

Jesus Among The Churches

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[0 : 00] Well, as you know, we're going to spend the summer months meditating on Revelation 2 and 3, and whether we just continue on in this book after that, I don't know yet. We'll see how the Lord leads.

But what we find in chapters 2 and 3 are John's record of seven messages that Jesus sends to seven first century churches.

Before we ever zoom in to really think about the details of each of these messages, we need to see the bigger picture of the setting and structure of this book.

We really need to see how they fit in the very unique New Testament book of Revelation, and we need to understand why these addresses remain relevant to the church today, because they are. They are addressed to seven historic churches, but that doesn't mean that they are irrelevant to us. So that's really our goal for today. We want to see the setting and the structure of these first three chapters of the book of Revelation.

[1 : 08] So let's think about the book as a whole for just a moment. The book of Revelation stands out because it is unique. It is so unique that there are many Christians who obsess over it, that you will be familiar with them.

This becomes a very divisive book for many people. They have their positions that they cling to at all costs, some even making it a point of fellowship with other believers, which is absurd when you think about it from that perspective.

It is a popular book in that sense. It is a book that some of us may be afraid of because of that. But it is a unique book, and I want to explain why. Let me just kind of set the tone of the genre of this book for you.

You know, in the Bible, we have narrative books. We have letters, epistles. Here's what Revelation is. It stands out in this way. It is an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter.

It's an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter. Let me explain what that means. It comes, all of these words come directly from chapter one.

[2 : 13] First, it's an apocalypse. Look at verse one, chapter one, the revelation of Jesus Christ. What's translated in English as revelation is the literal word apocalypse.

The apocalypse of Jesus Christ is how we might refer to it. An apocalypse is something that typically concerns itself with what takes place at the end of history.

So we're looking at the consummation of history and of the kingdom of God, the establishment and return of Jesus Christ. What will happen at the very end, okay?

Second, it's a prophecy. So if an apocalypse concerns itself with what happens at the end of history, prophecy concerns itself with events in the flow of history leading up to that end, okay?

We get this from verse three. John says, blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. So it is an apocalyptic prophecy that is telling us about the end and the events in the flow of history that lead up to the end.

[3 : 23] And then thirdly, it is a circular letter. This is the form that it takes, the written form it takes. So verse 11, we just read it. Write what you see in a book. Send it to the seven churches.

And I have a map here for you to see because we're going to deal with these seven churches so much. I don't know if you can see that very well. When we say circular letter, we're really referring to a circular path that a messenger would have carried this letter.

And so it starts here in Ephesus. You'll notice this is the order in which the sermons are laid out in chapter two and three. It starts in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum. Then it begins to work its way back around.

Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. This is most likely the route that whatever messenger is carrying this letter from John takes in the process of distributing this to the seven churches that are mentioned here.

And so it's a circular letter. It's a letter, letter form, but it is an apocalyptic prophecy. So what does all of that mean? Here's what it means as we come to the book.

[4 : 25] Revelation intends to unveil Jesus' return at the end of time. The end of time, he's going to judge all that is evil, and he's going to establish the new heavens and the new earth for his people.

Okay? It foretells historic events that lead to the return of King Jesus. Some events that await the future.

Some events that have already happened at least in our past, but are recorded here in the future in the first century, in the future tense. And then it instructs the church to persevere in faith and obedience until the king returns for his bride.

That's essentially what this book is about. Jesus is coming back. When he returns, he is going to judge all evil, and he is going to set up his kingdom.

And in the intermediate time between now and that return, there is a war raging, a spiritual war, between the serpent in the garden, Satan, and the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ.

[5 : 37] And we're going to see great tribulation. We're going to see great hardship, even for Christ's people, all leading up to his return when he returns to get his bride. And so in the process of this, Revelation instructs the church.

This is how we are to persevere in faith and in obedience so that we may conquer. And of course, there's lots of images used throughout the book, but that will suffice for us for now.

Now, I want to suggest that the sermons to the seven churches in chapter 2 and 3 present somewhat of a key to unlocking the meaning and purpose of the rest of the book.

And as we examine them, we need to keep in mind that they are preceded by this magnificent vision of the risen Christ. And then they are immediately followed by a series of images reflecting the power of Christ in judgment and in salvation.

Jesus' words to the churches include his desires and his promises for his people as they navigate this spiritual war that begins to unfold here.

[6 : 49] And even the structure of each message reflects the overall theme of the book. Jim Hamilton says the opening words of each message in chapters 2 and 3 point us back to chapter 1.

They do that with those opening Christ titles. When Jesus says who he is, he gives a description of himself that John then uses in chapter 1 in this vision.

So it's pointing us back to chapter 1, the person of Christ. The contents of each message signify what will be described in chapters 4 through 20.

That's this tremendous war, this tribulation, this hardship. And then the conclusion of each message promises blessings that the faithful enjoy in chapters 20 to 22 in the new heavens and the new earth.

Of course, before we can ever rightly understand the messages to the churches, we need to carefully consider what John has to say about this vision in chapter 1. Like I said, it's an amazing description of the glory of the risen Lord.

[7 : 53] Along with this exchange between him and John, it really is fundamental to everything that we read in the subsequent chapters. Who Christ is matters.

So that revelation is not merely the unveiling of an event. Revelation is the unveiling of a person. The person of Christ in all of his exalted glory and power.

It is an unveiling of Jesus from verse 1 all the way to the end of chapter 22. This is about Jesus and nothing else. That's why we begin our study here.

And so before we get into this setting though of verses 9 through 20, let's just talk about the structure of chapters 2 and 3 for just a moment, okay? So let's look at the structure here.

Three structural notes that I want to point out to you. First, these are sermons, not letters. Sermons, not letters. We typically refer to them as letters.

[8 : 58] And so really what I'm dealing with is a proper classification of what these messages are in chapter 2 and 3. It's better for us to understand them as something more akin to what the prophets have to say in the Old Testament.

These various proclamations. Now, the difference between a letter and a sermon is not all that great. But in these messages, there is certainly this, thus says the Lord dynamic.

Do you remember in reading through the Old Testament prophets, whenever God would have a specific message for his people or for other nations even, through Isaiah or Jeremiah or a number of the other prophets, remember there was a specific message that they were to deliver. And they often began with, thus says the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord or the burden of the Lord. That's what the sense that we get here. As John is writing these, it has come directly from Jesus. And the opening statements of the messages have this, thus says the Lord. Hear the words of the one who was dead but is now alive. Hear the words of the one who has for a tongue a two-edged sword.

[10:09] So on and so forth. And what we see unfolding in this is that these are sermons. They are proclamations. Here, Jeffrey Weymus says it this way. He says it better than me.

The best option is to identify the seven messages as prophetic oracles. Messages delivered by an inspired prophet dealing with a specific situation that currently confronts the people of God.

A modern, more user-friendly designation for a prophetic oracle is sermon. So that's what we're going to call them, the seven sermons. Because that's what it is, isn't it? Isn't that what a sermon is Sunday by Sunday as I stand up?

It is delivering a message from the word of God to a particular people at a particular time in a particular situation. And that's exactly what these letters are.

They are sermons from Jesus to the churches. Second, let's think about the external structure here. So how these seven sermons fit together. Now remember, it's seven sermons addressed to specific churches, real churches in the first century.

[11:21] But together, they paint a picture of the condition of the whole church. And following Jesus' direction, I want to show you something that John does.

A literary device that is common to the Bible called a chiasm. Have you ever heard that term before? You know, okay, one person. Well, I'm going to enlighten you a little bit today.

I didn't know this either. But let me explain what a chiasm is. It comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like a capital X. Okay? Chi, not K-A-I, kids.

That's not the word I'm looking for on Thursday night. This is C-H-I, chi. It's a letter. Looks like a capital X. What a chiasm does is it's a literary device that starts at a broad point, narrows in, and then works its way back out to another broad point.

And it mirrors itself as it goes through. Now, I want to show you how John does this with these churches. You see, it starts with Ephesus and ends with Laodicea.

[12:25] Ephesus and Laodicea are akin to one another in that they have a similar problem. The lukewarmness of Laodicea is very similar to the loss of love in Ephesus.

Okay? Then we move one step in. Smyrna and Philadelphia. They're the only two churches who are not corrected. They're the only two healthy churches in this whole scenario.

And they mirror each other in the context of what John is writing. Then the three churches in the middle are very unhealthy churches, but they progress from bad to worse.

So we see Pergamum is beginning to give in to false doctrine. They're standing against some things. They're not committing sexual immorality yet. They're not going quite so far.

But they are giving in to false doctrines. Then we get to Thyatira. Not only are they committing themselves to false doctrines, but now they've taken a step forward, and they're incorporating the evil work, the sinful actions from this prophetess Jezebel.

[13:28] Then we go one step further in Sardis, and Jesus says, you have the reputation of being alive, but you're dead. So it goes false teaching, false teaching plus sinful works to completely dead.

They're on the last lifeline of support, and there's only a few people in the church that are even saved anymore. They're even saved at this point. And then it begins to work its way out. Now let me explain why this is so significant.

Again, recognizing the intentional structure of this is important because it emphasizes the universality of these sermons to all churches.

To all churches. This is not just about these seven churches in history. This is, they are representative of all churches, of the general condition of the church of Christ, and what we must do in persevering in faith and obedience with Him.

This is further supported by the constant refrain, as we read earlier, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches, plural.

[14:40] So as this is read to each church, it is clearly intended not just for them, it is intended for us all. And this chiasmic structure shows the overall condition of the church and Christ's concern that all of them be faithful and healthy.

And at the very heart of this chiasm is a statement of Christ's lordship over His church. The middle statement of the middle sermon says this, Revelation 2, 23, And all the churches will know that I am He who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

This is this significance in the literary device that John's using here. He starts in Ephesus, and He works all the way here. And when He gets here, Jesus says that all the churches may know that I am reigning over them.

That's the point. That's the main point. Listen to Him. Hear His words. He is Lord. We are His church.

His glory and power are at the very heart of these sermons. And it is to Jesus that we must cling in faith and in obedience. We must hear His judgments.

[16:03] We must repent of our sinfulness. We must conquer through faith. That's the point. So that's the external structure. Let's say a few things about the internal structure, and then we're going to get to chapter 1, okay?

The final structural note here has to do with how each sermon is shaped. They follow a particular pattern. And let me just give you, we're going to deal with this in great detail each week for the next eight weeks, but let me just give you kind of the categories here.

It always starts with the church's identity and a Christ title. And the Christ title always reflects something in the message itself.

Take, for instance, the church at Smyrna, which is the second church mentioned, chapter 2 and verse 8. The Christ title is the one who died and came back to life.

And this corresponds to His challenge for them to be faithful unto death and His promise that whoever conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

[17:06] So the sermons themselves, both the challenge of the sermons, the correction of the sermons, the promise of the sermons, are all rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.

That's significant, okay? That's how they begin. The next part is a commendation, complaint, and correction. If there's something good to say, Jesus says it. If there's something bad to say, Jesus says it.

If there's something to correct, Jesus corrects and calls them to repentance. And then the final category includes a statement of Christ coming. I will come.

Sometimes He's coming in the form of judgment. Sometimes He's coming in the form of rescue.

Depends on the nature of the message to the church. But He emphasizes His coming. He gives the conquering formula.

Whoever conquers, remains faithful through all of this, will receive the promise. And then there is a call for all to hear.

[18:05] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. All right. Are you still with me? You haven't reached those deep stages of anesthesia yet. All right. That's the structure.

Now let's get to the setting, okay? That's where we're going to get to chapter one. Three primary things I want to point out here. First, where John was. Where John was.

Look at verse nine. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

This is what marks the beginning of John's vision. And this vision is going to continue all the way to the end of the book. And what he does right here from the beginning is he identifies with his audience, these believers.

Notice he says that he is their brother. Recognizing the familial relationship that we all share in Christ. I, John, your brother in Christ.

[19:15] He is also their partner. That's the koinonia word I like to talk about so much. That's the word he's using here. He is their partner. And look what he's a partner in.

I am a partner in your tribulation and kingdom hope. These two things are also rooted in Christ.

And there's a sense in which John's opening greeting here sets the context of the entire book. As is made clear in Revelation and through the New Testament, the kingdom of Jesus is entered through

the patient endurance of suffering.

Of suffering. Of tribulation. Of hardship. Jesus said this in Matthew 24. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

That was a promise made from Jesus to his disciples. Acts chapter 14, verse 22. Paul was strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

[20 : 35] And we can hear John's words here, even at the very beginning, being informed by those conquering formulas of the seven sermons. There's a guarantee of hardship and tribulation for those of us who know Christ.

But there's also a promise. A promise of eternal salvation for all who patiently endure suffering through faith in Jesus Christ.

I'm your brother, and I'm your brother in tribulation, but also in kingdom hope and patient endurance. And how could John relate to them on this level?

Well, he tells us right here. I, John, your brother and partner in tribulation, the kingdom, patient endurance, was on the aisle called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

John was suffering in that moment because he had been exiled, banished by the Roman proconsul to the isle of Patmos. And we need to have the right idea of this.

[21 : 38] Patmos wasn't, it wasn't a prison. It wasn't a Lord of the Flies kind of situation here, as sometimes we picture it. Patmos was civilized. It actually had a small community on it.

It had a Roman garrison there. And what was happening here was not the same thing that was happening with Paul in Rome. John had been banished there. He had freedom on the island. He had community in some sense, in the fact that there were other people there on the island. And he was free there. He just couldn't leave. That was the significance of his banishment. Eventually, he would leave, but not before Jesus did this amazing thing in the Revelation.

So how is it that he's suffering then? If he has freedom and there's people there, and well, he's suffering physically due to his age. He's nearing a century years old at this point.

There's a rugged terrain there. He's suffering in that sense. He's suffering socially due to the dishonor of an honor-shame culture. He's been banished, publicly humiliated by the rulers in his area in Ephesus.

[22 : 44] He suffered emotionally due to being separated from fellow Christians and family. And all of it was as a result of his faithfulness to Jesus, preaching the gospel.

He says, I'm on Patmos and I'm there due to the word of God, due to the testimony of Jesus. That's why I'm here. That's why I've been banished. So I'm your partner in this.

I know what you're going through, John says. Now hear what I saw. Hear what I saw. Now then he says in verse 10, I was in the spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book.

Send it to the seven churches. So this marks the beginning of the vision here and it's going to continue all the way to the end. In the spirit is a phrase that's used four times in Revelation, each time marking a significant movement in John's vision.

And here, what John is about to see is an encounter with the risen Christ in all of his glory.

[23 : 53] So he hears the voice and then he turns. That's where John was. Now I want to show you what John saw or who John saw, excuse me, who John saw. Look at verse 12.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe, with a golden sash around his chest.

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.

His voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand, he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun, shining in full strength.

So as John turns around, the first thing he sees is seven golden lampstands, which verse 20, if you just look ahead, verse 20 goes on to tell us, represent the seven churches.

[25 : 00] The seven churches. Verse 20, as for the mystery of the seven stars, the seven golden lampstands, the seven lampstands are the seven churches. He also saw someone like a son of

man, a reference to Daniel chapter seven.

The son of man coming to the ancient of days to receive the kingdom. He's using the image of the Old Testament here. He says there was someone standing in the midst of the lampstands, like a son of man.

And in his right hand, John says, he was holding seven stars. Well, verse 20 tells us that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

Now the one in the midst of the leaven, of the, which, and by the way, the angels there I take to be the pastors of these churches. I don't take them to be actual angels. People disagree with me.

Believe what you want. I think they're the pastors. And we'll get into that each week as we go on. But the one in the midst of the lampstands is the one that we need to see. This is where the description is. It's Jesus.

[26 : 02] It's Jesus. And John begins to provide this amazing, amazing description of him. Like I said, it's informed by both images in the Old Testament.

And it's John using what Jesus says of himself in the seven sermons. He's going back at the beginning, writing after seeing that vision. And he's writing this description.

So it's not that what John is seeing is a man with Jesus standing in front of him. And he actually has a sword protruding out of his mouth. Or that his eyes are literally on fire.

That's not what John is seeing. He's describing Jesus in a particular way. And what he's describing of Jesus is his power and of his glory. And what we see John doing here at the very beginning is he is unfurling the divinity of Jesus Christ, the deity of Jesus.

Using language that the Bible reserves only for the Almighty God, John emphasizes that who he saw was Jesus, the sovereign Lord, who reigns over all time and space and matter.

[27 : 15] Jesus is God. And the events of this apocalypse are under his sovereign control. But notice where Jesus is in the vision.

This is so important. Notice where Jesus is standing in the vision. He is in the midst of the churches. And he's holding the angels of the churches in his right hand, his hand of power and control.

Now the significance of this is that before these churches can ever understand the sermons that Jesus sends, they must realize that Jesus is in their midst.

He stands among them. Just as his power and his glory are at the heart of the sermons, so is Jesus himself present with these churches.

He is ruling over them as the Almighty God. Jesus, the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God hears them.

[28 : 17] He knows them. He sees them. He diagnoses everything that is true of them. He knows the truth of their works.

And he knows the reality of their suffering. He is in the midst of his people. He stands among his churches.

So that when we get to this description of Jesus, we see two prominent themes of the New Testament coming to the surface here. First, he is Lord. And he is Lord of his church.

Meaning, we must submit to him. He is our authority. We obey him. We follow him.

We trust him. He is Lord of his church. So that when John begins to write these sermons from Jesus to the churches, sermons of correction, the only proper response for a church that calls itself by the name of Christ is to repent in the way that Jesus calls them to repent.

[29 : 25] Why? Because he is Lord. He's the risen Lord. But he's also Savior. He's Savior. Why is it so significant that Jesus stands in the midst of these churches when he's saying that they're about to go through a season of intense suffering?

He tells some of these churches, you're about to die. You're going to be killed. And when they look back at this chapter one, what is it that should bring them comfort?

The fact that their Savior is with them. He knows their suffering. He is with them through their suffering. And he maintains this wonderful promise that if they conquer in faith, they will receive eternal life.

And how will he know if they conquer in faith? Because he is with them. He is in their midst. I've taken tremendous comfort in this this week.

That our church is not just here. And Jesus is there. And we're just doing our best and trying our hardest.

[30 : 43] No, he is with us. He stands among us as a people. He knows us. He sees us.

He understands us. He's working in us. He is reproofing us. And he continues to issue his promise of grace to us as a people.

And then when I see that he holds these angels in his right hand, which I genuinely believe represent pastors, do you know how comforting it is to know? I am in his hand.

I am his. He is mine. Jesus. He is among his people. He is among his churches.

And we can take comfort in this. And we must obey. Finally, I want you to see what John heard. What John heard.

[31 : 45] Verse 17. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me. Saying, fear not.

I am the first and the last. And the living one. I died and behold, I'm alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades.

John responds to this vision the same way any sinner would respond to a vision being encountered with the risen Christ. He falls flat on his face thinking that he's about to die.

He understands. He's in the presence of God Almighty. This is the only proper response. But John's been in this situation before.

He's been here before. Flip in your Bibles to Matthew 17. Just quickly here. Matthew 17. The first thing that John hears is the same thing he hears in Matthew 17.

[32 : 45] He hears words of comfort. This is Matthew's account of the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain.

He's transfigured before them so that momentarily the veil of his humanness is lifted. And they see Jesus in his glorified state shining in front of them.

And he appears there with Moses and Elijah, representatives of the law and the prophets in the Old Testament. Jesus being the fulfillment of both things. And remember, Peter speaks up foolishly.

And he says, Jesus, oh, we can just stay here and we'll make a tent for you and a tent for Moses and a tent for Elijah. And then all of a sudden they're overwhelmed by the cloud of God's presence.

And a voice comes out of the cloud. God the Father saying, this is my beloved son. Listen to him. And then what do the disciples do? Verse 6.

[33 : 44] When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. So think about this. John's been here before. He's seen this vision of the, at least temporarily, of the glorified Christ.

And his response was the same. He hit the floor. He trembled before the Lord. He trembled before the voice that thunders like many waters. And then notice what happens.

Verse 7. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, rise, have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Now, go back to Revelation chapter 1. What happens with John here? Same thing that happens in Matthew 17. He hits the floor.

And what does Jesus do? He walks over and he puts his hand on him. And he says, John, fear not. Don't be afraid. And why does he tell him not to be afraid?

[34 : 44] Look at the verse again in verse 18. Or excuse me, verse 17. Fear not. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I died. And behold, I am alive forevermore.

I have the keys of death and Hades. You see, there are many people who, being encountered with the glory of the risen Christ, have no other way to see him except as a sovereign judge.

And they tremble in terror before him. That's what's going to happen at the end of this book. The wicked of this world, those who do not believe, will face the judgment and the wrath of the risen Lord.

And they will tremble in terror before they are cast into eternal fire in hell. But those who know Christ, they don't experience the terror. We don't see him as judge.

We see him as savior. And for those of us who know Christ, who trust in his name, Jesus lifts us up. And he says, fear not. I died for your sin.

[35 : 49] And I rose again for life evermore. I have the keys over death. I have the keys over hell. Do not be afraid. You are mine.

He hears comfort. The only comfort you could possibly have is the comfort that comes from the gospel of grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That he is the one who died but is now alive.

And he holds the keys to death and hell. And if you will trust him, he will lift you up. And you will hear the same words of comfort that John heard, which is fear not.

But if you do not trust him, and you will not follow him, and you follow your own path, and you seek your own way, you will not hear fear not. You will hear, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Depart from me into eternal death and hell. I never knew you. So he hears comfort. Then he hears commission. Look at verse 19.

[36 : 51] Write, therefore, the things that you have seen. Those that are, that are, and those that are to take place after this.

Now notice, it is on the basis of the vision of the Lord Jesus that John is to write this authoritative sermon.

He is Lord. He is God. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. The things that you have seen refers to this vision.

This vision of the risen Christ from chapter one. The things that are refer to the condition of the churches in chapters two and three. The things that are to take place after refers to the events recorded in chapters four through 22.

And John is to write all of it on the authority of the risen Christ. It is on the basis of the gospel that revelation finds its authority and its power.

[37 : 54] The gospel of Jesus. Write, therefore, because of who I am. Write what you see. Send it to the churches. Jim Hamilton, again, is so helpful.

He says, The incomparable glory of the risen Christ is meant to motivate John's audience to heed what John has been commissioned to write. The matchless splendor of heaven's king will attract the attention and compel the obedience of the churches John addresses.

The risen Christ in glory summons forth obedience from his churches. If you want a theme for Revelation two and three, it's that phrase.

The risen Christ in glory summons forth obedience from his churches. Jesus. Well, let's finish it here. Why are we going to study this?

Why take the whole summer to just think about two chapters in Revelation? Well, like I said, though the sermons of two and three were addressed to real historic congregations, they are representative of Jesus' message to all the churches.

[39 : 11] Their problems, as we will come to see, are our problems. Their promises, our promises. So what Jesus has to say to these seven churches, he has to say to the church at Lake Norman, so to speak.

I was told this has been probably six months ago. I was told that someone said that our church is destined to fail.

That was their words. Our church was destined to fail. And they had a few reasons for that. They couldn't understand why we would encourage family integrated worship.

They saw no way of how that could ever be successful in this particular culture. Remaining wholly committed to the word of God in everything that we believe and practice and promote and confront in our culture.

It didn't make a lot of sense to them. And their judgment at the end was, this will never last. It cannot make it. That's a distorted view of what the church is, for one.

[40 : 19] But fortunately, I find no cause for concern there. Because as I understand Revelation chapter 1, this is Jesus' church.

We are in his hand. He is in our midst. Which means that whether or not we success or fail, if those are even categories that are worth using, whether or not we remain or do not remain, is ultimately up to the Lord Jesus.

And whatever he decides to do with us. And to do with our church. He rules over his people. He walks in our midst. The only way this church can fail is if we stop listening to the words of Jesus. If we stop obeying his truth. And in the case of such rebellion, according to chapter 2 and verse 5, a failure is actually a judgment from his hand.

Not because we haven't followed the proper paths of church growth and methods. Now, it's also true that we will inevitably face tribulation in this life as individuals and as a church.

[41 : 35] We have loved ones like Beverly who is enduring this now. There will be times and seasons that our church goes through tremendous hardship and persecution from the community around us simply for the fact that we follow Christ and that we stand on his word.

It is coming. If it has not come already, it is going to come. It's a guarantee from the word of God. And what we need is for these sermons to remind us that Jesus is with us. That he has conquered for us. We need these sermons to teach us how to persevere. How to cast ourselves wholly on the risen Christ who died but is now alive. We don't need to fear death because he defeated it. We don't need to fear tribulation because he reigns over it. Finally, our greatest need is not a building. Though we are so thankful that there is an open door for us, it seems, at the school. And as we transition there, things are going to get a little easier for us, I think, on a week-by-week basis. [42 : 45] We're thankful for that. But that's not our greatest need. Our greatest need isn't finances, it's not better strategies, it's not more programs that would be attractive. Those aren't our greatest needs. our greatest need is to be faithful to Jesus, to hold fast to the gospel, to live lives that are pleasing and obedient to him. And what we have in these seven sermons to these seven churches is a message directly from Jesus as to what he wants and desires for us. It's his blueprint for a healthy church that conquers. And that's why we'll spend the next eight weeks studying this passage together. Well, that's whyNINGNING