

Revelation 2:1-7

"The Road To Restoration"

What is the wisest approach to take when studying the book of Revelation? How am I to know how it lays out; or when the things it describes are supposed to take place? People have wrestled w/questions like that for ages; yet the truth of the matter is that it's incredibly simple. Here's why: the book of Rev is the only book of the bible (that I'm aware of) that comes w/it's own Divine outline.

Jesus doesn't leave it to us to speculate or postulate on the matter; He tells us matter of factly, quite clearly, exactly how we're to understand this book.

We left off w/John lying on his face at the feet of Jesus (good place to be btw) as though dead having seen the glorified Christ. It's a position that Daniel was familiar w/as well. You find it in the 10th Ch of the book of Daniel. He begins to share some details of a vision that he had & he says that as he was hanging out beside the Tigris River that he lifted his eyes & there was a certain man, clothed in linen, girded w/gold; his body was like a precious jewel, his face like lightening, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms & his feet like burnished bronze & the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude... Well now that sounds familiar doesn't it? Look at Vs 12 of Rev Ch 1 (Read 12-16).

When John saw Him, Vs 17 tells us that he fell on his face as though dead. Listen to what Daniel says, "...I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground." ¹

This is that, you can't scream, you can't move, you are simply emptied of all strength, your knees buckle & your face hits the floor. Seeing the glorified Christ is an awesome, overwhelming experience (which is an incredible understatement to say the least).

Right now what John is experiencing is enormity of the miracle that Jesus could ever conceal such glory while He was on the earth. The miracle of the Transfiguration wasn't that Jesus *revealed* His glory, it's that He could ever *conceal* it! Jesus lays His right hand on John & says to him, "Do not be afraid, I am the 1st & the Last." God of eternity past, God of eternity future. Look at Vs 18

¹ The New King James Version. 1982 (Da 10:8-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 2:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Or another way to understand that: “I am in control & I come w/the credentials of resurrection, I’ve experienced death, defeated death and will live forevermore.”

Vs 19

There it is, did you catch that? The Divine outline of the book of Revelation, Jesus tells John exactly how we’re to get a grip on what He’s going to share w/us & show to us. He says, “I want you to write about the past, the present & the future.” It’s a 3 part outline that shows us how to study this book. “Write the things you have seen.” What has he seen so far? Lampstands, & the glorified Christ w/7 stars in His hand; part 1 done.

Part 2? “The things which are.” What things are those? Those are the things of Ch’s 2-3; the things that pertain to the church. Some 2,000 yrs later we’re still in this section of the book of Revelation, we live in the age of the things which are; the matters that concern the church. Part 2 is the present, you & me, we are living it.

Part 3? “The things which will take place after this.” After what? After the things which are, the things of the church. It’s what will happen in heave & on earth after the age of the church, after the Rapture of the church. As far as the book of Rev is concerned it’s everything included from Ch 4-22; the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Millennial Reign of Christ, the White Throne Judgment, the New Heaven & New Earth & we all live happily ever after, right?

You say, “Well how do you know that Ch 4 starts in the future, after the age of the church? Again, it’s not difficult, it’s 2 key words that Jesus use, the words “Meta Tauta” which are translated in Vs 19, “after this”.

When we get to Ch 4 the very 1st Vs we’ll see where John heard a voice calling him up to heaven & saying to him, “Come up here, & I will show you things which must take place... “meta tauta” after this. After what? After what you just finished writing about (Ch’s 2-3,) the things of the church.

So Jesus has been kind enough to save us tons of questions & confusion by laying out the simple out line for us, “Things which you have seen, the things which are & the things which will take place after this.”

Vs 20

Real quick, most people believe (I tend to agree) that when we read here that Jesus says that the 7 stars are the 7 angels of the 7 churches. That what He’s speaking of is the 7 pastors that represent those congregations.

Here's why (it's not because pastors are angels believe you me). It's because the word translated "angels" literally, simply means "messengers" & has been translated as such in a few places in the NT. That's who Pastors are, they are *messengers* who are to deliver God's message to the local congregation.

But whether you choose to believe that this is a reference to Pastors or not the important thing to realize is that they are the representatives of that church whom God is addressing so as to get the message to that church.

It's also worth pointing out the fact that regardless of how messed up the church being addressed may be; they're still being held in Jesus' right hand. There are some churches that have some real problems, Jesus still has His hand upon them & will deal appropriately w/them. 1st up...Ephesus.

Vs 1-3

As we look at these 7 letters to the 7 churches there will be a similar structure that applies to them all. There will be an *identification* (both of the church & of Jesus who is addressing them), an *evaluation* given by the Lord as to the state of the church, an *exhortation* given from the Lord as to what needs to take place presently along w/some *eternal motivation* as to what will take place ultimately should they heed His word.

Typically as we read these letters we all like to gravitate toward the church of Philadelphia & identify w/that church. My prayer is that, that's appropriate for us to do. However Jesus never said, "Read these letters & identify w/one of these churches so as to discern where you're at." The truth of the matter is that more than likely there is something to receive for each of us in each of these letters. Something that the Lord would deal w/us about, out of each of these churches He addressed.

As for Ephesus, at the time John was writing this it was a major metropolitan in the Roman Empire, somewhere to the tune of 500,000 people inhabited it. It was a major thoroughfare & trade city/seaport in which 3 main routes converged. It was wealthy, politically charged & very pagan. It housed the great Temple of Diana (supported by 127 pillars, each 60' tall), which is 1 of the 7 wonders of the Ancient world.

It was a famous city w/an equally famous church. The apostle Paul planted the church some 40ish years earlier & spent 3 yrs ministering in that city. Aquila & Priscilla ministered there as did Apollos. It was the city where Paul's son in the faith (Timothy) ministered & where the apostle John himself settled in before being exiled to Patmos & he returned there after he was released.

So believe me when I tell you that any church that has had a spiritual lineage like that is a famous church!

It was an incredibly effective church; such to the extent that silversmiths/idol makers were being put out of business & causing a riot (literally). So many people were being saved & coming out of the occult that they had a book burning party (of sorts) & the total value of books that were burned (books containing spells/incantations etc) was 50,000 pieces of silver! (A lot of money no matter what age you live in)

So the church in Ephesus was on the move (as you can no doubt tell by Vs 2-3). Jesus says here, "I know your works."

2 Things here. #1 We need to realize (as per the eyes of fire [Ch 1 Vs 14]) that Jesus sees everything that's going on in our lives. Not only *what* we're doing, but (as we'll see in a minute) *why* we're doing it. There may be secret sin in a church, or in someone's life in the church, it's not secret to Jesus. Both to us individually & as a church collectively Jesus says, "I know your works."

#2 We need to realize that as believers the Lord expects us to work. Trust me when I tell you that if Jesus looks at your life & says, "I know that you *have no works*" that's not the kind of evaluation you want at all! Now you're not saved by works. *Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

So we're not saved *by* good works, yet the bible is very clear that we're saved *unto* good works. That's Vs 10 of Eph 2, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*² James tells us that faith *w/out* works is dead. So don't be deceived, if you claim to be a Christian & there is nothing going on in your life that's befitting to something that Christ is doing in you, or through you whereby He's being glorified *by* you than you do well to seek Him & avail yourself *to* Him to be used *by* Him. He wants to work in & through your life, there's a reason He grabbed hold of you & He wants us to grab hold of that.

"I know your works, your *labor*" meaning that they went for it no holds barred; it speaks of laboring to the point of exhaustion. "Your patience" speaking of a steadfast endurance; these guys were rock solid & steady on; they were persecuted for their faith yet they endured it patiently.

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 2:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

They had a lot of things they were doing right; they had a detest for evil, they wouldn't believe every person who claimed to have a word from God or stood behind a pulpit, they would test these guys according to the scriptures & if they were right on they were kicked outta town. They listened to what Paul, to what John had taught them.

It was the final meeting that Paul the apostle had w/them (& he told them it would be), he said, "You won't see my face again on this side of eternity boys, so listen close." Then he proceeded to tell them... (Let's look at it together, Acts 20:25-31)

John told them, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*"³ They took these admonitions seriously & they did it. Nor did they grow weary in their works. To put it in brief they were a serving church, a sacrificing church, they were a steadfast church, a separated church (pointing out the polluted false apostles), they were a suffering church who refused to grow weary, but patiently bore their burdens.

Hey, if you were to visit that church you'd think, "Man this place is happening, their bulletin is full of opportunities to serve, various ministries, home groups, outreach, discipleship, evangelism, the doctrine is spot on...where's the membership roster man, sign me up!" From the outside it all looked great, but the One who walks in the midst of the 7 golden lampstands, evaluating and inspecting His church (not outwardly, but inwardly) has a different diagnosis than we do, notice.

Vs 4

Vs begins w/a sobering word from our Lord, "Nevertheless". What that means is that despite all the good I just sighted, taking into account all the good, that doesn't cancel out the bad. As a matter of fact the bad that I'm about to share w/you is *so bad* that *it* cancels out all the good that I just stated.

"I have this against you, that you have left your 1st love." A sad, but a very definite departure; notice they didn't *lose* it. Personal intimacy w/Jesus is not something you *lose*, "Oh I had it a minute ago, where did it go?" It's something you *leave*, it may not happen suddenly, it may happen subtly over many years, but it happens nonetheless.

Here's the point, just being busy w/matters of the kingdom (despite popular opinion) doesn't make anyone spiritual nor does it point to a close personal relationship w/Jesus.

³ The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Jn 4:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Labor is no substitute for love, it's not *what* we do it's *why* we do it (that's what Jesus is addressing here). Activity *for* the Lord w/out affection *toward* the Lord, motion apart from *emotion* is empty before the Lord, it counts for nothing.

We're called to have a labor *of* love, not a labor *instead* of love. We can get so busy, so work regimented that we leave love out altogether. Yet the bible says, "**And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.**"⁴

Now when we talk about 1st love, what are we talking about? It speaks of the love, the fervency, the passion, & affection that so often characterizes a new believer, open & unashamed love for Jesus.

Now I'm not saying that if you're not all giddy over Jesus that you've left your 1st love. (Though that's an awesome thing to maintain at all costs). But much like a couple who's been married for years, the excitement may come & go, ebb & flow, (that's ok) but over time that excitement transitions into a deeper & deeper love relationship w/one another.

That's what Jesus wants a relationship w/you that continually transitions whereby you're falling deeper & deeper in love w/Him. Listen, it's possible to serve, sacrifice, and suffer "for My name's sake" and yet not really love Jesus at all! There may be purity, but no passion. The Ephesian believers were so busy maintaining their separation that they were neglecting adoration. We need both. Concerning the way everything appeared the Ephesian church was successful; moving a shaking, as far as Jesus was concerned it had fallen.

What then needed to happen?

Vs 5

Jesus calls them (& any of us who are in this position) to do 3 things. **The Road To Restoration** is marked by 3 things: **#1 Remember**, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen". **The 1st step in restoring your love relationship w/Jesus is to remember... remembering where you used to be in your love for Jesus, your love for the body of Christ.** Perhaps you recall the story of the Prodigal son (Luke 16), it was when he was in the pigpen, at his lowest conceivable state that he began to remember what life was like back in his father's home. How good it used to be, he began to long for what he once had.

⁴ The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Co 13:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

That's always the 1st step in getting back to where we need to be w/the Lord. Remember from where (that place of passion) you've fallen.

Which leads us to the 2nd road sign along the road to restoration #2 Repent; it's not a command to feel sorry, or for that matter really *feel* anything. It means change your mind as demonstrated through your change in direction. Whatever way you're going, turn around & go the other way. One commentator (Robertson) called it, "an urgent appeal for instant change of attitude and conduct, before it is too late." (Robertson)

#1 Remember, #2 Repent, & #3 we'll call it Repeat, He says, "do the 1st works". Get back to the basics, when you used to spend time in God's word, you used to always carve out time for prayer.

You used to listen to Christian radio & worship God as you drove down the road, you used to hang out w/other believers all the time & were stoked to share w/others what Jesus had done & was doing in your life.

You used to serve out of devotion, not a sense of duty... When your service to the Lord becomes duty, not devotion, burden, not blessing you need a heart check, it's imperative that it be faith working *through* love (Gal 5:6), not service *apart* from love.

"Or else" Jesus says, "I will come to you *quickly*" & remove your lampstand from it's place. "Be revived, or be removed." That's the basic message. Repentance or removal, it's up to you.

Just FYI the Ephesians *did* respond & repent & went on to thrive for a number of years; but ultimately (as evidenced by the fact that they're not there presently) their lampstand was removed. Jesus would rather have *no* representative as opposed to a *wrong* representative...

Vs 6-7

We'll see the Nicolaitans again in Vs 15 so we'll save our comments on them for then; but for now we need to recognize that concerning the God w/whom love is so critical, He Himself hates sin. He has a zero tolerance level for it & He desires that we have the same & He commends them for having a hatred for sin as well.

Now here's where we come to realize that this message wasn't simply for them on that day at that time. "He who has an ear," last I checked that pretty much qualified us all...

"Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Again not the church of Ephesus individually, but the *churches* collectively, that's every one of us who names the name "Christian".

Here's the message, "To him who overcomes... eternal life". What is it that we're to overcome? Callusedness; a coldness of heart, absence of affection for Christ; lack of love marked by *leaving* our 1st love.

It's all about getting back to the basics, keeping the main thing the main thing. Remember, repent & by faith repeat... draw near *to* the Lord, fall in love fresh w/the Lord.

*"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"*⁵

Take your heart & place it in Jesus' hands...

Prayer Points:

Lord Jesus we want that "1st love" fire to burn bright in our lives for You. It's so easy to fill our lives w/busy-ness thinking that somehow laboring is what it's all about. But teach us to labor out of the overflow of love rather than laboring in the place of love... May we spend time remembering, repenting & getting back to the basics; we want our heart in your hand.

Listen, if you don't know the Lord, Jesus wants to embark upon a love relationship with you. It's not about what you do, it's about what He's done for you, all we do is respond to that. Jesus shed His blood, He bled & died upon the cross so that we could be forgiven of all our sin & find everlasting life in Him. He calls us to repent, to turn from our sin & to trust in Him. Let me encourage you, if haven't done that, than do it now.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Jn 5:4–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

