

Studying the book of Revelation (4)

@ Concord Community Church on 23/02/2025

Jesus' Message to the Church of Ephesus: Rev 2:1-7

Introduction:

Although the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch and Corinth all had a tremendous influence on the development of the Early Church, it seems that none had an impact as significant as the church of Ephesus.

Because of its unique beginning, strategic location and enormous size, the Ephesian church had a monumental level of influence on churches throughout Asia. In addition, the repercussions of spiritual events that occurred in Ephesus, rippled out to churches in every part of the Roman Empire. Many of these events were recorded in the book of Acts—events so numerous that an entire book could be written on that subject alone. The following is the recap of some of the significant events that took place in Ephesus: (1) The church of Ephesus was started because of the Apostle Paul and his ministerial co-labourers Aquila & Priscilla.

(2) One of the first people to be converted in Ephesus was Apollos of Alexandria. He eventually became the pastor of the Corinthian church, which resulted in an ongoing partnership between the churches at Ephesus & Corinth that lasted for many years.

(3) Special miracles and significant deliverance from demon powers occurred as a result of Paul's ministry, which caused the name of Jesus to be known and magnified throughout all the Asia.

(4) After Paul departed from Ephesus, he asked Timothy to serve as pastor of the Ephesian church—which he accepted (1-Tim 1:3). Early writers tell us that Timothy eventually died a martyr's death in Ephesus.

(5) The Apostle Paul was beheaded in Rome during the rule of the Emperor Nero. After Paul's death, a new overseer was needed for Asia, so the Apostle John relocated to Ephesus. John guided the churches in Asia for

many years from his home on the hilltop located directly behind the Temple of Artemis near the city of Ephesus.

(6) When John first moved to the city of Ephesus, he brought Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with him. Historical records affirm that John cared for Mary until her death.

(7) The Apostle John was arrested in Ephesus during the reign of Emperor Domitian and was subsequently exiled to the island of Patmos, where he lived until Domitian died. Later, when amnesty was granted to many people, John was also released. Returning to his hilltop home near Ephesus, John continued to give Apostolic Oversight to the churches of Asia.

(8) The Gospel of John and the epistles of First John, Second John and Third John were all written during the time of John's residency in Ephesus. In addition, there is evidence that suggests that the earliest circulation of the book of Revelation coincides with the time John lived in Ephesus after his release from Patmos.

(9) John died in Ephesus at a very old age. According to his wishes, he was buried near his hilltop home. A large basilica was later constructed on the sight of John's grave by the Emperor Justinian as a memorial of the Apostle's Residency in Ephesus.

These are just some of the reasons the Church of the Ephesus held a unique place in early Christian history, unequalled by any other First Century Church.

A CHURCH THAT SHINES IN A DARK WORLD (Revelation 2:1)

Christ is zealous about the spiritual health of His Church. That is why in Revelation 2:1, we read that He walks among the lampstands, or His churches. In Revelation 2&3, we see Christ scrutinizing seven churches and alerting them to the ways they are being faithful or unfaithful. Exercising His authority over the church, Jesus directs and admonishes the believers in these seven churches with words—also meant for all believers through the ages, including us.

As lampstands, churches are to stand out as lights in the world. All of us within the church are to contribute to that light by putting CHRIST on display, through our words and actions. If unbelievers cannot see the evidence of Christ in us, then there is no light emanating from us.

A church that has become like the world, has lost his light, and therefore, its ability to attract unbelievers. It's when we live holy and blameless lives that it is possible for those who live in darkness to see and be drawn to the light only God can give. This raises serious questions for the present-day believers: Questions like:

(a) Is my faith evident? (b) Can people see the difference Jesus makes in me? (c) Do I engage with others, where Matthew 5:16 is fulfilled?

Ephesians 5:22-27 reveals there is a connection between Christ's love for us and His desire for us to be pure. He wants every believer in a church to be "holy and without blemish" (v27). WHY? Only when we are a proper expression of Christ can we have any influence for Him. Christ is walking among the lampstands even now. How bright is our light?

ENDURANCE (Revelation 2:3)

In the face of persistent trials and evil, the believers in Ephesus had not grown weary. They had remained faithful and uncomplaining. In response, our Lord praised them for their loyalty.

As we draw closer to the last days, we can expect difficulties and wickedness to worsen. Satan will do all he can to wear us down. And when we are worn out, it's easier to give-in to temptation and compromise. Rather than counter the many pressures against us, we are inclined to go with the flow, so life won't be so difficult.

What motivated and enabled the believers in Ephesus to endure???

We find the answer in Jesus' commendation to them: They were "bearing up for His name's sake". They were driven by the desire to bring honour to Christ's name and reputation. They recognized the importance of doing what was right and standing firm so that Jesus' reputation would not be damaged.

When we are eager to represent our Lord well, we will be energized to stay strong and keep going. When our longing is to exalt Christ, we are less likely to succumb to thoughts of giving up. We find confirmation of this in 1-Corinthians 10:31, where we are exhorted, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”. Living with a dedicated concern for God’s glory in every way possible will have a powerful effect on our attitudes & actions.

If our desire is to endure and not grow weary, be earnest (serious, sincere, with intension and conviction) about bringing honour to CHRIST. Our motivation to lift- up the Lord will fill us with the inner strength we need for pressing onward.

BACKING UP OUR LOYALTY WITH LOVE (Revelation 2:4-5)

The good news for the believers in Ephesus was that they received strong marks for their faithfulness to Christ. But the bad news was they had also “abandoned the love” they had formerly shown for their Saviour. Their fiery passion for Christ had diminished, making their service to Him cold and mechanical. This rebuke serves as a sober reminder of our need to ensure our loyalty is backed by love.

Shortly after the birth of the church in Ephesus, Paul encouraged the new believers there to be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). Love is the seed that germinates into a fruitful relationship with our Lord. Remember the greatest commandment? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

When our love for Christ wane, our relationship with Him will suffer, and our obedience will become hollow. This is why it’s so vital for us the keep feeding the flames of love burning within our hearts. Forty years after Apostle Paul urged the Ephesian believers to be rooted & grounded in love, Christ examined them and diagnosed that their love was lacking.

Jesus the great physician, tells us what to do when we sense our love is weak. “Do the works you did at first”. These “works “include relating intimately with God. That happens when we spent time in His Word, Prayer and Worship. Restoring our passion begins with prioritizing our relationship

with God above all else. The depth of our faithfulness is proportionate to the depth of our time (the quality of being intense) spent relating to God and growing in our love for Him.

AN EXHORTATION TO EVERY BELIEBER (Revelation 2:7)

When our Lord repeats an exhortation, it is His way of saying “Pay attention—this is important!” So, you can imagine the significance of a statement that is repeated seven times. That’s what happened when CHRIST spoke to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. To every single church, He said, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says.”

Because the commendations and rebukes Jesus gave to those churches continue to apply to all believers today, we should take this repeated command seriously. Very simply, Jesus was saying, “Listen & obey.”

This charge make sense when we remember Christ’s reason for writing the letters to the seven churches. Back in Revelation 1:12-16, John described Jesus as a chastening authority, who walks among His churches with an earnest desire that they be pure. Ephesians 5: 25-27 tells us that “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her...that she might be holy and without blemish.” When Jesus examined the Christians in Revelation 2-3, He was concerned about what their lives communicated to a watching world. He wanted their faith to be visible and to cause unbelievers to have a right impression of God.

In all sincerity, we can ask ourselves: Is our faith visible? Are we “blameless and innocent...without blemish in the midst of a crooked & twisted generation, among whom we shine as lights”? (Philippians 2:15). Can others see Christ in us? The answer will be YES if we “hear what the Spirit says.” 1-Peter 1:22-23 tells us that the Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture. As you & me heed God’s Word, it has a cleansing effect on our life, and our light will shine, and our faith will be visible. Let’s pray.