

## 20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning

### Week 29 (July 12-18, 2015)

The amazing material we will study this week will show what has happened in our churches during the past 53 years, which allowed the moral decline in our nation, the subject of next week's devotions. (Updated and expanded reprint of week 18, 2012)

**Sunday, July 12** (read Revelation 2:1-7)

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. (Revelation 2:4)

Jesus appears to the apostle John on the island of Patmos, where he has been exiled because of his faith (Revelation 1:9-11), and dictates seven letters to be sent to seven actual churches. These letters also picture what has happened to the churches in the United States over the past 53 years. Before 1962, all churches, like Ephesus in v. 1-3, believed and taught the truth of the Bible that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). After our government replaced **the teaching of creation** with the **teaching of evolution** in 1962, many mainline churches made a decision to become inclusive of other religions, contradicting the salvation-through-Jesus-alone doctrine, thus forsaking their first love (v. 4). Jesus gives them the "3 R's" in v. 5: remember what you used to teach, repent of your negligence and repeat, "the things you did at first." If you fail to do this, Jesus (not Satan) will remove your church's influence to keep it from spreading false teaching. Those who accept His Word will eat from the "tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (v. 7).

**Monday, July 13** (read Revelation 2:8-11)

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! (Revelation 2:9a)

Two of the seven churches receive no critical remarks from Jesus. One of those is the church in Smyrna, the recipient of the letter in today's text. Jesus identifies Himself as the One who died and rose again (v. 8). He acknowledges the tough situation of the Christians in Smyrna. They are poor and afflicted (v. 9), yet they are rich in the things that really matter. People have infiltrated their ranks claiming to be believers although they actually belong to Satan's church (v. 9). Jesus tells His followers to hold on without fear even though they will suffer persecution. The "crown of life" awaits them in Heaven (v. 10). The second death (hell) will never touch God's true believers. I believe persecution is coming to true Christians in the United States on a level that we have not yet experienced. Believers around the world are already suffering terrible trials. It is imperative that we remain faithful to our first love at this time.

**Tuesday, July 14** (read Revelation 2:12-17)

Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. (Revelation 2:16)

The third letter is to the church in Pergamum. It begins with an understanding of their difficult location and a compliment concerning their faithfulness (v. 13). Jesus identifies Himself as the One "who has the sharp, double-edged sword" (v. 12). This pictures the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). The rest of the letter identifies their shortcomings that God will not tolerate. This is the second step of decline since 1962. Those churches that have forsaken their first love and no longer teach salvation through Christ alone according to God's infallible Word will inevitably attract folks who have little regard for morality (v. 14). They will also take no stand against perversion, just like the Nicolaitans (v. 15). Thus, they **tolerate sin** of all kinds. His warning is the same as it was to Ephesus (v. 5). The source for judgment will be the Word of God whether they choose to teach it or not (v. 16). Those who remain true will discover "hidden manna" (truths that are not shown to those who do not trust the Bible-v. 17). The white stone refers to the old idea of black balling someone you don't want in your fraternity. Jesus has the white stone for you. It will crush all other stones of peer judgment! He loves you unconditionally.

### **Wednesday, July 15** (read Revelation 2:18-29)

I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. (Revelation 2:21)

Many churches have stopped preaching the Bible as God's infallible Word; therefore, they tolerate sin because they have no standard to condemn it. The third step down the spiral is found in Jesus' letter to the church in Thyatira. He identifies Himself as the One who sees all their deeds and whose feet will not be moved (v. 18). He observes that they are busy with activities (v. 19); however, their tolerance for sin has now gone to the next logical level: they are **participating in sin** (v. 20). God's patience is running out and **His judgment** is about to begin (v. 21-23). This will be an object lesson to the churches that teach only about **His love** (v. 23). He challenges those members who have not fallen prey to the false teachings to hold tight to His Word (v. 24-25). Those who persevere will rule with Him in His Kingdom (v. 26-29).

### **Thursday, July 16** (read Revelation 3:1-6)

But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. (Revelation 3:3b)

The fourth downward step is written in Jesus' warning to the church of Sardis, but we saw a preview of it in the church of Thyatira (2:19). The church in Sardis has a reputation for being alive because of her many activities. Some of today's churches are known for hosting such activities as boy scouts, garden clubs, weightwatchers, aerobics, and AA, but they are **spiritually** dead. Many have become social clubs instead of worship centers. They still have a remnant of true believers, but even these will not last long unless they are fed the Gospel (v. 2). Jesus' warning of coming as a thief informs us that church members will not be taken in the rapture unless they are true believers (v. 3). You can identify them by their daily walk dressed only in white representing His righteousness (v. 4-5). Their names are in the Book of Life and will never be blotted out. Jesus, Himself, is their advocate before the Father and His angels (v. 5). I pray that you have spiritual ears to hear this warning (v. 6).

### **Friday, July 17** (read Revelation 3:7-13)

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

The church in Philadelphia is the second one with no negative observations from our Lord. They are weak and small (v. 8), but they are faithful to their calling. God placed them in that location to be salt and light in their area (v. 7). Some imposters have come into their church, but God will separate them from the true believers (v. 9). He encourages them (and us) by saying that true Christians will be caught up into Heaven in the rapture prior to the Tribulation (hour of trial in v. 10). His return is imminent (v. 11). We who overcome by His blood will worship and serve Him in the New Jerusalem (v. 12). I hope you are looking forward to the new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-2).

### **Saturday, July 18** (read Revelation 3:14-22)

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! (Revelation 3:15)

So far, we have met two churches that have no criticism from Jesus. They are weak, poor and persecuted (see Monday's and Friday's devotions). The other four churches form a downward spiral:

- 1) They have forsaken their love for Jesus and His Word (Sunday)
- 2) They tolerate sin in their church (Tuesday)
- 3) They participate in sin (Wednesday)
- 4) They have become nothing but social clubs under the name of a church (Thursday)

"The ruler of God's creation" (v. 14) addresses the church in Laodicea that pictures the 5<sup>th</sup> step of decline. Their members take no stand on anything! They are moderate (lukewarm, politically correct) on all issues, because the Bible is not their final authority (v. 15). They make our Lord sick (v. 16). What's their problem? They have lots of money in reserve and are oblivious to the fact that they have nothing of value (v. 17). This describes many churches in America today. It is significant because it is the state of the church in the final days prior to the Rapture. Jesus tells them to get their treasures from Him and not from the world. His treasures, alone, have **eternal** value. A true child of God comes under the discipline of Jesus (v. 19). Our Lord issues one final invitation and reminds us that we must open the door in response to His call (v. 20). Those who do will reign with Him throughout Eternity.