for us as a church, not just to investigate ourselves by our doctrine – we need to investigate ourselves by our doctrine, but also by our fruit. Is anything happening? That's the problem he's got here. Nothing's happening at this church. He says, "Wake up!" It's like everybody's taking a nap. "Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore," – here's the command – "what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent."

A number of these churches are told to repent. I know it's not a popular word. I know that people don't like to be told to repent. "I'm not wrong; I'm misguided." "I'm not evil; I'm misunderstood." "I don't need to repent; I need more love." And sometimes, the most loving thing that someone could do is be honest, and say, "That is wrong, and it needs to stop. It dishonors God, it leads to death, it's hurting others, and it needs to stop." "I thought you loved me?" "I do love you. Sin leads to death, and I'm trying to save you from running headlong into chaos and the fist of God." He says repent. Stop. "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you." Patience with God does not last forever. "Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The blotting out there, it seems like you're born, your name goes in a book, and if you don't repent of sin and trust in Jesus, your name gets blotted out and you don't make into the Kingdom.

But, he says this – I find a word of encouragement in it. This is a terrible church. Are there a few people that still love Jesus? There are. That's why you and I need to be so careful with passing judgment on other churches. In those churches, there are brothers and sisters – even if they're terrible churches – that love Jesus. And often times, God has them in those places, trying to bring about change and to fix the mess, okay. Some of you are at the 5:00 service because in the morning, you go to one of those churches. Your church is dead and it stinks, and nobody loves Jesus. And you come here because you go there in the morning to serve, and you come here to worship. Welcome to Mars Hill. I'm glad to have you. We'll be praying that God uses you in that church so that some life can come.

You know, I remember a few years ago, I was on a consulting gig with one of the largest denominations in the country, and they brought me in, they said, "We want you to fly out, and we're gonna pay you good money, and you're gonna talk to all of our leaders and you're gonna tell them how to bring young people to their church," right. Okay. Whatever. Fly out. The first thing they said is, "Okay, how do you get young people to come?" I said, "who's Jesus?" "Who's Jesus?" They all looked me like, "Hmm. Trick question?" No tricks. Just want to know that we're on the same team, right. They said, "Well, what do you mean?" Just, you know, I say Jesus, you say anything. We're gonna play this game. I said, okay Jesus. What do you think? Word association – anything you want. And I remember the leaders from this denomination, they said, "Well, you know, Jesus is a tremendous teacher." Nope. He's a good teacher. He's also God. I want to hear that part. I want to hear that God part.

And I said do you believe that Jesus Christ is God, who lived without sin, died for sin, rose for sin, is coming again. That without him, there is no hope for our sin. One of the guys said, "Some of us," – leaders of the denomination. I said well, I can't tell you how to bring young people into your church. He said, "Why?" I said, do you believe that Jesus Christ is God and that you are not gonna get your sins forgiven apart from him? He looked at me – honestly. He was the head of the Evangelism department and he said, "I'm not sure." I said well, I tell you what. I'm not gonna tell you anything about how to get young people to come to your church, because if you're going to Hell, I want you to have a small following; a little, tiny, itty-bitty group.

And I remember talking to this guy, and his whole thing was, "Well, I want the church to grow." I said no. I don't – you know what. If you see Jesus, the church grows. That's the whole key here to Revelation. Jesus and then the church. Jesus says, "If you lift me up, I'll draw everybody to me." You know how you get a lot of people; young people, old people, any people. Jesus loves people. People love Jesus. That's the big shocking secret. It's not a huge secret, but it's so often missed by dead churches that don't do anything. By dead churches that are compromised. By dead churches that don't teach the Bible, and a lot of false teachers, and sin, and heretics, and whatever. And they're saying, "Golly, we're not really coalescing into an enormous movement. How are we gonna get more people?" Well, maybe if you got saved, things would kick in. You know, you'd get a little momentum. Take that two-wheel drive out of the snow bank and get going somewhere.

And in some of these churches – I got done with the meeting. I was so frustrated, I quit. I quit the deal. I said this is not gonna work. And the guy pulled me aside afterward, who brought me in – he was a friend of mine. He's a guy who loves Jesus. He's a really good guy. I said why in the world did you bring me to do this gig? This is terrible. This is like lunch with Judas. He said, "I know. It's terrible." He said, "The people that run the Evangelism for the denomination," I said I don't even think they're Christians. And he said, "I was hoping maybe they'd listen to you. They don't listen to me."

You know what, that's like these guys in Sardis. Here's one guy dressed in white, loved Jesus, working hard trying to fix the mess. Hanging in there. And so, even now, people say, "What do you think about this group?" I say you know what, there's some terrible churches in there, and there's some whack-job things, but there's some people in there that love Jesus and are trying to turn it around. That denomination – he told me – has over a billion dollars in law suits against its pastors for sexual misconduct. You know even bad church have people who love Jesus and are trying to turn it around. You and I need to be very careful from judging whole groups, and we need to get to know brothers and sisters, and see where they're at. You never know. There's a lot of people who love Jesus, that they know they're in terrible places, and they're there because they're trying to fix it.

Here's the other church, Philadelphia. This is a great church; city of brotherly love, home of Rocky Balboa, and a tremendous sandwich. The church of Philadelphia. "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write," – this is a great church. He has no rebuke; just kind things. "These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David." – he's a King – "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." Jesus is absolutely in charge. He's the King. He's the ruler. He's holy. He's faithful. He's true. And he has given this church an opportunity. He's opened a door in this city that no one could shut. Here's the encouragement, "I know your deeds." It was a hard working church. "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

Guys, do you think Seattle's been opened up to us? You think God's opened a door here? He totally has. I don't know what we are – 1,500 today, 1,600 today. You know what; this is the least church city in the United States of America. This is the least likely place that a young man would go to church in the whole country. I say this all the time; if you're a young man and you're here, you're a miracle. It didn't take much, but you're a miracle. This is a place where all the big churches and all the book stores are in the suburbs surrounding the city, which is great. Praise God. People are worshipping Jesus. I'm all for it. But, the city itself is kind of hard packed soil. And God has opened a door for us that no one can shut. And he speaks to this church. He says, "I'm giving you Philadelphia." I pray God gives us Seattle.

He goes on to say, "I know that you have little strength," – they're tired. How many of you have been here at the church for a long time, serving faithfully? Getting a little burned out; a little tired, right. That's what happens in a church when God opens a door and the church starts growing and everybody's serving, those faithful people, man, they can get a little tired. That's why everybody needs to do their part and chip in. It says, "Yet you have kept my word," – you still love me and you're hanging in there, even though you're tired. "And have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to

come upon the whole earth to test those who live on the earth." This is a good church that's growing. And because of that, jealous people and false teachers and stuff start criticizing that church.

You know what? We're gonna get criticisms. We're gonna. It's okay. We need to be gracious and kind and loving. And somebody said recently, "We're only growing because you're taking all the Christians from the other churches." Where? Like, yeah. Like you guys were all like committed Baptists last week. You know – I mean – what I'm saying – it's like most of you haven't been to church in years. Many of you aren't even Christians yet. You don't even know why you're here. You're here because God loves you and he's gonna get a hold of you. Many of you were in church and you went to one of these bad churches, and you haven't been in years, and every time you hear "church," you get a twitch like a Nam Vet with flashbacks. It wasn't a great experience. You know what? People will say all kinds of things. Jesus says here, "Don't worry about that. Stay on the mission. Keep loving people. Keep saying the truth. Keep walking with me. And you know what? Eventually, things will turn around, people will acknowledge that I love you, and I'm working with you, and I'm for you, and that you love me."

You know what? We don't need to defend ourselves. We don't need to argue and fight. We don't need – we just need to love people and teach Jesus, and stay on course, and invariably, people will have to come around and say, "You know what? I think Jesus does love you guys, even though you're weird and your pastor's unattractive, and things aren't like they should be." That's okay. Praise the Lord. And it's been interesting, in the history of the church – when we started, we got a lot of criticism. Now, as we grow, that's starting to happen; people who initially criticized us say, "Well, you guys love Jesus don't you, and you preach the Bible." Yeah, we're not nearly as weird as it seems. We're kind of old school, really. Everybody thinks we're one thing, then they come and they're like, "We just yell at them and sing. It's not that big of a deal." I know. No need to complicate it. What, do you want me to dance or something? I mean come on, what are we gonna do? We're gonna – Jesus is gonna yell at us, we're gonna repent, and then we're gonna take communion, and we're gonna take your money, and we're gonna sing and be happy, and go home and stop whatever it is we were doing before we got here. Anything else? No, that's enough. And let people say what they want to say. That's okay. That's okay.

No rebuke. Here's what he says, "I am coming soon." – Verse 11 – "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem," – can't wait to move in there – "which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What Jesus is saying is this; you're work's never done. Philadelphia, you're doing great. I know you're a little tired; people are old, sort of complaining from the outside because they're all a little jealous and a little unhappy or critical, whatever. Here's the deal, though. Just keep going – keep going 'till when? 'Till you get to the New Jerusalem. The work's never done. Keep going. Keep going. Keep going. My fear is with us as a church, some of you are gonna think we're done. We're not done. We're never done. Jesus comes back or we die. That's the finish line, and then we get the crown of life. Until then, love, serve, follow Jesus. Keep on going.

The last church stinks. I wish I could end on an up note. It's supposed to be like a band. You know, they always save the best song for last – the big rousing finale. This is sort of [blows raspberry] – it's just sort of – I would have liked to have ended with Philadelphia, but I have to teach your Bible in the order that it comes. So here comes the worst church of all, really. So, if you're not depressed, this'll do it. Here we go. Verse 14, "To the Church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen," – got to thank you – "The faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Jesus is the Amen. He is the image of the invisible God, Paul tells us, that he is the exact God, come to earth. That he is the Amen. He is the echo of the Father.

Here is the deal. He has nothing nice to say about this church, just bad things. "I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold." Hot and cold is good; lukewarm is bad. This is the lukewarm church. Hot's good, because when it's like this; it's a crisp fall day, hot chocolate – mm-mm, num – nobody says lukewarm chocolate, because then the marshmallows don't disintegrate, and it's wicked, really. It's awful. Hot tea. Hot coffee. Hot apple cider with caramel; Praise the Lord. Hot. We like hot. It's a cold day; hot bath with your wife. You like hot. Now, cold – we like cold; hot day, cold shower. Cold water. Cold iced tea. Cold pop. Cold river. Cold lake. Cold good. Lukewarm – it's really not good for anything. Can't make tea. Can't get refreshed. Lukewarm water's terrible. Can't do anything with it. It's sort of useless, worthless. Lukewarm water. Toilet water is lukewarm. You see where this is going.

"So," – Verse 16 – "because you are lukewarm," – toilet water, to paraphrase – "neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Okay, now there is a doctrine that some churches teach that there are two kinds of Christians: lukewarm and hot. I will tell you this. There is one kind of Christian: hot.

Response: Amen.

You are either hot or sinning; not lukewarm. You're either zealous for God, or distasteful to him. Some of you say, "Well, I don't like that." That tells you you're neither hot nor cold. You're lukewarm. And Jesus gets to the point where he's just like, "I'm just sick of this indifference, ambivalence; I'm tired of it." How many of you really like to be in a relationship that is lukewarm? Come home to your wife, "How are you doing, Honey?" "Fine." Hug her, her arms – kiss – nothing – nothing. "We won the Lotto." "Great." "I got hit by a car." "Great." Just flat line on the EKG – no life at all. This is terrible. That's what Jesus is saying, "I love you. I'm trying to have a relationship here. I'm the living God. You, you're worthless. There's nothing there. You don't respond to me. You don't get happy. You don't get sad. You don't get committed. You're just nothing." And there's a season where he endures that, and then finally he just spits you out of his mouth.

"You say, 'I am rich;' – these are wealthy people – "I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." I have a great resume, a big car, a phat house, more degrees than Fahrenheit, nice resume. I'm very important. "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Naked means you don't even – you can't afford clothes. "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." You know what? This is a bad church. This is a terrible

church. Nobody cares. Do you care?

Response: Amen.

Response: Yeah.

Some of you care. Some of you are hot. Some of you work, serve, pray, give. The reason that we've gone as fast and as far as we have, is because of some of the most faithful people I've ever seen in my whole life. Some of you are dead weight that we're dragging up hill. You are. You are. Not helpful. Not zealous. These are the people who come to church, sometimes. Give, sometimes. Pray, sometimes. Read the Bible, sometimes. Serve, sometimes. Why? Because they don't care. And you say, "I care." You know, caring is what you do, not what you feel. Caring comes out. If you don't do anything you don't care. It's like me looking at my kids saying, "I love you." "Can you wrestle with me?" "No." "Can we have dinner?" "No." "Could you kiss me?" "No." "Could you pray for me?" "No." "Can you love me?" "No." "Why?" "Because, I don't care." Because caring is what you do. And when you're in relationship with Jesus, caring is what you do. If you don't care, it shows. And don't think that you're lack of maturity or consistency is because you're busy, or burned out, or – it's because you don't care. That's the painful reality. You and I do those things that we care about. There are things in your life that get done, because you care about them. There are other things that don't get done. Why? You don't care as much about them.

Jesus has nothing kind to say to these Christian. Jesus has nothing kind to say to this church. Nothing. Is there any hope? There's not any hope in this church, and there's not any hope in these people, but there is hope in Verse 19, "Those whom I, – what – "love," – well, there is your hope. Some of you are pathetic. You're not lovely, lovable, or loving, so where's your hope? You're loved. That's your hope. And that love will make you lovely, lovable, and loving. It's the love of God, the kindness of God, Paul says, that leads to repentance. God's nice until we change. That's God. He loves you. Why? It's the great mystery. It's the great mystery that God would love us. We're not very lovable, but he does. God loves you. He loves you dearly. He loves you sincerely. He loves you fully. He loves you completely. He loves you faithfully. He loves you unendingly. He does. Even those of you that are pathetic and lukewarm, especially those of you who are pathetic and lukewarm.

He goes on to say something else, "I rebuke and discipline." Some of you are saying today, "Well, I feel like this is a rebuke." It is, because of love. God loves you; he wants to get your attention so that he can turn things around for you. So, he says this, "be earnest, and repent." Be honest. Be honest. If you don't care, own that. If you don't serve, if you don't give, if you don't pray, if you don't read your Bible; own it. Just be honest. Be earnest. First thing; honesty. Second thing; repentance. That's what he says. Be honest. Here's where I'm at. And then bring that to God, ask him to change your heart, have him put his arms around you and straighten you out. That's the goodness of God. It says in Verse 20, this is the great evangelism verse that everybody's heard proof-texted, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

You heard that? "Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart today." No, actually this is a church that kicked out Jesus. That's what it is. It's not about people getting saved, it's about the church got together, had church, keeps locking the door. Jesus keeps showing up saying, "Hey! I'd like to go to church. I like church. I'm for church. I died for the church. I'm the head of the church. I'm coming again to save the church. This is my wife. Can I see her?" And the church says, "No. We've got it all figured out, and you're gonna ruin it. You're gonna ruin everything. The committee voted, we're not doing what the Bible says, and if you show up, you're gonna create all kinds of trouble. They crucified you the first time; we'll do it again. Don't come in here." How many churches, if Jesus showed up he wouldn't be welcome. It happens. There are some churches that Jesus is not welcomed at. As a church, we must listen to the Spirit and we must continually ask ourselves, "Are we a place that is inviting to Jesus? That we are glad that Jesus is with us. Are we wanting Jesus to be here?" Jesus says, "If you repent, I'll have dinner with you. I love you. I'll be your friend, but don't think you can do church and life, and faith without me."

"To him who overcomes," this propensity for this terrible evil, "I will give them the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." You're kidding me. Jesus is willing to take rebellious, sinful, lukewarm, worthless, lying people, beat on the door of a church until they finally let him in, and when he does, he'll love and change them, and then he's gonna take them into his Kingdom and he's gonna enable them to sit on a throne. Yep. See, we believe in grace. We believe that God saves by grace, and God changes and transforms us by grace. And we can start pretty pathetic, but once we meet Jesus, everything changes. It truly does.

Mars Hill, if Jesus were to write a letter to us, what do you think it'll read like? It's all great to do all this historical study. We could look around and say, "Yeah, heretics, compromised, perverts, suffering, faithful, good church, bad church, duck-duck-damn." We can do that. Let's just do a little analysis. Worship is what we are as a community. Worship is the sum total of how we live our lives together. Worship includes the singing of our songs. It also includes the living of our lives. It's what we do. From the glories of the exalted Christ in Revelation 1, to the glories of the exalted Christ in Revelation 4, in the middle sits the church in Revelation 2 and 3, which is mixed bag of good and bad, and has a lot of earnestness that needs to investigate itself so that it can become that community that is able to join the angels in the worship of God, because they've repented.

Do you think Jesus would commend us or rebuke us for our doctrine? What do you think, Mars Hill? I think he'd commend us. We are a Bible believing, Bible teaching church – period. Being heretics, that's not my greatest concern. We love Jesus. We teach the Bible. You as a congregation sit through an hour of Bible teaching every week. Doctrine's not the biggest concern that I have. I don't think it's a big problem. I think we're – nobody's perfect, but I think honestly, we're a good Bible teaching doctrinal church. How about our work; our deeds? Do we serve hard? Work hard? Get stuff done? Accomplish things as a church? Yes or no? Yes, we do. A lot gets done.

We've been in seven locations. Growing like crazy. Things are going well. Now, not everybody's serving. Not everybody's faithful. But, as a church, there's a lot that gets done here, quite frankly, especially for the size of staff that we have. How about our perseverance? Have we hung in there when times are hard? Buildings were lean? Money was tight? Things weren't getting done? Did we hang in there? You guys have hung in there. Here we sit. I think Jesus would reveal himself to us as the chief shepherd, the senior pastor of 1 Peter 5. I believe that he would encourage us that we have good doctrine, and we have hard working people, and things are going pretty good, and we're doing more than we did at first, by a lot. You think about it. What do you think he'd rebuke us for? What do you think?

Response: Being immature.

An immaturity. There is a propensity in this room for us to think that because we're young – we're new Christians, we're college students, we're singles, we're young marrieds, we're starting our families, starting our career; not everyone in here is young, but many of you are – there is a propensity to wrongly correlate age and maturity, and thereby, excuse immaturity because of youthfulness. Age and maturity are not necessarily related. You could be old and very immature. You could be young and very mature. You are the church. There is no other group of people out there that are gonna pay the bills. There's no other group of people out there that are gonna pray in the converts. There's no other group of people out there that are gonna do the work of service and be the kingdom of priests. There's no other group of people out there that are going to fill the gaps and get things done, and continue walking through the open door that God has given us in Seattle. You are the church. Mars Hill is your church. It belongs to Jesus, and it's under our jurisdiction and responsibility to tend to. But, because of a youthfulness, there is this belief that somehow someone else, especially when there's this many people in the room, will take care of it. Someone else, whoever this invisible other person is. And for those of you who are young to say, "Well, things are going great. Bills are paid. We're rocking and rolling. Things are awesome. We're growing. We're a good church. I know the Bible. I'm learning about Jesus. Yeah, I need to grow up and become more consistent and mature, but I'm young. And you know what? I'll get there someday." Jesus' word to you as Mars Hill would simply be this: today. Today. Maturity consistency is more about a want to than a how to. If you want to, you'll figure out how to be faithful and mature. And we can do how to all day, and if you don't want to, how to doesn't really matter. I love you guys. I'm privileged to be your church. I'm proud of what we've accomplished. I'm excited that we get to actually investigate ourselves.

We're gonna call you to repentance. The Spirit of God has spoken to you today. You need to hear from him. Whatever it is, maybe it's an encouragement. You're doing good. You need to be excited. Maybe you got some stuff that's out of order and you need to repent. Maybe God's given you a command and you've been disobeying him and it's time to get straight. We're gonna call you to respond though the partaking of communion, which is remembering Jesus' body and blood, shed for our sin. We're gonna sing songs to Jesus, and we're gonna see him as our exalted and great God who loves us and is here with us, walking among the church today to meet with each of you, and to meet with us. And we're gonna commit ourselves as a congregation to continuing in the things that he has given us, because we're never done. And though we are young, we are the people that he has chosen to do the work of ministry here in Seattle. And so we must do it, whether or not we feel up to the task. His grace is sufficient. His power's made perfect in weakness.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for this church. I thank you for the church of Mars Hill and the city of Seattle. I pray that, Lord God, as the musicians come forward and the communion servers come forward that, Lord God, we would commit ourselves to taking your words to heart and hearing what the Spirit has to say to this church. Lord, we thank you that you have protected us from false teachers, even when many have tried to infiltrate, that you have protected us from widespread sexual misconduct, even though we're a young congregation. But God, there's always sin and there's always error. We pray for a purifying and cleansing in our midst, and we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit, Lord God, to open our ears that we might hear. For those of us, Lord God, that are suffering, we thank you that you encourage us to continue.

For those of us that are serving faithfully, and feeling tired, we thank you that you encourage us by telling us that our work is not in vain. Lord God, for those of us who are sexually immoral or impure, for those of us who are heretical, or reading the wrong books, or elevating the wrong teachers, or getting off on the wrong doctrines, we thank you for loving us, and disciplining us, and rebuking us. And God, for those of us who are lukewarm, we thank you that our hope is in you. That you love us and that today you have extended your hand. And I pray that by grace, we may receive it, those of us who have not. That, Lord God, we would love you and we would do business with you, and we would not leave here until we are able to hear well done, good and faithful servant as our report card. Amen.