

8-13-2016, COTR Texarkana

Title: The 7 Churches of Revelation, pt.-1

Purpose: Proclaim the words of Jesus to the Churches of Revelation and provoke people to imitate their virtues and repent of their mistakes.

Spiritual Truth: Jesus wants us to follow him in a hostile world.

Text: Revelation 1:9-11

Topic: Revelation, Last Days, Persecution, Suffering, Love, Endurance

Series: The Final Chapter

Series Purpose: Teach people about the last days and show them how to live accordingly.

The 7 Churches of Revelation, pt.-1

I. Introduction

A. Review series: The Final Chapter...living in the last days

1. Listen to live stream @ChurchOnTheRock.org or the COTR iPhone/ Android app
2. Last week we talked about the major events in the Book of Revelation and the main character, Jesus Christ. Rather than focus on a sequence of end time events which we can't control, I've chosen to focus on how we should live as the last days unfold.

B. Today we'll talk about the churches John wrote to in the Book of Revelation. Revelation 1:9-11 (ESV) I, John, your brother and **partner in the tribulation** and the kingdom and the **patient endurance** that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day**, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."

1. These were 7 churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. John was exiled off the coast on the isle of Patmos. John, a partner in the tribulation, said I'm suffering and being persecuted just as you are and patient endurance means I'm willing to put up with it for a long time if necessary. I was in the Spirit 3x, i.e. God's Spirit took control/ God's Spirit came upon me.
2. The order in which the 7 churches/ cities are named may indicate the route to be followed by the messenger taking the book to them. Picture: Map

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D. Purpose: Proclaim the words of Jesus to the Churches of Revelation and provoke people to imitate their virtues and repent of their mistakes.

E. Spiritual Truth: Jesus wants us to follow him in a hostile world.

II. The Church at Ephesus (Picture of Jesus, commendation, rebuke and promise)

A. The picture of Jesus: Revelation 2:1-7 (ESV) "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**."

1. Angel is messenger, leader/ representative of the church.
2. Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia; it was a busy seaport, had thriving commerce, was the center of the cult of the goddess Artemis,

and a place where magical arts were practiced, Acts 19. At the time Rev. was written it may have been the most important Christian church in the Roman empire.

3. Stars represent the leaders of the 7 churches and the lampstands are the 7 churches.
4. Jesus walks among the churches, i.e. He watches and takes care of the churches.

Attachment to local churches were and are a part of God's plan.

- B. Commendation: Verse 2 "**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. 3 I know you are **enduring patiently** and bearing up for my name's sake, and **you have not grown weary.**

1. Works include their service for Jesus but also their behavior. Jesus is saying I know all about the life that you are living for Me.
2. Toil means their persistent and painful struggles to maintain live the Christian life.
3. Patient endurance 5x in Rev., means the endurance of suffering and persecution that Christians were experiencing and would experience in the future.
4. And how you cannot bear evil men: bear means to tolerate, to put up with. To test means noticing their behavior/ lifestyle and their teachings, and perhaps seeking information about them from other churches. We need to be careful who we follow.
5. They deal with hardships by enduring patiently 2x/ And you have not grown weary: they'd not given up following Christ even when it was hard.

- C. The rebuke: Verse 4 But I have this against you, that **you have abandoned the love you had at first.** 5 **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.

1. Jesus said you're doing really good but there's something I disapprove of and you need to change. You have abandoned the love you had at first: this may be
 - a (1) their love for Christ. Most of the Ephesian Christians were now 2nd generation believers. They had pure doctrine, lived godly lives and served the Lord but they could have lost their deep devotion to Christ. (Great Cmdt.)
 - b (2) their love for one another as Christians
 - c (3) their love for lost people. (The Great Commission) Lamps are supposed to shine. Maybe they no longer cared for lost people and didn't witness to them.
 - d (4) Their passion for their call to be a prophetic witness/ voice of God to the world. In Rev. 11:3-7, 10, lampstands refer to God's 2 "prophetic witnesses."
2. Jesus said remember how you used to live and repent/ do the works you did at 1st, i.e. radically change, not just a temporary feeling of regret or remorse.
3. The threat remove your lampstand is a punishment of unfaithful believers. It may mean the end of this community of believers as a church. The good news is they repented; church history says the church continued and was later the scene of a major church council. But today this once great metropolis is the site of a small, poor Islamic village with little or no Christian witness and only ruins of the past. Darkness has replaced the light.

- D. The promise: verse 6 Yet this you have: **you hate the works of the Nicolaitans**, which I also hate. 7 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**.
1. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans: i.e., the followers of Nicolaus. It's not clear who they were but some believe they taught that some degree of participation in the idolatrous culture of Ephesus with its pagan temple was permissible. Rather than being separate from the world they became a part of it.
 2. Christians are called to conquer/ overcome. This is a military term calling us to be victorious against the forces of evil.
 3. The reward for the conqueror is The tree of life. It was in the Garden of Eden and in Rev 22 it reappears in the New Jerusalem. Those who eat of it will never die, i.e. eternal life. The paradise of God is probably a name for heaven. This is why we imitate the virtues of the Ephesian church and repent of their mistakes.

III. The Church at Smyrna

- A. The picture of Jesus: verse 8 “And to the angel of the church in **Smyrna** write: ‘The words of the **first and the last**, who **died and came to life**.
1. Smyrna was a large and wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus.
 2. Jesus is the eternal God who suffered death and then was resurrected from the grave. Christ's suffering and victory encouraged the Christians at Smyrna who, like Christ were experiencing severe persecution.
- B. The commendation: verse 9 I know your **tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)** and the **slander** of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a **synagogue of Satan**.
1. Christ knew all about their sufferings: I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! They suffered persecution and extreme poverty. James tells us how they were rich. James 2:5 (NIV)...my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are **poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom** he promised those who love him?
 2. They were being persecuted not only by pagan Gentiles but also by hostile Jews and by Satan himself, i.e. the synagogue of Satan. In the history of the church the most severe persecution has come from religious people. Satan is mentioned in four of the seven letters as an adversary to the churches.
- C. The rebuke: there was no rebuke for these faithful, suffering Christians. Only 2/7 churches weren't rebuked. Maybe their sufferings had helped them be stronger Chr.
- D. The challenge: verse 10 **Do not fear what you are about to suffer**. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be **tested**, and for **ten days** you will have tribulation.
1. Do not fear/ be afraid (lit., stop being afraid) of what you are about to suffer. The Devil is about to cause your enemies to arrest some of you and put you in prison in order that they may test you for ten days, i.e. a short, limited amount of time.

2. That you may be tested: going to jail for being a Christian was a test. Their enemies' tried to get them to renounce their Christian faith. Like Job God allowed the test to prove the genuineness of their faith. Tests reveal who we really are. They passed A+
- E. The promise: 10... **Be faithful unto death**, and I will give you the **crown of life**. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who **conquers** will not be hurt by the **second death**.'
 1. Be faithful unto death, i.e. prove yourself to be willing to die for your faith/ Never give up believing in me, E.g. Christians suffering in the Middle East under ISIS.
 2. The crown of life // the wreath made of laurel leaves that was given to the winner in an athletic contest. Picture Michael Phelps and his 13th individual gold medal, the world's most decorated Olympian. // Christians
 3. James 1:12 (NIV) **Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial** because, having stood the test, that person will receive the **crown of life** that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 1 Peter 5:4 (NIV) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the **crown of glory** that will never fade away.
 4. Those who conquer / overcome will be spared the (evil) effects of the second death, which is spiritual death, eternal death.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The message to the 7 churches of Revelation is simple: Jesus knows the way I'm living, keep on doing what's right no matter what, change what's wrong because one day very soon Jesus is coming back to reward His faithful servants!
- B. 2 Timothy 4:6–8 (NIV)...the time for my departure is near. 7 I have **fought the good fight**, I have **finished the race**, I have **kept the faith**. 8 Now there is in store for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also **to all who have longed for his appearing**.
- C. I want to be like Paul and the believers in Revelation and hear the Lord say, Well Done!

V. Response

- A. Prayer
- B. Souls
- C. *** *Logos Bible Software and library, ESV Study Bible, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, A Handbook on the Revelation to John, The New Intl. Greek Testament Commentary and Word Studies in the NT were used to prepare this message.*