

A Biblical View OF THE **END TIMES**

THE CHURCH IN HISTORY AND IN HEAVEN, PART 1

Week #24; June 21, 2026, 6PM

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Review:

- For the past few lessons, we've been hovering over a certain timeframe.
- It's that timeframe defined on the front end by the events and issues of the Rapture, and on the back end by our arrival in heaven.
- Within those bookends, we've had a few issues to consider: our glorified bodies, the specifics of the Rapture, our souls, our rewards in heaven, what happens when we die, and so on.
- Generally-speaking, I'm trying to move in this entire series from the start of the Bible to the end of the Bible.
- **Likewise**, I'm trying to follow a chronology with the details of Bible prophecy itself. For example, most of us will die BEFORE we get to heaven, the Rapture PRECEDES the Tribulation, we get to heaven and THEN we get our rewards, (etc.).
- But every now and then I need to pause, look around a bit, and bring a few other details up to speed. I'm doing that today.

NOTE: And so today, we're going to begin a quick review of the church in history and in heaven. This will not be a deep dive, but an overview. We'll have Part 1 of these issues this week, and Part 2 next week. Today, I want to look at:

A. The seven churches of Revelation (Cf. *Revelation*, chapters 2-3).

NOTE: These two chapters are a picture of the church age which began at Pentecost in **Act. Ch. 2**, and which continues in our present time. It is almost done. It will end at the Rapture.

1. Now - the book of **Revelation** mostly moves along a natural timeline, and this fact is reinforced several ways:
 - John is instructed in **Rev. 1:19** to *"...write the things that you saw, and the things that are, and the things that are about to take place after these."*
 - The things which John 'saw' are not only in the past, but the visions he is given in this book.
 - The things which 'are' refer to events that are contemporaneous to John's life. Those things are in HIS present time and perspective.
 - The *"things that are about to take place after these"* refer to matters that are ahead. They are future to John's life, and many of those things are still future to you and I too!

- In **Rev. 19:1**, the phrase *"after this"* (Greek: **'meta tauta'**) is intended to be a transitional marker. It shows structural and timing shifts in the various events of **Revelation**.
 - Here's another example of this. **Rev. 4:1** begins with the words, *"After this."* That means the events of the church age in **Chapters 2- 3** are followed by something else that takes place.
 - That is the Rapture. This is pictured when John sees a door standing open in heaven and he is instructed to *"Come up here."*
 - Then, after John is instructed to *"Come up here"* in this type or representation of the Rapture, he is told he will be shown *"...what will happen **after** these things."*
 - That means the things that John records in **Revelation Ch. 4** not only follow the church age, but they follow the Rapture.
 - It is all systematic. It's laid out quite plainly and orderly.
 - Depending on your translation, the words *'after this,'* or *'after these things,'* appear roughly 8-11 times in the book of **Revelation (Cf. 1:19, 4:1, 7:1, 7:9, 9:12, 15:5, Et al)**.
 - As we will see and have reinforced in our sessions ahead, **Revelation** mostly moves from A to B, then from B to C, and so on.
 - There are some exceptions to this, and when we come to them - we will see why that is the case.
 - But this chronology or timeline of issues is important if we are to understand **Revelation** properly.
2. That brings me now to the matter of these seven churches we read about in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3**. There are several overarching things we need to know about these seven churches.
- **First**, these seven churches were literal churches – they were literal bodies of believers in Asia Minor - at the time John was instructed to write the book of **Revelation** (that area is mostly modern-day Turkey).
 - They were not the ONLY churches which existed at that time, but the Holy Spirit chose these churches to address their problems and to communicate some larger points.
 - **Second**, another purpose of these churches is to reveal different types of people and churches that have existed throughout the last 2,000 years of history, and to instruct them in God's truth.
 - There are specific problems that are noteworthy within each of these seven churches. Accordingly, there are specific remedies too.
 - Each passage to each of these seven churches ends with the phrase *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*
 - The point is we can **all** learn something from **EACH church**. There are problems we are supposed to see, and lessons we need to apply **from each one**.

- (and then **third**) – and this takes a bit of personal study to see this - these seven churches also show a certain larger flow, or trend.
 - Consequently, these seven churches as foreshadowing seven different periods within the greater history of the church since Pentecost.
 - Seen in their respective order, this pattern reflects the ebb and the flow of churches – and faith - throughout the past 2,000 years.
 - Most relevant to **you and I** concerning this is the time we are living in now. Our present church age is MOST represented by the final church in this group: the Laodicean church.
 - And within the larger timeline of **Revelation**, the church of Laodicea is the church that exists right BEFORE the Rapture (more about this church in a moment).
3. (And so) – as we consider this larger perspective, we see the following basic outline which supports these issues and the ebb and flow of church history.

NOTE: I'll make a further comment or two about some of them:

- **The church of Ephesus (Cf. Revelation 2:1-7)** – this is the church that had forsaken its first love (described in **2:4**).
 - You might recall that the early sincerity and purity of this church's faith took some hits.
 - For example, there was the influence of Jewish-Christian legalists who insisted that Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and they needed to follow the Laws of Moses to be **truly** saved.
 - That, of course, is NOT true, and these matters were addressed in the Jerusalem Council as recorded in **Acts Ch. 15**.
- **The church of Smyrna (Cf. Revelation 2:8-11)** – this is the church that was notable for suffering persecution (mentioned in **2:10**).
 - The believers in Smyrna were among the earliest and most well-known martyrs for their Christian faith under the Roman Empire.
- **The church of Pergamum (Cf. Revelation 2:12-17)** – this is the church that desperately needed to repent (this is specified in **2:16**).
- **The church of Thyatira (Cf. Revelation 2:18-29)** – this is the church that pivoted around heavy liturgies and the invasion of false doctrines. They had emphasized a female figure (as described in **2:20**).
 - Various scholars equate the church of Thyatira with the rise and influence of the Catholic Church.
- **The church of Sardis (Cf. Revelation 3:1-6)** – this is the church that had fallen asleep (mentioned in **3:2**).
- **The church of Philadelphia (Cf. Revelation 3:7-13)** – this is the church that had endured patiently (specified in **3:10**).
 - This church is most associated with the Protestant missionary movements and Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries.

- This is when the Reformed influence gave way to a proper dispensational and prophetic interpretation.
- Various scholars date this era of church history to generally be from 1750 to about the early 1900's (give or take...)
- **(Then lastly, there is the church of Laodicea (Cf. Revelation 3:14-22) – this is the delusional church with the useless faith (this is clearly stated in 3:16).**

B. The basic characteristics of the church of Laodicea

NOTE: In the grand expanse of church history, the church of Laodicea **most represents the greater church of OUR PRESENT TIME**. So, I want to give this one more attention since it applies to you and I today:

1. This is the church that God says He will spit out of His mouth. He will reject it. Again, this is stated in **vs. 16**.

- It should be of grave concern to us that this is the **ONLY** one of the seven churches that does not receive **any** commendations or positive remarks from Jesus.
- This church is stated to be '*lukewarm*.' That means it has no redeeming qualities about it. It is useless.
 - The historical city of Laodicea was a very wealthy city. It was known for its strong banking economy, as well as its textile and medicinal industries (we'll see applications for all three in a moment).
 - And Laodicea gained its water supply from two sources: one was the cold and fresh water supply from the source at Colossae.
 - The other source was from the nearby medicinal hot springs of Hierapolis. But, by the time these two sources of water arrived, they'd become mixed, lukewarm, mineralized, and unpalatable. It sometimes made people sick and unhealthy.
 - The Holy Spirit inspired John to use this real life example to make a point. The church of Laodicea was neither hot or cold. If it had been one or the other, it would have had some value (**read vss. 15-16**).
 - The church of Laodicea had no redeeming qualities about it. It was lukewarm, it was unacceptable, it was foul, and it was corrupted. Jesus said He will spit it out; He will reject it.

2. Here are some other things we should note about the church of Laodicea which accurately represents the greater church of our time **today**.

- **First**, it was extraordinarily delusional. It did not see itself properly.
 - It considered itself rich, independent, capable, successful, and without any needs (**in vs. 17**).

NOTE: It's an interesting point from history that Laodicea's wealth was so great, that when an earthquake destroyed the city in A.D. 60 (roughly 30 years **before** John wrote **Revelation**),

Laodicea's citizens had proudly refused any financial aid from Rome. They opted to fund all the rebuilding themselves.

- Perhaps the Holy Spirit had this occasion in mind when this Laodicean church was chastised for saying (they) “....*do not need a thing.*”
 - In any case – the larger point is this church had evaluated itself by the standards and attitudes of those around it. It had conformed to the world rather than to Christ.
 - It measured itself by its acquisitions, by its finances, and by all the ways and methods it had aligned with the values of its culture.
 - Again - it did **not** see itself as it most needed to. It could not admit it had a problem or it needed help.
 - It was unwilling to perceive this, and so it was virtually impossible for this church to correct its choices. Admitting you have a problem is the first step to overcoming it.
- **Second**, it was unable to see its desperate symptoms as Jesus saw them:
 - It was ‘*wretched*,’ – it was worthless, but it thought it was noble.
 - It was ‘*pitiful*,’ – it was in miserable shape, but it thought it was admirable instead.
 - It was ‘*poor*’ – this is a church that was spiritually destitute and broken. Its light was out, but it believed it was ‘on fire for the Lord.’
 - It is ‘*blind*’ – it has no spiritual insight, but it thinks it has the right view of how things need to be and how they should be understood.
 - It is ‘*naked*’ – it has no true appeal; it is disgraceful. It only looks good in its own eyes.
 - **Third**, there are remedies for this church's condition, but the church is not pursuing these things as it ought to be:

NOTE: Again – I just want to remind us that this was a set of problems with a real historical church, but it ALSO represents the greater church today.

- The Holy Spirit inspired John to make three illustrations about the problematic Laodicean church from actual industries that the city was known for:
 - **#1** - This church needed ‘*gold refined in the fire.*’ The city of Laodicea was a wealthy banking and finance headquarters.
 - ✓ And so, Jesus says this church needed to find REAL wealth. That has ZERO to do with material assets; it has everything to do with **spiritual** assets.
 - ✓ This was a church that had measured its effectiveness by its money, its spreadsheets, and its resources.

- ✓ It had placed too much priority on its material gain and accomplishments rather than on its spiritual health.
- #2 – This church needed ‘*white clothes to wear.*’ Laodicea was renowned for producing high-quality, glossy black wool cloth.
 - ✓ And, Jesus says this church was exposed. It was ‘*shamed and naked.*’
 - ✓ It needed to cover itself with the distinguishing spiritual apparel of true believers: ‘*white robes.*’
 - ✓ We will see more about this ‘*white robes*’ issue next week. The point is this church was bare and stripped of the things which were the most important.
- #3 – Jesus also said this church needed eye salve so it could see.
 - ✓ Laodicea was famous for its innovative eye salves. The city had a medical school; it was famed for these treatments.
 - ✓ The church in Laodicea did not realize it was blind. It did not comprehend the fact it had no TRUE spiritual vision.
 - ✓ As far as this church felt, they believed they saw things the right way. They trusted in **their** perspective and not God’s.
- Apart from these specific interventions, the **larger** remedy this Laodicean church needed was to ‘*be earnest and repent.*’ This is seen in **vs. 19**.
 - Quite simply, what we have here is a church that needed to be genuine by God’s standards, and not by man’s standards.
 - They needed to be real and vibrant and effective by the terms of God’s Word - - not by the terms of culture and institution.
 - Furthermore, they needed to turn around 180 degrees and go the opposite direction of where they were headed.
 - That is the fundamental meaning behind the word ‘*repent.*’ Jesus says they desperately needed to stop going down the path they were on. They needed to turn around and head the other way.
 - But to do this, **vs. 19** says this church needed to be open to rebuke. They needed to humble themselves and be disciplined – by God.
 - But this church had a certain pride, and this pride prevented it from receiving the truth and correction it most needed.

NOTE: But, I believe the most remarkable and appalling insight about the Laodicean church is found in **vs. 20 (READ)**. **What do we see from this?**

- a. Jesus is **outside** of this church! He’s not **in** it, and He’s not truly a part of it.
- b. This is a church that **claims** it’s “all about Jesus,” but in a tragic and more truthful twist, Jesus says He’s actually standing outside this church. He is knocking on its door, and He is trying to get in.
- c. Here, we have a historical church that is JUST like many churches are today. They have a serious disconnect that they cannot come to grips with. They claim things that are not true.

- WHAT they **claim** to be is miles apart from what they actually **are**.
- WHO they **claim** to follow is **not** who really leads them.
- WHAT they **claim** to practice is far removed from the things they **really** do.
- And so – in the end - WHERE they are leading people is the **opposite** place they **claim** to be pointing folks to. **Matt. 7:21-23** make this point very clear!

NOTE: Let me remind you once more, the Laodicean church of **Rev. 3:14-20** is not only a commentary on a real historical church, but it prophetically describes the dire condition of the greater church **just prior to the Rapture**, pictured in **Rev. 4:1**, just three verses later...

C. This should be a serious and sobering reality check.

NOTE: It is here I want to start the wind-down process by speaking to each of us as individuals. I want to lay out some **applications** for each person here - - and listening.

1. Look at the principle of the last part of **vs. 20**: *“...if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*
 - Here we see an important shift.
 - While Jesus is deeply concerned about the sick state of the greater church today....
 - While Jesus is clear that the greater church today has improperly conformed to cultural and institutional parameters....
 - While Jesus warns that the greater church today is deluded, proud, blind, pitiful, wretched, misdirected, and so on...
 - While Jesus sees nothing about the greater church today that He can commend or provide positive remark about...
 - **The fact remains** He is most concerned about YOU!
2. So - here are some personal applications for you and I in this dilemma. There are four of them, and they each begin with an action verb. These are things we need to ACT on:
 - **#1 - AVOID** identifying with a lukewarm body of believers –
 - There is a Biblical principle at play here. Just as **1 Corinthians 15:33** tells us, *“Do not be deceived; bad company corrupts good morals,”* so a wrong church will dull, compromise, and weaken your faith.
 - I’ve heard from various folks over the years, *“Yeah, I know my church is not doing what they need to be doing – but I want to be a good influence on them. That’s why I stay there.”*
 - That NEVER works. The book of **Jude** has many warnings about a fellowship of believers that is being adversely affected by the wrong leaders, the wrong doctrines, and the wrong behaviors. **Jude** never suggests a lone person can turn a troubled church around.

- **Ephesians 4:11-14** is clear what the purpose and focus of a church needs to be. It says:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”

- This passage, along with others like it, makes the following points about what a church should focus on:
 - ✓ It is about the ‘body of Christ’ being equipped – it is not about ‘being attractive to the lost’ or being ‘seeker friendly.’
 - ✓ It is about ‘building up’ and edifying those who are ‘in the faith.’
 - ✓ It is about having unity in the body, it is about growing in knowledge of the Son of God, and it is about maturing in our Christian walk.
 - ✓ It is about NOT being tossed about like infants who have no foundation of true knowledge.
 - ✓ It is about NOT falling prey to deception, cunning, and various new trends of teaching (and so on....).
 - These main goals of a church cannot be gained if the church insists on acting like the world, if it cannot correct its delusions, and if it fails to see that Jesus is not really IN it like it thinks He is.
 - So, avoid being part of a lukewarm body of believers. It’s a very dangerous thing to identify with a church that Jesus has no positive remarks about.
- **#2 – RECOGNIZE** the subtle seductions of compromise –
 - There is very little about the modern institution of the church that conforms to Biblical parameters.
 - I encourage you to do your own study on this matter. Be as the Bereans here. You won’t find a NT church with 30 minutes of shallow and doctrinally-suspect ‘praise and worship’ music followed by 25 minutes of light teaching.
 - You won’t find the NT church tacking on The Lord’s Supper with gluten-free wafers as a 5-10 minute mindless ritual after a sermon.
 - You won’t find Children’s Church, Youth Groups, skits on stage, women pastors, choirs, rainbow icons, big buildings (and bigger budgets), ‘woke’ agendas, concert lights and sound, BDS initiatives, and politically correct Sunday School curriculums.

- What you WILL find in the healthy NT church is a priority on strong doctrine, a priority on sharing with one another, a priority on prayer, a priority on intergenerational fellowship, and a priority on celebrating The Lord's Supper DEEPLY and OFTEN.
 - Most Christians today have confused the modern cultural and institutional model of a church with being the Biblical model. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are light years apart.
 - We must be **very careful** of the subtle seductions of compromise.
- **#3 – ACCEPT** the discipline of God –
 - God's discipline in a church – and in our personal lives – comes through a variety of ways. It can be all kinds of challenges and trials that test the integrity of our faith as **James 1:2-4** makes clear.
 - A church may invite God's discipline through irresponsible and irreverent behavior.
 - God's discipline might be seen when a church is turned over to apostate leaders as **Jude** warns about, or when pastors and teachers do nothing more than 'tickle ears' as **2 Timothy 4:3-4** says.
 - A church may receive God's discipline when it fails to honor The Lord's Supper as it should according to **1 Corinthians 11:27-32**.
 - A church may experience the discipline of God when there is unrepentant sin in its ranks, when proper structures and standards of leadership are not followed, and when there is a refusal to teach the full Gospel as a church needs to do.
 - As **Revelation 3:19** says, the Lord '*rebukes and disciplines those He loves.*' We should accept the discipline of God in our individual lives and in our churches. He is making us better and more mature.
 - (and I'll conclude with one more **application...**)
 - **#4 – KEEP** Jesus Christ central.
 - When a church becomes so self-reliant that we lose the centrality of Jesus Christ, then we would be better off to be less **independent** and more **dependent**.
 - When a church is more concerned with 'Christian culture' rather than Christlikeness, it has neglected to keep Jesus Christ central.
 - When a church forces every passage and every verse in the Bible (this happens a lot) to somehow be about Jesus Christ when it's not, then God's Word is not being taught as it needs to be, and Jesus Christ is NOT properly central as such methods may imagine.
 - When the clear instructions of God's Word to the church are not followed so that the church can be 'attractive to the lost' instead, then the church's mission is not what it should be. Jesus Christ is left on the outside, looking in. He's not central anymore.

- When sound doctrine is substituted for shallow devotionals, when deep theology is sidestepped in favor of topical ‘candy’ - - and when the more than one-quarter of God’s Word given over to Bible prophecy is dismissed, diluted, and derided, then Jesus Christ is not central anymore.
- When the OT is ignored, when most of the sermons are just **portions** of the Pauline epistles (as some studies indicate more than 50% of churches do), and when churches set their sails to the latest breezes in the latest Christian movement, then Jesus Christ is probably not central anymore.
- When the church supports BDS, advocates for a two-state solution, marches for the Palestinians, or believes it has replaced Israel, then Jesus Christ is definitely no longer central.
- (I could continue like this – but you get the point...)

CONCLUSION: We should take the instructions and warnings to the Laodicean church very seriously. It accurately represents the church of our time. The connections are obvious. It means the Rapture is **any moment**, and we will be reminded of that in our next lesson.

It is mortally dangerous to ‘fall into step’ and conformity with a church that Jesus says He will ‘*spit out of His mouth.*’

NEXT WEEK: We will look at our arrival in heaven after the Rapture. We will learn from **Revelation Ch. 4** who the 24 Elders are, and what it means to be called ‘the Bride of Christ.’



Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God’s Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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