

Jesus' Messages to the Seven Churches



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 2:8–11, Rev. 2:12–17, Rev. 2:18–29, Rev. 3:1–6, Rev. 3:7–13, Rev. 3:14–22, Isa. 61:10.*

Memory Text: “ ‘ ‘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’ ’ ” (*Revelation 3:21, NKJV*).

From Patmos, Jesus sent a letter via John with seven messages to His people. While those messages concern the churches in Asia of John's day, they also each prophetically portray in symbols the condition of the church throughout history.

A side-by-side comparison of these messages shows that they follow the same sixfold structure. Each opens with Jesus addressing the specific church by name. The second part begins with the phrase, “ ‘ ‘These things says . . . ’ ’ ” (*NKJV*), in which Jesus introduces Himself to each church using descriptions and symbols found in chapter 1. Those descriptions of Jesus were suited to the specific needs of each church. Thus, Jesus pointed to His ability to meet their different struggles and situations. Next, Jesus gives an appraisal of the church, and then He counsels the church how to get out of its predicaments. Finally, each message concludes with an appeal to hear the Spirit's message and with promises to the overcomers.

As we saw in last week's lesson in our analysis of the message to the first church in Ephesus, and as we will see this week in our study of the remaining six messages, Jesus offers hope and answers the needs of each church in each situation. Hence, surely He can meet our needs today, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 19.

Christ's Messages to Smyrna and Pergamum

Smyrna was a beautiful and wealthy city, but it also was a center of mandated emperor worship. Refusing to comply with this mandate could lead to the loss of legal status, to persecution, and even to martyrdom.

Read Revelation 2:8–11. How does the way that Jesus presents Himself to this church relate to the church's situation? What was the situation of the church? What warning does Jesus give to the church about what was coming?

The message to the church in Smyrna applies prophetically to the church in the postapostolic era, when Christians were viciously persecuted by the Roman Empire. The "ten days" mentioned in Revelation 2:10 point to the ten years of the Diocletian persecution from A.D. 303 until A.D. 313, when Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan, which granted Christians religious freedom.

Pergamum was the center of various pagan cults, including the cult of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, who was called "the Savior" and was represented by a serpent. People came from all over to the shrine of Asclepius to be healed. Pergamum had a leading role in promoting the cult of emperor worship, which, as in Smyrna, was compulsory. No wonder Jesus said that the Christians in Pergamum lived in the city where Satan's seat is and where his throne was located.

Read Revelation 2:12–15. How does Jesus present Himself to this church? What was His appraisal of its spiritual condition?

The Christians in Pergamum faced temptations from both outside and inside the church. While most of them remained faithful, some, the "Nicolaitans," advocated compromise with paganism in order to avoid persecution. Like Balaam, who apostatized and enticed the Israelites to sin against God on the way to the Promised Land (*Num. 31:16*), these members found it more convenient, and even rewarding, to compromise their faith. Though the Jerusalem Council had forbidden "things offered to idols" and "sexual immorality" (*Acts 15:29, NKJV*), the doctrine of Balaam taught church members to reject this decision. The only solution Jesus can offer to Pergamum is: " "Repent" " (*Rev. 2:16, NKJV*).

The church in Pergamum is a prophetic picture of the church from approximately A.D. 313–538. Although some members in the church remained faithful, spiritual decline and apostasy increased rapidly.

What does it mean not to deny " "My faith" " (*Rev. 2:13, NKJV*; see also *Rev. 14:12*)? How can our refusal to deny our faith help us to resist compromise and be " "faithful unto death" " (*Rev. 2:10*)?

Christ’s Message to Thyatira

In comparison with other cities, Thyatira had no political or cultural significance that we know of. Furthermore, the church was obscure. In order to run a business or have a job, people in the Roman Empire had to belong to trade guilds. Thyatira was especially noted for enforcing this requirement. Guild members had to attend the guild festivals and participate in temple rituals, which often included immoral activities. Those who did not comply faced exclusion from the guilds and economic sanctions. For Christians at that time, that meant choosing between total compromise or total exclusion for the sake of the gospel.

Read Revelation 2:18–29. How does Jesus present Himself to the church in Thyatira (see also Dan. 10:6)? What were the qualities that Jesus commended the church for, and what issue troubled it?

Like the church in Pergamum, the church in Thyatira was pushed to compromise with the pagan environment. The name “Jezebel” refers to the wife of King Ahab, who led Israel into apostasy (*1 Kings 16:31–33*). Jesus portrays Jezebel as spiritually immoral (*Rev. 2:20*). Those church members who compromised the truth and adopted “unclean” pagan ideas and practices were committing spiritual adultery with her.

The church in Thyatira symbolizes the condition of Christianity from A.D. 538 to 1565. During this time, the danger to God’s people did not come from outside the church but from within. Tradition replaced the Bible, a human priesthood and sacred relics replaced Christ’s priesthood, and works were regarded as the means of salvation. Those who did not accept these corrupting influences were persecuted and even killed. For centuries the true church found refuge in wilderness areas (see *Rev. 12:6, 13, 14*). But Jesus also commends the church in Thyatira for their faith and love, works and service—pointing to the Reformation and the beginnings of a return to the Bible.

Think about the words of Revelation 2:25: “ ‘Hold fast what you have till I come’ ” (NKJV). What do those words mean to us, both corporately and individually? What do we have from Jesus that we must hold on to?

Christ’s Message to Sardis

Sardis had a glorious history. But by the Roman period, the city had lost its prestige. While the city was still enjoying wealth, its glory was rooted in its past history rather than in present reality. The ancient city had been built on top of a steep hill and was nearly impregnable. Because the citizens felt so secure, the city walls were guarded carelessly.

Read Revelation 3:1–6 along with Matthew 24:42–44 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8. What three things does Jesus urge the Christians in Sardis to do as a cure for their spiritual condition? How did Jesus’ warning to “watch” correspond to the city’s history?

While Jesus recognizes a few Christians in Sardis as faithful, most of them are spiritually dead. The church is not charged with any open sin or apostasy (as are those in Pergamum and Thyatira) but with spiritual lethargy.

The message to the church in Sardis applies prophetically to the spiritual situation of the Protestants in the post-Reformation period, from approximately 1565 to 1740, as the church degenerated into lifeless formalism and a state of spiritual complacency. Under the impact of the rising tide of rationalism and secularism, the church’s focus on the saving grace of the gospel and commitment to Christ waned, giving place to creedal and dry philosophical arguments. The church of this period, although appearing to be alive, was spiritually dead.

Jesus’ message to Sardis also applies to every generation of Christians. There are Christians who always talk in glorious terms of their past faithfulness to Christ. Unfortunately, these same Christians do not have much to share about their present experience with Christ. Their religion is nominal, lacking the true religion of the heart and genuine commitment to the gospel.

Keeping ever before us the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone, in what ways could we say that our works have not been found “perfect” before God? What does that mean, and how can we “perfect” our works before Him? See Matt. 5:44–48.

Christ's Message to Philadelphia

The sixth church addressed by Jesus was Philadelphia (meaning “brotherly love”). The city was located on an imperial trade road and served as the gateway—an “open door”—to a large, fertile plateau. Excavations indicate that Philadelphia was a center to which people came for health and healing. Shaken by frequent earthquakes, the city’s inhabitants moved to the countryside, living in humble huts.

Read Revelation 3:7–9. How does the way that Jesus presents Himself relate to the situation of this church? What does Jesus’ statement “ ‘ You have a little strength’ ’ ” (Rev. 3:8, NKJV) say about the condition of the church?

The message to this church applies prophetically to the great revival of Protestantism during the First and Second Awakenings that took place in Great Britain and America, from about 1740 to 1844. Given the light they had, God’s people did indeed seek to keep “ ‘ My word’ ’ ” (Rev. 3:8, NKJV) at this time. There was a growing emphasis on obedience to God’s commandments and pure living. The “open door” is apparently the way into the heavenly sanctuary, because “ ‘ the temple of my God’ ’ ” is also mentioned (Rev. 3:12, compare Rev. 4:1, 2). One door being closed and another door being opened point to the change that would take place in Christ’s high-priestly ministry, in 1844.

Read Revelation 3:10–13. What indications are given that time is short and that the coming of Jesus is drawing near? What is the significance of God’s name being written on His people (see 2 Tim. 2:19)? If a name represents a person’s character, what does Exodus 34:6 tell us about those who bear God’s name?

Great revivals took place in churches on both sides of the Atlantic. In the years leading up to 1844, the message of Christ’s soon coming was proclaimed in many parts of the world. God’s promise to write His name on those who overcome indicates that God’s character will be seen in His people. Just as important as the message that Christ is coming soon is the message that Christ promises to make His people ready for that great event by forgiving their sins and writing His law in their hearts (see Phil. 1:6; Heb. 10:16, 17).

What does the hope of Christ’s soon coming mean to you? How does Christ’s promise to complete the work He has begun give us assurance?

Christians in Laodicea

The last church addressed by Jesus was in Laodicea, a wealthy city situated on a major trade road. It was famous for its woolen manufacturing industry; its banks (which held a vast quantity of gold); and a medical school, which produced eye salve. The prosperity of Laodicea filled its citizens with self-sufficiency. Around A.D. 60, when an earthquake destroyed the city, the citizens declined an offer of assistance from Rome, claiming to have all they needed to do the job. Because the city lacked water, it was supplied through an aqueduct that came from the hot springs at Hierapolis. The source was distant from Laodicea, so the water became lukewarm by the time it got there.

Read Revelation 3:14–17 along with Hosea 12:8. How did the self-sufficient spirit of the city pervade the Laodicean Christians?

Jesus did not rebuke the Christians in Laodicea for a serious sin, such as heresy or apostasy. Rather, their problem was complacency leading to spiritual lethargy. Like the water that reached the city, they were neither refreshingly cold nor hot, but lukewarm. They claimed to be rich and in need of nothing; yet they were poor, naked, and blind to their spiritual condition.

The church in Laodicea symbolizes the spiritual condition of God's church near the close of this earth's history, as certain links with end-time portions of Revelation show. One such link, as given in Jesus' parenthetical warning in Revelation 16:15, refers back to the "white garments" of Christ's righteousness needed by spiritually naked Laodicea (see *Rev. 3:18, NKJV*). The warning to keep one's garments and not walk naked appears in the midst of a reference to the spiritual battle of Armageddon. The timing of Jesus' warning may seem rather strange, at first, because it is no longer possible to receive these garments. After all, probation already will have closed for everyone. But the warning to keep one's garments appears in connection with the sixth plague and Armageddon because Jesus wants to remind Laodicea to be ready now in advance of that terrible conflict—before it is forever too late. Thus, Revelation 16:15 warns Laodiceans that if they fail to heed Jesus' counsel and instead choose to remain naked (*Rev. 3:17, 18*), they will be lost, and ashamed, at His coming (see *1 John 2:28–3:3*).

Jesus assures the Laodiceans that He loves them. He appeals for them to repent (*Rev. 3:19*). He concludes His appeal by picturing Himself as the lover in Song of Songs 5:2–6, standing at the door and knocking and pleading to be let in (*Rev. 3:20*). Everyone who opens the door and lets Him in is promised an intimate dinner with Him and, ultimately, to reign with Him on His throne (see *Rev. 20:4*).

Read Revelation 3:18–22. What counsel does Jesus give to the Laodiceans? What do gold, white garments, and eye salve symbolize (see *1 Pet. 1:7; Isa. 61:10; Eph. 1:17, 18*)? What does this counsel say to us as Seventh-day Adventists, who recognize ourselves as the Laodicean church?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Revelation,” pp. 578–592, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The seven messages to the churches show spiritual decline in the seven churches. The church in Ephesus was still faithful, although it had lost its first love. The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia were largely faithful. Pergamum and Thyatira compromised more and more until the vast majority of believers in those churches had completely apostatized from the pure faith of the apostles. The church in Sardis was in a very serious condition. The majority of Christians in this church were out of harmony with the gospel, while Philadelphia represented the faithful few. The church in Laodicea was in a condition of such spiritual lethargy and complacency that there was nothing good to be said about that church.

In concluding each message, Jesus makes promises to those in the churches who accept His counsel. One might observe, however, that along with the evident spiritual decline in the churches, there is a proportionate increase in promises given. Ephesus, to whom Jesus gives the first message, receives only one promise. As each church follows the downward spiritual trend, each one receives more promises than the previous church. Finally, the church in Laodicea, while given only one promise, receives the greatest promise of all: to share Jesus’ throne (*Rev. 3:21*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does the increase in promises to each successive church, along with the spiritual decline in the churches, reflect the statement that when sin increases, grace abounds even more (*Rom. 5:20*)? Think of that promise in light of the statement that “the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard. He is constantly watching it with solicitude, and is strengthening it by His Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 396.
- 2 Often Christians say that it is hard to be a Christian in industrial, commercial, and metropolitan cities. In the prosperous cities in Asia there were Christians who remained loyal to the gospel and unswerving in their allegiance to God amid the pressures exerted upon them by their pagan environment. What can we learn from this fact? Think of those Christians in Asia in light of Jesus’ prayer in *John 17:15–19*. How does the concept of being in the world but not of the world apply to Christians today, particularly those living in metropolitan cities?
- 3 How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, better heed the words given to us in the message to the Laodiceans?

Joy in the Morning

By GORATA OBONETSE

One day, a Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelist showed up at our door in Botswana.

My mother was interested and bought three books by Ellen G. White: *Messages to Young People*, *The Desire of Ages*, and a King James Bible with *The Great Controversy*. Soon she started attending an Adventist church and was baptized. This happened when I was in the eighth grade and thinking about high school.

Mother began to pray and fast because she wanted me to go to Eastern Gate Academy, an Adventist boarding school in Francistown, about a 2½-hour drive from our home in Mahalapye. But my father refused. He said he didn't have money for the tuition.

Mother didn't lose hope and kept on praying. I prayed with her. She woke me in the early morning, and we prayed together. We also prayed in the evening.

But my father didn't change his mind, and I entered ninth grade at a government boarding school in another city. Studying at that school was difficult. Some students used drugs and drank alcohol. The teachers didn't seem to care whether we did our homework—just as long as our parents paid the tuition.

After two years at the school, I decided that I had had enough. I asked my father if I could transfer to the Adventist school.

“No,” he said bluntly.

That night, I cried and prayed. I asked the Lord to help me because I really wanted to go to Eastern Gate Academy. I spoke with my mother, and she read Psalm 30:5, which says, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (NKJV).

That verse gave me hope.

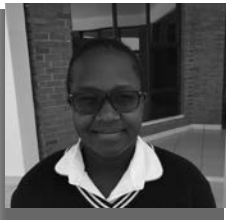
Two months later, as summer vacation was ending, I asked my father again if I could attend the Adventist school.

“Fine,” he said.

I thank the Lord! From this experience, I learned that the Lord is always listening. Everything happens according to His plan when we have faith and obey Him.

Now I am 16 years old, and this is my final year at the school. After graduating, I hope to train to become a medical doctor.

My whole family has joined the Adventist Church except my father. Please pray for him, for us, and for the school.



Eastern Gate Academy shares a campus with Eastern Gate Primary School, which opened in 2017 with the help of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering collected in 2015. Thank you for your mission offerings that support Adventist education around the world.

Part I: Overview

▶ **Key Text:** *Revelation 3:21*

▶ **Study Focus:** Last week we looked at the first of the messages to the seven churches. In this lesson, we will study messages two through seven (*Rev. 2:8–3:22*).

▶ **Introduction:** The messages to the seven churches have brought encouragement to God's people over the centuries. They assure us that God is intensely interested in the workings of His church. He knows all its challenges and is eager to provide counsel and precious promises to all who will listen.

▶ **Lesson Themes:** The lesson and the focus passage introduce the following themes:

I. The Chiasm of the Seven Churches

The messages to the seven churches are structured in a typical Hebrew style (see the commentary that follows for details).

II. Encouragement in Trouble

The messages to the seven churches exhibit both spiritual decline and a corresponding increase in the number and weight of promises made to each church.

III. Christianity's Greatest Advance and Its Contemporary Consequences

The message to Philadelphia forecasted a time of great missionary advance. But that advance included aspects that have put Christianity on the defensive today.

IV. The Message to Thyatira Is Different.

The churches as a whole exhibit spiritual decline. That also is manifest in the messages to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis. But the message to Thyatira deviates from that pattern in a couple of key ways.

V. Laodicea and the Final Era of Earth's History

Evidence from the text supports the idea that Laodicea represents the church at the close of Christian history.

▶ **Life Application:** The inclusion of Jezebel in the message to Thyatira invites students to reflect on the role of the four women in Revelation. Seventh-day Adventists also are invited to apply the message for Laodicea to themselves.

Part II: Commentary

The messages to the seven churches have a common structure, similar in form to ancient letters. (1) Jesus addresses each church by name. (2) He then introduces Himself to each church, using characteristics drawn from chapter 1. (3) He offers an analysis of the strengths and/or weaknesses of each church. (4) Jesus provides counsel suitable to His analysis of each church. (5) An appeal is made to the church to listen to the Spirit. (6) Each message concludes with a promise or promises to those in each church who overcome. In messages four through seven (beginning with Thyatira), the fifth and sixth components are in reverse order.

Main Themes of Lesson 3 Elaborated:

I. The Chiasm of the Seven Churches

The structure of the messages to the seven churches exhibits a literary form that is grounded in Hebrew logic. In Western thinking, $A + B = C$. But in Hebrew logic, $A + B = A$ enhanced. This literary form is called chiasm (from the Greek letter X [pronounced “key”]). Writers produce chiasms when they reason full circle, coming back to the beginning point of an argument. The first point parallels the last point. The second point parallels the next-to-last point, and so on, with the climax at the center rather than the end. It is, perhaps, not coincidental that the form of the seven-branched lampstand in the tabernacle is analogous to a literary chiasm.

The letter to Smyrna (second letter) shares many similarities with the letter to the Philadelphians (sixth letter): both are largely positive messages. The letters to Pergamum (third letter) and Sardis (fifth letter) are to churches in steep decline. The message to Thyatira (the fourth and middle church) is twice as long as the others and is different from all the others (see theme IV). This arrangement means that the first and last letters (to Ephesus and Laodicea) also are parallel. This structure suggests that Laodicea, like Ephesus, suffers from a deficiency of love.

II. Encouragement in Trouble

When we look at the seven churches as a whole, they seem to be in a state of decline, and the rebukes from Jesus become more and more serious. The churches at Ephesus and Smyrna are faithful churches, with the only flaw of Ephesus being a deficiency of love. But as we

go through the messages to the churches, things seem to decline from Pergamum through Sardis until we get to Laodicea, where Jesus cannot think of anything good to say about the church. While the message to Philadelphia is positive, the church is much weaker than Smyrna. In the message to Ephesus, Jesus longs for their repentance. Laodicea makes Jesus feel like vomiting. This graphic description is a severe word picture.

But this word picture leads into the most encouraging part of the messages to the seven churches. The first church gets one promise: the tree of life. The second church gets two: the crown of life and deliverance from the second death. The third church gets three: hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name. The fourth church gets four promises; the fifth church gets five; the sixth church gets six. Each church gets more promises than the church before, and the seventh church, Laodicea, gets the loftiest promise of all: to sit with Jesus on His throne.

As the condition of the churches declines, as the rebukes of Jesus become more severe, the promises of Jesus abound more and more. The worse things get, the greater the grace and power that God exerts. The deeper the problems you may have in life, the more powerful is the grace of Jesus Christ. This message speaks as powerfully for us today as it did in ancient times.

III. Christianity's Greatest Advance and Its Contemporary Consequences

The lesson brings out the point that the message to Philadelphia applies to the great revival of Protestantism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This revival motivated the church to carry the gospel to the whole world. It resulted in the greatest expansion of Christianity since the time of Pentecost.

But there was a dark side to this expansion. Missionary endeavors too often rode on the back of Western civilization's colonial expansion in the economic and political realms. As a result, many non-Christian peoples today see Christianity as a self-serving tool of Western imperialism rather than a humble, self-effacing movement that seeks to improve the lives of others. This attitude is increasingly found even in the more "Christian" parts of the world. Christianity, as a whole, is on the defensive today. In this context, manipulation or political involvement of any kind on the part of the church plays into the negative stereotypes that have arisen. The gospel message must not rely on political and economic support for its success. It has been thrown back to Jesus' original plan of "power . . . made perfect in weakness" (*2 Cor. 12:9, NIV*).

IV. The Message to Thyatira Is Different.

As mentioned earlier, the churches of Revelation, as a whole, exhibit spiritual decline. That decline also is clearly manifested in the messages to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis. But the message to Thyatira goes against the established structural pattern of the previous messages in several ways. First of all, the message to Thyatira is twice as long as the other six messages. This length is fitting to its role at the center of the chiasm and the long period of persecution that it represents during Christian history. Second, within the church of Thyatira is a faithful remnant, just as at other difficult times for the people of God, such as the time of Elijah, there was a faithful remnant (*see 1 Kings 19:18*).

Third, Thyatira is the only church about which Jesus says that their “latter works exceed the first” (*Rev. 2:19, ESV*). While all the previous churches were either in decline or holding steady, Thyatira already was improving. Placed at the center of the history of the seven churches, this positive message means that God is bringing people out of apostasy and through the subsequent messages preparing the church for the second coming of Jesus. While Satan accuses God’s followers in order to discourage and distract, Jesus and the Holy Spirit rebuke in order to encourage and to heal.

V. Laodicea and the Final Era of Earth’s History

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often have seen the message to Laodicea as applying particularly to us at the end of time. One of the best evidences for this is the connection between Revelation 3:18 and Revelation 16:15. No other text in the Bible contains the four major words found in both of these passages. Both verses contain the Greek words for “seeing” (Greek: *blepô*), “clothing” (Greek: *himation*), “shame” (Greek: *aischunê*, *aschêmosunê*), and “nakedness” (Greek: *gumnotês*, *gumnos*). This inclusion is a striking parallel. In the midst of the verses speaking about Armageddon (*Rev. 16:14–16*), there is a call to end-time watchfulness in the language of Laodicea (*Rev. 16:15, compare Rev. 3:18*). This call is striking evidence that Laodicea represents the final church of earth’s history.

Part III: Life Application

1. ***How many women are portrayed in the book of Revelation, and what is their role in the message of the book? There are four women portrayed in Revelation. Two are positive figures; and two are negative. The first is Jezebel, the leader of the opposition to the faithful ones in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20–23). The second is the godly***

woman of Revelation 12 (*Rev. 12:1, 2, 5, 6, 14–17*). The third is harlot Babylon (*Rev. 17:1–7, 16*). The fourth is the bride of the Lamb (*Rev. 19:7, 8*). All four are ultimately associated with the church, either positively or negatively. Jezebel, the opponent of Thyatira, anticipates harlot Babylon, who is dressed like the high priest (*Rev. 17:4*). If the first part of Thyatira represents the medieval church, then the two images are very closely related. Opposition to Christ often wears a Christian face.

Similarly, the woman of Revelation 12 represents the faithful people of God throughout history. The bride of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7, 8 represents the faithful of God at the end of history symbolized by the New Jerusalem. So it stands to reason that the woman of Revelation 17 represents all those who oppose God, especially religious powers that unite with secular worldly powers to form an end-time Babylon. “Woman” in Revelation represents those who profess to be followers of Christ, but depending on which woman, the profession may not be sincere.

2. *How should Seventh-day Adventists apply the message of Revelation 3:18–21 to themselves? What is there in the text for all of us to learn?* Gold can express the value we have in God’s eyes, as well as faith that has undergone a refining and purifying process. White raiment represents the righteousness of Christ that is given to us. Eye salve represents the spiritual discernment that helps us clearly see our need for Christ.

Although Jesus disciplines as needed (*Rev. 3:19*), He never forces anyone to follow Him. He gently invites and leaves the decision to us (*Rev. 3:20*). And He holds out the promise to end all promises to us. If we invite Jesus to rule over our hearts and overcome (*Rev. 3:21*), we will participate in His throne. As expressed by the gold tried in the fire, God sees infinite value in us.

3. *What encouragement can we take from an awareness that many ancient Christians remained faithful to God in the midst of godless cities?*