

PICTURES OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION - PART 4

Jesus, the Faithful Witness

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Preaching passage:	Revelation 2-3
Subject:	Who stands in the midst of the churches to give affirmation, rebuke and counsel
Complement:	Jesus, the Faithful Witness
Exegetical idea:	Jesus, the Faithful Witness, stands in the midst of the churches giving affirmation, rebuke and counsel.
Homiletical idea:	(Our mission is not to point out everyone's faults and tell them how they should live). Our mission is to tell people about Jesus!
Purpose:	To remind my hears that our mission is not to point out everyone's problems and tell them how they should be living their lives but rather to point them to Jesus.

Introduction

We are going to see a beautiful picture of Jesus today! We are in the midst of a series of sermons entitled Pictures of Jesus in the book of Revelation. In our previous study, we noted that this last book of the Bible is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the Revelation by Jesus Christ to His servant John concerning the things which are to come. But this book is also the Revelation about Jesus Christ. In this series of messages, we are going to examine five pictures of Jesus in the book of Revelation.

We also noted at the beginning of this book of Revelation a blessing is promised for all who study it. Listen again to the words of the apostle John, recorded in Revelation 1:3. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." So there is a blessing promised as we study this Revelation of Jesus

Christ. And we will also be blessed as we watch an artist capturing this message in a picture.

The picture of Jesus in the book of Revelation that we are going to examine today is Jesus, the Faithful Witness. In Revelation 1:5, Jesus Christ is described as the Faithful Witness. We see this Faithful Witness standing in the midst of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2-3. He is giving affirmation, rebuke and counsel. I want us to examine this picture of Jesus, the Faithful Witness. And then I want us to ask how we should respond to this picture of Jesus in the book of Revelation.

We could easily devote one entire study to each of the seven churches addressed in Revelation chapters 2-3, but I want us to stand back and look at the bigger picture. Who are these seven churches, and why were they chosen to be the recipients of affirmation, rebuke, and counsel from Jesus, the Faithful Witness? We find these seven churches listed in Revelation 1:11 . “.....”

(Use map and pointer) Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Some of us have heard of the Christian church in Ephesus. Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Ephesus. Paul lived there for several years. Timothy was the pastor there. According to early Christian tradition, the apostle John lived there, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, may have spent her final years there in Ephesus. So Ephesus is a well known city in terms of the Christian community.

But who ever heard of Smyrna? It's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. And Pergamum? That's the Latin name. Pergamos in Greek. It's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Thyatira is mentioned once, in the book of Acts, but only as the hometown of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, who became part of the vibrant Christian community at Philippi. Sardis is

not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. The same is true of Philadelphia. Laodicea is referenced in Paul's letter to the Colossians, including the mention of a woman named Nympha who had a church in her home.

That ought to leave us all wondering why at least six of these seven messages are sent to obscure Christian churches that are never mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Any ideas? I want to suggest to you that while these local Christian communities existed, with real needs and real problems, they also represented the needs of the Christian church down through the ages, all the way from Ephesus in the early Christian church, to Laodicea, the Christian church in the last days of earth's history. And the reason seven churches are chosen is because seven is a symbol of completion. Seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues.

And so, Jesus, the Faithful Witness, is not only giving affirmation, rebuke, and counsel to seven churches in Asia in the first century, many of which were unheard of anywhere else in Scripture, but Jesus, the Faithful Witness is also giving affirmation, rebuke, and counsel to his church down through the ages to the end of time!

So let's listen to some of the words of Jesus, the Faithful Witness. "....."

Whether we are considering 7 localized Christian communities in 1st century Asia Minor or the church down through the ages, I think that we could agree that all of these churches have challenges. Most of them have problems. They all need Jesus.

But rather than ask questions like "Who are the Nicolaitans?" or "When were the 10 days of suffering in Smyrna?" ask yourself "What is the big picture in these chapters?" Look beyond all the details, and what do you see? You see Jesus, the Faithful Witness, standing in the midst of His churches. Each one of the churches is different. Not one is the same. Even within each

church, there are differences. And Jesus meets them all where they are.

- To Ephesus, Jesus is the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand.
- To Smyrna, Jesus is the First and the Last, the One who died and came to life again.
- To Pergamum, Jesus is the One who has the sharp double-edged sword.
- To Thyatira, Jesus is the Son of God, with eyes like blazing fire.
- To Sardis, Jesus is the One who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.
- To Philadelphia, Jesus is the Holy and True One, who holds the key of David.
- To Laodicea, Jesus is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the ruler of God's creation.

Jesus speaks truth to all of His children, in all places, throughout all ages! He is the Faithful Witness. That's a beautiful picture of Jesus, isn't it?

So how should we respond to this picture of Jesus in the book of Revelation—Jesus the Faithful Witness? We should resist the temptation to think that we are the ones who are supposed to go around and point out everyone's problems and faults. Have you ever met anyone like that? They think that it is their job to point out everyone's problems. To set people straight. That's not our job! That's not the mission that Jesus gave to us. Jesus is the Faithful Witness. That's His job.

What then is our mission? Our mission is clearly stated by Jesus Himself in Acts 1:8. "....." We are to be witnesses of Jesus. We are to tell people about Jesus. Point people to Jesus. Lead people to Jesus. He is the One who will speak words of affirmation, rebuke and counsel to them. Once they meet Jesus and their hearts are changed, then they are ready to hear what He has to say to them. Does that make sense to you?

So if someone comes to church and they don't look quite the same as you do, or smell the same as you do, or dress the same as you do, what is your assignment? To point out all of the areas that they need to change? "Excuse me, Sir. But we don't wear flashy clothes like that at our church!" "Excuse me, Mam. Please don't wear tight clothes like that. If you can't dress

modestly, don't come back." Is that our job? No. That is not our assignment. Our assignment is to tell them about our wonderful Jesus! Point them to our marvelous Jesus! Give your testimony about Jesus. Use words if necessary. But the most powerful testimony is with your life. Show love. Show kindness. Reflect the beauty of your Savior, the One who is altogether beautiful.

I received an e-mail last month from a young man who has devoted his life to telling people about Jesus. This young man's Christian name is Daniel. I met Daniel many years ago at a meeting in California. Daniel was a discouraged young man. He was born in Iran, had come to Christ through a remarkable revelation of Jesus Christ, but was now struggling with direction in his life. God gave me the privilege that day of encouraging Daniel to go back to school. Daniel attended Weimar College in northern California, and is now serving as a full time Christian missionary! He has a special ministry to Moslems. I can't mention the country where he is working, because I don't want to put him at risk. But he has given permission for me to share this amazing story.

Last night the Lord impressed my heart to go out into the streets of the city. I felt that I would meet someone that God wanted me to talk to. I am glad that I obeyed, though it was difficult at first. You see, I was busy with other things which were not really important. In the streets, I met an Iranian man who has moved to my city from up north about a month ago. During our conversation, he invited me to walk with him. He mentioned that he was willing to try any faith, be it Jesus, Mohammad, or who ever if he could just find peace. After about five to ten minutes he led me to a dark alley which eventually led to a Kurdish restaurant. I must admit I was kind of nervous since I had no idea where I was and what this man was thinking, so I said a prayer asking Jesus to protect me and went with him. This man started to open up to me and to tell me of his anguish. You see while he lived in the north of the country, the people who he encountered were all prejudiced against him because he was from another country. They treated him with contempt. He was alone without any companion for about seven months. At the end of this time he developed some strange emotional problems. Perhaps it was a nervous breakdown. On one occasion he said that he laid flat on his carpet for three days and could not eat, drink, move, or even sleep. He told me that for a while he was unable

to even cry until one special day. One day on his walk, which he had started as a way to help his condition, he was ended up in front of a church. As he opened the front gate and walked into the church yard, he began to cry and sense relief. The Lord led me out into the streets of the city that night to tell him of God's great love, compassion, and desire for him to find peace and freedom in Jesus. I was able to tell him about the great sacrifice of the Father and the Son. I thank Jesus for enabling me to lead his broken mind to the Great Healer of mind body and soul. During our conversation he told me that since he has met me he senses calmness and peace. I told him that it is because of God. Before we parted I asked him if I can pray for him and he said yes and I did. I do hope that this man will give Jesus the permission to set him free of all his problems. Please pray for him and pray for me too. Thank you and God bless you all.

Isn't that a remarkable story? Daniel is telling people about Jesus. I'm sure that this man that Daniel met had lots of problems. But Daniel did what God wanted him to do. Daniel told this man about Jesus! We have the same privilege of telling people about Jesus. We don't have to point out all of their short-comings and give them all kinds of direction about how we think that they should live. We need to point them to Jesus! He is the Faithful Witness. He will impress upon their minds areas that they need to change, and counsel that they need to follow. Our mission is to tell them about Jesus.

I have a resource for you today to share with someone that you love, someone that you have been praying for, someone that you would be overjoyed to be a part of the kingdom of heaven with you. We just completed a life-changing series of messages here at Forest Lake church entitled "Words of Blessing." It was a fresh look at the 10 commandments. I know that my life was changed as a result of this series of messages, and I know that many of you felt the same way. Thanks to your generous commitment to the mission of this church, we have been able to prepare 14,000 copies of these messages for you to share. As you share these resources, pray that Jesus, the Faithful Witness, will speak to the hearts of those who listen and impress upon them exactly what He knows they need to hear.