

Sent: Wednesday, September 29, 2021 11:42 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Revelation 2:1-7

"And He (Jesus) said to him (and to us!), "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind! This is the great and foremost commandment!" (Matthew 22:37-38)

Last week, in our study of Revelation 1:9-20, we saw how the resurrected Son of God, Jesus Christ--now in heaven--appeared to His beloved and aging disciple, John, in an overpowering vision while he was exiled and alone on the Isle of Patmos. The vision was so vivid and overpowering that he "fell down at His feet like a dead man." Then, after being touched by the One he described as "like the Son of Man" (the name often used in referring to Jesus during His earthly ministry), he was brought back to his senses, and heard what must have been the most encouraging and calming words he had ever heard--that he should "not be afraid"--words that must have taken his mind back to same words Jesus uttered after calming the great storm on the Sea of Galilee, or before the cross, when He said He was leaving this world but would "come again"! And so, there he was, not only reunited with Christ, his beloved Savior and friend, but given the command, and privilege, to write the "book of the Revelation"--which would describe "the things that he had seen, and the things that are, and the things that would take place after these things"!

The "things that he had seen" are recorded in Revelation 1:9-20 (which we talked about in last week's lesson) and describe John's first-hand impressions of the risen Christ, in all His glory, who identified Himself as God, the great "I AM"--the "first and the last" (the Old Testament name for "Yahweh);" the "living One," who was dead but "now, behold, alive forevermore"! And the One who "holds the keys of death and Hades"! If John hadn't fully understood it all before, he knew it all for sure now! Jesus, having taken on "the likeness as a man," was (and is) the Eternal God! And so, John recounts "the things that he had seen"!

And with our lesson last night, we began our study of the second main division of the book of the Revelation--about the "things that are"! The things that God had to say to John about the "seven churches," that were in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) which were not only representative of all the churches in that day, but also of all the churches down through the ages of time, including "the church" today--and thus applicable to our church, and to us personally as well!

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write..."

The church in Ephesus was undoubtedly the most prominent of the seven churches to which John penned his words, and also the church about which most has been written otherwise! Its founding and activities are well documented in the Acts of the Apostles, and the apostle Paul not only ministered there for three years or more, during his missionary journeys, but later wrote, under inspiration by God, one of the greatest expositions of Christian doctrine and practice in the Bible--while imprisoned in Rome!

The city of Ephesus itself was legendary! Located on the western coast of Asia Minor, it had the greatest harbor, providing the gateway to Asia Minor and became known as one of the most prosperous trade centers of that part of the world! And so, the city thrived economically! More significantly, it also became the center of worship for the pagan fertility goddess Diana (or

Artemis)--and the magnificent temple of Diana was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world!

MacArthur notes how the worship of Diana embodied a grossness of immorality beyond description! There were scores of eunuchs who had been castrated for the purposes of serving this goddess. And there were apparently thousands of "priestesses" who were nothing but prostitutes who, MacArthur says, "believed they could lift the worshiper up into the presence of the deities"! You can only imagine the chaos that took place in the temple, with all the feasts and festivals, and money exchange and sale of idols, all of which must have created mass hysteria!

It was into this setting that the church of Ephesus was born and established! Founded initially by Aquila and Priscilla, an exceptionally gifted couple, left there by Paul on his second missionary journey to start a ministry (presumably in their home). But things really got rolling when Paul later returned on his third missionary journey--preaching the gospel of Christ! Acts 19:8-10 says that he "entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months...reasoning and persuading people about the kingdom of God...then reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus, over a period of two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks!"

The Acts account goes on to say that God "was performing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul," healing the sick and casting out evil spirits, "causing fear to fall upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus being magnified"! Also, that "many who practiced exorcism and magic believed and brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone...so that the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing"! And so, the church was born in a great revival!

But there was also great opposition and even a mass riot in the city perpetrated by those who profited from the sale of idols! Remember Paul's preaching, noting in Acts 19, about "how the gods made with hands were no gods at all," and how Demetrius, the silversmith, instigated an uprising in the city!

Then, after Paul left Ephesus to continue his missionary journey, he encouraged Timothy (in I Timothy 1:3-5) to "remain there so that he could instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines..." Tychicus, a well-known witness to the Colossians, also served there, and later, the apostle John himself, apparently until he was arrested by Domitian and exiled to the Isle of Patmos!

And so, the church in Ephesus was powerfully influenced by some of the greatest Christian pastors and teachers. MacArthur wrote: "No wonder God gave them Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos, and Paul, and Tychicus, and Timothy, and later John! This was a very, very wicked city!"

All this and Paul's epistle to the Ephesians provide context and a better understanding of what John wrote to the church of Ephesus, some 30 years later! Paul, for example, addressed his epistle "to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus"! And in 1:15 writes that "...having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers..."! And he ends his epistle with the words, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love!"

The bottom line is that the church of Ephesus was a great church--at least at the time of the apostle Paul!

And so, what did John write to "the angel of church of Ephesus" some 30 or so years later?

Read about it again in Revelation 2:1-7! There's lots to commend:

- They persevered and endured hardship "for My name's sake"!
- They "didn't grow weary in well-doing"! (Galatians 6:9)
- They had great discernment when it came to false teachers and heresies!
- They "abhorred" evil!
- They remained "doctrinally sound"!
- They served Christ well!

And yet they are reprimanded for "leaving their first love"! Somehow the passion, the "intensity," they once had for Christ had grown cold! Wow! According to Max Lucado, "it's clear from Jesus' words that the believers there had been influenced by the culture and lost their first love for Him"! John Walvoord writes that "the Ephesians' cooling of heart that had overtaken them was a dangerous forerunner of spiritual apathy that later was to erase all Christian testimony in this important center of the early church"! (May sound a bit harsh!)

The pattern is sadly familiar in church history; a cooling of the church's love for Christ, then the replacement by a love for the things of the world, resulting in compromise and spiritual corruption, followed by a departure from the faith and loss of effective spiritual testimony!

John wrote in I John 2:15-17--"Do not love the world nor the things that are in the world! If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but it from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever!"

Christ called upon the Ephesians, in Revelations 2:5, to "remember from where they had fallen, and to repent and do the deeds they did at first"! And that unless they did, He would remove "remove their lampstand out of its place"! Not speaking here of a loss of salvation but of a loss of their testimony in the world! No longer a light in the world!

May it never be said of us!

Revelation 2:7 ends on an encouraging note to the church of Ephesus: "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God!" Who are the "overcomers"? John wrote about it, in I John 5:5--"Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God!"

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!" (Revelation 2:7)

May God be with us 'til we meet again!

Lowell