

Place: Lurgan Baptist 25:7:2010

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE LUKEWARM

Reading: Revelation 1:1-20

1. THE LORD OF THE LAMPSTANDS

Ann Lotz tells the story that in Mogadishu, Somalia on 21st March 1994, a young man was cycling to work. He was considered the most outstanding Christian in his very small, struggling, isolated Christian community. He had taken seminary courses through correspondence, and he was investing his life in discipling other young believers as he sought to build up the church in Somalia. *The church had high hopes for growth and national impact under his enthusiastic, gifted, Spirit filled leadership.* But early on that March morning, two men drove by him on a motorcycle, and with one blast of a machine gun, blew this young Christian into eternity. His brutal, senseless murder left behind a young wife and a one year old baby who now faced potential devastation. He himself had led his wife to the Lord. *When she professed her faith in Christ, her family and her tribe disowned her.* Upon her husband's death she was all alone with no means of support. Not only his family but the church and the entire Christian movement in his nation were rocked to its very foundation of faith. ***Is there any hope for the future of this young wife and baby ? Is there any hope for the future of the church in Somalia ?*** As this Somalian family and church struggle to put the pieces of their lives

back together, what about you ? Have you faced a devastating tragedy in your life ? Has your life taken an unexpected turn ? Is there any hope for your future ?

- *When life seems too hard to bear ?*
- *When bad things happen to good people ?*
- *When evil triumphs over good ?*
- *When Satan seems to have the upper hand ?*

Is there any hope for the future at all ? The book of Revelation answers with a resounding **yes**. There is one shining, sure hope for the future and His name is Jesus Christ. You see, one of the reasons the book of Revelation was written was to give hope to the early church when believers were being fed to the lions, nailed to crosses, burned at the stake and boiled in tar. It was written by a Christian who himself was suffering “*for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*” (1:9) In (1:4) he identifies himself as John, then in (1:9) he describes his circumstances. I have never been to Patmos but I have been close to it. It belongs to a group of islands called the Cyclades group. It was about 10 miles long and 6 miles wide, located just off the coast of Turkey. Patmos was a penal colony settled by the Romans. It was the Alcatraz of the day, like being shipped to Siberia for the winter. Can you see the apostle John here ? Labouring in the mines and quarries of Patmos. Busting rocks on a chain gang.

Ninety years old. Separated from believers. Suffering persecution. Aged and forgotten. Confined. Without sufficient food. Sleeping on the bare ground of a dark

cave. Cold, lonely, under the severe lash of an overseer. Imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. My do you think you have problems ? The early Christians including John faced tremendous problems. But rather than focus on each painful step of his walk of faith, in the midst of such suffering, John “ *turned his eyes on Jesus, he looked in His wonderful face, and the things of earth grew strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.* ” My sometimes when faced with great problems, our tendency is to focus on ***the hands of God***, what He has not done for us, and what we want Him to do for us, instead of focusing on ***the face of God***, simply who He is. Often, in the midst of great problems, we stop short of the real blessing that God has for us, which is a fresh vision of who He is. So this morning I want to talk to you about “ ***The Lord of the Lampstands.*** ” Firstly, I want you to notice,

(1) THE CHURCHES THAT ARE PRESCRIBED BY CHRIST

You see, the book is addressed in (1:4) “ *to the seven churches which are in Asia.* ” Now we can view these churches in a three fold way. We can view them,

(a) HISTORICALLY:

First and foremost these are seven letters written to seven actual, historical churches found in the Roman province of Asia, which was located on the western seaboard of what we now know as Turkey. Geographically, these seven cities form a rough circle and they are listed here in the

order which a messenger might visit them. Sailing from the isle of Patmos he would arrive at Ephesus, he would then travel north to Smyrna and Pergamum, then south east to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Now the churches in this region were hard pressed.

- **Circumstantially there was Persecution:**

The book of Revelation reflects the situation during the reign of the Emperor Domitian. (AD 81-96) He regarded himself as a “ *God,* ” so Christians who worshipped the Lord Christ were now being invited to worship the Lord Caesar. The battle was joined. Once a year everyone in the Empire had to appear before the authorities and cry “ *Caesar is Lord.* ” I mean what were the believers to do ? They were faced with a choice Caesar or Christ ? To confess Caesar as Lord meant liberty, to confess Christ as Lord meant hostility, possible death.

- **Doctrinally there was Infiltration:**

False prophets were abroad trying to deceive the churches into their heretical teachings. (2:2)

- **Morally there was Contamination:**

Immoral men and women were contaminating the church by their influence, standards of behaviour were being lowered. So the devil was attacking from several fronts. Sometimes the onslaught was Physical, the Emperor. Other times it was Doctrinal, false cults. Still other times it was Moral, lowering standards. My have the tactics

of the devil changed ? Are the same pressures not troubling our churches today ? Oh you say, “ *We are not being persecuted.* ” Well, what about false cults ? What about the Ecumenism ? What about the continual desire to dilute the truth ? What about the pressure of the world to conform the church to its own ways ? My do these seven letters not issue a call to endure persecution, to hold fast the truth, to obey the Lord. (a)

(b) PROPHETICALLY:

The plan of the book seems to indicate this. (1:19)
" *The things which thou hast seen.*" - Chapter 1.
" *The things which are.*" - Chapter's 2-3 " *The things which shall be hereafter.*" Chapter 4-22. So, chapters 2 and 3 reveal to us conditions in the church from Pentecost to the Rapture. In other words each church may be seen as representing a different phase in church history. (1:3)

1. Ephesus: (A.D. 30-300) The name means “ *desirable.* ” It represents the Apostolic Church. Even then a gradual cooling toward the Lord was evident.
2. Smyrna: (A.D. 100-313) The name means “ *myrrh,* ” representing the Martyr Church.
3. Pergamos: (314-590) It means “ *marriage,* ” speaks to us of the Compromising Church.
4. Thyatira: (590-1517) Means “ *Continuing sacrifice,* ” and it speaks of the Papal Church.
5. Sardis: (1517-1700) Which means “ *remnant,* ” speaking of the Reformation Church.
6. Philadelphia: (1700-1900) The name means “ *brotherly love,* ” the Revival Church.

7. Laodicea: (1900- Rapture) And the name means “ *People’s rights,* ” The Worldly Church. So we may see in these seven churches a panorama of prophecy from the day of Pentecost to the Rapture of the church. So we may view these churches (a) (b)

(c) TYPICALLY:

One might ask the question. *Why were there seven churches singled out by the Risen Lord ?* Certainly there were more than seven churches in this area. (Acts 20:5 Col 1:2 4:13) Indeed at the time the Book of Revelation was written (A.D. 95-100) there may have existed over one hundred separate and independent local churches in the world. But out of the many Christ chose seven typical churches and addressed Himself to these. Why ? Well, it seems that the spiritual conditions found in these seven churches are typical and representative of what every local church has been throughout her history and what she is like today. *You see, any condition of any church in any place at any time may be found here.* It may be that each of us will see our church depicted here in these letters, for the conditions existing in these seven are conditions which have existed in the past and which certainly exist in the present. Do you know something ? Every thoughtful believer will find himself mirrored here. You see, as we read the letters and see the state of each church, we will be confronted with a series of questions.

Are you an Ephesian believer, have you grown cold in your love for the Lord ? Perhaps you’re like the Christians in Smyrna, are you suffering for Christ’s sake ? Are you

like those in Pergamos ? Are you compromising the truth ? Or are the believers at Thyatira a picture of you ? Do you know what they believed in ? Peaceful coexistence. Maybe you're like those in Sardis. Have you a reputation but there is no reality ? Like those in Philadelphia, could the Risen Lord commend you for your faithfulness ? Or like the believers in Laodicea are you lukewarm and is Christ about to spew you out of His mouth ? You see, in these two chapters the Risen Lord speaks His mind to His churches. It is in these chapters and not in (Matt Ch 28 or Acts Ch 1) that the final words of Christ to the church is recorded. ***That means that Christ's message to these churches has a timeless relevance.*** Indeed if you look closely at these letters you will see the character of a New Testament church. What ought to be found within a New Testament church ?

- **Love:** The letter to Ephesus:
- **Suffering:** The letter to Smyrna
- **Truth:** The letter to Pergamos
- **Holiness:** The letter to Thyatira
- **Reality:** The letter to Sardis
- **Opportunity:** The letter to Philadelphia
- **Wholeheartedness:** The letter to Laodicea

(2) THE TITLES THAT ARE ASCRIBED TO CHRIST

Never forget that the central theme of the book of Revelation is Christ. While prophecy, has its place, Christ Himself is the grand theme. (1:3) This is a revelation of Jesus as told to John. And if we study the book of

Revelation and don't learn anything about Christ, then we've misread the book of Revelation. *Now this is not what the early church needed ?* I mean you think about it. Christians were being fed to lions, nailed to crosses, burned at the stake, and boiled in tar. Mothers were hanging with their babies draped around their necks. The church with its back to the wall, fighting for survival needs more than exhortation. It needs to get a glimpse of the exalted Lord who is still on the throne, still in control, and still running the show. Now here in (Ch 1) three impressive titles are ascribed to Christ and reveal His present relationship to this present age. Notice how,

(a) ***THE AGE COMMENCES:***

The blessing is from Jesus Christ “ *who is the faithful witness.* ” (1:5) He came to earth to be a witness to dark and degenerate world. Do you recall what Christ Himself said ? “ *To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth.* ” (Jn 18:37) As John Philips reminds us Christ witnessed to,

- **The Name of God:**

In the Old Testament God was revealed through His many and varied names, each of which revealed an aspect of His character. But Christ taught men a new name for God, the lovely, intimate, heart warming name of Father.

- **The Nature of Sin:**

The Old Testament had developed quite a vocabulary for sin. (Ps 32:5) Yet the full horror of sin was not revealed until Christ came. Sin ploughed His back and crowned Him with thorns, sin hung Him up on cruel nails amid the jests of mankind. Sin broke His body and broke His heart. Sin wrung from His lips the “*orphan cry*,” upon the cross. Sin was not revealed in all its naked horror until Christ came.

- **The Nearness of Judgment:**

Did you know that the Lord Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven ? For each verse in Matthew’s gospel in which He mentions heaven, there are three verses in which He refers to hell.

- **The Need of Salvation:**

To Nicodemus He said, “*Ye must be born again.*” (Jn 3:7) To the rich young ruler He said, “*One thing thou lackest*,” (Mk 10:21) To Zacchaeus He said, “*Come down for today I must abide at thy house.*” (Lk 19:5) The age began with Christ as “*the faithful witness.*” My are you called to bear witness in this world ? Well, are you following your Master’s example ?

(b) THE AGE CONTINUES:

For the blessing is from the Lord Jesus, “*the first begotten of the dead.*” (1:5) This does not mean the first one raised from the dead but the highest of those raised from the dead. (Rom 8:29) Others had returned to life to

die again. He rose and is alive for evermore. (1:18) Is this not what a persecuted church needs to hear ? (1:9) Is this not what those facing trials, difficulties, hardships need to hear ? Is this what you need to hear this ? Do you feel abandoned, worthless, lost in the shuffle of life ? Are you battling with the power of the world, the subtlety of the devil, the desire of the flesh ? My you have a living Saviour with you, One who says, “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*” (Heb 13:5) (a) (b)

(c) THE AGE CONCLUDES:

For the blessing is from the Lord Jesus, “*the prince of the kings of the earth.*” (1:5) Oh, He is the King of Heaven: (Dan 4:37) the King of the Jews: (Matt 2:2) the King of Israel: (Jn 1:49) the King of the Ages: (1 Tim 1:17) the King of Glory: (Ps 24:7) the King of Saints: (15:3) and the King of Kings (19:16) He is the mighty Prince of the Kings of the Earth. (Dan 8:25) Do you see the Lord Jesus here in **His three-fold Office ?** Prophet for He is the Faithful Witness. Priest for He is the first begotten of the dead, King for He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. Do you see the Lord Jesus here in **His three-fold Work ?** “*Unto Him that loved us.*” (literally keeps on loving us) “*and washed us.*” (literally once for all washed us) That’s His Past Work of Redemption for He is the Faithful Witness.(1:6) “*Kings and priests*,” That’s His Present Work of Sanctification for He is the First Begotten of the dead. “*Behold He cometh with clouds.*” (1:7) That’s His Future Work of Glorification for He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. (1) (2)

(3) THE GLORIES THAT ARE DESCRIBED OF CHRIST

What a revelation of glory for an aged apostle who recalled vividly the garments that were stolen, the head that was crowned, the hands and feet that were pierced. How thrilling, it must have been for John who had witnessed the suffering now to see the glory. My they had tried to confine him on an island 10 miles by 5 miles, but now he's transported away from it all and in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, where better to begin with than with a sight of the Lord Himself? *What compensation for an aged saint being denied the usual privileges of the Lord's Day, to get a vision of the Lord Himself.* You see,

**No mortal can with Him compare
Among the sons of men
Fairer is He than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train**

(a) HIS PERSON IS GLORIOUS:

Will you run your eye down this chapter and notice John's description of Christ? Do you see here,

* *The Humanity of the King:* " *One like unto the Son of Man.*" (1:13) It was a full 60 years since John had at last seen Jesus, but he immediately recognises Him as " *the Son of Man.*" (Dan 7:13-14)

* *The Authority of the King:* He was clothed " *with a garment down to the foot,*" (1:13) In ancient times this

was the recognised apparel of authority, dignity, and rulership.

* *The Purity of the King:* " *His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.*" (1:14) Is this not a symbol of Christ's absolute sinless holiness.

* *The Sagacity of the King:* " *His eyes were as a flame of fire.*" (1:14) Today we might say He has X ray vision. I heard about a country man who was arrested for stealing a watch. At his trial, the persecution did everything they could to prove the man's guilt, but he could not be found guilty. The judge told him, " *Sam, you're acquitted. You can go home.*" The man replied, " *Does that mean I have to give the watch back?*" My Christ cannot be deceived. He sees every minister, notes every member, observes every ministry, views every motive with X ray vision.

* *The Severity of the King:* " *And his feet like unto fine brass,*" (1:15) Make no mistake the Head of the church will judge sin in the churches.

* *The Integrity of the King:* " *And His voice as the sound of many waters,*" (1:15)

* *The Sovereignty of the King:* " *And He had in his right hand seven stars.*" (1:16) The Lord Jesus is holding the seven stars, messengers in His right hand, and that suggests that He has complete control of all things.

* *The Ferocity of the King:* " *And out of his mouth went a*

sharp two-edged sword.” (1:16) The sword is the Word of God. (Eph 6:17 Heb 4:12) And nothing can stand before God’s Word.

* *The Glory of the King:* “ *And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*” (1:16) Once that face was marred and spat upon, here it shines in resplendent glory. (Matt 17:2) And it is this divine glory that John now beholds. Unveiled. Unmasked. Unadulterated. My on what is your focus ? Is it on other people ? On your problems ? On your pain and pressure ? Do you need to refocus this on who Christ is ? “ *To turn your eyes on Jesus*,” (a)

(b) HIS POSITION IS GLORIOUS:

For look if you will at (1:13) Now what are the seven candlesticks ? (1:20) Christ walks in the midst of the churches taking cognizance of all that is going on. The Lord Jesus was always in the midst. (Lk 2:46 Matt 27:38 18:20) And as the Lord of the Lampstands He walks in the midst of the churches. Here we see the centrality, supremacy and authority of Christ in relation to each local church. He is Lord. He alone has authority. He alone can say, “ *I will,*” (2:5 2:10 2:16) I wonder, what is Christ’s position in relation to this fellowship ? Is He central ? In this church ? In this fellowship ? In your life ? (a) (b)

(c) HIS PURPOSE IS GLORIOUS:

What is His purpose for us corporately ? **Continuity.** You see, right until the rapture or “ *the things which are,*” the

Risen Lord addresses the church. Look if you will at (2:7) The Holy Spirit speaks to the churches. *That means our corporate testimony must be maintained and our responsibility must be to the local church.* Is that where your responsibility lies ? Having heard the gospel and received Christ, have you confessed Him through baptism ? Having confessed Christ through baptism are you identified with this local church or another ? Have you submitted yourself to the teaching and direction of those whom God has appointed over you for your good ? (Eph 4:11-12) Perhaps this as a believer you feel burdened. Are you so depressed by the greatness of your problems that you have given up all hope ?

Years ago in small church in Scotland the offering plate was being passed around. A small boy had put the plate on the floor then stepped into it. *When asked for an explanation he replied that he had no money to give God, but he wanted to give himself.* He was reprimanded for disturbing the order of worship. But the little boy did not forget he had given his life to God, for he grew up and became a great missionary used of God to change the course of individual lives, tribes and nations in southern Africa. *His name was Bobby Moffat.* He was a man who overcame the smallness of his life by giving himself totally to the Lord, and keeping his focus on Christ. ***Do you need to do that ?*** Instead of giving up, would you focus on Christ, until you are so preoccupied with Him alone that you fall in worship before Him ?

