

A Time to Mend

Rich Nathan

November 7 & 8, 2020

To Everything there is a Season

Revelation 2 & 3

Thank you to veterans who have served our country.

We made the decision in July to start in person gatherings again in January. We are going to be sharing more in the next few weeks, but I wanted to let you know that we are putting plans together for in-person meetings across our campuses. We will obviously do it wisely and with careful planning to keep everyone safe. But for now, I wanted to invite you to pray for us as we put those plans together. We are so excited to be together with you again, church!

We've had an extraordinary week here in America. If you haven't heard, we held a presidential election this past week. Our country has been through so much trauma in the past year. Of course, we're still experiencing a global pandemic that appears to be getting worse in almost every state, including here in Ohio. On top of that, there has been terrible natural disasters from fires in the west to hurricanes in the Gulf. Hundreds of communities have been destroyed by fires and floods over the past year. Suicide rates and opioid abuse rates are up again, and racial tensions continue unabated.

And, politically, the polls show really troubling signs for our country. According to surveys, the vast majority of Biden voters believed that President Trump, if he was reelected would make our country into a dictatorship. And a vast majority of Trump supporters believed if Biden was elected, he would make our country socialist. According to a survey this past week, 70% of Americans believe that if the wrong candidate was elected, our country will not recover! So regardless of the winner, we are a deeply divided nation.

I've repeatedly heard from commentators on the news over the last couple of years that our country is in the darkest period we've ever faced. I'd like to just respond to that idea that this is the darkest period ever. Apart from reading Christian books and Christian authors, I've spent a great deal of my free time over the past 40+ years reading history and biographies. I love getting perspectives about how people in the past dealt with the challenges they were facing during their lives.

When I hear folks say that our country has never faced a series of crises as bad as what we're facing today, I think to myself: have you even read a magazine length article about American history, much less a whole book? People, if you want to consider troubling times here in America, we could just go back to the 1930's. Not only did

America suffer a decade long economic depression, but we also suffered an environmental catastrophe, worse than anything we have ever faced before or since. It was called the Dust Bowl. It affected the Great Plains from the Dakotas all the way down to Texas.

There's a wonderful book called *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan.

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Book cover

What Egan does in the book is chronicle a dozen communities that try to carry on through blinding black dust storms. Dust storms so bad that cattle all across the Great Plains were killed, their lungs filled with dirt. Storms so bad that you couldn't drive because the electric charges in the air would electrocute people in the car. With the dust storms came crop failures and the deaths of thousands of people.

Along with the Depression and the Dust Bowl, Hitler came to power in Germany and threatened all of Europe. And here in America, our country was torn apart culturally and politically. The air waves and newspapers were filled with the angriest rhetoric. There was a virulently anti-Semitic Catholic priest named Father Coughlin from Detroit who had a radio audience of 40 million people – about a third of America at the time. Week after week he railed against the Jewish banking conspiracy that he claimed was taking over the world.

He said on one of his broadcasts that “when we get done with the Jews, they'll think that the treatment that they received from Hitler was nothing.” Father Coughlin along with the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh and the great industrialist Henry Ford were also anti-Semitic Nazi sympathizers and had powerful anti-Semitic friends inside and outside the government. People were literally at each other's throats.

I tell you all this to say that our country has gone through hard times before. And we've been mended. But today, I want to turn our attention away from the election, away from our country and talk about the church – Vineyard Columbus and the big “C” Church across the world. The Christian church has been through very hard times before. Going back to the time of the church's birth in first century and all the way through Christian history. There have been times where the church has been severely wounded by persecution and external pressure from the world, and there have been hard times because of internal problems and division in the church.

But because of his great mercy, God has given us eternal words of encouragement that are as relevant today as they were when they were written 1900+ years ago.

Last week, Pastor Julia began a brief series from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes titled “To Everything There is a Season”. The text for this series is taken from

Ecclesiastes 3. Today, I'll be speaking about "A Time to Mend" which is a phrase taken from Ecclesiastes 3:7. Before we consider "A Time to Mend", let's pray.

Here's the question I want to ask today: What does the church need in order to be mended, in order to thrive? In every age, in every country, part of the church is going through hard times and part of it is going through good times. Whether we're talking about the church in the Greco-Roman empire of the first century or in Columbus, Ohio, in the 21st century, what does every church need in order to be healed and in order to thrive?

Today, we're going to look at some texts from the very last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. We'll be looking at Revelation 2 and 3. Now, Revelation 2 and 3 contain seven messages. Each of these messages was written to a particular church located in a particular city at a particular time in history, somewhere during the last 20 or so years of the first century. Most contemporary scholars assign the book of Revelation to the last years of the reign of the Roman Emperor, Domitian, somewhere around 95 AD, when it became the official policy of the Roman Empire to persecute Christians. Each of the churches mentioned had problems in their own particular city.

The message given to each church was not meant for that church alone as if we read this stuff simply to satisfy our curiosity about history. Rather, each message closes with a statement. Here's what we read:

Slide Revelation 2:7a

⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This verse is repeated over and over again. We read the same thing in verse 17:

Slide Revelation 2:17a

¹⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Holy Spirit, in other words, was not just speaking in the past tense to churches that existed back in the first century. Rather, the Holy Spirit is speaking in the present tense to churches in the year 2020. The Holy Spirit is speaking today to the church in America and to the church in Zambia and to the church in China and to the church in Columbus, Ohio, and to our particular church, Vineyard Columbus.

The Spirit always speaks in every age to every church everywhere. The reason why John writes to seven churches is because seven is the Jewish symbol of completeness. It's a symbol of totality. These seven churches were real churches, but they represent, I believe, the whole church, the complete church, in every age for the last 2,000 years and every future church until the Lord returns.

Because of time, I'm going to look at the messages to just the first three churches today. And, again, the question that we're looking at today is: what does the church need at this moment in order to be mended? What does the church in America need right now to be mended? What do we at Vineyard Columbus need to be mended? To be healed from all of the trauma we've been through, the divisions we've experienced, the anxiety we've felt over the last year? What do we need to hear from the Lord in order to thrive both now and in the future?

Jesus says some things to the churches about the things that need to be in place if we're going to be mended.

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We need to love

In Revelation 2:1-4, we read this:

Slide Revelation 2:1-4

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

The church in Ephesus had so many things going for it. The church worked hard. The people in the church were real servants and they were busy serving God. The church had a high value for the truth. They hated false doctrine. Jesus said he had one thing against this hard working doctrinally correct church. They forgot to love!

Let's look at verse 4:

Slide Revelation 2:4

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

The Ephesians lost the love they had at first. Or in the more familiar King James Version: the Ephesians had forsaken their first love. What does it mean to forsake your first love? They had forsaken their love of Jesus.

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Love of Jesus

In all the activity and all the great things our church is doing in the community, did Jesus ever speak a word to Vineyard Columbus and say, “You know, sometimes I feel like you have moved away from your love relationship with me. You’re doing so many good things. And yet, you’re missing the most important thing. Me!”

I think about all the busy folk trying to hold things together during the pandemic. You are trying to hold down a job and if you’ve got kids, making sure that they are learning online. You’re trying to take care of a sick relative. Some of you have actually had to learn to cook during this pandemic. So we take our complaints to Jesus. I’m tired, Jesus! I’d like some help here.

It reminds me of Jesus’ words to a very busy woman named Martha in Luke 10:

Slide Luke 10:41-42

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things,
⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Again, we can do so many good things. But in the midst of our busyness we can miss the best thing – Jesus. So, let me ask you a personal question. Would any of you listening to me today say, “You know, the truth is that I miss Jesus. I miss being with Jesus! I miss Jesus’ presence! I miss spending time with him just worshipping him.” If you want to individually thrive, you’ve got to get back to your first love – simply Jesus!

If we want to thrive as a church, we need to return to our first love and put Jesus above everything else.

Now, it may be that the loss of love for the Ephesians was not a loss of love for Jesus. It may be that they lost their love for each other.

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Love of each other

In their passion for serving their community and in their passion for doctrinal truth, maybe they lost the loving relationship with each other.

Francis Schaeffer was a Christian philosopher whose writings were very influential back in the 1970’s for Christians of my generation – Baby Boomer Christians. Back in 1970, Schaeffer wrote one of his most profound essays. It was called

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The Mark of a Christian

I'm going to read to you a brief portion of what Francis Schaeffer said in "The Mark of a Christian". He wrote:

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The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? Jesus says in John 13: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority, he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians.

And we must not get angry. If people say, "You don't love other Christians [therefore, you are not a real Christian]," we must go home, get down on our knees and ask God whether or not they are right. If they are, they have a right to have said what they said.

Wow! That is challenging! What would the world say to us, to you and me, as they evaluate our love toward other members of our church? What would they say if they overheard the way we speak about other Christians in our church? What would the world say if they overheard us speaking about other Christians in the world – especially those who voted differently than you did? What would they say? How would they judge our Christianity or whether we bear the marks of a Christian, which is love?

Jesus says that the most important thing a church needs in order to be mended is to love well. To love extravagantly. To love Jesus. To love each other. To put love first!

There's a second thing that every church in every age needs to have in place if we're going to thrive, if we're going to be healed and mended. That is

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We need to be willing to suffer

Here's what we read:

Slide Revelation 2:8-10

⁸ "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

Jesus knew the affliction and poverty and the slander in which the church in Smyrna was having to endure. There was a local emperor cult in Smyrna. From time to time, citizens of the city were required to sprinkle incense on the fire burning before the emperor's bust and to confess out loud that Caesar was Lord. But how could a Christian call Caesar Lord when the Christian knew that Jesus was Lord?

More than 60 years after Jesus spoke to the churches in Smyrna that they would need to suffer, there was a man named Polycarp, who was the bishop to the church in Smyrna. Standing before a crowded amphitheater, a local governor urged the bishop of Smyrna to call Caesar Lord and to curse Jesus Christ. But Polycarp refused. He said:

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For 86 years, I have served Him [Christ], and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?

Polycarp was burned at the stake rather than deny Christ. He was willing to suffer. He believed, brothers and sisters, that a willingness to suffer is the greatest issue that exists regarding the extension of the gospel in every time and every place. I've heard Christians over the last number of years worry about the loss of our religious liberties, what would it mean if the government begins to limit what churches could do? I believe that today most of us as American Christians are more afraid of suffering than we are disobeying Jesus.

You see, I believe that the New Testament teaches the greatest issues that exist regarding the extension of the gospel in every time and in every place, is the willingness of individual Christians to suffer so that the gospel message gets announced. The gospel cannot be extended without suffering! Someone has to be willing to say: I will give up some of my money. I will pay for this so that the gospel gets extended. I'll sacrifice. I'll give to the church. I'll give to missions. I will personally pay.

If the kingdom is going to be extended, some people have to say: I will give up my social standing with my co-workers or with my family or with my neighbors. Some people have to be willing to say: I am going to undergo some level personal embarrassment to extend this gospel message. Some people have to say: I'm willing to give up my home or my country to go across the world to bring this gospel message to another people group.

This is the law of the harvest, brothers and sisters. Jesus says that unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it dwells alone. But if it dies, it bears many seeds. To have many seeds, Jesus tells us, one must die. You say: I want many seeds in my family. I want many people in my family to know Jesus. I've been praying for that. Well, then you must die. At least, of embarrassment. You have to take the risk of sharing your faith with your family. You want many seeds in your school? Maybe you would like to see a classmate come to know Jesus the way you do. Then you have to die. You have to

risk that someone may not like you. You have to risk that someone might think that you are too religious.

The same is true of any of you who want the kingdom extended to your workplace. Someone has to pay a price. Brothers and sisters, religious persecution while bad is not the worst thing that we might have to endure as the church in America. Disobedience to Jesus by our unwillingness to suffer and to pay a price for the gospel is far worse than persecution!

What does the church need to be like in order to thrive and be mended?

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- We need love
- We need to be willing to suffer

And third,

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We need to hold on to the truth

Jesus says in Revelation 2:

Slide Revelation 2:12, 14-15

¹² "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

You know from the Old Testament that Balaam was a pagan prophet and he decided to compromise Israel's relationship with God by telling women from the nation of Moab to seduce Israelite men. In later Judaism, and in the New Testament, Balaam became a symbol of false prophets, false teachers.

We don't know the exact nature of the teaching of the Nicolaitans was. We know that the church in Pergamum was dying because it listened to bad teaching and false prophecy. I think it's generally the case in America today that healthy, strong, biblical teaching is undervalued. Churches are evaluated today by their programs, by how cool their worship is, by their contribution to society. But I hear fewer and fewer people these days who say: At the core of the church, I want the truth. I want biblical teaching.

Writers of the New Testament regularly tell us if you want to have a healthy church, you need healthy teaching. If you want people living healthy lives, they need to listen to healthy words. Bad teaching, bad counsel will lead to bad living.

Words are hugely important. You listen sound, healthy words and it will lead to living a God-honoring, healthy life. If you listen to false words all day long, it will lead to sick living.

False words are like the COVID virus. They will infect you and they will lead to spiritual illness. I love the way the Message Version puts it:

Slide 1 Timothy 6:3-5

²⁻⁵ These are the things I want you to teach and preach. If you have leaders there who teach otherwise, who refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and this godly instruction, tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy, bad-mouthing, suspicious rumors. Eventually there's an epidemic of backstabbing, and truth is but a distant memory. They think religion is a way to make a fast buck.

Let me ask you: what do you listen to all day long? What do you pay attention to on your Facebook feed? What articles do you click on? Who are you listening to? What are you filling your soul with? Are you filling it with life-giving teaching from God's Word? Or to quote the Apostle Paul, are you listening to ignorant windbags who are making your soul sick?

You want the church to thrive?

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- We need love
- We need to be willing to suffer
- We need to hold on to the truth

Slide Revelation 3:20

²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

He's standing at the door of our church. He's standing at the door of every one of our hearts. He's knocking and he's waiting. Today, if anyone opens the door, he'll come in. We can ask Jesus to fill our lives with love for him, with love for others, with a willingness to suffer for him and with truth. He wants to mend us and heal us. Open the door of your heart right now to Jesus!

Gospel call. Call to veterans, families.

A Time to Mend

Rich Nathan

November 7 & 8, 2020

To Everything there is a Season

Revelation 2 & 3

- I. We need love
 - A. Love of Jesus
 - B. Love of each other
- II. We need to be willing to suffer
- III. We need to hold on to the truth