

# The Voice of Truth # 472

## The Seven Churches of Asia

In the opening of our message today, let's notice the correct division of the book of Revelation, open your Bible, at Revelation 1:19. Here we have the divine outline as given by the risen Lord himself to the Apostle John, Revelation 1:19. Let's read.

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter, or following the things which are. The things which thou hast seen is the first division of the book and comprises the first chapter. Here we have the vision of the risen Lord as judge-priest who is now walking in the midst of the churches. Now, if you haven't ordered these messages and you haven't heard those first three, by all means you ought to have them.

Then second, the things which are, follow in chapters two and three and form the second division of the book. Herein we find the messages of the risen Lord to the seven churches in Asia, which outline the history of the professing church from Pentecost to his second coming. Third, the things which shall be hereafter, is the third division of the book and are set forth in chapters 4 through 22. Herein are described events and the revelation of our Lord that will take place after the church shall have been caught away to be with Christ as recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This is the God-given outline of the book, and it is a fact that is absolutely necessary to the understanding of the book of Revelation. Now, my friend, if you ignore Revelation 1:19, I don't know that you can understand the book of Revelation at all.

Our subject today is the seven churches of Asia. Revelation 1:4 says, John to the seven churches which are in Asia. This statement is repeated in verse 11, where John was commanded, **What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.** Then in the 11th verse he goes on to name those seven distinct local churches Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Now my friends if you ever listen, you listen this morning to this message will you, on the seven churches. I'm giving you an introductory

message to the study of the letters that Christ dictated directly and personally to John and are to be sent to the seven churches.

Let's first notice the meaning of the word church. It is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means the called out of or called out from. Literally the word church means assembly. The heathen Greeks used it to mean the select assemblies of the free citizens, convened for the transaction of public affairs. Stephen used it in Acts 7:38 to denote the congregation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, which had been called out of Egypt. Throughout the entire New Testament, the gospel speaks of a calling and an election, and the church or assembly is the organized society of the called and elected. We may say it is the assembly of those whom God has elected and called out from the world in fellowship with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, of such a local, true, New Testament church, Christ is the head, and it is led, get it now, it is led and governed by one, authorized, called, and commissioned minister, under the absolute leadership of the Holy Spirit. The world never puts its stamp of approval on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now let me call your attention briefly to the location of these churches. They were located in well-known cities of Asia Minor, which all lay within the scope of a few hundred miles north of the Mediterranean Sea and east of the outlet of the Black Sea, they are called here the Seven Churches of Asia. The name Asia does not refer to the great continent of Asia or even to Asia Minor, but to only a small western province of Asia Minor. The whole territory was no larger than the state of Louisiana. The Seven Churches of Asia do not include all the churches that were located in this era, the Lord Jesus Christ, get it now, selected these seven local New Testament churches for the definite purpose of setting forth certain great facts regarding his church throughout the entire period of church history. Now that's important to know.

Now let's notice the significance of these seven churches. Let me ask the question, what is the significance of these seven churches? And why the number seven in the first place? Let me say that what John is commanded to write to one church, he's commanded to send all seven churches. So, the seven churches in the second and third chapters of Revelation are meant to comprise all the

churches in the world, as well as the church of all ages. And the message to these churches has been the message of Christ to all his churches throughout this entire church age. Now, do not forget that, my friend. That's well to know. The thing I've noticed through the years is that this scripture, in Revelation 2 and 3, is not read in the churches today. To my knowledge, they have never been used in the International Sunday School lesson series. Also, in the majority of the commentaries on the book of Revelation that I've examined, these two chapters are either ignored or passed over lightly and treated as if they were not significant. These two chapters contain Christ's direct, definite message of all centuries to his church at all times and should be read and meditated upon and preached and memorized by every preacher in all ages. But Satan has succeeded in casting a veil over them until the present-day ministry knows nothing about Christ's message contained in these scriptures for the heart and life of the preacher and his church. It is the most appalling situation we've ever faced today. Go get your red-letter Bible, and you'll notice that these two chapters are printed entirely in red, just as the parables and the Sermon on the Mount are. Why has the minister neglected reading, studying, hearing, and preaching the messages contained in these first three chapters of the book of Revelation? I'll let you answer that. Why haven't you done it?

To more clearly understand the significance of these seven churches, let's look at the sacred significance of the number seven. First of all, let me call your attention to the fact that the Bible as well as all nature, is built around a strict numerical structure. When you study nature especially, you'll find that everything in all the creation is governed by numerics, or mathematical and scientific law. The numerical structure is evident throughout the entire Bible, and the book of Revelation is written largely around the number seven, and the whole Bible and nature are built around numbers. That's the reason I know that the author of the Bible is the same one who is the creator of the universe. Now, my friend, you ponder that great truth.

Let's begin with number one to show you what we mean here. This is the source of all numbers. Number one stands for God and the absoluteness of his being, in which the whole Godhead and all things stand. There is one God, and there is none other but He. We might say that the number one expresses the beginning,

and God is the beginning, and by Him all things consist. One stands for the absolute unity in heaven, yet the Godhead is set forth as the triune God. The one three and the three one or, the three in unity.

The number two stands for Christ. Now get this significance. The number two stands for Christ. And it is not complete in itself. The Godhead would be incomplete with only two persons or only one. Therefore, number three is the number of individual completion and stands for the Trinity. Man is a Trinity, body, soul, and spirit. The family is a Trinity, husband, wife, and child.

Number four is the number of the world. There are four elements, fire, air, earth, water. There are four points of the compass, north, east, south, and west. There are four seasons, a spring, summer, fall, winter. Ezekiel's vision of the cherubims, four in number, four wheels, four sides, four faces, four wings. The square and the cube are fourfold. The number four is prevalent through all of nature.

Five stands for the perfect, 3 with the imperfect 2. Man has 5 toes and 5 fingers. There were 5 wise virgins and 5 foolish virgins. There are 5 senses. You study these numbers, will you? Then 6 is the number of man, or the number of imperfection, because it falls short of 7. The number of the Antichrist will be 666. Nebuchadnezzar made an image of Gold, 6 cubits broad and 60 cubits high, we might say 6 is the satanic number. Then the number 7 represents fullness or consummation. We may say it is the divine number because it is the divine 3 plus the 4 of the world, making 7. Therefore, the number 7 is always connected with whatever touches the covenant between God and man. We might call it the sacred number and it reaches to the beginning of all things when the Lord restored this earth in six days and hallowed the seventh day and rested. It always occurs, get it now, in cases of union between God and man, and represents the holy in the earthly.

Now then, looking at the book of Revelation, which is the book of the consummation of all God's dealings with mankind, we find that it is a book of sevens. It consists of seven churches, seven visions, seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven lamps of fire, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes of the Lamb, seven angels with seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven heads of the beast, seven crowns upon those heads, seven plagues, seven bowls of the wrath of God, seven

mountains, the seven new things. It is the book of sevens because it is the book of the fullness of everything that it talks about. It sets forth the consummation of the day of man. It is the number of fullness of completeness with nothing left out, nothing added to it. We could go on showing the other numbers and so on, but this will suffice. This will give you some idea of what we are dealing with here in the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation being woven around the number seven is not an invention of men, but the expression of God in his word.

Therefore, the book of Revelation is the book of consummation. In our text, the seven churches of Asia presents just one of these seven fold aspects of a complete revelation because the significance of this number is the unmistakable character of completeness. We have already noted that the seven spirits which are before the throne are the one Holy Spirit in all the fullness and completeness of his offices and power in his work of making Christ known to the hearts of men. So, we understand the seven churches All those seven distinct local churches are the one complete church in its entire history from the time of John's vision to the end of the church age. Now, my friend, you're going to have to understand that. And if you catch that, you'll understand the book. It'll just open right up to you.

Now, this does not conflict with the fact that these were literal historical churches in existence at the time John wrote down the revelation. There were other churches in existing, namely Colossae, Antioch, Alexandria, Corinth, Rome, and many others elsewhere, some of them larger and more powerful than any of these named here. Did not all the churches need to be counseled with, instructed, rebuked, and taught? Certainly, but they all were included, get it now, but they were all included in this sevenfold classification just as we today are included among those seven churches. Note, my friend, that the instructions given to those seven churches are for us today. And may every one of us, especially us preachers, read them, study them, and ask God to unfold the message in them for us now. Therefore, these seven churches are representative of all the churches and embrace the entire fullness of the church age. Now, if you get that truth, then you'll begin to understand the book of Revelation.

In connection with this thought, let me call your attention to this fact. At the close of each of these letters, you'll find the words, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Here we find a sevenfold admonition

written seven times as it were in boxcar letters and affixed to each of the seven epistles. Thus, each individual, pastor and church, were directed to pay attention to the contents of every letter of the whole seven as it was circulated among them in the order dictated to John in that eleventh verse. The Lord himself therefore, informs us that these letters are all applicable to the church in every age, and they give the mind of Christ to his churches. Let me call your attention to Revelation 1:20, the mystery of the seven stars, which thou sawest in my right hand. That word **mystery**, as applied to the ministers and the churches, has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface. A mystery in Scripture is simply that which is undiscoverable by mere human reason and has to be revealed by divine agency, and it continues to be a mystery after it's been revealed and understood, because the unfolding of the mystery by divine agency does not change the divine eternal truth.

And my friends, it means that not these seven churches alone, but the churches of all ages are included in these letters. That's right. That's right. Now let me call your attention to another great fact that I see in that number seven, referring to the church age, that is that the seven churches mentioned here represent seven distinct phases or clear-cut periods in church history beginning from the time of the apostles down to the coming of Christ again for his church. These characteristics are set forth to a certain degree in the names of these churches.

Then the characteristics are set forth more fully in the letters themselves. For instance, the period described by the letter to the Ephesian church was a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, and the detention that began by them leaving their first love, that is, leaving Christ, who was their first love. False professors began to take over, and there began to arise the exaltation of the clergy over the laity. Martyrdom ushered in the second church period, as designated by the church at Smyrna, and so on. As you study each one of these letters, you'll find that the outstanding characteristic of that particular letter is applied to a certain characteristic of the church period. This continued up until the age of Luther, that is, the church at Philadelphia, and then you see that each one of these letters describe a certain period of church history down to the present time, in which we living today, all of it has given away to the Laodicean age of lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, religious empty profession, false peace,

believing a lie, and living under strong delusion. We are hastening to the day of judgment, which will find the unthinking multitudes, who think they are Christians and prepared to die, but are not, lost and on the road to hell. Preachers, evangelists, church members, Bible teachers, by the wholesale. That's the period in which we're living today. My friend, we are now living in the Laodicean age, the age of inter-religious profession, profession without possession, church membership without Christ. It's tragic indeed, isn't it?

Do you know Christ? Do you know Him?

Another thing I notice here, these seven churches represent varieties of professed Christians, both true and false. Therefore, we find the seven churches in every church, and as we study them, that truth will unveil to us as we take up each letter beginning next Lord's Day. And as we look more closely at these seven letters in Revelations chapter 2 and 3, we find them to be direct messages, now you get this, from our absent Lord, yet at the same time, they are pungent sentences of a present judge who walks among the churches engaged in the most solemn act of inspection, either in commendation or condemnation. These messages are exclusively Christ's own words and are his last words that we have directly from him. They ought to be solemn words. They are. They are sacred words. You know, we always hang on to the last words that an individual speaks before he dies. And these are the last words of our risen Lord. And we'll never hear him again until he comes from glory. Now you get that, friend. And you ought to read that. Why? Why don't we do it? Why do we pay so little attention to those letters? Why don't we study them? Well, you answer that question. I believe if you knew the Lord, you would.

Now, let's notice the structure of these letters. We find each one embraces seven distinct parts. I come back to a number seven. First, there's an address to the pastor of the church. Second, we see some outstanding attribute of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thirdly, we notice his complete knowledge of the church, her duties, her doings, and the members of the church addressed. In the fourth place, we find a very curt description of the state of each church with such praise or promise or censure or admonition as each church required. We have a reference to his second coming. And that is in every letter. Six, there is a universal command to

hear, listen, stop and be quiet before the Lord. And the seventh place, we find an outstanding promise to the overcomer or the victor or the victor. So, you see, every letter follows a particular order. You sit down and go through there and enumerate that, will you?

Now let me call your attention to another characteristic of these letters as found in the second and third chapters of Revelation. And we find that Christ addresses every letter to the minister or the pastor in charge of that church. Now, if you haven't listened before, now prick up your ears and listen. He does not address that letter directly to the church, but he does address it to the pastor of the church. I know that what he was saying here was not meant only for the pastor, but for the entire church. But here's a fact I want to call your attention to, my friend, and that is that every church had its God-called, God-commissioned, God-anointed minister in addressing, and in addressing that minister, he addressed the church. In describing that minister, he described the church, like people, like priests. The pastor is the embodiment of the church. You cannot separate Christ, the pastor, the message, and the ministry of the church. The reputation of the pastor is the reputation of the church. The church does not rise any higher than the pastor in devotion to Christ, in prayer life, holy living, in zeal, in knowledge, in compassion for the lost, or in giving. God holds the pastor responsible for the church of which He's overseer! Now what kind of a man are you, pastor? And I'll tell you what kind of a church you have.

In dealing with his church, Christ deals directly with the pastor and leads that pastor through her, leads that church through her pastor. God doesn't lead a pastor, or a church through a board of deacons. He doesn't lead a church through the laity. He doesn't lead a church through a petticoat. The pastor is to preach the word, reprove, rebuke, exhort! He has to get his message directly from the Lord, and as God's ambassador, he's to carry God's message irrespective of what the world thinks or says, or how they may treat him. He is a foreign ambassador representing the court of heaven. He is not to become entangled with politics or the affairs of this life in any way. He is to deliver God's message as a dying man to dying men, and if need be, seal his testimony with his blood. You know these so-called preachers who skip, hop, and jump over the nation, and these who are marching, as they say, in the interest of civil rights, have never been called of God.



They are nothing but a bunch of infidels, and when they die, it'll just be one more face in hell. God pity our nation that has to put up with such nonsense as we face today from preachers. I've never seen the like in my life. I'm raising my voice over the nation against such rotten nonsense. Preachers- preach God's Word. You know, as a result of that thing, our people do not know what to do. Fear grips the heart of our people all over this nation, that we ought to stand by and see a bunch of preachers marching, skip hoppin' jumpin' over this nation, calling themselves preachers. God pity such a bunch of infidels.

The preacher's not to lord it over God's heritage, but he is to be the servant of Jehovah. The pastor is to hear for the church, the pastor is to receive for the church, the pastors to answer for the church that's been committed to his care.

Preacher, tune that ear to the Lord of Heaven, and hear what the Spirit says unto the churches. The pastor is the chief, the guardian, the watchman, the over and under shepherd of the flock. He is the ruler of the church. He is to receive the word of God at the mouth of the Lord and present it faithfully to his people to be accepted, observed, obeyed as unto Christ. Now that's what those seven letters there teaches. You read them.

The Seven Churches of Asia. #472