

02-08-09a Revelation

As we prepare to study the Word of God together this evening, let's take a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit so that we will be susceptible and pliant in our souls and as the Word of God is revealed to us through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, we will be able to take advantage of it. That's the reason that God gave it to us. It's not just a totem.

It's not just a symbol. It isn't something that we refer to in a superficial or shallow way or it should not be. I think it often is and you hear verses quoted in out of context or in ways that are ultimately self-serving and it is so important for us to let the living and powerful Word of God get inside us and do its transforming work and give God the Holy Spirit the words of truth to speak to our hearts and to our souls so that we can pursue and lay claim to the calling that God has given us in Christ Jesus.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the standing that we have before you in the Lord Jesus Christ. We would have nothing but fear and trepidation were we to try to approach your throne on the basis of our own character or our own attributes. We are completely hopeless and helpless and useless apart from your grace and the gifts that have come to us through the wonderful work of Christ on our behalf.

We thank you that in Him we have confidence. In Him we have position. In Him we have relationship with you.

We have fellowship with you. We have a bright future with you. We have great hope in this life, great potential.

Our lives have been given meaning and purpose. You have laid out for us the path that we should follow. We have the straight road that goes through the narrow gate that leads to life.

It has signposted and marked your Word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We ask this evening as we study your Word together that God the Holy Spirit will find our hearts willing and ready to receive the truth and to see its applicability in our thinking and in the way that we view our circumstances and our relationships. We pray that it will not just be an academic exercise.

It won't just be a momentary dipping of our spiritual toe in the water, but that it will be something that does cause us to be transformed in the inner man, to be renewed in the likeness of our Savior, and will enable us and empower us to live a supernatural life, a life that reflects your glory. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We resume our study this evening. I mentioned before we began that it has really, if I was a Baptist or something, I would say it's been laid on my heart, but I really have a desire to move

through our study of the words of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches here in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. In so doing, we're going to change up our schedule a little bit and suspend for a time our study in Luke. Both on Fridays and on Sundays, we'll be in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 so that we can pursue and complete our study here.

And having done so, we'll return to our norm, our usual procedure, which is to have one of our studies in the Old Testament and one in the New. I'm very excited about beginning the second book in the Old Testament. We spent a few years going through the 50 chapters of Genesis, and we left Joseph in a coffin in Egypt, which is an awful place to leave him.

So I'm very excited about the chance to pick up in Exodus chapter 1 verse 1 and move through the very exciting story of God's deliverance of Israel and see its applicability to our Christian experience. So we'll fire both barrels here on Fridays and Sundays with Revelation, and then we'll return to Luke on Friday nights and begin our Exodus study on Sundays in a few weeks hence, probably a few months hence realistically, but as soon as we can. Having said that, you'll recall that last time we met, which was last Sunday, for our study in Revelation, we found ourselves in Revelation chapter 2 verses 1 through 7, which contains the first of the letters, the letter to the church at Ephesus.

In our study of chapter 1, we have familiarized ourselves with the background of the book of Revelation in general and this particular vision with regard to Jesus transmitting a message through John to the messengers of the seven churches, which are in Asia. This had been John's territory, his apostolic mission field, and these seven churches lay along the major circular route that he no doubt traveled so that the word could be disseminated from these large centrally located churches to the satellite congregations that might be scattered throughout that particular region. You could think of it almost as visiting the county seats in a corner of a state in a circular fashion so that someone coming to, for example, if you're in Rogers County, Oklahoma, you might go to Claremore and spread the word and present messages and then people could go from Claremore out to Bushyhead and Foyle and Pryor and Venita, which even off over into Mays County and other areas that are a little further afield to spread the message.

John himself didn't have to travel to all of those locations, keeping in mind that there were not buildings with steeples and pews and baptistries and parking lots and education buildings and so on. These were churches, much as ours is here, where people assembled in homes depending on the size of the group. There would be someone provided by God who would graciously offer the use of their home for the assembly when the apostle would visit, and then these people might in turn go out and the elders in that group might themselves be able to go forth and transmit that message to others.

The point being, although these messages were given by the Lord Jesus Christ to John, they were intended for the messengers. The messengers in turn would deliver them to the churches. The people in the churches, as is the pattern in the New Testament, would speak the truth in love

to other believers and it goes out like a rock striking the surface of the water where the ripples go forth and all the believers throughout Asia and ultimately throughout the world would receive the benefit of these messages.

They were so intended. They were intended not only for the Christians in that day, but for you and for me today. Those ripples continue to extend all the way to the present.

Every word, every phrase, every allusion, every symbol, every granule of truth that the Lord Jesus placed into these letters is for you and for me, every bit as much as it was for the apostle John, for the messenger angel, and for the people who first heard these words from their lips. So it's wonderful. It's the final testament, if you will, the final message from the Lord Jesus Christ to the church.

We don't have much from Jesus directed specifically to church believers. Most of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels and in John all the way up halfway through chapter 13 is all aimed at Israel. We find our instruction and our edification and our application of those things by noting that its first audience was Israel, just as the Old Testament.

If I were to organize the Bible afresh, someone gave me that task and said we're going to just instantaneously change all the Bibles on the planet. I would put the dividing line between the Old Testament and the New Testament between John and Acts, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and most of John are Old Testament times. It's the age of Israel.

The Lord Jesus spent his entire earthly ministry in the Old Testament age. This age did not begin until Pentecost. You find the feast of Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning, the inception of the new dispensation in Acts chapter 1 and chapter 2, and Peter explaining it to the assembled crowds.

But we often find people going and applying scriptures and statements of the Lord Jesus from the Gospels directly to the church when it really should not be so, even our translations. What did Jesus say? If you have ought against a brother, go and see him in private, and if he doesn't respond, take one or two others with you and try again, and if that doesn't work, then it says in your King James, take it to the church. Well, there was no church.

It's ecclesia, and in those days it meant assembly. This would have been the synagogue, and it should be noted, but a lot of that has been lost. So here we find ourselves now in Revelation chapter 2 beginning these seven letters, and these are words, the final words, almost 70 years after the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven.

Here we have a final message to the church delivered from the Lord Jesus through John the Apostle, through the messengers, to the believers of each of those locations. And after Revelation chapter 3, when you get to chapter 4 and all the way up to about chapter 20, those 16 odd chapters are all dealing with what dispensation? What's Revelation chapter 4 through the

end of 19 talking about? It's the last seven years before the second coming, and that's the 70th week of who? 70th week of Jesus, 70th week of John, 70th week of Paul, 70th week of Daniel. It's an Old Testament period.

It's the final seven years of the Old Testament age. You're back. That section could logically be classified as Old Testament.

Believers, people who come to faith, why is it so important to hold left behind and get saved before the Lord comes at the rapture and all? What is the reason for that? Can't you get saved after he's gone and the Antichrist is here? It might be tough times going through the tribulation, but you can still get saved. There is an entirely different covenant package, an entirely different set of blessings, a different relationship to God for Old Testament saints than there is for New Testament, and it's politically incorrect. People don't like to hear it.

The progressive dispensationalists get their back up when you mention that. They don't like to hear about the difference between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God. Well, I'm real sorry, but read your Bible.

That's what God set up. You've got angels and you've got human beings. How politically incorrect of God to make angelic beings and then make human beings inferior, and then one of these days he's going to raise up the humans and make them superior to the angels.

Well, where's the great egalitarian, equalitarian, all for one and one for all, we're all the same in God and in Christ? How come God's creatures can't all be equal and level? Well, that's the God of the universe. Ask him. Read his book.

But until he chooses to do something different and explain to us why, right now there is a different set of covenant promises for us. We are in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Guess what? How can Paul say that? If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. How can Paul say that? What about Abraham and Daniel and David and all of the greats of the Old Testament, Daniel and Joseph, Enoch? Why does Paul say if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation? Old King James said a new creature. But the Greek says he's something new, something created from the hand of God.

It's like going back to the Genesis account of the six days of creation and saying, well, guess what? God waited and in the New Testament age, in the dispensation of Christ in the church, God created something new. Fooled Solomon, who said there is no new thing under the sun. Well, there is.

And it is a man in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away.

All things have become new. It's a new kind of relationship. It's a greater, grander, fuller

relationship.

And the Old Testament saints are going to have to catch up. They will come forward and begin to enjoy the blessings that we have now in the Millennial Kingdom. We're getting their blessing package in many ways now.

Things that they should have laid hold of when Christ was here. So what a wonderful opportunity to take these final words that the church age to the church. Can you think of another place outside of Jesus talking to Paul on the road to Damascus, perhaps, where Jesus speaks to the church in the church age? This is it.

This is such an exciting passage to be studying. So in chapter two, having given us the introduction, having described the vision of Christ in His glory, this is not a personal visit. John doesn't say, Lord, if you'll just sit down there, I'll put my head in your bosom and it will be like old times.

The Lord Jesus Christ has this white hair and flaming countenance and burnished bronze feet, and it's a symbolic, visionary presentation of Jesus Christ. This is a business trip. This is a formal visit.

There is a message to be communicated, and it is of utmost importance. It is so important that there is no time for any familiar exchange between John, the beloved disciple, and the Lord Jesus. That's how important it is.

Can you imagine? John hasn't seen the Lord Jesus in what? Fifty years? Sixty years, perhaps? And here's the Lord Jesus after decades have gone by, and not so much as a, how are you doing, John? Well, straighten up here. I've got to put on my formal face here. There's no familiarity, no intimate communication, because this is such an important mission that the Lord Jesus returns in a visionary fashion to deliver to John.

Chapter 2, verse 1, "...to the messenger, to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." And we saw last time especially the significance of emphasizing that particular aspect. Why, as we look at each of these seven letters, we see that the Lord Jesus harps back to that visionary appearance to John and chooses a couple of aspects of it and says, these are the ones that pertain especially to you, Ephesians, the fact that I hold the seven stars in my right hand. Why is that pertinent? Well, you remember last time when we talked about the significance of the seven planets, the sun and the moon and the five visible planets, I was looking in the Farmer's Almanac a day or two ago to check sunrise.

In fact, it wasn't a day or two ago, it was this morning. Somebody was asking me at work why it was that it was too dark to walk when they got up at six o'clock. So I looked at sunrise and it turned out sunrise was at like 646.

And so getting up at six, it was too dark for a lady by herself to go walking in a sort of an abandoned looking park. But as I was looking at the almanac, it also had when you could see the different planets and during such and such a time to such and such a time, Mars will appear in the morning sky or in the evening sky and after in a certain range of months, it will be visible in the mornings. And in a later range of months, it's visible in the evenings.

Same with Jupiter and Saturn and the others. You can refer to an almanac and find out when to see the planetes, the heavenly bodies that move in a different pattern to the background of stars that are fixed even as the earth rotates and they travel uniformly across the sky. You have the five wandering stars or the five visible planets and along with the sun and the moon, these form the seven.

What's the significance? Why does Jesus say to the Ephesian church he holds the seven stars? What did those seven stars signify? Go back to Genesis chapter one and the account of creation, the days of creation. What does the Bible say that God created the greater light by day and the lesser light by night and the stars to do? They are for signs and for seasons and for days and for years. They measure off and mark off time.

They are chronological references so that man can organize his efforts. In the agrarian world, the agricultural economy, what does that tell you? When do you plant? When do you harvest? When can you expect the former rains? When can you expect the latter rains? How do you mark off day and night? Where do you begin your labors and where do you end? Did you ever stop to think that if God had chosen to, he could have had a different kind of a solar system, could have had some kind of a binary star system where there was always light, it never got dark, the sky was always bright blue and you couldn't see any stars, and we might not have seasonal variations. It would be very difficult.

You would have to keep flipping a sand glass or an hourglass and making hash marks on the cave wall or something to tell how much time had passed because things would be so similar from non-day to non-day and non-week to non-week. How would you measure time? God gave us these cycles and these repetitious patterns that are of short duration, medium duration, long duration to guide us. It is guidance.

It tells us when something is appropriate. You remember when we were in Ecclesiastes and you get to chapter 3 and it talks about there is a time and a season for every purpose under heaven. There is a time to plant and sow, there is a time to reap, there is a time to gather and a time to scatter and so on.

How do we know those times? It is the planets, even more so than the stars which have a fixed carpet that rotates as the earth moves. These give us our seasons. So what does it mean when it says Christ holds those in his hands? If you want ultimate guidance, if you want to really know how to order your life and your efforts and your thinking, it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

People who had made a business and a priority out of not only astronomy but astrology, you know how it is, you can pick up any newspaper anywhere in the country and back toward the comics they are going to have what? They are going to have the astrology deal. What do you call it? Horoscope. They are going to have the horoscope.

What is that? That is the superstition people have that when the planets are in certain houses and stuff is in a certain alignment and you are born at a certain time within that pattern of heavenly movements that it influences things on earth. It is a hugely arrogant point of view to think that the entire universe is organized and influencing your life. It is sort of a pre-Copernican idea.

The whole universe revolves around me and if I line up with it then everything will go well. This was strong in Ephesus. There was a strong cult of magic and of reliance on astrological data and on unseen forces.

They say, you want to talk about unseen forces? The Lord Jesus Christ holds those seven all-important guiding lights in the sky right there in his hand. It has a double significance because those lights are referred not to the planetes, the wandering lights in the heavens, but the earthly lights who communicate the word of God to the churches. Jesus says the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

This harks back to an association made in the Old Testament we find in Job and a couple of other passages. The one I am thinking of is in Job where it talks about when God created the world how the stars rejoiced and the sons of God sang for joy. Stars and angels are associated, the heavenly angels are associated in Old Testament poetic and prophetic literature.

But here it is given a new twist and many times symbols are not constant throughout the Bible, but they will change. Even phraseology will change and we are going to see a set of terms change its meaning or have a different meaning in the Old Testament than in the New Testament as we look at some things tonight. So here we are, the messenger receives this message.

To the messenger, to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things say, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Normally if you are walking in the midst of something that is upright and has branches you are talking about walking in the midst of trees, of a grove. These lampstands, if you have seen a branched menorah, a Jewish menorah, it is sort of modeled, it is a stylized tree.

It has a trunk and then it has these seven branches, one in the center and three on each side. As you think about these seven golden lampstands, it is as though the Lord is walking through this small clump or grove of trees. We find that the tree is an important symbol in Ephesus.

We talked about that last time, how the whole cult of Artemis or Diana began as a tree shrine. I think I mentioned toward the close of the lesson last time, that for hundreds of years there is a

series of coins that archaeologists have unearthed that were minted in this region that all depict Artemis associated with some form of a tree. It is almost always a date palm and often it is also associated with a bee, a buzzing bee and a stag.

I won't go into all the details of that, but the symbol of Artemis was the date palm. That was her logo. If she was on somebody's desktop, that would be her icon as a date palm.

Often you find in statuary, in bas-relief, in coinage, you will see Artemis dressed as a huntress standing beneath a date palm. So this idea of the tree associated with Artemis, we saw in Acts 19 and 20, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Paul and his cohorts here are threatening our business and threatening our goddess and threatening the standing of our city of Ephesus and our whole surrounding region.

This was seen as competition. Christianity was reducing belief and reducing reliance on those things. So there was a tension and a conflict in those.

So we can see the rationale. Why is it that for him who overcomes, there is something offered that is greater and grander than what Artemis with her date palm and her bees and her stags and all the rest of it could offer. Jesus says, I offer you something that transcends what is available in the temporary and mundane and inane society about you.

He who has an ear, verse 7, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The other thing that is fascinating, and I'll come back to it in a moment, is that first phrase. But he says to him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Not some long forgotten tree that is now stamped on a coin or pictured in statuary or in relief on some tomb carving, but a tree of life that bears fruit. And this harks back to an even older archetype. Artemis and her stuff went back hundreds of years.

Ephesus had been founded nearly 1200 years before the time of John and very early in the city's history was this association with the tree cult. But thousands of years before this, 4,000 years before this time, 4,100 years before this, you had the garden of Eden and you had the tree of life in the midst of the garden. And we're going to spend a little time looking at the tree of life.

There's a couple of other quick details we want to clean up before we focus on that. And that's the intervening material. Because how is it that you gain that right? We know that whatever it is, whatever it means to partake of the tree of life, it's a wonderful privilege.

We want to be sure that we hear the message. We want to be those who have an ear and we hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Well, what has he said? What is it that is necessary in this particular church to be an overcomer? He says, you have already established a solid foundation.

I know your works. I know your labor. I know your patience.

I know you cannot bear those who are evil. So you've distinguished between good and evil. You know what's right and you know what's wrong.

That's one of the basics. Remember in Hebrews chapter 6 when he says, not laying again the foundation of what? Change of mind away from dead works and of faith toward God. There are dead works, which is evil, whatever is not of faith is sin, and you have faith toward God.

So they've scaled the first rung of the ladder. They know the difference and they eschew what is evil. They separate from it.

They expel it and expunge it from their fellowship. And they labor and they work. The Lord Jesus says, I know all about your work, your labor.

I know about your endurance, your bearing up, your perseverance, and that you cannot and do not bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not. So there is a problem in this region particularly with false apostles.

What would be the corollary to a false apostle today? Now we have people that run around saying, I'm the apostle Tom Bill over here in bug scuffle Arkansas. But what would be the functional equivalent today of someone who says they are an apostle? What did apostles do? One of the primary functions of an apostle in the first generation of the church was to impart divine truth that is specifically related to the church. The Lord Jesus Christ communicated New Testament truths that were not previously revealed.

They were mystery doctrines and he did it through his apostles. That was the function of the apostles, to train up pastors, the first generation of pastors and elders in these mystery truths. Paul especially was the steward of the mysteries of the church.

But the other apostles, Peter and John, you see them in the early chapters of Acts doing the same thing. Trying to bring their Israelite brethren forward into the church age with linking up the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Christ. And showing them that the Messiah had come and that they had missed it, they crucified him.

And that they yet had a chance by faith to lay claim to the millennial promises in a spiritual foreshadowed form. So what is a false apostle? Well in those days there were men who said, hey this apostle deal is really creating a stir. There is notoriety to be had, there is support to be gained.

There are some people who crave attention or crave leadership. There are some of us who are sort of like control freaks. We just like being in charge.

There are people who just want to lead something. They don't care if it is the PTA or the Graham Cracker Lovers Association or whatever it might be. If I can get a group together and be the head

of it, I am happy.

I have something to lead, something to organize. So people would rise up that did not have a connection to Christ, didn't have a divine commission, didn't have the gift from God the Holy Spirit of divine truth. They might even be believers.

But they got hooked on the feeling of being looked up to, having their words hung onto, having their skirts clung to and being followed. There are people who just live for that, it is like a drug. Well they are false apostles.

The church at Ephesus figured out how to identify them and how to keep them away. How to expel them from the fellowship. How to say, you know, we don't really believe you have the calling, why don't you just head on down the road and try to fool somebody else.

What is the functional equivalent today? Do we have people who are today purveyors of false Christian doctrine? New ideas, new revelations from God? Latter day apostles who say, I have a word from God that is not in your Bible? We sure do. A lot of them are in the charismatic and in the tongues and sign gift arena. A lot of them are in the holiness and the full gospel area.

They are not limited to that. A lot of the fundamentalist denominations, a lot of the conservative evangelical denominations have become infected with the idea that the Holy Spirit is the latter reign. It is a movement of the Holy Spirit.

He is giving fresh revelation from God. It is a new insight. Anytime someone says, God told me, I have a word from the Lord, and he doesn't open up scripture and start teaching divinely inspired truth, beware.

That is what the Ephesians learned to do. To separate truth from error. To separate, more importantly, truth from twisted truth.

Truth from modified truth. Truth from adulterated truth. And we have a lot of that today.

Either through doctrinal error or through outright invention. There are people who just walk around making stuff up. It happens today.

I know your works. I know your labor. Your perseverance.

And that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered.

He mentions their perseverance again. And you have patience. He mentions that again.

You have labored for my name's sake, and have not become weary. He doubles his mentions of all of those things. They are doubly commended for their perseverance, for their labor, and for

their patience.

Nevertheless, this is one of the things, we've talked about this before, and it's one of the truths of Scripture that did not come to me as early as I wish it had. I wish I could have wrapped my mind around this earlier in my life. It is easy to look at a part of your Christian walk, or your daily spiritual functioning, however it is you want to define it.

It's easy to say, well, I think people overuse the term Christian way of life, or your Christian life, or your life as a believer. But you know what it is. We're believers.

We get up in the morning. We start going through our day. And there are things we look at, and we say, I really think I'm doing pretty well on this.

I'm very faithful to attend church, or I pray regularly. We have some things that we've got a grip on, and we do pretty well. Maybe we stay in the Word.

We're real consistent in our Bible studies. Some people are really consistent in their prayer life. Some people are very consistent in the area of fellowship, and in the function of their spiritual gift.

And the danger is that we will look at our strong areas where we're doing well, and we will say, because I am doing well in this, I'm all set. Just look at the way I attend, or look at the way I study, or look at the way I pray, or look at the way I give, or look at the way... I know I'm not perfect, and I know I've got a few weak areas here, but you look at this thing, that's my bellwether. That's my telltale.

That's my weather vane. It shows me how the wind is blowing in my Christian life. But you look at these letters, and Jesus gives strong commendation, as He does here to the Ephesians.

And He said, I would love to receive this commendation. Look at that. You're laboring.

Boy, I would love to get the patience commendation. I will never get that one. I am just out of the running.

I've about decided I'm never going to excel at that. Your perseverance. You've stuck with it.

What a wonderful commendation. You know, never, never, never, never quit. Every time you sin.

Every time you fail. Every time you screw up. Every time you're embarrassed and ashamed, and disheartened and discouraged.

You still just claim God's grace. You claim the blood of Christ. You confess your sins.

You get back up out of the mire, and start walking back toward the Father. You know, well, how many times am I going to stray to the pig pen and feed the swine before I learn? But perseverance. Never, never, never quit.

The only reason people fail the grace of God is not that the grace of God failed. It's that they didn't persevere in claiming His grace. God's grace is endless because we need it endlessly.

God's grace could have a finite limit if we could avail ourselves of a certain amount and then be all fixed up. But in this life, God's grace is renewed every morning because we need it every morning. We never arrive.

We never get totally healed. We don't get ultimately sanctified in this life. So what is required? You have need of patience.

You have need of endurance to inherit the promise. He doesn't even say you have need of great spiritual perspicacity. He doesn't say you have need of great doctrinal accomplishment.

You have need of great understanding. You have need of thick, full notebooks with every categorized doctrine and all the points. What does He say? If you want to inherit, you've got to stick.

You've got to hang in there. We watched a program about George Washington that I taped back on July 4th. Really excellent program.

I've seen it twice and I could watch it a couple more times. They talked about his career and at one point he was fighting a battle and it's a battle where he was being routed and they were trying to escape across a bridge and there was a unit from Maryland who defended the bridge. They started out with 400 men in that unit and those men fought and wave after wave.

This is before they got the training. They were just a ragtag band and General Washington was disorganized and wasn't experienced as a commander. His men were raw and untrained and didn't know what they were doing and it's a miracle they didn't get wiped out.

It was just an act of God. But they had to escape across this bridge and the Maryland unit defended the bridge and the well-trained, well-drilled, highly experienced Redcoats came at them seven different times. They withstood seven assaults and those 400 Marylanders, by the time the rest of Washington's army retreated in ignominious fashion across the bridge and the Marylanders came across, there were less than 40 out of the 400 left.

But they have a name that will live because they stuck. They were faithful. They didn't quit and they accomplished their mission.

And it's a sad thing because the men who were lost on that day, who were such heroic defenders of the Revolution and made it possible for the American Revolution to continue, their mass grave is under an auto garage with hydraulic lifts today. There was an act of Congress that said it should be dedicated as a national cemetery and a park and be maintained with federal money and all that. But there's a garage with oil on the floor and hydraulic lifts and guys using pneumatic

things to change tires right on top of their grave.

Not even a marker there. But they were heroic. And endurance is what they are commended for here.

You've persevered. You have patience. You've labored for my namesake.

Notice, it's not just labored. It's not just that they work. There are many Christians who are working themselves.

I've told you that everybody knows I grew up in a Baptist church largely and they had a saying, Mary had a little lamb, it would have been a sheep, but it joined the Southern Baptist Church and died from lack of sleep. And they just work and work and work and work. And I don't mean to make a blanket statement.

I love Southern Baptist. I'm working for a Southern Baptist organization, so I'm not tarring them with a brush. But that's what Southern Baptists tell each other.

They know that they're hard workers and they can work each other right into the ground. It's not just labor. You can work and work and work like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the slope and have it roll back down.

It's labor for my namesake, Jesus says. How do we close our prayers? In Jesus' name I pray. Do we mean that? Do we understand it? Do we think about it when we say it? The requests, Lord, that I have just brought before your throne, I make those requests on behalf of the Lord Jesus, in His interest, for His sake.

That's why I'm asking what I'm asking, because I believe it represents the interests and furthers the plan and purpose and the glory of the Lord Jesus. That's a good test. We probably ought to move that up to the front of the prayer and say, Lord, in Jesus' name, I pray that you will answer request A. And in Jesus' name, I pray that you will honor request B. And in Jesus' name, I pray that you will do request C. Labored for my namesake and have not become weary.

How many places are we enjoined? Do not grow weary in well-doing. And it's easy to grow weary, especially if you start operating in your own strength. We can wear out our strength in a hurry.

And any time we start feeling weary in well-doing, you can count on it. Does God's strength run out? If we're being sustained by God's *dunamis* and God's *energeia* and all of the other five Greek words for energy, all five of them, if we're being sustained by that, are we going to be weary? It's impossible. You can't wear out divine power, but you can sure wear out human strength.

And when we grow weary and we grow discouraged and disheartened, you can count on it. It's

because we're starting to lean on flesh as our arm. You have not become weary.

So the Ephesians have figured this out. They've got the essentials of faith figured out, and they're operating in faith. Nevertheless, you can't just look at your good points and say, I'm all set.

You can't look under the hood of your engine and say, you know, all these first four cylinders I looked at are all firing just great. Well, I'm just going to shut the hood and I'm good to go. I've got to check them all.

You could have four other cylinders that aren't firing at all. You've got to check every area. I have this against you.

You have left your first love. You have begun to turn into a hollow shell where you're still laboring and you're still working, but it is no longer motivated by that love you had at the first. And it alters the works that you do.

Your works are not the same. You can be doing the identical task with the same expression on your face, and if your motivation has changed, you're not doing the same thing you did before. It is a fundamentally, characteristically different work.

That's why Jesus says, remember from where you have fallen, repent, change your mind, and do the first works. Their works, from a material point of view, have not changed, but because the motivation has changed, they're no longer doing the first works. From a human point of view, maybe the program hasn't changed at all, but from God's perspective, they're not even the same works when they're not motivated by love.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. It just seems like there's so much richness of material in this letter, I despair that I'll ever be able to leave it, but we will. We're going to move forward, but we're going to take a look at the Tree of Life when we come back.

We have one other point to note here that has to do with remembering the first works, and then we'll move on to the Tree of Life. But let's pause here and take our break.