

Rev 25-09-21a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning service here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 21st of September, 2025. We're in the book of Revelation.

We are at the threshold of chapter 2. We're going to be looking this morning at the Lord Jesus' message to the church in Ephesus. Fascinating letter. It lays out a pattern that we are going to see followed for the next six churches.

And there's wonderful and fruitful content for us. Messages for contemplation, for encouragement, for application, and for warning. To keep us apprised of what to check.

How to ensure that we are on the narrow road headed for the straight gate. Bless God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and then begin. Father, what an amazing and exciting time to live.

How many wonderful blessings you have bestowed on us. The potentials, the opportunities to live at this time. And the nexus of history which we are observing.

The near proximity to the end of all things. The forward progress of your plan after these many centuries of building and moving toward this consummation. We pray that as we look at the prediction and the preparation that are involved.

That God the Holy Spirit will minister these truths to our hearts. Help us to understand it. Help us to recognize our place and our potential.

The power that is available to us through your word and through your spirit. So that in all things our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. We ask it in his name.

Amen. We've had something of a careful and extended introduction here in chapter one. Closing with the sound that the Apostle John hears behind him.

With the command, the commission to not fear. To initially be told that what he sees, write down. Make a record of it.

Keep it in his heart and soul and mind. So that he can communicate it to other believers. And he lists the seven churches in verse 11.

We saw last time that the vision of the Lord Jesus is very similar to that found in the transfiguration. And the effect on John is also quite similar. In the sense that it strikes him down in the midst of the lampstands.

He is seen and of course the lampstands are identified by the Lord Jesus as the churches. And he holds in his hand the seven stars. He is like the Son of Man.

This immediately references Old Testament prophecy. And the fact that Jesus speaks in these

terms is a reminder to us that we should know our Old Testament. You cannot understand what Jesus is about to say with regard to Balaam, Jezebel, Satan.

The symbolism and the metaphors that are going to be involved in the letters, in the vision, in the prophecies. The Old Testament is the key to understanding them. As I've mentioned a time or two in the past, there is a trend in more recent Christianity.

Used to say modern, but now it's post-modern. But in a lot of churches there's very little shrift given to the Old Testament. You can go to large churches and mention even the standard Bible stories and people are unfamiliar.

Because they are busy with kingdom work and being Jesus followers and so on. The Old Testament is the scriptures that are said to be inspired by God and profitable. For doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

2 Timothy 2.15 and all of these other wonderful reminders that the Old Testament scriptures are the foundation for our faith. We're going to see another allusion to that this morning. But you can't understand lampstands if you haven't paid attention to Zechariah.

You can't understand so much of what is coming without that foundation. So we love our Old Testament. We read our Old Testament.

We study it. And we endeavor to build on that foundation. To see God's dealings with His people in Old Testament days.

To help us appreciate, glorify and serve Him in our day. So when He says, one like unto the Son of Man. This immediately takes you back to Psalm 3.4 Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man over 80 times in the Gospels.

So it's important to know where that comes from. The importance here is to recognize that this is the risen and glorified Lord Jesus. And He bears great resemblance to the angel Gabriel as He speaks to Daniel.

Turn back with me to Daniel very quickly here. Just grab Daniel. Start at chapter 7. Daniel has the vision of the four beasts.

You see in 7.13. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He comes to the Ancient of Days. They brought Him near before Him.

To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. And His kingdom is the one that shall not be destroyed.

This has implications for your understanding of what the kingdom means in our present day and time. Because everything you see around us is going to eventually pass away. So this is not

that kingdom.

So Daniel sees this and he is grieved. And the visions of his head troubled him. Then as you move forward to Daniel chapter 9. And he receives the vision of the 70 weeks in response to his prayer.

You go to chapter 10. Verse 2. I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks, ate no pleasant food, meat, wine. On the twenty-fourth day I was by the side of the great river that is the Tigris.

Isn't it interesting? Ezekiel is often by the river Kabar when he views the visions that come to him. Here Daniel is beside the Tigris, lifted his eyes. Notice this description.

A certain man. This is not the son of man. But a certain man who is clothed in linen, whose waist is girded with gold of Uphaz.

Notice this is not the breast, which has that high symbol of judgment that we see in John's vision. But girded about the waist with gold. His body was like barrel.

His face like the appearance of lightning. His eyes like torches of fire. His arms and feet like burnished bronze in color.

And the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. I, Daniel, alone saw the vision. The men who were with me did not see the vision.

A great terror fell upon them, so they fled to hide themselves. I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me. For my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength.

Yet I heard the sound of his words, and while I heard the sound of his words, I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. What's John's reaction when he turns to see the son of man similarly appareled, similarly bright to the point of being unable to look at it? John says, I fell at his feet as dead. Very significant.

We'll see it in a moment. So, verse 10, still in Daniel 10. Suddenly a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands.

He said to me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you. While he was speaking this word to me, I stood. Hand is laid on him, he is strengthened and is able to stand on his feet.

Then he said, Do not fear, Daniel. The first day you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before God, your words were heard, and I have come because of your words. Ask, and it shall be given.

Seek, and you will find. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously, abundantly, and without reproach. But let him ask, nothing doubting.

That's James chapter one that we've seen. And then you have this explanation and an extended vision that begins really in chapter 11. We'll return to Daniel from time to time, as you can well imagine.

But this is the similar experience, coming in contact with those who are from the heavenly realm, whether it is the angel Gabriel. He is bright enough to melt Daniel into a puddle of weakness. Imagine the Lord Jesus himself.

And only the strong are able to abide the experience and take the strength that comes from God to accomplish the purpose of the visit. This is an incentive for us to be strong and have a good courage, to be not afraid, to strengthen our faith, to ask of God and not be afraid of the answer. Sometimes we're almost hesitant to ask God to reveal his will because we fear what may come.

We are concerned about suffering or pain or sorrow or heartache. And we fear that if God doesn't let this cup pass from us, it's going to be a very difficult time. We should not have a spirit of fear, but a power of love and a sound mind.

So John said back in chapter one, verse 17 of Revelation, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead, but he laid his right hand on me and started speaking. Now, pop quiz question. Why is this significant? Take a look at it again.

Specifically, I fell at his feet as dead, but what did he do? Look at each individual word. He laid his right hand on me. Which hand? The right hand.

Have we had the right hand of the Son of Man mentioned in this context? What do we know about his right hand? Look at the previous verse. He had in his right hand seven stars. What happened to the stars that Jesus can now lay his right hand on John? Think about this.

This to me is a fascinating idea. What do the stars represent? The messengers of the seven churches, the lampstands, and Jesus is standing in the midst of the lampstands. If he approaches John, who isn't apparently inside the circle of lampstands, two things have happened for the Lord Jesus to lay his right hand on John.

What are they? He is no longer in the midst of the lampstands, and he is no longer holding the stars in his right hand. He is able to reach out and touch John and put his right hand that a minute ago had seven stars in it on John. What has happened in the meantime? What separates the vision of Jesus standing in the midst of the lampstands representing the churches and holding in his right hand the seven stars which represent the messengers or pastors? Now he is reaching out and laying his right hand on John to strengthen him.

What changed? John fell at his feet as dead. Everybody worries about, will we be married in heaven? They neither marry or given in marriage. I can tell you one thing for certain about our life in the resurrected state.

There are no churches and no pastors. Do you notice? John falls at his feet as dead. Now he has personal contact with the Lord Jesus without the intermediate agency of churches and pastors.

Do you see how this makes sense? In the same way that in chapter 4, verse 1, John hears the voice come up here and there is an association with the rapture there, the perspective shifts from earth to heaven. I will show you things which must take place hereafter from a heavenly perspective. We're going to see several clues in that regard.

But when John falls at his feet as dead, this, I think, represents or symbolizes the leaving of this life. And at that point, the pastor and the church is no longer an issue. We become priests and the Lord Jesus is our high priest, but the Lord Jesus is dealing directly with John at this point.

So when he first sees him, and the first thing Jesus says is, you've got some messages I want you to take down and send to the churches. That's what it is. But in order to put it, it specifies his right hand.

And of course, this represents comfort, power, enablement, transfer of strength, care. There are many wonderful additional concepts, but he doesn't have stars in his hand when he lays it on John. He is no longer standing in the midst of the lampstands.

That vision has gone away. And now the Lord Jesus is directly in contact with John and says, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last.

I want to give you a quick note about the first and the last. It only occurs six times in scripture. I am the first and the last.

Three times in the Old Testament. Three times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it is in the book of Isaiah.

Remember, the first 39 chapters are identifying the problems for the nation of Israel, for Judah specifically, right? And then in chapter 40, we turn a corner. We have that wonderful transition. Isaiah 41, verse 4. I, Yahweh, am the first and the last.

I am He. Isaiah 41, 4. Tetragrammaton. I, Yahweh, am the first and the last.

I am He. Isaiah 44, verse 6. Thus says the Lord, Yahweh. You can always identify it in your Bible.

It's all small caps. Thus says the Lord, I am the first and I am the last. Beside me, there is no God.

Isaiah 48, verse 12. Listen to me, O Jacob. I am He.

I am the first and I am the last. This emphasizes the Lord's eternal self-existence, His uniqueness, His power, the comprehensive presence that He represents. In the New Testament, we have it three times, all in the book of Revelation.

Here, fear not, I am the first and the last, and the Living One. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Clearly the Lord Jesus.

We're going to see it again in the letter to the church at Smyrna, in verse 8. To the angel of the church in Smyrna write, these things says the first and the last, who was dead and came to life. Clearly also the Lord Jesus. Finally, can flip over real quickly to Revelation chapter 22, the last chapter in the Bible.

Verse 13, Revelation 22, 13. Verse 12, behold, I am coming quickly. My reward is with me to give to everyone according to His work.

All authority, all judgment has been committed to the Son by the Father. This is the Lord Jesus speaking. I am the Alpha Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Three times in the Old Testament, this is said of the Lord. Three times in Revelation, it is said of the Lord Jesus. Clear recognition of His membership in the Trinity, His unity with the Father, who is self-identified as the Alpha and the Omega.

We saw that in verse 8 of our chapter. So, why is that important? The first and the last. And you notice that it is the explanation for why John should not fear.

The Lord Jesus is on His side. He is not there to judge John, to send John into some form of punishment or discipline. This is who you're talking to.

This is the God of the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament, the Lord of Glory, specifically the Lord Jesus. The Lord our God is one Lord, but He is Father, Son, and Spirit. And clearly this is the Lord Jesus, not appealing to His sympathy with our human weaknesses because He was tested in all points like as we are.

This is one avenue of the way we think about the Lord Jesus. He lived in our flesh. He walked through suffering, rejection, hardship, difficulty, oppression, persecution.

He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. And we can reflect on that aspect of His humanity and His incarnation. Here, fear not.

Remember our Old Testament memory verse, Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee.

I will help thee. I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. The whole picture of this vision is the purity, the power, the righteousness of the resurrected Christ.

He bore our sins. The penalty is paid and those sins are gone. He doesn't continue to wear the dirty robe.

Remember when we studied Zachariah and you see the vision of the priest, take off those dirty robes and put clean white robes and put a headdress on his head that is clean and white. That

phase is over with. This is the resurrected and glorified Jesus, and He is our comforter.

He is the basis upon which we will rise from the prostration of falling as dead to stand on our feet as Daniel. Interestingly, both Daniel and John are closely associated with some of the most detailed teachings on resurrection, Daniel 12, 1 and 2, and He Himself experiences a type of resurrection when He is confronted with eternal things and glorified beings. Who is sufficient for these things? But God's power raises us up.

It is via the angel in the Old Testament, but Jesus Christ Himself raises John up so that He can accomplish His mission. What a fantastic concept to reflect on. This is us.

This is our privilege. And we have nothing to fear in death. We, from time to time, experience death of our loved ones, of those in our family and circle of friends, our acquaintances, those who are close to us, and it is always a challenge.

It is sobering. It puts us in a mode of reflection. This is a comforting truth.

When we fall at the feet of the Lord Jesus as dead, He puts His strong right hand on us and strengthens us, takes away our fear and lifts us up. So, we now come to the first church here, to the angel of the church of Ephesus Wright. There is a common belief the word angel throughout this book is uniformly celestial beings in the service of God, except in these two chapters.

Actually, these three chapters. We know this because as celestial beings, angels don't need a letter to be written to them by a human apostle. It doesn't comport with reality.

Nowhere in Scripture do humans deliver messages to angels. And Jesus says, write to the angel of the church of Ephesus. If there is a message to be delivered, should we expect that an angel is going to walk in the room and transfer the content of Jesus' words to us? No, this can only be a human messenger.

Context, context, context. This is not a celestial angel. This is a singular angel.

There are those who appeal to a plurality of elders that seem to be visible in other parts of the New Testament, Philippians or the letter to Timothy or whatever. This, by the time John is confronted by the Lord Jesus and given this vision, churches have not much instruction by way of organization, but there is a messenger for each church. A singular messenger.

It's not teaching by committee. You can have oversight with several elders. You can have service with several deacons, but not the communication function.

The communication function is singular. And this is for a reason. What if you've got two teaching pastors and someone perceives a conflict and, well, Bob said this and Ted said that and, you know, Bob seems to believe this and Ted seems to believe that.

The pastor is accountable to the Lord Jesus and if he's doing his job, he will be held in the Lord's

hand. And if there's any problem with Bob's teaching or Ted's teaching or Sam's teaching or anyone else's teaching, a faithful pastor is going to get corrected in the hand of the Lord Jesus himself. That is the role.

It is authority. It is oversight. It is judgment.

And it's a very sobering thought. You'd better get it right. You'd better be on your knees praying, asking God for wisdom, nothing doubting.

I know this is my job to communicate. Please don't let me get it wrong. If I do get it wrong, let it not be anything of a serious nature that affects faith and practice on the part of others.

We can get details wrong. Maybe I guess it's something and it isn't right. But in terms of our daily life and that's what's going to come up here in the letter to the Ephesians.

So we're going to see a pattern here. How many elements would you think are going to be in each of these letters? Just take a wild guess. How many elements are in each letter? Seven.

Seven of them. They are going to consist of the title that the Lord Jesus chooses for himself. If I put these in order, number one is the name of the church.

To the church in this city. Notice the churches are identified by their location, not their pastor's name. I like the idea that if you're located in a city, you can be Tulsa Bible Church, Dallas Bible Church, Bible Church of Owasso.

Jesus identifies these churches. The New Testament epistles identify the churches by where they are, not who the leader is. And it's a dangerous thing when you think of a church and you immediately think of the pastor.

That should not be the identity of a church. Where has God placed us? By confluence of circumstance, experience, predilection, like-mindedness, unity, fellowship. We're in a place.

And of course, in our day, because of the wonders of communication, we can be widely scattered in terms of our individual location, but we come together as a group and this is where we are. I like to think that our church is located in the town of Grace and Truth. But it is not, the churches are not identified to the church that Timothy pastor's right, to the church that Epaphras pastor's right, to the church that Titus pastor's right.

It's significant that they're identified by their city. So that is first, the name of the church. Secondly, the Lord Jesus, from the vision that John has seen will choose a title for himself.

Here, these things says, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. This is the aspect of John's view of the Lord Jesus that is chosen for a reason, as we will see for this particular church. That's number two.

Third, what is commendable in that church? Jesus leads with, here's what you're doing right.

Here's your commendation. He always says, I know your works.

Seven times, I know your works. Notice he does not say, look at verse two of chapter two. He doesn't say, I know your beliefs.

I know your theology. Now theology is gonna have a bearing, but what does he lead with? I know your doctrinal statement. I know your position on pre-mid or post-tribulationism.

I know your position on predestination. None of that. I know what you do.

This is air gone. This is what you accomplish. We are seeing this in the book of James.

I will show you my faith by my works, by what I do. I know what you do. I know the visible manifestation of your Christian walk.

I know it. This is personal observation. Jesus doesn't say, I've heard of your works.

Somebody told me about what you do. Jesus says, I know it at firsthand. Why? In a church where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst.

If he is there, there's another place where as Paul closes a letter, he says, let your moderation be known to all. The Lord is at hand. It doesn't mean his return is near.

It means he's watching. Let your moderation. Don't go to excess.

Many things are good in moderation. Many things taken to excess become sinful and even evil. I know your works.

So, and then follows commendation. That's the third element. The fourth is here are the criticisms.

Here is the concern. This is what's not going so well. Start with what's good.

Move to what's not working so well. That is the fourth. The fifth is the exhortation.

The command, the imperative. Here's what you need to do to fix your problem. This is something you learn very early in military service in general, Navy more so in the Marine Corps in particular.

Don't just identify a problem. Or if you become aware of a problem, what is the solution? If you're going to bring a problem to the attention of higher ups, bring with your critique a solution. Sir, here's what's going wrong.

Here's how I think we can fix it. Maybe somebody else has a better idea, but you don't ever just bring the problem and shrug your shoulders. So, the exhortation.

That is followed by a promise to the overcomer. And in all seven letters, he that has an ear, hear

what the spirit says to the churches. Seven elements in each letter.

So, what we're going to see is that there are those who try to spread these seven letters across the last 2,000 years of church history. And Ephesus is the apostolic church. Laodicea is the one where we are in.

And the various phases of Catholicism and other things are represented in Smyrna, Thyatira, and Pergamos and the rest of it. I don't hold that view. I think you're assembling evidence to fit your preconceived pattern to do that.

It's not preterist. It wasn't all fulfilled back in the day. Especially given that those who tie it to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, why wouldn't you talk to the Jerusalem church? Or the church at Rome or any others in the nearby vicinity? Why not Antioch and so on? These are going to be aspects of Christian life, corporate Christian life, as we are brothers and sisters in Christ where we can do well or we need to watch for potential problems.

Our individual and collective walk before the Lord is going to be exposed through the examples of these seven churches. It's a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, to ensure that we strive to enter by the narrow gate so that we enter into life and that we are overcomers. That's what we'll see as we move forward.

We'll see the details in this first and fulsomely known church at Ephesus when we come back from the break.