

Seven Churches 2020 Pt. 2

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, August 23, 2020

INTRODUCTION PT. 1

Thank you for joining us today. Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let us turn to the Book of Revelation (i.e., Revelation 2).

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

In the opening chapter of the Book of Revelation, the Risen Christ PRESENTS Himself to the aged apostle John as One who has come to JUDGE and/or ASSESS His people. Decades after His Death, Resurrection and Ascension, the Lord commissioned John to record specific messages for the CHURCHES located at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea...

KEY – I want to consider these words of Christ (i.e., considering HOW they continue to speak through the ages)

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

FYI – Last Sunday I noted that the remarks of Christ tend to follow a very clear PATTERN or OUTLINE...

1) Initial Address

...Unto the angel of the church at _____, write...

2) Self-Description

Christ will detail some unique feature re: Himself to the readers—a feature demonstrating glory and authority.

3) Commendation

Christ will delineate what the church has done well (i.e., those areas that please Him—if applicable).

4) Rebuke

Christ will then delineate with stinging clarity how they have grieved Him (i.e., if applicable).

5) Call to Repentance

Christ will call them to remedy the stated rebuke through some repentance-oriented command/mandate.

6) Promise

Christ will offer a word of encouragement re: what lies ahead and/or could be theirs if they obey.

7) Conclusion

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

KEY – Let’s BEGIN our EXPLORATION in Revelation chapter 2...

EPHESUS [TO THE WORD]

Revelation 2:1–7 (NIV)

1 “To the angel [i.e., “messenger”] of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

EPHESUS [INITIAL ADDRESS]

FYI – Christ’s opening message was directed to the church at EPHESUS. As I noted last week, the other six churches were DAUGHTER churches of the church at Ephesus (i.e., Ephesus was the “mother-ship” in this regard). Thus, it is sensible WHY Christ began with them.

Q. What do we know about ancient Ephesus? (FYI – Historical context matters)

A1. Ephesus was one of the five MAJOR cities of the Roman Empire—along with Rome, Corinth, Antioch and Alexandria. This was a PROMINENT city for the following four REASONS: **a)** ECONOMICS (Ephesus was an economic powerhouse—being the most favorable seaport in Asia Minor); **b)** SIZE (Ephesus had a mammoth population of app. 300k); **c)** CULTURE (Ephesus was a cultural and architectural marvel with a 25k-person theatre, public baths, gymnasiums, etc.); and **d)** RELIGION (i.e., the Temple of Artemis/Diana was located in Ephesus—being one of the seven wonders of the ancient world).

A2. The apostle PAUL first came into contact with the city of Ephesus and its people during his missionary journeys (cf. Acts). Paul came to ESTABLISH the church at Ephesus over a three-year period (i.e., app. forty-three-years before the writing of the Book of Revelation).

A3. The apostle Paul experienced FRUITFUL ministry during this multi-year stay (cf. Acts 18–19): a) he BAPTIZED new converts; b) he PREACHED boldly to the local population; c) he worked MIRACLES (i.e., his garments were known to heal people); and d) sorcerers BURNED their pagan scrolls and spells. Sounds like REVIVAL to me!

A4. Eventually, Paul would have to move on, though he NEVER forgot his ties to the believers at Ephesus. Years later, during his imprisonment in A.D. 60, Paul wrote a letter of correspondence that we NOW call the Book of Ephesians. Years later, the apostle JOHN would come to lead this assembly!

KEY – When Jesus addresses the church at Ephesus, it is a congregation we are BIBLICALLY FAMILIAR with...

EPHESUS [SELF-DESCRIPTION]

FYI – Once Christ makes the address, He offers a SELF-description (i.e., some facet of His power and authority).

Revelation 2:1–7

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

NOTE 1 – The seven STARS represent the seven MESSENGERS who presided over the local church (i.e., angelic beings OR pastoral leaders cf. Rev. 1:20). The fact that they are in His RIGHT hand establishes His dominion and mastery over them.

NOTE 2 – The seven gold lampstands represent the seven CHURCHES—i.e., churches He has come to rightly assess (cf. Rev. 1:20). He has EVERY right to SPEAK TO and/or JUDGE His own as they, ultimately, BELONG to Him!

EPHESUS [COMMENDATION PT. 1]

FYI – Christ naturally and lovingly moves on to address areas of STRENGTH, HEALTH and proper FUNCTION...

Revelation 2:2–3, 6

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

6 . . . you [also] have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate [**FYI** – the Nicolaitans being a group who professed that Christians could live in sin without consequence because of the forgiving nature of God].

NOTE 1 – Christ begins with a simple yet profound statement (cf. v. 2): “I KNOW...”

Hebrews 4:13 (Emphasis Mine)

13 **Nothing** in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. **Everything** is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Q. What—precisely—did He know concerning the church at Ephesus?

A. He knew about **a)** their hard WORK, **b)** their PERSEVERANCE and **c)** their REJECTION of wicked men, false apostles and false teaching (i.e., purity and sound theology). Christ noted their **d)** spiritual ENDURANCE—i.e., laboring for forty-plus years in a morally bankrupt, pagan and oppressive environment!

KEY – This church received a GLOWING report from the Lord. ANY church would and should be glad to receive such a word from the Lord. As I have noted in years past, I would be more than PLEASED if the Lord offered such a word to NEW LIFE!

EPHESUS [COMMENDATION PT. 2]

Q. If He were to speak, what might He say concerning our areas of relative (+)?

Q. Would He perceive us as a people hard work and spiritual diligence?

Q. Would He perceive us to be a people of perseverance amidst adversity?

Q. Would He perceive us as a godly people who reject false teaching/living?

EPHESUS [REBUKE]

FYI – Of course, Christ moves on from commendation to REBUKE (i.e., assessing areas of waywardness, etc.).

Q. What does Christ have to say to the Ephesians re: spiritual waywardness? Where were they OFF?

Revelation 2:4

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

NOTE 1 – Christ herein used the word “AGAPĒN” (i.e., the unconditional and deep love that God has for the whole of humanity). Apparently, their love for God and their relationship with Him had somehow become SECONDARY or LESS vital than it had previously been...

NOTE 2 – Though this church had RETAINED a moral purity and lifestyle, high levels of Christian service and fidelity in the face of persecution, their LOVE for Christ Himself had WANED. They were lacking in the area of INTIMATE connection and affection. Perhaps they, like many believers through the centuries, became “so busy doing the work of the Lord they forgot the Lord of the work.”

KEY – The WORST thing that can happen to a church (ind. or corp.) had taken place: their RELATIONSHIP with Christ had devolved into a RELIGIOUS exercise. Relationship was replaced with orthodoxy and routine—i.e., the passion that fueled their faith had LAPSED...

Q. What is the status of your love for Christ?

Q. What is the condition of your relationship with Him?

EPHESUS [REMEDY]

Q. What did Christ command them to do in light of this?

Revelation 2:5

5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

NOTE – The Ephesians were called to REMEMBER those early moments in their connection with Christ—i.e., moments when their love for God was palpable and the driving force in their lives! They were to get back to the heart of the matter and REPENT (i.e., change of spiritual direction).

Q. Have you lost the love you had at first? Has your love for Him waxed or waned with the passing of time?

KEY – It is NOT too late to go back to that place in your heart and RETURN to your first love!

EPHESUS [PROMISE]

Q. What did Christ PROMISE to those who FAILED to heed His warning?

Revelation 2:5b

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

NOTE – He warned them that if they failed to properly respond, the LIGHT of their witness in Ephesus would be EXTINGUISHED. There comes a time when the Lord—should the church refuse His will—sovereignly removes the local assembly from the spiritual landscape of a region.

Q. How many churches has He REMOVED?

Q. How many has He YET to remove? Word of warning!

KEY – But to those who would HEED His words...

EPHESUS [CONCLUSION]

Revelation 2:7

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

KEY – This speaks to HEAVENLY ENTRANCE and REWARD. Who wants to be a part of this? REMEMBER...

Matthew 22:37

37 . . . Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

SMYRNA [TO THE WORD]

Revelation 2:8–11

8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

SMYRNA [INITIAL ADDRESS]

Q. What do we know about Smyrna?

A1. Smyrna was a PROSPEROUS and BEAUTIFUL port city in the Roman province of Asia (i.e., modern-day Turkey). It was located about fifty miles north of Ephesus. The name Smyrna comes for the word MYRRH, which was a wonderfully fragrant spice (i.e., used for anointing dead bodies).

A2. Smyrna boasted schools in the fields of science and medicine (i.e., city of ACADEMIC pedigree and note).

A3. Moreover, Smyrna was an epicenter for Emperor worship and was home of the Imperial Cult (**FYI** – they literally WORSHIPPED Roman EMPERORS as gods among men in ancient Rome). The refusal of Christians to worship the Emperor led to fierce, ongoing PERSECUTION...

NOTE 1 – Early Christians were NOT persecuted by Rome because they worshipped Jesus. They were persecuted by the Romans because they worshipped ONLY Jesus. The world has NO problem with you serving Christ as one God among many. However, you cross a line in their eyes when you proclaim HIM and Him ALONE! This has been true from the beginning...

NOTE 2 – Interestingly, Jesus notes the major source of their current persecution: the JEWS themselves! Not only were the believers at Smyrna persecuted by PAGAN Gentiles—they were persecuted by those who claimed ALLEGIANCE to the One True God. As the Jews were working against the spread of the gospel, Christ called them the “synagogue of Satan” (v. 9b).

KEY – Read through the Book of Acts and you will OFTEN see the Jews as aggressive opponents (TRAGICALLY).

SMYRNA [SELF-DESCRIPTION]

Q. How did Christ identify Himself in this text?

Revelation 2:8

8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”

NOTE – Christ presents Himself as One with all AUTHORITY and DOMINION (i.e., He transcends the universe—being the First and the Last; He has also conquered the power of death, etc.). Think of how comforting it would be to hear from the One who conquered death (i.e., in light of the fierce persecution and death they were facing)!

SMYRNA [COMMENDATION]

FYI – Christ had much to COMMEND them for...

Revelation 2:9

9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

NOTE – Christ proclaims to know the sincerity and the richness of their FAITH in Him. DESPITE their afflictions and poverty (i.e., the underlying Greek word for poverty indicates an extreme deprivation), they were truly RICH.

Q. In what way?

A. They had HIM...

Jeremiah 9:23–24a

23 This is what the Lord says:

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
 or the strong boast of their strength
 or the rich boast of their riches,
 24 but let the one who boasts boast about this:
 that they have the understanding to know me . . .

Q. To what degree are we convinced that the wealth of knowing Him transcends the wealth of this world?

Q. To what degree do we realize that the reward in knowing Him transcends earthly opposition/challenge?

SMYRNA [REBUKE & REMEDY]

FYI 1 – It is notable that Christ has NO rebuke for this church. Out of the seven we shall study throughout this series, it is this persecuted church that receives NO word of correction. Such remarks seem most RESERVED for the churches that were COMFORTABLE and under little to no external THREAT!

FYI 2 – Since there was no rebuke, there was no need for a remedy or corresponding call to repentance.

SMYRNA [PROMISE & CONCLUSION]

Q. What did Christ promise the church at Smyrna?

Revelation 2:10–11

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

NOTE 1 – Christ reassures them that they need NOT fear what they WILL suffer. Sometimes the Lord delivers us FROM peril and sometimes He preserves us THROUGH it. There must have been some COMFORT in knowing that He knew what was to come, giving them advanced warning. We can handle almost ANYTHING when we remember that He is aware!

NOTE 2 – There is much DEBATE concerning the “ten days: of v. 10b. Some see this as a SYMBOLIC representation of the ten persecutions Christians would experience under varying Roman rulers (e.g., Nero to Diocletian AD. 64 through 312). More likely, it refers to an indefinite, though LIMITED, period of time.

NOTE 3 – To those who overcame, they would enjoy lasting GAIN! They would receive heavenly REWARD (v. 10b) and the fires of HELL (i.e., the second death) shall NOT touch them (v. 11b).

KEY – Church of Jesus Christ—remember that your reward is eternal in nature. Herein you will have tribulation and difficulty (as Jesus Himself has promised). But if you overcome and hold on, there is an eternal crown of victory in store for you! I cannot help but think of the concluding words of the apostle PAUL...

2 Timothy 4:6–8

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and 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.

Q. Can we TRULY say the same?

Q. To what degree are we living under this sense of PROMISE?

CONCLUSIONS

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.