

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 7, Revelation 3--7 churches

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All right, so today we are diving deep into early Christianity. Okay. And we're going to be looking at Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on the messages to the seven churches in Revelation.

Yeah. Those chapters two and three specifically. In these chapters, each church gets this really personalized message from Jesus.

It's wild. I know it's like a spiritual report card, but with like really intense imagery. There are keys and open doors.

And there's even lukewarm water. You know, it just makes you think like, yeah, what was Jesus really trying to say here? Well, what's so fascinating about this is that these messages, they aren't just, you know, historical curiosities. I mean, they are packed with insights into the challenges of faith that people faced back then.

Yeah. And you know, it's surprising, but they are still very relevant today. Okay.

So before we get into the specifics of the messages themselves, can you set the scene for us? Sure. Like what was life actually like for these early Christians? So imagine, you know, the Roman Empire in the first century. Paganism is the dominant culture.

Right. You know, there's pressure to worship the emperor. Yeah.

And being a Christian, you know, that could cost you everything. Wow. I mean, these churches are trying to live out their faith in a world that's often hostile.

Yeah. And their struggles are things that we can relate to even now. So you're telling me that these messages might actually have something to say to us? Absolutely.

Even though, you know, we are living in a totally different time and place. I think so, because Dr. Mathewson points out that, you know, human nature really hasn't changed that much. That's true.

The temptations to compromise, the allure of comfort, the fear of persecution. These are things people grapple with in every generation. Yeah.

No, that makes sense. Yeah. Okay.

So that's the backdrop. So who are these seven churches? So we've got Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. This is seven.

Seven. Yeah. And each one gets its own unique message.

Right. And it's not just a generic, you know, good job or you messed up. Yeah.

It's this really tailored advice. It's almost like Jesus is sitting down with each church and saying, like, look, here's what I see and here's what you need to work on. I like that.

Okay. So let's take a closer look at a few of these spiritual report cards then. Okay.

Dr. Mathewson's analysis of Sardis really stood out to me. Uh huh. They are described as dead.

Right. Even though they have this reputation for being alive. Yeah.

What's going on there? So Sardis is this classic example of appearances being deceiving. They might've looked good on the outside, but Jesus, he saw right through that facade. Yeah.

He calls them out for having a faith connection to him. Right. It's like they're going through the motions, but their hearts weren't really in it.

So it's not just about, like, doing all the right things. It's about the why behind those actions. Right.

Exactly. And what's even more interesting is that Dr. Mathewson suggests that, you know, they're a living reputation. Yeah.

It might not even be accurate. What? Yeah. Maybe it's how other churches perceived them, or maybe Jesus is using, like, a bit of irony here to emphasize just how far they've strayed.

That's a little unsettling. Yeah. To think that, you know, even other churches might not have seen the truth about Sardis.

It makes you wonder. It does. If we're blind to similar problems in our own communities today.

It certainly does. And it really highlights the importance of self-examination. You know, are we truly living out our faith, or are we just projecting an image of piety? Right.

I mean, what would Jesus say about the state of our hearts? That's a good question. All right. So Sardis is a wake-up call about the dangers of superficial faith.

Yeah. But what about the promises to those who overcome in Sardis? Okay. What does that even mean in this context? Well, overcoming in Sardis means more than just, you know, going through the motions of religious practice.

It's about rekindling that genuine connection with Christ. Yeah. Rediscovering the passion and purpose that's been lost.

Yeah. It's a call to move beyond empty rituals and embrace a faith that transforms our lives from the inside out. So it's a pretty high bar.

Yeah. But what's the reward for clearing it? Well, the rewards are powerful symbols of spiritual restoration and victory. Okay.

You know, there's the promise of white garments representing purity and vindication, a sign that they've been cleansed from the stain of their complacency. White garments. It's like a fresh start.

Exactly. A clean slate. Yes.

A symbol of being made new. Exactly. And it's not just about outward appearances.

It signifies an inward transformation, a heart that's been purified and renewed by God's grace. Okay. And there's also the promise of having their names inscribed in the book of life.

Yeah. And, you know, this isn't just about, you know, getting into heaven. It's about this secure and permanent relationship with God, a relationship that can never be broken.

Wow. Those promises paint a pretty vivid picture of what's at stake. It does.

Okay. So moving on, let's talk about Philadelphia. Okay.

The church that's described as powerless, but given an open door. What's their story? So Philadelphia is fascinating because they seem to be facing a lot of external challenges. Okay.

Um, Dr. Mathewson suggests they were likely a small and marginalized community facing persecution and maybe even economic hardship. Wow. So think about what it means to be faithful when you're constantly under pressure, when you feel overlooked or even despised by, like, the wider society.

Absolutely. And yet Jesus commends them for their faithfulness. Really? He sees their perseverance, the refusal to give up on him.

Wow. Even when things are tough. And this is where that open door comes in.

Dr. Mathewson suggests it's not just about evangelism. It's about this guaranteed access to God's kingdom. Okay.

It's a promise that no matter what they face in this world, they have an unshakable place in eternity. That's an incredible promise. Yeah.

Especially for a church that's going through so much. Right. But it also raises some questions.

Okay. Like, if they have this open door to God's kingdom, why are they still facing hardship? Yeah. Why haven't they already been rescued from their difficult circumstances? That's where it gets really interesting.

Okay. Dr. Mathewson connects this open door imagery back to Isaiah 22. Okay.

Where Jesus is described as holding the keys of David. Okay. Think about keys for a second.

Yeah. They symbolize authority, access control. Okay.

In this case, it's Jesus who holds the keys to God's kingdom. Right. And he's using his authority to open a way for the Philadelphians to enter, even though they're facing trials in this life.

So it's like he's saying, I see your struggle. I know what you're going through. Yeah.

And I'm not going to abandon you. Right. I'm preparing a place for you, and nothing can stop you from getting there.

Exactly. And there's another layer to this. Oh, wow.

Okay. That Dr. Mathewson unpacks. Okay.

He points out that in Isaiah's original prophecy, the keys were given to Eliakim, a figure who was initially powerless, but then rose to a position of authority. Interesting. And in a surprising twist, the prophecy even speaks of those who once persecuted Eliakim, ultimately bowing down to him.

So Dr. Mathewson suggests that this foreshadows the ultimate vindication of God's people. Wow. Even those who seem powerless in the present moment.

Wait, so you're telling me that the very people who are persecuting the Philadelphians might one day be the ones bowing down to them. It is. That's a pretty dramatic reversal.

It emphasizes that worldly power is fleeting. Wow. True strength lies in faithfulness to God.

Right. And that faithfulness will ultimately be rewarded, even if it doesn't seem like it in the here and now. That's a powerful message.

Yeah. For anyone who's feeling like they're fighting an uphill battle, whether it's because of their faith or any other challenge they're facing. Exactly.

It's a reminder that our ultimate victory rests in God's hands, not in our own strength or circumstances. Okay. So we've talked about Sardis, the church with the dead faith.

Yes. And Philadelphia, the church that's powerless, but persevering. Let's move on to another church that caught my attention.

Okay. Laodicea, the one that makes Jesus sick. Ah, Laodicea.

Yeah. Their story is quite different from the previous two churches. Okay.

Their problem isn't persecution or lack of resources. In fact, they seem to have it pretty good materially. Yeah.

They're wealthy, comfortable, and they seem to have everything they need, but that's precisely where their problem lies. They've become complacent, self-satisfied, and spiritually lukewarm. Okay.

I've got to ask, what's the deal with this lukewarm water that Dr. Mathewson keeps mentioning? Is lukewarm water really that big of a deal back then? Nah. It's a brilliant detail that really drives home the point about their spiritual state. Okay.

You see, Laodicea's water supply came from an aqueduct system, and by the time it reached the city, it was notoriously lukewarm. Ooh. Now to understand why this is such a powerful image, we need to consider the neighboring cities.

Okay. Hierapolis was known for its hot springs, often associated with healing and cleansing. Right.

Colossae, on the other hand, had refreshingly cold water, perfect for drinking. Right. So you've got hot and cold, both representing positive quality.

Exactly. And then you've got Laodicea stuck in the middle with its lukewarm water. Right.

I'm starting to see where this is going. Yeah. Hot and cold both have their purposes, but lukewarm is just, well, kind of useless.

Right. It's not refreshing. It's not healing.

It's just kind of there. Exactly. And that's the point Jesus is making about the Laodicean church.

Okay. They're neither hot nor cold. They're just lukewarm.

And that's what makes them repulsive to him. So it's not about being like a middle-of-the-road Christian. Right.

It's about being so caught up in comfort and complacency. Yeah. That you've lost your passion, your purpose, your fire for God.

You got it. And what's even more ironic is that Jesus tells them to buy from him gold, refined in fire, representing true spiritual wealth, and eye salve to see clearly. But guess what? Laodicea was known for its material wealth.

And they even had a medical school that produced eye salve. Oh, the irony. I know.

They had all the wrong kinds of wealth and couldn't even see how blind they'd become. It's a powerful warning to us, isn't it? It is. It's so easy to get caught up in the trappings of success, the comforts of this world, and lose sight of what truly matters.

We might think we have it all together. But are we actually spiritually bankrupt? Are we so focused on the things of this world that we've become blind to our own spiritual poverty? And then there's that image of Jesus standing outside the door of the church, knocking to be let in. Right.

It's almost heartbreaking, isn't it? It is. The very people who should be welcoming him have shut him out. And it speaks volumes about their spiritual state.

They've become so self-sufficient, so reliant on their own wealth and status that they've excluded Christ from their lives. They no longer see their need for him. It's a stark reminder that even in the midst of material abundance, we can be spiritually empty.

That's right. And if we're not careful, we can end up shutting Christ out of our lives too. And that's why the call to repentance is so crucial.

It's about recognizing our need for Christ, turning away from our self-sufficiency, and inviting him back into our lives to be at the center of everything we do. So we've got Sardis, the church with a dead faith; Philadelphia, the church that's powerless but persevering; and Laodicea, the church that's rich but spiritually bankrupt. Each one is facing its own unique challenges, but they all have one thing in common: a call to overcome.

Yeah. And that's something we'll be exploring further in part two of this deep dive. I can't wait.

Me too. Welcome back to our deep dive into the book of Revelation. We've been unpacking Dr. Mathewson's insights on the messages to these seven churches, and it's already been quite a journey.

It has been fascinating to see how these churches, though separated by so much time and distance, face challenges that we can still relate to today. It's amazing, right? We've seen the dangers of superficial faith in Sardis, the power of perseverance in Philadelphia, and the spiritual apathy that can kind of creep in with wealth and comfort in Laodicea. And we've only just scratched the surface.

I know. There are four more churches to explore, each with its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. And as we delve into these other churches, I think it's important to keep in mind this common thread that Dr. Mathewson highlights throughout his lecture.

It's this idea of overcoming. Okay. So we've touched on this idea of overcoming a few times already.

But I'm still a little fuzzy on what it actually means. Is it about achieving some kind of spiritual perfection? Because let's be real, that's a pretty intimidating standard. I hear you.

And that's actually a common misconception that Dr. Mathewson addresses head-on. He emphasizes that overcoming isn't about achieving sinless perfection. It's about persevering in our faith, resisting temptation, and remaining steadfast in our commitment to Christ, even in the face of trials and difficulties.

It's about relying on God's grace to help us stay the course, even when we stumble or fall short. So it's less about being perfect and more about the journey. The daily choices we make to follow Christ, even when it's hard.

Precisely. It's about that constant reorientation towards Christ. That ongoing process of seeking his will and aligning our lives with his teachings.

Okay. That makes a lot more sense. So how does this idea of overcoming play out in the specific messages to the other churches? Let's start with Ephesus.

What are they being called to overcome? So Ephesus was actually a pretty strong church, commended for their hard work, their perseverance, and their intolerance of false teachings. But Jesus calls them out for having lost their first love, that initial passion and zeal that marked their early days. Dr. Mathewson suggests that their good works had become routine.

Their service had lost its joy, and their relationship with Christ had grown cold. So it's like they'd become so focused on doing the right things that they'd lost sight of the heart behind those actions. Exactly.

It's a good reminder that even our good works can become empty. If they're not motivated by love for Christ, what about Smyrna? Okay. So Smyrna is a church that's facing intense persecution.

Dr. Mathewson highlights that they were likely a marginalized and impoverished community, enduring slander and even threats of imprisonment. That's intense. Yeah.

Their call to overcome is about persevering in their faith despite suffering, refusing to compromise their beliefs, even when it costs them everything. It's a powerful reminder that following Christ isn't always easy. It's not.

No. There will be times when we face opposition, hostility, even danger because of our faith. Right.

But Smyrna's example shows us that true strength comes from standing firm in our convictions, even when it's hard. What about Pergamum? Okay. So Pergamum is interesting because they're being commended for holding fast to their faith, even in a city that was known as a center of emperor worship.

Right. But Jesus also criticizes them for tolerating false teachings and compromising with pagan practices. So like, what were they doing? Well, Dr. Mathewson suggests that they were trying to blend in with the surrounding culture to avoid persecution by accommodating the beliefs and practices of their pagan neighbors.

So their call to overcome is about drawing a clear line between their faith and the world around them, refusing to compromise their beliefs in order to fit in or gain acceptance. So it's a reminder that faithfulness sometimes requires us to stand out, to be different, even if it makes us unpopular or puts us at odds with the culture around us. What about Thyatira? Okay.

Thyatira is a church that's wrestling with the influence of a false prophetess. A false prophetess. Someone who's leading people astray with teachings that contradict Christ's message.

Dr. Mathewson points out that this false prophetess is associated with immorality and idolatry. Practices that were deeply ingrained in the surrounding pagan culture. So their call to overcome is about discerning truth from error, rejecting false teachings, and holding fast to the purity of the gospel.

Okay. So we've got Ephesus, who's called to rekindle their first love. Smyrna, who's enduring persecution.

Pergamum, who's facing pressure to compromise their beliefs. And Thyatira, who's wrestling with false teachings. It's incredible to see how these churches, though facing different challenges, are all united by this common theme of overcoming.

It's true. And as we've talked about, overcoming isn't about achieving perfection. It's about perseverance, faithfulness, and reliance on God's grace.

It is. And I think it's important to remember that these messages weren't just meant for the original recipients. They have a timeless relevance.

For all of us who follow Christ today, we may not face persecution like Smyrna, but we all face temptations to compromise our faith, to blend in with the culture. We may tolerate false teachings or lose our passion for Christ. The call to overcome is a call for each of us to examine our hearts, to identify the areas where we need to grow, and to rely on God's grace to help us become more like him.

So it's not just about reading these messages as interesting historical anecdotes. It's about letting them speak into our lives, challenge us, and inspire us to become more faithful followers of Christ. Absolutely.

But the question is, how do we actually do that? Right. What does it look like to overcome in our modern context? Well, Dr. Mathewson offers some insights on that. He does.

And we'll be diving into those in part three of our deep dive. Oh, I can't wait. Welcome back.

We've been on quite a journey through these messages to the seven churches in Revelation. It has been quite a journey. And I have to say, Dr. Mathewson's insights have really got me thinking.

Yeah, there's so much depth here. It's not just ancient history. Right.

It feels incredibly relevant to the challenges we face. In our own lives, in our communities today. It's true.

It speaks to timeless human struggles, you know, the temptations we all face and the choices we make and how we respond. And as we discussed in the last part, woven through all of these messages is this powerful call to overcome. Yes. It's a challenge to persevere in our faith, resist compromise, and ultimately become more like Christ.

Right. But that begs the question: what does that look like in practice? Right. Especially for those of us living in the 21st century.

Well, that's where Dr. Mathewson gets really practical. Okay. He reminds us that these messages weren't just meant to be read and admired.

Right. They were meant to inspire action. Yeah.

To motivate real change in the lives of believers. So how do we translate these ancient calls to overcome into something tangible for our modern lives? Well, Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that overcoming starts with self-awareness. Okay.

It's about honestly assessing our own lives, identifying areas where we've become complacent, compromised, or maybe even a little bit lukewarm in our faith. Yeah. That self-reflection can be a little uncomfortable.

Oh, it's true. It's easier to focus on, like, what other people are doing wrong. Right.

Than to, like, look in the mirror and see our own shortcomings. Yeah. But Dr. Mathewson reminds us that this honest self-assessment is the starting point for real growth.

Okay. It's only when we acknowledge our need that we can begin to move towards transformation. So we need that honest self-reflection.

Yeah. What's the next step? Well, once we've identified those areas where we need to grow, Dr. Mathewson challenges us to take concrete action. Okay.

And he's not talking about just trying harder in our own strength. Right. He emphasizes that true overcoming comes from a deep reliance on God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

So it's not just about willpower or good intentions. Right. It's about surrendering to God's work in our lives, allowing him to shape and transform us from the inside out.

Exactly. It's about partnering with God in the process of becoming more like Christ. That's a powerful image.

Yeah. It's not just about us striving to be better. Right.

It's about inviting God into the process. Yeah. Trusting Him to do what we can't do on our own.

And this partnership with God isn't just about personal transformation. Right. It's about living out our faith in the world around us.

Okay. Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that overcoming isn't a passive activity. It's about actively engaging with the challenges of our time.

Yeah. Standing up for truth, resisting injustice, and being a force for good in the world. So it's not just about personal piety.

Right. It's about living out our faith in tangible ways, making a difference in our communities and beyond. Yeah.

But that can feel overwhelming. It can. Especially when we look at the state of the world and all the problems we face.

It's easy to feel like our efforts are just a drop in the ocean. I understand that feeling, but Dr. Mathewson reminds us that God doesn't call us to solve all the world's problems on our

own. He calls us to be faithful in the little things, to be salt and light in our own spheres of influence, to make a difference wherever we are, however we can.

So it's about finding those opportunities to live out our faith in practical ways. Exactly. Whether it's through acts of kindness, speaking up for those who are marginalized, or simply living with integrity and compassion in our daily interactions.

Exactly. And even those small acts of faithfulness can have a ripple effect, inspiring others and ultimately contributing to God's work of bringing healing and transformation to the world. It's a powerful reminder that we don't have to have all the answers or achieve some grand heroic feat to make a difference.

No. Faithfulness in the everyday, ordinary moments of our lives can have a profound impact. And I think that's a message of hope that we all need to hear.

Yeah. I spoke in a world that can feel so divided and overwhelming. It's a reminder that God is at work, even in the midst of the messiness.

And he invites us to partner with him in bringing his kingdom to earth, one act of faithfulness at a time. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Revelation's messages to the seven churches, I'm left with this sense of challenge and encouragement. Me too.

It's a challenge to look inward, to identify the areas where we need to grow, to overcome complacency and compromise, and become more like Christ. But it's also an encouragement to remember that we're not alone in this journey. We're not.

We have God's grace, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the support of our fellow believers to help us along the way. Absolutely. So to our listeners, we encourage you to take some time to reflect on what you've heard today, what resonates with you, what challenges you, what inspires you.

Yeah, good questions. Let these ancient messages speak to your heart and allow God to work in you, transforming you into the person he created you to be. Until next time, keep seeking, keep exploring, and keep diving deep into the riches of God's word.