

# Pulling Back the Curtain on Church as Usual

Message 1 of 5 in the series: "Pulling Back the Curtain"

## A. About 60 years after He ascended into heaven, Jesus appeared to His disciple, John, and pulled back the curtain on heaven, himself, and the end of the world.

Revelation = "apokalypsis" (ancient Greek) = unveiling, revealing, disclosure, pulling back the curtain

"This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 1:1-2 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near." Revelation 1:3 (NLT)

"I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, '**Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.**' When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, 'Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. **Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen.** This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels (messengers) of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.'" Revelation 1:9-20 (NLT)

## B. Jesus pulled back the curtain on what was happening in some first-century churches that were going about church as usual.

*Note:* Jesus is the head of His church, and He knows what's going on in every church. "This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, **the one who walks among** the seven gold lampstands." Revelation 2:1b (NLT)

**Life Application:** "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches." Revelation 2:7a, 11a, 17a, & 29; 3:6, 13, & 22 (NLT)

1. Jesus told the church in Ephesus: "**I know your works, your labor, your patience**, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and **you have persevered** and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless, **I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent** and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate... To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Revelation 2:2-7 (NKJV)

**Life Application:** "As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But **Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing**. She came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.' But the Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:38-42 (NLT)

2. Jesus told the church in Smyrna: "I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan. **Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer.** The devil will throw

some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But **if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life...** Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death." Revelation 2:9-11 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way." Matthew 5:11-12 (NLT)

3. Jesus told the church in Pergamum: "I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet **you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me** even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city. But I have a few complaints against you. **You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel.** He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. **Repent of your sin,** or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Revelation 2:13-16 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you." 2 Timothy 4:3-5 (NLT)

4. Jesus told the church in Laodicea: "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! **But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!** You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. **So be diligent and turn from your indifference.** Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne." Revelation 3:15-21 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

Matthew 13:22-23 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Questions:

1. Have you read the Book of Revelation in the Bible? If so, what did you get out of it? Why do you think many Christians have never read it?
2. Read Revelation 1:1-3. How does it make you feel to hear that Jesus wants us to know what will happen in the future and promises to bless us if we read the Revelation He gave to John? What kind of blessings do you think He might give?
3. Read Revelation 1:9-20. How would you respond if Jesus appeared to you in all of His glory?
4. From the list below select two or three of the letters Jesus had John send to churches in Revelation. For each church you select, read the letter and then discuss the following questions: What did God commend them for doing well? What did He rebuke them for doing poorly, wrongly, or not at all? What action did Jesus tell them to take? How might their letter apply to us today?
  - The Letter to the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)
  - The Letter to the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)
  - The Letter to the church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)
  - The Letter to the church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

- The Letter to the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)
- The Letter to the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)
- The Letter to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

5. Discuss the following quotations:

“If we had to sum up the Book of Revelation in one phrase, it would be, ‘Jesus wins.’” Jud Wilhite

“If God did not want us to understand the Book of Revelation, He would not have given it to us at all.”

D. L. Moody