

An Epistle to Ephesus...and to Us

(Revelation 2:1-7)

INTRODUCTION:

1. There are two epistles to Ephesus, although we do not think about it that way.
 - A. The first, of course, we call Ephesians, a letter written by Paul while in prison in Rome, but we really do not have a name for the second.
 - B. The second is a small one—only seven verses—found in Revelation 2:1-7.
2. Despite its short nature it carries a very powerful message that every congregation seeking to remain faithful to the Lord and His word needs to hear.
3. Though we will be dealing with this text Wednesday, Lord willing, I cannot address it fully at that time. So, I am going to try to do that today.
4. So, let's take some time to examine this short epistle to see what lessons we can learn from it, lessons that are applicable to us and His churches today.

BODY:

I. The author: Jesus

- A. He is “the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand.”
 1. Jesus is first described this way in 1:16.
 2. Holding the seven stars that represent the messengers of the seven churches (1:20) in his right hand indicates:
 - a. The importance of the message to be given—that the power of His right hand will assure that the message is delivered.
 - b. That God's power is the protection and security of the churches.
 3. We need to see, to visualize, Jesus holding **seven stars in his hand**.
 - a. No one seems to deal with this, so maybe I am seeing more than it presents.
 - b. But this *apocalypse* intends to paint a picture of the magnitude and magnificence of Jesus the Savior, and He holds **seven stars in his hand!**
 - i. We should ask ourselves if Jesus is that big, that magnificent, in my life?
 - ii. Do we stand in awe of the majesty and power of Him who not only holds stars within His hand, but who *created* them and the universe itself (Col. 1:16)?
- B. He is “the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”
 1. That the churches are represented by golden lampstand...
 - a. Made of gold indicates their precious, valuable, and likely holy nature.
 - b. May connect them to the temple lampstand that had seven lamps and was the **only source of light** for the inner sanctuary of worship/service to God.
 - i. That would be fitting seeing God's people, His churches, are His means of dispensing His light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16 – “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”).
 - ii. And that light consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph. 5:8-9 – “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)”)
 2. That He walks among the lampstands tells us that though He rules as King over all (Eph. 1:23), He chooses to stay close to His people, observing their times of goodness and joy, as well as the bad times of sadness, trials, and tribulation.

II. Jesus knows the good

- A. He knows their deeds, toil, and perseverance (2:2a).
 1. He is aware of his people's **deeds**, the **work** they do, the actions they take in service to Him (Mt. 10:42 – “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”).

2. He is aware of his people's **toiling**, their **struggles** in standing aright in this hard and wicked world.
 - a. Toil comes from a Greek root meaning to *chop*, and is used in the sense of beating one's chest in grief, in lamenting, in mourning amid hardships and sorrows.
 - b. It carries the idea of cutting down or reducing the strength of the one suffering.
 - c. God sees all of this. He knows what we face and what it does to His people!
 3. **He is aware of his people's perseverance**, how they endure **cheerfully** in **hope**!
 - a. That is what persevere means, to endure with cheerfulness and hope.
 - b. Hope is it, it is the means of enduring all we face with a cheerful outlook (Heb. 10:32-35 – "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted **joyfully** the seizure of your property, **knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.").
- B. He knows their enduring stand for truth.
1. He knows they demand the truth, the correct doctrine (2:2).
 - a. They would not tolerate evil men, testing those who claimed apostleship and finding them to be false.
 - b. They took seriously the command of the Lord for purity in truth, which so few are inclined to do today (1 Jn. 4:1 – "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.").
 2. He reminds them again that he knows they have persevered, endured, for His name's sake and have not grown weary (2:3).
 - a. It is so important that we understand that God knows, sees, and understands what we are going through, what we are facing.
 - b. It is important that each of us know that our brethren know, see, and understand as well! And we need to express that to one another.
- C. This is a church...
1. That is working and active in their service to the Lord.
 2. That is standing strong in the faith, in the truth, and doing so with determination.
 3. That is morally pure, that would not tolerate sinful people and sinful actions.
 - a. This was the opposite of the church at Corinth that was rebuked for having an adulterous brother among them (1 Cor. 5:1-2).
 - b. They also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which God also hates (2:6)
 4. Doing all these things despite facing suffering and trials.
 5. We would likely want to be a member of, seeming to be sound and true in the Lord's eyes.

III. God knows the bad

- A. Despite all that has just been said, this is a church with a serious problem! They had left their first love (2:4).
1. They were getting the "do this, do not do that" part right. But a relationship with God is not a list of things to be done to please Him!
 2. They were missing the love:
 - a. Our relationship with God must first and foremost be about love.
 - b. Love is the first and second greatest commandments from God (Matt. 22:37-39 – "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. Love is the purpose of our instruction in the gospel (1 Tim. 1:3-5 – “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**,⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.⁵ But the **goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart** and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”).
 - d. Failure to live in love is failure to comprehend and appreciate God’s great love for us (1 Jn. 4:19-21 – “We love, because He first loved us.²⁰ If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”).
- B. We cannot let our relationship with deteriorate into a life of checking off the boxes of a “to do list”!
- 1. Approaching God that way is less than what we will accept.
 - a. We expect people we have a relationship with, those we are close to and connected to, especially in Christ, to act toward us in love.
 - b. Think about one of the closest connections we can have in this life—the marriage bond. Would any of us be happy if our mate said they would fulfill their marriage duties, but they no longer love us? That would crush me! So, why think would God accept it?
 - 2. So, we should ask ourselves, “Do I truly love the Lord?”
 - a. If you have trouble defining that love, maybe your love is weak.
 - b. If you have trouble being what God wants us to be, maybe your love for God is weak.
 - i. I understand that life can be hard, demanding of your time, etc., which can easily get in the way of being and doing what God wants.
 - ii. If that is the case, maybe you should consider why those things are being allowed to take precedence over our service to God. Ask yourself about your love for God.
 - c. If you are struggling with temptation and losing, consider Joseph, who though a slave in Egypt after being sold out by his own brothers, and how he dealt with temptation.
 - i. When faced with sexual advances from Potiphar’s wife, Joseph never lost sight of his relationship with God (Gen. 39:8-9 – “But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and **sin against God**?”).
 - ii. Relationship is what it all came down to. It was not ultimately about Potiphar or his wife, but about God, about loving Him and refusing to harm that relationship!
 - d. That is what God desires of us!

IV. Solution, consequence, and reward

A. Solution (Rev. 2:5):

- 1. **Remember**...from where you have fallen.
 - a. *Forgetting* is one of the greatest problems we have as Christians.
 - i. Those freed from sin are often drawn back to it by its promise of pleasure, all the while *forgetting* the pain and weariness of its slavery, guilt, and self-loathing.
 - ii. Those once freed from sin forget the great joy of freedom, the sense of peace and comfort, offered in the grace of God and we become weary, we stop loving.
 - b. God wants us to remember those days when our *love* for God was *expressed in zeal*!
 - i. If you are struggling with your love, zeal, for God, you need to ask yourself why you are in the state you are in, why your love for God has faltered!
 - ii. You should ask yourself what you are doing, or not doing, or allowing into our life that is weakening your love for God.
 - c. Though only you can truly answer that question, a suggestion to consider is that maybe our love has declined because we have forgotten God’s majesty and awe.

- i. We live such rushed lives and often fill what free time we have by looking down at our phone, or at the computer screen, or at TV screen.
 - ii. We do look up, out, or around and see the marvelous wonder and power of God.
 - iii. We need to take to heart the warning and exhortation of Jeremiah (Jer. 5:22-24 – “Do you not fear Me?” declares the Lord. “Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, an eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it.”²³ ‘But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and departed.’²⁴ ‘They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain in its season, both the autumn rain and the spring rain, who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”’).
 - d. Has the wonder of the creation become mundane?
 - e. Have we become so attached to technology and serving the “media gods” that we cannot exist without it before our eyes, without it keeping us from seeing God’s wonder, without it interfering with our relationship with God and others?
2. **Repent**—change your mind
- a. Until our minds are changed about what is lacking in our relationship to God, nothing in our life and relationship with God is going to change!
 - b. To properly repent, we need to examine our lives and find the deeds, etc., that we need to repent of—what it is that is keeping us from loving God as we should—and change them!
3. **Return**—do the deeds you did at first!
- a. What were those deeds? Did you read the Bible more, pray more, gather with Christians for studies, worship, and enjoyment more? Did time together with brethren mean more?
 - b. Did you fear condemnation more and so appreciate God’s salvation more?
 - c. Why is it so easy to become sluggish in our work? We forget...
 - i. Who God is and all that He has done and continues to do for us!
 - ii. What we have in Christ—how all that we need for the best life here and the reception of eternal life after this short one is over is abundantly supplied by God.
 - iii. When we forget, our mind changes about God and what He asks of us.
- B. **Consequence** of not repenting and returning—“or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place.”
1. Remember, we can be like Ephesus, gathering for worship, doing all the things we should, etc., but doing so without our first love. That is a serious problem.
 2. True, acceptable local churches of God are those that **obey** the truth and **love** the Lord. Both must be present. So, it matters where you worship, what local church you choose!
- C. **Reward** for faithfulness (2:7 – “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.”)
1. We need to listen, to have an ear inclined to hear, and a heart inclined to do.
 2. Only by doing what we hear can we gain God’s blessings (Jas. 1:23-25 – “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”).
 3. Those inclined to listen and do will **overcome**. And those who overcome are granted to **eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God**.
 - a. The paradise that was lost because of sin is regained by the faithful, the overcomers!
 - b. The fellowship, joy, and hope of life lost by sin is restored for the faithful in Jesus.
 - c. What a wonderful thing that is, a wonderful goal for your life. So, do not forget. But, if you have forgotten, choose to remember, repent, and return to God!

CONCLUSION:

1. This epistle to Ephesus is an epistle to us! Its message is timeless and relevant for all who have an ear to hear and a heart to obey.
 - A. If you are a Christian but have lost your first love, will you repent and return, seeking God's forgiveness in prayer, and determining to serve him with renewed love and zeal?
 - B. If you are not in Christ, will you enter a relationship of love and salvation today by hearing His word and obeying Him in F-R-C-BP?
2. The *One who walks among the lampstands* and *holds the seven stars in His right hand* invites you to come. Will you come today?