

Revelation 2:1-7

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Revelation. Turn with me to the book of Revelation. We'll be in Revelation chapter 2. I don't know why it is, but it seems to be very quiet this morning. I know we have a number of people who aren't here, specifically in this area right here.

I guess last week when I introduced it, the Lord was leading me to go through the book of Revelation. At least the people in the first three rows on each side got scared. A number of people told me that they were excited that I was in the book of Revelation.

But at least this group right here that sits close to me decided that some of you are faithful and you stay true. The others are, well, I don't know about that. And I know some are traveling and I know we have a number that are out of pocket.

But last week we introduced the book of Revelation. We looked at Revelation chapter 1. We looked at the outcome of the book of Revelation. When we get to the end, what we can expect. As I was preparing for this and as I was praying through it, before I realized the Lord was going to lead me through the entirety of the book, at least I believe that's where we're going now, the portion of Revelation that I really wanted to stop at and the portion I really wanted to focus on is the portion in which we are entering into this morning.

And that would be Revelation chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 3. If you are familiar with the book of Revelation, you will understand that these are the letters to the seven churches. There are a number of repetitive themes throughout the book.

[1 : 19] One of those repetitive themes is the number seven. We see it over and over again. We see in Revelation 1 that Jesus is holding the seven stars, which are the messengers or the angels, to the churches.

That would be the pastors. We see that he is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Jesus tells us that this is representative of the churches, the lampstand being a church and the stars being the messenger or the pastor of those churches.

It is not just saying that Jesus is standing only in the midst and in control of these specific seven churches, but seven is representation of the entirety or the complete church because all throughout Scripture, the number seven stands for completion.

So we see in Revelation chapter 1, stay with me on this, Jesus in heaven standing in the midst of and in control of his church on earth.

That's what Revelation 1 shows us, that there is Jesus, the King of kings and Prince of peace and the Lord of lords, standing in the midst of and in control of his church on earth.

[2 : 26] Revelation chapter 2 and 3 shows us his church on earth, standing in his presence and being controlled by its king in heaven.

Revelation 1 shows us what the king in heaven looks like, standing in the midst and in control of his church. And Revelation 2 and 3 shows us what the church looks like when it stands in the presence and in control of its king, which is in heaven.

We saw the reality that in Revelation chapter 1, Jesus is presented differently than he is anywhere else in the New Testament. He is no longer a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger.

He is no longer a peasant walking around in common, ordinary clothing. He is no longer lowly and mild and meek and the humblest of servants. Rather, he is the ruler of all rulers, it says.

He is the one with flaming eyes of fire, white hair, with a sword of the Lord coming out of his mouth, a golden sash across his chest and his feet as burnished bronze. We see what he looks like when he stands in the presence and in control of his church, what he looks like today presently.

[3 : 31] And in the next few weeks, we will begin to see what it looks like when the church allows him to be in its presence and in control of it while it functions on earth.

So if you're physically able and desire to do so, I want you to stand with me as we read together Revelation chapter 2, verses 1 through 7. This is the first of the seven letters to the seven churches.

Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 1, says, To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this, I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men.

And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you have found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first.

[4 : 35] Or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent. Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

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.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much this morning for your word. We pray, oh God, that your word would accomplish its purpose. That it would go forth, not just as the thought and the opinion of man, but that it would be proclaimed as the very word of God.

That it would penetrate our hearts, it would penetrate our minds. Lord, that it would draw us closer to you. Lord, that it would call us to be the church, that you are calling us to be for your glory and honor. And we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated. We have in Revelation chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 3, seven letters to seven churches going counterclockwise across the region of ancient Asia, which would be modern day Turkey.

[5 : 37] These churches, some of them are very familiar to us, as is the first one, the church at Ephesus. It is a very prominent church throughout the New Testament. Some are not familiar to us at all. There have been many different interpretations of these seven letters, depending on your interpretation of the book of Revelation.

There are a number of ways. There are four primary ways in which you can approach the book of Revelation. You can approach it as something that is just something that has already taken place. It took place around the fall of when Rome overtook Jerusalem.

Sometimes predetermined that. And you can see it as past events that have already taken place. You can read it as something that is taking place currently. You can read it as something that is always pointing to just this type or this picture, not necessarily something that is going to take place.

Or you can read it as things that were promised to take place sometime in the future. That is the way in which I interpret the book of Revelation. I have a number of reasons to get there. I believe that the church is raptured in chapter 4 of the book of Revelation, and everything from chapter 5 and following speaks of things to happen after the rapture of the church.

When we get there, we will address those issues. But depending on how you read the book of Revelation, it always determines how you read these seven letters.

[6 : 53] Some, and I see it throughout history, though I don't stick to it stringently, some see the seven letters as representative of seven church ages throughout history.

There are seven epics. These are very great men who preach this that say that each one of these represents a time in the church age, that the church at Ephesus would have represented the church following the apostles.

And then we would finally get all the way down to the church at Laodicea, which is a representation of the church today, that the church is lukewarm. And many of us would go, absolutely so, that is right. And we would see how we can find some place in history that would match the picture of the letter to the seven churches.

For each of those churches, we could find an epic or a time. The problem with that interpretation is that we would have to take a European and American view of the church.

Now, stay with me on that, because while the church in America may be lukewarm, as is the church at Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3, the church in Asia is red hot and on fire and is growing rapidly.

[8 : 03] So we have to be careful to pigeonhole interpretations of things in Scripture. We have to be careful how we try to make it fit our worldview, that is, our American or European worldview, and we try to separate itself from the rest of the world.

What we do know is that God, through Jesus, through an angel to John, gave seven letters to seven churches at one time.

And those letters were to be circulated among those seven churches so that all seven of them would have read them in one sitting. The book of Revelation would have been circulated around these seven churches.

I believe that the seven letters represent for us seven characteristics of a healthy church. They are to be equally visible in every church, seven being total.

This is what God expects His church to look like. If His church is going to be the church on earth that the King in heaven is standing in the presence of, these attributes or these characteristics will be found in His church.

[9 : 10] And we will see them. And I'll go ahead and tell you that the outline I give you this morning, you can hold on to for the next six weeks because we will follow the same outline as we look at each letter.

I'll go ahead and give you the seven characteristics of the healthy church. Seven characteristics that we see in these seven letters are one, a church of supreme love, a church of suffering obedience, a church of sincere doctrine, a church of self-guarded purity, a church of steadfast deeds, a church of seized opportunities, and a church of settled convictions.

It is my interpretation that as we read these letters, we see what the church looks like or should look like when it is in the presence of the King in heaven and allowing the King in heaven to be in control of the church on earth.

It's when man relinquishes his control of the church and allows the King of kings to be in control of the church that we will see these seven characteristics being displayed. Now, will we have to struggle for them?

Absolutely so. Because each one of these letters has this conclusion, to he who overcomes. Now, we know that we have more than victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord, but in our life, there are some struggles we will have to overcome.

[10 : 25] Which means that in the flesh, we want the church to be what we want the church to be. We want the church to look the way we want it to look. We want the church to do the things we want the church to do. But we have to overcome those natural temptations and allow the King in heaven to be in control of his church on earth.

And then and only then will we begin to see these seven characteristics take place. So we start this morning with the first of these characteristics, and that is the church on earth that is living in the presence of its King in heaven and allowing the King in heaven to be in control of the church on earth will first and foremost be a church of supreme love.

It will be a church of supreme love. We see this to the letter of the church at Ephesus. There will be four primary things we look at in each of these letters, and I'll go ahead and give them to you.

One, we'll see the attribute of Christ that promotes this characteristic. We'll see the action of the church that ensures we live up to this characteristic.

Number three, we'll see the avoided consequences because of this characteristic. And fourth and finally, we'll see the anticipated outcome or the anticipated reward.

[11 : 36] So we start with this church of supreme love, that the church will be a place of supreme love. And what attribute of Christ will promote the church being a church of supreme love?

We see this in each letter as how Christ introduces himself. When I walk up to you and the way I introduce myself to you, if you are a stranger and you've never met me, will always determine what you think of me and how you hear me.

Because the way people hear us is so much more than the words we say. People tell you that communication is only about 15% of what you say. Somewhere around 80 to 85% of communication is how you say it, the mannerisms you take while you say it, and the way you look when you're saying it.

Only about 15% of how people hear you is determined by the words which you proclaim. So how you introduce yourself and how you present yourself is very important.

And when Christ calls the church to live to a specific characteristic, when Christ is calling the church at Ephesus to live as a church of supreme love, he introduces himself in a very specific way.

[12 : 42] He says, Here it is. Here's the attribute of Christ. The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, and the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this.

Jesus introduces himself as the one holding the stars and walking among the lampstands. Each of these letters will have a different attribute of Christ. He will introduce himself in a different way to each church because each characteristic of Christ determines a different characteristic in the church.

That does not mean that the church at Ephesus could only see Jesus in this way because they had to see him as he was. But the problems that were evident in the church at Ephesus that were hindering them from becoming what they needed to be needed this specific attribute of Christ.

He is introduced here as the one who is present and ruling currently. He is the present ruling authority of the church. He says, The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

He is calling the church to be a church of supreme love. And he reminds the church that not only am I just a distant ruler, I am a present authority. I walk among the churches.

[13 : 58] I hold the rulers of the church in the palm of my hand. I hold the mess, not the rulers, but the angels, the leaders, the pastors and the teachers. I hold them in the palm of my hand.

What is he doing? He is introducing himself as the one in absolute control. Too many times the church begins to believe that their savior and its head is some distant, far off authority.

But Jesus says, No, I am just as near as anyone you can see. Because the Bible tells us that where two or more gathered together, I am there as well. Whenever you have church, Jesus says, I'm there.

I'm walking among my lampstands. I'm holding the angels and the messengers in the palm of my hand. I am a present ruler. And that makes all the difference in the world.

My friend, I want to ask you something. As Jesus introduces himself this way. When each of us walked into the door this morning and we came into the company of the church, we came into the company of believers, if we actually grasped this attribute of Christ, that he is here, it would completely transform the way we have church.

[15 : 07] If we walked into the door and you said, You know who's present today, rather than being concerned about who's absent today, though we all have that. I mean, as a pastor, you struggle with that. If we were more concerned about who was present today, and that doesn't just mean you and I.

That means the King of Kings is here. The Lord of Lords is here. Did you know that Jesus is here today? That's how he introduces himself. I'm the one who walks among the lampstands. I'm the one who holds the angels in the palm of my hand.

I am a very present and near ruler. I'm not just some far off king. I'm not just some flung away forgotten savior. I'm not just one who is coming back.

I'm one who is already present. See, he reminds us in this passage that where the church is, he is. And my friend, listen to me. It's a whole lot easier to forget about someone who's not there than it is to forget about one who is there.

And Jesus reminds the church so many times, you act as if I'm not there, but I want you to know church at Ephesus. I want you to know church at Wartreus. I want you to know church entirely, because each of these letters are addressed to the capital C church.

[16 : 13] That is the universal church, and they have application in the local church. But he says, I want you to know that I'm not just someone who is up in heaven. No, I am someone who is very near, someone who is very close.

Why? Because it's a whole lot harder to love someone who's not close to you than it is to love someone who is close. And the first thing he does when he's calling us to his supreme love is to remind us just how close he is.

Friend, listen to me. He says, I am there when you're there. I am near the church. I am in control of the church. I am the leader of the church and the ruler of the church.

And I am present in the church. We see the attribute of Christ that promotes supreme love. Number two, we see the action of the church that ensures supreme love. Jesus here is calling his church to be a place of supreme love.

But before he calls the church to be a church of supreme love, he talks about what he knows about the church. In verse two, he says, I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance and that you cannot tolerate evil men.

[17 : 15] And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not. And you have found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake and have not grown weary.

Friend, listen to this. The church at Ephesus was a good church. It was doing many good things. As a matter of fact, it was doing many right things.

Jesus says, I know how much you labor. I know how much you work. I know the deeds you're doing. I know that your teaching is true. I know that you're testing the false prophets.

I know that you're casting out the false apostles. I know that you're holding good deeds and true doctrine. We will get to deeds and doctrine later on in this series in case you missed it. He says, I know you're doing what you should do.

I know that you only believe what you should believe. He says, I know that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. You say, what in the world are the Nicolaitans? Well, the Nicolaitans were someone that was prominent, named after a man named Nicholas, who came in and decided not St. Nicholas, okay, not that Nicholas, but another man named Nicholas, who came in and began to promote within the church during this time, during the time of John, that the deeds of the flesh are really not that important.

[18 : 26] That the only thing that God cares about is your soul or your spirit. And you need to just preserve your soul and your spirit. So it was pretty much this. You go out and do with your body whatever it is you want to do with your body.

You live however you want to live. You act however you want to act. Now that's important in the city of Ephesus, because the city of Ephesus had this temple to a goddess in it, in which they promoted a cult of prostitution.

So the Nicolaitans would have been like, go out and do whatever you want to. God's not concerned about your body. He's only concerned about your soul. And what Jesus is telling the church at Ephesus, I know you hate those deeds.

Look, you believe what you should believe. You do what you should do. You hate what you should hate. The Bible says it's okay to hate some things. This church was a good church.

And from the outside looking in, you're like, man, that church has got it going on. Nobody in there is doing anything they shouldn't, at least not that we know of. They're all out in the community doing good deeds.

[19 : 28] They all believe what they should. They're testing the false prophets. But Jesus says, but this I have against you. You have left your first love.

Friend, isn't this astounding? That when Jesus begins to speak to the church, and he begins to talk to the church about the things he wants to see in the church on earth while he's in heaven, the very first thing he starts with is love.

We will get to deeds. We will get to doctrine. We will get to denying these deeds of the Nicolaitans. We'll get to all that. But before he gets to that, Jesus says, The first characteristic I want to see in my church is that the church would be a place of supreme love.

He says, It's not really so much about what you do. It's not even so much about what you oppose. It's not so much about what you believe. He says, church the thing that's most important is how much do you love me see these were second generation believers in the church at ephesus which meant that their mamas and daddies and even maybe their grandmas and grandpas had already believed in jesus that they had no nothing other than believing in jesus christ some of you are in that very fortunate position my own children are there that as long as my daughter has been alive and and my youngest son has been alive i have been a preacher of the gospel all they have ever heard is me preaching the gospel and all their life all they've ever heard is about jesus and as long as my two oldest boys have been alive i've been a believer at least as long as they could remember i came to christ 100 was somewhere around a year old so pretty much all of my children's life i have been a believer an adamant believer in jesus christ as my lord and savior and they're in that privileged position of having parents who believe in jesus christ but they're also in that challenging position of making sure that their knowledge of jesus christ is individually specific to them the church at ephesus was a church of second generation believers they knew the right things they did the right things they oppose the right things but it was all head knowledge it was all head knowledge and jesus says you can do right you can believe right you can act right and you can oppose right but if you don't love right we have a problem he says friend listen to me the very first thing i want the church to do is love me the very first characteristic of the church at war trades the very first characteristic of any believing church across all of the world should be that it should first and foremost be known as a place emphatically in love with its savior jesus is not so much concerned about drawing people to a church that does good he wants to draw people to a church that loves greatly he wants people to see others madly in love with him and everything we do is because we are in love with him everything that we believe is because we are in love with him friend listen i can convince you to do good things i can convince you to believe right truths but if i do not lead you to love the savior those things will only last a season because you can always find something else to do you can always find something else to believe but once you fall in love you can't get over love jesus says how do we go back what actions does the church need to do he says remember remember you know what the church needs to do you know what every great awakening has ever done you know what every great revival throughout history has ever done it has been god's people remembering how much they love the savior that's all it is look through our history read the history books read church history books every time there's a great revival every time there's a great awakening by the way you need to know this there are two attributes of every revival and awakening throughout world history number one it always began with a praying figure it was i think it was billy graham who said that every great revival can be traced to a kneeling figure it always started with someone praying number two the majority of them started with a lay person it's not a pastor it was a lay person and it was someone in the congregation falling in love with jesus all over again the welsh revival that that captured that nation it was seen as the haystack revival and what happened is there was a church individual who fell in love with jesus all over again and he said you know what the reason it was called a haystack revival he said i'm going to go out by the hay pile every day and i'm going to pray because i love jesus so much and he began to invite other people to come pray because he loved jesus so much and before you knew it a whole company of people were there by the haystack praying because they loved jesus so much and then the whole nation was transformed because this man fell back in love with jesus what does jesus say the church needs to do remember from where

you have fallen church if we want to have this characteristic to be a church of supreme love the very first thing we must do is remember what it's like to be in love with jesus i wonder how long has it been since you've reminded yourself what it's like to be in love i mean not to do things not to be burdened with i should or i ought to or i have to but i mean you know when you when you come to christ never get over the fact that he loves you he cares for you he redeems you he saved you he died for you and all he asks is that you love him in return oh jesus says remember that remember that husband and wives it's good to go out and remind yourself once again how much you love one another oh how often i fail to do that why because of busyness right the church gets busy and we forget to go back and remember what it's like to love the savior we can do all the good deeds we can believe all the right truths we can be out there defending all the right things we can be hating the things we need to be hating oh but we need to stop and remember the love of the savior he says the church needs to be reminded once again how much it loves it so we see the attribute of christ the action of the church the avoided consequence because this is astounding look at what jesus says here he says in verse four but i have this against you that you have left your first love therefore remember from where you have fallen go back and remind yourselves what it's like to be in love with jesus i mean how many of you just go i mean i remember when i came to christ nobody could calm me down i got so excited i mean i was a little i started singing in the choir i can't sing i can't you know i just can't i wanted to sing in the choir you know why i wanted to sing in the choir because it gave me a chance to practice with other believers i went early on sunday mornings to practice and it wasn't that i was a good singer it wasn't that i wanted to sing it said i wanted to be around other believers and i was so excited and i wanted to i wanted to catch on and i wanted to i just couldn't get enough of it i couldn't get enough of church i couldn't get enough of of giving i couldn't get enough of bible reading i i go back every now and then and i open up my old spirals old notebooks i was carrying with me what was going on i was in love with jesus he says remember and repent he says remember from where you have fallen to repent and do the deeds you did at first here's the consequence that we need to avoid what happens if the church fails to live in supreme love or else i'm coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent what does jesus say jesus says you're doing a bunch of good things right now you're making an impact in your community there at ephesus you are testing the false apostles you are hating the deeds of the nicolaitans you are persevering during tribulation but if you don't fall back in love with me i want to take your candle and move it what is that saying you're going to lose your witness the lampstand was something that was to shine light in darkness it was something to be a proclaimer of the truth something to be a witness to those around it and this is representative of the church and jesus is saying church if you don't repent church if you don't remember church if you do not come back to a place of supreme love you're going to lose your witness history shows us that there have been a number of people who did the right things and believed the right truths and no longer are a witness to the community that they once existed in none of these seven churches of the seven of these seven letters are in existence anymore why because it's not about what we do it's about who we love and when our love begins to wane and we begin to go through the motions because we're supposed to and we begin through the motions because this is a requirement and we begin to go through the motions because we ought to instead of because we want to out of our love all of a sudden we begin to lose the witness that we have in the community the greatest witnessing church is the church that loves supremely because we will love one another as we love him we will

[28 : 23] love others as we love him we will love a lost and dying world as we love him but it's only as we love him the consequence jesus says if you don't fall in love with me you're going to lose your witness and we see fourth and finally here the anticipated outcome so if the church does repent if the church does remember then what benefit is given to the church that has this characteristic of supreme love he says in verse five he says or else i am coming to you and i will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent yet this you do have that you hate the deeds of the nicolaitans which i also hate here is in verse seven he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches again not just to the church right churches plural let him hear what the spirit is saying to all the churches to him who overcomes again a reminder that this is going to be an intentional effort on our parts jesus has done all he can do jesus has done all that is necessary for us to love him now we have to be intentional in our love for him now we have to be intentional in our devotion for him to him who overcomes here is the promise i will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of god he says what reward can you expect church if you fall in love with me what reward can you expect you'll eat from the tree of life i believe that this is a picture of sweet fellowship in the paradise of god this is a picture of being in the presence of the savior and eating of the tree of life and living for all of eternity i believe now i know that all believers and i believe that once you're saved you're always saved that's just what i believe i believe that the moment you come to christ that nothing can snatch you out of the hand of the father neither principalities nor princes of the air or spiritual forces of darkness and you can't jump out of the hand of the savior but i also believe that there are rewards for those who overcome the temptation that comes to you after you come to the savior i believe to the church that remains faithful in its love that there is a special privilege here it says because jesus says this is to the church this is to the believer right that if you overcome if you continue in your love for me you'll have a special place around that tree of life in the paradise of god you'll be eating in my presence and eating is always a picture of fellowship it is always a picture of intimacy it is always a picture of nearness it's always a picture of closeness and he says and we'll be eating around that tree of life sure there's the marriage supper of the lamb we'll get to what a beautiful picture it is but here's this outcome for the faithful church that loves him we'll gather around the tree we'll pick of the fruit of the tree of life and we'll stand in paradise and eat it together what a beautiful picture it is my friend i don't know where you're at today but i know that the very first thing jesus calls his church to do on earth is to be madly in love with him i'm not asking you to go out and do a whole bunch of things for him i'm not asking you we'll get to that i'm not asking you to go out and and oppose a bunch of things in his name all scripture says here is just fall deeply in love with the savior because when you love him these other six they fall right in place they fall right in place everything else hinges on this first thing if he is not our first love if he is not our supreme love then we cannot have these other six traits that must be present in a healthy church but he has to be loved by his church if you love him it changes everything because then you do all he commands you to do out of want to not have to let's pray lord i do thank you for your word lord i know as we open up the book of revelation there are so many

questions and so many concerns there lord i thank you that in this passage we've seen today the very first thing you call us to do is to love you so right now i come and i repent and i confess there have been seasons in my life where i have act out of should and have to rather than acting out of supreme love so lord i pray as a church we would be a church deeply and maddeningly in love with its savior lord that all that we do will be an overflow of the love we have for you there's any here today who lord they don't know what that's like i pray that by the power and presence of your spirit that you would soften their hearts open their mind i pray that you would show each one of us where we stand with you lord how are we in our walk with our savior lord may we be the church on earth that you've called us to while you're present in heaven and we ask it all in jesus name amen i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i prayed i

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[35 : 17] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[37 : 47] Thank you.