

11 February 2024

Lessons from the Seven Churches

Dear Sisters and Elders,

In the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 contain counsel from the Lord to the seven branches of the Church in Western Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). I will provide a review of the key counsel to each branch and then summarize the importance for us of these two chapters and the counsel to the seven Churches.

To Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7), He praised them for forsaking those who were evil and then commends them for laboring for the name of Christ without fainting. The Lord then chastises them because *"thou has left thy first love"*. Though they maintained the doctrines of Christ, they showed less affection and enthusiasm for Jesus than they previously had done.

To Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11), He tells them he understands the tribulations they are enduring from people who claim to be righteous Jews but are really followers of Satan. He encourages them to fear *"none of the things which thou shalt suffer"* and explains that some will be cast into prison, and perhaps even killed. Yet, if they are faithful, they will receive a crown of life.

To Pergamos (Rev 2:12-17), He praises them for holding fast to the name of Christ and not denying Him while living in a place filled with wickedness. He mentions the martyrdom of Antipas, one of their members, and how they stayed strong through all the opposition. And then, he chastises them because they were doing things that weakened the faith of some of their members specifically committing fornication and willingly eating the meat of animals sacrificed to idols.

To Thyatira (Rev 2: 18-29), He praises them for their *"works, their charity, their service, their faith, their patience, and their works"*. Mentioning specifically that their works appear to be getting better and better. And then despite their goodness and efforts, they allowed a woman named Jezebel to enter in among them who then encouraged and engaged in sexual immorality and the eating of meat from animals sacrificed to idols, the same practices that had crept into Pergamos.

To Sardis (Rev 3:1-6), there was little for the Lord to praise. As a church, they were spiritually dead and had faded into sin and wickedness. His counsel to them was to *"strengthen the things which remain"* and to repent of their apostasy. Fortunately, there were still a *"few names"* who had not defiled their garments and the Lord promised that they *"shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy"*.

To Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13), the Lord gave ample praise. *"... for thou hast ... kept my word and has not denied my name."* The Lord promised protection from the temptations *"which shall come upon all the world."*

To Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), He chastises the members because they had become lukewarm. Meaning they were not cold (against God) or hot (for God). They seemed to simply not care.

The Lord explained their relative comfort and wealth was the basis of this apathy. Because they did not seem to be in temporal need, they were satisfied with their lives, neglecting the spiritual. He declared them to be wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

If I were to rank these churches based on righteousness, I would place them in the following order of most righteous to least righteous.

- 1) Philadelphia – Kept the word of God and did not deny Christ's name.
- 2) Smyrna – They were faithful in persecution despite living among wickedness.
- 3) Ephesus – They still labored for Christ's name, but they were losing their zeal for truth.
- 4) Pergamos – The saints did not deny the Christ, even though the city was wicked. Sexual sin had crept in.
- 5) Thyatira – Good works were growing until they allowed in Jezebel and sexual immorality.
- 6) Sardis – Most were spiritually dead, but there were a few who were still righteous.
- 7) Laodicea – Caught up in the pursuit of comfort and wealth, they had become lukewarm to spiritual matters.

In his writings to each of the seven Churches, the Lord inspired John to write both warnings to the sinners and blessings to the righteous. Here is a generalized list of things they were/(we are) warned against:

- Immoral acts and accepting and supporting that which encourages many forms of "idol" worship. (Rev 2:15)
- Following the teachings of "worldly" people respected and knowledgeable but who do not live Christian virtues or promote the following of Jesus Christ. (Rev 2:14)
- Being seduced by men and woman who choose a course of immorality and "idol" worship due to status, wealth, beauty, intelligence, or charisma. (Rev 2:20)
- Giving into persecution, no matter how difficult. (Rev 2:10, Rev 3:9)
- Placing emphasis on the wisdom, fads, ideas, technologies, and cultures of the world. (Rev 2:4, Rev 3:2)
- Being apathetic and lukewarm about spiritual things because of comfort and wealth. (Rev 3:16-17)

Every one of these warnings is directed towards worldliness and the ills of a decaying society. I really love this quote by Ronald A. Knox, an English Priest and theologian born in 1888, that defines the lust and desire for the things of the world. *"Worldliness is not, in the last analysis, love of possessions, or the habit of courting great personages. It is simply the weakness of fibre which makes us take our standards from the society around us."* Many of the members in these seven Churches had *"weakness of fibre"* causing them to look for "horizontal approval" (the world) rather than "vertical approval" (God). They sought after the pleasures and comforts of the world rather than the spiritual truths that would strengthen their moral and spiritual *"fibre"*.

Following these warnings, the Lord explained to the Churches the blessings available to them (and us) if they (we) will overcome these temptations and distractions. It is interesting that every one of these blessings reference the Temple.

- **Philadelphia:** *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God ... and I will write upon him my new name."* (Rev 3:12)
- **Smyrna:** *"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second (spiritual) death"* (Rev 2:11)
- **Ephesus:** *"... to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God"* (Rev 2:7)
- **Pergamos:** *"I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written"* (Rev 2:17)
- **Thyatira:** *"I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron ... And I will give him the morning star"* (Christ)" (Rev 2:26-28)
- **Sardis:** *"... clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father"* (Rev 3:5)
- **Laodicea:** *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne"* (Rev 3:21)

In these two chapters, there is a divine pattern established by the Lord in encouraging those on the right path to continue their course and those in need of a course correction to change. Here are the four points of the pattern:

- 1) Praise them for what they are doing right (if possible).
- 2) Correct them for that which they are doing wrong.
- 3) Warn them of the consequences of their sins.
- 4) Promise them holy and sacred blessings for repenting and standing firm in truth.

As I have reflected on how this applies to us in the Ghana Kumasi Mission, I think there are three questions we might each consider.

- Am I living my life like a Philadelphian or a Laodicean?
- Am I being distracted by the world?
- Am I claiming the referenced temple blessings?

The city of Philadelphia is known as the "city of brotherly love". The root of the word is "*philos*", a Greek word meaning "*friend*", or "*someone dearly loved*". Isn't it interesting it was in a city with this as its foundation that the people were the most righteous. May we each be filled with the love of God and claim the blessings available to us as we make conscious choices to avoid the temptations and distractions of the world.

All My Love,

President Kunz