

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WILL WE BE?

A Church Without Passion?

TEXT: Rev. 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION: The Apostle John was pastor of the church at Ephesus when he was sentenced to exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of Asia Minor. There, the Risen Christ appeared to John in all His glory.

- His voice resounded like a trumpet.
- He was clothed in a long flowing garment with a golden band across His chest.
- His hair was as white as new fallen snow, and
- His eyes burned like fire.
- His feet glowed like brass coming out of the furnace.
- And all around Him were lampstands, seven beautiful lampstands.
- The countenance of the Lord Jesus so shone with the glory of God that looking at the Lord was like trying to gaze at the sun on a cloudless day.

The Lord Jesus told John that the lampstands he saw, amongst which Christ walked, were the seven churches of Asia. And the Lord proceeded to give John a message for each of them, and told him to write it down.

John wrote these seven messages from the Lord to His churches, and we find them word for word as spoken by the Risen Christ, recorded in the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3.

These seven churches were real, historical churches. The remains of their church buildings have been discovered by archeologists. What Jesus said about them and to them fit what was happening in their churches near the end of the first century when He gave these messages to John to send to the seven churches.

But as is often true with the Scripture, Jesus' message to these churches applies to other churches. Just as Paul's letters to the Corinthians were not only for people in the church at Corinth, but apply to Christians living now in Panama City. Sure, there are contextual differences between what the seven churches of Asia Minor were experiencing and what is happening in our culture today, but **the messages from Christ are universal in their truth for us.**

Over the next six weeks, we will examine those seven messages, and as we do, we will consider **WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WE WILL BE** in the months and years that are ahead of us, until the Lord returns to take His bride home with Him in heaven.

The first message was to the church at Ephesus, where John had been the pastor for more than twenty years before he was exiled for preaching the Word of God.

Revelation 2:1-7 NKJV

1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

2 “I know

- your works,
- your labor,
- your patience,
- and that you cannot bear those who are evil.
- And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;
- 3 and you have persevered and have patience,
- and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you,

- that you have left your first love.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen;

repent and do the first works,

or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

6 But this you 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 give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’

I. WHAT WERE THE CITY AND CHURCH LIKE AT EPHESUS?

- **The city was like many a metropolis in the world today.**
 - Commercial center – famous seaport; three roads merged here offering the merchandise from Mesopotamia and the rest of Asia, along with the local fare of southern Asia Minor
 - Politically important – Ephesus was a free city even under Rome with self-government; it was called an assize town where the Roman Governor came periodically to dispense justice
 - Athletic center – home of the Panionian games, which were much like the original Olympic games across the Aegean Sea in Greece
 - Religious center – There had been three temples of Diana through the years in Ephesus, but the third, during John's day, was by far the greatest – one of the seven wonders of ancient world. 425x220x60'; 127 marble pillars, 36 covered with gold and jewels
 - It was a place of great licentiousness; in the worship of Diana; thousands of priestesses served as temple prostitutes in the temple. A letter, supposedly from an Ephesian philosopher said, "The approach to the altar of the temple was the darkness of vileness."
 - Ephesus was an asylum for criminals – everywhere within 200 yards of the temple boundaries was declared to be a "safe house."
 - The city was a fomentor of superstition – unreadable letters were sold as good luck charms in the temple
 - In such a city, submerged in the darkness of sin, idolatry, immorality, criminality, and sorcery, God placed a church!
- **What was the church like?**
 1. Paul stayed there three years, more than in any other city on his journeys except for Rome.
 2. John spent twenty five years of his life in Ephesus.
 3. But more important than all, Christ is there! Jesus said,

Revelation 2:1 NKJV "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

Holds – Gk construction means holds the whole thing, not just a part; the whole church was in the hand of the Lord.

Walks in midst – the Presence of Christ is there.

Revelation 2:2-3 NKJV 2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

Labor – toil which exhausts. **They were hard workers.**

Patience – triumphant fortitude – **They had steadfast endurance.**

A man took a little book of Christian comfort to a young lady who was terminally ill and unable to walk. He said, “I thought you might like to have this little book.”

She said shyly, “I wrote it.” – That is biblical patience – triumphant fortitude, steadfast endurance!

Revelation 2:6 NKJV But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Many things were right: labor, endurance, sound doctrine, discernment, rejection of Nicolaitans “priestly hierarchy.”

Revelation 2:4 NKJV Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

One thing was wrong: you have left your first love.

Perhaps the merchandise of her abundant markets had taken their passion for the Savior away.

Maybe a focus on the famous athletic events had robbed them of their love for Jesus.

Maybe the licentious influence accepted by the citizenry had corrupted their love for Christ.

We do not know. We only know it had fled. And the Lord who gave His life for theirs on Calvary, wanted their love back.

Revelation 2:5 NKJV Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

- **The appeal: remember, repent, return**

So Jesus said,

Remember how you were a slave to sin and bound for hell, and I paid the death penalty for you by dying on the cross.

Remember how I began to transform your life and make you into the person I created you to be.

Remember the answers to prayer you enjoyed and marveled at.

Remember the joy you had daily walking with Me in the newness of life I gave you.

Remember!

You don't enjoy those things anymore because you have lost your passionate love for Me.

Therefore, repent – turn around!

Do the first works – return to the passion you once felt and acted upon as a new believer.

Now let me ask an uncomfortable question.

II. WHAT DOES AN EPHESIAN CHURCH LOOK LIKE TODAY?

WHAT DOES AN EPHESIAN CHRISTIAN LOOK LIKE TODAY?

A. The Ephesian Church or Christian today may have

- 1. sound doctrine**
- 2. faithful discipline**
- 3. regular service**
- 4. but does not have a fervent passion for Jesus**

Jesus says to such a church or to such a Christian,

Remember –

- Remember the price I paid for you on the cross;
- Remember the joy you had when you were first saved;
- Remember how you loved to read My Word.
- Remember the way you would sing and worship Me.

- Remember how often and for how long you would pray. You could not get enough.
- Remember how you used to tell everyone what I had done for you and how I was changing you.

But not anymore –

- Thinking about the cross no longer moves you. You tire of hearing preachers or other Christians talk about the cross.
- So much of your joy that you had in Me and in the salvation and life I gave you is gone. Now you look for some kind of synthetic joy in endless football games, round after round of golf. Your eyes are close to being petrified by Pinterest, and how many thumbs up can you give on social media without it falling off.
- My Word has been replaced by TV or streaming or games.
- And if you even make it to worship twice a month, you think you are the most spiritual guy in the neighborhood.
- Prayer is reserved for crises, and then you feel like you have forgotten how to pray because you have.
- And witness? Really? Give your own testimony? Not on your life!

Remember how passionately you used to love Me?

I was number one in your life!

Not anymore!

So, repent! Don't keep going the same direction. **Turn around!**

Jesus says, "I still love you. Rekindle the passion in your love for Me."

- **How is passionate love for Jesus stirred and grown?**
 - **Adoration in worship**
 - **Intimacy in prayer**
 - **Excitement over evangelism**
 - **Invigorated as a witness**
 - **Service with purpose**

B. The Risen Christ says

1. I love you; you are in My hand.
2. I am still moving among you.
3. Remember how you used to love Me.
4. Repent of leaving your first love.
5. Return to Me.

Jesus wants a church filled with people who are passionately in love with Him.

Revelation 2:7 NKJV “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’