

THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

BIBLE TEXT : Revelations 2:1-29; 3:1-22

LESSON 460 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20)

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Revelation 2:1-29

1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but

Notes:

Among the Candlesticks

When Christ gave to John the Revelation on the Isle of Patmos, He revealed a message to seven churches. Each was addressed to "the angel of the church." No doubt these were the ones in authority or in charge of the church. John saw Christ with seven stars in His right hand, walking among the seven candlesticks -- churches. They are in Christ's hand and are responsible to Him. The angels, in turn, were to deliver the message to the individuals of the church. In order to have a spiritual church, the people in it must live holy lives. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "Ye are the temple of God...the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are," (I Corinthians 3:16, 17).

As we study these messages, let us see how they could help us, and not study them as historical letters to bygone churches. Some people like to study these messages as representing periods of church history, but let us see what message they have for us today. When Christ looks at each one in the church today, what does He find? If Christ looks at your life, what does He say to you?

Thy Works

Each letter reminds us that Christ knows "thy works." These are the church activities in which you take part. They may include perfect attendance at Sunday School and memorizing portions of Scripture. "Thy works" may also include your activities when you are not in church, like helping others, giving to the needy, and showing kindness to those about you. Some people like to remind God and men of what they do for the church and for the Lord. The account is given of the Pharisee who "prayed thus with himself" as he listed all the good things that he did. But he did not go home justified, as did the publican who prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (**Luke 18:11-14**).¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.).

Saved by Grace

God expects good works from His people. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). In the writings of Paul we read that he prayed for the church that the people "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work" (Colossians 1:10). To Titus, Paul wrote, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7); and to the Hebrews he wrote, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24).

So we know that the Lord expects good works from His children but those good works come after one is saved. A person is

thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the

not saved by his works. Paul taught, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). In Ephesians 2:8, 9 we read, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

First Love

The church at Ephesus had done good, had laboured and had been patient, but there was something against it: it had lost its first love. The people did not have the love of God as they did when they were first saved. Do you remember how very much you loved the Lord when you were first saved? Do you remember how you loved all God's people? We should check our own lives to see that we still have a strong love for God, His work, and His people. We are told that in the last days, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12).

Not only were the people told what was wrong but also they were told what to do: "Repent, and do the first works." How faithful the Lord is to all! He mentions the good that they have done, then tells them their shortcomings, and what to do to improve their spiritual condition

Repent

The church in Pergamos associated with those of the world who had false practices, instead of following the commandments of God. The name "Pergamos" means marriage, or the church joined with the world. The Lord is not pleased with such, and He told them to "repent." God warns His people to be careful with whom they make friends. One may have good intentions to win that person for the Lord but often we find that he is enticed away if he prefers the company of evil-doers. The Psalmist said, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63). That is a good rule to follow.

The church in Thyatira permitted those to worship among them who practiced idol worship. Perhaps many did not follow these false teachings but some were seduced to sinful practices. They, too, were told to repent, and were threatened with death if they did not repent. The Lord said: "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." Perhaps you have heard some people try to excuse themselves for wrongdoing by saying that they can do it if someone else is doing it. But we see here that each one of us, individually, must give an account to the Lord. In Proverbs 20:11 we read: "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."

Till He Comes

To the last five churches, the Lord speaks of His coming. He said, "That which ye have already hold fast till I come." To the church at Sardis He sent the message to be watchful and to remember the things, which it had heard. The Lord had not found that church "perfect before God." That church had a good reputation before men, but the Lord who looks on the heart said that it was "dead." Some members of that church had kept themselves from being defiled with the things of the world but the others were told to repent.

Lukewarm

The church of the Laodiceans was "neither cold nor hot" the people had worldly goods and felt that they needed no more. They were rich in a temporal way but so poor in a spiritual way that they did not even feel their need. How easy it seems for some people to make plans to accumulate property and wealth here! Jesus said: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:20, 21).

Treasure in Heaven

stone a new name written,
which no man knoweth saving
he that receiveth *it*.

18 And unto the angel of the
church in Thyatira write; These
things saith the Son of God,
who hath his eyes like unto a
flame of fire, and his feet *are*
like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and
charity, and service, and faith,
and thy patience, and thy
works; and the last *to be* more
than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a
few things against thee,
because thou sufferest that
woman Jezebel, which calleth
herself a prophetess, to teach
and to seduce my servants to
commit fornication, and to eat
things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to
repent of her fornication; and
she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a
bed, and them that commit
adultery with her into great
tribulation, except they repent
of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children
with death; and all the churches
shall know that I am he which
searcheth the reins and hearts:
and I will give unto every one of
you according to your works.

24 But unto you I say, and unto
the rest in Thyatira, as many as
have not this doctrine, and
which have not known the
depths of Satan, as they speak;
I will put upon you none other
burden.

25 But that which ye have
already hold fast till I come.

26 And he that overcometh,
and keepeth my works unto the
end, to him will I give power
over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a
rod of iron; as the vessels of a
potter shall they be broken to

A rich young ruler asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life. In his case the Lord told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor and follow Jesus. But he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions which he loved more than treasures in Heaven. Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23). When asked who then can be saved, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Of the seven churches, there were only two of which Christ found no fault: Smyrna and Philadelphia. The church at Smyrna was a humble church, poor so far as this world's goods are concerned. Christ said, "But thou art rich," meaning spiritual riches. This church suffered persecution and tribulation. Jesus encouraged them by saying: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Faithful unto death! If one expects to be with Jesus in Heaven he must have that determination to be faithful unto death. There is no profit in being faithful for a time and then failing the Lord. In Mark 13:13 we read, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Kept in Temptation

The church at Philadelphia was a loyal church and had kept the "word." It was given a wonderful promise that the Lord would keep the people in the "hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world." We are given to understand that everyone will be tempted. It is not a sin to have temptation. The sin comes when one yields to the temptation. Jesus Himself was tempted but He did not yield to Satan. Jesus quoted the Bible as a weapon against the temptation of the enemy. To each Christian the Lord has promised help in the time of temptation. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"(I Corinthians 10:13).

Opportunity

To the Philadelphia church the Lord said, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." This meant that there was an opportunity for the people to work for the Lord and to win souls for Him. We, today, have opportunities all around us and the Lord expects us to see them and to make use of them. In John 4:35 we read, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

Overcomers

To each one of the churches was given a promise. The promises were to the ones who overcome. To overcome means to have victory over sin, to rise above temptation. When a Christian ceases to have victory, when he yields to the temptation of Satan, he is no longer a child of God. Each person can claim these wonderful promises because the Lord will help him to be an overcomer. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Each message closes with a warning that we should hear the words spoken to the churches. If we want to hear and to do the Word of the Lord, let us apply these messages to our own lives.

QUESTIONS

1. Whom did John see walking among the candlesticks?
2. What did the candlesticks represent?
3. Why cannot a person be saved by doing good works?
4. What does it mean to leave one's "first love"?
5. How does a person repent?
6. Why should a person repent?

shivers: even as I received of my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:1-22

1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be 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, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8 I know thy works: behold, I

7. How can a person "lay up treasures in heaven"?

8. What does it mean to "overcome"?

9. Name several things promised to those who are overcomers

10. Why should we study the messages to the seven churches?

have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and

poor, and blind, and naked:
18 I counsel thee to buy of me
gold tried in the fire, that thou
mayest be rich; and white
raiment, that thou mayest be
clothed, and *that* the shame of
thy nakedness do not appear;
and anoint thine eyes with
eyesalve, that thou mayest see.
19 As many as I love, I rebuke
and chasten: be zealous
therefore, and repent.
20 Behold, I stand at the door,
and knock: if any man hear my
voice, and open the door, I will
come in to him, and will sup
with him, and he with me.
21 To him that overcometh will
I grant to sit with me in my
throne, even as I also
overcame, and am set down
with my Father in his throne.
22 He that hath an ear, let him
hear what the Spirit saith unto
the churches.