

Conclusive Thoughts on the Letters to the Seven Churches

Call to Worship: Revelation 15:3b-4

Hymn #490- *Onward, Christian Soldiers*

1st Scripture: Hebrews 12

Hymn #79- *Though Troubles Assail Us*

2nd Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

Hymn #484- *Fight the Good Fight*

Introduction:

As we prepare to move into Revelation chapter four, I want to leave you with some conclusive thoughts regarding the letters to the seven churches, which we have gone over. Since I believe that these letters, together, form the key that unlocks the rest of this Book, I thought it would be profitable to leave you with a handful of summary statements, which will help us begin to string together the Book as a whole.

Remember, this Book was written *first* to these seven literal churches, and it is through them that it makes its way to all individual churches of all times. That which is represented in the Revelation; all that is summed up in the many complicated symbols, finds its relevance *first* right there in the first century, and with time, these travel down throughout all ages (in a progressive way, however), ultimately culminating in the final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, when we speak of the enemies of Christ and His church, such as the beasts, and the scarlet whore of Babylon, we speak not of identifiable, *physical* enemies, but rather, of *spiritual* enemies, who manifest themselves in different physical forms throughout the whole of the last days, or what we would call the “church age” (that time period beginning at the resurrection of Christ and ending at His final return). And the final manifestation of these wicked *spiritual* enemies will take on a final *physical* form, which will lead to the final battle, the “Battle of Armageddon,” where Christ will ultimately destroy both, their final and probably most prominent, *physical* vehicles of destruction, as well as their personal, *spiritual* beings.

Let me give you an example. It will become clear and evident, when we work through the remainder of this Book that the great beast, who comes out of the sea in chapter 13, is a demonic opponent, who utilizes government powers as a means of persecuting and seeking to

destroy Christ's church throughout the history of the church age. And while this demonic opponent moves from government to government throughout the ages, though each government is conquered along the way, he himself is not ultimately destroyed until Christ returns. And so, we will see him clearly begin to take form in the empirical power of the Roman Empire, and this is where he finds his greatest relevance for the seven churches of Asia. But when the Roman Empire is later sacked and destroyed, the beast himself yet remains, and throughout all of history, he works to bring about the rising up of other persecuting empires, always attempting to destroy Christ's church. And in the end, there will be one final empire, perhaps worldwide, which Christ will ultimately defeat when He returns. We further recognize this to be true, when we look back at the Book of Daniel, and find angels warring against each other by means of influencing worldly empires, with some seeking to contradict and obstruct God's plan of redemption, while others strive to carry it out to its proper end. I think a key point given to the seven churches, and to us, brethren, is this: There are indeed spiritual enemies at work at every moment. There are principalities and higher powers and spiritual hosts of wickedness at work in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10-13), influencing governments and powers and people in our physical world. And we can determine which ways they are attacking us, and perhaps which ways we have compromised with them, by examining our spiritual condition in the light of God's Word, and in the light of the seven letters we have just gone over. The compromising churches of Asia needed to understand that below the surface, they were succumbing to the deceptions and powers of wicked demons and spiritual enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were engaged in a spiritual war, and they were losing ground to the enemy, who was subtly and effectively deceiving them. And so, these graphic symbols; a scarlet whore, two gross and hideous beasts and an evil dragon, sufficed to reveal to them that which "really was," in the light of what "seemed to be."

And furthermore, brethren, even Christ's coming is revealed in Revelation as something that is progressive in nature. We have seen in the seven letters that Christ has threatened to "come" in various forms of judgment, if repentance did not take place. These "comings" were not referring to His final, visible return, but rather they precede and lead into it. To be sure, Christ comes in various forms of judgment, especially upon those churches who have worn out His patience, failing to repent when they have gone astray in the various ways described in the seven letters. There is a point where the Lord comes upon a church in judgment, and removes its

lampstand, casting it out as a useless lamp, from God's heavenly temple. We are to bring glory to God, by being a light to the world; we are to be the salt of the earth, but when that light dims down, and that salt loses its flavor, it is cast out as useless, and to be trampled underfoot, no longer bearing the light of God's grace; no longer housing the Holy Spirit and His power. And when the root of the tooth is removed, soon enough, the rest of the tooth crumbles. Well, these "comings in judgment" continue until that great and final, visible return of Christ, where He comes down from His heavenly throne with His angels and conquers and destroys all of His enemies and all of those who have proven to be hypocrites and compromisers in the churches. There is a progression of these kinds of themes given throughout the whole Book of Revelation, making the Book very applicable to the churches of all ages.

Three Summary Statements Regarding the Letters to the Seven Churches

1) Having gone through these seven letters, we can conclude that there are three general forms of attack, which the enemy uses as a means of seeking to destroy Christ's churches. And he will use these forms of attack in a variety of ways, and throughout all periods of church history. No two of the churches, which we have gone over, were *identical* as to the exact nature of the warfare they had experienced, although there were certainly similarities among them. For example, the faithful churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia had experienced similar trials and successes. The churches of Pergamos and Thyatira, and then Sardis and Laodicea, shared their strong similarities as well. But there were indeed differences even within the same small portion of a continent. Likewise, we will find similar experiences in our own day, although in different degrees throughout the world. Certainly, churches in China and Iraq and Afghanistan will share similar experiences with each other (at different levels), but they will be quite different from the warfare that the churches of the West are currently experiencing.

What is critical for us to understand is the fact that the enemy is at war with Christ, and because he is at war with Christ, he is at war with every true church (Rev. 12). There are no *true* churches that are without the experience of ongoing attacks from the enemies of Christ. Some may, sadly, not realize it, which may mean that they have compromised in some significant ways (like Laodicea or Sardis), but the fact of the matter is, all are attacked. What would do us all a

lot of good then, is to recognize the three general forms of attack, and to prayerfully consider our own experienced warfare in light of them.

The three forms of attack then are as follows:

a- First, there is physical persecution. This is *most clearly* seen in those portions of the world where Christianity is illegal, and where Christians are persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned or even killed for their faith. In such places as this, the beast that comes out of the sea in Revelation 13, manifests his power. During the time that Revelation was written, this would have been best represented by the Roman empirical government (but could also include Jewish persecutions).

b- Second, there is the temptation toward doctrinal compromise. This is most clearly seen wherever churches begin to compromise their doctrine and holiness, generally as a means of appeasing outside pressures. In the first century, it involved eating meat offered to idols or partaking in idolatrous feasts as a means of relieving the pressures, coming from trade guilds. Often times, and we will see this in Revelation, this form of attack works in cooperation with the first form of attack. But wherever there is doctrinal compromise for the sake of appeasement, it involves a surrender to this form of attack. Here, the second beast, the one who comes from the earth (Rev. 13:11ff), exercises his power, especially in cooperation with the first beast.

c- Lastly, there is the temptation toward all manner of lusts and worldliness. This is most clearly seen when churches begin to lose heart and vigor, as they subtly get swept into the desires of the world. Here, materialism, entertainment, wealth, sensual pleasures, and all manner of worldly idols, lure the church away from her undivided commitment to Christ. Her Christianity becomes more of a label, a “going through the motions,” just another part of life’s package, as opposed to it enveloping the whole of her life. The zeal for Christ flickers down to hardly a spark, and often times, the church doesn’t even know it. Clearly, this is the most prominent attack, which is waged against the Western church, and it is represented by the scarlet whore of Babylon (Rev. 17). During the first century, all of the luxuries of the Roman Empire and economy would have been represented by this whore.

These are the three *general* forms of attack, which the enemy, the dragon, uses against Christ’s church. The dragon organizes and orchestrates the whole plan; he sets it in motion and

gives power to these three, as he aims to vent his anger toward the victorious Christ, by attacking the “Apple of His eye,” namely, His church. These three work together and individually, wielding the swords of government, false religion and worldliness, striving to put out and destroy the lampstands (the churches), which are called to shine forth the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. By these means, Ephesus is swept into a doctrinal plasticity, where the critical component of love has been lost. Smyrna will suffer strong physical persecution, in an attempt to wrest her from her present faithfulness. Pergamum and Thyatira have begun to make their way over to doctrinal and moral compromise. Sardis and Laodicea have been swept away by the luring, worldly lusts of the harlot. And Philadelphia’s steadfastness will be challenged, with the hope that she might just lose her footing and diminish or even put out her flame.

Brethren, the rest of the Book, in part, gives us graphic descriptions of these kinds of attacks, so that we can be prepared to persevere and to overcome them by remaining faithful to our Beloved Savior. Where will we finish? Will one of the beasts sink their teeth into us, and drain our life blood? Will the scarlet whore carry us to her death bed, and keep us occupied with her many allurements and material trinkets? Or will we stand fast, and fight the good fight of faith, clinging to Christ with every fiber of our being, working together to maintain a bright light in a dark place, furthering the Kingdom of God for the glory of Christ? Do we have repenting to do in the present? Do we have changes to make in our own individual lives and as a church, to ensure that we are indeed on track? What would Christ’s words be to us right now, were we one of the recipients of these letters? Where do we stand?

2) When we consider the self-designations of Christ, His exhortations and His promises to those who overcome, we come to one absolute, guaranteed, “beyond the shadow of any doubt” conclusion...Christ wins in the end! And those who persevere, must win with Him! This will be thoroughly reiterated throughout the Book! The enemies of Christ will perish! Unrepentant compromisers and hypocrites will perish! But Christ, and those who persevere even unto death; Christ and those who love not their lives (in this world) to the end, will win the battle! Brethren, when the ongoing battle of this world is finally over, and the smoke clears, no government will stand, no false religion will stand, no materialistic influence will stand...there will only be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, revealed in all of His glory, majesty and splendor! And His enemies will be crushed; they will be overwhelmed with the utmost anxiety, wishing the

mountains and hills could just fall on them and cover them forever! They will wish for annihilation, but it will not be found. They will face the wrath of the Lamb, and He will be glorified in their destruction! The reign of Christ will be fully realized! And His people; the faithful of this world, who have followed Him unto sacrifice and rejection and suffering and even death; they will joyfully marvel at His presence! They will stand with Him on that Day, brethren! We must keep this end in mind at all times! We must write it on the doorposts of our homes and on our foreheads! We must discuss this with our children with a sense of excitement! Brethren, do your children see your faith in this reality, manifested in some form of excitement? Do they get the sense that this is not your home! Or is this reality; is that which Christ emphasizes throughout the whole of this Book, and the whole of the Bible, something which gets lost in the paperwork of everyday life in your home? This is exciting, brethren, isn't it! We are marching in this direction! We are marching to Immanuel's Land! Are we overjoyed by this? Does this reality eclipse all of the temporal things that tend to consume our time! We ought to be elated and overjoyed in Christ! Nothing can touch us! Nothing can change our end! We are not home yet, brethren!

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (2:7). “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (2:10-11). “To him overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (2:17). “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations...as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star” (2:26-28). “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (3:5). “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (3:12). “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (3:21).

Brethren, what is the primary call of this entire Book? What is the charge of the Revelation as a whole? What message do all of the symbols seek to convey to us? Persevere and overcome! You will face great opposition; fix your eyes on Christ, recognize the enemy's attacks, remain steadfast and immovable, abide in Christ...overcome, and you will make it to the end; you will make it to what really matters: eternal, visible fellowship with God and Christ! Christ has already won the victory for you! Push forward and abide in Him!

3) Lastly, having addressed the seven churches individually and collectively, in preparation for the giving of the Revelation of all that is to come, our Lord will now (in chapters 4 & 5) prepare his audience, by reminding them of two important realities that must remain in their consciences as they work through the remainder of the Book. To be sure, they will see that the battle ahead is not easy. And this is why our Lord begins by bringing them into the throne room of God, to behold two great and prominent realities, which will carry them through the rest of the Book. First, they will behold the universal sovereignty of God, which will assure them that all that God has planned will come to pass; it cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything; God's will must come to pass because He sits sovereignly at the center of all things, *beyond time even*. And then, secondly, in time, they must be reminded of the absolute, finished and complete victory obtained by Christ. These two things, the universal sovereignty of God and the already accomplished reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the two pillars that will carry them, and us, above every fierce foe and challenge that we will ever face, in accordance with all that is revealed in the remainder of this Book. And we will be reminded of these two pillars throughout the Book, both, in the destruction of the enemies of Christ and in the prosperity of the people of God, who persevere and overcome...by the blood of Christ!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25