

Letters to the Churches

8 Studies from Revelation 1 to 3

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Introduction

It was towards the end of his life - around 95 AD - that the Apostle John was exiled by the Roman Government for preaching about Jesus Christ and sent to a concentration camp on the island of Patmos off the coast of modern day Turkey. It was there in the harsh environment that an angel came to him from God to deliver the visions in Revelation, which he then recorded in written form and sent as a letter to seven churches that existed in that time period.

The word 'revelation' comes from the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις (apokálypsis), which literally means 'an uncovering or revealing of something that was hidden'. It is the first word in the Book of Revelation and it is where the book gets its title from. The purpose and intention of the Book is quite clear from the opening verses:

- 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,
- 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

The Book of Revelation is written as an encouragement to the churches to trust in the unfolding plans of God in Christ, rather than the particular circumstances they found themselves in, which included severe persecution at the hands of the Government.

Our studies will focus on the first three chapters, which contain commendations, criticisms and encouragements that were very specific to the seven churches. The churches are called to be holy communities - full of genuine love for Christ and living in

accordance to all that he desires of his people. Christ's word to the churches often includes discipline and rebuke, but this demonstrates his deep love for his people, like a good father with his children (1 Thessalonians 2: 11-12; Hebrews 12: 6).

In the opening chapters, we are also given a glimpse of the glory of Christ as the Ascended King and shown what his rule and authority will bring in the near future. We discover that Jesus is not someone we have to fear, but rather someone we need to trust and listen to.

Our prayer for the studies is that we might hear his voice recorded for us in the words of Scripture and learn from what he says to the seven churches and what that means for us at CrossCulture today.

Study 1 / GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES / **Revelation 1: 1-20**

Verses 1-3

- 'The revelation of Jesus Christ' could mean that the revelation is Jesus, belongs to Jesus or is about Jesus. Which option do you think best fits verses 1 to 3?
- The churches that John was writing to were going through severe persecution. What bearing do you think that would have on the purpose of the letter?
- In what way might people be blessed by reading, hearing and acting on Revelation?

Verses 4-8

- John was writing from a location where people considered dangerous by the Roman Government were sent to. What implication could this have on the language John used in his letter? Do you consider that Revelation as a whole was written to seven actual churches?
- Verse 5 says that we are loved by Christ and freed from our sins by his blood. How strongly do you believe both statements?
- Who should receive glory and dominion forever? What relationship does this have to the predictions in Daniel 7: 13-14?

- In verse 6, the phrase 'made us a kingdom' should be read 'made us into a kingdom'. What impact should this have on how Christians view themselves? See also 1 Peter 2: 5.
- Verse 7 indicates that the coming of Christ will cause 'wailing' for some. What should our response be to this as followers of Jesus?
- The Alpha and the Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. How does this imagery offer comfort to Christians facing persecution because of their faith?

Verses 9-16

- John was an Apostle and Christ's closest companion on earth, yet he refers to himself as a brother and partner to the churches. What is the significance of this for Christian leaders?
- Read Daniel 7: 9-14 and see what parallels you can find between Daniel and John's vision.
- What else stands out to you in this section?

Verses 17-20

- What was Daniel's reaction to what he saw in Daniel 7: 15? How does it compare to John's experience in Revelation 1: 17?

- What reason does Jesus give as to why John did not need to be afraid? How does this truth give comfort to suffering Christians?

Verse 20 says 'As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches'.

- The 'angels of the seven churches' could refer to literal angels, the pastors or leaders of the churches; or be symbolic for the identity or spirit of the Church. Which do you think it is and what are the implications of each interpretation?

Think/Grow/Live

- Jesus became flesh and walked among people, but Revelation also presents an image of Christ that is supernatural and transcendent. How do we hold these two things together in a healthy way in our relationship with Christ?
- Read 1 John 4: 16-18. Do we find ourselves afraid of Christ more than we should be? How can we allow the love Christ has for us to remove fear from our lives? Are there things about God that we should be afraid of?
- One day every person will come face to face with Christ, even 'those who pierced him'. What impetus does this place on the Church in regards to evangelism? How can we grow a passion to explain this reality to people?

Prayer Points

- Pray that we might 'set our minds on things above' (Colossians 3: 2) in light of the nearness of Christ to his Church and the reality that he will return one day.
- Ask God for a fresh sense of the authority and wonder of Jesus as the Ascended King of Kings. Pray that this might fuel a passion to tell others about him.
- Pray that suffering Christians may trust in Christ's plans, in spite of the severity of their circumstances.
- Jesus was seen holding the stars, but also in the midst of the lampstands. Praise God for Christ who stands with his people - comforting them and holding them in his hands.
- Pray for each other in the group that we would trust in the unfolding plans of God in Christ whatever the circumstance is.

Study 2 / TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS / **Revelation 2: 1-7**

Ephesus was the most important of the seven cities. Though Pergamum was the official capital of the Asian province, Ephesus was its greatest city. It was a town of a great size and the seat of the proconsular government. When a new proconsul took up his appointment in leadership, he had to make his entrance at Ephesus. Situated near the mouth of the river Cayster, it was a great commercial centre. Much of the trade east to the Aegean Sea came via the port of Ephesus. The great road from Euphrates terminated there, as did roads from the Cayster Valley and the Maeander Valley to the south.

Ephesus was an outstanding religious centre, the chief pagan cult being that of Artemis. The city had the prized status of *neōkoros* (temple-sweeper) in connection with the great temple, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Religion and magic were hopelessly intermingled. Magical arts were popular. 'Ephesian letters' were charms widely supposed to cure sickness and to bring luck. Paul spent over two years in Ephesus establishing the church, to which the important epistle to the Ephesians was later sent. Timothy was a resident there for a time. Tradition also says that John lived there in his old age.¹

For someone who believes in Jesus, can his life be filled with good works and still not be saved?

¹ Leon Morris; THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN (a. To The Church Of Ephesus (ii. 1-7)).

Verses 1-7

- Who do the stars and the golden lampstands represent? To whom is this letter addressed and for what purpose (2: 1 cf. 1: 16 & 20)?
- What are some characteristics of a star and a lampstand in relation to light? (1: 16 & 20, 2: 1 cf. 22: 5; Isaiah 46: 6; Matthew 5: 14-16; John 8: 12; Ephesians 5: 8).
- What is the meaning of Jesus 'walking among the seven lampstands' (2: 1)?
- What are the attitudes and works that Jesus is commending the church of Ephesus for (2: 2-3 cf. 2: 6; 1 John 4: 1; John 15: 20-21; Hebrew 12: 3)?
- Despite the commendations, what is Jesus rebuking them about? What does it mean that they have 'abandoned the love they had at first' and 'do the works you did at first' (2: 4-5 cf. Matthew 24: 12; Mark 12: 29-31; Jeremiah 2: 2; Hosea 6: 6)?
- What does it mean that Jesus will remove their 'lampstand from its place' lest they repent (2: 5 cf. Matthew 8: 12)?
- What promise does Jesus give to those who repent and return to their first love (2: 7 cf. 21: 4 & 7; 22: 1-5)?

Think/Grow/Live

- In our busy lives, it is easy to get distracted from fulfilling the first and most important commandment (Matthew 22: 37-38; Deuteronomy 6: 5). Discuss what can we do as individuals and as a cell group to avoid this from happening?
- We can often fall into the belief that to obtain salvation we need to keep and fulfill a list of principles, rules, attitudes and actions that religion dictates. How is this different from what Jesus says (Mark 1: 14-15; John 3: 14-15, 11:25-26)?

We do not love to justify our lives; we love in response to our lives being justified by God's love for us displayed on the cross.

Study 3 / TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA / **Revelation 2: 8-11**

If the seven churches refer to different periods in history, Smyrna would represent the period of persecution. Christians in Smyrna were singled out and suffered persecution in a time when the Roman Emperor was worshipped. Authorities made life virtually impossible for believers and persecuted anyone who did not renounce Christ to the point of death. The letter to Smyrna remains relevant today with persecution of Christians on the increase, especially in the Middle East, where radicalism has intensified. How is this letter still relevant to us as Christians today in the places where we live?

- How is Jesus referred to in the letter to Smyrna? Why is this reference an encouragement to those who are being persecuted?
- What would afflictions and poverty refer to in this letter? How would you think these were inflicted on believers?
- How can those who are afflicted and poor be rich?
- What would today's equivalent be of the slander and of the people referred to in verse 9?
- Are we being tested in the same way today? How have we remained faithful?
- Do you fear suffering persecution to the point of death? How does Jesus' reassurance change this?

- What happens if we fail to remain faithful to the point of death?

Think/Grow/Live

Imagine being denied the basic essentials for living or being refused passage or freedom of movement because of your faith in Christ. How would you react if you were questioned about your faith knowing that your answer could see you deprived of your civil liberties and normal way of life?

Prayer Points

- Pray for courage to face persecution in the places we live and situations we find ourselves in.
- Pray for the safety of our global partners in the places where they serve.
- Pray for Christians who face persecution that they persevere and remain faithful.

Study 4, TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM / **Revelation 2: 12-17**

Pergamum was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a city mired in paganism. This city, where parchments derive its name, attracted people from all around the world to its temples. There was one for every deity of the time, including one for the compulsory emperor worship of Caesar. Pergamum was a centre of healing, spiritual and sexual wellbeing - a place for everyone who was preoccupied with themselves. Although these stone temples no longer stand today, society remains preoccupied with itself. Where do we stand as Christians?

- The Word has been described as a sword. What is the significance of the double-edged sword?
- The Church of Pergamum resides 'where Satan has his throne'. Where is Satan's throne today?
- Antipas stood firm in his faith in Christ even unto death. We also know the consequence of renouncing our faith. What about to those around us?
- What are the practices mentioned that are stumbling blocks or enticement to sin? Do these practices remain to this day?
- Would you agree that the character of compromise sits at the heart of a stumbling block? Discuss and provide a few examples of stumbling blocks that exist today.
- What does Jesus say He will do to those who compromise?

- What is the significance of the hidden manna (Exodus 16: 32-34; Hebrew 9: 4; John 6: 31-35, 48-51)?
- What is the significance of the white stone with a new name written on it (Isaiah 56: 5-8; 2 Corinthians 5: 17; Ephesians 4: 24)?

Think/Grow/Live

Every possible sensation and form of gratification is catered for through the internet today. Because of the internet, society is far more vulnerable to sin today than at any other time in the past. Is the internet the new Pergamum where every conceivable cure can be found through a search engine?

Prayer Points

- Pray for forgiveness for times when we were drawn away by preoccupations that compete for our attention and devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Pray for wisdom to discern right from wrong in whatever situation we find ourselves in, so that our actions and words do not cause others to stumble and sin.
- Pray that we remain devoted only to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Study 5, TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA / **Revelation 2: 18-29**

Thyatira was located on the main road from Pergamum to Syria, at the meeting of well-travelled roads in a fertile valley. While limited information is available on this city, Thyatira appears to have been quite a commercial centre. One of the most notable known facts about Thyatira was its relatively large number of trade guilds¹. The people of the Church were drawn from a commercial community². Lydia, who was a trader in purple-dyed goods and a convert to Christianity 40 years earlier through Paul's ministry in Philippi, came from this city (Acts 16:14).

Like the modern trade union, membership was de facto compulsory. The meetings of such groups inevitably involved cultic activities directed to pagan deities¹. Christian tradesmen were therefore exposed to temptations to compromise their faith for business purposes.

- Share an experience where you were tempted to compromise your Christian faith or value in exchange of a gain.

Verses 18-19 (Thyatira commended for good works)

- Who was the giver of the message? Who was the recipient?

¹ Paul Barnett, *The Seven Churches in Asia* 2-3, pg. 56-57

² Blaiklock, *The Seven Churches*, pg. 42

- What were the two descriptions used on the giver of the message? What was their significance on the message?
- What were the commendations noted for the Church in Thyatira?

Verses 20-23 (Thyatira rebuked for its sins)

- What were the sins that the Church in Thyatira was rebuked for? What or who was the source of temptation?
- Explain why 'eating food sacrificed to idol' was mentioned as a sin of the Church in Thyatira (1 Corinthians 8).
- How would God judge 'Jezebel' and her followers?
- What characters of God do you observe in verses 21-23? How are you encouraged or warned by these observations?

Verses 24-29 (Promises for the overcomers)

- In your own words, explain the instruction given in verse 25 to those who have not been led astray by false teaching. Imagine you are one of these people. What challenges do you think you will face? What strategies or approaches would you take to deal with these challenges?
- God's promises were given in verses 26-28. What were the specific promises? Who were given these promises?

Think/Grow/Live

Christians today are facing similar pressure. Many are guilty of the charges outlined in the passage. It is clear from Revelation 2: 20 that taking on a neutral position (i.e. being tolerant) to sin is not acceptable by God's standard.

- What is God's expectation of the Church in handling immoralities practiced by its members?
- Consider James 5: 19-20. What would your personal responses be if you were aware of immoralities practised by other believers?

Our God is an omniscient God who knows the heart and mind of each individual (2: 23).

- How does this aspect of God's quality challenge your perspective about sins, in particular those 'hidden sins'?
- Take a moment to reflect on any 'hidden sins' that may need to be confessed and repented of.

Prayer Points

- Pray for courage, boldness and perseverance for God's people to stand firm in the truth against the pressure and immorality exerted by the world.
- Pray the prayer of Psalm 139: 23-24. Ask God to help us to be sensitive to sins in our lives and to repent of them.
- Pray for discernment to identify sins in our church, as well as wisdom and courage to address them in love and truth.
- Praise God for the forgiveness we have in Christ, despite our shortcomings.

Study 6 / TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS / **Revelation 3: 1-6**

Jesus Christ is present among the seven churches of Revelation (and all his churches on earth). He knows the trials they are going through, their triumphs and their failures.

In the letter to the Church in Sardis, Jesus told them that while they might look good on the outside, they were dead on the inside. Their words were no good. The Church of Sardis had a good reputation for being a church that was alive, but did not live up to that reputation. Their Christianity was superficial. While they claimed to follow Christ, they did not live that way. They were not putting what they knew from the Scriptures into practice.

Verses 1-3 (Wake Up, Church of Sardis)

- Who is the one who has 'the seven spirits of God and the seven stars' (3: 1)?
- What would you call a person who says they do one thing but in practice does the opposite (3: 1 cf. 2 Timothy 3: 5)?
- What do you think John is referring to when he says, "strengthen what remains and is about to die" (3: 2)?
- What do you think they must repent from (3: 2-3)?
- If you come to church week after week, hear the Word of God, but change nothing in your life, you are just like the Church of Sardis. Please discuss (3: 1-3; James 2: 17).

Verse 4 (There is Still Hope in Sardis)

- There are a few in the Church of Sardis 'who have not soiled their garments'. What does this mean? Are they squeaky clean and perfect?
- What does it mean by 'they are worthy'? In what way are they worthy (cf. Ephesians 4: 1; Colossians 1: 10)?
- What does it mean to walk with Jesus in white garments (cf. Revelation 19: 8)?

Verses 5-6 (To the One Who Conquers)

- For those who conquer (persist in faith), your name will never be erased from the book of life (3: 5). How does this make you feel? Allow this promise to sink into your heart and mind.
- Jesus will never deny his relationship with you before God the Father on the day of judgement (3: 5b). To what extent should we acknowledge our relationship with Jesus here on earth (3: 5 cf. Mark 8: 38)?
- What is the 'book of life' (3: 5)? How do you know your name is written in it? Can you know for sure (Philippians 4: 3; Revelation 20: 12 & 15, 21: 27)?

Study 7, TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA / **Revelation 3: 7-13**

In appreciation for imperial reconstruction aid after an earthquake (17 AD), Philadelphia was briefly renamed 'Neocesarea' (Caesar's New City). Jesus; however, promises his suffering church an infinitely greater name - 'the city of my God, the new Jerusalem' (3: 12).

Philadelphia was located near a fertile valley especially suited for growing wine grapes. Inscriptions from a nearby town mention the worship of Zeus and Hestia, along the Roman Imperial cult already present by the first century AD. Later in 110 AD, Christians in Philadelphia were addressed by a letter from one of the early church fathers Ignatius and shortly after suffered deeply during the martyrdom of Polycarp (155 AD).

It is interesting to note that this is the only letter to the seven churches that does not include a rebuke. Instead, it contains an encouragement to continue to persevere and attain the promised crown.

Verses 7-13

- What does the letter tell us about Jesus when it says that he holds the Key of David? What key is it referring to? What does it give access to (3: 7 cf. 1: 18; Isaiah 22: 22; Matthew 16: 19)?
- What are the attitudes and works that Jesus is commending the Church of Philadelphia (3: 8 & 10 cf. John 14: 23; 1 John 2: 23; 1 Peter 2: 20)?

- What is Jesus telling them to endure past their trials? What does it mean that they are to 'hold fast what they have' (3: 11 cf. Hebrew 4: 14-16, 10: 23; 1 Thessalonians 5: 21)?
- What does the letter says is in store for those who profess a false faith (lie about their faith)? What does it mean that they belong to the synagogue of Satan (3: 9 cf. Matthew 10: 33; 1 John 2: 22, 3: 38)?
- What promise does Jesus give to those who conquer by holding fast to their faith (3: 13 cf. 21: 10 & 22-23, 22: 4; Hebrew 12: 22)?

Think/ Grow/ Live

- As a cell group, discuss the trials you are experiencing or will potentially face as a result of your faith. How does this letter encourage you to overcome them (3: 11)?
- What are some situations where we might be tempted to lie about our faith or not hold true to it? Discuss what we can do as individuals and as a cell group to avoid this from happening (Proverbs 7: 1; Psalm 1: 1-3, 119: 9 & 11; Colossians 3: 2; Philippians 4: 8)?
- Discuss the practical ways in which you can encourage one another as a cell group to keep true to your faith and not stumble (Hebrew 3: 13, 10: 25; 2 Timothy 3: 16; James 5: 16)?

It is easier to hold fast, when certain that you are holding to the Truth (Jesus).

Study 8 / TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA / **Revelation 3: 14-22**

God is love. But what is love?

Where is love?

Does it fall from skies above?

Is it underneath the willow tree

That I've been dreaming of?

Oliver, Where is Love?

In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.

Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4: 18

God is love (1 John 4: 8a). This is an idea that most people will have heard before they can locate the exact verse reference for it. Banners are hung in churches proclaiming this lovely truth. All obedient Sunday-schooled children will be able to lisp, "Jesus loves me; this I know". So far, so good. We have a God who is not just *in* love with us or who *loves*

us. We have a God who *is* love itself. God's very nature and essence is love, and love itself is defined by God's demonstration of it to his beloved church-bride.

But what is love according to God's great love letter - the Bible? What does love look like to God?

It is not an easy question to answer. We have so many deformed versions of love from the world to confuse us as to love's true image. The expression 'making love' refers, of course, to sexual intercourse. So is love the same thing as sex? The expression 'lovesick' refers to the difficulties of loving another person. So is love a pathological problem? We talk of *falling* in love. So is love as uncontrollable as the act of tripping over our own feet?

We cannot deny that worldly and human conceptions of love deform and confuse our understanding of God who defines himself as love. And it is of critical importance that we understand love if we are to understand God at all. So what does the Bible say about the true meaning of love?

This study of Revelations 3: 14-22 expresses God's love for the Church in Laodicea - and us - in three distinct ways. **Firstly**, God rebukes the Church in Laodicea - and us - for having lukewarm love for him (3: 14-17). **Secondly**, God explains that rebuking and provision of grace are two ways that he offers the Church in Laodicea - and us - his love (3: 18-20). **Thirdly**, God graciously and lovingly gives the Church in Laodicea - and us - a picture of the perfection of that reciprocally loving relationship in heaven (3: 20-22).

Verses 14-17 (You Did Me Wrong)

- How were the 'deeds' of the Church in Laodicea (3: 15-16)?
- What is the dictionary definition of 'lukewarm'? What are some synonyms for 'lukewarm'?
- How would you feel if a close friend, family member or partner described their relationship with you using one of these synonyms?
- How does God feel about lukewarmness, indifference, coolness, apathy, sitting-on-the-fence, or complacency with regards to our love for him (3:16; Matthew 12: 30, 25: 32-33)?
- Why might have the Church in Laodicea become complacent towards God (3: 17)?

Think/Grow/Live

- How does God feel about us putting our hope, security or treasure into other people or things (Matthew 6: 24; Hosea 12: 1-2; Exodus 20: 3)? Is it possible to love both God and our idols equally?
- Do you trust in God exclusively and love him above all other things? What kind of things do you put your hope and security in apart from God?

Verses 18-20 (But - if you let me - I'll put you right)

Laodicea was known for being a wealthy area. Patterson points out that while other cities nearby had come to depend heavily on Rome for resources in times of crisis (such as the great earthquake of 60 AD), Laodicea did not need to seek help from Rome. Furthermore, they even rejected help from the Imperium. In this passage, God is rebuking the Church in Laodicea for their security in perishable earthly things and graciously offering them his imperishable heavenly alternatives in their place.

- What do you think is the symbolism of the 'gold' God offers in place of the Church's evident abundance of gold (1 Peter 1: 7; Psalm 66: 10-12)?
- The Church's members were likely clothed in the latest fashions of their time. What do you think is the symbolism of the 'white clothes' God offers in place of their fine clothes (Revelation 19: 8, 21: 2; Psalm 132: 9)?
- What do you think is the symbolism of the salve God offers to heal the Church's blindness (2 Corinthians 4: 3-4; John 8: 11-12)?

Think/Grow/Live

- Recount a time when you disciplined or rebuked a child, student, family member, friend or partner. How did they respond?

- How do you respond to God's rebuke and discipline? Do you see it as a symbol of God's love for you? Or do you imagine it to be a symbol of cruelty, distance, vengeful punishment and despotism?
- How does God want us to respond to his rebukes (3: 19)?
- Are you earnest in repentance? Do you respect God enough to understand the cost of sin and the importance of repentance? Or do you imagine God to be a kind of needy lover from whom you deserve all the best parts of relationship while treating him with unrepentant callousness?

Verses 20-22 (The Future Could Be So Beautiful)

So often we are confused about what heaven looks like. How can we look forward to something that will be unlike everything we have ever known or seen? During good times, it is a struggle to treasure heaven more than our earthly 'heavens'. During bad times, we think of heaven as a consolation prize or a back-up plan for our disappointment in earthly circumstances. How can we advance beyond these human understandings of heaven, when we are limited by our human minds and desires? This passage gives us some very clear pictures of heaven that explain to us what we can look forward to through experiences we can understand as human beings who have never seen the heaven.

- In Hebrew culture, entering a home and dining with a family was the most intimate expression of love and friendship. How might the picture of Jesus standing and knocking outside the door of our homes be a picture of heaven (3: 20)?
- A throne is usually a symbol of a king's power and glory. But it is also a symbol of a king's distance from his subjects. No one but the king deserves a throne. Jesus is the only King with a *heavenly* throne - yet what does he promise those who overcome (3: 21)?

Think/Grow/Live

- Do you leave Jesus standing and knocking *outside* the door of your heart? Will you invite him in?
- What do you look forward to? Do you look forward to the weekend, to a holiday, to seeing your family, friends or partner when you come home? How often do you look forward to heaven? Will this change in the week to come?

Prayer Points

- Ask God to make your heart long for his intimate love language of rebuking.
- Ask God to open our eyes when our love for him - in actions, thought or emotion - is lukewarm.
- Ask God to help us not to misinterpret his discipline as distance.

- Thank God for refining us like gold, clothing us in robes of righteousness and offering us a light that we may see him clearly. Ask God for these things in our daily lives.
- Thank God for the promise and assurance of heaven to all who believe.
- Ask God for help to set our hearts, minds and actions on our heavenly reward and the future perfection of our relationship with him.
- Praise God for being the King who invites us to draw near to his heavenly throne day by day.