

**The 1st Vision: What the Spirit says to the Church
Rev 1:1-3:22, Matt 19:27-30**

Friends, there's a riddle that goes like this;

As I was going to St Ives - I met a man with seven wives -
Every wife had seven sacks - Every sack had seven cats -
Every cat had seven kits - Kits, cats, sacks, wives
How many were going to St Ives?

Only one, it is the person who met this polygamist and his
feline collecting females... they were all travelling away from
St. Ives.

What makes this riddle clever is the fact that it draws your
attention to man, and his wives and their sacks and the cats
and the kittens...

and then asks you a question which has nothing to do with all
the detail that has been given to you. To answer correctly you
must have not allowed yourself to become distracted by all
the detail.

And friends we can find ourselves with a similar riddle as we
look at the 1st Vision in the book of Revelation. It might go
something like this;

As I was reading the book of Revelation –
I noticed that it consisted of seven visions
And in the first vision, chapter one had seven sections -
And in one of those sections
Jesus is walking among seven lampstands,
with seven stars in his hand
And chapters two and three have seven letters -
And each letter had seven components
So... what did the Spirit have to say to the Churches?

Did you get all that? Right lets go through that again.

Book of Revelation consists of Seven Visions;

From 1-3 Christ among the Lampstands, from 4-7 The
heavenly Throne Room and the Seals, from 8-11 it's the Seven
Trumpets, from 12-14 the Dragon and his helpers, from 15-16

it's the Seven Bowls of Wrath, in 17-19 we see the Fall of Babylon, and from 20-22 it the final vision of the Great Consummation.

And Chapter one of the First Vision has seven sections;

The Introduction in verses 1-3, the Greeting and Adoration in verses 4-6, an announcement of Christ's second coming in verse 7, Christ's title in verse 8, John's commission to write down the Vision in verses 9-11, the vision of Jesus amongst the lampstands in verses 12 to 16, and the effect of seeing that vision upon John in verses 17-20.

In Chapters two and three in the First Vision there find are seven letters to the seven churches – Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira, Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

And in these letters Jesus includes seven components. He begins with “to the messenger of the church of...” then he introduces himself with a title, gives commendations to the church for what they are doing or have done well, then he

rebukes them for what they are not doing well, gives them a warning about making sure they improve, follows that with an exhortation to encourage them, and then reminds them of what is promised to them when he returns...

All these sevens with-in sevens, but the question remains... what is the Spirit saying to the church?

And just like the riddle of St. Ives, it's easy to become so distracted by all the divisions of seven so that we miss what the Holy Spirit wants to say to us through this.

In other words, the numbers are the media, but they are not the message - (sorry Marshal McLuhan)

And if there is anything that we should understand from the usage of all these “Sevens” in the first vision, and what the number Seven represents in the rest of the Visions of Revelation, it is that is communicates the concept of completeness.

Seven Visions covering the time between times - in order to give the reader the complete perspective and full understanding of what to expect and how to live as we wait for the return of Christ.

And Jesus is described with seven symbolic characteristics – and what they represent is the complete array of the responsibilities and powers that He now been given upon ascending to the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

And there are seven letters, to seven churches – no doubt written to actual existing congregations in the early church, in those cities.

But... what Christ says in **seven** letters with **seven** components makes it his complete, his comprehensive once and for all word, to his Church for the time between times.

Now, as I said last week – the seven visions in Revelation are parallel because they all cover the same time period – from Christ's first coming to his second coming, and so today we

discover that the 1st Vision spans this period by giving Christ's complete word to His entire church for that entire time.

In other words, these letters are for every church that will ever exist - in every century, in every situation, in every country or city, in the time between times... until Christ returns.

So what do they continue to say to us today? We'll friends, since we have ears to hear – let us hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to us – the church.

So pay close attention... because these are direct words from Jesus to us, and this is what Jesus wants for us as his church, what He will not put up with, and what He has planned for us.

First and foremost Jesus wants us to be busy doing the work which he instructed us to do when He left - five times He says in these letters "I know your deeds."

So friends, our Lord is aware of what we are doing – that we are working to find ways to be obedient to His great commission...

“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
(Matt 28:18-20)

Christ is aware that we are striving to *“Love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Luke 10:27)

That we are seeking to grow in our passionate spirituality in our weekly worship services, and in activities like hosting Inn from the Cold, and going on trips to build homes in Mexico...

He knows that we are looking for opportunities to share with people that *“Jesus is the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6) that we have renamed ourselves Valleyview Community

Church to emphasize the fact that we exist to reach those who live around us and who are not yet part of us.

That we’ve partnered with Young Life, so that our teens have a venue to introduce their non-Christian friends to Jesus...

Jesus says “Valleyview... I know your deeds, your love, your service and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”

But friends, here’s the kicker... while Jesus sees our deeds and service and He commends us for proclaiming the truth, not everybody appreciates it, not everybody wants it or supports it.

In fact that’s why the apostle John was on the Island of Patmos – he had been exiled to a prison colony for doing what Jesus had instructed him to do - he was persecuted.

And equipping Christians to endure and persevere in spite of persecution is pretty much the main purpose of the Book of Revelation.

Because when we go and do what Jesus told us to keep busy with until He returns there are three things that can happen.

First and most obvious, and desirable is that people will receive our service and message with joy and appreciation and will they put their faith and trust in Jesus... wonderful!

However – what we do **will** also threaten people, it can offend people - and if we persist in proclaiming and living out the gospel message they will end up persecuting us for it.

But there is a third option as well – people can take what we do and try to co-opt it, take it and use it for their own purposes, put their own spin on it, and make it fit into what they already believe.

For example; the bible says a great deal about Love, e.g. Love is patient, love is kind, etc... and God is love... and so many people are willing to accept what we have to say about Love but use it to support their own belief system of “live and let live” and or “Co-exist”

And this is the other purpose of the book of Revelation; to encourage the church to resist those kinds of false teachings and the false teachers who would promote this and instead stay loyal to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Because both persecution and false teachers will prevent us from continuing the work that Jesus commissioned us to do.

Persecution will attempt to do so by outright opposition – vigorously, vocally and violently... while false teachers and their half-truths will nudge us off course more subtly and politely.

And Jesus says to us – keep my word and do not deny my name, persevere and endure hardships for my name, remain

true to my name, hold on to what you have, be faithful even to the point of death...

Because there is something better that is coming when Jesus returns... which is why the apostle Paul says in Romans 8:18 *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

The truth is whatever happens to us in this time between times – is as nothing... when compared to our coming existence and life in with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven!

Now, we at Valleyview, and in fact the church in North America and the West, have enjoyed a reprieve for the past century or so from the kind of intense focused persecution where people are killed for their faith in Christ.

What is a more immediate danger for us is the issue of false teachers and false teachings and Jesus hands out some indictments in these letters regarding this; He says *“I have this*

against you... you have people who hold to the teaching of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, Jezebel...”

All these false teachers seemed to find ways to twist the message of Jesus’ grace and forgiveness in order to rationalize Christian participation in pagan worship activities such idol sacrifices and temple prostitution.

They justified participating in these things because refraining from these activities would cause Christians to be marginalized and persecuted.

They believed that Christians could serve two masters Friends –what sort of false teachings and false teachers do we flirt with that “soften” the call to discipleship and obedience... so that following Christ doesn’t have to cost us anything, so that we don’t stick out as weird...

Or maybe to put that in more proactive terms; that we attempt to follow Christ passively... no passion- neither hot nor cold – just lukewarm?

Do we believe that “faith” is a personal private matter of choice? That all roads lead to god?

Have we bought into the power of positive thinking? Do we just accept whatever Oprah says is inspirational? Are we into “new age or native spirituality?”

Have we committed ourselves to Lodges, Brotherhoods, Multi-level Marketing schemes, or Self-improvement systems which and offer to reveal secret truths or offer us quick and easy steps to develop all our hidden potential and make exclusive claims to our loyalty and energies?

Do we believe that loving everyone and not being judgmental means that we should consider any and all expressions of marriage and sexuality and family as healthy and normative?

Friends, what false teachings and false teachers are presenting themselves as a danger to us?

I know your deeds Valleyview, yet I have this against you... but friends take heart because Jesus says “those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”

So friends, if we take to heart Jesus’ rebuke about false teachings and we turn away from them, and if and we take to heart his command to stand firm against any opposition, consequence or back-lash we get from doing that and we persevere... **friends, we will overcome** – we will stay faithful until his return.

And those who overcome will then receive what Christ has prepared for them.

In these letters He describes it as eating from the tree of life, hidden manna, and dinner with Jesus, having your name in the book of life, being given a new name, receiving authority, sitting with Christ on his throne.

These are all phrases describing some aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven, and how Christ will make this world new once

again – related in some way to what His followers, what we will have to endure, or turn away from in our struggle to overcome in the time between times.

So Jesus says to us what he had said to his disciples in Matt 19
“Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”

Friends what the Spirit has to say to the church, to us – in these letters and throughout the rest of the book of Revelation is this:

to endure whatever hardship we encounter in following Christ, to persevere through whatever persecution we face,
to turn away from false teaching
to hold firm to the truth of Christ as our substitute and
to anticipate the reward of His return

This is Christ’s complete, comprehensive, once and for all, word for us in this time between times.

He who has ears to hear let him hear... Amen.