

## Scene One: Seven Letters

### Christ Amidst the Lampstands

There was a time before Christ was sacrificed when He took His disciples Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain (**Matthew 17**). When they reach the top Christ is transfigured in a vision before these three men. Moses and Elijah show up in like semblance speaking with Him. Their significance is twofold. First, they are simply the representatives of the Law and the Prophets – the whole of Scriptures which testify of Christ. More importantly, I think, is this twofold testimony - the two witnesses that “*by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established*” (**2 Corinthians 13**). The Father announces “*This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*” What is the reaction of these men? They are so overwhelmed with glory that they fall down on their faces before Him. “But Jesus came and touched them and said, ‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’” In the opening chapter of Revelation we have an almost identical situation, yet even more glorious. John sees Christ in all His glory, and is so overtaken by the sight that “*he fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.’*” Christ is *the One* who lifts us up to the Father and *He lives*. “*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*” - **John 8:58**

This display of the power and authority of the risen Christ is **glorious**. His appearance is priestly, royal, and prophetic in nature. This would be a clear message to the early Christians familiar with the Scriptures – *Christ is in control. Don't worry about the Roman Emperor or what they say, hear these things I'm about to tell you.*

### We Lampstands

*“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* (**Matthew 5:14-16**) We shine the light of the gospel and the love of the Savior. **This is our duty, our privilege, and our right.** We do this in the name (*authority*) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Anything that is not subject to this Authority does not know God. Without a lamp, it's just an empty stand. The light of the gospel *must* be in place if we are to fulfill our purpose and our calling in Christ Jesus.

The churches we're about to see are seven in their number. While these *were* very real, literal places being written to, it is significant that seven are written to. There were not only seven churches, or even seven churches in Asia. However, besides being specifically designated towards individual churches, they seem to address the entire body of Christ, and many characteristics and shortcomings of congregations and even individuals which have plagued the followers since the beginning.

## Seven Churches

### Ephesus – the *loveless* church

Christ introduces himself as the One in authority – with power to give life and power to take it away. He knows their works – that they cannot bear evil. They would not tolerate false doctrine. Christ commends them for this. What’s more, they *are* doing good works – they have patience and continue to labor for His sake. **Yet**, *one* thing Christ has against them – they have left their first love. Here is a church doing *great* things! They have the right doctrine, they’re doing the work, and they go to great efforts to maintain these. But they don’t have the right motivation. They’re going through the motions – their devotion is not based on their love for Christ, which makes it *useless*. Christ tells them to “Remember the *height* from which you have fallen! Repent and do the first works.” The problem in this church was not a trivial matter or lack of emotion. This is one of two churches where Christ warns of **destruction**. Even though they kept the right doctrine, after all the good works they had done, Christ tells them He will cut them off completely – He will *remove their lampstand* – unless they repent. Oh, the building might still be there, and from the sound of it, not much would really change anyhow. They’ll keep doing the same things and going through all the motions, but they’re **not** Christ’s church. The lampstand is removed – the *power* of the church to shine the light of the gospel. But to him who overcomes: the tree of life in Paradise. Back to the beginning with God, before the fall.

### Smyrna – the *persecuted* church

Smyrna was a prosperous town where there was really **no reason** for anyone to be impoverished. *That is, unless you were a Christian*. One was **required** to worship idols in order to do business, thus the faithful Christians found it hard to buy or sell goods. Yet Christ tells them they are rich – for their treasures are in heaven. He tells them there is still persecution ahead, that they will suffer and that they will die. Jesus introduces Himself as the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life. He says, do not fear the things that will happen, be faithful until death and you shall not be hurt by the second death. This second death speaks of the final, eternal death and separation from God. Jesus says I have conquered Death – *I have the keys!* Do not listen to them and do not fear what they will do to you. Be faithful and I will give you the crown of life. Jesus doesn’t tell them it’s going to be easy, and He’s not just telling them what they want to hear. He’s telling them the Truth. There’s some good news and there’s some bad news. The faithful Christian *always* wins, but that doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. Don’t let anyone ever tell you it’s easy to follow Christ. In fact, we’re told that it isn’t! But it’s all for our eternal benefit. It helps strengthen our **faith**. Christ told Paul “My strength is made perfect in *your* weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) *And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”* But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be ready to give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (1Peter 3:13-16)

### Pergamos – the *compromising* church

Here is another church amidst persecutions and trials – a tough place to survive as a faithful child of God. A huge altar sat on the hillside where sacrifices were offered before the throne of Zeus. The city was filled with emperor worship, false idols and false gods, and unspeakable immoralities, yet they did not deny their faith in Christ. **But...** Jesus has a few things against them. There are those who hold false doctrines. Balaam and Balak are Old Testament figures. Compromise is promoted. Likewise, the Nicolaitans were loose in almost every way. Believe what you want to believe and do what you want to do – cheap grace. False teachers and false doctrines had overtaken some of the believers. What's more, the faithful had **allowed** these things to go on. Both are told to repent. Else Christ comes with the sword of His mouth.

### **Thyatira** – the *corrupt* church

The situation around Thyatira is much like Pergamos. Nevertheless they remain faithful – their works were progressing and they were striving to please God. Yet, likewise the church is going through many of the same troubles as their neighbors in Pergamos. They have allowed corruption to deceive some of the children of God. Again we have a figure from the Old Testament of Jezebel – who entices and seduces the servants into immorality and adultery – physically and spiritually. He warns of punishment on those who follow her. He the Son of God, the One who sees all and knows all, with feet ready to trample and destroy the evil works, and His power to give to the ones who overcome. There are those who *are not involved* – they are told to hold fast until the end and they will be given the morning star.

### **Sardis** – the *dead* church

A striking message is given to the church in Sardis. They have an appearance of being alive – but they are *dead*. They were careless. They've forgotten. Now I don't know exactly what was going on, and I don't know the excuses. This was not an empty church in a physical sense, but it sure was an empty church spiritually. They may be doing all these things and going through all the motions but they were only glorifying themselves. Thus their works were *not* perfect before God. Yet there are a few **names** who have not defiled their garments who will walk with Christ. To those who overcome He promises they will be clothed in white garments and He will not blot out their name from the Book of Life, but rather confess their name before His Father.

### **Philadelphia** – the *faithful* church

Philadelphia was a small church who took a little bit of faith a long way. Jesus introduces Himself as the one who has the key, who opens doors, who is faithful. Because of their faith He has increased their strength and provided for them. For their perseverance He keeps them from the hour of trial. He assures them of His coming and makes sure they be careful “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” They've already got the crowns! Once we are clothed in Christ through baptism, Jesus promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit – as a guarantee of our salvation – and our crown! They are doing well, they're in a good spot. They're not just sitting in the same place, but they're following Christ in their faith. He opens doors and they step through. The overcomers get to be **pillars**, *and they are*, of God's temple. The earth can shake and our buildings fall, our dwelling places,

everything we've made. But God's temple remains solid and the pillars stand unmoving even as everything crashes around them –because the **foundation** is Christ.

### **Laodicea** – the *lukewarm* church

Laodicea: the center of banking, clothing, and medicine. They had everything they needed and they were getting along fine on their own. Their success has driven them to complacency. Serving the Lord has fallen in the list of priorities. As much as we talk about commercialism and materialism, are we really so exempt from wrapping ourselves up in such ways? Every good thing we have comes from God and belongs to God. Everything. Not because we worked hard and earned it or because we're the best in our field. God provides all things. Not to say we shouldn't work hard or use our gifts, but rather when we do – do all to the glory of God. There's a bigger problem that results from such self reliance. And you probably guessed what it is: non-reliance on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These people had it all and everything was going great. I don't know for sure what this metaphor of their works being hot or cold mean, but I know it's one of the most serious situations we've seen in the churches. Christ warns He will *vomit them out of His mouth*. Maybe it's so serious that He would rather them be completely apart from Him than trying to occupy the middle ground. Or more likely, He may be calling them to righteousness. In Laodicea they were known for their hot springs. They also piped in cold spring water from the mountains. Both of these were useful and good. Lukewarm water, however is not pleasing, not useful, but has probably been sitting around for awhile doing **nothing** except getting worse. *Now* we're blessed in this country, so it's hard to appreciate good water. In other countries unclean water is *nasty*. It tastes horrible, not to mention the many diseases it carries which are harmful. It's not good. One might spew it out because it's so unclean. Christ is calling them to righteousness. He's used violent and stern language, **why?** "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.**" How hard is it for us to speak to those we love about Jesus? Christ loves us too much to allow us to go on living apart from His will. Satan puts up as many barriers as he can to stop us from spreading the gospel, but with Christ *we can overcome*. That's the message of this book. That's the message of the whole Book.

### **Faithfulness**

Christ's call is to **remain faithful**. Overcome, *conquer* through **faith**. He doesn't say *be perfect, or don't slip up*. He says **get back up, I'll help you. Be faithful**.

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