

Revelation Three

09/15/2024

Hymns: 12 I'll Fly Away 51 Love Lifted Me 54 Oh, How I Love Jesus
This World Is Not My Home

Scripture: Psalm 69:30-36

Big idea: Lost Love of Ephesus

Labor Day has come and gone and with it we say a fond farewell to another summer. Betsy and I have been traveling more than usual this year, but not as much as the four astronauts that rocketed into orbit last Tuesday. Two of the four spent over an hour on a spacewalk to test a new spacesuit design. These were the first two civilians ever to perform a spacewalk. I'm sure they will attest that was quite a trip!

Today we're continuing our **trip** through the fascinating book of Revelation. We learned that this final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse* unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but instead it reveals Him in His glory. The imagery of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation describes a person of great majesty and power.

We also learned that despite Jesus having this frightening appearance, His demeanor towards His own is tender and gracious. We learned that we who know Him will receive a body like His that can operate in the following ways:

1. It can appear like a human body and even like your former recognizable self.
 1. Walk
 2. Talk
 3. Eat
 4. Feel like a normal body to mortal physical humans.
2. Pass through solid matter without disturbing it.
3. Cloak its identity.
4. Instantly change to reveal its identity.
5. Instantly disappear.
6. Ascend visibly into the clouds.
 1. Not limited by gravity
 2. Not limited by lack of atmospheric pressure.
 3. Not limited by absence of oxygen (no need for a spacesuit here).
7. Perfect and sinless.
8. Eternal – cannot be destroyed.

Did you ever dream that you can defy gravity and fly? I have. Some day we will trade in this limited aging model and exchange it for that new model. I'm looking forward to that.

With that introduction, let's move on to our scripture for today as we travel to Ephesus: **Revelation 2:1-7**

Revelation 2

[1] *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things sa[ys] he that hold[s] the seven*

stars in his right hand, who walk[s] in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

There's quite a bit there, so let's stop and get our bearings.

This sub-letter contains just 180 words and is the first of seven letters. It resides in the context of the larger letter which is the entire book of Revelation that God told John to send to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:11). This begins *the things which are* section of Revelation (Revelation 1:19). Bible teachers readily admit that Revelation chapters 2 and 3 address the seven churches in Asia **at the time of John's writing**, yet they consistently cannot resist the temptation to **leap off and assert** that they refer to **future times** as well. We will not make that mistake – especially in light of the promised curse for doing so given in Revelation 22:18.

Jesus directs John to write a message to the *angel* (ä'n-ge-los) (singular by the way) which in this context can mean:

messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God

“The Blue Letter Bible,” (classic edition), accessed August 4, 2024,

<https://www.blbclassic.org/lang/lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=G32&t=KJV&page=2>

Three examples of the usage of **this same word** meaning *messenger* are:

1. John the Baptist – Jesus called him a messenger (Luke 7:27).
2. The disciples of John the Baptist were also called messengers (Luke 7:24).
3. And interestingly the **messenger** (same word) of Satan was sent to buffet the apostle Paul (II Corinthians 12:7)

So the next time some pastor starts crowing about being an **angel**, you might bring him back down to earth by reminding him of that *messenger of Satan* reference. This messenger of the church of Ephesus is one to receive and relay the message. You can think in terms of a mailman or even in our day a text message or email application.

Note this reference to *church* is singular, not plural.

<https://www.blbclassic.org/Bible.cfm?b=Rev&c=2&v=1&t=KJV#conc/1>

There was just one Ephesian church at that time. But exactly where was the city of Ephesus located, and what do we know about it? Let's explore that ancient city of Ephesus and find out.

Ephesus has a temperate climate with a latitude very close to ours in Cary, N.C. It sits along a river just a few miles from the Aegean Sea just off of the west coast of Turkey. Its ideal location fostered a prosperous and vibrant city in the first century A.D. with a population around 200,000. This made it one of the largest cities of that time but far behind Rome, the largest, with a population that approached one million.

Quoting here from Easton's Bible Dictionary:

[Ephesus] was colonized principally from Athens. In the time of the Romans it bore the title of "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia."

The apostle John, according to tradition, spent many years in Ephesus, where he died and was buried.

Easton, M. G. "Ephesus", *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Blue Letter Bible. 1897. 24 Jun, 1996 21 Aug 2024.

<http://www.blbclassic.org/search/Dictionary/viewtopic.cfm?topic=ET0001225>

As you walk from the former harbor, up a wide, marble, column-lined main street you will see the ruins of key sites in ancient Ephesus:

1. Temple of Diana a pagan goddess of fertility: 450' x 225' x 60' high one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. For all of you sports fans out there the temple was about 25% larger than a football field including end zones.
2. Grand Theater: one of the largest of the ancient world with a seating capacity of about 25,000 – used as an open-air theater as well as a stadium.
3. Commercial Agora: a huge marketplace next to the Grand Theater.
4. Library of Celsus: an imposing structure even now. The third largest library in the ancient world – housing over 12,000 scrolls.
5. Terrace Houses – luxury Roman villas used by the very wealthy.

We also have the following quote from the International Bible Encyclopedia:

ef'-e-sus (Ephesos, "desirable"):

A city of the Roman province of Asia, near the mouth of the Cayster river, 3 miles from the western coast of Asia Minor, With an artificial harbor accessible to the largest ships, ..., standing at the entrance of the valley which reaches far into the interior of Asia Minor, and [is] connected by highways with the chief cities of the province, Ephesus was the most easily accessible city in Asia, both by land and sea. Its location, therefore, favored its religious, political and commercial development, and presented a most advantageous field for the missionary labors of Paul. The city stood upon the sloping sides and at the base of two hills, Prion and Coressus, commanding a beautiful view; its climate was exceptionally fine, and the soil of the valley was unusually fertile. [We expect that from a river delta.]

Though Pergamos was the center of the Roman religion and of the government, Ephesus was the more accessible, the commercial center and the home of the native goddess Diana; and because of its wealth and situation it gradually became the chief city of the province. It is to the temple of Diana, however, that its great wealth and prominence are largely due.

Banks, E.J. "Ephesus", *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Blue Letter Bible. 1913. 5 May, 2003 21 Aug 2024.

<http://www.blbclassic.org/search/Dictionary/viewtopic.cfm?topic=IT0003137>

And finally, here's a quote from Smith's Bible Dictionary:

Conspicuous at the head of the harbor of Ephesus was the great temple of Diana or Artemis, the tutelary divinity of the city. ... The earlier temple, which had been begun [550 B.C.] before the Persian war, was burnt down in the night when Alexander the Great was born [356 B.C.]; and another structure, raise[d] by the enthusiastic co-operation of all the inhabitants of "Asia," had taken its place. The magnificence of this sanctuary was a proverb throughout the civilized world. In consequence of this devotion the city of Ephesus was called neo'koros (Acts 19:35) or "warden" of Diana.

Other temples in the city dedicated to Roman emperors (Diocletian and others) also earned the city the Roman title of *neo'koros*.

Another consequence of the celebrity of Diana's worship at Ephesus was that a large manufactory grew up there of portable shrines, which strangers purchased, and devotees carried with them on journeys or set up in the houses. ... The stadium or circus, [was] 685 feet long by 200 wide, where the Ephesians held their shows. ... The whole place is now utterly desolate, with the exception of the small Turkish village at Ayasaluk.

Smith, William. "Ephesus", *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Blue Letter Bible. 1884. 14 Dec, 2010 21 Aug 2024.
<<http://www.blbclassic.org/search/Dictionary/viewtopic.cfm?topic=BT0001387>>

Today there's nothing in Ephesus except ruins (and cats – lots of cats). To date, only about fifteen percent of the ruins have been excavated. The former harbor there is long gone after being filled in with silt.

What does the Bible say about Ephesus? The apostle Paul spent three years there teaching (Acts 19:10), ministering (20:31), and all while supporting himself (34).

There, perhaps he was made a spectacle (I Corinthians 4:9) in that huge arena.

I Corinthians 15

[32] If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus,

That sounds like Paul was forced to fight beasts in that stadium.

Paul also wrote a letter specifically to the church at Ephesus (the epistle to the Ephesians) to encourage them in their faith and the fellowship of Christian love and unity.

Ephesus was where Aquila and Priscilla explained the fullness of the gospel to Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).

With that, lets return to our text:

Revelation 2

1. Salutation to:

[1] **Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write;**

2. Salutation from: giving a unique description of Jesus Christ:

These things sa[ys] he that hold[s] the seven stars in his right hand, who walk[s] in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

Recall that the description of these two symbols appears at the end of Revelation chapter 1 (verse 20).

1. The seven stars are the **messengers** to the seven churches in Asia.
2. The seven golden candlesticks are the **seven churches** in Asia among which one is Ephesus.

3. Commendation:

[2] **I know thy works,**

and thy labo[r],

and thy patience,

and how [y]ou can[] not bear them which are evil:

and [y]ou ha[ve] tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and ha[ve] found them liars:

[3] *And ha[ve] borne [this],*

and ha[ve shown] patience,

and for my name's sake ha[ve] labo[red], and ha[ve] not fainted.

Jesus commended them for their labor, and patience in their work, and maintaining purity in their church body.

4. Rebuke:

[4] **Nevertheless I have somewhat against [you],** *because [y]ou ha[ve] left [your] first love.*

Despite all of their commendable hard, patient work to remain pure, **their heart was not right**. They were going through the motions with the wrong motivation. When we think of first love we can remember a **passion** or think of Valentine's Day. That kind of heartfelt love was gone.

6. Exhortation

[5] **Remember therefore from whe[re] [y]ou ar[e] fallen, and repent, and do the first works;**

Jesus tells them to remember when they loved the LORD and operated from that mindset. He tells the church, not individuals in the church, to repent (or turn back) and return to the motivation that they had at the start.

5. Jesus then describes the consequences for them not obeying His command.

or else I will come unto [you] quickly, and will remove [your] candlestick out of [it]s place, [unless you] repent.

In other words, when the church of Ephesus failed to repent, it would die – and indeed it did.

3. Commendation:

[6] But this [y]ou ha[ve], that [y]ou hate[] the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Jesus commends them that as part of their zeal for purity, they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The Bible does not say what deeds these might be. We will not speculate. It does say that Jesus hates them which indicates these deeds are ungodly.

6. Exhortation:

*[7] **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;***

It's interesting to note here that Jesus frequently used this expression taken from Isaiah 6:9-10 during His earthly ministry. Here's an example:

Matthew 13

*[15] For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should **understand** with their **heart**, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

7. Eternal, Heavenly Promise:

To him that overcome[s] will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

As we shall see, Jesus will follow a very similar structure in each of His messages to the churches. Here he gives a promise with a heavenly reference. It's interesting to see that this Tree of Life first appears in Genesis 2:9 and Genesis 3:22, 24. The tree was in the **midst** of the Garden of Eden. Now it appears in the **midst** of God's paradise or God's garden.

Application

Let's wrap things up. We started today thinking about taking trips. We traveled in our minds to ancient Ephesus and explored a beautiful and prosperous ancient city, but there was a problem. It's telling that Jesus singles out *love* as the issue with the Ephesians. They lived in the center of sensual love fostered by the goddess of fertility Diana and the associated immoral acts surrounding their worship at the temple. Of course, Jesus was not talking about this sensual love. He was pointing to something far greater.

Note the apostle Paul uses the word *love* nineteen times in the little book of Ephesians. That's about three times as frequently as the New Testament. Love seems to be a key issue with this church. Elsewhere, Paul directly addressed the importance of real love.

I Corinthians 13

[1] Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as

sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

[2] And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [love], I am nothing.

[3] And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it profit[s] me nothing.

[8] [Love] never fail[s]:

II Corinthians 5

*[14] For the **love** of Christ constrain[s] us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*

[15] And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

God's wants us to serve Him because we **love** Him. Love matters.

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:21).