

Sunday October 24, 2021
Lesson 8: The Need For Spiritual Renewal
Scripture: Revelation 3: 1-6, 14-20

Context:

The 2021 fall series is titled “Belong.” Each unit will focus on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. Today we continue to unpack the unit titled “Into the Future,” an exploration of the early church’s foundations and a call to return to our roots for renewal. This lesson “The Need For Spiritual Renewal” addresses how we can become aware of the signs and causes of spiritual stagnation and develop a coping strategy.

The lesson comes from the book of Revelation, a book dedicated to worship and consolation found in Jesus. Often, the book of Revelation has been misrepresented in its interpretation and has been considered a book detailing the end of time. In the beginning of the book from chapters one through three, John writes to seven churches, with each message addressed to its “angel” instead of to the church.¹ The number seven is to be taken as symbolic of completeness and strengthens the idea Revelation addresses all the churches in Asia.² For today’s readings, we read John’s words to the angels of the churches over Sardis and Laodicea.

There are similarities and differences as each church is addressed. The “bodies” of the seven messages provide us a window into the life of the church in Asia at the end of the first century.³ There are the reoccurring themes of tribulation, division, good works, repentance, holding firm to the Christian life, love and spiritual gifts, and the Lordship of Christ as the conquering hero. These messages reveal the focus of the early church and how they were defining who they were as a community.

To both of the churches, John provides encouragement mixed in with reproachment for slipping in behavior. To the angel of the church in Sardis, John reminds them they are to keep going. Their reputation is for good, and yet they have been so bogged down in their lives, their number of works is slipping. John wants them to keep going through the tribulation and see the goodness of God in front of them, as difficult as it may be.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea, John has concern for the growing wealth in their storehouses. As a result of them growing in wealth, they have grown complacent to the needs of those around them. John counsels them to think of how they spend their money and to remember their Lord. Jesus will come knocking and they should be ready to accept all those the Lord sends their way. In both cases, while sternly worded, there is evidence of a deep love John possesses for those churches.

¹ Boring, M. Eugene. “Revelation,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 86.

² Ibid. 87.

³ Ibid. 91.

Application

Whenever I move to a church, one of the books of the bible most people request to study is the Book of Revelation. Of course, it arises from the fact of how it is one of the most mysterious and difficult books to understand in the canon. And there are the numerous interpretations of how it is a book of woe and destruction. The popular interpretation is how it is a roadmap for the end of time.

Yet the Book of Revelation is more hopeful in tone and nature, especially when one reads these messages to the individual churches. The churches are given very practical instructions, as well as a word of encouragement. God has gifted them and even in trying times, God is at work in their lives.

As our focus suggests, these churches need spiritual renewal, especially as they face trials and tribulations. They must find the practices and ways to connect them to God and one another. And they must beware of spiritual stagnation, which can affect all churches and all individuals no matter how long they may be in the faith.

Spiritual stagnation is something which can come to all of us, and we all may experience it from time to time even if we stay on our guard. When I was in divinity school, I learned about compassion fatigue, where those who give care to others so much, they find themselves depleted and drained. It comes out in how little time they spend with family or friends, and their general physical health may even take a decline. They may even be so focused on others; they neglect other duties as well.

When I learned about these concepts, as well as others forms of spiritual stagnation, I discovered how easy it is for us all to get to points where we need to be renewed by God. In the fast-paced world we live in today, it is so easy to forget how renewal is something we need. It is not a luxury as it is part of our walk with Christ.

What I continue to be amazed by is how there are different ways to experience renewal. For some people, the idea of going off to a monastery or convent sounds heavenly as one can pray and step away from the chaos of the world. There is peace and serenity.

Or one can try the breath or centering prayers. One of my friends has found it to be so soothing and has helped her both with breathing and hearing God speak to her in scripture. She states centering prayer has been a way to feel God's presence and love in her life and accept it, knowing she doesn't deserve it. She also feels it is a chance to be with God without asking anything but to be present.

One of my favorite ways for coping has been to go search for God in nature and to think of the peace one can find in God's creation. Recently, I went kayaking with a friend on a river we had not seen in over a year. As we came around the rapids, we saw a cross on the shore with a bench. We definitely remembered that had not been part of our previous journey. As we journeyed on, I was reminded of how God was constantly at work in my life to remind me to keep the good faith and to find the peace in Christ. With my phone on do not disturb and the worries of the outside world away, I could hear God encouraging me and then putting the kind reminder to look to the cross and find the peace of Christ as always at work in my life.

Coping mechanisms help us as we face the fragility of life. In our spiritual journey, ways of renewal remind us of how much we need God and how our frenetic pace of life is not stable for any of us. We all need God to come in and cleanse our hearts

and minds.

Why do you think it is so easy to slip into spiritual stagnation? What do you think spiritual renewal looks like for you? How can different practices help you get in touch with God and with your soul? What do spiritual practices do in helping the body of Christ to grow and bloom? How can spiritual renewal stop us from not being our best selves?

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