**To the Church in Ephesus**

1. **Background to Ephesus**

1a) Ephesus, with a population of 250,000, was the chief commercial city of the Roman province of Asia. In the New Testament era it was the fourth greatest city in the world. It was the Gateway to Asia, a large port and hub of the main roads in Asia. Most traffic and trade from Rome to and from the Eastern empire would have passed through Ephesus. It was a prosperous commercial city. Many streets were paved with Marble. The main street was ½ mile long and 12m wide, running from the harbour to the theatre, lined with shops and pillars. The theatre held 24,000 people.

1b) The temple of Artemis/Diana was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was 130m x 70m, held up by 127 marble pillars. It housed a statue of the many breasted goddess, carved out of a black meteorite. The temple was the finest building ever built in the Greek world. Tens of thousands of pilgrims and tourists came to visit the shrine of Artemis every year, giving a great boost to the local economy. (see acts 19).

1c) Ephesus was also Roman world’s centre for witchcraft and magic. Magic scrolls in the ancient world were called “Ephesia Grammata” (Ephesian writing). In the revival of Acts 19, converts came and burned their magic scrolls, valued at 50,000 silver coins, worth £5 million today.

1d) After Jerusalem, Ephesus was the most important church in the New Testament. It became the centre of the greatest revival in the book of Acts, and . The membership was so large that when they stopped spending money on the local temple artefacts, the whole economy of the city was affected. There must have been several thousand believers to make that much difference in a city of 250,000 people.

1e) Apollos worked in Ephesus, as did Aquilla and Priscilla. Paul made 3 visits there between 53-56 AD. On his 2nd visit he lived there for 3 years. He later wrote the letter to the “Ephesians”.

Timothy became the leader/bishop of the church – 1 & 2 Timothy were written to the leader of the church of Ephesus.

The letters 1 & 2 Corinthians were written whilst Paul was in Ephesus.

The book of Colossians was possibly written whilst Paul was in prison in Ephesus.

1f) John the apostle came and lived there with Mary, mother of Jesus. John’s gospel was likely written there and the 3 letters of John were written there and probably addressed to the church there. Both were probably buried in the city.

1g) Ephesus became a centre of **regional mission**. Acts tells us that during Paul’s stay in Ephesus “at all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19, 8). The 7 churches of revelation were planted from there.

1h) Ephesus was also a centre of healing and supernatural miracles. “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.” (Acts 19,11-12).

1i) It also became a place of spiritual attack and persecution. Paul wrote … “about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.. (2 Cor.1, 8). He tried to equip the local believers to withstand the spiritual pressure by giving them his famous teaching on “The full armour of God” (Eph. 6, 10-20).

1. **About the 7 letters**

2a) These letters are the only time in the scripture where Jesus speaks with His own lips to identify the issues that he wants his church to embrace to be purified from.

2b) These letters are spoken in the context of the book of Revelation. Though the letters were originally addressed to the churches of that area, it is clear that the Holy Spirit wanted to give messages that would help the end time church to be aware of what they should embrace and what they need to be purified from as they walk through the days of the book of Revelation.

1. **The Attributes of Jesus**

3a) In the last talk, we listed the 30 different attributes of Jesus mentioned in Rev 1-3. In each of the 7 letters, he names one specific characteristic that will meet the challenge of that particular church and one reward that they will win if they keep strong in the faith.

3b) For this church that had lost its first love Jesus pointed out that He was the one who holds the 7 stars in his hand and who walks in the midst of the candlesticks.

3c) **He holds the 7 stars in His hand.** He doesn’t advise his leaders at arm’s length, but holds them in His hand. He wants them to know how precious they are to Him and how intimately involved He is with looking after them. As we go through the troubles of the last days with all its opposition, and confusion and persecution, we need to know that God is holding us in His hand.

3d) The Second point really has the same meaning. “I walk among the 7 golden lampstands”. Though we can’t see Him, Jesus is there, walks up and down in the midst of his churches.

1. **I know your deeds**

4a) Notice Jesus doesn’t say; “I know what you believe”. Today we often think as Christians that we will go to heaven because we believe the right things. But the Bible actually doesn’t teach that. He says; “I know your deeds”. Jesus is watching to see **what you do** for Him. This seems to go counter to the teaching of Paul; ***“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Eph 2, 8). However, as James says; ***“Faith without works is dead”*** (James 2, 20).

4b) Jesus rewards believers according to what they do for him, not just for believing the right things. “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” (Rev. 20, 12. See Matt. 25, 21). **Jesus is watching your life**. He’s recording everything that you do, good and bad, and those things that you do for Him and the motives with which you do them.

4c) Jesus praises them for their **Enthusiasm**, their **Endurance** and their **Enlightenment** ***“I know your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.” (2, 2).***

God values hard work that is done for Him. He wants us to hate what he hates and requires us to not tolerate wicked people. This is very counter cultural today, where toleration is lifted up as one of the greatest and most necessary characteristics.

4d) He also requires us to ***“Watch your life and doctrine closely”*** (1 Tim 4, 16). Paul, in his farewell greeting to the church leaders in Ephesus warned of false apostles with their false teaching. ***“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”*** (Acts 20, 29-31). The Ephesian church faced and overcame this threat.

1. **You’ve forsaken your first love**

5a) ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first”*** (v 4). Was John talking about love for others or love for God? Or both?

5b) The central theme of the 3 letters of John (written to the church in Ephesus) is that we should love each other. The aged apostle John was asked to preach in the church in Ephesus, though only seldom, because every time he preached, he would give the same message; ***“My dear children, let us love one another”.***

5c) I think that you can’t separate love for God from love for people. In his letters John tells us; ***“Whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” (1 John 4, 20).*** However the only way to get true love for others is by pouring out your heart in love for Him. Then He pours His heart of love of others into you.

5d) He asks us to “**Consider how far you have fallen!”** (v 4). The words remind us of Jesus words in Luke 10, 18; ***“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”.*** Lucifer, the bright star of heaven who was the closest to the throne of God – how far he fell. Do you love Jesus like you used to do? Or are you slowly falling away?It takes time to cultivate a deep and consistent love for Jesus. It requires developing a regular focus that connects our heart with His.

1. **If you do not repent ...**

6a***) “If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place”*** (2, 5). This seems harsh to say to Christians who are working hard for the Lord and persevering in the right doctrine. Yet it shows God’s priorities. Our live will be judged against the first (and second) commandment. “How much did you love me? How much did you love others?” (Matt 22, 36).

6b) God can remove His Spirit, His supernatural anointing, from the church, though in many churches, even then, the activities and meetings just go on just as before but without the supernatural presence of God.

1. **The right to eat from the tree of life**

7a) ***“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”***

7b) We read of the tree of life 3 times in the Bible. Once at the beginning of time in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2, 9), where the tree of Life enabled Adam and Eve to not just live for ever but also to experience the supernatural quality of the Life of God.

7c) We read of the tree of Life at the end of time, in the heavenly city; ***“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”*** (Rev. 22, 2). That talks about how that tree nourishes people and how its leaves provide healing for the nations.

7d) In the middle, there are 3 references in the book of proverbs which refer to the time which we are living in, and that tell us how we can have a foretaste of the supernatural quality of the life with God here and now. ***“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”*** (Prov. 13, 12).

7e) The depth of our longing or desire for His presence to be with us and His promises to be fulfilled in and through us determines the amount of the life of God that we experience***. “If you seek me, you will find me if you search for me with all of your heart”*** (Jer. 29, 13).

***“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness .... He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, and escape from the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*** (2 Peter 1, 3 & 4).

7f) The Cross is the tree of life for those who believe***. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed”*** (1 Peter 2, 24)

1. **He who has an ear, let him hear …**

8a) ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*** (v 7). This was one of Jesus’ most frequently repeated commands in the gospels, repeated to each of the 7 churches. We need to listen carefully to what God is saying through the scriptures and by His Holy Spirit.

8b) Jesus message was listened to. 20 years later, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch wrote a letter to the Ephesian church in which he congratulates them for having stood firm in the doctrine of the true faith in spite of the fact that some of their members had been martyred. He also specifically mentions that they have a reputation for being a loving church.