

## LESSONS FROM THE SEVEN CHURCHES

### REVELATION 1:19 – 3:22 (NIV)

Scripture Source: biblegateway.com

Good morning!

[Senior Nobody - Terry]

Pray with me. [Worthy of glory, we worship you, here to seek your face and to receive your direction, fill us with your Spirit, change us for your glory.]

Let me ask you to close your eyes.

Now – for a full minute – try to imagine how Jesus might feel about us at Brazos River Baptist Church. **Ask Him** to show you what would He say to us if He were to speak to us or write to us.

[Time 1 full minute.]

O.K. Thank you.

Would anyone like to share what He revealed to you?

[Sharing time.]

[**Turn on Slide 1.**]

Keep these thoughts in mind as we explore together Jesus' letters to the seven churches in what we now call Turkey. [**Slide 2** - Talk about map.]

Every message I have ever heard about the churches John wrote to in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 has dealt with only one church. Typically, pastors tend to preach these chapters as a series of seven or eight messages dealing with only one church at a time. They spend time exploring the history and situation of each of the cities and explain how this relates to the language Jesus used to describe each congregation. Such series are usually very interesting and inciteful; however, I'd like to take a different approach to see what Jesus might like to say to us at Brazos River Baptist. We will be looking at all seven congregations.

In Revelation 1 Jesus introduced Himself to the Apostle John [Slide 3] as the Alpha and the Omega – the First and the Last – the Living One! His appearance and His voice were so compelling that John fell at Jesus' feet in worship!

Before dictating the letters, Jesus defined the stars and the lampstands that John had seen:

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: [Slide 4A] The seven stars are the angels [the pastors or church leaders] of the seven churches, [Slide 4B] and the seven lampstands are the seven churches [the seven congregations]. [Rev. 1:19-20]

Jesus told John to write to all seven churches. Each church got a letter, but all seven also got all the letters.

It is my experience, having been a part of 13 congregations since I put my trust in Jesus in 1968, that most churches exhibit several of the characteristics that Jesus attributed to each of the seven congregations.

Let's start, as He did, with **Ephesus**. [Slide 5]

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

[Jesus acknowledged that Ephesus had done all the right things – they worked hard, they did good deeds, they were diligent in doctrinal correctness and they persevered under hardship. We would say Ephesus was a great church!]

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

[Huh? What's that all about? I believe Jesus was saying they had no fellowship with Him – or reliance on Him. Ephesus was doing all the right things *in their own power*! They weren't spending time with Jesus in prayer or in *Bible* study. They didn't really worship Him with their lives! In His sermon on the mountain, Jesus said to people like this, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Now of course Jesus didn't mean He didn't know who they were. He meant that they were ignoring Him and there was no relationship.]

Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. [Spend time with Him in specific and hanging-out prayer, in *Bible* study and in real reliance on Him.] If you do not repent, I will come to you and *remove your lampstand* from its place. [I will close your congregation down. You won't be a church anymore.] But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

### **Smyrna [Slide 6]**

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days [a relatively short time]. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death [They won't be condemned to Hell].”

[Jesus told them, “You've got it right. Just keep doing what you're doing.”]

[Then Jesus moved up the coast to Pergamum.]

## **Pergamum** [Slide 7]

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live — where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city — where Satan lives.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. [Numbers 22-24] Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. [The Nicolaitans seem to have been followers of an early church leader, Nicholas of Antioch, who preached a doctrine that merged Christian and pagan practices.] Repent therefore! [Clean up your act!] Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against *them* with the sword of my mouth.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”

[Then Jesus moved down the road to Thyatira.]

## Thyatira [Slide 8]

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel [that wicked wife of Israel’s King Ahab], who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’ [Hang in there and remain pure.]

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations — that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’ — just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. [Jesus Himself.]

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

### **Sardis [Slide 9]**

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but *you are dead*. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.

[What was the one job Jesus gave us to do? Look at Mark 16:15:

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.  
..”

They weren't doing this assigned job. They weren't telling people about Jesus. Their deeds were unfinished! Jesus had nothing good to say about the Sardis congregation and His indictment of them was their failure to evangelize – failure to tell others that He died for their sins!]

Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in

white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

[Note that Jesus did not condemn the whole congregation. There were a few who walked with Him. That gives me hope. I can be part of a congregation that isn't great at knowing Jesus or serving Him and still be received by Him.]

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

[Speaking to the Philadelphia congregation, Jesus said:]

### **Philadelphia [Slide 10]**

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

[What were their deeds? What caused Jesus to say this? – They were actively sharing the Good News about Jesus! And Jesus opened the door for them to keep doing it. We often pray that God will open the door for missionaries to tell people about Jesus. He does – and He will do so for us if we are faithful to tell others about Him!]



I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth [He would keep them from the Great Tribulation.].

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

[It's now time for Jesus to deal with the congregation in Laodicea.]

### **Laodicea [Slide 11]**

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

[I have noticed (You probably have too.) that the water in Texas is cool and refreshing in the Winter and Spring, but in the Summer the ground warms up, warming up the pipes, and the water becomes

lukewarm. It is disgusting for drinking! If you don't have to drink it, you spit it out! That was the way the Laodicean congregation tasted to Jesus. The City of Laodicea had lukewarm water and this church modeled it!] You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. [Jesus wanted to fellowship with them – He wants to hang out with us.]

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

[Slide 12] Let's summarize what we have learned about the characteristics of these seven congregations with a view toward determining how Brazos River Baptist stacks up.

### Jesus' Observations

- Worked hard
- Persevered under trial
- Doctrinally sound

- Persecuted
- Poor
- True to Christ. Did not deny Jesus
- Loved people
- Expanding ministry
- Reputation of being alive

### Reasons for Jesus' Bad Evaluation

- Didn't love Jesus
- Didn't hang out with Jesus
- Tolerated false teachers and heretical doctrine
- Tolerated sexually immoral and idolatrous leaders and behavior
- Dead – Failed to actively share Jesus. In practice, they were ashamed of Jesus.

### Reasons for Jesus' Favorable Evaluation

- Rich in Christ
- Did the right stuff
- Faithful to actively share Him with others
- [By implication] Hung out with Jesus. They spent time with Him in prayer and in His Word.

Let me ask, do you recognize any of these good or bad characteristics as being true here at Brazos River? If so, what will you do about them? Will you strengthen what is good? Will you confess what is not good, repent of it and change your ways?

As you can see, Jesus was watching each of the seven congregations. He is watching us – and He *will* reward each of us according to our deeds.

Now that we have identified the good and the bad about the seven churches, let's identify the blessings Jesus promised if we would walk with Him faithfully – if we would overcome and be victorious [Slides 13 & 14]:

- Will have the right to eat from the tree of life – We'll live with Jesus forever.
- Will not be hurt by the second death – We won't go to Hell.
- Will receive manna – Jesus, the bread from Heaven, will nourish us.
- Will be given a white stone with a new name – God will accept us.
- Will be given authority over the nations – We will rule with Christ.
- Will be given the morning star – We will have Jesus. He will give us Himself.
- Will be dressed in white – We will be pure in Jesus' sight.
- Will not be blotted out of the Book of Life - We'll live with Jesus forever.
- Will be acknowledged before God and the angels – Jesus will claim us as His own.
- Will be a pillar in God's temple – We will have a continual role in the worship of God.
- Will have the Name of God and the name of the new Jerusalem written on us – We will be marked as God's own possession.
- Will have the right to sit with Jesus on His throne – We will be in constant fellowship with Jesus, hanging out with Him and ruling with Him.

**HALLELUJAH!**