

Letters to 7 Churches 01 Ephesus-Cooling Heart

by James Booker

The church at Ephesus has drifted away from its initial fervor and spiritual wealth, and the Lord's concern is that they return to Him and live a life that is centered on Him.

Duration: 44:34

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Revelation 2:1-6

Topics: "Church Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the letter to the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation. The speaker divides the letter into five parts, starting with the object set before the church. The object is to keep their focus on Jesus, who is the source of power and constantly present with them. However, the speaker points out that the church has lost sight of this object and has become caught up in routine activities. The speaker urges the church to refocus their attention on Jesus and regain their object.

Transcript

Now it is a joy to be back with you again and to share this time together around Word of God. As I mentioned last night, for those who were here, it's our desire to just look for a little while at the seven churches, these in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. So I'd suggest that you turn with me, if you will, to Revelation chapter 2 and verse 1, please. Revelation chapter 2 and verse 1. For those who are staying through the week, we suggest you read these verses over, these two chapters, and get them well implanted in your mind and your heart, and I'm sure the time together will be that much more profitable as we meet and study this interesting and wonderful portion of God's Word.

Verse 1, chapter 2. unto the angel of the church in Ephesus' right. These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience.

Now 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, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Just a brief word of prayer, please. Our gracious Father, we thank and praise thee again for thy love to us, thy great salvation, and above all, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And we ask as we consider this portion of thy word this morning, if thou would guide and direct by thy Holy Spirit as we've been singing, Lord, bring the word of life, dear Lord, to me.

And may our hearts be challenged, each one, whatever the spiritual need is. May by the Holy Spirit of God that need be met this morning. For we pray in our Savior's precious and worthy name.

Amen. Now we want to consider the seven churches and their practical value for us today. On one occasion, a dear woman spoke to the preacher after the meeting, and she said something like this.

She said, I really enjoyed all that you had to say today. She said, in fact, every point that you made fitted all my Christian friends. And I think that when we often turn to the word of God or listen to the word of God, we frequently are in time to think of someone else and say, I hope that they're listening and taking that to heart.

And so often we fail to take to heart ourselves what the Lord has for us. And it seems to me that this can be true with the seven churches of Asia. I'm sure we're all aware of the fact that they can be looked at in various ways.

Historically, there were seven churches. Seven churches actually existing at the time when our Lord wrote to them. The things that were carrying on happening in those churches as outlined here were things that were happening to them at that time.

And then we can look at it from a prophetic point of view. And it's challenging to notice the church in its outline from the time of Pentecost until our Lord shall come. And it's always a thrill to see how the Lord has outlined for us the progress of the church down through the history.

But we want to think of it from the practical, from the personal side, rather than the prophetic side. And while one enjoys the prophetic side, so often we're inclined, I think, to sort of say, well, you know we're not the Laodiceans. We're the Philadelphians.

And we're certainly not those of Sardis. And yet there are things about Sardis we need to take to heart. And there are things about the Laodiceans we need to take to heart.

In fact, things about each of these churches we certainly need to take to heart today. You remember how it closes in each particular church. He speaks about he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

He that overcometh. In other words, it's a personal message to each individual in the church of God. And it's rather interesting to keep in mind, you recall back in chapter 1, there's a blessing to those who read the word.

You remember in verse 3 it says, Blessed is he that readeth, he that heareth the words of the prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein. For the time is at hand. And that word blessed is the idea of happiness, or the happiness.

And there's a real happiness when we not only listen to the word and look into it, but lean upon it and live it out in our lives. There's a blessing for us as we go to the book of Revelation and a challenge, to say the least. And you recall that seven times he tells us there's a way of happiness in the book of Revelation if we

lay hold of the things that are contained in this book.

I was rather struck coming down from Ottawa to the park. We were asked to visit at Waynesboro for a meeting or two, and a few of the brethren from Waynesboro have had the opportunity of visiting the jail. In fact, they have an open door there to go at least twice a week and spend as long as they want ministering the word to the inmates there in the jail.

And so when I was there on Thursday, we went along and had an enjoyable time preaching the word to these young men. Quite a number of young men gathered together, and the Lord has blessed in the salvation of a number of them in the two months that they have been operating this jail service. And after preaching a message in the gospel, I threw it open for questions and just asked if they had any questions that they might like to ask.

And three or four of these young men who have trusted Christ as Savior have started a little Bible study, and for some particular reason known only to themselves, they decided to study the book of Revelation. And the first question that was asked, I thought was rather interesting. Interesting in more ways than one, because I was thinking of maybe taking up the seven churches here upon arrival, and the first question they asked was, why were there seven churches? Why were there seven churches? Rather interesting.

A group of young believers just saved a matter of a few weeks would think of that particular question. Why were there seven churches? Well, it's interesting, is it not, to remember that in the book of Revelation this number seven is repeated again and again and again. Some fifty-four times throughout this particular book, the number seven is mentioned.

And it's that number of completion, spiritual completion. Whatever area is in mind, it sort of completes that cycle. And it would seem as we look at the seven churches, we do have a complete cycle, whether it's a complete cycle in terms of the history of the church, or as in the case that we want to look at it during these days together, in the light of a complete cycle of the problems and the difficulties, the trials, the challenges that saints of God meet in every age.

Whether it's in the days when the Apostle Paul lived, or the Apostle John, or whether it's in the days in which we live today, or whether it was in the Middle Ages. The problems that are outlined here, the difficulties, the challenges that are mentioned here in these seven churches, are challenges that we face today. The word of God is so up-to-date.

And as we go over the seven churches we find that we face, we find that we face challenges that we face today. The word of God is so up-to-date. And as we go over the seven churches we find that we face, we find that we face challenges that we face today.

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And as we go over the seven churches we find that we face, we find that we face challenges that we face today. One problem after another, and the Lord gives us answers in dealing with those difficulties. Now, in looking at the church at Ephesus, and I'd like to look at it this morning and then again this evening in the will of the Lord, I want to think of it as the church that was drifting and didn't realize it.

Rather sad, as you read through this church, in one way, because they were drifting and they had been drifting for some little time. But the tragedy, they didn't realize that they had drifted and were continuing to

drift. The historical background to these churches is very important, very interesting.

There's no doubt in my mind that when the Lord wrote to these churches, He not only zeroed in on the problems that He saw in those churches, but He also illustrated by using certain historical backgrounds relating to those various churches. For example, Sir William Ramsey has written a very interesting and challenging book along this line in *Archaeological Discoveries Concerning These Seven Churches*, and pointing out very effectively the comparison between the things that they have discovered as the background of these churches and what the Lord has outlined for us here in the seven churches of Asia. For example, one of the things about this church, and as you know, the word Ephesus means desirable.

Desirable. And apparently the city, when it was formed many years ago, had many things about it that were desirable. It was chosen apparently because of the beautiful harbor, natural harbor that was there.

It had a desirable location. It became the gateway for ships going out to the east. It increased tremendously in population until over 200,000 people were living in Ephesus.

It increased because of its tremendous harbor and its shipping. It increased in wealth until it was one of the wealthiest cities of its day. Something like the church.

The church at Ephesus, when it was formed, how desirable it was to God. What a delight that church was to the Lord at the beginning. You remember when the Apostle Paul wrote to them in the letter to the Ephesians, how he delighted to speak of their wealth.

Not their material wealth, but the spiritual wealth that they had, being blessed with all their spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. And it, too, became a sort of a gateway for the gospel, and they spread the word of God in those early days throughout the region from Ephesus. Apparently, up until the present time, they've uncovered only about 20 percent of the ancient city of Ephesus.

But in that 20 percent, apparently they have uncovered what to the Bible believers is a very interesting thing, of course, is the remains, the ruins of the temple of Diana, which is emphasized so much in Acts chapter 18. And this tremendous temple that they have uncovered was one of the seven wonders of the world at that time. People came from all the then known world to see this tremendous temple.

Some 450 feet in length, some 300 or so feet in width, with this tremendous tall pillar some 60 feet high, some 227 of them all being donated, apparently, by various kings and rulers of that time. And if you had the privilege to go to Athens and see the ruins of the temple there, this particular temple they've uncovered at Ephesus is some four times larger than that one in the Acropolis at Athens. And you remember that Demetrius was very much concerned about how the gospel was going to affect the worship to Diana.

And you remember, as Paul was preaching, the crowd gathered together and for some two hours they began to chant, Great is Diana! Great is Diana! in Ephesus. And, of course, these things have been uncovered as factual in recent years. It was known as the Vanity Fair of the ancient world, and in this little city was a local church, very vibrant for the Lord at the beginning, but at this particular time in church history it had slipped, it had drifted, it had grown cold.

We mentioned last night that we wanted to think along the line of various heart conditions, and the heart condition I think of when I look at the church at Ephesus is the cooling heart. The cooling heart. And I want to challenge you this morning, beloved, do you have a heart that's cooling off for the Lord? Or is, by the grace of God and through the working of the Holy Spirit, you still have, as those two are on the road to

Emmaus, a burning heart? You remember how they said, did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way and while He opened unto us the Scriptures? And it's when the Lord opens the Word of God, it's when we sense that closeness to Him and the Holy Spirit reveals the things of grace to us that the heart begins to glow and burn for Him.

But when we fail in that, it's not long for the heart of ours to cool off, and that's what was happening here in the church at Ephesus. There's the lesson of degenerating into formality. Degenerating into tradition.

Into a routine. Into a habit. Into a lack of vision.

No power. These are the things that this particular church had drifted into. And, beloved, you know as well as I know, that even the things of God that are so vital--our prayer life, the reading of the Word of God, witnessing for the Lord, fellowship with God's people--can become a routine.

It can become habit-forming. It can be carried out in a way that we fail to do it effectively. Do it under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

Our Bible reading, even if we can carry on day by day with the reading of the Word of God, and after a while it becomes just something that we pick up when we read our chapter or our two chapters or whatever it is, and we close our Bible and that's it. We feel we've done our duty for the day. We go through our little prayer time and we almost say the same thing each time, and we close in our prayer before the Lord and feel we've done our duty.

And we have to be consciously concerned, daily concerned, that even these things that are so vital in the Christian life are done out of a zeal, a motive, borne by the Holy Spirit of God, and that there's a freshness to our study of the God. There's a freshness to our prayer life. There's a freshness to our gathering.

There's a freshness to our remembering of the Lord on Lord's Day morning. And it's not just simply a traditional thing that we get involved in, expecting to know when the next hymn is going to be given out or the next prayer and so on and so forth. And all these dangers I see with this particular church at Ephesus, and the Lord was concerned about it.

May I just divide the letter up into five little parts? I want to suggest to you that in verse 1, the Lord sets before them the object, the object that's set before the church. And in verse 2 and 3, he zeroes in on the operation of the church. He outlines what the church has been doing.

When you go down to verse 4, he sets out his objection to the church. I have against thee. And in verse 5, he gives an opportunity to the church, a tremendous opportunity.

And finally, in verse 6, there's an outlook set before the church, a goal, an outlook that they need to be willing to respond to. Let's look at the first two in the time that's left to us this morning, shall we? The object set before the church, and then the operation of this church. Mine's rather thrilling to me as I read this portion.

Notice what it says, unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things saith he, these things saith he. And immediately he's directing their attention to himself. He's our object.

The freshness of the Christian life revolves around my appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. As the spirit takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to me. And they have got their eyes off the Lord.

And as he begins with this church, he says, he. Do you remember back in Matthew chapter 2, the wise men, they said, where is he, the reborn King of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east. We've come to worship him.

Where is he? Where is the Lord in your life? Is he the center around which your whole life revolves? These things saith he. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Do you remember Abraham? What caused him to leave all they had in her of the Chaldees and go out to a land they knew not of? You remember Acts chapter 7 gives us the answer.

The Lord of glory appeared unto him. The Lord of glory and that sight of the Lord of glory moved Abraham to forget all else. What caused Saul to turn from all that he had been occupied with and had lived his life for up until he met the Savior? It was on the Damascus road, was it not? It was that sight of the Lord of glory and that glimpse of the Lord of glory just transformed his whole life.

So that he could say, for me to live, Christ, and to die, gain. Occupied with him. You remember Peter as he walked on the water to go to his Lord? Lord bid me come to thee.

The Lord said, Come. And whilst his eyes were riveted on that blessed one, he walked above all the circumstances and difficulties he was faced with. For the moment he saw the wind, the waves boisterous.

And so the Lord says, You've lost your object. You've lost sight of the One who is to be preeminent in your life. You've become so bogged down in all your little routine activities.

You're ceasing to do those things for me anymore. You're just doing them because it's sort of a force of habit. He said, Get your attention back to me.

You remember John in chapter 1 of Revelation? He said, I heard a voice behind me. And as I turned to see the voice behind me and be in turn, I saw. And he saw the Lord of glory.

The man of the glory. And he said, having seen, he said, I fail. He got his eyes back on the Lord of glory.

That's where it all begins. And that's the way the Lord begins in this particular church. He said, You're drifting.

Let's get back to the object. Let's get back to the goal. But not only that, you'll notice in this particular chapter, particular verse, we have brought before us this person in so many wonderful ways.

We see his, we see his work. We see his walk. And we listen to his words.

When he shows us his work, he also shows us his hand. When he describes his walk, we're reminded of his feet. And when we listen to his words, we think of his mouth.

When he speaks about his work here, he talks and reminds us that he is the source of all power. When he speaks about his walking, he reminds us he's constantly present. And when he speaks, he reminds us he's perceptive and he knows all that's going on.

Notice, for example, what it says in verse 1, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand. His work. What is he doing in this verse? My beloved, he brings his hand to play.

You remember what it says over in Mark's Gospels at chapter 6? They marvel at the wondrous works that were wrought by his hand. His hand. You remember in the Psalms it says, I muse on the works of thine hand.

Well, let's have a look at that hand for a moment. What is that hand doing? This is something I have to be constantly reminded of. If I don't rest, if I'm not to get into a routine in my Christian life, I've got to realize that my power, my source of strength, is the Lord himself.

And without him, I can do nothing. It tells us here that he's holding the seven stars in his right hand. And that word, hold, is an interesting word, and scholars have pointed out.

It simply means to hold fast. In fact, we're told that in Revelation chapter 2 and verse 13. He says, Thou holdest fast my name.

That word holding fast is the very same word as just translated hold in verse 1 of chapter 2. It's to hold fast. In fact, it's used over in Matthew's gospel when Judas said to the soldiers as they went in to take the Lord. And he said something like this to them.

He said, Now, the one to whom I kiss, that is he, hold him fast. Don't let him go. And that's the very same word as here.

Hold him fast. The Lord's never going to let us go. Greek scholars remind us that the word apparently has been used and was used in Bible times.

Not so much. They had a different word for sort of holding a Bible like this, than having a word when they had a coin and they put it in the hand and they completely had control of that coin. You see, you don't have complete control of a book like this, because much of it is out of the hand.

But this word apparently has the idea of being in complete control. He holdeth the seven stars in his right hand. Well, isn't that wonderful? His right hand.

That, beloved, is the hand of strength. That's the hand of power. That's his work for us today, or one of the manifestations of his work, is holding us.

Our strength. You remember over in Exodus chapter 15, as Moses and the children of Israel sang about the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, they said something like this, O Lord, thy right hand is glorious in power. O Lord, thy right hand has dashed the enemies to pieces.

And farther down in that lovely psalm or song, they go on to describe that right hand again, and it says, Lord, you stretch out your right hand and the earth is swallowed. Oh, the right hand. Over in Matthew's Gospel, we read about the Lord being exalted to the right hand of His power.

So it's the hand of power here, beloved. And that's the hand that holds us. And the Lord says, do you not realize that you must be daily, hourly, moment by moment, dependent upon me? I'm your strength.

I'm your power. You recall, as far as the seven stars are concerned, there are differences of opinion as to what the stars represent, and I don't profess to know or add that much more light on the thing at all. But others have pointed out that the word stars are the angels, of course.

We have that in Revelation chapter 1. And the angels can be equally translated messengers. In fact, we read concerning John the Baptist that he was an angel or messenger. We read concerning John the Baptist followers that they were messengers.

We read concerning the Lord's followers that they were messengers. We read concerning the men who went in to Rahab that their same word in James chapter 2 is referring to them as messengers. Or representatives.

And it seems to me this is more to the point as I see it at any rate. These seven stars, simply a representative figure of the local church, were all stars in that sense, left here to shine in this world of darkness. And beloved, I can't shine apart from the realization that he holds me there.

I shine through his strength and his power. And then notice we have his walk. His work is the holding of the seven stars in his right hand, but his walk, he walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

Notice he's not standing in the midst of the lampstands. He's walking. He's active.

He's observing. You remember over in John chapter 1, in verse 35 we read, And the next day John stood, and two of his disciples, and looking upon Jesus as he walked, said, Behold the Lamb of God. John stands, but Jesus is walking.

Active. Active. He's seen all.

He said there's two, there's three things you have to keep in mind. Three objectives you must keep in mind to keep fresh with me. I'm your source of power, and my presence is constantly with you.

I'm constantly walking in the midst of the golden lampstands. Golden lampstands because we are to reflect the glory of God. Why did the Lord save you? That you might be conformed to the image of his Son.

That you might bring forth glory to your Lord. And every local church is to bring glory to him. They appear to be a golden lampstand, conscious of the fact of the Lord's presence in their midst.

And then you'll notice he speaks here about the words, or at least we have his words brought before us. In verse 1 he says this, These things saith he, and then in verse 2, I know thy works. These things saith he, I know thy works.

So we have his word, our support. We have his walk, constantly with us. And then we have his words, and all those words are searching, beloved.

Do they search your heart? Do they really grip your heart? I know. I know. You remember that in every church, in the seven churches, he always begins this way, I know.

I know. I know. I believe it's Weast in his expanded translation says, in each case, I know with absolute clarity.

I know with absolute clarity. He knows every detail. We might deceive our family.

We might deceive our friends. We might deceive our neighbors. But beloved, we cannot deceive him.

The Lord says, I see much activity going on in your midst. But he said, I know. I know the good.

I know the bad. And just drawing to a close, notice the operation of the church. Just touch on it.

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, or not. I have found them liars. I'm inclined to think, beloved, that if we had the opportunity, if we could be sort of put into a machine, a sort of a reverse time machine, and go back into history, and find ourselves at Ephesus, and visited there for a week or so, I'm inclined to think we would have gone away tremendously impressed.

I think we would have gone away saying, now there is an active, thriving, work for God. They're just busy as bees. And they're so careful about things.

Doctrinally, they're correct. They don't need to know any false teaching there. And everything was just fine, outwardly.

Now, the Lord doesn't condemn them for that. He commends them for it. But He sees an ingredient that is missing.

And that's what He condemns them for. He's suggesting this church, you have got yourself into a rut. Into a routine.

Into a traditional set-up. And now you're doing things because it's sort of a thing to do. Rather than the love of Christ constraining you.

We go to our, many of our places today. I suppose wherever we go. I know it's the same in Canada.

Certainly, I don't know too much about various assemblies in the United States. But in Canada, we just overrun with much activity. If it's Monday, well, there's possibly an oversight meeting, or the deacons are gathering together, or some other executive meeting on Tuesday, perhaps a prayer meeting, Bible study on Wednesday.

Maybe there's a sister's coffee hour, maybe young people's committee meeting. Thursday is visitation night, we go off visiting. Friday, boys and girls activity, the Venture Club, Pioneers, and on and on we go.

Saturday, teens, young people, college careers, married couples groups, Sundays activity, Sunday afternoon, hospital visitation, and squeeze in between all these things. Many other little details that keep us going, morning, noon, and night. Now there's nothing wrong with those activities.

But beloved, sometimes we get burdened by them. We become like Martha. We become cumbered above much service.

And our relationship to Christ, and our closeness to Christ, our fellowship with him, has been crowded out. We're so busy for the Lord, we haven't time to spend with the Lord. And this was the thing that concerned the Lord about this church.

May we be challenged that it might concern us, but in our activities for him, we might realize he is the object for all that we do, and the strength, and the one to whom we seek to glory and glorify. Our gracious Father, we thank thee for our Lord Jesus Christ. We praise thee for the fact that he not only died for us, but rose again, ascended back to glory, our great High Priest.

And we've been reminded, our Father, through thy word, not only in revelation, but again and again in the word of God, the importance of keeping close to our Lord Jesus Christ. To be moved and motivated by our first love, the Lord himself. We pray that that love might grip our hearts.

But thou deliver us, Father, for those who are here this morning who have not drifted, but still have that freshness. Lord, may that freshness be kept in back for any who have found that they have cool love in heart. That Christ, the things of Christ, might indeed become exceeding precious again to them.

For we pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

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