

# Jesus' Care for His Churches

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Revelation 2:1-17

Our sermon title today from the book of Revelation should strike us as a contradiction: Jesus' care for his churches. Because when we take in the whole of this last book of the Bible, it seems more about Jesus takes care of his enemies!

Think of the content of these 22 chapters – chapter after chapter reveals Christ's sure victory over the wicked, Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet, the Harlot and Babylon the Great. Seven seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls fall upon our groaning world – followed by His return and judgment on a glorious white throne.

But all of that is in order to rescue His People, His Church, His Bride. And that is clearly set out for us in the beginning and the end of the book – in the letters to the 7 churches following chapter 1, and the 2 closing chapters of the final rest in a new heavens and a new earth.

For our communion message today, I want us to take three points from the seven letters on the care of Jesus for us.

All the glory and excellence of Jesus in Revelation 1 walks through the doors of our congregation.

I know you recognize that these letters are not just for these churches back then. They are written for us too, as to what Jesus thinks of the church and how he lovingly encourages and rebukes us in order to be godly.

And I know you recognize a similar pattern for each letter. Each church's angel is addressed, followed by Jesus revealing himself in a character fitted to that church, and then the message beginning with two words: "*I Know*". So the Lord gives fitting encouragements and/or admonitions. And then each closes with Christ being the answer for all his people, and they that hear the Spirit will overcome.

See here that Jesus is the Head of the Church, He is the Standard of the Church, and He is the Life of the Church.

We want to begin with this central truth – that Jesus cares for His seven churches here by His Word! He speaks to them and to us. He is the living Christ with a living voice – the sacred Scriptures!

He is the Lord of all. He has all the angels at his command. He will bring every enemy to his feet. He could come down to each one individually if He pleased. But no, he gives His Word which cannot change or be shaken! By His Word and by His Spirit – “Hear what the Spirit says to the churches!”

This is so important as the church is bombarded with the spirit of discontent with this; we want something more or something else besides the Bible. There are ministers, pastors, teachers and doctors who will line up to tell you why you shouldn't follow the Bible, shouldn't listen to Jesus speaking in the Scriptures.

And we really don't have to look too far to discover where this is coming from. We want a god of our own making, who fits us, who will just pat us on the head and say we are ok the way we are – that we don't have to change a thing!

One woman in the liberal Presbyterian church told her new pastor – a friend of Pastor Gorrell’s – that what she loved the most about that church was that she could believe whatever she wanted and nobody bothered her about it!

Oh – the Word of Christ is the foundation and life of the church! It is everything! Luther said, ‘take away our Bible, and you take away our sun!’

His Word is the Word that created the heavens and the earth! His Word sustains all things – by the Word of His power! And heaven and earth will pass away but His Word can never pass away! He alone has the words of eternal life! Blessed is the man, and blessed is the church, who builds his house upon the rock of His words; all else is sinking sand!

Now His Word is where we find Jesus Himself and His presence with His church.

Rev. 2 begins with Jesus presenting himself with all authority – all the angels are in his hands, pictured in these 7 stars; He is seated above all principalities and powers, at the right hand of the Father.

And we see further that this all-glorious Savior walks among or in the middle of the 7 golden lampstands – His people! His presence as well as his Word is central.

His promise to his disciples before his ascension was: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age!” He is as truly with his church today as he was with us by the lake, preparing breakfast on a fire!

He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and therefore will never, can never forsake us. You are His very body, members of Him, inseparable by the love of God and the sure covenant that is everlasting.

Let it sink in how precious and wonderful it is to have his presence with you, church of God!

The head of the church is Jesus; and that means he has not – in his heavenly rule – provided a substitute for himself here on earth. It is an awful robbery of His headship when any bishop, priest or minister says: “I am Christ’s vicar or representative here on earth!”

People sometimes misspeak and ask me – so, you’re the pastor of this church, the head here? I recoil at that last half! All ministers, elders, governors, are UNDERshepherds; Jesus is the ONLY Shepherd of the sheep!

Now the point to be made here is not merely to make a point for a more biblical church government. Rather it is to see that there is no substitute, no proxy or stand in for the presence of Jesus in the church!

The presence of Jesus cannot be replaced by anything else! The presence of Jesus the Lord cannot be faked or manufactured by flesh and blood! In fact, the presence of Christ Jesus cannot be replaced by everything else!

So the cry of the redeemed, and the cry of the church on earth, is that Christ would dwell in us, richly, by His Word and Spirit! That he would not be found, as in the church at Laodicea, outdoors and seeking entrance into his own house and home!

Without Jesus, the church is not the church! A headless body is a lifeless body! And this is where the threat that those who once professed Christ to be Savior, having turned from the gospel, will see their candle removed – Rev. 2.5.

This is the same that John spoke about in his first letter – they went out from us because they were not of us.

The presence of Jesus in His church is our very life as well as our authority. Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them!

The church then is opposed and spurned, mocked and persecuted by the world, the flesh and devil, precisely because Jesus is in our midst, precisely because we are following him!

So, we dwell in Jesus by faith; He dwells in us by His Spirit; you are the temple of God, *individually* – as living stones; and *corporately*, as local congregations, but also as one church, militant on earth and triumphant in heaven.

Communion with Him increases the enjoyment and assurance of His presence in us; we need to be conformed to him in every way.

That brings us then to our second point – Jesus is present with His church as the head, by both his Word and Spirit Presence.

### **He is also the Standard of His Church.**

There are many encouragements found from the Savior to his people here; but there are many rebukes and chastening to be found as well.

He comes into Ephesus and praises them – ‘I know your deeds, toil and perseverance; your proper intolerance of evil men and false apostles whom you faithfully test; their steadfast endurance for Christ’s name and unwearied service’ are all in the plus (+) column.

And there is nothing but praise for the church at Smyrna and Philadelphia. One author observes that the 3 middle churches of the 7 are a mix; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last are the best; and the first and the last are the worst.

Yet the Lord still counts them all his church – calling back the far gone to Himself, correcting the mixed bodies, and strengthening the faithful.

This really forms the heart of the letters then – if Jesus and His glory and authoritative presence is the head, *his knowing us* drives right to the heart of his people. He is like a good physician telling us plainly of our disease when he sees it, and encouraging our health as well.

Two points then which will be brief:

1<sup>st</sup>, Jesus comes to these patients in the character best fitted to stand them up and to help them.

For instance – to Smyrna beginning in verse 8, who are about to be tested by death and martyrdom, Jesus is the first and last, the resurrected one. Doesn’t it make a patient nearing death’s door sit up and breath with peace when Jesus walks in with the keys of life and death!?

And to Pergamum which has a close proximity to Satan's throne (whatever that means): he comes with a sharp two-edged sword in his mouth, to separate his people from the wicked.

All of this is an act of love on his part. Loving to encourage – and how we need it.

But there is love in chastening, too; love in reproof, love in discipline – love calls to repentance as well as commands a continued walking in faith. Quote Rev. 3.19.

Then secondly here, taking everything together to these 7 churches; Jesus cares for the church by encouraging real Christianity – a hearty, persevering life in Him built on true teaching and godly practice. (Repeat)

Doctrine is very important; but it is not enough to just have true teaching or doctrine. Ephesus shows this; they are the orthodox but dead church, without the first love which comes with gospel conversion.

Godliness is very important – who can miss all the references to sexual purity throughout these letters! But it is not enough to just hold to a pure and holy life; doctrine is central and wicked teaching and teachers need to be weeded out.

And it must be hearty – must come from a life fixed upon Christ, upon those things that are above. True worship resonates all throughout these two chapters. And even good and faithful churches were flagging and needed encouragements.

And so, above all, the whole tenor of these letters is repeated – overcome, persevere, press onward, press upward! “He who overcomes” is repeated to each church – seven times.

This is at the heart of true Christian, covenant living. At the end of this book we read: <sup>7</sup> "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son." (Rev 21:7)

Jesus is to be set before you then very decisively and fully and continually here. Take your eyes off of Jesus, and you will begin to slouch toward the ways of the world and sin. Jesus is the standard of His church; he knows us, knows what we need, and addresses us here. It is our response then to hear what he says to us, what he says by the Spirit, and to open our hearts and lives to him, to have him – like a good doctor – prescribe what is needed.

To borrow the words of David here in Psalm 16 –

<sup>7</sup> I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. <sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Psa 16:7-8)

So Jesus is the Standard here – what He approves and disapproves in our lives, in our church. And he is the head by His word and presence. We will all stand before him and give an account.

How then do we overcome? Jesus sends us forth to live for him and be godly and be lovers of the truth. What is the power to overcome? Is it in us? Do we just grit our teeth and walk in the Christian way?

No – not at all. For Jesus then points us to himself! He is not only the doctor, but he is our medicine cabinet!

Jesus is our Life as well as our Lord and our Law.

He is our tree of life who restores our first love; eat his fruit – his grace and love to you – and your love will increase.

He is our crown of life who a put to death in this world, to live forever in the world to come; to not be harmed by the second death.

He is the hidden manna to strengthen and sustain against Satan's rule and threats, and he is the hidden stone with a new name for those who have defiled themselves idolatrously or sexually.

He is your victory, your dominion over all, your morning star of eternity. He is the one who does not erase your name from his book and gives you a pure, clean robe unsoiled with sin; confessing you before his Father and the angels. He gives you a new place, a new name in the new Jerusalem, a pillar in the temple – never to leave anymore!

Buy from me, without money and without price, gold refined in the fire, white garments to clothe yourself and your shame, eye salve so you may see – and so sit down with Him in His throne!

And our walking by faith in His grace, by His truth, following Him – is how we overcome. Jesus, Jesus alone, is the answer in making us to persevere and overcome such real dangers and tests to our faith.

Here is the application – what is your weakness, your need, your sin, your trial? Set it before this all-glorious head of the church. Have him look at these things; He knows you and knows these needs. He desires you to overcome; He does all to bring you at last to be with him! Seek then his grace, his answer, for your many needs.

As the hymn-writer put it

*Jesus, with thy church abide,  
Be her Saviour, Lord and Guide,  
While on earth her faith is tried:  
We beseech thee, hear us.*

*Keep her life and doctrine pure;  
Grant her patience to endure,  
Trusting in thy promise sure:  
We beseech thee, hear us.*