

WARNINGS FOR THE AMERICAN CHURCH

(Revelation 2 & 3)

SESSION #2 – WORKBOOK
Intended For
“KINGDOM WARRIORS IN THE ARMY OF GOD”

Unveiling Mysteries in the “Book of Revelation”

Based upon the Book:
GOD’S ANOINTED WARRIORS
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(Slides # 1 thru # 3)

JESUS APPEARS BEFORE JOHN ON ISLAND OF PATMOS

Revelation 1:18-19

- *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*
- *But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*
- *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.*

Thus, the Book of Revelation was launched and the first command given to John was to write the words of Jesus to seven churches located in Asia Minor which are recorded in chapters 2 & 3.

(Slide # 4)

THE LETTERS OF JESUS TO THE CHURCH

It is important to understand that these letters from Jesus to the church in Asia Minor were also meant for the entire Christian Church from the 1st century until the present day.

- Jesus speaks of spiritual ailments concerning sin which have continually weakened the Christian churches over the last 2,000 years.
- Christian soldiers need to stand back and take an unbiased and truthful look at the American church today; hopefully they will see that Jesus is not only speaking to the churches in His day, ----

He is also speaking to us.

Notes:

(Slides # 5 thru # 8)

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA? (Revelation 2:1-7)

Key Points:

Verses 2 & 3 appears to indicate that the Ephesian church:

- Strong in doctrine - Faithful in Discipline
- Obviously Intellectual - Dedicated to the Scriptures
- They certainly baptized, fasted, paid tithes, and kept the Sabbath which, in their minds, was evidence of their spirituality.

BUT:

These initial accolades from Jesus are followed by a “**but**”, which tells us that we are **about to hear what really is on Jesus’ mind**.

BUT - They had left their first love

- Doctrinal purity and their legalistic approach to the scriptures had become more important than developing their intimacy with their Lord.
- Such routine priorities as whether the services were faithfully attended, the sacraments were properly applied, the church-bulletins were read, the budget was paid; all questions that pertained to the external life and activities of the church was its primary focus.

Consider the Ephesian Style Churches in America:

- These are churches and seminaries that possess a spirit of independence and the worship of their respective denominations exceeds their love for the Lord.
- This is very prevalent in the western world today and yet, these churches have **no idea of their lack of readiness** for the coming Day of the Lord.

Very subtly, the Christian Church can become like the Pharisees who prided themselves in their hard work and doctrinal purity.

This is a church that needs to pay attention to the following warning given by Jesus:

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:20***

Notes:

Consider the Ephesian - Style Churches in America:

- These churches are very prevalent in the western world today and yet, these churches have **no idea of their lack of readiness** for the coming Day of the Lord.

When Persecution Threatens these Churches:

- When this type of church is confronted with persecution from a worldly government, **many will not have the spiritual strength to stand against it** and many will undoubtedly compromise the Gospel message in order to maintain their status within the new governmental system.

An Eternal Perspective for these Churches:

- Their lack of spiritual commitment is so serious to the Lord, that He tells the church that **unless they repent and return to their first love, He will remove them from their place.**

(Slides # 9 thru # 12)

THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

(Revelation 2:8-11)

Now here was a Congregation of Warriors for Christ.

*"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
Revelation 2:9-10*

Key Points:

Now here was a congregation of Warriors for Christ

- As we contemplate the **tribulation**, the **poverty**, and the **persecution** that this church was experiencing day after day and year after year and **seeing them maintain their faithfulness in Christ**, it should be an awakening to us in the western world.
- These Christians who were shortly to be thrown in prison and subsequently killed, Jesus praises them and calls them "rich" and tells them to "fear not" for He endured a similar fate.
- Note that He didn't promise to deliver them from their tribulations, but that He would stand with them and strengthen them through it.

Do Smyrna-Committed Churches Exist in America?

- Not yet – but, they do currently exist in nations where governments and pagan religions are persecuting the uncompromising Christians.
- This is happening daily in Africa, Indonesia, China, India, Pakistan, and also in the Middle Eastern nations.

Notes:

THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

Key Points:

The Smyrna churches are compromised of Christians who:

- Suffered the loss of their homes and possessions, undergone rejections, blasphemies, and tribulation, and yet have remained steadfastly faithful.
- Unlike their Ephesian neighbors, **they have maintained their first love** despite tremendously adverse circumstances.

An Eternal Perspective for these Churches:

- These are victorious and conquering churches in the ongoing spiritual war that cannot be hurt by the “second death”.
- The Smyrna Church teaches us the spiritual character that Jesus Christ values in His people - faithfulness during intense trials.
- The tribulation experience not only produces mature and strong Christians, it will also weed out the tares from within their midst.

Where is Jesus when Christians are undergoing tribulation?

- He’s standing right alongside of us, strengthening and **encouraging us to keep fighting against the powers of darkness** and promising us that the finish line is fast approaching which will **bring eternal rewards so great that our finite minds cannot comprehend them.**¹
- *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! **Rejoice in that day**, and leap for joy, for behold, **your reward is great in heaven**; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*
Luke 6:22-23

Notes:

¹ Psalm 23:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Matthew 5:11-12

(Slides # 13 thru # 16)

THE CHURCH OF SARDIS --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

(Revelation 3:1-6)

Listen to the very first statement that Jesus says to the Sardis church:

..... *"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*

Revelation 3:1

- Something is seriously wrong with this one - yet the Sardis Church had a **reputation in the community for being “alive”**.

Key Points:

Envision a Sardis Church in Today’s American Culture?

- The church leadership might host a weekly television program
- Her parking lot is full every Sunday and local police are there directing traffic.
- It is a dynamo of activity; programs abound; but it’s all done by human effort.
- The Sardis community sends their children to Christian schools, listens to the latest Christian music, attends church on Sundays, **but deep within this people, there is no real hunger for the Lord;**

- Sardis-style churches portray an appearance of spirituality to the world, but God sees into the heart- their works are dead in His sight.
- This church is no different from any worldly club or organization which continually offers great programs to the community.
- Because of these ongoing, non-stop activities, the church gains a reputation for being “alive;” but it is a church that is “dead” in the eyes of the Lord.

Leadership within these Mega-Churches:

- These churches are led by **very gifted “communicators.**

- The Sardis-type churches are led by those who have **lowered the standard of their message to the level of people’s sensitivities** in order to make the message nice and inoffensive.
- They believe that being consistent and **strong in the gospel message will not make friends**, fill their **wallets**, or grow **mega-churches**.

Notes:

When Persecution Threatens these Churches:

When this type of church is confronted with **persecution from a worldly government**, the majority will not have the spiritual strength to stand against it and will in fact, **compromise the Gospel message to meet government standards in order to maintain their popularity within the new world system.**

Notes:

Faithful Remnant within this Church:

- *Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **Revelation 3:4***
- Like the Ephesian churches, there is a remnant of those within the church who know the love of Christ, but **they are a minority and not the leading element within the church.**

Notes:

(Slides # 17 thru # 21)

CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA ---- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

(Revelation 3:7-13)

Characteristics of the Philadelphia Church:

"I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

*Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. **Revelation 3:8-9***

Key Points:

Like the Smyrna church, this was a church beloved of the Lord.

- A passion for the Lord was the primary focus of their service.
- It was a church of “little strength” - a small congregation; with little financial resources.
- Yet, it was a church that remained faithful to the truth of the gospel even when they were continually ridiculed by the legalistic Jews
- It takes great spiritual strength to continually proclaim the name of the Lord in the midst of ridicule and threats of persecution.
- Those who will stand for His truths in such circumstances are the true “overcomers” whom Jesus encourages throughout His letters to the churches.

Notes:

CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA ---- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

Kept from the “Hour of Trial”

Jesus told these Philadelphians that because they patiently kept the Word of the Lord, **He would keep them from the “hour of trial” that is coming on the whole world in order to “test” those who dwell upon the earth. (Rev 3:10)**

Key Points:

Perhaps this was a church in a province of Asia Minor that was governed by Roman authorities **that were not persecutors of Christianity.**

- Perhaps our Lord restrained persecution for the Philadelphia church in order to allow it to freely proclaim the gospel message throughout the Mediterranean world.

Now these words of Jesus have also been used to support the modern-day theory of a pre-tribulation rapture.

- Our first question regarding this should be: why should the church of Smyrna, which was also dearly beloved of the Lord, be cast into the midst of tribulation while the church of Philadelphia is excused?
- This “escapism doctrine” of modern day “rapturists” is dangerous.
- The church that expects to be received in the air before the great tribulation does not prepare itself for the battle – and in the coming days of temptation, many will fall away; not fly away.

Jesus is not saying that the faithful church will be kept from tribulation but that in the midst of persecution, when the enemy rages - and the temptation to deny the Lord is strong, the Lord will be right alongside to encourage and strengthen His church so that it will endure to the very end.

Christians Warriors will not Compromise Under Threat of Persecution:

- **It takes great spiritual strength to continually proclaim the name of the Lord in the midst of ridicule and threats of persecution.** Those who will stand for His truths in such circumstances **are the true “overcomers”** that Jesus encourages throughout His letters to the churches.

Notes:

(Slides # 22 thru # 26)

THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

(Revelation 3:14-22)

Jesus begins His message to the Laodicean church with the following statement:

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Revelation 3:15-16

Key Points:

Laodiceans have a Lukewarm Love for Jesus:

- What was missing in Laodicea is very similar to what is missing in many congregations today - a relationship with Jesus Christ
- Laodicean leadership understand foundational theology and express belief in the Lord, but if anyone speaks with them about pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus, they will quickly label them charismatic fanatics.
- A very controlling leadership and those who disagree with their direction for the church are strongly encouraged to leave.
- Contrary to what they say, the priorities of these church leaders are not intimacy with Christ but watching Sunday attendance climb, along with the size of the offering.
- This leadership is very similar to those in the Ephesian and Sardis-style churches.
- More time is spent *organizing* programs than *agonizing* in intercessory prayer. Intercessors have been elbowed aside by intellectuals, who are determined to run the church like a business.

Jesus continues to address this lukewarm attitude when He says:

*For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. **Revelation 3:17***

Notes:

THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA --- DOES IT EXIST IN AMERICA?

The church, not the Lord, has won the hearts of this people; their unspoken attitude may be verbalized as follows:

“Wow, thanks God for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can take it from here. We appreciate the greatness of Your sacrifice, but now we want to show You what we can do. By the way, if Jesus wants to come with us, He’s sure welcome. Again thanks, we’ll let you know if we need any additional help.”

The God who deeply desires a relationship with His Bride and is jealous for His holiness **has been elbowed aside and replaced by a happier faced model of Christ** who always smiles approvingly at whatever we say or do.

- How could anyone who has met the living God, become lukewarm about Him?

Yet, despite their luke-warmness, Christ continues to knock on the door of their hearts.

*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **Revelation 3:19-20***

- We need to become not only His subjects but also His children. He is our Lord and King, but He’s also our Father.
- But, unless the individuals of this church awaken and respond to His knocking, they will remain lukewarm and thus, a terrifying time lies ahead; **He will spit them out of His mouth for this is a church that is nauseating to the Lord.**

The Laodicean Church is commonplace in America today; they have repackaged God so as to make Him user friendly.

Notes:

PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE MYTH --- "THE TRUTH IS LEFT BEHIND"

The pre-tribulation rapture is not an historical teaching, but a modern day teaching that has been adopted by numerous American churches in the 20th century.

- In brief, it teaches that Jesus will silently and suddenly return and rapture His church to keep them from a seven-year tribulation during which the rest of humanity must face the Antichrist. At the end of seven years, Jesus will again return visibly to deliver those who became Christians during the tribulation.

Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Doctrine:

- This very deceptive teaching was originally developed in England by John Nelson Darby, who founded the Plymouth Brethren movement back in the mid-1800's and was subsequently made popular in this country by C.I Schofield, a wealthy American attorney who embraced this teaching and felt it should be part of the bible.
 - Thus, he **published the Schofield Bible** in the early 1900's which contained notes that emphasized this pre-tribulation rapture myth.
 - Soon thereafter, this misleading doctrine was being taught in various seminaries beginning at Dallas Theological Seminary where Schofield himself was on the board of directors.
- Subsequently, this Schofield Bible became very popular among evangelicals, particularly in the charismatic-style churches, many of whom failed to see the difference between a man-made commentary and the inspired word of God since it was all included in a single book.
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Pre-tribulation rapture teachings certainly appear to be one of the "myths" that the Lord's Word has warned us about:

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. **2 Timothy 4:3-5***

So, what is the true result of this mythical teaching – "The Truth is Left Behind"

CONSEQUENCES OF PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE TEACHINGS

Now, this pre-tribulation rapture theory is more than simple error; it is a deception that can do great damage to one's faith.

- Many American Christians have been watching the early birth pains convinced by their teachers that the next coming event would be the rapture of the church, yet what is coming in reality is intense persecution for those who hold fast to their faith in Christ.
- A consequence of this mythical teaching will be widespread disillusionment when tribulation descends on this nation and many in the church will believe that they have been deceived by their teachers.
- This can certainly result in a great falling away and many former church-goers will align with the world in blaming God for allowing such catastrophe to take place and will then betray many who remain in the fellowship of the church.

All false prophecies are dangerous, and this one carries particular risks. **Consider the following testimony of Corrie Ten Boom** who was imprisoned by the German Nazi's for hiding Jews from their persecutors; and after the war, spent time as a missionary to the Far East:

I have been in countries where the saints are already suffering terrible persecution. In China, the Christians were told: "Don't worry, before the tribulation comes, you will be raptured." Then came a terrible persecution. Millions of Christians were tortured to death. Later I heard a bishop from China say, sadly: "We have failed. We should have made the people strong for persecution rather than telling them Jesus would come first." Turning to me, he said: "Tell the people how to be strong in times of persecution, how to stand when the tribulation comes – to stand and not faint." I feel I have a divine mandate to go and tell the people of this world that it is possible to be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in training for the tribulation.²

Folks, pre-tribulation rapture teachings are putting the Church at ease when, in fact, **it should be spiritually preparing itself for the greatest battle in the history of mankind.**

Notes:

² David Pawson, When Jesus Returns (Hodder & Stoughton; 1995) p.199-200

PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE – CHRISTIANS “WAKE UP!”

- Historically God’s people have experienced intense suffering.
- With the exception of John, all the disciples of Jesus were brutally murdered.
- Thousands of early Christians were mocked, spit on, and torn to shreds by wild animals inside the Coliseum.
- Millions of others were horribly tortured and burned at the stake during the Dark Ages.
- During this age, believers in Russia & China have suffered terribly under communism and so have many faithful followers of Christ in some Muslim countries.
- This is ongoing today in many nations of the world.

Key Points:

We need to ‘wake up’ - the Christian church is in the midst of spiritual warfare – a war that tests the true faith of God’s chosen people.

- In other words, will Christians remain faithful and trust in the Lord during times of tribulation - or will they compromise their faith.

God’s greatest commandment is revealed in times of tribulation.

- That is: we are called to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and with all of our strength.
- Times of tribulation reveals the priorities of our heart – either love of self or love of God?

Notes:

PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE – “A MARINE’S VIEW”

Pre-Trib Rapture Teachings are not for Soldiers in His Army:

- Being a retired Marine Corps officer who spent two tours in the war zones of Vietnam, I disrespect this pre-tribulation rapture myth for being a wimpy sales presentation designed to please those who are scared of potential conflict.
- Marines don’t leave people behind on the battlefield and I do get passionately angry when I see Jesus being portrayed as a Commander who calls His people to run from the battle.
- Jesus Christ is the greatest Leader that walked this earth - “**retreat**” is not in His vocabulary.

This Pre-Trib Rapture Beliefs is a Shameful Scenario for God’s Mighty Warriors:

- Imagine being a warrior in the Army of God who was raptured before the great battle begins. How would you feel in the presence of those who were martyred for their gospel testimony of Jesus Christ as the Son of God?
- Are those who escape tribulation by being raptured more privileged in God’s eyes than those who were martyred for their uncompromising faith?
- Personally, I believe that I would be eternally ashamed to stand alongside my martyred brothers and sisters if I was among one of the privileged saints who were raptured. In fact, we should all be truly grateful for the sacrifice they endured on the battlefield of this life.

- For without these Christian warriors that historically fought for the truths proclaimed by Jesus Christ, Americans would not have the religious freedoms that we have today. Freedoms that have allowed to true gospel message to be proclaimed worldwide over the last 300 years.

Tribulation Results in a Final Great Harvest in the Kingdom of God:

- The tribulation is not something for believers to enjoy; however, it is not something for us to escape from either.
- The primary purpose for times of tribulation is to present an opportunity for lost people to come to repentance; for it is a period of time that will bring in the final harvest. For when God’s judgments fall on the world, many will turn to righteousness.³
- Thus, God’s warriors need to embrace ministry opportunities during a period of tribulation for it is the most important mission we could possibly be assigned.

³ Isaiah 26:9

MIGHTY MEN WITHIN THE DISPENSATIONAL COMMUNITY

Finally, I do want to mention that several fine men of God, who have been raised and schooled in pre-tribulation rapture doctrines, **are among the very best Christian teachers concerning ongoing current events** in the 21st century.

Men like Hal Lindsey, David Reagan, Chuck Missler, Joel Rosenberg, Greg Laurie, and others have produced tremendously fruitful works. These are “watchmen” in the Army of God. **They have provided significant strategic information for the American church over the last thirty years.**

- Over the last thirty years, believers in the pre-tribulation rapture have been **the most prominent teachers of the Great tribulation events** which lie shortly before us.
- They had the **advantage of teaching hard truths without scaring their listeners** because of the “rapture” beliefs.
- Unfortunately, **much of their message is falling upon “itchy ears” that see no need to prepare.** This is a great danger that I perceive will soon confront the American churches.

We need to embrace the hard message of Matthew 24:9-14 for those days are rapidly approaching American Christianity.

Notes – Consider how you would lovingly speak to others who adhere to pre-tribulation rapture beliefs: (Also note - there are numerous books that expose this false doctrine).

BETRAYAL ARISES FROM WITHIN THE CHURCH

- *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.*
- *And **then many will fall away and betray one another** and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*
- *And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.*
- *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*
- *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. **Matthew 24:9-14***

This is one of the most eye-opening teachings in the bible when the Lord Jesus informs His disciples that when the nations commence persecuting the church prior to His second coming, many within the church will fall away and hate and betray, those who remain.

- This is primarily the **consequence of many false teachers** who are solidly established within the organized church system, but whose teachings continually lead their followers astray.
- Yet, the **promise of eternal salvation** is to those who will remain steadfast and not compromise their faith.

Here our Lord Jesus is alerting His people that many of the enemy are within their midst, yet His words are largely ignored within the American church.

- However, this is such a huge event that God's kingdom people will face in the near future that it simply cannot be ignored any longer – we need to **“be ready.”**

Notes:

THREE PEOPLE GROUPS EMERGE DURING TIMES OF WAR

Key Points:

Over the last fifty years in America, every war we have fought (particularly Vietnam) has produced three groups of people within this nation.

- **The first group** is comprised of pacifists - those people who will not fight but neither will they protest. (Wimpy types!)
- **The second group** comprises the anti-war demonstrators, who rebel against the call of their country and ridicule those who answer the call. Their motto: "Make love, not war!"
- **The third group** comprises those who willingly, proudly, and bravely step up to answer the call of their country as well as those who strongly support these American warriors who love and believe in their country.

Notes – Consider peoples you know & how you might lovingly speak (not debate) with them concerning their beliefs which causes blindness within themselves.

Now, there is an interesting parallel between these three groups and similar groups found within the American church of today. For example:

THREE CHURCH GROUPS EMERGE DURING TIMES OF WAR

Key Points:

THE FIRST GROUP

- Comprised of pacifists regularly attends church and Bible studies, but they have little personal vision for ministry.

THE SECOND GROUP

- Actively opposes any talk of warfare. “Make love, not war” is also the motto within their hearts.
- The sinfulness of man and the need for repentance and obedience to Christ is not a powerful voice in these churches. Their self-indulgent and prosperity teachings appeal to many who place their hope in this world.
- Their primary concern is to not offend people and hurt their feelings, and they repeatedly emphasize that Christ has already accomplished the victory for us; so, we just need to be faithful in our tithing and church attendance, and He will provide for all of our needs.

THE THIRD GROUP

- Comprised of warrior-spirited Christians who voluntarily serve in the Army of God.
- These are disciples who are very passionate for Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God and are prepared to lay down their lives if called upon to do so.
- They are among those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- They are among those who mourn over the abominations that are committed in this country and also in many of our churches.
- Yet, they are among those who love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them
- These are the ones who will fight the war against the forces of darkness that rules over the kingdom of this world and keeps many of our family, friends, and co-workers in bondage.

Their heart’s desire is to be among their fellow soldiers who embrace the following words of our Lord:

(Slide # 40)

THE FIRST GROUP – “SEED SOWN ON ROCKY GROUND”

Key Points:

The first group of pacifists is like the “seed sown on rocky ground.”

- They can be found in many of the Laodicean-style churches – “Those with a lukewarm faith.”

Listen to Jesus teach His disciples concerning this group:

*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. **Matthew 13:20-21***

- How will this group respond when faced with tribulation --- will they “fall away” and “betray others” within the church?

(Slide # 41)

THE SECOND GROUP – “SEED SOWN AMONG THORNS”

Key Points:

The second group of liberal, anti-war activists is like the “seed sown among thorns.”

- They love to attend many of the Sardis-style churches – “Those who believe they are rich, but are poor.”

Listen to Jesus teach His disciples concerning this group:

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Luke 8:14

- How will this group respond when faced with tribulation --- will they “fall away” and “betray others” within the church?

"CHRISTIANS" – A TIME OF DECISION IS COMING SOON

Jesus is a great army Commander who is giving instructions to His soldiers; however, some of the officers under His command are giving contrary instructions preparing for a massive retreat.

- A soldier preparing for war is very different than the one who thinks he will be discharged shortly before the war begins. Many believers today are like soldiers looking forward to an early discharge.
- Can you imagine David or Joshua preparing their soldiers to retreat when the heat turns up? Can you imagine Peter or Paul looking to escape from preaching the gospel because persecution was coming?

During a Period of Intense Tribulation –

Will we be among those who:

*..... will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. **Matthew 24:10-12***

Or, will our hearts respond with:

*My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. **Isaiah 26:9***

And:

*"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **Matthew 5:11-12***

Notes:

"ABOUT FACE"

Those with military experience are very familiar with the command "about-face" which is a command to immediately turn sharply 180 degrees from the direction you are currently facing.

- It is also a command used by our Commander-in-Chief **who calls us to "turn" from our sins**; then He will remove the veil which is blinding us from the truth and put us on the path of growing in spiritual maturity.
- This willingness to turn in an **"about-face"** will suddenly cause us to see ourselves as we truly are and thus, our need for a Savior.
- **All of God's champions will occasionally go astray** and veer from the course that the Lord directs. However, like Moses, David, or Paul, **they all have one thing in common**; when confronted with their blindness, they will readily turn in an "about-face" and return to following their Commander.

What will Christians do when our Commander-in-Chief commands us to "about-face"?

- Will they obey Him or listen to other subordinate commanders, such as some church leaders who tell us that the Commander-in-Chief really meant **"right-face"** since it is much easier to follow that path.
- **But a partial turn will eventually lead us away from the path that Jesus is going** and even though other leaders tell us that we are moving rightly, we are straying further and further from His direction.
- Some other false commanders may convince us that the command was really **"at-ease"**; just keep coming and giving to the church and God will be pleased.
- Eventually the time comes when the Commander-in-Chief gives the command **"forward march"**; only those who heard and obeyed the command **"about-face"** will be equipped to follow the King of kings and the Lord of lords in the direction He is heading.⁴

⁴ Al Houghton, *Word at Work* (Newsletter Volume XXI, Number IX, Chapter 10)

(Slide # 46)

THE NEXT SESSION:

SEALS / HORSEMEN / MARTYRDOM

First Read: Revelation 4 – 5 - 6

- The opening of the first “Five Seals” and their Effect on the World of Today.
- Identifying the Four Horsemen and their Respective Missions
- The Positive & Negative Effect of the Four Horsemen
- Looking at a World without the Four Horsemen
- A Christian perspective on Tribulation
- We’ll also meet the “Martyrs under the Throne” as the Fifth Seal is Opened and their lesson for Christian warriors of this generation.
- The Spirit of Martyrdom
- Today’s Scoffers will be Tomorrow’s Persecutors
- The Lamb of God is our True Commander-in-Chief

THE LAMB OF GOD - OUR TRUE "COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF"

The days are rapidly approaching when a tremendous separation will take place among mankind.

Yet, during this present era of warfare, He reigns as our Commander-in-Chief and His Name continues to be the battle cry for those warriors who fight daily for righteousness and truth.

His name is Jesus, Our Lord, Our King,
Our Commander-in-Chief

- A truly mighty Leader who would never delegate assignments to His people that He Himself wouldn't readily embrace.
- A Commander that Christian warriors will readily follow not matter the danger or what costs have to be paid.
- These are warriors whose deepest desire is to hear Jesus welcome them with the following words when they enter into His presence:

..... 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' *Matthew 25:21*