

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 4TH, 2024 // REVELATION

EPHESUS: YOUR FIRST LOVE (REVELATION 2:1-7) AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

John's letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor were meant for them but they also hold significance for all churches since.

- Rather than trying to figure out what church we are, we should **focus on evaluating our walk of faith and our public witness.**

WALKING AMONGST THE LAMPSTANDS

In ch. 1, Jesus was among them. Now He's moving between them, observing to evaluate the churches.

Each letter evaluates five main points:

- 1) To whom Jesus is talking 2) Who Jesus is 3) What Jesus knows 4) Jesus' command 5) Jesus' promise

GOD KNOWS

Most churches, except for Smyrna and Philadelphia, have things that need to be corrected.

- It doesn't matter how we look, what is seen by the world, or how "religious" we appear. **We can't hide behind our masks because nothing is hidden from the eyes of God!**

ABOUT EPHESUS

This port city stood as the religious, cultural, and economic center of the region. The temple of Artemis (Diana) and temples dedicated to its ruling emperors stood as symbols of the city's grandeur.

- Paul started the church there, and Timothy, Apollos, John, Priscilla, and Aquila all ministered to them.

WHAT JESUS KNOWS ABOUT EPHESUS

They were busy doing good things for the community, persevering in their faith, and rejecting false teachers.

- Some of the false teachers included the Nicolaitans. They believed in unrestrained indulgence and idol worship. It would've been **hard to tell them apart** from others in Ephesus.

CONDITION OF EPHESUS

Even though they were doing amazing things, Jesus said they left their first love. The Great Command (Matthew 22:35-39)

- We always have to **be careful not to put what we do for Jesus, or our beliefs, before who we are in Him and what He is doing in others!**

COMMAND TO THE EPHESIANS

Jesus advises them to "Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." **Christ considered improper motive to be a sin that needed forgiveness.**

- **It is easy to fall into the trap of running after what is new,** but we have to remember the first works.

WHAT ARE THE FIRST WORKS

We have to remember the **excitement** we had when we truly fell in love with God!

- **How we spent time in the Word**
- **How we used to pray**
- **Fellowshipping with others**
- **Talking about Jesus**

JESUS' PROMISE

If they choose to listen to Jesus, they will have "the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God," but if they refuse, their "lampstand" will be taken from them.

- Tragically, the Ephesian church ultimately didn't change and neither the church nor city exist today.

SMYRNA: BE FAITHFUL! (REVELATION 2:8-11)

ABOUT SMYRNA

Smyrna was a city known for its wealth, commercial prominence, learning, and culture. While it had many temples dedicated to pagan gods, the focus of worship was shifting towards the Roman Emperor.

- Domitian was the first emperor to demand worship under the title "Lord."

WHAT JESUS KNOWS OF SMYRNA

The Christians suffered poverty because they were fired and robbed for their lack of worship toward Caesar. Even in that, Jesus called them "**rich.**"

- They also suffered slander from the "synagogue of Satan." **These were Jews who thought they were doing God's work.**

COMMAND TO SMYRNA

They were instructed not to fear persecution because God would shorten it. Even though some would die, they were urged to stay faithful.

- **Jesus never taught that we'd avoid trouble.** We must not let difficult times turn us away from God. **Our suffering should bring us closer to Him!**

JESUS' PROMISE

The suffering of the Smyrna Christians will refine them and demonstrate that **the "crown of life" is not just given to anyone but to the faithful followers of Jesus.**

- Though Christians will experience the 1st death, **if we are faithful, we will be spared from the 2nd death!**

PERGAMUM: HOLD ONTO THE TRUTH (REVELATION 2:12-17) ABOUT PERGAMUM

- It was the political capital of Asia Minor that boasted a massive library with 200,000 volumes and a temple dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing. It also had a huge altar for Zeus described as "Satan's throne," and had the rare authority to perform executions, known as "**the right of the sword.**"

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

The sword symbolized Rome's authority and judgment, but Jesus used it to illustrate that **He alone holds ultimate authority and judgment.**

- While we are called to **respect those in power, it is never a reason to sin** in order to honor their authority.

WHAT JESUS KNOWS OF PERGAMUM

Though the city was a hotbed of Satanic activity, the Christians never wavered from their faith in Christ, with some giving their lives (Antipas).

- Some false "teaching of Balaam" was creeping in, and the heretical teaching of the Nicolaitans was accepted. **This led to compromises in their faith!**

REFUSING TO LISTEN IS A SIN

Sexual immorality and universalism are pretty clear (though often ignored) to the church, but what about **violating our convictions?**

- **God will sometimes ask us to do things that don't apply to everyone else. We're to be obedient to God's individual instruction.**

THE COMMAND AND PROMISE

The command is to repent. If they do so, they will receive "hidden manna," which symbolizes **God's provision**, and a "white stone," representing an admission ticket.

- If they refuse, **God will "fight against them."** **God is quick to forgive, but ultimately, He resists the proud.**

THYATIRA: RESIST TEMPTATION (REVELATION 2:18-29)

ABOUT THYATIRA

The city, though small, was famous for its production of purple dye (Lydia).

- It boasted numerous trade guilds essential for conducting business. However, joining these guilds involved eating food sacrificed to gods and engaging in sexual immorality.

THE SON OF GOD

Jesus first describes Himself by His deity. He demonstrates His **ability to see through everything, knowing our true intent**, with His eyes of fire.

- He also describes His feet of fine bronze, showing His **unlimited perfection and power, giving Him alone the ability to judge all things.**

WHAT JESUS KNOWS OF THYATIRA

Jesus praised the church for their "love, faithfulness, service, and endurance" and their "last works [were] greater than the first."

- This meant they were growing spiritually and doing good works for others with pure and noble motives.

THE CONDITION OF THYATIRA

Jesus' criticism of the church is serious. Despite their success, they are rebuked for their **tolerance** of "the woman Jezebel."

- Jezebel is from 1 Kings and was a name used like Judas. In Thyatira, she encouraged participation in the guilds, possibly by giving a "**prophetic word.**"

STAYING IN BUSINESS

"Jezebel" was using "so-called secrets" to claim a deeper knowledge of God and **to convince the church to fit in with the society around them.**

- Thyatira had the opposite issue of Ephesus. **They were so "loving" that they accepted everything without discernment.** Sound familiar?

THE COMMAND TO THYATIRA

Like Jezebel, Thyatira was given the chance to repent. God sternly says since Jezebel won't, He "will throw her into a sickbed" and "strike her children dead."

- **The tolerance for evil must be repented of. We must let go of unbiblical teaching and the "so-called secrets of Satan."**

THE PROMISE

If Thyatira returned to the truth and **persevered** until the end or until the return of Jesus, they'd inherit "authority over the nations" and receive the "**morning star.**"

- The details will come later, but the main point stands: **hold on to the truth until we die or Jesus comes back!**

EYES OF FIRE

- Christ can see through anything we are trying to hide, so do our lives align with who we claim to be?
- **Have we let unbiblical theology creep into the church and our personal lives?**
- **Have we betrayed our convictions by giving in to the temptations of this world?**

PERSEVERANCE

- We will go through tests of our faith. Will we remain faithful?
- **When we make mistakes, will we be humble, repent, and change our ways?**
- **We have an advocate in Christ! Do we understand the rewards of endurance?**