

Daily Bible Study

“Seven Letters ~ Ephesus”

Revelation 2:1-7

February 16 – February 22, 2014

MONDAY – Today, we begin a study dealing with the “Seven Churches of Revelation” as they are called. There are letters written to each of these literal seven churches and these letters are contained for us in the opening chapters of the book of the Revelation. Much has been said, read, written and studied concerning the book of the Revelation which oft times may seem mysterious and difficult. There have been no shortage of opinions or discussion as to what much of the symbolic writing refers. We have discussed much of this from the pulpit in our introductory lesson yesterday but I want to reiterate this important point as we move forward. I’ve thus far mentioned twice the title as, “The Book of The Revelation” and I would do better to continue by saying it is “The Book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ”. We take that title from the opening verse, **1:1**, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John...*” What we must understand is that this book and the entire Bible for that matter is about revealing Jesus Christ to us; Jesus, who is The Holy, sinless Creator God, The Almighty, The Savior of Sinners, The Conqueror, The Lion & Lamb, The God who will always save His people from their sin and destruction regardless of what appears to be taking place in the world. This book reveals to us that Jesus wins the epic battle of life. He has beaten death, Satan, Sin, and hell and He will rescue and deliver those who come to Him in repentant faith. Now we move into the specifics of the letter and see that Jesus had a word for seven literal churches of that day and like much of Scripture; God has recorded it so all His people can read and apply the truths of what He is saying to us. Read our text: **Revelation 2:1-7**: ¹“*To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:’* ²“*I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;’* ³“*and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.* ⁴“*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* ⁵“*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.* ⁶“*But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* ⁷“*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*’

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me this week from Sacred Scripture the wonderful reality that Jesus has won the battle for His people. Help me to see & obey what He has to tell me.

TUESDAY – **Revelation 2:1**: ¹“*To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:’* As our text opens let me point out that in all of these letters to the churches we will find a similar parallel pattern followed. The pattern is this: **1.** The Church is addressed by name. **2.** An aspect of The Lord’s appearance to John at Patmos is given. **3.** There is an evaluation of the spiritual health of the church. **4.** There are words of praise and or reproof. **5.** There are words of exhortation. **6.** There are promises for the overcomers. **7.** There is a command to hear what The Spirit says to the churches. Today, we see number **1 & 2.** The Church is *the church of Ephesus* and The Lord is seen here as *He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.* Pergamum was the official capital of the province of Asia, but Ephesus was by far its greatest city. It claimed as its proud title “The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia”. In John’s day, Ephesus was the greatest harbor in Asia. Ephesus was the gateway of Asia and all the roads of the region converged at Ephesus and it was a marketplace city of varied riches being the wealthiest city of Asia. As it resembled so well John Bunyan’s picture in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it has been called the Vanity Fair of the ancient world. It was what was called in the day a *free city* one that in the Roman Empire was within its own limits self-governing, and it was exempted from ever having Roman troops garrisoned there. It was a religious city being the center of the worship of Artemis. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was huge (dimensions will be mentioned Sunday) and ornate and was also a center of crime and immorality. The Temple area if reached by criminals would offer a place of asylum. Hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes filled the Temple and sexual immorality was the form of Worship expressed. All this combined to make Ephesus a notoriously evil place. Heraclitus, one of the most famous of ancient philosophers, was known as “the weeping philosopher” and his explanation of his tears was that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at its immorality. The city was also very superstitious being famous for the *Ephesian Letters*, small charms which were supposed to be fail proof remedies for sickness, ensure children to the barren, and be a basic “good luck” charm. The city also had a very mixed population. Well such was Ephesus and it sounds a bit like any average American city to me. In our human thinking, it sounds like a difficult place for the Kingdom of God to flourish and a more unpromising soil for the sowing of the seed of Christianity can hardly be thought up. But it was there that Christianity had some of its greatest triumphs. R. C. Trench, the nineteenth-century Archbishop of Dublin, wrote of Ephesus: “Nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil, strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love.” Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other city (**Acts 20:31**). It was with Ephesus that Timothy had a connection, so that he is called its first bishop (**1 Timothy 1:3**). It is in Ephesus that we find Aquila,

Priscilla and Apollos (**Acts 18:19, 18:24, 18:26**). Paul was closer to no one than to the Ephesian elders, as his farewell address so beautifully shows (**Acts 20:17–38**). Legend has that later John was the leading figure of Ephesus and that he brought Mary the mother of Jesus to Ephesus and that she was buried there. Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Ephesus on his way to being martyred in Rome: “You were ever of one mind with the apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.” Wow. Few places on earth better prove the conquering power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. Finally, there is little left today of Ephesus but ruins. The great harbor is now a line of sandy beach, unapproachable by a ship, without a harbor. What was once the Gulf of Ephesus and the harbor is a marsh filled with reeds and the silt won the battle and Ephesus vanished from the scene. It is to the church of this once great city Jesus speaks. The Lord is seen as the one holding *the seven stars*... Jesus holds the churches in his hand. The word for *hold* is **krateo**, and it is a strong word which means “**to seize**”. This means that Christ has complete control over the church and all we need to do is submit and we will never go wrong. Furthermore, our security lies in the fact that we are in the hand of Jesus. **John 10:28**, “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*” Another technical point in the Greek language is that **krateo** normally takes a genitive case after it (the case which in English we express by the word *of*) because, when we take hold of something, we seldom take hold *of the whole of it* but usually *part of it*. When **krateo** takes an accusative after it, it means the whole object is gripped within the hand. Here, **krateo** does take the accusative, and means that Jesus clasps the whole of the *seven stars* in his hand. That means he holds *the whole Church* in his hand. We must remember that. It is not only *our* church which is in the hand of Jesus but the *whole* Church is in his hand. He also *walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*. The lampstands are the churches. This expression tells us Jesus tirelessly is active in the midst of His churches. He is not limited to any one of them; wherever His people are and meet, He is there.

Suggestion for Prayer: God, thank You that Your Gospel has power to save the worst of sinners like me. Thank You Jesus that You hold me safe in Your hand and that You are active in Your relationship with me and all those in Your body, Your church. Help me walk with You.

WEDNESDAY – Revelation 2:2-3: ² “*I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;* ³ *and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.*” The risen Christ Jesus now evaluates their spiritual health and gives words of praise. He praises their *works*, their *labor*, or *toil*. The word is *kopos* which means “trouble, work” and it is a favorite New Testament word. “*Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis all work hard in the Lord*” (**Romans 16:12**). The one thing that Paul claims is that he has *worked harder* than all (**1 Corinthians 15:10**). He is afraid that the Galatians may slip back and his *labor* should be in vain (**Galatians 4:11**). In each case the word describes the kind of toil which takes up all mental and physical effort that

can be put into it. These Christians worked for Jesus like this. The Christian life IS NOT for those who are afraid to break a sweat. **Christians are to toil for Christ**; and if physical toil is impossible, we can still toil in prayer. Jesus also praises their *patience*, their steadfastness and endurance. The word **hupomonē** is not merely a grim patience resignedly accepting things but is a courageous active patience, accepting suffering and hardship, turning it into opportunity for praise, grace & glory. Jesus praises the Christians of Ephesus because they have *tested* phonies *and proved them to be liars*. Jesus had warned of the false prophets who are wolves in sheep’s clothing (**Matthew 7:15**) and in his farewell speech to the elders of this very church at Ephesus, Paul warned that savage wolves would invade the flock (**Acts 20:29**). These evil people were of various sorts: Jews who sought to tie Christians up again in the law. People who followed the Apostles, harassing them. There were the people who tried to turn liberty into license to sin. There were professional beggars who preyed on the charity and kindness of the Christian congregations. Because of Ephesus location; they were very vulnerable to these things. But Jesus praises their discretion, discernment, patience, courage and steadfastness in truth. The church at Ephesus was praised for faithfully applying tests and finding the weeds but the trouble was that something else was lost in the process.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to work hard for You and Your glory by following what You have told me in Scripture. Give me patience to endure for you and also wisdom and discernment to not be fooled and deceived by the lie of sin and the enemy of my soul.

THURSDAY – Revelation 2:4-5: ⁴ “*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* ⁵ *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.*” Jesus now gives His reproof to these believers in Ephesus as He says; *Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love*. The phrase can be seen a couple ways. It means that the first enthusiasm has gone. Jeremiah speaks of the devotion of Israel to God in the early days and God says to the nation that He remembers “*The kindness (devotion, loyalty, faithfulness) of your youth, The love of your betrothal, (Jeremiah 2:2)*. There had been a “honeymoon period”, but that first rush of enthusiasm is long gone and past. Jesus is saying that all the enthusiasm has gone out of the religion of the church of Ephesus. Furthermore, He is saying that the love for the church community has gone. In the early years the members of the church at Ephesus had really loved each other and hearts and hands were ready to help. But something had gone wrong. Love had been killed and dead orthodoxy had replaced true fellowship. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love. Jesus summarizing the Law said, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (**Matthew 22:37–40**). When Jesus says that the Ephesians had lost their first love, he does not mean to say that the Ephesians lived

and worked without any love for God or their neighbors. They lost the vibrancy of the lush green color of springtime in their congregation and replaced it with the cold grey shades of an early fall and autumn. These people lacked enthusiasm and acted not as proponents of the faith but as its caretakers and custodians. They became deficient in evangelistic outreach. They loved the Lord but no longer with heart, soul, and mind. Early in their history it was said of Ephesus, “*the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power*” (**Acts 19:20**). Earnest toil was there; courageous endurance was there; faultless orthodoxy was there; but the love had gone. So Jesus gives the exhortation. First, he says *Remember*. He is not here speaking to someone who has never been inside the church; he is speaking to those who are inside but have somehow lost direction. Remembering can often be the first step on the way back. In the distant country, the prodigal son suddenly *remembered* his home (**Luke 15:17**). William Cowper’s hymn says; “*Where is the blessedness I knew When first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view Of Jesus and his word?* This may sound depressing but in fact it is the first step back; to put things right you must realize something has gone wrong. Second, Jesus says *Repent*. Many reactions are possible when you realize something’s wrong. Futility, resentment, blame; even the decision to attempt to find satisfaction in sin. But Jesus says: *Repent!* Repentance admits the fault is ours and expresses godly sorrow. *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,* (**Luke 15:18**). The hardest thing about repentance is to accept personal responsibility for our sin; once we accept responsibility, godly sorrow will surely follow. Finally, Jesus says *Do*. The sorrow of repentance is meant to drive us to action; to throw ourselves on the grace of God (*God, be merciful to me a sinner*) and drive us to action in order to *bring forth fruits worthy of repentance*. Barclay comments, “No one has truly repented if he or she does the same things again”. Praise Jesus, the great truth of Christianity is that no one needs to stay the way they are. A changed life is proof of repentance; changed by God’s grace, power and our obedience.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me remember, repent, and do by Your grace and power.

FRIDAY – Revelation 2:6-7: ⁶“*But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*” ⁷“*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*” Jesus ends with mentioning that He hates *the deeds of the Nicolaitans* something those in Ephesus also hated. It may seem a bit strange to some attributing hatred to Jesus. But if we love anything/one with passion and intensity; we are bound to hate anything which threatens to ruin the object of our love. Jesus ends with His great promise to those who *overcome* (literally, *overcoming* ~ present active participle). We are overcoming because Jesus has overcome for us and our faith is in Him. Finally, God brings us back to the Garden of Eden, to the beginning of Creation and promises those in Christ will taste and know the joy of eternal life, living forever in a state of glory that can only be labeled *the Paradise of God*.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for ultimate deliverance & salvation through Jesus.