

# A passion for God

Revelation 2:1-7

*Pastor Wyley Jenkins, Jr.*

*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

*<sup>2</sup> I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. <sup>3</sup> I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

There are many different kinds of churches in our time. There are serious churches and not serious churches. There are churches that focus on having a good service. Some focus on being cool and on entertainment. Some churches focus on being doctrinally correct. Some churches are more like social clubs. Some churches ask for money all the time. Some churches focus on trying to make people feel good even if they have to lie to them. Some churches are very missional and evangelistic. Some churches are superficial. Some churches are spiritually asleep and almost spiritually dead. Some churches are persecuted and live in places where to be a Christian might cause your death.

For the next seven weeks, we're going to embark on a journey to see that the seven churches in the book of Revelation are not too terribly different from churches in our time. In the words of the wise king Solomon, there is nothing new under heaven. Churches have and always will struggle with the same kinds of temptations. This is a very beautiful and useful part of scripture for those who care about Jesus and his bride. There are many interesting facts and details that make up this section of the book of Revelation. I just want to mention two. First is that even the way the churches are listed has a purpose. The first and the last churches, Ephesus and Laodicea, are in the greatest danger. They are both told to repent, or something bad will happen. The second church and the second to

last church are praised and commended. The middle three churches highlight mixed groups of people. Some are faithful and some are not.

#### **In Danger of Judgment**

#1 Ephesus

#7 Laodicea

#### **Potentially in Danger**

#3 Pergamum

#4 Thyatira

#5 Sardis

#### **Doing well**

#2 Smyrna

#6 Philadelphia

Understanding this will help us to see the letters correctly. Second is that there is a structure that all of the letters share. According to New Testament Scholar G. K. Beale, these seven letters to the seven churches have the following pattern.

### **Pattern for all 7 letters (Rev. Chapters 2-3)**

- a) **Salutation:** Christ addresses the church as represented by an angel and presents Himself with certain attributes particularly suitable to the situation of each church.
- b) **The situation:** Christ speaks of the situation, and the particular problems are reviewed.
- c) **Call to respond:** Jesus issues either an encouragement to persevere in the face of conflict, or a call to repent in order to avoid discipline or judgment.
- d) **Call to hear:** Christ issues a call for the churches to respond by hearing, which is obeying.
- e) **Promise:** For those who respond positively, Christ promises the inheritance of eternal life with Him.

Our passage today will be the book of Revelation 2:1-7. I believe it has four main ideas:

1. Jesus is the majestic King and High Priest who sees and controls all. (V. 1)
2. Jesus praises them for loving truth and hating sin. (V. 2-3, 6)
3. Jesus rebukes them for abandoning the love they had at first. (V. 4-5)
4. Jesus promises eternal life to those who conquer their lack of love. (V. 7)

Let's look at each one.

## **1. Jesus is the majestic King and High Priest who sees and controls all**

***"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:"*** As I said in Revelation part 1, the Book of Revelation commonly presents angels as the agents that God uses to carry out his will. This is normal in the Bible and is confirmed by many parts of scripture. The portion of scripture that is perhaps the most similar to the idea of angels in charge of churches is Daniel 12:1: ***"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people."*** So, according to the book of Revelation, there is an angel of each church. I cannot guarantee that I understand exactly what this means, but I will try and give you my understanding. Jesus sends his message to the churches by sending it to the angel in charge. It is the duty of the angel to carry out the words of Jesus. As Christians, we have no

authority to speak to these angels or negotiate with them. They do God's will, not ours. It is a little bit like what happens when a doctor writes a prescription. The prescription is directed to a pharmacist even though the medicine is for the patient. And this way the angel administers the prescription of Jesus to the patients at Ephesus. The message is for the people in the church at Ephesus, but the angel is receiving it and will enforce every word that Jesus has prescribed for them, whether it is blessing or discipline. In modern western countries like Spain, people do not believe that there are spiritual beings that are highly involved in the every-day world. They do not know spiritual being do not exist, it is their belief. God, in His goodness, has told us about this spiritual world, and we must be aware of it.

It is written to the Ephesians. This was a very important church. It is where Paul planted the church, wrote the letter of Ephesians to and through it reached all of the rest of Asia Minor. It is the place Timothy received the Paul's letters of 1 and 2 Timothy. If Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire, like Madrid is to Spain, then Ephesus was like Barcelona. It was a very important place. That is the audience.

This letter is from Jesus, *"who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands."* What are the seven stars and seven golden lampstands? There is no mystery here. Revelation 1:20 makes it clear when it says, *"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."* So, what does the imagery mean? When a King holds something in his right hand, it means that he controls it. He is the authority over it. Jesus holds these powerful angelic beings in his hand like you hold a coin. They are not the Lord, He is. Believe me, Jesus will enforce his will one way or another here at Immanuel. He is patient, but church history is clear that if his people turn away from him, they will suffer for it.

What about the lampstands? How is a church like a lampstand? In the Old Testament temple, the doors to the inside of the temple were almost always shut, and there were no windows. It was dark, and so the lampstand was the light in the darkness of the temple. The lampstand was a reminder of how God dwelled in his special presence in the temple. Where the lampstand was, there also was the presence of God. Where the lampstand was, there also was light in a dark place. This is the church. This view that Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks amongst the seven golden lampstands means that Jesus is present in his church like the High Priest was in the temple. He walks in the midst of the churches, similar to the way God walked with Adam and Eve. As he walks, he sees everything that happens and will act by the power of his right hand. Don't believe that Pastor Tim or I really hold the power here. Don't believe that the deacons or the church members hold the power here. Yes, we are all important factors in the church. But it is Christ who will act and Christ to whom we will all give account. Aren't you glad that Jesus reigns? Jesus is the majestic King and High Priest who see it all. What did he see in Ephesus? That leads us to point two.

## 2. Jesus praises them for loving truth and hating sin

Sometimes, we think that we are alone and that our lives are invisible to God. That is not the case. Jesus tells the church at Ephesus, *"I know your works"*. Jesus knows Immanuel Baptist Church, and he knows you. Jesus sees the good in us the same way he sees it in the Ephesians. He commends or

praises the Ephesians for how they *“cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.”*

In the times of the Bible, there were many false apostles, false prophets, and false teachers. The Ephesians did not allow the culture to dictate their beliefs. They filtered out those who are evil. In our day, there exist many groups who, on the outside, look like Christians, but are not in line with the historic Christian faith. [The Jehovah’s Witnesses](#) teach that Jesus was an angel. That he is created. They teach that the Holy Spirit is a force like electricity or water. They say that the Trinity is not biblical. They believe that blood transfusions and birthday parties are evil. These are not Christian beliefs. [The Mormons](#) say Jesus and Satan are brothers. They believe that they will be gods of their own planets like God is the God of our Earth. The scary thing is that they look like evangelicals.

But the evangelical church has its own issues. What can we say about the prosperity gospel? If the greatest goal of God is to make us rich, why do so many things happen that make us poor? If it is to make us healthy, then why are so many faithful Christians dying of COVID 19? The prosperity gospel is not Christian teaching. What about normal evangelical churches like ours? Should we be complimented for testing evil and keeping out false doctrine? Maybe, but today most churches like ours are scared to say what God says about things. They are scared to say what God says about the world, sexuality, marriage, gender roles, church discipline, spiritual beings, and so many other things. They present God as all love and no justice. They present Jesus as the Shepherd holding lambs and never mention that he is the majestic one with eyes of fire who is returning to judge the earth. If they talk too much about these things, people will go to another church that does not embarrass them or make them feel bad.

Jesus looks at the church in Ephesus and commends them for not bearing with evil men or worldly beliefs. He praises them for testing everything in the light of the Gospel and of God’s word. Jesus is happy because the Ephesians did not do this once or twice, but they persevered for what must have been many years this way. That is why in verse six he says, *“Yet, this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”* We will speak more about the Nicolaitans in a few weeks when we talk about letter #3-Pergamum. What you need to understand today is that Jesus hates their works. It does not say that he is not very happy with their works. It clearly says that He hates their works. This is one of the groups who are teaching falsely and living immorally and want to bring this into the church.

I want you to understand that God hates sin. He is not just unhappy with sin. He hates sin. He is not just in disagreement with evil; he hates it. He commends the Church at Ephesus for their hatred of evil works. Christians do not have a right to hate or to do violence against people. But God calls us to hate sin and kill the sin in us. Do you hate sin? Do you put to death the deeds of the flesh? Join Jesus in loving your enemies and hating sin. What about you? Do you want to be praised by Jesus? Are you testing all things? Are you bearing with evil people? Do you see false prophets as those who twist the scriptures and make money off of the people of God? May he give us the discerning heart of the Ephesians. May Jesus praise us for being people of truth.

There are a few practical applications of understanding this. First, one of the lessons we can learn for correcting people is that Jesus corrects honestly. In a moment, he will give a scary correction for the church at Ephesus, but that does not mean he is blind to the good they are doing. So often, people

who correct never tell people what they do right. The next time you correct any person, your child, coworker, spouse, or friend around you, take a moment to remember what they do right. Second is that we, as Christians, are absolutely called to evaluate, discern, and test doctrines and teachers. One old story I've heard, but I am not sure if it is totally true, is about how the FBI, 50 years ago, used to teach their agents how to know a false \$20 bill from a true one. It is said that they would take the agents and make them write as many observations as they could about the true \$20 bill. They would write hundreds of these observations. Then they would be given a false bill and told to explain to their trainer how they knew that this was a false bill. Even though they have never seen the false bill, they could recognize it was false because they knew the true bill so well. I'm not asking you to go out and become an expert in any of these false teachings, doctrines, cults or religions. What I'm telling you is that you should know your own faith so well that you can recognize what is false when you see it. That is what Jesus wants from us in relation to testing falsehood. Even though the Ephesians were an example of passion for the truth and holiness for Jesus, he still had a strong rebuke for them. They had abandoned the love they had at first.

### 3. Jesus rebukes them for abandoning the love they had at first

*“<sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”* Jesus can have things against a Christian church or a person. That means that the Ephesians were not doing what he asked of them. Jesus is so serious that he calls them to repent and do the works they did at first. If they do not, He will come to them and remove their lampstand from its place. That means he will close the church. He himself will leave it. It is hard to know exactly what the issue is. Is the love they had at first, the love they have for Jesus? Is the love they had at first the love they have for other Christians? Is the love they had at first a love that made them want to share the Gospel like a lamp in a dark place? Jesus never explains which one it is. It is, however, very clear in scripture that all of these kinds of love are connected. If you do not love God, you will not love your neighbor, lost or saved. I firmly believe that Christ is so serious about loving God, loving our neighbor, and sharing the Gospel, that the failure of a church to do these things is a reason for God to close its doors. That is what removing the lampstand means.

This strong rebuke of Jesus to the church at Ephesus reminds me of a famous prophecy from the book of Malachi, chapter 1:6-10, where God says to his people, *“You say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ (...) 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? (...) With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts. 10 Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!”*

Though Jesus gives a stinging rebuke to the church at Ephesus, it should also lead us to ask some questions. Where is our passion for God? Have we forgotten what he's done for us? Do we remember the ways that the word of God has blessed us? Where is our love for him? Why do we bring spiritual offerings that are blind or lame, and so show that we really love ourselves? Jesus's words to Ephesus are his words to all of us. May we learn to love God and our neighbors and so offer to Jesus the appropriate worship and sacrifice. May we be a lampstand of true love. Did you know that as Jesus is threatening the church with removing their lampstand, he is doing it for love? It is not from hatred that he tells them these things. I wonder today if we even know what the love of

Jesus looks like when we see it. Maybe be passionate to love biblically. This is a tough message, but there is a reward for those who will hear it.

#### 4. Jesus promises eternal life to those who conquer their lack of love

Jesus expects the Ephesian church to hear his words. He says, “<sup>7</sup> **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**” Christ reminds them that communication is always two-way. Christ’s words are perfect and true, but that does not mean the Ephesians will hear them. Having physical ears does not guarantee that they will hear. Jesus says that his words in verses 1-6 are what the Spirit says to the churches. To hear the Spirit, our ears must be spiritual ears. We must pray to be able to understand, and we must strive to listen actively. It is possible to be able to listen and walk away hard-hearted. Those who hear and obey will conquer, and what is Christ’s reward for conquering? ***“To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”***

Jesus gives a promise to those who conquer. But what does it even mean to conquer? What Jesus means to those who fight to obey his words is to conquer. What are we to conquer? Those who conquer laziness, fear, disobedience, selfishness, addiction, and lack of love for God and others, these people are true warriors for Jesus. Conquering is to fight against Satan and sin to be able to persevere. Jesus wants you to fight to change when he calls you to change. Listen to me, loved ones of Jesus. I know some of us are fighting, and we are getting tired. Sin crouches at our door to consume us. Please do not give up and give in to sin. I know you are tired of fighting, but there will be a place to rest. If you persevere, you will go to the paradise of God. There you can rest. You will eat of the tree of life, that fruit that Adam never ate of, and you will rest because your time to fight will be over. Until then, you are called to conquer all evil, fear, and sin. Fight for Jesus against unbelief. Fight to love God. Fight to love your brother. Fight to spread the Gospel and so be a lampstand for Jesus. Conquer by faith and you will inherit eternal life.

#### Questions for reflection:

1. When you think of angelic beings, what comes to mind?
2. How do you think the view of Jesus in chapter 1:8-20 changes the common idea that people have of Jesus?
3. What is it that Jesus praises the church at Ephesus for? Why is it so hard for people to be discerning today without feeling guilty?
4. The passage says that they had abandoned the love they had at first. How can we regain a love for God, a love for our Christian brothers and sisters, and the love for the lost around us?
5. How serious is Jesus about them regaining their lost love? What does he threaten them will happen if they do not?
6. What does Jesus mean when he says, “<sup>7</sup> *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches?*”
7. How does the promise in verse seven speak to you?