

Jesus' Letter To The Church At Ephesus

Text : **Revelation 2: 1-7**

INTRODUCTION :

A. Revelation is the only book directly written by Jesus.

1. Jesus wrote the Revelation just as Paul wrote his book to the Galatians.
 - a. **Gal. 6: 11**- See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.
 - b. Though Paul wrote a personal note at the end, he dictated his letters to a scribe.
2. Jesus gave the message to His Apostle, John, and told him to write it down.

B. From our last lesson we observed that :

1. The Revelation of Jesus to John was the only book of prophecy in the N.T.
 - a. It took the recipients from their present into what was about to befall them.
 - b. **Rev. 1: 19**- Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.
2. Though the book was prophecy, it was written with urgency because the events were about to happen.

(*The book both begins and ends with urgent admonitions to heed the warning.*)

 - a. **Rev. 1: 1**- “.. God gave to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place;..”
 - b. **Rev. 1: 3**- Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
 - c. **Rev. 22: 7**- And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.
 - d. **Rev. 22: 10**- And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.
3. This prophecy was addressed to specific people.
 - a. The book was addresses to 7 specific churches.

Rev. 1: 4- John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, ...

Rev. 1: 11- ... “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”
 - b. The prophecies must apply to the people to whom they are addressed.
4. All prophecy :
 - a. Remains of value even after it is fulfilled.
 - b. Contains lessons which apply to those other than the primary recipients.

Now that we have studied the general introduction the book , we are prepared to examine the personalized messages to each of the recipients. This lesson concentrates on the first of those personal admonitions, the message to the brethren Ephesus.

**As we study, let us do so asking ourselves,
“If Jesus wrote a letter to us, what would Jesus say ?”**

I. We start by looking at the city of Ephesus and the church which met there.

A. The city of Ephesus was known as “*The Supreme Metropolis of Asia.*”

1. It had a permanent population which reached 250,000.
 - a. This made it the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.
 - b. Only Rome, Alexandra, and Antioch were larger.
2. It also had a very large transient population. (*Merchants, Religious Pilgrims, Athletes*)

B. Ephesus was a very important commercial center. (*Strategically located*)

1. It was a port city where important trade routes arrived at the sea.
 - a. In later years deforestation caused silting problems.
 - b. Eventually large ships could no longer go there. (*Presently miles from shore*)
2. It was at the mouth of the Cayster River.
 - a. Trade tended to go down river valleys so it got all the trade from Cayster River valley.
 - b. It also got much of the trade from the Meander River Valley. (*Competed w/ Miletus*)
3. There were few roads, but three roads came to Ephesus.
 - a. From the Euphrates (*east*) via Colossae and Laodicea.
 - b. From Galatia (*Asia Minor*) via Sardis.
 - c. Coming north from the Meander River Valley.

C. Ephesus was of great political importance.

1. It was a “Free City” meaning that it was not occupied by Roman troops.
2. It had elections to select it's own magistrate and city council. (*town clerk – Ax 19:35*)
3. It was an “Assize City” meaning the governor held court there on a schedule.

D. It held one of the world's most prestigious athletic competitions.

1. The Pan-Ionian Games ranked with the Olympic Games.

2. They were financed by a few rich men in Ephesus. (*Asiarchs = Chiefs of Asia*)

E. The greatest claim to fame for Ephesus was the temple of Diana / (Gr.) Artemis.

1. The temple of Diana was twice destroyed and rebuilt more glorious than before.
 - a. It was said to be “as old as recorded history.”
 - b. The temple in N.T. times was the third temple. (*Two other temples in Ephesus*)
2. The temple of Diana was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.
 - a. 4 times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. (**425 x 220 x 60 ft. high**)
 - b. 127 marble columns (*36 of them covered with gold and decorated with jewels*)
3. The temple was a boon to commerce and the largest employer in the area.
 - a. Many male priests and all were eunuchs.
 - b. Thousands of female priests would have sex with worshippers.
 - c. Hordes of people worked service jobs related to the temple.
3. The temple also serves as a bank. (*Though surrounded by thieves in sanctuary circle*)

F. Ephesus was noted for its low character.

1. The sanctuary policy of the temple attracted many criminals.
2. One historian wrote, “*The morals of the temple were worse than those of the beasts.*”
3. It is said that the first brothel in history was in Ephesus.
4. Ephesus was the center of the ancient slave trade.

II. The church at Ephesus was established by Paul and had solid foundation.

A. Paul came to Ephesus during his second missionary journey.

1. **Acts. 18: 18-20** (*Primarily taught Jews in the synagogue.*)
2. He stayed but a short time, but left Priscilla and Aquila behind.
3. Apollos the evangelist was converted by them at Ephesus. (**ibid**)

B. Paul spent more time at Ephesus than anywhere.

1. He returned there on his third missionary journey.
 - a. Started teaching the Jews in the synagogue until they rejected the gospel.
 - b. For two years he taught the general public headquartered in the school of Tyrannus.
2. He was very successful while there.
 - a. He worked extraordinary miracles.
 - b. Many were converted. (*Gospel went into all Asia from Ephesus.* **Acts 19: 10**)

- c. Those who renounced idolatry burned their book of magic. (*value = 50K days work*)
- 3. So many people were converted that it began to threaten the shrine makers.
 - a. They rose up in riotous opposition.
 - b. That theater seated 25,000 people ... shouting for two hours.
- C. When Paul left Ephesus he left Timothy with them to continue teaching them.
 - 1. **I Tim. 1: 3**- As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ..
 - 2. Church Historians believe he was there for years. (*Some say 15 years*)
- D. Uninspired church history places the Apostle John at Ephesus for many years.

III. Jesus was complimentary toward the Ephesian church in several ways.

- A. Vs. 1 of text ... Jesus says I know you because I walk among the churches.
 - 1. When Jesus said, "I am with you always." (**Matt. 28:20**) He really meant it.
 - 2. "the seven stars in His right hand" (**1:20**) indicates His awareness of individuals.
- B. Vs. 2a ... He knows they are an active church.
 - 1. **Deeds** ... They were actively serving God.
 - a. Those who are properly taught serve God actively.
 - b. **Titus 3:8**- This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. (*Faith motivates*)
 - 2. **Toil** ... (*kopos*) ... means intense labor united with trouble ... (*Strong's Lexicon*)
 - a. Jesus knows that they are working to the point it is exhausting.
 - b. **I Cor. 15: 58**- Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.
 - 3. **Perseverance** (Also translated **Steadfastness**)
 - a. Strong's Lexicon defines **perseverance** like this :
Steadfastness, constancy, endurance. 1^A in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.
 - b. Working at doing good was a consistent way of life for the Ephesian Christians.
- C. Vs. 2b ... The Lord appreciated the fact that the Ephesians hated evil.

1. God is aware of our attitude toward evil ... as well as of our attitude toward Him.
2. The Christians has to make a clear choice ... **God -or- the world.**
 - a. Remember : **Luke 16: 13- No servant can serve two masters;**
 - b. The Christian also cannot maintain a cordial relationship with the world.
James 4:4- You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (*Can't go along to get along.*)
3. They had taken the Apostle's admonition to heart.
Eph. 4: 24- Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

D. Vs. 2c ... They knew the truth and did not accept those who taught anything else.

1. The Apostle had warned them to be on guard against wolves and they obeyed.
Acts 20: 29-31 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, ...
2. The Ephesians were not like those who sought out teachers to please them.
II Tim. 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

E. Vs. 3 ... The Ephesian church had remained faithful and active over the years.

**** Today we would view this as an exceptional church, one to be emulated, BUT Our Lord Jesus found them lacking and in need of repentance.**

IV. Jesus warned them that none of their virtues were of any benefit without love.

- A. This is exactly the same warning that the Apostle Paul gave the Corinthians.
I Cor. 13: 1-2 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- B. It is impossible to be faithful to God without loving Him and one another.
 1. These brethren have the virtues we hold most dear.
 - a. They are consistently active and hard working.

- b. They are assertively sound in both doctrine and practice.
- 2. **But, ...** they did not get the most important part right.

Matt. 22:36-39 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' " ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

C. Christians must stand for the truth, but it must be done in a loving way.

- 1. **Jude 3-** Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (*Stand up when it is spoken against or perverted.*)
- 2. The Ephesians were to be loving in their approach as they advocated for the truth.
Eph. 4: 15- but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, (*Loving is part of growth.*)

CONCLUSION :

A. The church at Ephesus started off as a loving church but lost it along the way.

- 1. **Eph. 1: 15-** For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,
- 2. *Sometimes we get so involved in winning the battle, we forget why we're fighting the war.* (**Making disciples of every nation** cf **Jn 13:35**)

B. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that he should teach the Ephesians to love.

- 1. **I Tim. 1: 5-** But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (*No love = failure*)
- 2. Thus, Timothy was successful in teaching them as per his instructions. ... **Eph. 1:15**
 - a. They were consistently active and hard working. (*Took the word to "all Asia."*)
 - b. They were sound in the faith and sought holiness.
 - c. **They were loving (Eph. 1:15) but it happened to as Jesus had warned.**
Matt. 24: 12- most people's love will grow cold. (endures to the end, he will be saved)

C. Vs. 5 ... When love grows cold, JESUS removes a congregation's lampstand.

- 1. **Rev. 1: 20** - " ... the seven lampstands are the seven churches."
- 2. **Jesus is saying ...** When love stops a congregation ceases to be His church.
- 3. **John 13: 34-35** ... Love is the identifying mark of the church of Jesus Christ.

D. When the gospel is passes from generation to generation (**II Tim. 2: 2),**

Love must be taught as being the MOST important thing. (**Heb. 10: 23-25**)

Without love, both service and soundness are useless. (**John 3: 16 .. love = give**)

Lesson Text :

Revelation 1: 20 – 2: 7

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which 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.

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: **2** 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; **3** and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. **4** 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. **5** 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. **6** 'Yet this you do 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 grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'