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Title: New World

Text: Revelation 1:1-20, 2:2-5, 3:15-21

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Once upon a time, on a dangerous seacoast notorious for shipwrecks, there was a primitive, little lifesaving station near a fishing village. Actually, it was a small hut with a large oil lantern on a 12 foot pole. The people of the small village took turns overseeing the light - keeping the fuel filled, and watching the coast and turbulent sea.

Every time a ship found itself in trouble, those at the little lighthouse would sound the alarm, and the brave band of villagers would all respond: the best sailors would row their small fishing boats into the icy waters with little thought for themselves, the youth would search the coastline and carry the injured back to the rescue station, while the women and children would assist those with medical training by preparing beds and bringing soup and strong tea for the rescued.

After one especially disastrous shipwreck, the small community met and decided to build a larger lighthouse in place of the little hut and pole. The whole community helped in its construction - some carried supplies, other laid bricks, and others made meals for the workers. It was their pride and joy.

The lighthouse light, now perched 40 feet above the ocean, was powered by oil and over the next several years, their new lighthouse and larger rescue station saved dozens of ships and hundreds, maybe thousands, of lives.

It was indeed a proud village; they named the lighthouse "*Our Lighthouse*" and the name was placed proudly over the entrance door.

Some of those who had been saved, as well as others along the seacoast, wanted to become members of this rescue operation. They were willing to give their time, energy and money to support the operation. New crews were trained. New boats were purchased. New additions were made to the rescue center.

The little lighthouse, once small and primitive, began to grow. Soon the members became burdened by the inefficiencies of the station, They proposed additional equipment, better furniture, and modern electronics.

They replaced the oil-fueled light with an automatic light. The analog and handmade equipment was discarded and automated digital systems were installed in the newly designed control room. The rescue center's emergency cots were replaced with fine furniture.

The upgrades made *Our Lighthouse* bright, attractive and like new. In fact, *Our Lighthouse* become one of the most popular gathering places on the coast. Fewer members were interested in braving the sea on life-saving missions, so they hired

professional rescue crews to do this work. Rescuing sailors, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry occurred less and less at *Our Lighthouse*. The original goal of the rescue station wasn't altogether forgotten, however. Lifesaving motifs still prevailed in the interior decorations. They even had an older lifeboat preserved in the Room of Sweet Memories with soft, indirect lighting, which helped hide the layer of dust upon the once-used vessel.

Around this time, a large ship wrecked off the coast and the new rescue crews brought in nearly a hundred half-drowned sailors—drenched, sick, and dirty *strangers*. It was obvious to the members that these sailors were from another part of the world. Instead of red hair, like almost all of the original members, some had blond hair, others' brown, and still others jet black. Their beautiful, updated "lighthouse" suddenly became cluttered and crowded.

A special committee was immediately formed to fix the situation. A shower house was built on the other side of the lighthouse, away from the original rescue room, so victims of the shipwreck could be cleaned up first—before coming inside *Our Lighthouse*. Then they added some emergency cots in the Room of Sweet Memories next to the shower house. This way, the committee said, these sailors can get cleaned up and healed up, before they come into *Our Lighthouse*.

But at the next lighthouse meeting, the room was engulfed in anger and division. Some people said, "Look, we want to get out of the lifesaving business. This place gets dirty every time shipwrecked strangers are brought in. The new shower house helps but they just eat our food, use our facilities, and don't even bother to learn the rules. Why should we keep putting ourselves at such risk to save such careless travelers? Besides, we all know each other and we worked hard together to make this a beautiful place.

In that same meeting, a minority group stood and protested, "Lifesaving is the reason why we are here. That's our mission, that's why we built OUR lighthouse and added better equipment. Everything we do around here ought to have something to do with lifesaving, regardless of our lighthouse's beauty or size or decorations.

It became so contentious that a vote was taken. The minority group however was just that, the minority—they were voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could start their own lifesaving station down the coast.

We don't live in a remote fishing area without modern medical centers or a government-run coast guard, so we might not personally engage with that story. Instead, we live in a place that offers constant access to digital devices that allow us to personally engage with games or social media so that we can escape any uncomfortable emotions like sadness, loneliness, boredom or sacrifice.

Add to this, the societal shift that has raised Happiness as the supreme emotion in our world today. So we have Children growing up believing that if they are not happy all the time, something must be terribly wrong. And parents believe it is their job to make sure their kids are happy all the time and their teenagers have every advantage to help them succeed, which all breeds anxiety to perform, rather than the ability to overcome.

Imagine if Daniel and his 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were teenagers **today** instead of during Israel's exile in Babylon in 600 B.C.? Would Daniel have had the perseverance, resilience and trust in God to keep praying to God, instead of to the Persian Emperor Darius, even though it meant he would be sentence to spend the night in the lions' den for worshipping God rather than worshipping the king? Or would Daniel's three friends had perseverance, resilience and trust in God to refuse to worship the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, even though it meant being thrown into a blazing furnace?

The elderly apostle named John, understood all this: he was exiled to a lonely island because he refused to worship the powerful, evil, Roman Emperor, Caesar Domitian, near the end of the first century.

The Emperor thought he had left John to die on that remote island, but there, John received 4 incredible visions that make up the book called revelation, the last book in the New Testament.

We need Revelation's message in the Church today. We need to wake up Jesus' agenda, to care about the things that matter to him much more than the things that matter us.

A point of clarification: Revelation is not about some secret code to crack when Jesus is coming back, it's about remaining faithful to shine for Christ, even through the darkest times. "If today's newspapers are a necessary key to interpreting the book, then no generation until our own could have understood and obeyed the book." But the prophetic books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zachariah, are very helpful, not to mention Genesis and Isaiah.

What Revelation does reveal is a symbolic vision for the people in John's day and for us today. John writes to bring assurance to the persecuted, to build up perseverance, resilience and trust in God, and to awaken those asleep, distracted, or just too comfortable.

So what are people to do? That's what we are going to discover.

We are going to focus on what the Spirit says to the 7 churches, because to whatever degree our lives or our church reflects these qualities or symptoms, we must listen and repent. If you're not sure these words matter today, consider the two cities that are now completely uninhabited belong to the two churches who were most severely

rebuked (Sardis and Laodicea). The two cities that endured the longest before the Turkish conquest were the only two churches who received fully praise (Smyrna and Philadelphia).

These may just be coincidence, but they could also illustrate That God will prevail in the end and until then, God remains with his people, the church, to be his lighthouses, his lampstands, to shine brightly for Jesus.

Every church was called a lampstand.

But because Revelation connects to so much of the OLD testament, we need to look back to what would connect immediately for John's readers in these churches.

[Tabernacle JPG]

The lampstand first appear in the book of exodus, lamp stand is one of the very few pieces of furniture that God commanded to be put in the Tabernacle and later the temple. The most important parts of both spaces where the holy place and the most holy Place.

The passage gives vivid descriptions of each item, specifically the Ark of the covenant, the altar of incense, the Golden table, and the golden lampstand. God gave specific instructions on how the lampstand was to be built, the kind of oil it should burn, and where it was to be placed. The lampstand was set next to the table that held the bread of the presence, which was the ultimate symbol of God's presence and provision.

The lampstand did not cast a bright light over everything— instead, it illuminated what was directly in front of it: the bread of the presence. One of the priests primary jobs was to make sure the light of the lampstand never burned out.

Ex. 25:30 NLT Place the Bread of the Presence on the table to remain before me at all times.

Ex. 25:37 NLT Then make the seven lamps for the lampstand, and set them so they reflect their light forward.

Generation after generation, the lampstand in the the holy place did it one thing: Spotlight the object that best represented god's goodness and God's presence. It's the same object that Jesus would use to symbolize his own body at the last supper.

Now think about the seven churches that are called lampstands in the book of Revelation. I think everything makes more sense when you connect the churches of revelation with the lampstand of the temple.

Five out of these seven churches were losing their effectiveness as the light of Jesus to their cities.

All of these encouragements and warnings to the churches point towards Jesus' concern for his church losing its impact and influence.

Look at what Jesus tells the church at **Ephesus**:

Revelation 2:2-5 I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! 5 Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

As churches, it's easy to get distracted and spotlight things other than Jesus. As believers, it's easy to get sidetracked on personal issues or battles and forget to shine for Jesus.

So what are we to do?

We must seek, serve and share in the power and faith of Jesus Christ: the slain and risen lamb.

First if we want to shine for Jesus we need to **Seek Jesus**: We cannot get distracted in our pursuit of Jesus and his pursuit of us.

Some of us just finished reading the entire New Testament. Others of you read part of the New Testament. Regardless of how much you read, how will you keep reading? How are you going to keep seeking Jesus?

Advent is a perfect time to seek Jesus. We are planning simple, yet sacred activities in our gatherings and for you at home to grow closer to Jesus. The only way we can continue to have unconditional love, is to first receive Jesus' unconditional love.

The second part of shining is **servicing**. We are to demonstrate Jesus and his goodness with acts of love. When we Love the lonely, feed the hungry, and serve the needy we demonstrate the good news of Jesus.

[Armful of Love connection]

Jesus tells the church at Laodicea,

Revelation 3:15-16 NLT

15 "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

"I wish you were either hot or cold" is not about either accepting Jesus or rejecting him—This is written to a city that was built half way up a mountain. They had ice cold water from the Mountain as well as Hot Springs near their city. The hot springs were

useful for healing and The mountain water was refreshing and pure, useful for drinking. But when the people would mix the two or send either water source down an aqueduct to the next city, it would become lukewarm, not useful for either purpose.

I think the message to that church, and maybe to us too: be a refreshing cup of cold water in someone's life, or be a healing agent in someone's life.

The third part of shining is **sharing**. We declare the good news of Jesus with our words of truth and hope. Jesus is awesome! That's what we see and hear in the remaining visions in revelation. But it's even more helpful for people when you or I share with them *why* Jesus is awesome. What has he done in your life?

Has he made you more patience? Has he given you a greater purpose? Has he forgiven your sin, removed your guilt, and covered your shame?

If he has, then don't be afraid to share it.

Jesus said that a lamp must be put on a stand in order to give light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:15 NLT No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.

John the Baptist was 'a burning and shining lamp' (Jn. 5:35), who came 'to bear witness to the light'

John 5:35 NLT John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message

John 1:8 NLT John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

It is Jesus Christ who is the light.

The church is like the lampstand in the temple, it's not supposed to illuminate everything, it's supposed to spotlight Jesus. God placed the church in the world to show the world Jesus.

People are still looking for light. Some our desperate for it!

Our Lighthouse did continue to grow. In fact, they added a concert quality sound system, cocktail bar, and dance floor were installed, and on cold, blustery night, the lighthouse looked especially inviting. The place shook with singing, dancing and celebrating.

One cold, winter night, a huge storm brewed, and way out at sea - a boat was in trouble. The automatic light at the lighthouse had failed, but no one had noticed. The

other stations' lights were either too small or the people never bothered to keep them lit.

Those who had once so proudly patrolled on nights such as this were now celebrating inside, or in their homes, safe and warm. The sailors strained their eyes in vain, looking for a light to guide them. In the darkness, wind and waves pounded the ship into the massive rocks. The lifeboats were useless in such a storm - the sailors tried to swim for shore. Only one especially strong swimmer made it...through the biting wind and black rain, he staggered towards the sound and light coming from the majestic room next to the dark tower. Weak and freezing, he banged and banged and begged for help.

But with the pounding rain outside and the reverberating music inside, no one heard him, and no one saw him...

As the sick sailor slumped down on the ground and surrendered to the cold, the last thing he saw was a bright new sign above the door that read: *the Clubhouse: no entry, members only.*

Friends, Restoration is a rescue boat church. This is what bringing hope to the world looks and feels like.

If having our own lighthouse helps us further the rescue operation then we will find one or God will show us one. But we aren't looking to become a clubhouse or cruise ship church.

We are here to help people find Jesus, and then Join with him in restoring communities, by seeking, serving and sharing.

Revelation 3:20-21 NLT

20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. 21 Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

Prayer

Revelation 21:1-7 NLT

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or

sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.”