

# THE SEVEN CHURCHES + + +

MIKE WHITE

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Well, good morning church. It's a privilege to be with you in worship today. I don't know if you know this, but we are right in the middle of the Christmas season. And even if those words come out of my mouth, it makes me sick to my stomach a little bit. But there's been this shift in our culture. We start celebrating Christmas earlier and earlier.

A couple examples, if you've noticed retailers around the city, they start bringing out Christmas decorations much, much earlier. I was reading an article that said they're actually correlating back-to-school shopping with Christmas season. So simultaneously you can buy your spiral notebook and your Christmas lights together and leave your store and shopping, right? It's just much more efficient to do that.

But other ways I've noticed it too, around our city, do you know there are heathens right now that have their Christmas lights on? Do you know that? Now I take by faith it's no one in this room, right? But outside these walls where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, right? And we all know the right time to turn your Christmas lights on is after Thanksgiving because that's when Jesus turned his Christmas lights on. Amen? Now you better get excited when I start teaching about Jesus in a little bit, okay?

We moved here from Texas about 10 years ago and we knew there was this thing here called winter. We hadn't really experienced it in Texas. But our first Christmas, we actually missed getting our lights up because it froze and you couldn't get up on the roof. In Texas, it was a little bit different. See, some Christmases in Texas, the weather would be 85 degrees. So you're running your air conditioner, you're wearing shorts, and you're sweating when playing football. Sometimes, though, in Christmas in Texas, it would dip down into the frigid 50s and you have to put your fire on and stuff like that.

I remember one Christmas when I was about 8 years old. I was a mischievous little kid. And back then, our neighbors across the street, they had Christmas lights. And they were different back then, y'all. They were the big glass bulbs in the strand. And for whatever reason, my 8-year-old brain decided to experiment a little bit. And so I started to unscrew these bulbs, walk out into the street, and throw them as high as I could into the air, and then just enjoy the explosion of the bulb on the concrete.

I did this over and over again, and then just headed home like everything was normal. And when I walked into my house, my parents encountered me, and they weren't as happy as I was. You see, the neighbor had called them and had shared my delinquency with them. And they proceeded to scold me, and I had a birthday party later that day, and they said, you cannot go to that party until you go back across the street and apologize in person to your neighbor.

And I can still picture this walk of shame across the street, tears coming down my face because I've been busted. And the dad opens the door, and I let some apology out and move on. And when you

hear that about my parents, you say, well, yeah, that's good parenting. They're correcting your delinquent behavior out of love.

And I tell you that today because we're continuing in the book of Revelation. And we're going to see Jesus correct the churches then and the churches now, and it's all from a posture of love. You see, he cares about us, he cares about the church in the first century, he cares about believers for all time, but he also authors the way of life.

So we're continuing in the book of Revelation. And Pastor Greg did a great job last week kicking off this series, and he shared that the word revelation is from the Greek pronounced in English apocalypse, where we would get the word apocalypse. And it actually means an unveiling or revealing of the truth of Jesus.

This week I googled the word apocalypse movies, and what was synonymous there was doomsday movies. We've allowed our culture to infiltrate the book of Revelation, and so when we think of apocalypse or revelation, we think nuclear fallout and zombies walking around everywhere, and that's how we read Revelation. But it's not that. It's an unveiling, it's a revealing of the truth of Jesus Christ.

And we see the resurrected Jesus encounters the apostle John, who is exiled on the island of Patmos, and he's revealing what is and what is to come when Jesus returns and reunites the new heaven and the new earth.

If you have your Bibles, open to Revelation 1, verse 4. And it says this, John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia. That's who Revelation was written to, that's who likely received it first, and then passed it around to the churches in the known area. Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne.

So again, it's about 96 AD. Jesus is writing to the apostle John, who is exiled on Patmos, and the church has been scattered throughout the known Roman world of the day, and they're facing intense persecution. And so Jesus is writing these letters to Christians then and now, and saying, have hope, have courage in the midst of persecution. He's encouraging them to continue on.

And these letters today, they were written to specific people, encouraging them and preparing them for Jesus' return, and that's what we prepare for today. So we need some context. These seven letters, they were written to specific 1st century churches, but they apply to all churches for all time. Revelation was written for us, but not to us.

We have to do our best as we can to get back into 1st century world, understand what they were facing and what they were living through. Pastor Greg said it last week, I think you'll hear it most weeks in this series, it can't mean to us what it didn't mean to them.

But now these seven churches, they were literal churches in Asia, and here's a map where you can see their placement. And this is modern-day Turkey. Our geography is not great, we probably wouldn't have known that. That's modern-day Turkey. To the west is Eastern Europe, where you see Greece, and then south is the Mediterranean Sea, and then if you go southeast down that land, that's where Jerusalem is.

And so these seven cities were literal cities. They were port cities that were really influential and significant of the day. They were major trade routes of the day that saw a lot of people come through there. They were very cosmopolitan cities that had a varying belief set that affected the Christians.

And we also see, as we saw last week, the numbers in Revelation are also symbolic. So it's a literal seven churches, but seven is also kind of God's number of completeness. So when he says to the seven churches, it is literally to these seven churches, but it's also to all believers for all time, which includes you and includes me.

And when you read these letters, John and Jesus interlace context of the city. They would know things that were referenced about the buildings, wars they'd faced, customs and culture of the day. So we'll see some of that in one of the letters in a little bit.

And here's the danger that I've seen today with modern Christians is that we impose our modern situation and bias onto Revelation. So whatever your political affiliation, the opposite party, the leader of that party has been called the Antichrist a number of times. It's just not true, okay?

Or I remember during COVID, there was a COVID vaccine. There were Christians proclaiming that that was the mark of the beast. And it's just not true, okay? So we've got to step back into first century culture and try to understand and unearth what it means to them and then apply what it means to us today.

There are seven letters, again, to seven specific churches, but they're for us today as well. And in these letters, there's a pattern that we're going to see emerge in almost all of the letters. It deviates slightly, but here's the pattern we're going to walk through today.

In each letter, you're going to see the authority of Jesus revealed, and he's going to say it in different ways. There's almost always an encouragement not in our letter today. There's going to be a correction in almost all the letters. There's going to be a call to repent and listen. And then Jesus has a promise, an eternal reward that he's giving to his people. He's calling them to overcome.

So let's go to Revelation chapter 3. The church in Laodicea. Laodicea was a very, very wealthy area. It was a major trade route of the day. It was a hub of banking commerce. It was also known for their textiles, their specific black wool that we'll get to a little bit later. It was also the home of a very fine medical school. So people would travel all over the known world to Laodicea to train in medicine.

And lastly, it was also the center of the imperial cult worship of the Roman emperor.

Here we go, Romans chapter 3. The church in Laodicea. To the angel, or the messenger, the pastor, it depends on your interpretation of this, of the church in Laodicea.

These are the words of the amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.

One of the most familiar verses in this section and one of the most misinterpreted verses in this section. We'll get to that in a little bit.

You say I'm rich, I've acquired wealth, and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Merry Christmas, Laodicea. Ouch, those are tough words.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich, and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes so you can see.

Salve, they were known to make a salve that was a medication to help eye infirmities.

Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. There it is, love and discipline goes together. So be earnest and repent.

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 him and he with me.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my father on his throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So we see the pattern starting in these letters, and we begin with the authority of Jesus. So Jesus presents himself with seven titles, different titles, but they all show authority, which represents total authority over the church.

So there are specific descriptors, but again we've got to take seven as a whole, a symbolic number, so Jesus is saying, I have total and complete authority over the church then and now.

In another letter he says it this way, him who has the sharp, double-edged sword coming out of his mouth. So he's speaking truth, he's speaking judgment upon the people, but it's all rooted in love to cause them to turn around and have relationship with him.

And I think we're seeing a shift in our culture today, especially with regard to religion, and there's this shift that I am the ultimate authority, that I determine morally what's right and what's wrong, and it just doesn't work with the Christian faith.

I was having a conversation with someone a few weeks ago, and they've been de-churched for a while, a number of years, and they're talking about getting back engaged into church. And this person had three very specific moral and theological things, and they said, this is what we are looking for in a church.

And I knew at that time it wasn't a time for theological debate, that wasn't the time for that. But I left that conversation thinking to myself, those are all very valid, complex moral theological issues. But those are not the right starting point. The right starting point is who is God and who determines truth.

See, that's dangerous. When we as a culture who shift and evolve over time in our morality, we say we're the center of determining what's right and wrong, then we create our own theology, our own practices.

But Jesus very intentionally begins each letter saying He is the authority. He is the total complete authority over all church as a whole and individual morality in our own life.

Now I want you to think about in your own life, think of a great teacher that you've had, or a great coach, or a great boss, and think about what qualities and characteristics make them great.

My boss is incredible. She's leading me for a number of years, and she's smart, she's funny, she's intelligent, she's a great leader. Smart, funny. Her handwriting is really hard to read, but...

But she has this amazing balance of grace and truth, love and correction in my life. And so recently, over the past couple months, there's been a couple times in our one-on-one meetings where she's brought correction to me.

And I can hear it and respond really well because I trust her and I know she knows she wants what's best for me. So she would share, Hey, you've been functioning this way in this meeting consistently, and it's just not helpful. And I'm like, Yeah, that's totally right. And I apologize, I'm going to change my behavior.

And so we see that in these kinds of relationships, how much more with Jesus, who is the greatest leader of all time. And yes, he is bringing correction, but it's from a heart of love that wants what's best for the churches then and the churches now.

We see in John 1, it says that Jesus came full of grace and truth, love, correction.

John 15, it shows the kind of leader that Jesus was and still is today. It says that greater love has no one than this, that he laid down his life for his friends.

Just as my parents wanted to get this delinquent back in line by correcting me with my Christmas light bulb incident, Jesus wants to move the people of God back in line under his authority and healthy leadership.

Next, see this pattern of authority. Now we move into correction. It says Jesus corrects the church in Laodicea for being apathetic and ineffective.

Back to verse 15. I know your deeds. And that word deeds is really important. He's evaluating how they've been living out their life in culture. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other.

So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.

So here's where I think we get misinterpreted with this. And I've heard it recently in the past couple weeks, this misinterpretation of this verse.

So what we see is this temperature spectrum is a spectrum of faith. We say hot, that is burning passion fire for Jesus. We see cold would be an atheist or far from God. And we see lukewarm is somewhere in the middle.

And I've always wrestled with that being a faith illustration. I don't think it's true. Because I've sat there and thought, why would Jesus, yes, we want hot, passionate faith, right? But why would Jesus want cold faith or no faith?

And when you dig into the culture and context of Laodicea, you understand it.

See, they were a very wealthy, self-sufficient, prideful church and city. But the thing the city lacked was a great and strong water supply. It had a river that ran through it, but it was a very slow-moving river, and almost every year it would dry up and they wouldn't have water from that river.

But thankfully, there were two major water sources close by. One was in the city of Hierapolis to the north, and it was known on these cliffs they would have very hot, chemically charged water that would come out and it would have medicinal purposes.

And the Romans were known for building great aqueducts that are still there today. And so what they would do is transport this hot water 11 miles into Laodicea, and by the time the water arrived, it would be lukewarm, and all the chemicals would be concentrated together, and you couldn't drink it.

And if you did drink it, you would get sick, thus spitting it out.

Now, to the south, Colossae was the other city, and they had a great water supply as well. And it was up high, it was this cold, refreshing mountain spring water. And they would transport it four or five miles into the city, but because of the heat of the area, it would become lukewarm, and no one wants to drink lukewarm water.

So this is what Jesus is saying here. It's not faith, but it is faith. It's their effectiveness in the culture.

He's saying, you're far from me, and I'm evaluating your deeds, and you're useless. You're ineffective in your faith, and you're not living out your faith. I know your deeds.

He's assessing them and saying, stop it. Like, come back to me and be restored, be refilled in our faith.

Pastor Zach, a couple weeks ago, he referenced a Barna study that our city did. There's a network of churches called the Within Reach Churches that paid Barna to do a faith assessment of the city.

And in Omaha, Omahans, Omahites, I'm just kidding, Omahans, whatever you are.

But they did this study of the city, and four out of six, or 67% of people in the city would identify as a Christian. Okay, that's good, that's positive.

But they broke this data down even further, and they said only one of these six people would enter the category of practicing Christian. Three of them would identify as non-practicing Christians, which is an oxymoron, okay?

And the bar to being a practicing Christian is so low, we're going to trip over it. Identify as a Christian, believe that faith is important to you, and have attended church once in the last month. That's a practicing Christian.

Now, think of it this way. If you think of it in a marriage context, what if you said there's a practicing spouse and a non-practicing spouse category, right? You would hear that and be like, wait, what are you talking about?

Unfortunately, it is pervasive in our culture, but it shouldn't be. I've been to a lot of weddings back in the day, and there's almost always a vow section that is pretty consistent in what they say.

I'll love you and cherish you until death do you part, I'll honor you, you guys have heard these things.

So imagine if you're at a wedding, and during the vows portion, the person just said, I promise to be self-centered and apathetic and uncaring and unkind at times.

You've never heard that. And if you were in a wedding ceremony where someone said that, you would stand up and say, what's the point? Why are you even getting married if you're going to be a non-practicing spouse?

You see, when I look at scripture cover to cover, nowhere is identified of a non-practicing Christian. There's one Christian, effective, engaged, not perfect, but making a difference and impact in the world today.

Jesus in Matthew 5 talks about his people being salt and light out in the world. Salt was commonly used back then to prevent decay and death. It was preserving life. And light is showing people the ways of Jesus. This is who he's calling us to be.

And there's a call to the churches then and now to wake up, to receive the grace of God, to be transformed inside and live your lives out transformed in the world.

You see what the Laodicean church, they were centered on self-sufficiency. They were consumed by the Roman way of life. Self-centered, pride-filled, didn't need help, and that's not a good match with the Christian faith.

Look at verse 17. You say, Jesus quoting the church of Laodicea, I am rich, I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich, and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes so you can see.

So they were a very wealthy culture, very self-sufficient. They didn't want outside help.

And there was actually an earthquake a few decades before that, and a chunk of their city was destroyed.

But they refused Roman government intervention to rebuild the city. They didn't need help because they were so wealthy and they were self-sufficient.

And I think it ties to their faith as well. And that Roman culture was pervasive and it was influencing the church.

And so back then, their religion was very self-centered, and the gods, in a way, were there to serve you.

So they had a variety of temples all around the area where you would go worship. And each temple was dedicated to a god or goddess, and they'd have a specific attribute.

So there would be a goddess of beauty.

And so if you were looking for more beauty, which I totally am, you'd go and you'd worship at this temple.

And you'd offer sacrifices and there'd be sexual rituals and things you would do.

If you were heading to war, you'd go to the temple of Artemis, and you'd worship there, and you'd give offerings and those sorts of things.

And so this culture, this Roman way of life, infiltrated the church, and they were not loyal to Jesus.

This is why there's this call to repent.

And I wonder today if this correlates with our American culture.

West Omaha has a unique subculture as well.

We're wealthy, most of us.

We're comfortable.

We're self-sufficient.

We don't need anything.

But Jesus is saying, you need a lot, actually.

You're actually much more broken than you think, and you can't do this on your own.

And the Christian faith was not meant to be this way.

Again, Jesus is our authority, leading us in life and giving us morality.

And so he calls them out and he says, you say I'm rich, I've acquired wealth and don't need a thing.



He's giving this comparison of the human kingdom.

He's giving three specific attributes of Laodicea of the day.

And he's saying, I'm offering you a better heavenly kingdom that will last forever.

And so he says, I'm giving you gold, gold refined by fire.

Again, they were a major trade route that was banking and textile.

There was a lot of wealth and they would use gold to trade.

But he's saying, you have this earthly gold, but I'm giving you gold that's refined by fire.

He talks about clothing, as I alluded to earlier.

They were known for having black sheep, literal black sheep, and they would make clothing out of their black wool.

They would have black clothing they were very proud of.

And he's saying, you have clothing, but I'm giving you white clothes, which represent holiness and relationship with God.

And then again, they were known for having this salve to put on your eyes to heal infirmities.

He's saying, this is the earthly stuff, but I've got heavenly salve to actually open your eyes to see that the ways of the kingdom are better.

There's this call to respond.

There's this call to repent.

Continue on in verse 19.

Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.

There's love and discipline together.

So be earnest and repent.

There are a couple of Greek words here that are important for us today.

The word repent is metanoeo.

That's like metamorphosis.

We think of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly, like that's metamorphosis.

And that's what he's calling.

There's a turning back, a receiving an inward transformation that affects external behaviors.

R.C. Sproul, the great American pastor and theologian, he said it this way.

For a Christian to be a Christian, he must first be a sinner.

Being a sinner is a prerequisite for being a church member.

The Christian church is one of the few organizations in the world that requires a public acknowledgement of sin as a condition for membership.

We all start and have to admit our brokenness and our need for Jesus, for God's grace to cover us because we've fallen short and we've sinned.

And we take sin lightly these days.

We have to step back and see that it's offending a holy God.

This is why Jesus lived his life and gave his life for us to pay, to bring that relationship back together.

And so he says whom I love, I discipline.

And discipline there is the Greek to like train a child, like to have restrictions and guide them back in a way, like my parents guided me back into the way.

I was watching this movie recently and I won't name it because I don't know if I recommend it or not.

But it was poking fun at the culture and the shift in parenting styles to away from a healthy discipline to being a very child-centered discipline.

So there was this scene at a kid's birthday party and they were like five or six years old.

And one kid comes over crying and he says, hey, Billy hit me with a stick in the head.

The dads get together and they come over and they find Billy who has a stick in his hand just running around hitting people and stuff like that.

And the dad of the kid picks him up and just says no and takes the stick and he throws it away and says, we're going to go apologize to this kid.

You do not hit people with sticks.

And the mom comes out and intervenes and says, what are you doing?

Put him down.

And she's down and says, Billy, whatever you're feeling now is okay.

Like just let it out.

And the kid lets out this scream.

And he says, I don't want to apologize.

She says, that's okay, you don't have to apologize.

Someone get him the stick.

And I'm like, what are you doing?

No, you can't hit people with sticks.

But parents and grandparents, you've seen this.

When there is not healthy discipline, kids become monsters.

And this is what Jesus is saying to the churches then and the church now.

They're deviating from his way of life and he's calling them back into relationship because he loves them.

He rebukes them.

He disciplines.

He's calling them to repent.

He's calling us to repent today as well.

Because in John 10, it says that I've come that you may have life and life to the full.

We think that Jesus' intention are to restrict our fun, restrict our freedom.

But it's quite the opposite.

His ways are the ways of eternal life.

And he's calling this warning right now.

He says, listen to me.

Respond.

If you have ears to hear, hear what I'm saying.

And not just hear, but listen, like change, like act upon this.

And if there's a relationship in your life, whether it's a spouse or a friend or a parent, child or whatever it might be, refusal to listen can cause a severing of the relationship.

I know my wife and I experienced this years ago.

Some of our closest friends, they did a couple things that really hurt us.

And so we reached out to them through an email to try to restore and say, hey, we love you guys.

There are a couple things that happened that didn't feel great for us.

And we'd love just to talk these through.

And they met that with an email that said, we didn't do this.

This is on you guys.

And then we tried to just continue to reconcile and restore this relationship.

And we said, hey, we're actually going to be in town.

We'd love to get lunch with you guys and just talk and restore this relationship.

And they said, we don't want to meet with you guys.

And it was one of the most hurtful things we've ever been through.

And thank God, since then, we've actually restored that relationship.

But because they refused to listen and hear how we'd been hurt, it actually severed the relationship.

And what Jesus is saying to the church in Laodicea, to us now, and for believers all time, is to listen, to hear, to receive his discipline with love, to respond and turn back to him and receive his grace.

And so I was preparing for this and praying.

I was just thinking, what would the Lord say to King of Kings today?

What would he say?

I know your deeds, your coffee is delicious and you impact the community, but I hold this against you.

I don't have that specific of a word, but I think I have something the Lord is speaking to us today.

And I think we overcomplicate faith and we look for the flashy and not the faithfulness and perseverance that God calls us to.

So I think what God is saying is that we be faithful to the word of God, that we're led by the spirit of God, and that we're shaped by the community of God.

These are not complex things, but it takes discipline, it takes faithfulness.

You see, the word of God reveals who God is, his truth, who Jesus is, why he came, why he died, that he rose from the grave.

You see, it's a relationship.

So Romans 8 talks about the spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us.

There's this daily walk with the Lord where he's leading us.

And my guess is when you guys walked in this morning, no one cheered you on for taking steps.

Because it's not flashy, but it says keep in step with the spirit, just slowly taking steps, progress, that he's guiding us as we walk forward.

And what Satan would desire is to separate and isolate us, to be alone, to be depressed, to be anxious.

And we're not meant to walk that way.

That's why he creates the body of Christ, so gifted to walk with one another.

And so I challenge you and encourage you, how are you in those three areas?

Word of God, listening to the spirit of God, integrated in the community of faith.

And it's fascinating, Laodicea, they get the strongest rebuke in all the letters in some ways, but they also get the warmest promise of love.

Hear this as we wrap up this letter.

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 him and he with me.

To him who overcomes, look at this promise, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my father on his throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

And I saw that there was a picture that's been associated with these verses, and it's a lithograph from 1883.

And that was actually the same date the University of Texas at Austin was founded.

So I was like, this is the Lord's hand writing this sermon, you know what I mean?

But it's this fascinating image of Jesus knocking on the door.

And again, remember, this is written to churches all the time.

We individualize this, but he's writing to a church, a body, to people then and now.

If you notice a couple of things on this picture that stand out to me.

Over on the right, you see ivy.

It's growing up and it's going to start covering that door.

I think it's representing the heart of the believers, the heart of the church.

And if it covers it over, there's an inability to find that door.

Severs the relationship.

And if you notice on the door, something's missing.

There's no handle on the exterior of the door.

Jesus is not going to force his way upon anyone.

He's going to knock.

Keep calling you to hear.

Keep calling you to respond.

Keep calling you to relationship with him.

And then if you open the door, there's this great promise of the heavenly banquet, the new heaven, the new earth.

Back then, sharing a meal together was relationship.

It was sign of deep friendship, deep family.

It showed status and meaning.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us.

He's knocking on our hearts individually and collectively and saying, hear my voice, respond to my message of love today.

And there's a word he uses in there.

He says, to him who overcomes.

And you're like, wow, that sounds like a lot of work to overcome something.

But there's a clue later on in Revelation 12, which we'll get to.

It says they overcame by the blood of the lamb and the word of his testimony.

That's the word of God, the gospel of Jesus revealed, the spirit of God creating faith in our hearts, the community of faith that celebrates the testimonies of what God has done.

That's how we overcome, church.

And then as I wrap today, it's fascinating.

You see that if we open the door to Jesus, the door to eternity is open to us.

It sets us forth into the crux of the book of Revelation chapter four and five, which we're going to see next week.

Let me just read the first two verses of that.

So we open the door, you receive Jesus, you respond to his calling.

And then watch this.

After this, I looked and there before me was another door standing open in heaven.

And the voice I first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the spirit and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

We open the door to Jesus and we get the picture of eternity.

Then we're going to see in chapters four through 22, it's the picture of Jesus ascending.

So it's the heavenly viewpoint of the throne room of God.

Jesus ascends all the way to his return in the new heaven, the new earth.

God's calling us to respond, church.

To invite you to stand and rise as I pray over us this morning.

So Jesus, I thank you that you call to us.

If there's conviction, if we're hearing the spirit of God today, we're not too far.

He's calling us to hear, to repent, to respond, but it's all done in love.

Jesus, thank you for that call.

Move right now by your spirit.

Convict where there needs to be conviction.

Bring grace where there needs to be grace.

Bring identity where there needs to be identity.

Lord, I pray we're a people that always listens well.

Thank you that you promised to come in and eat with us.

We see a picture of the heavenly banquet and the taste of eternity now.

Let us be moved by your spirit.

We love you.

Praise in the powerful name of Jesus and all God's people said, amen.