

REVELATION 2:1-7

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Revelation chapter 2 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Remember the outline for the book of Revelation that Jesus gave to us in Revelation 1:19. He divided this book up like this, “**Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.**”

If you don't get the outline right, then you are going to be messed up on what the rest of this book is all about.

The first division is this, “**Write the things which you have seen.**” This is the description of Jesus given to us in Revelation chapter 1, that is what John saw!

Next, we see the second division of this book, “**and the things which are.**” This is speaking of the actual churches in John's day and they also look to the Church Age as Jesus writes seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey! And this will cover Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and we will begin to look at these letters tonight.

And the last division of this book is this, “**the things which will take place after this.**” After what? What does Revelation chapters 2 and 3 deal with? The things of the church and thus, after the church age comes to a close, after the Rapture, then these things will take place and that covers the rest of the book, Revelation chapters 4-22.

Now let's face it. When most people think about the book of Revelation their focus is Revelation chapters 6-19. Why is that? Because those deal with the prophetic judgments God will bring upon a Christ rejecting world!

The reality is, for the Christian, we won't be here and thus, they really don't have anything to do with us, if you believe in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church or that that church will be removed from this earth prior to the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

That means, at least for the church, the most important section for us are these letters that the Lord wrote to these seven churches in Asia Minor because they apply to us as well, as we will see.

Now, the way these letters were written they made a circuit from Ephesus going north to Smyrna, Pergamos, then south east to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Why these seven churches when there were many more churches and why seven?

Because seven in the Bible is the number of completeness and thus, these seven churches give to us a picture of church history throughout the ages.

Also, these things that were going on in these churches go on in churches today and thus, it is applicable not only to churches, but to us as individuals as I have said.

I understand that not everyone agrees with these churches representing church history, but as you look at them and what was going on and you look at church history, they do seem to fit. Let me show you what I mean, and I will dig into this more as we look at these specific churches over the next several weeks.

EPHESUS – This letter deals with the first century church that left its first love. And we will be looking at that tonight. We would call this the - ***LOVELESS CHURCH!***

SMYRNA – This letter deals with the church from the end of the first century to the fourth century, it is the persecuted church that suffered at the hands of the Roman Empire. We would call this the – ***PERSECUTED CHURCH!***

PERGAMOS – This letter deals with the church in the fourth and fifth century where Christianity became part of the state religion under Constantine. We would call this the – ***COMPROMISING CHURCH!***

THYATIRA – This letter deals with the church from the fifth century as we see the Roman Catholic Church rule in western Christendom and in the east, we see the Orthodox Church rule. We would call this the – ***IDOLATROUS CHURCH!***

SARDIS – This letter deals with the Reformation that rocked this world but by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries their light grew dim, it was a post-reformation period, as the church grew cold and lifeless. We would call this the – ***DEAD CHURCH!***

Now out of this we see the protestant church branch out in two directions, one good the other bad, and they are the last two churches.

PHILADELPHIA – This letter deals with the church from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as there was a mighty revival that broke out, great missionary movements began. And I see this church around today as well. We would all this the – ***FAITHFUL CHURCH!***

LAODICEA – This letter deals with the last day's church, the lukewarm church, the apostate church. Yes, it looks as if things are going well, there is a lot of activity, it is growing, but Jesus is outside knocking to get inside this church. It is the liberal church that is ecumenical in nature. We would call this the – ***APOSTATE CHURCH!***

I have briefly covered this but let me show you the three different ways you can look at these letters.

HISTORICALLY: These letters were written specifically and literally to the churches that existed during this period of time that John wrote, churches located in the Roman Province of Asia Minor or the western part of modern-day Turkey.

PROPHETICALLY: As you look at how these letters are arranged; it is not a random order but Jesus places them in a specific order to give us a complete picture of church history.

We touched on this already but just to remind you, Ephesus is the first century church or the apostolic church that lasted to around 63 A. D.

Then came Smyrna or the persecuted church from the end of the first century to around 312 A. D, and-so-on. I think you will be amazed at how this all plays out.

INDIVIDUALLY: Obviously these letters apply to all of us, Jesus wants us to hear these words and apply them to our lives. He wants us to check our hearts, where we are at!

In fact, in every letter Jesus closes them by saying, “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. . . .**”

Let me make another point here because many get themselves into trouble on this one.

They look at church history as some kind of sacred cow and thus, they put into practice what the church was doing over the years.

Folks, look to the Word of God: Did Jesus teach it? Do we see it practiced in the book of Acts? Is it spoken of in the Epistles?

If not, then I would tend to stay away from that even if the church practiced it! You see, church history is not good, it is not a pretty picture.

Even here, after only some 60 to 70 years after the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the state of the church is in trouble, there were many problems, even some apostate. In fact, if you want to see how the church is to function, read the Pastoral Epistles: I & II Timothy and Titus.

We are told in I Timothy 3:14-15 as Paul was sharing with this young pastor, Timothy, **“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”**

The Word of God will not lead you astray, but the practices of the church may!

Another important point before we dig into our study tonight is that there are seven key principles that come forth in these letters. They are as follows:

DESTINATION – This speaks of the church that is being addressed.

TITLE OR DESCRIPTION OF JESUS – This comes right out of Revelation chapter 1 and it is specific for each church. The description that Jesus uses of Himself from chapter 1 fits in with what was going on in that church that He was writing to.

COMMENDATION – Jesus gives words of encouragement as He writes to these churches on some of the good things that they were doing. The only church that did not receive any commendation is the church of Laodicea, they had nothing that Jesus could commend them on!

REBUKE – As good as they were doing, Jesus tells them that they have a serious problem that needs to be corrected and as our Great Physician, He should know what is wrong with us.

The two churches that were not rebuked were Smyrna and Philadelphia. These two churches were doing well.

EXHORTATION – Here Jesus exhorts them to get right, He tells them what they need to do to avoid His judgment. You see, as our Great Physician He not only knows what is wrong with us, but He gives to us the cure to heal our spiritual illness.

Now, Smyrna and Philadelphia did not get a rebuke and thus, their exhortation is to continue on, to forge ahead, don't give up!

WARNING – There are consequences for not obeying. The Lord Jesus warns them ahead of time so there is no excuse. The issue is not that they can't be healed, but they refuse to be healed, they refuse to obey the Lord. Because of that the Lord will judge them.

PROMISE – If you listen, if you hear and obey, then God will fulfill His promise to you. You don't have to worry about Him coming through, the bigger issue is, are you willing to listen and obey!

Before we get to this letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus, let me share these words from Warren Wiersbe and this will lead us into our study this evening. We are told,

If you have ever moved to a new community and had to select a new church home, you know how difficult it is to examine and evaluate a church and its ministry.

Imposing buildings may house dying or dead congregations, while modest structures might belong to virile [macho or manly] assemblies on the march for the Lord. The church we think is "rich" may turn out to be poor in God's sight (Rev 3:17), while the "poor" church is actually rich (Rev 2:9).

Only the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, can accurately inspect each church and know its true condition, because He sees the internals, not only the externals (Rev 2:23 b).

In these special messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gave each assembly an "X ray" of its condition. But He intended for all the churches to read these messages and benefit from them. (Note the plural "churches" in Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22.)

But the Lord was also speaking to individuals, and this is where you and I come in. "He that hath an ear, let him hear."

Churches are made up of individuals, and it is individuals who determine the spiritual life of the assembly. So, while reading these messages, we must apply them personally as we examine our own hearts.

Finally, we must keep in mind that John was a pastor at heart, seeking to encourage these churches during a difficult time of persecution. Before Christ judges the world, He must judge His own people (Ezek 9:6; 1 Peter 4:17). A purified church need never fear the attacks of Satan or men. “It is a very remarkable thing,” wrote G. Campbell Morgan, “that the church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. The church of Christ patronized has always been the church of Christ impure.”

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, p. 1040

With that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in Revelation chapter 2, beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we look at this letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus, or the Loveless Church. And in reality, He is also writing to all of us so that we can examine our walk with Him!

REVELATION 2

VERSE 1

I am going to follow the points that I gave to you earlier as we go through these letters.

And the first point was the ***DESTINATION!***

We see that the destination of this letter was Ephesus and specifically to the pastor of the church in Ephesus, why?

Because he was leading the people, he was their shepherd, and he was responsible to represent the things of God to the people.

If we are going to look at the destination of this letter, then we need to look at this city called Ephesus for a moment and see how the Gospel message went forth.

Even though Pergamos was the Province's official capital, Ephesus still remained the most important city in Asia Minor.

During New Testament times the population of this city is estimated at 500,000 people, that is ½ a million people lived there! Just a little bit bigger than Manitowoc!

It had a theater that can still be seen today that held 25,000 people and it was the place where Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus were dragged into for their faith in Christ. We see that in Acts 19:29 and remember the turmoil there. Paul brought the Gospel message to Ephesus and people were getting saved. That caused a huge decline in the purchase of idols in that city. Thus, the 501 idol makers union was upset, and they stirred up the people and they cried out for two full hours, "**Great is Diana of the Ephesians!**"

That was their god they worshiped, and we will deal with who Diana is in a few minutes.

Ephesus was a seaport city in which many trade ships came in and out of its harbor.

Also, the Cayster River flowed into the harbor; Ephesus was about three miles upriver.

Not only was it an important seaport city but it was also located on the junction of four of the most important roads in Asia Minor. One of its highways led to and from Rome transporting merchandise and tragically, many Christians were taken captive to Rome to be martyred for their faith in Christ on this road.

In fact, Ignatius called Ephesus the highway of martyrs!

Ephesus also had one of the seven wonders of the ancient world located there, the temple of Diana, which was her Roman name; or Artemis, which was her Greek name.

This temple was huge. Its length was 425 feet, its width was 220 feet and it had 127 columns that were 60 feet tall that supported its roof!

The worship of this god, whose image was a gross, multi-breasted monstrosity that they believed fell from heaven, was centered around immoral sexual activity, which makes sense.

You see, Diana was the goddess of sex and fertility! They had thousands of temple priestesses, who were nothing more than prostitutes and through their activity it helped to support the temple.

Not only that, but any criminal who would make its way into this temple would be safe.

Thus, on the grounds of this temple area you would find priests, prostitutes, criminals, musicians, bankers, dancers, the place was filled with immorality and the people loved it, they worshiped it!

In fact, the philosopher Heraclitus said that none could live in Ephesus and not weep over its immorality.

Thus, Ephesus was morally, spiritually and physically dark, there was no light in it until the light of the Gospel, the light of Jesus Christ came bursting onto the scene!

The light of the Gospel first came into Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila and then Apollos joined them. (Acts 18:18-19, 24-26)

Paul was in Ephesus on his second missionary journey, towards the end of it, where he left Priscilla and Aquila behind to spread the good news of Jesus to the people. (Acts 18:19-21)

Then, on Paul's third missionary journey he spent three years with them, building them up in the faith. (Acts 20:31).

At the close of his third missionary journey, on his way to Jerusalem, he stopped in Miletus and exhorted the Ephesian elders to, **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”** Acts 20:28-30.

Did the light of the Gospel have an impact upon this pagan society?

You bet it did for in Acts 19:18-20 we are told, **“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”**

Notice that their lives were transformed, and they did not sell the magic books they had so they would not lose any money, but they burned them so they could take no one else captive.

And this was no small amount of money; it was 50,000 days of workers’ wages that went up in smoke because God touched their lives!

You see, they did not need to pass laws to stop this black magic, they just needed their lives transformed by God, it works much better, and it lasts!

Not only that, but Timothy was a pastor there, Onesiphorus and Tychicus ministered there and as I have said, John spent the remainder of his life there, prior to his banishment on the island of Patmos and then when he was released by Nerva, he lived out the rest of his life in Ephesus.

So this church had a good start, the light of Christ shined brightly in this wicked and immoral city!

What is interesting to me is that the name “**Ephesus**” means “*Desirable One.*”

These believers had a great zeal for the Lord and a passion to serve Him, doing the work of God. They were a light to a people in darkness and many were drawn to them and thus, they were drawn to Christ.

People wanted what they had, a love for God, they desired it and thus, the name, *Desirable One.*

The light of the Christ was shining brightly through them and the people were drawn to it, to Jesus, the *Desirable One!*

Now, historically speaking, this relates to the church in Ephesus and prophetically speaking, it represents the church of the first century or the apostolic church to about 63 A. D.

And as you will note as you go through this letter, it did not take too long before there were some major problems in the church.

It is no different today, we just need to keep our eyes upon Jesus and know that the truth of God will set us free from the lies of the Devil, we don't have to be deceived, we don't have to move away from the faith that has been entrusted to us!

Why is that important? Because of the next point.

Next, we see the ***DESCRIPTION OF JESUS*** in this letter.

We are told that He is holding the seven stars in His right hand and is walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

The picture here is that Jesus is holding in His hands these pastors, the seven stars, securely and He is walking in the midst of these churches that are to be light bearers.

This description of Jesus is taken out of Revelation chapter 1 and it is specific now to the church here in Ephesus, as we shall see. (Revelation 1:12, 16)

Look at this picture we have here. Jesus is in the midst of this church saying, ***“I know everything that is going on with absolute clarity!”***

Now that can be good or bad depending on what you are doing. Remember what Paul wrote in Hebrews 4:13, **“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”**

And as Jesus looks at this church in Ephesus, as He looks at us individually and as a church, what does He see?

Look at what we read next.

VERSES 2-3

Remember what we just saw. Jesus is in the midst of His church and He is watching what they were doing and what we are doing. He knows the conditions of His church, it is not surprising to Him, it is not a mystery to Him.

Churches and individuals can hide their sin, but it is not hidden to Jesus. Jesus is saying to us – ***“I know your works!”*** and that can be good or bad depending on what we are doing!

The next point we see is the **COMMENDATION!**

And the commendation that Jesus gave to this church was a good one.

You see, these believers worked to the point of exhaustion, their **“labor”** or KOPOS in the Greek speaks of an all-out effort. The Ephesian Christians paid a price to serve the Lord. They gave it all.

Not only that but we also see that the Lord knew their **“patience”** or **“perseverance.”**

The Greek word is HUPOMONE and the meaning of this word is, “*endurance under trial.*” In other words, they kept going when the going was tough, they were not going to give up!

And please understand that this was not a fatalistic view but a hopeful effort that caused them to go on, they continued to forge ahead in the work God had called them to do.

It is as Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:22-24, “**And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**”

You see, they understood what Paul said and they lived it! They followed his example and were not going to let anything move them from what God called them to do, not even exhaustion in the work! May we have that same passion for serving the Lord!

They also could not bear those who were evil. Which is interesting today because many churches today have become tolerant of sin and the world commends them for this and God reproves them for it! They end up being man pleasers instead of pleasing the Lord and that is never a good thing!

Remember the church in Corinth, they were a very tolerant church and Paul called them out on it because they were a sick church that was full of sin!

That is an important lesson for us.

But here in Ephesus, they did not tolerate evil men, they held each other to a high standard of living, they did not tolerate or make excuses for sin. They were serious and the Lord recognized that in them!

It is as Peter said in I Peter 1:13-16, **“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”**

Don’t let sin trip you up, but gird up the loins of your mind, focus on the Lord and let Him guide you in all that you do, be holy as He is holy!

They also used the spiritual discernment that God had given them, they tested those who said they were apostles but were not.

Some tried to make a profit off of God, they were called ***“Christ Merchants.”***

Like today, people were trying to take advantage of others using the name of Christ, the only difference is they did not tolerate it and sadly, many do today.

The early church father, Ignatius, who wrote a short time after John wrote Revelation, commented on the vigilance of the Ephesian church. He wrote: ***“You heed nobody beyond what he has to say truthfully about Jesus Christ. . . . I have heard that some strangers came your way with a wicked teaching. But you did not let them sow it among you. You stopped up your ears to prevent admitting what they disseminated.”***

What a lesson for the church today to learn and put into practice – spiritual discernment!

Spurgeon wrote, *“This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some.”*

If Spurgeon wrote those words years ago, over 130 years ago, I wonder what he would say about the church today!

And folks, they did not grow weary in the work, but they remained steadfast!

It is as Paul admonished the Corinthians in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

The Amplified Bible puts it like this, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].”**

Now in reading what the Lord had to say about this church, you would think, *“Great, they are doing an awesome job in serving the Lord!”*

Well, not exactly.

The problem was that it all became external while inwardly they were dead!

Let’s read on and see what the Lord has to say regarding this serious problem they had.

VERSE 4

We have just seen all the commendations that Jesus gave to this church and then He says, **“Nevertheless.”** And that is not a good thing.

And yet, when you think about it, all the good they had done, there was only one thing that they did wrong! So how does all that good become negated by one bad thing?

Because this church had a lot of motion, a lot of activity but they had no emotion for Jesus, they had left their first love.

And this, of course, is the – **REBUKE!**

Now this is important for us to understand. They did not lose their first love. That happens by accident, like losing your car keys.

No, they did not lose their first love, but they left their first love. This is something that they did and not something that just happened to them by accident.

In Weymouth’s N.T. translation of this passage it reads, **“Yet I have this against you - that you no longer love Me as you did at first.”**

Yes, we are to serve the Lord, but the Lord did not save us to have us just work, work, work!

No, He saved us so that we can have a love relationship with Him. What did Jesus say that the greatest commandment was?

In Matthew 22:37-38 we are told, **“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”** (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27)

Notice that Jesus did not say, **“You shall serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”**

Again, the Bible is not saying that we are not to serve Him, we are.

But our service is done out of love.

Imagine that I told my wife that I don't love her anymore, just an illustration, I do love her! But say I don't, but I will still work, pay the bills, cut the grass, do all the things that I need to do, but I don't love her anymore!

How do you think she would feel about that?

She would not appreciate it!

But I am doing everything that I am supposed to be doing, right?

I am doing all the motion but there is not that emotion for Julie, and she would rather have me love her than do all that work!

Then why do I do what I do?

Because I love her!

That is what the Lord wants out of us, our love for Him and out of that love we will serve Him. For the Ephesian church, they worked to the point of exhaustion but there was no love for the Lord and that is the rebuke!

Now let's think about this. What if you came to this church in Ephesus and saw all that they were doing, all the activities and you might be thinking everything was okay. But it was not, as we have seen.

Keep in mind that without love everything that is being done is being done in vain! That is why Jesus had this against them!

Spurgeon put it like this, *"A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Lose love, lose all."*

And here's the thing. If your love for God has grown cold, your love for others will reflect that!

Jesus wants our hearts as well as our hands and head!

And think about this. Some 40 years earlier Paul wrote to the Ephesian church,

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.”

Ephesians 1:15-16.

What happened to their love for Jesus then?

At this point we are now into second and third generation Christians.

That first generation of believers knew God and His power.

By the time we get to the second generation of believers they might have known God but not His power.

And for that third generation of believers, they may have lost both.

You can't work for the Lord without loving Him, He won't accept that. He wants our love, and it is out of that love we have for Him that we serve Him!

VERSE 5a

The Great Physician, Jesus Christ gives to them a prescription that would cure their spiritual condition and thus, the ***EXHORTATION!***

It is very simple really; ***REMEMBER, REPENT*** and ***REPEAT***.

You see, remember when you first were saved, the love you had for the Lord, how that fire burned brightly in you.

Then repent before God, do a 180 degree turn back to Him, return to Him.

And finally, repeat your first works or do those things you did when you were first saved.

Now you may be thinking, “*What things?*”

You were going to church on a regular basis – go to church once again!

You were going to Bible studies on a regular basis – go to those Bible studies once again!

You were getting up and reading your Bible – get up and read your bible once again!

You spent time in prayer with the Lord – spend time with Him so He can speak to you!

You spent time in fellowship with other believers – get together with them once again!

You used to love singing praise songs unto the Lord – start singing again!

In other words – ***FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS ALL OVER AGAIN!***

I have been married for 42 years and if I did not spend the time to stoke the fire in our relationship, that fire would go out and I think that is what happens many times with Christians.

If your heart has grown cold in your relationship with Jesus, if that fire has gone out and you are just serving Him but there is no love, ask Him to rekindle that fire once again, that passionate love once again so you can fall in love with Jesus all over again! And then act upon that!

Jesus gives us the answer to this loveless relationship with Him - ***REMEMBER, REPENT and REPEAT.***

May we get back to where we once were – in love with Jesus!

VERSE 5b

Jesus has told them what they need to do to get right with Him. It is not very difficult, but they must listen and obey what Jesus is saying.

Why is this so important?

That is the next point, that if they don't, here is the **WARNING!**

And this warning is simple. If you don't take the medicine, if you don't remember, repent and repeat, God will remove your light.

Now what in the world is Jesus speaking of here?

I believe it is our witness of Him!

You see, we are to be light bearers of Christ, but if we remove Him from our lives, the light of Christ will go out, our witness will be gone.

Apparently, at least in the short term, the Ephesians heeded this warning.

In the early second century (not too long after John wrote the book of Revelation), Ignatius praised the love and the doctrinal purity of the Ephesians.

This is what he wrote, ***“You, who are of the most holy Church of the Ephesians, which is so famous and celebrated throughout the world. . . . you, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit. You are complete in Christ Jesus.”*** (Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, Chapter 8. From the Ante Nicene Fathers Volume 1, page 52)

Now, as we read what Ignatius wrote, it would seem that the Ephesians returned to their first love without compromising doctrinal purity. That isn't always an easy balance to keep, but the Ephesians apparently kept it, at least for a time.

But, in the end, what happened to this church that started out so well?

Just what the Lord said would happen if they did not return to their first love, their light went out!

Make no mistake about it, when Jesus says, **“Or else”** He means it!

You can go to Ephesus today and find it in ruins, its harbors gone, the sea is some 6 miles away and unapproachable by ship.

Their witness to the world is gone and so is their city.

The Desirable One is not seen in them anymore, their light, their witness has gone out.

What is left?

A vivid reminder that God means what He says and says what He means!

VERSE 6

Here is one more commendation for the church in Ephesus – they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. What is interesting here is that Jesus says that He also hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

I am sure we don't think about that too often if ever, that Jesus hates things. I realize that many would reject that, but that is exactly what it says. We also know that Jesus hates sin, but He does love the sinner and died for us!

Now the big debate is what are these deeds of the Nicolaitans that the Ephesians hated but the church in Pergamos welcomed them into their church?

First of all, we see that Irenaeus, writing in the late second century, described what he knew of the Nicolaitans: “The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate [office of deacon] by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrifice to idols.” (*Against Heresies*, book 1, chapter 26. From the *Ante Nicene Fathers Volume 1*, page 352)

Also, Hippolytus, a student of Irenaeus, writing in the early third century, associated the Nicolaitans with the Gnostics: “There are, however, among the Gnostics diversities of opinion. . . . But Nicolaus has been a cause of the wide-spread combination of these wicked men. [He] departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating [teaching] indifference of both life and food.” (*Refutation of all Heresies*, book 7, chapter 24; ANF volume 5, page 115)

I think there is more to it than that. You see, I don’t think this is some sect or group but as you look at what the word means, I think it describes who these people are.

The Greek word can be broken down into two words.

First of all, there is NIKAO, which means “*to conquer.*”

And then we have LAOS, which means “*the people.*”

In other words, God hates those that set themselves up to be above the people, like they are closer to God.

God hates those hierarchies because it separates His people, they tend to look down upon them.

In some churches, like the Roman Catholic Church, we see this hierarchy of the Pope and Cardinals and Bishops and-so-on. In fact, we are told that the Pope is infallible.

Folks, God alone is infallible not man and Jesus says that He hates when people do that, He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans and so should we!

We are all the same in God’s eyes, we are on a level playing field you might say. One person is not more important than another. I am not more important than someone who cleans the church or is in the video room or whatever.

We may have different roles in the church, but we are not more important than anyone else. We are part of the body of Christ and Jesus is the head, He is the One who guides us and leads us in all that we do. May we not forget that!

VERSE 7

Please keep in mind that these letters, all seven of them, were read through each of these churches because they applied to individuals as well. And if you think about it, these letters are for us as well.

And notice what Jesus says here, “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. . .**” Revelation 2:7.

And the idea here is not just to hear these words, but to act upon them as well. Don’t just be hearer of God’s Word, be doers of God’s Word as James has told us. (James 1:22)

You see, if God’s Word does not become part of our life, then there is no change in us and there are consequences to our indifference to what God is saying. Here, their light would go out, their witness of Jesus would be gone.

So Jesus wants us to hear and obey what He is saying and He closes this letter with a –
PROMISE!

And this promise is to those that overcome, those who not only hear but obey these words!

Who are those who overcome?

John tells us, “**For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**” I John 5:4-5.

In other words, we overcome this world by believing in Jesus and then walking by faith where God has called us. It is not our strength or power, but His!

Now, what is the promise?

This promise to us, as overcomes, is that we will eat from the tree of life, which we saw in the Garden of Eden, but we will partake of this tree of life in the New Jerusalem, spoken of in Revelation chapter 22.

Now, in saying that, I also think there is more to it than that.

Don't get me wrong, that is going to be great, but let me share with you what I also see this tree of life representing and how we can gain this victory!

I think the tree of life for us is the cross of Calvary.

How do I know that?

Because the same Greek word that Jesus uses for "**tree**" here in Revelation 2:7 is the same Greek word that Paul uses in Galatians 3:13 where he said, "**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree').**"

And so, life is only found in Jesus who became a curse for us as He hung on that tree, the cross of Calvary paying in full the penalty for our sins.

John put it this way in I John 2:25, "**And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life.**"

That eternal life begins with Jesus and His finished work on the cross of Calvary for us!

Obviously, this is also speaking of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. But to partake of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, you must first come to Christ and receive the gift of grace that He is extending to us!

Thus, the reason I see this as the tree of life spoken of in Revelation chapter 22 is because those who have come to Christ will be with Him in Paradise or the place where God dwells!

As I begin to close this evening and knowing that the Ephesian church was warned about leaving their first love, listen to this story. We are told,

At the county fair in New England there was a continual crowd around one agricultural exhibit which excited a great deal of admiration [respect], and was the occasion of many remarks.

The exhibit was marked. ***“Raised on An Abandoned Farm.”***

The articles shown were grown by a man who had formerly followed another occupation, upon the farm in a rough hill town, which its owner had found an undesirable piece of property, and had practically deserted.

The exhibit included twenty-two varieties of potatoes, several varieties of wheat, oats, barley, rye, and beans, onions, pumpkins, squashes, melons, beats, carrots, and turnips.

The people kept the proprietor of the abandoned farm busy explaining how he produced such wonderful results.

His reply was that he took delight in farming, and did the best he could.

“O yes,” said one bystander, “he’s farming for the love of it.”

- The Youth’s Companion

Are we serving the Lord because we love Him or are we just doing the work because it has to be done?

And just one more and then I will close. We are told by Hudson Taylor what is the best, the only motive we should have in the work we do for the Lord. This is what we are told,

Hudson Taylor was interviewing some young people who had volunteered for the Lord's service.

He asked several practical questions to find out how well qualified they were for the life they were anticipating.

“And why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?”

“I want to reach others across the sea because Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” one replied.

Another said, “I want to go because millions are dying without ever having heard of Jesus, the only One who can save them.”

Others have similar answers.

Hudson Taylor looked at them thoughtfully for a moment and then said, “All of your motives are good, but I fear they will fail you in times of severe testing and tribulation - especially if you are confronted with the possibility of having to face death for your testimony.

The only motive that will enable you to remain true is stated in II Corinthians 5:14. Christ's love constraining you will keep you faithful in every situation.”

- Our Daily Bread

May the love of Christ be your motivating factor in serving Him – don't become so busy you leave your first love, Jesus!

May it be your love for the Lord that compels you to serve Him!

You see, Jesus wants a relationship with you; don't go through all the motions without the emotion for Him!

If you do, God will not honor it and like the Ephesian church, your light will go out!

Keep falling in love with Him, over and over and over and over again and the light of Christ will shine brightly in your life!

