

Revelation Unraveled Part 4 – Ephesus & Smyrna

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. Berean Sunday School Class 2/12/2017

† Revelation 2:1-11

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.

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.

As we continue with part 4 of our Revelation Unraveled Bible study, we are going to examine Revelation 2:1-11, Lord willing. These 11 verses cover 2 of the 7 Churches that the letters were written to; Ephesus, and Smyrna.

The church at Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul and would be considered the chief church of the 7 because the other 6 churches were started off of this one. According to the Book of **Acts, chapter 20:31**, Paul spent 3 years there:

31 *Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

This church was started out with some strong leadership, Priscilla and Aquilla, Appollos, Paul, Timothy, John, all at some point were involved in the ministry of Ephesus. So, they were strong from the beginning. History tells us that John spent much of his late ministry in Ephesus even being the overseer or pastor of the Church, and that he died in Ephesus.

Ephesus was where Paul's handkerchiefs healed people and cast out evil spirits. This was the place they burned all of their magic and evil books. This was the city where one of the 7 wonders of the world was, the Temple of Diana, where some of

the most evil and disgusting forms of worship were displayed 24-hours a day. It was a cesspool of nasty.

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;

We've already established in Chapter one that the one that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, and who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, is the Lord Jesus holding the 7 ministers or pastors of the 7 churches and the Lord is in the midst of them.

John is told to write these things down that he about to hear and let the minister of Ephesus read it. The previous letter that we know of that was written to the church at Ephesus, was Paul's epistle, which is our Book of Ephesians. It had been about 40-years since they had received Paul's letter.

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.

The Lord starts out by saying good things about the church. It is always nice to hear the good news first. This shows that the Lord loved them and that he recognized they had many good things about them. I always like that, don't you? I've never liked for someone to just immediately light into me telling me how bad I do things. Butter me up some first. Tell me that you noticed that I'm at least trying before you lower the boom.

That's what Jesus does. He tells them that they are labourers, have great patience, they hate evil, and they have examined everyone that claimed to be an apostle and found out the truth about them. They were doing a very good job with religion. These were not pew warmers at Ephesus but people that had a great desire to see the Lord's work accomplished. They participated in every function of the church, carried out every tradition and ritual. As far as a church that had it going on, they had it going on. They had been taught well and they practiced what they were taught.

Please remember that this church was an actual church that was real in the time this was written. This wasn't a hypothetical piece or allegory but it was written to a real church with real people for a real purpose. However; this church is also representative of all churches. So even though it was written to a specific group of people, it also applies to our church today as a Biblical lesson from the Lord.

In fact, all 7 of the churches here were real but the message applies to churches today. We need to heed to the warnings that these churches were given unless we too become like them.

4 Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Now we get to the "nevertheless" part. Can't you just imagine as someone read this letter out loud to the congregation for the first time and they start out reading about all of the great things they have done and are doing and how the Lord recognizes everything they are doing. My, but how they must have been walking on air at that

time. But, while they were doing their celebration dance, the Lord gives them a “nevertheless.” Huh, oh!

He says, “I have somewhat against thee.” Oh no, what does he mean? We were doing so good! Friend, have you ever been there? I mean, you are doing everything you can to live the Christian life, you are reading your Bible daily, you are praying 3 times a day, you are going to church every time the door is open, you are witnessing to people, handing out Bible tracts, you are just being Super Christian. Then the Lord slaps you upside the head with a “nevertheless.” I know there are people outside this church that has things against it. Some people don’t like us because we sing out the old Red Book. Some don’t like us because we only use the Authorized King James Version of the Bible. Some don’t like us because we pray too much. Some don’t like us because we still adhere to the old-fashioned style of worship. Friends, I’m alright with that. If you don’t like our church because you’ve got something against it, that will be okay. But, if the Lord has something against our church then we better be changing our ways!

He says “nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love.” Boy, if that doesn’t get your attention, nothing will. There’s nothing worse than to be accused of not loving someone that you claim to love. Husbands, what if you went to your wife and said, “*Honey, I just don’t love you anymore but we’re still going to carry on our relationship as before. I’ll work and bring home the money, you cook and clean, we’ll keep doing what we’ve always done but, I just don’t love you.*” Wow, you would be totally floored.

The church at Ephesus was still going through the motions. They were doing everything that was expected of them. Carrying out every service, every tradition, every ritual, doing it by the book. They were crossing the T’s and dotting the I’s, they had religion down pat. But, the problem was they were just doing it out of routine and not because of the burning desire and passion that they had for the Lord. It didn’t matter if the Lord showed up or not as long as they kept up appearances. As long as they looked good on the outside, everything would be okay. But Jesus said, “I have somewhat against thee!” You don’t love me anymore. You don’t hold my hand anymore, you don’t give me kisses anymore, you don’t write me letters anymore, you never tell me that you love me. You just clock in and clock out.

Oh, dear Church, are we in danger of leaving our first love? Are we in danger of just opening the doors on Sunday morning, evening, and Wednesday evening, and out of habit coming in and sitting on the same pew week in and week out because we know it’s what we ought to do? Or are we coming in here with our hearts overflowing, butterflies in our stomachs, eager to hear from our Lord? Just so in love with Him that we think we are going to explode.

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.

Jesus then gives them an ultimatum. He says, you better do some serious soul searching and remember how things used to be, repent of your wickedness, and come back to me and love me or else I’ll cut you off. I’ll destroy you. I’ll wipe you out. There won’t be nothing left but a black spot on the ground where you once were. I’ll hang a for sale sign on your front door and shut you down!

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now, who the Nicolaitans were is not really mentioned in the Bible. There are only 2 references to them and both are here in Revelation chapter 2. Once here in verse 6 and once in verse 15. One thing is for sure, the Lord hates their deeds and their doctrine. Some people believe that they derived from the deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5 who was named Nicolas. They claim that he was a deacon that went rogue and began teaching heresy and wicked perverse doctrine. I’m not going to state that as fact because the Bible does not say that and honestly, I don’t believe it. It’s not really important to know who they were but we can rest assured the Lord hated their deeds and their doctrine so whoever they were they were not right.

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.

Then he ends the letter to Ephesus the same way he ends all 7 of the letters to the churches, “he that hath an ear, let him hear.” In other words, you best be listening to what I’m saying. If you know what is good for you, you will open up your ears and listen to what the Spirit saith. -- To him that overcometh is referring to those that are Christians. **In 1 John 5:4-5, the Apostle John writes: *4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*** -- Who are those that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Those are the saved.

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;

This letter written to the pastor of the church in Smyrna. Smyrna was about 40 miles north of Ephesus. It was a city founded by Alexander the Great. The Church most likely was founded by followers of Paul.

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

The first and the last again, referring to the Lord, the Alpha and Omega. Jesus the one who once was dead but no is alive. This of course referring to his death burial and resurrection (The Gospel).

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.

One thing we all need to be aware of is that the Lord **knows our works**. You can pretend to be something and say you are something and you may be able to fool most of the people but you will never fool the Lord. He knows our works and he knows our lack of works. Some people go around saying, “well I’m saved and that’s all that matters.” Oh no my friend, that’s not all that matters. If you are saved, you were saved unto good works. God didn’t save you just for you to become a bench warmer. He saved you with full expectation that you would do good works. The Lord says he knows the works of this Church at Smyrna.

He also says that he knows about the **tribulation** they are under. Remember they are under the rule of a wicked Roman Emperor named Domitian who was notorious

for persecuting Christians. A little bit of interesting trivia about Domitian; he was the only Emperor who demanded to be addressed as ***dominus et deus*** "Master and God." He believed and practiced early Roman religion who's chief deity was the God Jupiter. He also worshiped Minerva, the patron goddess of wisdom. He had a private shrine built for her in his bedroom and had coins printed with her picture on them. He was murdered by members of his own cabinet including his wife.

And poverty. For some reason, unknown to us, this church was particularly poor. It was enough so that the Lord would mention their poverty. It could be that because of the tribulation and persecution they were suffering that they had been robbed and made poor by their persecutors.

But thou art rich. So which is it, poor or rich? He isn't talking about money riches here, he means they are rich in grace and favor of God. Unless you missed it, our Lord lived here on this earth as a very poor man. No house, no bed, no place to lay his head. He borrowed everything that he had from the stable he was born in to the tomb he was buried in, nothing belonged to him. Don't ever try to align wealth with faith. These hucksters on TV try to make you believe that if the Lord is blessing you then you will be wealthy. That is completely opposite of what Jesus taught.

And I know the blasphemy. He isn't talking about blasphemy against God here, he is meaning that this church has been blasphemed against by their persecutors. By using the word blasphemy it apparently is because of their religion.

of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. This is a very difficult statement to try and understand. I want to read you what Matthew Henry says about this: *that is, of those who pretend to be the only peculiar covenant-people of God, as the Jews boasted themselves to be, even after God had rejected them; or of those who would be setting up the Jewish rites and ceremonies, which were now not only antiquated, but abrogated; these may say that they only are the church of God in the world, when indeed they are the synagogue of Satan.*

Friends, we've got people like that today. There are literally thousands of people right here in Knoxville, TN that claim the title of being a Christian but they really belong to the synagogue of Satan. I'm so sick of seeing pretend Christians that it makes me want to vomit. There are people running around here today that claim their saved out of one side of their mouth and are cussin like a sailor out of the other side. They've got one foot in the church house and the other in the smut house. Holding a Bible in their right hand and in their left hand their holding a smart phone that they just surfed pornography with on the internet. I'm telling you friends, they are sick, they are an abomination, God hates it and he says they are from the synagogue of Satan! We've got limp-wristed, panty waste so-called preachers in churches today that say they are gay and a man of God. Friend that is a lie, you can't be a man of God and be a sodomite too. Light and darkness don't mix, there ain't no such thing!

Honey, it's time that men of God grow a backbone and preach against this stuff. We're gonna answer to a real God one day and he's gonna call out every one of us preachers and say "Why didn't you preach against sin? Why didn't you throw those sodomites out from behind those pulpits and run them outta of my church?" What are we going to say? What can we say? "Well Lord, I didn't want to upset anybody. We just want to love everybody. Didn't want to make anybody mad." And the Lord's

gonna say "well you've made me mad, you've invoked my wrath and fury. I hate that abomination. I called you to sound the alarm and you didn't do it, their blood is on your head."

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.

Notice that the Lord never promises that we will not suffer persecution. In fact, he flat out tells us that we will suffer. Did you notice at whose hands they are going to suffer? The devils. Now, you thought I went into that tirade while ago about sodomites because I was just being belligerent, didn't you? Well, let's look at this.

First he told them that there were those that said they were Jews but they were really of the synagogue of Satan. I said there are those that say they are sodomite Christians, but they are really of Satan.

Now he tells them that they are going to suffer because of the devil, that they would be cast into prison to be tried. So, let's say one of these so-called Christian sodomites just happens to tune into my sermon and hears me standing up for the truth and he decides that he'll just work and push to make a law to make it illegal for any preacher or pastor to preach against sodomites. The next thing you know Pastor Byron is being cast into prison to be tried.

Do you see the correlation here?





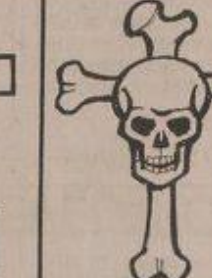
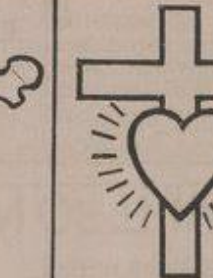
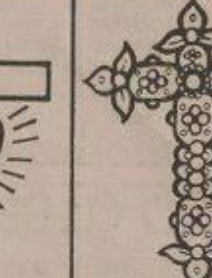
The fact is, this church did suffer a lot because of Satan. It's leader, whom history tells us was a man named Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle's and the bishop of the church at Smyrna. Fox's Book of Martyrs gives us this account of Polycarp:

Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, hearing that persons were seeking for him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. After feasting the guards who apprehended him, he desired an hour in prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the proconsul, condemned, and burnt in the market place.

The proconsul then urged him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee;--reproach Christ."

Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" At the stake to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him; and the executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword, when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire. But his body, at the instigation of the enemies of the Gospel, especially Jews, was ordered to be consumed in the pile, and the request of his friends, who wished to give it Christian burial, rejected. They nevertheless collected his bones and as much of his remains as possible, and caused them to be decently interred.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| EPHESUS (Rev. 2: 1-7) | SMYRNA (Rev. 2: 8-11) | PERGAMOS (Rev. 2: 12-17) | THYATIRA (Rev. 2: 18-29) | SARDIS (Rev. 3: 1-6) | PHILADELPHIA (Rev. 3: 7-13) | LAODICEA (Rev. 3: 14-22) |
| ONCE ON FIRE FOR CHRIST, BUT NOW BECOMING INDIFFERENT. | PERSECUTED, POOR, BUT EVER FAITHFUL AND RESOLUTE! | PERMISSIVE, SHELTERING FALSE TEACHERS, FOLLOWING FALSE DOCTRINES. | IDOLATROUS, SEDUCED INTO CORRUPT BELIEFS AND PAGAN RITUALS. | A CHURCH IN NAME ONLY. WITHOUT RESULTS AND SPIRITLESS. | EXEMPLORY! FAITHFUL TO GOD'S WORD AND FILLED WITH HIS LOVE! | SELF-INDULGENT, RICH, AND OSTENTATIOUS. FULL OF WORLDLY PRIDE. |
| A BACKSLIDING CHURCH | A STEADFAST CHURCH | A LICENTIOUS CHURCH | A LAX, PAGAN CHURCH | A DEAD CHURCH | A FAVOURED CHURCH | A LUKEWARM CHURCH |
| CRITICISM: "Thou hast left thy first love...." | NO CRITICISM! | CRITICISM: "Thou hast them that hold the doctrines of Baalam and the Nicolaitans...." | CRITICISM: "Thou sufferest that ...Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication..." | CRITICISM: "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. I have not found thy works perfect..." | NO CRITICISM! | CRITICISM: "I will spue thee out of my mouth... Thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked..." |
| COUNSEL: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent." | COUNSEL: "Fear not! Be faithful unto death and I will give thee a Crown of Life!" | COUNSEL: "Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly!" | COUNSEL: "Hold fast to what (little) ye have till I come." | COUNSEL: "Strengthen what (little) remains. Hold fast and repent." | COUNSEL: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy Crown." | COUNSEL: "Buy my gold, and white raiment to clothe thee... and anoint thine eyes..." |

