

Jesus is Lord!!!

To The Seven Churches I Write



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For the Glory of God and the Edification of His Church...

Introduction

The letters are broken up into several levels. The first is that they were actual churches of their time, and archaeological findings have confirmed this. Since there were many much bigger churches during this time such as the church at Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome, I would have to speculate that these seven Churches were a cross-cut representation of major issues that all churches may encounter. The second level are the warnings that Christ gives to the seven churches. Each of the letters has this very important phrase “Hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Notice it is not singular “church” but plural “churches”, which tells us these messages were for every church in existence during John’s time. Also, once we understand these messages we can see seven very distinct profiles of Christianity. The next level is that these messages are for every Christian and church that has ever existed. Notice he says “He that hath an ear let him hear...” This tells us that anyone with an “ear” to “hear” should heed his admonishments to the seven churches. To put this in perspective, has anyone ever heard a message on a Sunday morning and say “Golly gee Ma, I wish so-and-so would have been here because she could have really needs that message”. I know I have, and this is where many of us get in trouble because they think the messages to the seven churches are for everyone else, and not ourselves. So as we go through these messages, I pray God will open our hearts so HE can speak to us. The next level is the prophetic level because if you study church history you will see that the church went through all the stages listed in Revelation 2-3. This kind of accuracy cannot be manmade, but can only be inspired by God. The final level are the promises, however the promises are not just handed out. Each time a promise is mentioned there is the condition of “He who overcometh...” Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 24:13 when he said “But he that endure unto THE END, the same shall be saved”. For us to obtain the end time promises then we must be faithful and overcome everything that comes our way, even if it means our very lives.

The next thing about the messages to the seven churches are the key elements of each message. The first thing we see is the name of the particular church, and the meaning of the name (along with the message) is very important because it will set the tone of the letter. The second element is how Jesus “titles” himself, because each title is chosen specifically for that church (and will give us more insight to that church). Next, we see how Jesus commends each church for what they are doing right. This is important, because we can learn a lot from this alone as parents, employers, and as Christians. The next time you decide rip someone apart, it would be a good to tell them what they have done right first. The fourth element are the “admonishments” that he gives each church. Note that not all churches received rebuke, so understanding why the ones who didn’t is just as important as understanding why certain churches did. Next, after rebuking (or in some cases not) we will see that Christ exhorts a good condition of the church. This helps to rebuild their confidence in what they are doing correctly. The sixth element in the messages is the promises to those who overcome (and this could be an eBook all in itself). Not only does Christ rebuild us after we are admonished, he gives us gifts if we do what he says!! What a GREAT GOD we serve. The final element is always “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches”. The hear is not just to hear it, but to give heed and go what it says. If I said I would give you a million dollars, but you never acted on it and came and got it, would you have a million dollars? Not a chance, and this is how we are to receive the messages to the seven churches.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:9 “who hath ears to hear, let him hear”, which tells me that hearing is crucial if we want to follow Christ, but hearing his words is not enough. “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:47-49). In these perilous times we need a strong foundation, and nothing is stronger than hearing and doing the Words of Christ.

John and the Last Days

John wrote the book of Revelations around 95 AD, which was approximately 60 years after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Both Peter (by crucifixion) and Paul (who was beheaded) had been killed 30 years prior to the writing of this book, and John was the only original member of the twelve disciples still alive. John starts out in Revelation 1:3 by telling that “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand”. So according to John, the time of Revelation is at hand but this was 2000 years ago. There are three basic premises as to when the last days started, so we will examine each and see how they may or may not fit with the word.

The first position states that the last days started when Jesus started his ministry. However, this would mean that the last days have been going on for 2000 years which is possible because 2 Peter 3:8 says that “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”. However, if this is the case then why would Jesus say to the church at Smyrna “These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”. Apparently, Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection so we can easily reason that the last days could not have started till after he was resurrected and not when he started his ministry (since he still had the choice whether or not to go the cross). The second premise states that the last days started when Israel became a nation (Matthew 24:32-34). Jesus did say that the generation that sees Israel become a nation WILL be the generation that will see his return so this position has lots of merit. In addition, Jesus went on to say that “this generation (the one that sees Israel become a nation) shall not pass, till ALL these things be fulfilled”. So what things is Jesus talking about? He is referring to Matthew 24:1-31, which is the tribulation that we as Saints will go through. Due to these factors, we can say that this position about the last days is very plausible. Finally, many think the last days will start sometime after the year 2000 which is the beginning of the 7th millennium. The number seven means divine perfection, completeness, or something that is finished so the seventh millennium could easily be the last days. So which one is right? The following are my views, and you can agree or disagree with them but this is how I see the last days. I believe that the last days started when Jesus ascended into heaven. In addition, I feel that we are THE generation that will see his return because of Israel becoming a nation again in 1948. Finally, I believe we are in the very last days because we have entered into the seventh millennium (the year 2000). So if we are the last generation then we need to figure out how long a generation is.

In biblical times a generation was all over the board from over 900 years (pre-flood) all the way down to 38 years, but we need to know what a generation is in today’s numbers (since we do not

live in biblical times). Today the average life expectancy on average is 68.5 for males and 73.5 for females, which gives us an average age of 71 years (this is according to the UN World Population Prospects 2012 revision). So if a generation today is 71 years old, then the approximate (I am in nowise claiming Jesus is coming back on any date or year) return year is around 2019 (1948 + 71years). However, I said the average was 71 which means some people of this generation will live to be much older so the actual year is speculative. However, as we have seen over the last 6 ½ years, and even more so in the last 7 months the world has gone up in flames. Things in America that we thought would never happen (gay marriage and the pursuit to destroy Christianity) has hit this country like a freight train from hell. All this being said, we can almost certainly say we are in the final days before our Saviors return so we must be wise virgins and be ready...

Prologue

In Revelation 1:9-11 John makes it clear where his prophetic vision comes from when he writes “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”. The entire vision was to be sent to each of the seven churches, so that each church would know how Jesus felt about not just them but the other churches as well (there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed). In addition, every church would know about the other churches issues which would help them so they would not fall into the same traps. Finally, each of the churches would see the rewards that would be given to those who overcome and endure until the end. This is something we need to know today because God does not want us in the dark about what is coming, and he wants all his children to have access to the same information. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus describes himself the “First” and the “Last”? The Greek word for “first” is “protos”, which is where get our modern day word “prototype”. Anyone working in engineering or design will know that a prototype is the original build or idea, and sets the bar for everything that comes after it to make sure they conform to the original. In other words Jesus was OUR prototype of how we are to live, and yes someday maybe die. Romans 8:29 tells us that “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). The word “last” comes from the word “eschatos”, which means the end of the line. This can be viewed as “Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”, or as Jesus being the highest level than can be achieved. This being said, we must always pattern ourselves after Christ, and not each other for an incorrect ruler leads to incorrect measurements and inaccurate results.

John said “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev. 1:17-20). In this verse the Lord divides Revelations into three sections, which are the things John has seen (chapter 1), what is now (chapters 2 and 3), and those that will take place later (chapters 4-22).

The fact that the Lord is seen standing in the midst of the seven lampstands shows us that Christ has direct involvement with the 7 churches, and it is Christ himself who holds the seven stars in his right hand which speaks of the intimate relationship He has with its leaders. Whether you see them as the pastors or as angelic messengers, the fact remains that He has them in the palm of His hand.

The seven churches in Revelation 2-3 are a great insight into how God views the Church and Christians today because they were not just written to the churches of the day, but for anyone that "hath an ear let him hear". The reason these messages are so vital for us today is that we can use them to measure where we are in Christ, and they act as a warning system in case we are committing the same transgressions that these churches were. As we all know, we are in the beginnings of the final tribulations on earth, and soon the wrath of God will fall on this planet like never before. In the case of the 7 churches it does not matter if you believe in a Pre, Mid, or Post-Tribulation rapture because in Revelation 1:3 it says "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand". This book is for everyone who is born of God because "all scripture is given by inspiration of God... that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So we as professing Christians need to "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). As we look at these seven churches we need to keep our eyes wide open to see what God is telling us, because he goes into great detail about the issues of each church. In addition, these "issues" are very much alive in today's churches so we need to heed the warnings and see where we are and if there is something that we need to repent from. The only real and true way that we can examine ourselves is by using the Word of God, because it is the ruler that we will be judged by.

As we read all the letters to the Churches it is imperative that we remember that in Revelations 1:4 John wrote that "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne", or in other words these letters are for everyone that hears them, not just the seven churches.

I found this to be interesting math ...

Paul signed 13 epistles

Three of these had "duplicate" addressees: Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy
So $13 - 3 = 10$ addressees.

Of the remaining 10, three were addressed to individuals: Titus, Timothy, and Philemon.
So $10 - 3 = 7$.

Paul wrote to seven churches.

To the Church at Ephesus

History

The name Ephesus means “desirable” or “the desired one”. Ephesus was a bustling town, and with its artificial harbor made it the most accessible city in Asia. In the New Testament times Ephesus had a population of about 250,000, and it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire coming in behind only Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. It was connected to the sea by a huge harbor, and connected to the inner parts of Asia by a network of roads. With its great access, it was a natural magnet that drew political and religious groups from all over the known world. Also, when Christians were brought from Asia to Rome to be killed in the Coliseum by lions they had to go through Ephesus, and this is why Ignatius called the road from Ephesus to Rome the “Highway of the Martyrs”. Paul went to Ephesus many times to preach to the Jews and about things of the Kingdom of God. However, Ephesus was known for his huge amount of wizards, sorcerers, witches, astrologers, diviners, and palm readers. After hearing Paul preach many burned their books “so the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:19-20), but many Ephesians still worshipped their main idol which was Diana.

The Temple of Artemis (Diana was her Roman given name) at Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the Ancient world. According to lore, she was the twin sister of Apollo, and the daughter of Zeus. She was also known as the goddess of hunting, the moon goddess, and the patroness of young girls. Her image was housed at the temple on Ephesus, and was said to have come directly from Zeus (Acts 19:35). The temple that held her image was actually four times larger than the Parthenon, and during the Roman period they even had coins that had the inscription “Diana of Ephesus” imprinted into them. She was to some the embodiment of female principles from fertility to the one day eternal return of life to the earth. With all this idol worship it is no wonder that Ephesus would be a magnet for so many false teachers and apostles. However, The Temple of Diana was also the center for prostitution and an asylum for criminals. The priestesses of Diana were also prostitutes, and were known as the Prostitutes of Babylon. Paul gave the Christians at Ephesus a dire warning so that they would be ready when false teachers would try and draw them away from the faith. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you over-seers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

To the Church at Smyrna Write:

- 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.

Chapter 2 Verse 1

The seven golden candlesticks represent the seven churches that John was told to write to. This verse also shows us that it is Jesus himself who holds the seven stars (the messengers to the churches) in his right hand, and it is Jesus who walks among them which shows Christ's intimacy with these Churches. In addition, Jesus establishes that he is dictating every word that John wrote. Once we realize that it is Christ himself delivering the messages to the Churches we can then understand that he doesn't just want us to read them, but he wants us to understand and heed these warnings as well. This speaks to the power and love of Christ that he would not only give us warnings (and a chance to repent), but also that would give so many amazing promises to those who endure till the end. As lampstands he also reminding us that we are the light of the world, and if our light is snuffed out then what good are we? This is why trusting in the Lord is so important, and understanding the spiritual nature of these letters is equally important. We live in perilous times, and understanding Satan's traps is more now than ever before.

Chapter 2 Verse 2-3

In these two verses Jesus shows what the Church of Ephesus was doing correctly. He says that he knows their work, labor, patience, and that they have not grown weary in their good works. In other words, they were a very evangelical church. He commends them for not listening to false apostles and finding them to be liars, which means they did not allow false teachers to come into their congregation. So far, Ephesus sounds like a great Church, and in many ways it was but why? First, the Word tells us that works are very important to the Kingdom of God and a sign of a changed person. In Matthew 5:16 it says to let our light shine so that the world can see our good "works" and give glory to the Father. Also, in James 2:26 it says "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead". We must remember that we are saved by grace and not by works, but an outward sign of an inward change are the works of Christ in our lives. If we are going to name His name, then our actions must line up with the Word of God. However, we must also understand that they will not all change overnight but that is still no excuse to commit sin. Did you ever hear the phrase "We are a work in progress? That is absolutely correct, but we cannot use that as an excuse to sin (Romans 6:15). Secondly, they did not allow false teachers to come and teach in their Church or in their homes. 2 John 1:10 (NIV) says "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them". What teaching? "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9). So God is telling us that anyone who does not abide in the doctrine of Christ should not be allowed in our home or even welcomed. This may seem harsh, but once you let them in your home then you have allowed the spirits who control them into your home as well. There are many warnings about false prophets and teachers, and here are just a few ...

Romans 16:17-18 (ESV) – "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve"

Matthew 7:15-16 (ESV) – “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves... You will recognize them by their fruits”

2 Timothy 4:3-4: (ESV) – “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching”

So if the Church of Ephesus has good works and didn't tolerate false teachers then what was their issue? Jesus states it clearly in verse four “Thou hast left thy first love.”

Chapter 2 Verse 4

I can hear them now; “Lord I have taught Sunday school for 40 years”... And “Lord I have lead the choir for 50 years”... And “Lord I have been the Pastor here for 80 years”. However, the Lord told us in 7:21-23 that “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” While many will clap and shout AMEN at this point, personally this is one of the scariest verses in the New Testament to me. Imagine thinking your whole life that you were serving God and hitting the bullseye of God's will only to find out that you had left your first love. To know the Word is one thing, but to know the Author of the Word is another. So how do you know what your first love is? What occupies your thoughts? Many people have grown up in church, and had dads who were Pastors or moms who were Sunday school teachers so they naturally think they are born again too. Unfortunately, no one is ever grandfathered into heaven because of a relative or group association. In addition, Jesus is pointing out here that works in and of themselves are not good enough for anyone to obtain eternal life, and makes it clear when he says “You have left their first love”. Many people of Ephesus were no longer serving God with their heart, but only in their actions. In the same way that faith without works is dead (James 2:26), so too is are works dead without a “love” relationship with Christ. The story of Mary and Martha really brings home this fact. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha was running around doing her “works”, however Jesus told Martha when she complained that Mary wasn't helping said “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her”. From this exchange it is crystal clear that Jesus valued Mary's “wanting to be” with Jesus over Martha's “wanting to work” for Jesus.

Another aspect of Ephesus was that the temple of Diana was the center of prostitution in the region, and many could have left their “first love” for the love of the prostitutes, other sexual activities, or just sinning in general. If we think about the world today, there are many things that Christians have left their First Love for. In this busy run everywhere, I have to get it done now world we easily can forget to spend time with the person who is supposed to be the most important person to us – Jesus. Many people may not even know they have left their first love for sin or activities such as their job, family, TV, a hobby, online gaming, or even sporting events but regardless of the why Jesus clearly stated that where your “treasure is; therein lies your heart (Luke 12:24). However, for whatever reason a person leaves their first love does not matter, what does matter is that they left it. Have we left our first love? Is there ANYTHING in our lives more important than our relationship with Jesus? If so, then we need to fix it but how? Christ is always displeased when we put anything before him and even though we can make up a thousand excuses for why we did it... It is still SIN at the end of the day...

Chapter 2 Verse 5

“Remember from where they have fallen from, and repent and do the first works or he will remove their candlestick from its place, except they repent”. So what are the first works? The first works include repentance and making Jesus lord of your life!! Something very interesting is that Jesus brought up repentance not once, but twice in this verse. So what is repentance? In the Greek this word repent is “metanoēō”, which means to change one’s mind. This is not what most people think when they hear the word repentance because many of us have been told that is groveling or weeping and gnashing, but that is not repentance. I heard a man of God once say that there is nothing more powerful than a changed mind, and that is a 100% fact. When you change your mind about Jesus, you turn and do a 180 (true repentance), and this is what the Church at Ephesus is being told to do. TURN AROUND and MAKE ME LORD again. When I was in my desert time (as I call it) I remember clearly how I came back to Christ. I was sitting on my picnic table and said “God, I have messed up my life so bad but if you will take me back I am yours and will do whatever you want me to”. As I said, there is NOTHING more powerful than a truly changed mind because from that day forward I was NEVER the same again. There was no “sinner’s prayer” or 7 steps to repentance, and I didn’t have to grovel or do forty “Hail Mary’s”. However, I meant business and God met me right there on that picnic table; and Praise God he changed my entire destiny. If you are tired of what you have done with your life, then all you need to do is change your mind and make Jesus Lord again. So what would have happened if Ephesus hadn’t repented? He clearly states that he would “remove” their candlestick from its place, so does this mean that once you are saved, you may not be always saved? That is food for thought, but I would say this “why take the chance!” We know that God wants to have a loving relationship with us more than anything else. However, no matter how many times we attend church, teach Sunday school, sing worship songs, lift our hands, shout hallelujah, or feed the poor will make up for a life void of fellowship with the Father. In other words, become Mary and quit being Martha. The Christian life is not a onetime prayer experience, but a lifetime of spiritual warfare against Satan, sin, the world, and the flesh. While we will never win every fight, we must never just yield ourselves to our spiritual enemies. We need to remember that the more we overcome our enemies, the more we will overcome them the next time they come at us. If we have left our “first love” then our relationship at that point is broken and only repentance will reestablish the connection with our Heavenly Father! Are we ready to repent?

Chapter 2 Verse 6

Once again Christ commends the Church at Ephesus. He tells them that they have hated the deeds of a cult known as the Nicolaitans, which Jesus states he also hates. The exact origin of the Nicolaitans is unclear, but there are two major theories about who they were. The first one says that they were followers of the teachings of Nicolas who could have been a deacon in the early Church (Acts 6:5). According to this theory, he became part of a group who followed the doctrine of Balaam; who instructed by Balac to make Israel sin by putting a stumblingblock before them which included having them eat foods offered to idols, and by having them commit acts of sexual immorality. The Nicolaitans were an apostate group that believed for someone to be free from lust then they must submit to their sensual desires to overcome it, and they used these religious teachings as an excuse to pursue whatever sexual pleasures they desired. Their teaching also changed and perverted grace into legalism. The other theory says that the name came from the Greek word “Nicolah”, which meant “let us eat”, and they encouraged each other to eat food offered to idols. Either way, their actions were an abomination to God, and the

Church of Ephesus was extolled for hating their deeds. Even though many may condemn you for not having the “drippy love” they think you should have towards a person’s sin, remember Jesus commended Ephesus for “hating” the deeds of the cult. If you doing what Christ tells you then who cares what other people say, because Christ is the one who will judge us all. We will discuss this cult more when we get into the Church or Pergamos.

Chapter 2 Verse 7

The first thing in verse seven is “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”. Can you hear what the Spirit is saying to you? This is crucial because if you cannot hear him, how will you return to him? Jesus said my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27). Now is the time when we as Believers need to learn to hear his voice, for perilous times are just ahead. The second thing is a promise “to him that overcometh”, but what does overcometh mean? It the Greek overcometh here means to be victorious, or to hold the faith unto death against the power of foes, temptations, and persecutions. Going back to what we talking about before, we are not in a physical battle against flesh and blood, but against powers and darkness of this world. To defeat them we need to have the Armor of God, we must know God’s Word, we must have God’s Wisdom about how to use His Word, and we need to move when our Commander-In-Chief Jesus Christ tells us to move. Even though our faith may lead to our death we are still overcomers, and that’s a promise you can take to the bank. This is his promise to us who repent and overcome that we will get to “eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”. Where is this amazing tree? It is located IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARADISE OF GOD!!! It is not on the outskirts or some vague place, but it is the center of Heaven. This is where we all want to be, but it is reserved for those who overcome. Have you left your first love? If so then it is time to repent and do the first works. God is not waiting to strike you dead, he is waiting to restore you as though you never left so why not change your mind today...

To the Church at Smyrna

History

The name Smyrna means “myrrh or death”. Myrrh is a resin, which was extracted from trees in Africa, India, and Arabia and used as an incense like frankincense, and in ancient times myrrh was so valuable that it was worth as much as gold. Myrrh was also used in the purification of women (Esther 2:12), as a perfume (Psalm 45:8), as a gift for Jesus when he was born (Matthew 2:11), and they mixed it with wine that they offered to Jesus on the Cross (Mark 15:23). Myrrh was also commonly used in burial because it could dry up moisture thus preventing the growth of worms. As an embalming spice, myrrh released its odor when crushed so the crushing of the Saints at Smyrna in the name of Jesus was a pleasant aroma to the Lord.

The city of Smyrna was approximately 35 miles NE of Ephesus, and it was a port city as well as a commercial center with a population of around 100,000. It was called the most beautiful of the seven cities, and it is still around today except it is now called Izmir Turkey. Smyrna dates back to 3,000 BC and it became known as the “Glory of Asia” because of its beautiful temples, harbor, and planned development. The temple of Tiberius was built in 26 AD, and it became the center of worship for the Evil Kings of Rome. The word “Catholic” was first used by Ignatius in a letter he wrote to the Church at Smyrna, however the most famous pastor of Smyrna was Polycarp (69-155AD) who when he refused to abandon his faith was burned at the stake. Christians were extremely persecuted in Smyrna, and many lost everything they owned because there was a group known as the 10%’ers who got 10% of the property seized from Christians that they turned over to the Romans. These people were non-Christians and often Jews who profited off the death of Christians so hunting Christians was commonly practiced. In 178 AD the city was destroyed by an earthquake, but it was rebuilt by Marcus Aurelius who ruled from 161-180 AD. It is said that from 100-313 A.D that 5,000,000 Christians were martyred, which was the greatest persecution of the Church ever known. During this time, Satan did everything he could to wipe the Church at Smyrna off the planet. Also, the Christians at Smyrna were persecuted by ten different Roman Emperors and the last ten years being a living nightmare for the Smyrna Church. However, the gospel spread faster during this period than any other period in history, and the more Satan persecuted this Church the more God’s Word spread!

To the Church at Smyrna Write:

- 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.

Chapter 2 Verse 8

In this verse, Jesus is described as the “first and the last”, and that “which was dead and is alive”. The Greek word for first and last here are “protos” and “eschatos”. The word “protos” is where we get our modern word “prototype” from, and the definition of prototype means “a first, typical

or preliminary model of something, especially a machine, from which other forms are developed or copied". In other words, a prototype is what all products of the same line are patterned after, so Jesus is the prototype for all Christians which why we should never pattern ourselves after each other. (Philippians 2:3-8, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 4:32, and 1 John 2:6). If we try and pattern ourselves even after the most righteous person we know (pastor or youth minister), we will always fail. After working in manufacturing for so many years I have seen this happen many times. When you begin to make a pattern of the prototype, and then begin to make patterns of that pattern you will eventually be so far off from the original prototype that the part you are trying to manufacture will not fit or work. So to avoid this, Christ made sure that we understand that He is the only should be who we pattern ourselves after for he will make us into who he wants us to be. Another danger here is spiritual "inbreeding". This happens when a Church is primarily dominated by a few families, and those families are the main people who show up. This is dangerous because this can turn into nepotism, which can lead to an uneven and large amount of power in a few Believers hands. For a Church to grow there needs to be a balance in the power structure of that particular Body. Next, the word "eschatos" carries the meaning of a finished product. So Jesus is not only our prototype, but he is what we will look like as his finished product. This is a great revelation because once you truly understand this, then Hebrews 12:2 "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." has much more MEANING and POWER!!! Many times we start out with Jesus as our "Lord" only to take the reins back and do our own thing. Even though we may not be in what Christians would call outright sin (drinking, cussing, or fornication), we must remember that Jesus must always be first because without him in that position we will not make it to the end. Simply put, the key to Smyrna's success was they kept Jesus first and foremost in everything they did and they never left their first love.

The word dead in this verse comes from the Greek word "nekros", which literally means someone who has breathed his last breath, and the word alive (zaō) means to be among the living, someone having true life, or having endless life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling us that he died, (not ceremoniously) but literally DIED so that he could pay the price for us so we would never have to see the second death or eternal hell. Not only did he die, but when he went to hell He took the keys of death and hell so his children need never fear death or hell again. In addition, if this wasn't enough Jesus also ROSE AGAIN!!! Because of this, Jesus has eternal life in the Kingdom of God, and where does Jesus reside? IN US!!! This is so amazing once we realized that we are "... (His) children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17) then we know that HE has it all under control and we never EVER need to worry. In short, when Christ died and rose he gave us eternal life in the Kingdom NOW once we accept him, so does it matter what happens to us here? It shouldn't!! Since Christ was raised from the dead unto eternal life then so shall we also be raised from the dead, and we will FOREVER be with our Lord!!! "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). What is our soul worth? It was worth God sending his Son to die for us, which tells me that we are worth more than we will ever imagine to God!

Chapter 2 Verse 9-10

Smyrna as we showed was notorious for killing Christians, and not only were the Romans hunting them, but the Jews were turning them in for money. Once we understand this then verse nine and ten become crystal clear. What I find interesting is that Jesus knew this, and did not

intervene on their behalf, but why? Paul in Philippians 3:10-11 stated that “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead”. It was Jesus that said “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). Many people, especially those in America think they are “safe” from the coming storm of persecution, however a time is coming when Christians worldwide and in America will face it. During this period many will lose their lives for naming His name so God is giving us all time to prepare. Remember the 10 virgins? Are we preparing? (Psa. 20:7-8)

If we look closer at verse nine and ten Jesus says he knows their works, tribulation, poverty, the blasphemy of those that say they are Jews but are of the synagogue of Satan. This is a reference to the Hellenistic Jews who opposed the fact of Jesus Christ being the “Savior”. However, these Jews were deceived and as Paul stated in Romans 2:28-29 “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”, so the real Jews now are ones who are Jews inwardly. In this verse Jesus is giving the Church at Smyrna “high praise” for what they are doing, and in verse ten he tells them to “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer because the devil SHALL cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried and have tribulation ten days, and that they should be faithful unto death.” People today are seeing the death of Christians over in Islamic countries and act surprised, and I have to ask myself why? Jesus clearly told us that this will happen and in Matthew 24:9-13 Jesus says “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another...And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”. Remember his warning to the church at Ephesus about leaving their “first love”? In Matthew 24:12 it is saying the same thing, and in verse thirteen he goes on to say that “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”. The word saved here is from the Greek verb “sō'zō”, which has many meanings such as keep safe and sound, rescue from danger or destruction, heal someone from disease, to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance, and to deliver one from the penalties of the Messianic judgment. As we can see Jesus wants to deliver us from eternal damnation, heal our bodies, and keep us safe from death and destruction. However, we must remember that we may still be called to give our lives for the Lord but our spirits are forever HIS and Satan cannot have us!! As we can see from Matthew to Revelations Christ promises that we will live eternally with him IF we endure and are faithful to the end, and we know that God Never Lies! (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, Numbers 23:19) So be of good courage, for Jesus overcame all and He lives in each of us that belong to Him!

Chapter 2 Verse 11

If we remember the beginning of this section where Jesus says he is the first and the last, we can see that his promise in verse eleven is so incredible! Jesus promised the church at Smyrna that “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” We need to remember that the messages to the seven churches are also a message to us. So if we endure and overcome by continuing in Christian works, overcome tribulations, endure poverty, endure imprisonment, and endure to the end even if it means our life, then we WILL receive the crown of life and we will

not be hurt by the second death. Abraham had to endure with patience, and THEN he received the promise that God gave him (Hebrews 6:15). However, to endure as his body we need to encourage one another daily. Ecclesiastes 4:12 tells us that “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” and Acts 14:22 says that “...exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”. In these end times we will need each other like ever before. If we marginalize people because they aren't in our cliché or like “us” then we are committing outright sin against God because we are ALL His body, so let me ask you this... Will you cut off your nose to spite your face? Another lesson we can learn from the Church at Smyrna and is that Jesus already knows what we will ever go through, and He will always be there with us. So it doesn't matter if it is doing hard work, going through poverty and tribulation, or even dying for him; He is with us, ALWAYS even unto the end of the world! (Matthew 28:20)

To the Church at Pergamos

History

Continuing on our trek the next church was Pergamos, which was located 40 miles NE of Smyrna. The first part of the name Pergamos or “*per*” means improper, and “*gamos*” means marriage so “Pergamos” literally means “Improper Marriage”. Pergamos was located in the Roman province of Asia called Mysia in Caicus valley. The city was located three miles from the river, and one of the tributaries known as the Selinus flowed through the city and the other tributary called the Kteios ran along the walls of Pergamos. The early city was build on a cone shaped acropolis that was a thousand feet tall with steep perpendicular sides, which made the city an easily defensible fortress. After Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, Lysimachus left Philetaerus in charge and left him with 9,000 talents of God but Philetaerus decided to keep the money and make himself the ruler of Pergamum. Many evil kings ruled over the next few years in Pergamos, and they were worshipped as gods. However, Eumenes II was the most memorable king and during his reign the city reached its greatest height. During this time art and literature were encouraged, and the city library had 200,000 volumes which Antony would eventually give to Cleopatra. One of the biggest and most renown buildings in the town was the alter of Zeus, which was also one of the wonders of the ancient world. In 133 BC when Attalus III who would be the last Greek ruler died, he gave his entire kingdom over to the Roman government. His son Aristonicus try to retake it, but in 129 BC he was defeated and the Roman province known as Asia was formed and Pergamos was made its capital city. However, the term they used “Asia” was not the continent of Asia nor was it part of Asia Minor but it was simply the part of Asia Minor that the Romans controlled.

In Pergamos they worshipped four gods, which included Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Asklepios. During this period the priests and physicians of Asklepios had a scam going on to make money. Invalids from all over Asia would come there and sleep in the court, and the “gods” would reveal to the priests and physicians in dreams the remedies needed to heal their diseases which gave many opportunities for the priests to deceive them. The priests used skills to make the people believe that people were getting healed, and this is how they made money. Pergamos was also called "Thrice Neokoros" meaning that in the city there were three temples built for three Roman emperors, and as we stated earlier they worshipped as gods. Pergamos was the main religious center of the region, but gradually as it grew it also became the political center. Eventually even the Jews that lived there assimilated into the Greek culture and even began using Greek names. Christianity came to Pergamos in the early days of the Church, and Antipas was the first Christian killed by the Romans and it was in Pergamos where he died. According to Revelation Pergamos is also known to be “where Satan’s throne is”, which could refer to the temples of the Roman emperors whom people worshipped in Pergamos.

During this period Satan was not winning his battle by persecuting and killing Christians, so he changed his tactics and decided to corrupt them from within (which was the same tactic used against Israel by Balaam). Constantine the Great, who ruled from 306 to 337 A.D. was the first Roman ruler to convert to Christianity. In the year 313 A.D. he issued a degree that gave religious tolerance to Christians. Even though Christianity soon became the state religion (which some believers liked), it also allowed for Roman pagan rituals and doctrines to influence Church doctrine (the way of Balaam) (2 Corinthians 6:14). The Church was never meant to have political

power on this earth but spiritual power, and to mixing the Church with politics was a dangerous game...

To the Church at Pergamos Write:

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.

Chapter 2 Verse 12

Jesus is described in verse 12 as “he which hath the sharp sword with two edges”. Revelation 11:15 also says that “...out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations...” From these two verses in Revelation we can see that Jesus uses a two-edge sword, and that the sword he is using is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). We must also remember that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14), and even when Satan came to tempt Jesus he had to use the Word to defeat him (Matthew 4:1-11). If Christ needed the Word of God to overcome Satan, then how can Christians not see that we also need to know the Word to overcome the enemy (Revelation 12:11, Ephesians 6:17). People like to say we need to “know” the Word of God, so in reality if Jesus is the “Word of God” then we need to know Jesus more to know God’s Word and know God’s Word more to know Jesus!! (Nice circular pattern indeed)

Chapter 2 Verse 13

In verse 13, Jesus states that he knows of their works and they dwell where Satan’s seat is. In addition, he says that they have held fast the name of Christ and have not denied His faith. Sounds pretty good, so what is the issue? Apparently the Church at Pergamos let things creep into their lives that shouldn’t be there, and in a sense they married themselves to those things.

Chapter 2 Verse 14-15

In the next two verses Jesus spells out exactly what the Christians at Pergamos allowed into their church and how it corrupted them. Apparently they became soft on doctrine because they allowed people who followed the doctrine of Balaam and doctrine of the Nicolaitans into their Church. Some people may not realize it, but God is very serious about who we allow into our Churches and he will not tolerate false teachings. 2 John 1:10 says “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.” Jesus wants his bride pure, so even allowing false doctrine (or a little leaven) will not be tolerated by him. If we remember the Church at Ephesus

then we remember that they were admonished for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. However, when we get to the Church at Pergamos we see that they decided to embrace both doctrines that God hated, but why did God hate these two doctrines so much? These doctrines were based on greed, selling the Word of God for money, idolatry, and sexual immorality so it is easy to see why our Heavenly Father did not want these doctrines in his Church.

Balaam was a false prophet who did his work for God for one thing, which was money. Sadly, in today's churches we can see this same type of behavior. First we see televangelists everywhere fleecing the sheep by selling their "Word from the Lord" for \$19.99, and by begging the sheep for cash to stay on the air. Next, we can also see "so-called" music ministers charging admission prices to come and receive what you need from God. And finally, we see many people selling their talents (such as musicians) to whichever church pays them the most to show up on Sunday to play. All three of these are in no way of God, and it is time for the Church of the Living Most High God to call a spade a spade. If we are truly called to do a ministry for the Lord then he will supply our needs and we should never EVER have to charge for it or beg for money. In addition, if we are doing what we are called to do in the Lord then it should be done out of the love for our Him and from a humble heart. A good rule of thumb to follow is that if a ministry is doing what we described above then the ministry in question is more than likely not of God. The sad part is that this new modern commercialized Church is far worse than simply being religious because it has turned the Church of Jesus Christ into a den of thieves (Matthew 21:12-13). Another sad point is that the Church has been deceived for years about this, and doesn't even know it. A really good example of this new age demonic doctrine is the "Prosperity Message". The Bible clearly states that we as Christians are to be blessed, however NO WHERE does it say Christians are to be rich or have huge bank accounts full of cash. The blessing of Abraham wasn't so Abraham could have tons of money, but that he could bless others and this is what we as Christ's followers should be doing as well. So much I could say on this devilish lying doctrine, but simply put God is NOT an ATM and if you are calculating your blessing based on what you give then you are not giving as onto the Lord. People who do this are trying to put Almighty God into their little blessing box. Have you heard a preach say "Send us XXX amount and God will do this or that"? If so then you are hearing the doctrine of Balaam for these "preachers" are using their ministry to make money. We as Ministers should never EVER do our service to God for reward, but out of a humble and thankful heart for all HE has done for us. Paul told us that people in the last days will "have a form of godliness, but will deny the power thereof" and we see that in full force today in many America's churches and in MANY American ministries.

Another even more deceptive aspect of Balaam was that Balak instructed him to make Israel sin by having them eat foods offered to idols, and by having them commit acts of sexual immorality. When it comes to idolatry, most Christians that I know do not have a "shrine of Buddha" in their home however they may have "shrines" in their life which is still idolatry in the eyes of God. No you say, then let me ask you three pointed questions ... What occupies your time? In your life do you strive for more money, a bigger house, that new fishing boat, or even a fancier car? Do you spend the majority of your time watching TV, going to sporting events, or playing video games instead of spending time with God or doing the work of the Lord? Idolatry is not just getting on our "knees" and bowing before a physical idol, but an idol is "anything" that we put before God! Jesus clearly said "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). God warned us that "Thou shalt have no other gods before me (or beside me). Thou shalt not make

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