

## **Rev 2:1 WHAT JESUS is SAYING to the CHURCHES**

Of all that we are hearing just now, we **need** to hear and to **heed** the “*words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand*” and it is very **encouraging!** The Book of Revelation is **not** about ‘space travel, nuclear warfare, global pollution, or even the Antichrist - the name ‘Antichrist’ is not even mentioned once!

For some reason, Jesus did not speak to churches in His own land of Palestine, not the Church at **Jerusalem**, or **Bethlehem**, or **Nazareth**, or **Galilee**, but to **Gentile** congregations throughout **Asia!** In fact, it is amazing that there is one congregation about whom He has **nothing good** at all to say - **Laodicea!!** Encouraging!!

### **THINGS JESUS SAID to ALL the CHURCHES**

First - **encouragement!** No matter how bad a church was, Jesus Christ **still** “*walks among the seven golden lampstands*” [1] the lampstands are the seven churches [1:20]. And they are **still** “*golden*” to Him. We are still **precious** in His eyes! Even although we may not **think** or may not **feel** He is with us - He is with us!

But He is not just walking amongst us - He **is talking** to us! He is walking amongst us because He **wants** to say things to us. Remember “*Build Me a sanctuary...that I may meet with you, and there I will bless you*”! God is still **interested** in us and to **bless** us!

(2) “*I know your works*”! ‘I know what you are **doing**’! Your **struggles! Worries! Difficulties! Desires!** “*your tribulation and your poverty...and you have not grown weary*” [9]. ‘I know how **hard** you are finding things! Maybe you are thinking no one is noticing! Well, I am noticing. I know **everything** about you’! I know how you **worship!** I know your **style** of worship. I know your **shortage of resources** - both in **finance** and in **manpower!**

I know that “*you have abandoned the love that you had at first*” [4] At conversion most people have a passion, ardor, enthusiasm and some zeal. But as time goes on, the **love** very often grows **cold!** And that is what “*I have...against you*” [4] That, I am sure is what Jesus has against a lot of congregations today - we have forgotten what ‘church’ is all about - **saving souls from hell!** That is **primary!** If this is not a **priority** with us, it is because our **love** has

grown cold! We must **repent** [5]!

(3) Jesus told **all** the churches, **you have to hear** - “*what the Spirit says to the churches*”[8]. Notice: God **still** has things **to say** to churches! He is still a **speaking God** who **leads/directs** His people! His people are **led** by the **Spirit** of God! Most of us have ears to hear what we **want** to hear! Even Christians **are selective** in what they hear! We hear what our **favourite author** says; what the **popular evangelical community** says; what the **Christian Press** says; what our **respected friends** say! But what Jesus tells us here is, that we must listen to what “*the Spirit*” of God, the Spirit of Christ, says!

Very often God says the **opposite** of what His people and even the Church think! Remember David at Keilah! [1 Sam 23]! Again David felt he should build the **temple**! Good thought! He even consulted the **prophet Nathan**! “*Go, do all that is in your heart for the Lord is with you*”[2Sam 7:3] But **none** of **them** had the mind of the Lord! None of them had the **Spirit** of God!

So **we** need to “*walk in the Spirit*” and we need to “*live in the Spirit*” and we need to be “*led by the Spirit*” - all as Paul says in [Gal 5:16,18,25]. Paul defines the true believer (those under no condemnation) who walk “*according to the Spirit*” and not according to the human, fleshly ideas of man [Rom 8:4]!

## **The PRIORITIES of JESUS**

Have you ever compared the complaints Christians make about churches today, with the complaints Jesus makes in these letters? Churches today are **divided** over: **baptism** - not one word of it here!! Churches are divided over the **Lord's Supper**, what conditions, convictions, behaviour, lifestyle, children - not one word about the Lord's Supper here! **Psalms/Hymns/Music**! Which version of the Psalms? Which Hymbook? What type of music? Not one word about it here! **Gifts/Healings/ Tongue-speaking!** Not one word! **Church Government** - not one word here!

And yet, **we are divided** over all **these** things. Jesus heart may be broken about it! So what **is Jesus concerned** about in His critique of the Churches in Asia? What **are** the fundamentals of the faith? What are the things which **disturb** our Lord and Saviour?

First: it seems, that **all** churches need to **repent** of something! Even **Ephesus** “...unless you **repent**” [2:5b]; **Pergamos** “**repent** or else I will come to you quickly” [2:16]; **Thyatira** “I gave her time to **repent**” [2:21]; **Sardis** “hold fast and **repent**” [3:3]; **Laodicea** “be zealous and **repent**” [3:19]!!

**Problem?** Not many churches believe they **need** to repent! “If we say we have **not sinned**, we deceive ourselves and the **truth** is not in us”!! [1John 1:8] As James says “we **all** stumble in **many** ways” [Jam 3:2]! There is not a man that has not sinned. There is not a church that has not sinned. So, we need **humility** to **discern** the **mind** of the Lord regarding **ourselves**! What is that thing that God requires of **us**? Micah: “**With what** shall I come before the Lord...will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams...my **first born**...the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?..... He has told you O man...what does the Lord require of you but to **do justice**, and to **love kindness**, and to **walk humbly** with your God” [Mic 6:8]!

**Humility** is a **beautiful** thing! It is simply lovely to see! It **rejoices** God’s heart! You know, all the problems we get and will get has **one purpose only**! “you shall **remember** the whole way that the **LORD** your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, **that He might humble you**, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” [Deu 8:2]. Let **us** be humble before God, thankful for all His mercies to us - because He **has** blessed us all these past years.

I have mentioned before that **self-pity** is a form of **pride**! I used to be filled with self-pity regarding many things - **why** is there no **more blessing** and more **growth** - we are **faithful**? as a Church, aren’t we God? What **arrogance** on my part! Self-pity means you believe you **deserve** more than you are getting! It means you are not being **recognised** for all the good you think you do! It means you think you **deserve greater honour** than you are receiving! To feel **embarrassed** at the smallness of our congregation or denomination is not only a reflection on the **Sovereignty** of God and on His **wisdom**, but it is also a form of **pride** and **self-love & worthiness**’!!

The **second** thing Jesus is concerned about in these letters is, the importance of **defining** the **identity** of true Christians as **distinct**

from **nominal** Christians. We have to **discriminate** between the wheat and the chaff!! It is true that we cannot really tell, and that we cannot look into the heart, and that we make many mistakes, but it seems from these letters that Christ **expects** His Church to **distinguish** between those who make **false profession** and those who are indeed trusting in the Lord! The Church at **Ephesus** were **commended** for having a **test** to see who were **real** Apostles. You *“have **tested** those who **call themselves** apostles and are **not** and found them to be **false**”* [2b]. In **Smyrna** *“I know...the **slander** of those **who say they are Jews** and are **not**”* [9b] Who is a Jew? Paul tells us *“**no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter**”* [Rom 2:29]. In **Sardis**: *“you have still a **few names...who have not soiled their garments**”*[3:4]. **Pergamon**: *“you did **not deny My faith**”* [13]. It seems clear from these verses, that the church must **define** the true nature of saving faith. Poor sinners must know what lies ahead of them. To be under a delusion about **eternal realities** is one reason **why** the Church was instituted - to **remove** the natural reasonings of a corrupt nature and the misunderstandings!

The world ‘out there’ are searching for **truth**, for **assurance**! Many people today feel ‘lost’, they don’t belong anywhere, they need a home. But many of them identify **good feelings** with truth and reality! If something makes them feel **happy**, then that is the **ultimate** for them - there is nothing more! But they are deceived!

But the Bible is a revelation from God to man to correct man, and this Book is **great encouragement**! Revelation is a **Book of Triumph**! It is about the triumph and **success** of Christianity over the powers of darkness *“the lion of the tribe of Judah has **prevailed**”* [5:5] It is about Christ going out *“**conquering and to conquer**”*[6:2]. It is **not** about the triumph of evil or the power of the devil as so many think, but about the triumph of the **gospel** of Christ! The judgments in Revelation is on the **enemies** of God and the **apostates**!

Here is something for small churches: to the Church at Philadelphia: *“I know you have but **little power** and yet you have **kept My Word and not denied My name**”* [3:8]. May that be us also!