

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPT 16TH, 2018 // REVELATION 2:1-29

Chapter 2 contains letters to four churches in Asia (modern day Turkey) from Jesus Himself where Jesus reveals what He wants His church to be like in all places and at all times. Jesus desires for His people to overcome the challenges that we face in our Spiritual lives.

TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS (2:1-7)

Ephesus was an important city and home to perhaps the most influential church in the region.

- Ephesus had strong leadership- it was founded by Paul (Acts 18-19), later led by Aquila & Priscilla, and pastored eventually by Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3).
- Jesus revealed Himself as the "...who walks among the 7 golden lampstands"
- Jesus is basically saying, "I'm walking among you- watching you!"

The thing Jesus had noticed was "the works" of Ephesus (vs. 2).

- One aspect of their hard work was that they had ejected evildoers from their church and had tested and rejected false apostles.
- In the early church, many itinerant preachers and teachers arose who claimed to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit and to speak for God.

Remember- there was no formal New Testament or established creed of orthodoxy!

- So the true apostles were constantly encouraging believers to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) to determine whether or not such teachers were really speaking the word of God.
- Although Ephesus had stood for truth, they had "abandoned the love they had at first".

The love that they had known before was certainly a love for Jesus, but most likely refers mainly to their love for one another.

- Apparently after years of struggling against false teachers and heresy, they had developed a harshness and hard feelings towards others.
- In standing up for truth they had forgotten how to love people- which is a common pitfall for many Christians.

Jesus's command was to recall how it was before, repent of their loveless attitudes towards others, and return to works motivated by love.

- If not, Jesus would "remove their lampstand"- He'd shut them down as a church!
- Jesus briefly mentions the "Nicolaitans"- we don't know much about them, but they were most likely a "gnostic" or "antinomian" cult in the 1st century.

The commitment Jesus makes at the end of each of the 7 letters always includes 3 parts -

1. **The one who overcomes is praised**
2. **He who has an ear is praised**
3. **The message is the one that the Spirit says to the churches**

Jesus promises the faithful believers in Ephesus who conquer eternal life with God in paradise

TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (2:8-11)

The Christians in Smyrna receive the shortest of the 7 letters, and Jesus reveals Himself to them as the one who has power over time ("1st and last") and power of sin ("came to life").

- This church was being heavily persecuted, and they were poor (even though Jesus reminds them that they're actually rich) in vs. 9.
- The persecution was most likely being done by the Jewish community in Smyrna.

Jesus says that the tribulation these believers were encountering was at the hands of "those who say they are Jews but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (vs. 9)

- What He's implying is that these Jews were not worthy of their claim to be God's people because of how they were treating Christians.
- In fact, their place of worship was a "synagogue of Satan"!

Jesus doesn't have a criticism for the Christians in Smyrna, only a command to not fear.

- The suffering in Smyrna will get worse as some church members will be thrown in prison and some will even lose their lives (vs. 10).
- Behind all of it stands the devil who had inspired these Jews to harass Christians.
- This suffering was coming to "test" these believers, and Jesus tells them to be faithful.

If they are "faithful unto death", Jesus says He will give them "the crown of life".

- This is a reference to victor's crowns that were given to Olympic athletes who ran marathons and other events and completed them successfully.
- The word picture works- an athletic competition involves some level of pain that eventually becomes forgotten upon victory.

Those who conquer in Smyrna will not be hurt by the "2nd death".

- The 1st death is simply death of the body, but the 2nd death is eternal separation from God (Matt. 10:28)- and Jesus promises that His people won't be hurt by it if they conquer.

- The 1st death for the believer, no matter how painful or bloody, is simply an upgrade into the presence of God.

TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

Pergamum was a prominent political and religious city, and in 29 B.C. had a temple built that was dedicated to emperor worship.

- Not only that, there was a massive altar to the god Zeus that overlooked the city.
- Pergamum was a stronghold of both pagan religion and emperor worship which would have made it a difficult environment for a Christian church.

Jesus reminds them that He has a "sharp, two-edged sword"- He has the power to judge and conquer His enemies.

- "Satan's throne" is most likely referring physically to the altar of Zeus and the temple for emperor worship- but Spiritually referring to the stronghold Satan had on this city.
- It was such a stronghold that one believer named Antipas had been killed.

Pergamum had the opposite problem of the Ephesians- instead of testing and rejecting false teachers, they received every one and every teaching into their church.

- Many held to the "teachings of Balaam" (vs. 14) and the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- Balaam was a false prophet in the OT that tried to curse Israel and failed (Num. 22-24)

But even after Balaam failed initially, he succeeded in leading the people of God astray into idolatry and immorality (Num. 25:1-2, 31:16).

- Apparently the kind of false teaching happening in Pergamum was that sexual immorality and engaging in pagan practices and idolatry was permissible.
- Jesus tells them to repent, and if they don't, He will come and war against them! (vs. 16)

But to those who hold fast to the truth and overcome, Jesus will reward them with "hidden manna" and a "white stone".

- These are two different symbols for eternal life- one Jewish and one Gentile.
- Hidden "manna" is a reference to the manna hidden in the ark of the covenant and enjoyed at the coming of the Messiah.
- White stones were used as tickets to festivals.

TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (2:18-29)

Jesus reminds Thyatira that He's the "Son of God" and that He sees all and has all power

- This church was complimented for growing in their "love, faith, service and perseverance" (vs. 19), the first two being motives, the last two manifestations.
- But the criticism Jesus has against them is serious- they had tolerated a false teacher.

This teacher is called, "Jezebel", but that's probably just a code-name that is associating her qualities with the Jezebel in the Old Testament.

- The original Jezebel promoted pagan worship of Baal among God's people and was judged by God and met a violent death.
- This modern Jezebel was also leading people away from the true God and was under God's judgment.

She was calling herself a "prophetess" and leading astray gullible Christians (vs. 19), she was teaching (vs. 24), she was deliberately leading Christians into sexual immorality (vs. 20), and she was encouraging them to violate their conscience regarding food sacrificed to idols.

- In the name of being "tolerant" (vs. 20), the Christians in Thyatira were allowing this to happen in their church.

Jesus promises to repay those who refuse to repent according to their deeds, because He's the one who searches the heart & mind (vs. 23).

- These severe disciplines that were promised were intended to bring these backslidden believers to repentance.
- Unrepentant and willful sin doesn't go unnoticed by God- and if we continue to refuse to repent, there will be severe consequences.

To the believers in Thyatira who conquered and kept the works of God until the end, Jesus promises that they will share in Christ's authority over the nations (vs. 26-27).

- They'll also be given "the morning star"- a reference to a time when the night of sin's rule is over and a new day is at hand.
- The morning star in Rev. 22:16 is Christ Himself, which is the greatest reward of all!

Ephesus- overcome the pitfall of harsh, cold, unloving Christianity and love others greatly.

Smyrna- overcome the hopelessness of persecution and look to your eternal reward.

Pergamum- overcome the temptation to compromise and hold to the truth.

Thyatira- overcome the seductions of sin and stay morally pure in the midst of immorality.

HOW DO WE OVERCOME? REVELATION 12:11