Dear Church

Good morning Woodhaven! (2x)

I’m encouraged that you all are here this morning. It’s indeed a privilege to share in the ministry of the word. I want to say **that it’s been a joy to serve this local body for the past 2 and a half months.** I’m extremely excited about what the Lord is doing in this new season!

Now, let’s pray before we begin our time.

Father we’re grateful for the opportunity to gather this morning under the preaching of your word and to have our minds transformed by your truth.

If someone had to guess your favorite book of the bible, which book would it be? Do you think it would make the list for **Bible-Gateway’s top 10 most popular books of the bible?** In 2014 (BG) looked at their usage data to find out which books were the most popular with their website users. According to their data, the 10 most popular books were (Starting at # 10) 10) Acts, 9) Isaiah, 8) 1-Corinthians, 7) Luke, 6) Genesis, 5) Proverbs, 4) Romans, 3) John, 2) Matthew, 1) Psalms. (By a show of hands, whose book made the list?)

Today we are going spend some time in a book that didn’t make the list, but it’s a book that has **rich and weighty theological themes** and is **one of the more debated books of the bible.** Again, our book doesn’t make Bible-Gateways cut of the top 10 most popular books, **BUT it does make the cut of the inspired and inerrant 66**.

For our time this morning we are going to the book of Revelation. Now I know that for many, when I say Revelation, we immediately default to a hermeneutical system and we begin to think about the **timing of the rapture**, the **millennium**, and Tim Lahaye’s – **“Left Behind”** series.

Revelation is a book that can be tough to read because it’s full of strange and often scary imagery, symbolism, confusing numbers, time references, (and there are even times that you feel like you are in Marvel’s – “Doctor Strange” because the frequent time-loops that John experiences).

Reading and understanding Revelation can be difficult, but like any difficult task, if we immerse ourselves into it and press deeper, **the experience can strengthen, grow, and sharpen us.** As a matter of fact, John communicates this point to his readers, in the opening lines of the prologue, (1:3)…where he writes *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”*

Let me be clear in communicating that my aim this morning is not to work through the entire book, but **with our time I want us to** **consider** **how our Lord informs his bride about the type of posture she is to have for the task of maintaining an effective witness.** What I mean by posture is the “approach or attitude” necessary to accomplish the task of living as his people in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christian thought and practice. (Don’t get Christian thought and practice confused with nationalism or conservatism. The two are not the same).

We see “posture” (attitude and approach) in many environments, but one environment that helps us to frame and anchor what I mean by “posture” is in athletics. It’s critical for athletes have to apply a specific “approach or attitude” (posture) to accomplish a particular task in order to be successful in their sport. **Just as an athlete needs to have a specific posture to accomplish a particular task in order to be successful in their sport,** **believers ought to have a posture as well**. (now I didn’t say a swagger….I’ll save that terminology for another sermon).

The point is that **Jesus has much to say about what our posture ought to be for an effective witness in a fallen world.** And he desires that we **display an attitude and approach to our thought and practice that honors him.**

\*\*Let’s read Revelation 1:1-11

In John’s letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2 & 3, there are **3 phrases that capture and shape our understanding** for the **type posture** that Jesus desires for us to have as his witnesses in a fallen world.

**3-Postures of an effective witness:**

Let’s begin with the 1st posture as we consider the phrase: ***“remember and repent”***

This is a phrase that **appears 5x** and it’s **given as an imperative to 5 of the 7 churches** that John addresses in chapters 2 & 3. It’s given to Ephesus – “the loveless church” (2:5), Pergamum – “the compromising church” (2:16), Thyatira – “the corrupt church” (2:22), Sardis – “the dead church” (3:3), and Laodecia – “the lukewarm church” (3:19).

The phrase “remember and repent” carries with it a unique tone and feel!

Bill Mounce, who comments on this statement states that “the Greek imperative is present, with a meaning like “keep on remembering”, or to “hold in memory” and “let you minds dwell on it”. Then he says “the statement itself goes a step further because **remembering is not to just bring it to mind, but to act on it”.**

The idea is that **we are to maintain a posture where we never forget the price that was paid for our sin.** The fact that we are sinful beyond measure but loved beyond belief. When we remember the messiness of our sin, the price that was paid for us through the gospel, and we treasure the work of Christ; **we develop a posture where we delight in actively making a break with what displeases the Lords heart.**

Now, a posture of “remember and repent” has a number of ways that it plays out individually and corporately. Individually, it’s in the context of marriage, or parenting, or a strained relationship. Corporately it’s lamenting over egregious injustice that dehumanizes people made in the image of God. The point here is that Jesus calls the church to “remember and repent”, and this a posture that he calls us to as well.

The 2nd posture that we want to consider is the phrase: ***“he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches”***

This phrase **appears 7x** (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and is also **given as an imperative to all 7 churches** despite their political and economic circumstance. This is a phrase that functions as a prophetic warning for the 7 churches to open their mind and heart to kingdom truths. Now keep in mind that having ears isn’t synonymous with hearing/listening (anyone who’s been around kids can give a hearty amen to that!

**Hearing and listening is intentional and purposeful!** It’s helpful to note that “to hear”, for the believer is “to obey” or “put into practice”. And while obedience is intentional and purposeful, this obedience is by and through the “spirit of God”. (Galatians 5:16-25)

The 2nd posture **directs our attention to the role and priority of the Spirit in our lives and our obedience to the truth of God’s word.** (Philippians 2:12-13 – *“therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”*)

HB Charles (Shilow Metropolitan Church) says it this way – “It is the will of God, to use the word of God, by and through the Spirit of God, to make the people of God, look like the Son of God”

And I think a question we need to consider is **how does the posture of** *“he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the church”* **play out in our lives?** Where have we been loveless like Ephesus, where have we compromised in our apprehension and application of truth like Pergamum, in what ways have we become corrupt like Thyatira, where have we become dead our spiritual fervor like Sardis, or where have we become lukewarm in our affections for God like Laodicea?

**Jesus summons the 7 churches of chapters 2&3 and he is summoning us to maintain a posture of obedience to truth.** We need to remember, as Nancy Pearcy (professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist Seminary) states, that “Christianity is total truth, not just religious truth”. It speaks to the full totality of our lives…(i.e. our masculinity, femininity, marriage, singleness, sexuality, our political person, our social person, and the emotional and intellectual person. It is total truth.

The 3rd posture that we’ll end on is mentioned once in chapter 3:8 and it’s the phrase:

***“yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name”***

This statement **appears once in (3:8)**, but the **idea of faithfulness is expressed to both Philadelphia and Smyrna.** Both have maintained a posture of faithfulness to the revealed truths of Christ and the gospel message, but Jesus says specifically of Philadelphia, that **they guarded the gospel from error and obeyed it within the midst of economic, political, and religious marginalization and persecution.**

Now this is helpful for us because as we gather this morning and we consider “the persecuted church abroad” - Organizations like “Voice of the Martyrs” , “International Christian” Concern”, and even many of our very own missionaries that we support in various countries around the world; it gives us a sober and necessary reminder of the costliness of posture of faithfulness.

Our brothers and sisters are marginalized, criminalized, arrested, tortured, and even martyred for their faith in Christ.

And for them and for us **- Jesus demands faithfulness from his bride! Jesus is worthy of faithful from his bride!** (Repeat 2x)

When the church begins to lose her witness in any society, what precedes it is unfaithfulness – “you **have not kept** my word and **have denied** my name”.

The diagnostic for unfaithfulness - A callousness to the revealed truth of Christ and the gospel.

Before we end, I **think it’s necessary think about what this posture looks like in our lives.** When the pressures of life began to swell and crash down like waves, can it be said of us, “you have kept my word and not denied my name?”

**Conclusion:**

Woodhaven, **Jesus is concerned about our posture in this world!** (Let me repeat that again.) The RISEN Lord is **concerned about our attitude and approach** for the task of **maintaining an effective witness** in this world (a place that is increasingly hostile to Christian thought and practice)

We’re reminded by John, that our Lord desires that we maintain a posture where we

1. We “remember and repent”, never forgetting the price that was paid for our sin.
2. We “listening to, and obey the Spirit God”, as he leads and guides us in truth
3. We “remain faithful to the words, person, work of Christ

Why, because HE is worthy of this! (Repeat)

Let’s pray.