THIS IS YOUR

SPEAKING





THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN SPEAKING

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Series Summary

Over the course of this seven-week series called, "This Is Your Captain Speaking," we are going to be studying seven letters that the Apostle John wrote to seven churches in Asia. They are found in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation. Now, John was not actually the author of the letters; he just wrote them. These were given to him by the risen Lord Jesus. The letters are a result of an on-site inspection Jesus himself conducted. We're going to learn a lot throughout this series about how we can learn from Jesus' evaluation of the seven churches in Revelation. So fasten your seatbelts as we take off on this journey together.

Ephesus: You've Lost That Loving Feeling

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 1 | Revelation 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
The church in Ephesus was a great church, an awesome church, a tremendous church, but it had one humongous problem that dealt with loving Jesus. What we are going to learn from this church is this – the only way to love Jesus right is to love Jesus best. We need to hear what Jesus says to this first church, to our church, and to us if we want to learn from the mistakes of the church in Ephesus.	
KEY POINTS	
1. See How Jesus Commends The Church One of the things that encourages me about Jesus is He always wants to catch us doing what is right wherever we are. This church behaved right, and they believed right. They stood for moral purity, and they stood for theological integrity. It was a dynamic, devoted church because it was made up of dynamic, devoted individuals.	
A church may depend on the leadership of the pastor, but ultimately the greatness of a church in many ways will be determined by the devotion of its people. Jesus commends this church for believing right and behaving right.	
2. See How Jesus Confronts The Church Now you may be thinking what I would be thinking, "What in the world could be wrong with a church like this?" It was a dynamic church working hard for the Lord. It was a devoted church. They were standing strong on theological truth and biblical morality. I must tell you as a pastor reading these first verses, I have to think to myself, "Who wouldn't want to pastor a church like that?" But after having gone back and studied this one church, I was reminded of something. I was not evaluating the church the way Jesus evaluates the church. I was reminded that we look at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart. Jesus didn't care about the outside of anything. What Jesus wanted to know was	
what was going on inside the hearts of the people.	

Ephesus: You've Lost That Loving Feeling

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 1 | Revelation 2:1-7

Jesus knew this church had one fatal flaw in their fellowship. Oh, they loved Jesus, but they didn't love Jesus like they used to love Jesus. They had forsaken their first love. The spiritual honeymoon was over. What they were doing on the outside looked good, but what their hearts looked like on the inside didn't match up.	NOTES
3. See How Jesus Counsels The Church Now Jesus doesn't just condemn the darkness; He lights a candle. He would have been the perfect marriage counselor because He tells this church what to do since they have lost that loving feeling. His perfect advice is perfectly practical advice. His first piece of advice is to remember, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen" (Revelation 2:5).	
The first thing Ge tells us to do is to go back down memory lane. If you have lost something, the first thing you need to do is to go back and remember the last time and the last place that you had it.	
In this church, the furnace was on, but the fire was out. Do you remember how it was when you first came to know Jesus, when you first got saved? Remember how it was when you first got married to that new spouse and how awesome that honeymoon was? That is the way your love ought to be for Jesus every day and every moment of your life. You can every day, all over again fall in love with Jesus.	

Ephesus: You've Lost That Loving Feeling

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 1 | Revelation 2:1-7

- 1. What is something you are doing in your life right now that you think Jesus would be proud of and commend you for?
- 2. Have you ever focused more on what you were doing for Jesus than how you were loving Jesus? What was that season of life like for you?

3. What is one practical step you can take this week to "remember your first love" and go down memory lane in your relationship with Christ?	

Smyrna: Grace Under Pressure

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 2 | Revelation 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
In Revelation chapter 2, there was a church in a place called "Smyrna" that was under tremendous pressure. This church was under pressure to deny Christ, compromise their faith, bow down to Caesar, and join the cult of conformity. But they showed grace under pressure. Like the men in the fiery furnace, they didn't bend, bow, or budge, all because of one thing this church was taught and this church remembered. It is this sermon in a sentence - Whatever you are going through, remember who you are coming to. I don't know what you are going through right now, but whatever it is, I want to give you four things to remember and to live by in the midst of whatever pressure you're currently facing.	
KEY POINTS	
1. The Lord Knows What You Are Going Through The church in Smyrna was being antagonized, ostracized, and blasphemed. They were being horribly mistreated and pressured to do things against their belief system and their faith. But even in the midst of all the pressure they were facing, the Lord was completely aware of what they were going through. And the same is true for you and the pressure you're dealing with in your own life.	
Just like Jesus knew all that was going on in the church and all that was coming down on the church, Jesus knows all that is going on in you and coming down on you. So even when you're anxious, worried, and under pressure, there is comfort to be found in the fact that the Lord is aware of your circumstances and He is with you in the midst of them.	
2. The Lord Knows What Is True Of You Right in the middle of describing all of these problems this church is facing, Jesus says four surprising words, "yet you are rich!" (Revelation 2:9). This might some random and out of pocket compared to the topic of conversation at hand, but there is so much truth wrapped up in this short phrase Jesus makes.	
If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you are rich. If you have treasure laid up in heaven, you are rich. If you have eternal life, you are rich. If you have abundant life in Christ, you are rich.	

Smyrna: Grace Under Pressure

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 2 | Revelation 2:8-11

out together for your good and for His glory, you are rich. If you have joy that is undeniable and full of glory even in the midst of the worst of circumstances, you are rich. Jesus knew this truth about all of His followers, and we must remember this truth as well when we are under pressure. 3. The Lord Knows What You Are Coming To As followers of Jesus, we are in a spiritual battle. The pressure on the outside is relentless, but "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world." Every trouble, every trial, and every tribulation you are going through is a test. The enemy tempts us in order to destroy us, but Jesus tests us in order to develop us. You know why — right? The faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. And in the midst of you being tested, God knows what you are coming to. He knows the reason behind your faith being tested. He is all-knowing and He is sovereign. God is not only in control of you in your suffering, but He is in control of the suffering over you. No matter what you may be going through, whether it is physical suffering, financial suffering, emotional suffering, mental suffering, or personal suffering, emotional suffering, mental suffering, or personal suffering, the Lord knows what you are coming to and He is firmly in control of it all. 4. The Lord Knows What You Are To Do So how do you handle the pressure? What is the secret? How do you come out victorious no matter how hard, how deep, and how wide the pressure is? It doesn't crush you, but you conquer it. Here is the key: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown" (Revelation 2:10). When you are under pressure, you will become one of two things: fearful or faithful, When you are fearful, you are full of fear. When you are faithful, you are faithful until you are full of faith. Let me give you a fair warning. If you choose today to be faithful, you are the more pressure you will face. But the Lord is with you in the midst of it, and He tells you exactly what to do to		
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Smyrna: Grace Under Pressure

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 2 | Revelation 2:8-11

- 1. Before hearing today's message, would you have considered yourself a rich person? Why or why not? How has your perspective on your "richness" changed in light of this message?
- 2. When was a time you felt like your faith was being tested? What did you learn from that season of your life?

3.	What are practical ways you can choose to be faithful rather than fearful this week?

Pergamum: Dealing With The Devil

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 3 | Revelation 2:12-17

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
The church of Pergamum was located right in the middle of Hell's headquarters. Living in the shadow of Satan himself, the smell of satanic influence was everywhere. Satan may have visited other towns, but he made his home in Pergamum and this was his neighborhood. Just like Pergamum, the Church today is always going to be dealing with the devil. The lesson we need to learn from this church today is how to deal with the devil and not succumb to his tactics and schemes. So as we dive into this section of Scripture, we'll learn that lesson by looking at three specific things Jesus addressed in His letter to the church in Pergamum.	
KEY POINTS	
1. Jesus Compliments Their Personal Conviction The Pergamum Christians held fast to the truth about Jesus, and He commended them for that. They not only believed who Jesus was in their head, but they had put their faith and trust in Him and surrendered to Him in their hearts. They fully embraced the essence of being a Christian, which is that you must affirm that Jesus Christ is the divine and human Son of God, and you must confess that only through his death, burial, and resurrection can anyone come to God and be saved.	
In other words, this church held to a conviction that there is only one supreme master of this universe, and His name is Jesus. There is only one saving message and that is the gospel. Salvation only comes by believing that message and receiving that Master. This church held to those convictions and Jesus compliments them for doing so.	
2. Jesus Criticizes Their Moral Compromise Even though this church was a church of devoted loyalty, it had become a church of doctrinal leniency. This was a church that had begun to compromise. They were not compromising their beliefs, but they were compromising beliefs that were being allowed into the church by others.	

Pergamum: Dealing With The Devil

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 3 | Revelation 2:12-17

The problem is not that the church itself was holding to these false teachings; the problem was they were tolerating those who did hold them. So in other words, they were beginning to compromise their beliefs for the sake of peace and unity in the church. This was completely unacceptable in the eyes of Christ, and so He calls them on their compromise.	NOTES
3. Jesus Calls For Their Continual Commitment You know a lot of people think that the last message Jesus gave to the church was what is called "The Great Commission," but that is not true. The last message Jesus gave to the church was "Repent!" The message to the church and Christians then is the same message to the church and Christians now.	
If we compromise with spiritual idolatry, sexual immorality, indecency, and church-wide iniquity, if we don't deal with these things, Jesus will deal with us. Remember, it wasn't so much the church doing anything wrong. It wasn't that they were teaching false doctrine or by and large engaging in immorality, but they were allowing others to teach it and practice it. They were not guilty of this crime, but they were certainly an accomplice.	
So why is Jesus so insistent? Why is Jesus so intolerant? Why it is that Jesus doesn't want even an inch of compromise to come under the door of the church? It is because He loves the truth, He speaks the truth, and He is the truth. He wants the church to stand for truth and live the truth because He is the truth and His word is truth.	

Pergamum: Dealing With The Devil

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 3 | Revelation 2:12-17

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1.	Why do you think some people struggle to believe that Jesus is the only way
	to heaven?

2. Have you ever fallen into the temptation to compromise on your beliefs based on what somebody else said or did? What did you learn from that experience?

3.	What are some practical steps you can take to make sure you don't compromise on your beliefs in the future?

Thyatira: Failing The Tolerance Test

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 4 | Revelation 2:18-29

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
In today's message, we are going to look at the church in Thyatira, or as I like to call them, the church that failed the tolerance test. The way you fail the tolerance test is by tolerating what should not be tolerated. This church was tolerating something that it should not tolerate. It was putting up with something that it should have put out and put down. They thought they were broadening their thinking, but what they were really doing was stretching their conscience. They were choosing compromise over conviction. They were choosing comfort over confrontation. They were choosing peace over principle. In light of this, we are going to learn that when you tolerate what is wrong, you will always contaminate what is right. So in order to help us not fail the tolerance test, the Lord does three things that we need to know how to respond to correctly.	
KEY POINTS	
1. The Lord Commends Our Biblical Health Now of the seven churches, this is the only one that Jesus singles out for their love. It is interesting on the interior their love for Jesus was decreasing, but on the exterior, it was increasing.	
In one church, the love for Jesus was waning and in the other church, it was gaining. There is no doubt about it. This was a loving church. They loved Jesus. They loved one another. They loved unbelievers. And remember what Jesus said, "By this shall all people know you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35). So this was a church with a loving heart and a servant spirit. And Jesus commends them for that.	
2. The Lord Commands Our Personal Holiness This church had one problem but it was huge. In effect, they had failed the tolerance test. They had decided to tolerate false teaching, false preaching, and false doctrine in their midst. It would have been praised as being an affirming, open, broadminded, tolerant church.	

Thyatira: Failing The Tolerance Test

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 4 | Revelation 2:18-29

There will always be the temptation for the church to do what I
call, "buy the lie." There will always be the temptation to do
anything we can to cast doubt that there is any plain teaching in
Scripture and that there are some things in God's word and in fact,
more than a few, that are simply not up for debate, discussion, or
dialogue. Therefore, we need to be able to stand boldly and
confidently on what Scripture clearly says is true so that we don't
fail the tolerance test.

3. The Lord Calls For A Biblical Heart

At the end of the day, our goal should not be to be considered tolerant. Our goal should be to be people who hold fast to what they believe, who stand firm in their convictions, and who honor the truth of God's Word above all else.

After all, if we will stay under the authority of the Word of God and the Son of God in this world and in this life, we will one day have authority over the next world in the next life. But for that to happen, we must be willing to be the last ones standing. We must be willing to lose, to be left out, to be rejected, and to be shunned by the enlightened culture that we are living in.

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Thyatira: Failing The Tolerance Test

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 4 | Revelation 2:18-29

- 1. How would you rate your biblical health right now? Strong or poor?
- 2. Has there ever been a time you've been tempted to compromise or denounce your beliefs for the sake of being tolerant? How did you respond to that temptation?

3.	What is an example of someone you know who stood strong for the truth of God's Word even when it wasn't popular? What can you learn from this example?

Sardis: The Walking Dead

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 5 | Revelation 3:1-6

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
The church at Sardis was not a weak church that needed restoration. It was not a sick church that need rejuvenation. It was a dead church that needed resurrection. It was in a sense the church of the walking dead. I can tell you as a pastor my greatest fear is both pastoring a dead church and being a dead Christian. I want all of us today to perform our own self-examination and let's see what steps we must take first of all to determine just how alive our Christian faith is and what we must do to be resurrected. Death may be fatal, but it is never final if we turn back to Jesus. As we examine ourselves, notice the fourfold prescription Jesus gives to get a church (or your faith) off the machine and alive again.	
KEY POINTS	
1. Ignore Your Spiritual Reputation Reputation is a funny thing. Isn't it interesting we care a lot more about what we think people think about us than perhaps what they actually think about us? There is something else that is funny about reputation. Isn't it interesting that we care more about what people may think about us than what God knows about us?	
Nobody wants a bad reputation obviously. But do you know that at the end of His life, even Jesus wound up with a bad reputation? So, a gentle reminder. God is never impressed with the reputation of either the church or a Christian. Reputation is what other people think you are; character is what God knows that you are. The best thing we all can do is to ignore our spiritual reputation.	
2. Face Your Actual Reality Unlike the other churches, there is no mention made of persecution or of oppression against the church at Sardis. Why? The church had lost its witness. Instead of standing up against what was wrong and speaking up for what is right, they were sitting down and shutting up.	
There was no evangelism. There was no gospel witness. There was no persecution because they had put their weapons down and they were not invading enemy territory. They had a dynamic ministry, but they had a dying witness.	

Sardis: The Walking Dead

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 5 | Revelation 3:1-6

If there is not enough life in your Christian faith to share Jesus with the dead people who need that life, your faith is pretty dead. More and more churches are becoming mausoleums and monuments rather than movements of dynamic witness to the saving gospel. This was the reality of the church in Sardis, and they had yet to face it. If we're going to keep our faith alive, we have to face our actual reality.	NOTES
3. Experience Your Personal Repentance All was not lost for this church. With Jesus, death may be fatal, but it is not final if you turn back to him. Jesus gives us this counsel. "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die" (Revelation 3:2).	
He tells this church in no uncertain terms, "Wake up!" There were actually three kinds of Christians in this church. To all of them, He gives three pieces of advice: remember, repent, and return. First, remember your past. Remember what you know to be true. Remember the foundation of your faith. Second, repent from your sin. Turn away from what is killing you and turn towards what and Who promises to give you life. And third, return. Return to Jesus. Return to your Savior. He is always waiting to welcome you back with open arms.	
4. Expect Your Eternal Reward In this dead church, there were a few faithful followers breaming with spiritual life. They had people who wouldn't bend, bow, or budge in their walk with God, in their Christian faith, or in their gospel witness. Though I have never truly believed there has ever been a "moral majority" in America, I do want to be a part of the "master's minority" wherever they are found. I don't want to be among the walking dead within the church. I want to live a life that has my eternal reward waiting for me at the end of it all.	
So the question is this, "What group are you in?" Are you a part of those who are truly spiritually dead? Or are you living alive in Christ? I hope this message has helped you examine yourself and your relationship with Jesus so you know how to answer that question.	

Sardis: The Walking Dead

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 5 | Revelation 3:1-6

- 1. Do you find it easy to ignore your spiritual reputation, or is that something you struggle with because of how you are concerned with what other people think of you?
- 2. Do you feel like you have a good grasp on the reality of your relationship with Christ? If so, explain that reality.

3.	Which of the three steps Jesus gives in point #3 (remember, repent, and return) do you need to implement in your own life?

Philadelphia: Like A Rock

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 6 | Revelation 3:7-13

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
Of all the letters that Jesus wrote, I believe this is the one he enjoyed the most. Of all the seven churches, I could have joined back in that day I could have easily moved to Philadelphia and joined this church. They probably heard of some of the other letters that Jesus had written and they were probably nervous when they opened up their envelope, but they had no reason to be. Jesus had absolutely nothing negative to say about this church. It wasn't a perfect church, but it was a blameless church. So as we take a closer look at the church in Philadelphia, we are going to learn this lesson: when you stand true to God, God will come through for you. When we stand true to God, three things happen. Let's look at those three things together.	
KEY POINTS	
1. God Gives Opportunity To Our Faithfulness One important thing to note about the church in Philadelphia was their relationship with God's Word. They believed the Bible. They preached the Bible. They lived the Bible. Their moral and spiritual camp compass was always going to point north to the truth of God's Word. They were living proof that God honors the person and the church that honors his word. They also stood firm for the Son of God. Everywhere they went they were unashamed of the name of Jesus. They would not deny the Lord Jesus. They were willing to die for the Lord Jesus. And as	
the Lord Jesus. They were willing to die for the Lord Jesus. And as they stood strong for Christ, God rewarded them with opportunities to share the gospel and further His Kingdom. He opened doors for them because of their faithfulness. Remember, when you stand true to Jesus, He comes through for you.	
2. God Gives Authority Over Our Opposition The church in Philadelphia is proof that the moment you come into God's kingdom, you become a friend of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. At the same time, you become an enemy of the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are three formidable foes, but here is the difference. It is not an equal playing field. None of those three are immovable objects, but our three friends are irresistible forces.	

Philadelphia: Like A Rock

This Is Your Captain Speaking \mid Week $6 \mid$ Revelation 3:7-13

Therefore, when we have God on our side, we have authority. We have power. And we have strength like no other in order to overcome any opposition that comes our way. We have that because of whose we are, and that's a very comforting and empowering truth we get to hold onto.	NOTES
3. God Gives Security For Our Future Jesus tells this church to keep their feet on the ground but to keep their eyes on the sky because no matter how shaky things may look today you can be absolutely certain of your safety and security in the future. He says, "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown (Revelation 3:11).	
Those four words should ring in your ear every day, "I am coming soon." It may be in your lifetime and mine or it may not be, but He is coming. He's not coming to take sides but to take over. Every wrong will be made right and every lie will be exposed by the truth. We can have security about our future knowing that Christ is on our side and He is going to take care of us forever.	

Philadelphia: Like A Rock

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 6 | Revelation 3:7-13

- 1. When was a time God opened a door for you as a result of your faithfulness to Him? What can you learn from that experience?
- 2. How does knowing you have God-given authority over the enemy give you strength and comfort in light of any opposition you're currently facing?

3	back give you hope and peace about the future? be future?

Laodicea: Stuck In No Man's Land

This Is Your Captain Speaking | Week 7 | Revelation 3:14-22

INTRODUCTION	NOTES
The church in Laodicea and the Christians in it were stuck in a spiritual no man's land. They weren't hot and they weren't cold; they were just lukewarm. I believe remaining lukewarm is one of the greatest sins that goes unconfessed, unnoticed, and unrealized in the church today. The average lukewarm Christian is either too proud to admit they are lukewarm or too ignorant to realize they are. My prayer is that you will listen to this message with an open heart and sensitive ears to what God has to say in order to avoid getting stuck in no man's land. The sermon in a sentence is this — in the Christian life, sitting on the fence is the wrong side of the fence.	
KEY POINTS	
1. We Must Acknowledge Our Condition Of Lukewarmness It breaks my heart to say that, if we're being honest with ourselves, there is just not a lot of difference between the church and the world. The things you see in the world today (divorce, sexual immorality, pornography, materialism, indifference to the things of God and even the church) and when it comes to just sharing Jesus, to being sent, to sowing seed, to sharing the gospel, we are just lukewarm. We don't take a stand. We don't strive to keep the fire of Christ burning strong within us. And as a result, we grow complacent in our faith.	
But that's not where Jesus wants us to be. And in reality, I don't think any of us wants to be considered lukewarm. So with that in mind, I want to ask you to just be honest. Take your spiritual temperature and tell the truth. Is your Christianity hot enough and passionate enough to bring healing to people who are spiritually sick? Is it cold enough to bring refreshment and hope to those who are hurting? Or is it just lukewarm and good for neither?	
2. We Must Affirm The Cause Of Lukewarmness Now, there are two problems with being a lukewarm church or a lukewarm Christian. What causes us to be lukewarm? Jesus identifies both of them in verse 17, "You say, '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" (Revelation 3:17).	

Laodicea: Stuck In No Man's Land

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To put it plainly, here are the two causes: arrogance and ignorance. When we are too arrogant to ask for help and acknowledge the reality of our state of mind, and when we are too ignorant to realize how small we are compared to our big God, we are in some serious trouble. We are headed for lukewarmness, and that's a dangerous path to be on.	NOTES
3. We Must Apply The Cure For Lukewarmness Jesus never simply curses the darkness. He always lights a candle. He doesn't condemn us because we are not where we ought to be. He counsels us so we can be where we need to be. Dr. Jesus has the cure for lukewarmness. He says in verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich" (Revelation 3:18).	
Here is what Jesus is saying, "If you will just recognize how poor you are without me and come to me, I'll give you true riches. If you will just recognize where you are without me and if you will come to me, I will clothe you with purity and power. If you will recognize just how blind you are without me, you will come to me. I will give you eyes to see what is truly important in life." So with this cure so plainly laid out before us, we need to be willing to take hold of it and apply it to our lives so that we don't continue in our lukewarm way of living.	
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- 1. Have you ever been in a season of your faith where you were lukewarm? What was that season like?
- 2. Do you struggle with being arrogant or ignorant when it comes to your faith? If so, explain your answer.

3.	How can you apply Jesus' counsel about lukewarmness to your own life to either combat the currently present lukewarmness or to prevent lukewarmness from seeping into your faith?