

The Church That Jesus Is Building.
The Final Message Of Christ To His Church. - Pastor Roger Ridley
Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, NE, August 28, 2005

Final messages have always been a source of fascination for people. Many books have been written, which do nothing but catalogue the last words of “*so called*” famous people. I have been reading through a book about the history of Baptists in America that was recently given to me. I am enjoying it very much. Quite often, in telling the story of an individual, it provides the last words they spoke from their death bed.

We are fascinated with last words, I think, because we assume they hold great significance. Some of course are more significant than others. Of all the recorded last words which we have, I doubt that any have fascinated people as much as the final message of Christ to His Church. These are provided in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation.

Would you please open your Bibles to that portion of Scripture?

Unlike the words of other famous people who have died, never to speak again, Jesus is presented here as the One who died and lives again for evermore (1:18). He is presented as the living, glorified Head of the Church. It gives us a vision of Him as He is ***right now***. And in this vision He leaves a final message for His Church that **we** need to give heed to until He comes again at the completion of the Church.

I want to approach these chapters with you in **two parts**: First, I want us to see Jesus as the glorified Head of the Church. And second, I want us to understand, in a condensed way, His abiding message to the Church which He continues to build today.

I. The Glorified Head Of The Church.

The glorified Head of the Church is unveiled for us in Revelation chapter 1. Follow along as I read through the whole chapter...

Without question, the book of Revelation starts with a vision of Christ which can only be described as ***AWESOME***. As we will see, it is the vision of Christ that you and I need to maintain in our thinking of Him today. It is a vision of our powerful, glorified Head of the Church that too many have lost sight of. Jesus is truly the Alpha and the Omega of the Church.

This chapter provides three descriptions of Him:

First, in John’s greeting in verses 1-7.

Second, in John’s vision in verses 8-16.

Third, in the words of comfort from Christ to John in verses 17-20.

I am sorry, but we will only have time to look at each of these briefly.

(1) John's greeting (or introduction) to the book tells us WHO Jesus is. He is the One who *rose* from the grave, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

It also tells us WHAT He has done. He has loved us, *washed* us from our sins, and made us to be kings and priests.

And it also tells us that **He is coming again!** John said, "*Even so. Amen.*" And so should we.

(2) John's vision of Christ in verses 8-16 is really the focus of the chapter, it is the vision of Christ that a reader of the book of Revelation is to maintain throughout, in fact, it is the vision of Christ that you and I are to maintain even today. Allow me to read those verses again...

Here, Jesus is seen in the midst of seven candlesticks. According to verse 20, He says that these candlesticks are local churches. **That**, is significant to me. When we think of the Church that Jesus is building, we tend to blur out the individual local churches. Instead, we emphasize the whole, or the universal. But in this vision of Jesus as the glorified Head of the Church, we find Him in the midst of the churches. Jesus doesn't give consideration to the Church in a nebulous way, but in a tangible way. When He looks at the Church, He looks at the churches. The Church is made up of local churches. That's where the responsibility is at! That's where the ministry is at! That's where the accountability is at!

Jesus presents Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end of everything. Everything that you and I need - He is. And everything that His churches need - He is. It isn't glamour, it isn't full auditoriums, it isn't entertaining programs, it is **Jesus** that we need!

As I mentioned, these verses describe Jesus in His glory, this is a much different portrait of Him than we are accustomed to. I could go into great detail explaining all the symbolism but I don't really think I need to do that. These verses are intended to make one unmistakable impression - there is none like Him, and none to be compared with Him!

I tend to think that if churches, and the people who make up those churches, would see Jesus as He is described here, then we would all be much different than we are today. He is among us, He is powerful, and He holds us accountable.

All who have seen Him like this have reacted the same as John does in verse 17. He fell to the ground as a dead man. In Daniel 10, having a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ, Daniel fell to the ground, and every time he tried to get back up, he fell down again. Seeing Jesus as He is takes the strength out of us, it removes all the pride that would cause us to want to stand in His presence.

Perhaps, we would **all** do well to think on these verses more often, because too often our thoughts of Him aren't quite as glorious. We go to extremes to make Him just like us. And while I am grateful that Jesus did become like us in order to pay the debt of our sin, and bring us into a loving relationship with the Father, I am also grateful that He is God,

and we need to acknowledge Him as such, and humble ourselves before Him.

When was the last time you fell before Jesus - when you were so aware of the glorified Head of the Church that it left you without strength? To our shame, it doesn't seem to happen often enough to any of us.

Verses 17-20 provides us with one more description. Jesus is presented as the I Am that lives. Those words were meant by Christ to be words of comfort for John. In fact, they are the most encouraging of words for any of us. They emphasize His resurrection. And as the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus did not rise, then our faith is empty, our hope is useless, and our lives are to be most pitied. However, the fact that He lives gives us reason for hope no matter what the trial that we face.

The world seems to be in chaos right now. I've got news for you - it's going to get worst, a lot worst. And it just might be that some of that chaos has spilt unto your life: your hurting, your suffering, and your wondering if you can make it. The good news is - Jesus lives! He has overcome sin, death, and the world. And when you and I acknowledge Him, not only as the Head of the Church, but also as the Head of our lives, then we will overcome as well.

Do you know Him personally? Are you trusting in Him? You can...

II. The Message Of Christ To His Church.

In chapters 2 and 3, a cluster of 7 local churches are addressed. They contain the final message of Christ to His Church. These were 7 literal churches that existed in Asia Minor. Local churches that were facing difficulties from without, and experiencing difficulties from within. I believe that they were intended to be representative of all local churches that make up the Church that Jesus continues to build. They form the abiding message that the Head of the Church has for His Church. As such, these are good chapters for local churches, that presently exist, to study. They help us to take a look at our own lives, and our own church. They help us to understand what is right with us, what is wrong with us, and to have the opportunity to change what needs to be changed.

I am not going to take the time to read these chapters, and I trust you understand why I am not going to go into much detail concerning them either. What I will do is give a 3 point summary of the message they contain, hoping that it will encourage you to investigate deeper.

(1) What first gets my attention about the statements that Jesus makes to each of the 7 churches is the way they begin. They begin with a picture of Christ primarily taken from the description of Him in 1:13-16. Each picture is different, and each one meets the specific need of the church being addressed.

To the church of Smyrna, which was going through severe persecution, He came to them as the One that had overcome death.

To the church of Pergamos, which had succumbed to compromise, He came to them as

the One with the sharp two-edged sword. The Word of God that is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

What I gather from these different pictures of Christ is that He approaches each church, just as He approaches each individual, in just the way we need Him. We shouldn't expect that He is going to deal with our church in the same way that he deals with the church down the street, because we're a different group of people, and our needs are different. When He addresses the Church as a whole, He addresses the churches individually.

He does the same thing with you and me. With Jesus it has never been *one size fits all* it has always been personal. I don't need to ask why He doesn't work in my life the way He does in your life. You and I don't need the same thing. He addresses us individually. And to be perfectly honest with you, I'm glad that's the way He does it, because that means I am going to get the best He has for me, and so will you.

(2) Each of these letters also has a word of commendation, and condemnation. The Lord knows what is right with us, and what is wrong with us. He is the right One and the best One for us to come before on a regular basis for assessment that we might be the church and the people that the Head of the Church wants us to be.

The words of 1 Peter 5:6, "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*" is good advice for all of us: individuals and churches.

2:2; 9; 13; 19; 3:1; 8; 15 - *I know thy works.*

Jesus knows our works, what's right with us, what's wrong with us, what we need to hold on to, and what we need to change. Let's be sure to listen to what He has to say to us.

(3) And then, the way each of these messages end is also significant. There is an exhortation and a promise.

The exhortation, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith.*" It seems clear that these assessments are not only for churches, but for the people who make them up as well. You and I individually, as the church, are to listen.

As you take the time to study these chapters on your own, you need to be asking, "*Lord, what do You want me to hear, and what do You want me to change?*"

I think most of us would find that there are some things right in our life, but that there are also some things that need changing.

And then there is a promise. Each message ends with a promise to the over-comers.

These over-comers are not an elite group within the local church, but true believers who have trusted in Christ Savior. Look with me at 1 John 5:1-5...

No matter how corrupt or unspiritual a church may become, Christ will always honor those who belong to Him as they remain faithful to His Word.

These promises start with the Garden of Eden and end at the Throne in Heaven. Listen as I read each one...

2:7...

2:11...

2:17...

2:26...

3:5...

3:12...

3:21...

I read those verses, and I think of the last words of John in the book of Revelation, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*"

Conclusion: Jesus, in all of His glory, as the Head of the Church, is among His churches. He is all that we need. As He continues to build His Church today, He is available to us, He addresses us personally, He knows what is right, and what is wrong with us, and if we will listen to Him, He is prepare to help us change, that we might be the church and people He wants us to be, that we might enjoy all the promises He has in store for us.

Allow me to close with the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:22, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"