

Overcomers: Lessons from the Seven Churches

Preacher: Harold Summers

Date: June 16, 2026

Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Revelation 2-3**, Revelation 2:1; Revelation 2:4; Revelation 2:8; Revelation 2:10-11; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 2:20; Revelation 3:1-3; Revelation 3:8; Revelation 3:11; Revelation 3:14-16; Revelation 3:19; Revelation 3:21; 1 Corinthians 11:24; Exodus 23:19; Hebrews 13:8

Introduction

We're just going to ask the Lord to bless us as we already have. I want to consider with you tonight some truths from the seven letters to the churches that we read about in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

And you will remember that these two chapters contain letters written by and sent by the Lord Jesus to seven churches that were in the area of Asia, as it was then called—the area of Turkey today—seven churches. They were... I'll give you their names. They were Ephesus, and Smyrna, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, and Sardis, and Philadelphia, and Laodicea. And many of you have read those chapters many times. They're good chapters.

They are in many respects representative of churches in the world today, churches down through history. They are letters that are written to churches that have the same kinds of issues and problems that we have. But there were in all of those churches two kinds of people: the kind of people who... I'm not sure what to say, I'm going to say **failed**, and the kind of people who **overcame**. There were problems there. Some of them fell under the problems, and others pursued through the problems, and they became **overcomers**.

And so the interesting logic of each of the seven stories of the seven churches is the Lord says, "I know your works, and I can see some problems or some blessings," and at the end of it, "I want you all to be **overcomers**." There's a great reward for the overcomer. So the question that we would have is—it's true that it's written to churches, but it's also true it is written to individuals like you and me. And the question is: are we going to be dropouts, or are we going to be **overcomers**?

And so the song we sang is, "Don't turn around to the things you've left behind." And so I'm going to quickly summarize some of the teaching in each of these seven churches and a

simple lesson for each of us. So if you know the stories of the churches, it's going to be easier for you to follow. If not, you're just going to have to trust me when I say this is a problem in this church. We'll read a little bit about it, not as much as we should.

Ephesus: Don't Leave Your First Love

First church is the church at Ephesus, Revelation chapter 2 and verse 1. Jesus is the dictator. He says unto the church—sorry, unto the angel of the church of Ephesus, write. He says, "These things said, He that holds the seven stars..."

[Revelation 2:1 NKJV]

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

And He says, verse 4:

[Revelation 2:4 NKJV]

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

What's the first lesson from Ephesus? The lesson is: don't leave your first love.

Some people, when they get saved, they get really excited. It's absolutely wonderful! And they're filled, and they love the Lord, and... but then over time they sort of drift along and, "Oh yeah, that was yesterday. Yeah, okay, but not so excited as I used to be." It's interesting, they were full of good works—they kept on doing the work—but they just didn't love the Lord Jesus the way they used to. I think they probably loved one another, but they didn't love the Lord Jesus that much. Is that possible? The answer is yes.

We have one meeting in our chapel every week designed to encourage us to love the Lord. What meeting is that? That's the breaking of bread meeting, first thing every Sunday morning. What's the purpose of the meeting? To do what He said. He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

[1 Corinthians 11:24 NKJV]

and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

So in remembrance of Him, we take the bread and the wine. That's one of the longest meetings we've got. That meeting goes for a full hour, and it's all just worship of the Lord. All we're doing in that meeting is saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You."

And I've been going to that meeting for many years now, as you can imagine. I can remember when I was younger, and I would listen to men rise and pray, and praise the Lord, and read and comment on His Word. And I would sit there and I would say, "Harold, these men love the Lord Jesus more than you do, you know." They say good things about Him. You don't always say those good things about Him. And so I had to say to myself, "Lord, I want to love You more."

I've heard of people who get married, and I've heard that sometimes they don't love their spouse after a few years or more, like they used to. And I don't understand that, of course, because I've never been married. But some of you understand that. You've seen examples of it. And then you say to yourself, "Lord, I don't want to say I used to love my spouse, but I don't love her anymore. I don't love him anymore." That would be terrible.

Would it be possible for Christians to love the Lord more yesterday than they do today or tomorrow? Answer: yes, it would, because that's the case in Ephesus. It wasn't just one or two. It was many in that congregation who loved the Lord Jesus less than they used to. Lesson number one: don't be like them. Keep loving the Lord. Keep spending time with Him so that you love Him more. Huh?

I never know what phrases they have in Chinese, but there's a phrase that we have in the English language about love, and it says, "Love makes the heart grow fonder." I don't know that that's true. Usually love... no, that's not the right—"Absence makes the heart grow fonder." That's what it says. But you know, that's not true. Usually absence makes the heart grow colder. Want to love the Lord Jesus more? How would you do it? Spend more time with Him. And when you're with Him, you'd say, "Forget the nonsense. I want to tell You I love You, and I don't love You as much as I should. Would You help me love You more?" Lesson number one: don't leave your love for the Lord.

So, I can't remember, I probably did read that verse for you, verse 4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love." All right.

Smyrna: Don't Be Afraid of Persecution

The next church is this church in Smyrna, verse 8. "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write."

[Revelation 2:8 NKJV]

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

And what do we know about the church in Smyrna? Well, the answer is we know that it was a church that had lots of persecution. It was a scary place to live. This is verse 10.

[Revelation 2:10-11 NKJV]

¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

What is problem number two, the Smyrna problem? And it is: don't be afraid of persecution. You ever met anybody who was afraid of persecution? He says, "I better not. I better not." What if they... Paul says, "What if they throw me into prison?" He's praying about Bill C-9. What's Bill C-9 going to do if it passes? It is going to make it easier for people in Canada to persecute Christians. The persecution can be really bad.

Vic told me this morning—I'm not sure, Vic, whether I get all the answers right, I'm just trying to see, Vic is still here. That's right. Vic said there was three pastors who were put into prison just recently in China. So what would I do if I were in China? Well, I mean, I might be afraid. Frankly, I might even be afraid to go to China. I might say, "I think I can stay in Vancouver. I'd rather do that than go to China."

What does the Lord say to the people of Smyrna? Don't be afraid of persecution. What would the result be if you weren't afraid of persecution? And how does it end? Verse 11, it says: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes and is not afraid of persecution shall not be hurt of the second death."

Is that important? Yeah. If you were persecuted, what would you say? "This hurts, but you know what? I'm going to heaven. It's not going to hurt when I get to heaven." I lost when I was persecuted. I lost this, I lost that, but I'm going to heaven. Not worried, because when I go to heaven, I'm going to have far more than that.

Do you get excited about what you're going to do when you go to heaven? And frankly, I do. I'm hoping that I'm going to be able to be a tourist when I get to heaven, and I'm going to go around and see all kinds of places that I haven't seen. I even might get to go on a cruise when I get to heaven. I told you, didn't I, that the longest cruise I've ever been on was from Vancouver to Victoria? Okay, that was a nice cruise. I enjoyed it. I actually did it more than once. But I'd like to go on a cruise. I can probably do that when I get to heaven. I told you that I want to go for a giraffe ride when I get to heaven. I want to grab a hold of the giraffe and stand on his back and go hoppity-hoppity-hop. I'm going to have lots of fun in heaven, aren't you?

Okay, what if you suffer persecution now? Are you going to worry about it? No. Why? Because you get to go to heaven. Don't be afraid of persecution. So you've got two "don'ts" now: number one, don't leave your love for the Lord; number two, don't be afraid of persecution.

Pergamos: Don't Go Underground with Your Testimony

But the third church is Pergamos. What's Pergamos all about? Well, Pergamos, it was a wicked, sinful city. Satan was in power in the city of Pergamos. And the persecution was so great that many people said, "I'm just not going to say anything. I'm going to allow my testimony to go silent." So our third point is: don't go underground with your testimony. Okay?

In Smyrna, don't be afraid of persecution. In Pergamos, there's probably going to be lots of misunderstanding and upsetting and persecution—don't go underground with your testimony. Verse 13, what does it say? It says in Pergamos:

[Revelation 2:13 NKJV]

"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Wow. What happened there? Well, this man, Antipas, spoke up for God and he was killed. He wasn't just persecuted, he was killed. So what's the word Antipas mean? This is ESL. What's the word Antipas mean? "Anti" means against. "Pas" means all. He was against everything. He didn't just read some verses from Romans that Paul spoke about this evening. He did all kinds. He said, "This is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong." And he was speaking to non-Christians and saying, "You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't do that. This is wrong."

It would happen in our day. How many bad things are authorized by our government? A lot of them. A lot of them basically say, "God says don't do it," but they do it. "God says don't do it," but we pass laws to make it legal. When God says it's sinful—when God says it's not just legal, it's so sinful that you should die because of it.

What did the people in Pergamos do? Two kinds. One person was like... some of the people were like Antipas, and they simply said, "It's wrong." And the other people said... and they just zipped their lip and they didn't talk. Don't go underground with your testimony. All right, that's the third "don't." You got all three now? Don't leave your love for the Lord. Don't be afraid of persecution. Don't go underground with your testimony.

Thyatira: Don't Compromise with Evil Teaching

Thyatira. And it says: don't compromise with evil teaching and evil teachers. Thyatira is another city. What do we know about it? Verse 20.

[Revelation 2:20 NKJV]

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

Well, are there any teachers in churches today who teach that it's okay to commit fornication? And the answer is yes. One of the biggest denominations in the United States is dividing over this very issue: "Is homosexuality okay or not? Does God demand honor and obedience in the area of morality?" God... the Bible says yes. And all kinds of teachers like Jezebel are saying, "No, you can commit fornication and still go to heaven. You can carry on. You don't need to follow God's laws in everything."

They often use strange arguments. I can't remember them because I don't read them. But I heard one; it sort of goes like this: "The Bible says that you shouldn't..."—this is true—"The Bible says you shouldn't seethe a kid in its mother's milk."

[Exodus 23:19 NKJV]

The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

And then they say, "Well, of course, that's not terribly important. And the Bible also says you shall not commit fornication. That's just like, 'Don't seethe the kid in his mother's milk.'" That's the argument that they were using. I said, absolute nonsense! Who would ever teach that? Answer: Jezebel.

What is our responsibility? Don't compromise with evil teaching. Stand up for truth. Make sure that the preachers are preaching the truth. And what happens when I preach something's wrong? You all come up to me and say, "Harold, you are wrong." Okay, and I want you to do that fast. Don't wait. Do it right away. If I do anything wrong, don't allow me to teach what's wrong. And don't listen to the other teachers.

So here's this church in Thyatira, a good church, but they allowed Jezebel to teach, and she was teaching evil things. And that's not the way it should be. All right.

Sardis: Don't Forget What You Received

Now, the next church is Sardis. And interesting thing. This is chapter 3 now. Sardis. What do we have? Verse one says, "Unto the angel of the church in Sardis write." Verse number three, "Remember, therefore..." Back to verse 2 again, "Be watchful. Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die. I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard, and hold fast and repent."

[Revelation 3:1-3 NKJV]

¹ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and

repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

What do we know about Sardis then? Well, Sardis had been exposed to the truth of God. And they had heard the wonderful messages, possibly from Paul, from some of Paul's disciples. They'd heard the great truth of God, and they had embraced it. But, well, they didn't all follow it. And, well, things had changed a bit. I'm not sure how fast it happened. In our day, culture changes. And so we say, "Well, that was acceptable 30 years ago, acceptable 50 years ago, but, you know, the world has changed. People are different." And therefore, instead of standing for the truth of God, they... they basically say, "We're going to forget what we received and what we know to be right."

Have you ever heard something like this? "My mother was a believer, she taught me things, but I don't follow. My mother was very religious, but no, I don't follow that." How foolish! How many people out there have the sentence of God hanging over them because they forgot what their mother taught them?

And the people in Sardis had a big problem: they chose to forget what they once knew to be right. Can I remind you, if it was right yesterday, it's right today. Has God changed? No. Did God get up in the morning, read the newspapers, and say, "Oh, I guess I better... they took a new poll, and so I'll just change my position"? God doesn't say that.

God says, "I'm the same God yesterday and today and forever."

[Hebrews 13:8 NKJV]

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And if it was true yesterday, it's true today. And if you heard it yesterday and acknowledge that it was true today, don't forget it tomorrow. What are you supposed to do? Back again to verse number three. Simple verse. It says, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard it, hold fast."

[Revelation 3:1-3 NKJV]

¹ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things

which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

You received it. You heard it. What is your job? Remember it. How do you remember it? Well, you might write it down, for example. That'll help you remember. How do you remember it? Well, you memorize it. How do you remember it? You practice it. How do you remember it? You go back to where you heard it and what you heard, and you make sure that the truth that you received, you remember and don't depart from it. All right.

Have you got all five now? Don't leave your love for the Lord. Don't be afraid of persecution. Don't go underground with your testimony. Don't compromise with evil teaching and evil teachers. Don't forget what you received.

Philadelphia: Don't Slow Down

Philadelphia. What's it say? Don't slow down. What do we know about Philadelphia? Well, it was the best church of the bunch. Philadelphia was such a wonderful church. They preached, and people got saved. Philadelphia was growing, thriving. And the Lord had to say about them in Philadelphia... oh, dear. Where does it say, "I have set before you an open door"? What verse is that? Verse 8? That's right. Okay. "I know the works that behold, I have set before you an open door. No man can shut it, for you have a little strength, and you have kept My Word, and you have not denied My name."

[Revelation 3:8 NKJV]

"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Good people. What did they have before them? A great open door. What could they have done? Well, they could have said, "You know, yesterday... now, yesterday, I did a lot of good things for God. Yesterday, God really helped me, and we had a good day yesterday." What are you doing today? "Well, I'm sitting here with my feet up because yesterday was a hard day, and so I'm just not going to..."

I told you before that... I told you about a meeting that I went to many years ago. And there were a group of Christians there, all of whom had been walking with the Lord for a long time. And we went around the group for some reason, and we simply asked everyone, "Tell me what you're doing for God today and what you did before." And every one of them said, "You know, I used to do this for God, and it was really good." What are you doing right now? "Well, not much." And the next one said, "Well, I used to do this for God." What are you doing right now? "Well, I'm older than I used to be, you know." And you go to the next one, you say, "But what do you...?" "Oh," he said, "I used to, but I gave that up. Better let some of the young people do it, you know."

Philadelphia. What's the Lord say about Philadelphia? Verse 11. Chapter 3 and verse 11. He says, "Behold, I come quickly. Hold fast which you have, that no man take your crown."

[Revelation 3:11 NKJV]

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Would it be possible to serve the Lord diligently and then relax, and somebody comes along and says, "Oh, I like that," and takes your crown? God says that could happen. All kinds of people who serve the Lord zealously decided to "rest up for heaven." What a strange thing to say! "I'm resting up for heaven." You don't rest up for heaven. You keep working, and then you go to heaven. And if it gets harder, you expect it'll get harder. Some bosses, they run away. You could do that, but you're involved in the work of God. Don't run away. Don't take it easy. Keep working harder. Don't slow down. Why? Because it would be possible to lose your crown. I think that would be very, very sad. So that's Philadelphia.

Laodicea: Don't Go Casual

Laodicea. What do we know about Laodicea? Let's read the verse, chapter 3 and verse number 14. "And unto the angel of the church of Laodicea write, 'These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...'"

[Revelation 3:14-16 NKJV]

¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ "I

know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

So what do you know about Laodicea? Lukewarm. What do you think of? Tea. It's neither cold nor hot. It's insipid. I've never enjoyed tea or coffee; I don't understand those things. But some people I know did, and they say, "You know, lukewarm tea is not really... I like my tea hot." And they—amazing—they actually serve it in boiling water. And they don't think that's weird. I think that's weird, but they don't think that's weird. Tea is supposed to be hot.

Do you know there are Christians who are not cold or hot? What's God think of it? Well, you've read it before, but we should read it again. Verse 15: "I know your works, that they are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold or hot, I will spew you out of my mouth."

What's the word "spew" mean? Well, it's a very polite word, saying something that's not very polite. And you can... or you can go... neither way is really very... you wouldn't like either of those situations. Now the Lord says, "I'm the one who's going to say, 'I don't want you around. You're not cold or hot. You're just lukewarm. You're insipid.'"

Wow. What's the phrase? Don't go casual. I think our whole society has gone casual, hasn't it? Wow. You think about it: was there more respect in society in Canada 20 years ago, 40 years ago, 50 years ago than today? I can remember when we went to work, everyone wore a suit and a tie. We were all dressed up out of respect for our position. And then somebody introduced casual days, and people started going casual.

I told you, didn't I, about the day that I went in to see my boss. And when I went in to see him, as I was going in, I was putting my jacket on. And I put my jacket on when I sat down in his office. And I looked him square in the eye, and I said to him, "Do you know why I just put my jacket on?" And I can't remember what he said, but I said, "I'll tell you why. I said, I put my jacket on because I'm here to see my boss, and I wanted you to respect me. And I wanted to show respect for you because you're my boss, and I don't want to be casual before you, and I know you don't want me to be casual before you." And then I said, "Do you know why I didn't have my jacket on before I came into the office?" And he said, "No." And I said, "Because I was working so hard for you that I had to take my jacket off. I was too hot. Okay?" So I said, "I've got to respect you. I take my jacket off when I'm working, and I put it on when I come to see you." Is that logical? I can't remember, frankly, why I ever said that, but I did say that.

But I'll tell you another true story, and it's about a man whose name was David Livingstone. And David Livingstone was a missionary to Africa. He was one of the most outstanding missionaries to Africa that there ever was. And he went to Africa a long time ago, in the middle probably of the 1800s maybe, yeah, late middle of the 1800s. And he was traveling through Africa. He was a geographer, and he opened up much of the country to the world. The British Geography Society acknowledged he was an outstanding man, but he loved the Lord. And so there he is in Africa, and he traveled with him... he had a suit that he used to take when he went. And when he prayed, he would take off his ordinary clothes and put on his British suit. And the British suit was made of wool, and it was hot, hot, hot. And so when he was in his tent, he would be praying. He'd say to his friends and his others, he'd say, "Don't disturb me. I will be praying. Leave me alone in my tent." And so they left him alone in his tent, and he would always have his suit on when he prayed. Well, he stayed in Africa for a long time, but then he got very sick, and he died. And they went into his tent after he died. And what did they see? They saw David Livingstone on his knees at the side of his bed, dressed in his suit. David Livingstone says, "I've got it. I've got a glorious God. If I were going to see the Queen, I wouldn't wear blue jeans. If I'm going to see the Queen, I would honor her by appropriate dress and behavior—not just dress, behavior. And so," he said, "I serve the King of kings. He's far better than Queen Victoria or anybody else. I serve the King. I'm going to show respect."

We live in an age all over our country, all over the world, that doesn't show respect. Our homelessness situation is pathetic. In Vancouver and in other cities all over the Western world—I don't know what it's like elsewhere—what's happened? We have lost respect. We've gone casual.

Don't go casual with God. What's God want? He wants zeal. He wants you to be **hot**, not lukewarm. He wants you to be **hot**. Do you love Jesus? Yes. Tell somebody. Work at it, okay? Don't be casual. Be zealous.

What would happen if you were one of those who was not lukewarm in Laodicea? Well, what's verse 21 say? "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my father in his throne."

[Revelation 3:21 NKJV]

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Okay? What happens to those who are not casual, but they're zealous for God? They get to sit with God. Where do the others sit? Well, they sit in the back row, okay, and they're there along with a gazillion others. But what about those who are zealous for God? No, they will sit with the Lord. It's absolutely marvelous. All right.

Verse 19, what's it say? It says:

[Revelation 3:19 NKJV]

As many as I love, I rebuke and chaten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Okay, used to be casual, but I'm going to show God great respect. You do that. You say, "Lord, I don't want to be casual with You anymore. I'm going to respect You." And you can be like John Newton and respect the Lord.

Closing Prayer

Lord, just some interesting things tonight. Lord, we don't want to turn around to the things we've left behind. We want to keep right walking onto the promised land, and we don't want to be like these all who so many of them fell because they didn't heed the warnings. Lord, we pray that You will cause us to show respect and all the other things we've talked about. Lord, don't let us fail as so many of them failed. They were all in churches, but most of them in most of those churches failed. We don't want to, Lord. We would rather be **overcomers**. And so we give thanks for Your blessings, for Your promises, for the mercy and the hope that we have, and we pray that You'll bless each of us. Make us men and women of fervency and zeal. Make us **hot** for God, we pray. We ask in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.