



For the week of December 4

Monday, December 5 — Revelation 3

Chapter Summary: Jesus speaks to the church at Sardis and tells them that they are a dead church. There are a few things remaining that aren't dead and they need to strengthen these things. There are still a few faithful brethren and they are commended. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus commends their faithfulness and perseverance. The church at Laodicea is warned about being lukewarm. They need to wake up and make serious changes soon.

Devotional: To the church at Sardis, Jesus says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead," (v. 1). What does it mean for a church to have a "living" name? Were they known as a friendly and welcoming church? Were they known for their doctrinal purity? Or did they have a reputation for their faith and their worship? Whatever their name was, it wasn't backed up by the truth. God looked at them and said all their "works" didn't equal up to a truly living faith. But even then, Jesus encouraged them to strengthen what does remain. They're not completely dead! Take a moment to think about what a church would look like that had that living faith. How can you help make our church "alive"? Then think about your family and yourself. What is your reputation among others? What does God see when He looks at you? How can we get (and deserve!) a good reputation for our faith? What things can you strengthen to help you live your faith?

Questions for more thought/discussion:

- Philadelphia is the only church to receive almost exclusively praise from Jesus. What does He praise them for?

Tuesday, December 5 — Revelation 4

Chapter Summary: After John hears the messages for the seven churches, he is taken in the Spirit into the very throne room of God. The imagery is designed to convey the glory of God. Around His throne are 24 smaller thrones with elders on them. There are also four fantastical beasts that circle the throne and call out “Holy, Holy, Holy.” All the elders and creatures in the throne room worship God and testify to His worthiness to receive the honor and glory they give Him.

Devotional: How would you imagine the throne room of God would appear? John’s vision is not meant to be literal but to convey that God’s majesty is greater than any ruler on earth could ever hope to attain. What would your reaction be if you found yourself suddenly standing in the throne room of God? The living creatures proclaim God’s holiness above all else. There are so many qualities of God that are praiseworthy, but this one attribute is singled out. The holiness of God is designed to communicate that He is not like anything else on earth or in the Heavens. He stands alone as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We often try to compare God to other things we understand better, but every analogy must ultimately fall short because God is holy and is different from anything created. That holiness inspires awe and reverence in us as we worship. Take a moment in prayer and realize you stand in God’s throne room every time you pray.

Questions for more thought/discussion:

- Does this picture of heaven mean we will spend eternity praising God? Is Heaven like an eternal church service?

Wednesday, December 6 — Revelation 5

Chapter Summary: God holds a scroll in his hand that is sealed with seven seals, but no one is worthy to open it. Just as John begins to despair, a lamb also called the Lion of Judah steps up to open the scroll. The elders and creatures who are gathered around the throne take up several cries of worship and praise for the Lamb who is worthy to open the scroll.

Devotional: The image of the lamb in this chapter is one that is completely unnatural. He is a lamb and a lion who has multiple eyes and horns. He is alive but looks as if he has been killed. This is a picture of Jesus. What images would you pick to represent the various attributes of Jesus?

Questions for more thought/discussion:

- What is the significance of the fact that no one can be found who is worthy to open the scroll? What is it that qualifies a person to be worthy for this task?
- What items represent the prayers of the saints that go up before God? Why do these items make a good image of how God sees our prayers?
- How many angels and divine creatures are present in the throne room? What does this tell us about how big Heaven is?

Thursday, December 7 — Revelation 6

Chapter Summary: The lamb begins to open the seals on the scroll and after each seal John is invited to “come and see” what happens. He sees four horsemen go out upon the earth with specific God given missions. He hears the martyrs cry out for God to bring justice on the earth. He saw the earth begin to be destroyed and all the inhabitants cried out to God for protection and mercy from the cataclysms that were happening.

Devotional: This is the first of several different depictions of God’s judgement. We are supposed to see God’s amazing power even as it expresses itself in judgment. It is also clear that God rules over the affairs of men. All of this is designed to bring reassurance to Christians who are serving God, even during hard times. If God can be in control when all the things that happen in this chapter take place, then He can definitely still be on the throne during the problems I am facing in my life. And if those who have given their life for their faith (the martyrs) can be asked to be patient a little longer, then surely I can be patient with God as well when He doesn’t do things the way I want Him to. Through all of this imagery is the idea that God has a plan. The martyrs are told there is a time when God will bring justice, it just hasn’t come yet. I can trust God to do the right thing at the right time for all the right reasons. That is a message that is timeless!

Questions for more thought/discussion:

- In every grouping of seven things, the first six will be grouped together and the final item will be especially significant. Taken as a group, what do these first six seals represent?
- John sees that the kings of the earth and all the great men tremble before God’s judgment just like all the other people. How is this encouraging to Christians?

Friday, December 9 — Revelation 7

Chapter Summary: Before the final seal is opened, God stops everything (even the wind from blowing!) and marks those who are already his. 12,000 are chosen from each of the 12 tribes for a total of 144,000 identified as God's people. Immediately after this John sees an uncountable crowd before God's throne praising Him. He is told that these are the ones who held on to their faith in spite of great trials and now they are being rewarded. They will be in the presence of God for all eternity and He will meet every need they have. They will not hunger and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Devotional: Does God know who will be in Heaven and who won't? It's a question that has troubled Christians through the ages. Here John pictures God setting a specific number for the saved. But before we get too worried about that, John immediately tells us that there is a crowd of saved people in Heaven and there are too many of them to count! A study of how the Jews used numbers will tell us that the 144,000 represented absolute perfection. In other words, God will have the absolutely perfect number of souls in heaven. He won't miss anyone! I can trust His judgement because He is perfect. Those who are in Heaven are those who remained faithful which is the exact encouragement these Christians needed and we do, too!

Questions for more thought/discussion:

- We often say that there will be no tears in Heaven, but v. 17 seems to indicate there may be tears. What would make you cry in Heaven? How might God "wipe" those tears away and comfort you?

Thank you for walking with us through the New Testament this year! We are almost done! If you missed a week and want to catch up, check out www.hcofc.com.

