

The Revelation – The Letters to the Churches

In this week's lesson we continue our study on the Revelation by looking at the letters to the seven individual churches. Now I realize that we could do lessons on each of these churches, but my primary purpose in this study is to get into the prophecy. So, with that being said, let's begin by looking at each of the churches individually. We'll start with the letter to the Ephesian church, found in Revelation 2:1-7, which says:

- (1) Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;
- (2) I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:
- (3) And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.
- (4) Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.
- (5) Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.
- (6) But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- (7) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

There are a few things that I would like to notice about this church. First of all, Christ introduces himself as the one who has the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the middle of the candlesticks. Last week we saw that the stars were the pastors of the churches and the candlesticks were the churches. So, Jesus is reminding the church of the fact that he abides in the Church and that he is in control. Jesus wanted to let this church know that he was there, even though they had left their love of the gospel. They had stood strong against false doctrine, but they had become indifferent. They no longer worked out of a love for God but out of a sense of obligation. Their heart was not truly in it. Jesus was saying, "I'm here, just let your heart look on me." I think that this is a message that a lot of churches would do well to heed today.

Let's move on to the church at Smyrna as found in Revelation 2:8-11. This Scripture says:

- (8) And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;
- (9) I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

- (10) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
- (11) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

To this church Christ introduces himself as the first and the last, the one who was dead, and is alive. Christ is reminding this church that he is there through all things. He is reminding this church that nothing can separate them from his love, not even death. Now while many would say that Christ didn't find anything wrong with this church I believe he found one thing. This church didn't realize what they had. Jesus wants us to recognize his power in the Church.

Next we look at the church at Pergamos found in Revelation 2:2-17, which says:

- (12) And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;
- (13) I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.
- (14) But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.
- (15) So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.
- (16) Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.
- (17) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*.

To this church Christ points out that he has a sharp, two-edged sword. Since this sword is the Word, Christ is letting this church know that they are in need of the Word. They have held strong in many things, but they've gotten so caught up in fighting the enemies without that they have forgotten the enemy within. Satan had been able to infiltrate the church and cause division. They needed the pure, unadulterated Word of God to help them to repent of the false doctrines which had crept in.

Next we have the letter to the church at Thyatira. We find this in Revelation 2:18-29. This Scripture says:

- (18) And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass;

- (19) I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first.
- (20) Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.
- (21) And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.
- (22) Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.
- (23) And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.
- (24) But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.
- (25) But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.
- (26) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:
- (27) And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.
- (28) And I will give him the morning star.
- (29) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In this church Jesus reveals himself as the one with fiery eyes and feet of brass. He's letting the church know that his eyes burn through to the truth and that he will stomp out false doctrine. You see, even though this church had been faithful in many things they had problems. This church was one of the most charitable of its day. It was a church that would have appeared to be on fire for God. The problem was that the church had embraced false doctrine. Unlike the church at Pergamos, where there appears to have been divisions, this church seems to have fully embraced the false doctrine. They thought that as long as the church was growing everything was OK. We should always be careful that growth in the church doesn't come at the expense of sound doctrine.

Let's continue now with the letter to the church at Sardis. Revelation 3:1-6 says:

- (1) And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.
- (2) Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.
- (3) Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.
- (4) Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.
- (5) He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

- (6) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In this letter Christ introduces himself as having the spirit of the church and the pastors of the church. He wanted to let this church know that they were in his hands. This church thought that they were doing everything right. Their name was known all around. The problem is that they were living on the laurels of the past. Jesus asked, "What have you done for me recently?" I wonder how many churches today could be lumped into this category?

The next letter is to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13. This Scripture says:

- (7) And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;
- (8) I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.
- (9) Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.
- (10) Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.
- (11) Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.
- (12) Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name.
- (13) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In this letter Jesus introduces himself as the one with the key to holiness and truth. This is the only one of the churches that truly receives a recommendation without any real rebuke. He has opened the door for them in their time of trial. He tells them not to be afraid. He recognized that the struggle had been hard, and their strength has been worn down. Through all of this they did not deny him. Because of this he promised protection. He did say, though, that they should hold firmly to what they have so that their crown would not be taken away. I'm afraid most churches today have not held fast to the important things and are losing their crowns.

Finally, let's look at the letter to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22, which says:

- (14) And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

- (15) I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.
- (16) So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.
- (17) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:
- (18) I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.
- (19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.
- (20) Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.
- (21) To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.
- (22) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

First of all I would like to point out that Jesus referred to this church differently than the others. All of the other churches were noted as the church at a given location. This one is referred to as the church of people from a given location. I think this is important as Christ is presenting himself as the witness of the truth of the gospel, the all powerful creator of the universe. You see, this church had become a social gathering rather than a body of believers practicing the true worship of God.

As we conclude this lesson I want to emphasize that while these letters are to seven churches in existence in John's day, I believe that it represents the condition of the church throughout time. I do not believe, as some do, that each church represents a particular era in church history. I believe that if we look at churches today we can find aspects of each church in existence (hopefully some churches are even meeting the Philadelphian standard). As we continue in the revelation let's keep in mind that this is Christ's letter to the church.

I realize that this lesson was a little long, but I wanted to cover all of the churches briefly, and I prefer to include the Scripture so that you don't have to go looking for it.

Yours in Christ,

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