

The Letter to the Church of Ephesus

How It All Ends

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Bible Text: Revelation 2:1-7

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Let's look at Revelation chapter 2:1 together and let us ask ourselves these questions: why does Jesus describe himself in these two ways. You might notice in chapter 2:1 he says, "These things saith he," this is how Jesus describes himself to the church at Ephesus, "I am the who has the seven stars in my right hand, and I walk in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." We're not going to guess, we're going to look here in the Scripture. We don't like guessing. We're going to look here in the Scripture and we're going to determine what does Jesus mean when he says, "I have the seven stars in my right hand." Show me a verse. Chapter 1:20? "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." So, all of a sudden, chapter 2:1 Jesus says, "Here is how I describe myself to you: I hold the angels to the seven churches right here in my right hand." Well, that's pretty significant. The reason that is significant is because we know who the angels are. We have a couple of choices, we talked about this a couple of weeks ago: either they are, no kidding, angelic beings like we think of angelic beings and every church has one assigned to it, but then how does that angel deliver the Scripture to these seven churches? Probably, the likely answer is that these angels are the pastors of those churches because "angel" remember, is not an English word. It is a Greek word. So, the English word "angel" comes from the Greek word angelos which means "messenger." So, if you wanted to translate the word instead of transliterate the word, you would say this, chapter 2:1, "These things saith he that holdeth the seven messengers in his right hand."

Then he says, "I walk in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Alright, who is that? What are the seven golden candlesticks? The churches and how do we know that they are the churches? Chapter 1:20. So, Jesus says in chapter 2:1, isn't this great, we're not guessing, we haven't gone and spent a whole lot of money on expensive books. This is how Jesus introduces himself to the church at Ephesus, "I am the one who walks amongst the churches and I am the one who holds their messengers in my hand. I hold your messenger in my right hand." Why does he say that? We have over here, that Greg says that the right hand is a symbol of strength. So, here we are, we're in a culture here where the right hand really matters.

In Psalm 80:17, God defines what Son of Man means. It means “the one who sits at my right hand.” So, if you were to see right now, if you were to go to heaven, you probably wouldn’t see two figures. That’s what Mormons would teach, you would see two figures: you would see God the Father, Elohim, and God the Son and both have a physical body. We don’t believe that. We believe God is a Spirit and he revealed himself permanently in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. So, if you were to go to heaven, you wouldn’t see two physical beings right there, probably one man and another man sitting at his right hand but for Jesus to say, “I have you in my right hand,” when he is sitting, during this time, well, he’s walking amongst the candlesticks but as he gave the vision to John, but right now he is seated at the Father’s right hand. That’s a place of power. For him to say, “I have your messengers right here in a place of power,” then you can understand some things.

What are some things throughout history where this could have gone to the heads of people who are in Christ’s right hand? Help me out? What kind of church leadership abuse has taken place in times past because, “Hey, I’m in Christ’s right hand.” Crusades. Constantine. How about all the Roman Catholic abuse or speaking ex cathedra? So, we have a lot of things but what Christ is saying is, “I’m walking among your church and I hold your pastors in my right hand.” Now, when does that change? “I hold your messengers in my right hand.” When does this change? Well, we’re going to move on and talk more about this. By the way, it should give you some sort of confidence when you say the Christian world view, we are saying, if Christ were here today, this is how he would see it. Well, how does Christ see your pastor? And the answer is: he sees your pastor or pastors as being right here in his right hand as he walks in the midst of the church. Think about what that symbolism talks about. It says, “Christ walks among the churches with your messenger in his right hand.” That means a good, well functioning church, you have a pastor or pastors who are in touch with the head of the church, Jesus Christ, and you sense his presence in your church because he’s walking in it. If you don’t sense Christ’s presence in your church, perhaps one of the reasons is because he is not holding your messenger in his right hand.

By the way, don’t get this crazy idea that it has some idea that you could lose your salvation. That’s not at all what we’re talking about. Be real careful about taking Scriptures from two different parts of the Bible and putting them together. Okay? Be real careful about that because if you’re thinking like I am, you have this John 10:28 where Jesus says, “I give unto them eternal life and no man will be able to pluck them out of my hand.” Two completely different contexts. We’re not dealing here with, “Oh, by the way, if you are lucky enough to be a pastor, you can also lose your salvation.” We’re not dealing with that at all. But, you’re going to see later on that Christ says, “Repent or else I’m going to remove your candlestick out of my presence.” So, we need to talk about what does that mean? We’re going to talk about it.

So, what does it mean for Christ to say, “I walk among the candlesticks?” For time’s sake, I would prefer that instead of you turning, I would prefer that right next to chapter 2:1 you write down Leviticus 26:11-13. Go ahead, it’s okay. You can write in the margin of your Bible. The Lord is not going to drop a meteor on your house, there is no problem

with writing on the pages of your Bible if you're doing it in an act of worship to know him better. He says in Leviticus 26 that he promised his people that, "I will walk among you." And we are seeing a fulfillment of that, in part, when Christ walks among his church. Have you ever been in a church where Christ was not present? They talk about Christ, they mention him in prayers, they mention him in Bible lessons, they mention him in preaching but he is nowhere around. You can tell he's nowhere around. He's not within a hundred miles of there. You know he's not. The people are not sweet in their spirit. There is no conviction when the preaching happens. There is no amount of sweetness in the prayer. People are all cliché-like. You know what I'm saying, don't you? You've been to one or two of those places, I have to. Mostly on vacation. You finally get a man to go to church on vacation, right, and then he steps into a place and you fall asleep during the preaching, that kind of thing. I know some of you are very much afraid of going to church when you're on vacation because you know you're not going to find one like Berean and yet you are obligated to worship with God's people even on vacation. If I made you mad, file it away. Just see your Senator. Don't disgrace the Lord on his day even if you're at the beach.

Look at chapter 2:2, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience. What did this church have in common with John? Let's keep reading, "You have labor, 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." Look in chapter 2:2, what does this church, this Ephesian church, have in common with John? Now, you might have to look back at chapter 1 to get an idea. You might have to look at chapter 1:9, in particular, to get an idea what this church has in common with this Apostle. Anyone? Patience. You might notice that patience is a lot of what they have in common. Look here, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience." Patience is one of the three over-riding themes in the book of Revelation.

Look, it's mentioned right here and you're going to see that "this is the patience of the saints. They shall walk with me in white." Patience is a big deal to God. Now, I know we think we're patient when we're waiting out in the van at Wal-Mart and Momma's just going to get a quick thing or two. She's got to walk a half mile to get to the milk so I understand it taking a little while longer. It's not exactly like Stop-N-Go where you walk in and pay \$7 for it. I guess it's not that expensive here. It was \$5 for a half gallon in Hawaii but, in any case, you go to Wal-Mart and you've got to put on your running shoes to get a gallon of milk and it's not because people are chasing you, either. But that might turn out that way, especially this one on Skybow. "No, I don't have any money. No, I don't want to give. No, leave me alone. No, I can't, I don't have spare change. Nothing. I don't have anything. Pull up your pants."

Chapter 2:2, they've got all these things in common: patience and patience. John says, "You know, I feel real close with this church at Ephesus because we're both enduring things for the testimony of Jesus." We heard a lot about that this weekend, men, so I won't belabor the point but I'm thinking looking around through this chapel, I'm thinking probably half of you weren't there and there's a special kindred among people who have

suffered for Jesus. You know how it is, if family is disgraced to you and run away from you and won't talk to you, that it is a mild taste of persecution but it is persecution nonetheless. You are missing out on people's love because you love Jesus Christ. And John says, "You know what? You have endured that, you have works, you have patience." Look at the middle of verse 2. You want to talk about a church that's been accused of judgmentalism, how about this one? Look at it, you have found them that say that they..."you cannot bear those who are evil." That sounds like church discipline to me, folks. And yet, one of the most well-known verses on the globe is "judge not that you be not judged." Well, this is a church that had to make some judgments to be able to say, "you're evil, you won't repent, you can't be here."

Now, you say that in America, "I can't believe that church says I can't be there. I can go anywhere I want." No, you can't. This is not public property. You can't just say that this is my joint and it's my right to go to church. No, it's not your right to go to church. This is a private organization on private property and it is a privilege to be a part of the membership. Right out here, about a month and a half ago, we had a person who is a member of the church, six years ago, show up. Six years ago, everyone do some math with me: can you imagine someone who in 2006 was the last time they were here, they show up and they say, "I'm a member here." No, you're not. We have this thing in our constitution that says that if you're not here for six months, other than a deployment, you're not a member automatically.

So, a sweet, normal, diplomatic, tactful Bill Sturm sort of way, she said, "I know exactly where I'm at and my husband is parking the car. We were members. We're still members but we haven't been here in six years." And so, immediately the chain on my bulldog neck just tightens up and I just want to get crazy but then I thought, "No, no, no. The love of Christ. Be patient." And so I said, "What class are you going to this morning?" She said, "Well, I'm going over to this class over here." I said, "Oh, ok, I'll take you." She said, "I know where it's at." I said, "I still need to go with you." And I said to her, "You need to understand that if you haven't been here in over six months, other than the fact you left because the new pastor came and you were angry, you're just simply not a member. I'm sorry." And she said, "Well, I wouldn't go to a church that took me off their roll without me telling them to, anyway." Without you telling them to? Welcome to the world of "you're not in charge."

We have here in Revelation 2:2, a church full of people who understood, "You don't belong here if you don't serve Christ." If you want to be religious and check your little box, hit the road. There are other churches you can do that at. We could throw a stone from the steeple and hit seventeen Baptist churches. You can find one that can bare those who are evil and they'll let you be a deacon. They'll let you be a Sunday School teacher. They'll let you be an usher. They'll let you, probably, pastor the church if you show up on the right day. So, there are plenty of churches that will bear those who are evil and Ephesus was not one of them. Those of you who are still listening, I don't how I got on that.

“And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” What a judgmental church! They looked at people and said, “You’re a liar.” So, we have these people: they won’t put up with evil people and they won’t put up with false preachers, false apostles. They said, “You call us judgmental if you want to, but Scripture says this. You’re saying this. Hit the door.” So, they would’ve been accused of being judgmental.

Let’s look at chapter 2:3, “And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.” Look, he’s said “you have patience” twice. That was a big deal to John. “You weren’t looking for the next thing. As soon as tough time came, you weren’t sitting back in your dark room staring at the wall and humming music like you’re blowing through a,” let’s see if you can get this right, “a didgeridoo.” Does anyone know what a didgeridoo is? Those long things that make this deep hum. You know, “I’m depressed. I’m not going to church.” John said, “You’re nothing like that. When bad things happen to you for Jesus, you just decide that this is my lot. I suffer for the Lord because I’m a Christian and I love Jesus.” That’s just their deal.

Look at verse 4, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” Now, we need to talk about that because I’ve heard probably 5 or 6 preaching messages in my life on this verse and I could whip off 4 names, at least, right now, messages I’ve heard because I’ve been in church a minute or two. I’ve heard a lot of messages on this verse. “You left your first love,” and all of a sudden, you get everything. You could pull out 17 commentaries and you’d get 20 different opinions. Yes, I said that right because some of those commentaries are saying, “Here’s what some say. Here’s what some say. I don’t really know what I believe.” Why are you writing books then?

So, you’ve got this “what is this first love?” “Well, it’s soul winning. No, it’s the King James Bible.” And you’ve got all this crazy nonsense out there and here’s what I say, I think we ought to find out what God says the first love is. Want to? Alright, let’s do that. So, hold your place here and let’s look back at Jeremiah 2. What is a first love? Is it Nascar? Is it hot wings? Is it your favorite Bible with the wide margins? Is it the padded pew on the third row on the fourth aisle? Which is it? What is your first love because you’ve left it and some of you think that it is the pew because you leave your Bible here all week. What is my problem?

Jeremiah 2:1, “Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” He said, “I remember Israel. I remember when we were engaged and you loved me.” He says, “You’ve lost that little honeymoon sort of puppy love for me,” is what God said there in Jeremiah 2:2.

So, we don’t have to go look everywhere for the answer. This is Bible study and God says, “I’ve already talked about this. And do you want to know what it means for me to walk among the church? Look in Leviticus. Do you want to know what it means for someone to have a first love? Look in Jeremiah.” God comments the best on his own

Word. So, I would write Jeremiah 2:2 next to Revelation 2:4 in your Bible. What is the first love? It's the love you had when you first found Jesus, when Jesus first found you, when you first exchanged your vows, when you first believed on Christ and you couldn't wait to get to church and you couldn't wait to open your Bible and you couldn't wait to bow your head and say, "God, I love you." That's what we're talking about here.

And God says, listen to this now, think about this contrast folks, he says to the church at Ephesus, "You do this great. You have church discipline. You don't let the phony Maroney preachers preach in your pulpits. You don't let them lead your Bible studies. You don't let fornicators and adulterers and idolaters worship with you. You found them that are evil. You can't bear with them. You don't let drunks hang out in your church without you rebuking them for their sin." Now, some of you think that that is not love, but God said that is good church stuff.

He says, "But here's what I have problem with: you don't love me like you used to. Back when we first met, back when we were engaged, back when you were trying to pursue me, you don't love me like that anymore." And Jesus says that if you don't repent, in verse 5, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." The first works has that same idea: do what you did to get my attention at the beginning. Remember what it was: "God, if you get me out of this I promise I'll be a preacher, I'll go wear a toga in Africa and blah, blah, blah." Remember all those promises? "I promise if you get me out of this horrible test, I'll go and stand on my head in the town square and I will preach for 45 minutes and I'll let them throw Jolly Rancher candy at me." All these amazing promises, "God, get me out of this cold night." A lot of army guys have said that. "Lord, just help me make it through this night and I promise I will serve you." All these promises and Jesus says, "Look, hold your promises. I want your first love which will produce the first works."

So, he says in verse 5, "If you don't do that, if you don't repent." Some of us think that repentance is only for unbelievers. "I don't want to go to hell anymore so I'm going to believe on Jesus." No, it's for believers also. Repent, change your mind about this thing. You need to turn around and head back.

Yes, Brother Dick. (...) Well said. And so, in our desire, probably the Ephesian church got a little prideful, you think? And here's what they enjoyed: they are the kind of people that when they talked to the Jehovah's Witnesses on their front doorstep, they weren't interested in their soul, they were interested in winning an argument. I've been there. I have been there, friends. I don't want to read my Bible because it will get me closer to Jesus, I want to read my Bible because I want to be able to say I read my Bible. I want to be able to brag about the fact that I haven't missed so many days since I was whatever age, had my devotions and that's where the Ephesian church was. By the way, please notice, he isn't saying, "Oh, and you know what, I really wish that you'd quit being such good folks." No, he said, "Keep the good works and add the motivation that was there at the beginning." Right?

So, let me ask you what does it mean by removing the candlestick in chapter 2:5? Does anyone have any idea? What is the candlestick again? It's the church and he said, "I will remove thy candlestick." So, one of those seven candlesticks. Yes, I know it's probably seven menorahs, I got that, someone was just dying to say that. I got it. So, there's seven menorahs and each one probably represented each of the seven churches. And Jesus says, "Repent and love me like you did at first or I'm going to take your candlestick out of my presence." What does that mean? Everyone in the church lost their salvation? What does it mean? (...) It seems like it says, "I will remove your candlestick out of his place except thou repent." So, this Ephesian church had a particular function, a particular place to fill and Jesus says, "You love me like you did at the beginning or I'm going to take you out of your place." What does that mean? Help me out? It's a corporate idea. It means it might say "church" on the sign and you might have someone you call the pastor, but you are not a church. You are an organization that meets on a regular basis and you talk about super-duper things.

Corbin? (...) Well, I think that it might mean that. It also might mean that they relocated. My first guess and, by the way, that sounds lame to some of you but in studying a guy by the name of Shubal Stearns, that almost sounds like a comic strip guy, doesn't it, Shubal Stearns. He started the first Baptist church in North Carolina. It's about an hour and a half north of here. It's right off of highway 421 between Sanford and Greensboro and it's called Sandy Creek Baptist Church. In 17 years time, they planted 42 churches out of that church in the mid-1700s. You can still go there and see the old meetinghouse that was built in 1764. You can see it's about five miles off of 421. First Baptist church in North Carolina, I think started 1748.

In any case, that church started lots of churches. They started Deep Knee Church, Little Creek Church, Black River Church, whatever. A lot of them were just transplants of the previous church because either the cattle needed more grazing and so they moved it, or the frontier was moving further West and so the churches moved further West. So, it's possible that this church in Ephesus was a lot like those other churches and quite possibly, that it relocated. However, I think that's unlikely. I think the probable thing is that they did, indeed, at some point, lose their love for Jesus and so Jesus finally said, "Okay, I'll use someone else in your place."

Any other questions? No. Okay, let's move forward. Look at verse 6, "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans." What is a Nicolaitan? (...) No, ma'am. He says that he hates the works of the Nicolaitans. It comes from two words. Nico and laity or Nike and laity or conquering the laity or conquering the church members. So, there was a particular group of people out there that set the pastors way up here and the members way down there.

Yes? (...) I don't and the reason I don't is because the etymology of this word is really straightforward. It just comes from two words and Nicholas, I don't think has that word building, that etymology there. (...) I don't know. I'll check on that.

Can we go to that slide that has Francis Shaeffer on it, please? Can you go to that. Here is a guy. He's pretty, isn't he? He attended Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. That is a Presbyterian seminary and he taught there and he has influenced a lot of the writers of today. He blames America's drift toward secularism and injustice to the Christian community's failure to apply its worldview to every facet of society. Let me say that again: he says it is our fault that America is going down the toilet because when we have an opportunity to answer, we rarely think first what does the Bible say?

I don't know if you've had the pleasure or displeasure of listening to any of my commentaries on Sermon Audio. The truth is, after I'm done reading the article, I don't have anything to say other than, "What does Scripture say here?" Because the truth is, it doesn't matter what I think, Joe. It does not matter what I think and just to be really sweet and equal opportunity here, in the grand scheme of things it doesn't matter what you think either. We should be really interested in a Bible worldview of how does God see pastors? Does he see them as people who conquer the laity? No, verse 6 is very clear.

Now, in verse 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." So, I need to get forward to that, what does an overcomer overcome? Any ideas? Chapter 12:11 talks about these people overcoming the dragon, who is Satan. In chapter 15:2 it talks about them overcoming the beast which we will find out later is known as the antichrist. So, please know that this is not a proof text for smoking cigarettes or getting tattoos. "Well, see, if you'd just overcome, blah, blah, blah." I promise you I've heard it all. I promise you. Maybe I'll find out today that I haven't but a lot of people say, "If you don't overcome particular sins in your life you're not saved. It says so right here." No, because in the book of Revelation, we have this wonderful thing known as context and in context, in chapter 12:11, it says, "And they overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony and they loved not their own life even to death," talking about the dragon. In chapter 15:2, it talks about these overcomers overcoming the beast and the false prophet. So, we're not free to just throw anything in there and call it a day.

Last question: it says that if you are an overcomer, the readers of this book, if you're an overcomer you get to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Quick question: where have we seen that before? The Garden of Eden. So, the tree of life still exists and so does Eden. Where? We will see in another lesson.

Let's pray.

God, thanks for the opportunity to study your Word. Please help it to change us. Help us to be changeable. Help us to be malleable. And, Lord, when we don't want to change, give us the desire to change. Draw us after you and we'll run after you. Turn us and we will be turned that your people might rejoice in thee. I pray you'd bless the service to follow and keep those who are in the 8:30 worship safe on their way home. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Before I let you go, right over here, Justin and Erin, it's your last Sunday with us, right? So, go by and say "Howdy" to them and thanks for coming. They've been here, what? Three years? So, they are leaving.