

Back to the Future

discerning God's purpose for our life as His church

Every so often it's important to pause and take stock. How are we doing? What are we seeking to accomplish? Are we growing, making progress?

Such seasons of 'reflection' are as important in our communal life as a local church as they are in our individual lives.

This series of studies aims to provide a focus for such a season, a chance to let the Word of God inform our understanding of all that he calls us as His church to be and to be doing in these days of great turbulence and change.

You can find the background to this short series [here](#).

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2. The seven churches

(Rev.1.9-3.22)

[w/b Sunday 26th January 2020]

“.. let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches ..”

This week's study is slightly different in that, while it follows on from the previous study, there's a sense in which it's a 'stand-alone' study, insofar as it is unrelated to Sunday's Bible passage.

In the last study we saw the *interdependence* between the churches at Antioch and Jerusalem. It's very easy for any church to slip into a perspective which has more to do with *empire-building* than with advancing God's kingdom. In this study we'll look a bit more closely at this *interdependence*, particularly in relation to the 'seven churches'.

[Although there are 7 questions, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 1 & 2, 4 and 7. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. Read Revelation 1.9-3.22. The whole book of Revelation is in essence a 'pastoral letter' addressed to seven *separate*, but *related*, churches: these verses give an insight into 'the church'.

How would you describe the difference between a church which is merely 'empire-building' and one which is intent on advancing God's kingdom?

Why are the churches described a 'lampstands'?

2. Read Revelation 1.9-11. The order in which these churches are listed is the order followed by the 'posties' on their delivery round - check on a map! They were a *grouping* of churches.

Do you tend to think of your own church (eg Gilcomston) in isolation from others?

With which other fellowships is it helpful for us to see ourselves here at Gilcomston as most naturally 'grouped'?

How does/might/should such 'grouping' find, and be given, expression?

3. Read Revelation 1.12-20. There are some basic realities which are true of any church, anywhere, at any time in history: what John writes here is clearly for *all* churches.

What abiding truths stand out for you in these verses?

In the face of trials (these churches were facing persecution at the time) what comfort is there for Christ's church in these truths?

4. **Read Revelation 2.1-7.** Each fellowship is set in a specific place and faces a specific set of circumstances and challenges: the church at Ephesus is the one we know most about.

What were the particular strengths and weaknesses of the church at Ephesus at this time?

Read **Acts 18.18-19.41** (if you have the time!): how did 'the love (they) had at first' show itself?

What might it involve for a church to 'repent' (v.5)?

5. **Read Revelation 2.8-17.** Smyrna and Pergamum were fairly close to each other: the churches in each place, however, were in very different places.

What lessons does the letter to each of these churches have to teach us?

Why do you think the letters are addressed to the 'angel' of each church (commonly understood as the leaders)?

6. **Read Revelation 2.18-3.6.** Both these churches (in Thyatira and Sardis) were dangerously flawed, albeit in different ways: the Lord's challenging word to each is very specific.

Read **Rev.1.4-18** again: why does the Lord Jesus describe Himself differently at the start of each letter?

If it's true that each fellowship needs to have some particular aspect of Jesus' person and ministry impressed on them, what aspect do you think *we* most need to be aware of at present?

7. **Read Revelation 3.7-22.** The churches at Philadelphia and Laodicea were at opposite ends of the spectrum of spiritual life and health.

The other 6 churches heard what the Lord was saying to, and about, each church: why can such accountability prove so beneficial?

We're exhorted to 'hear what the Spirit says to the churches': that's what we're seeking to do at this time - so, having read through these seven letters, what do you think the Lord might be saying to *us* at this time?