



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Jesus Judges Churches Too: Does My Church Love?*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

Jesus knows everything that happens. In every church. In every soul. He proves that by judging the church at Ephesus, praising what was good, pointing out what was bad, and demanding an end to all that was ugly and ungodly. In the same way, our Savior judges our lives out of his deep concern for our faith and our faithfulness to the Father.

- **Revelation 2:1** To the angel<sup>[a]</sup> of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

The Good: Lots of \_\_\_\_\_.

- **Revelation 2: 2-3, 6** I know your deeds, 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. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Bad: Little \_\_\_\_\_.

- **Revelation 2:4-5a** <sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.
- **Revelation 2:5b-7** <sup>5</sup> If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 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.

## *Points to Ponder*

1. Consider the blessings and challenges of being a small church with dozens of people, a large church with hundreds of people, or a megachurch with thousands of people. What does “loving one another” look like in those varied situations?
2. Evaluate: The larger a church grows, the more important it is for every person to be in a group.
3. Re-read Revelation 2:1-7 with fresh eyes. List the three things in these verses that jump off the page. Why do you feel they are important for Christians today?
4. Is financial giving/volunteering a result of the love you have for your church? Or is the love you have for your church a result of giving/volunteering?
5. Do you know someone who walked away from the church because they didn't feel loved? Share today's message with them and mention how much love matters to Jesus, the Lord of every Christian church.

## *Homework for Next Week*

Read Revelation 2:8-11

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Jesus Judges Churches Too: Does My Church Love**  
Revelation 2:1-7  
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I was looking to improve my skills as a public speaker, since I obviously do a lot of public speaking, and I reached out to a friend who was an expert in the subject. He had spent most of his career training people for public speaking. He had written an amazing book on the subject. I asked him if he would help me out, and he agreed to do it. And so, he sat down in front of his laptop. He watched a sermon that I had recently preached. He watched it again. He took notes, and then he emailed me his judgment; what he thought was good, what he thought could use some improvements, the strengths, the weaknesses. And when I opened the attachment and I printed it out, what I found was this. I did not blow up the font on this before I printed it. Not 1 or 2 or 10 or 20 or 40, but 50 pages of presentation observation feedback. He dismantled me. He counted in a single sermon every time I said the word "um," "uh," "ah," "like," "you know" and gave me the total amount. He talked about the strengths of my presenting and the things, yeah, you probably do not want to do that again. He noticed the words I used, the pauses I did or did not take, the inflection of my voice and if it matched what I was trying to communicate. He told me what people subconsciously think when you do this or you do this or you stand like this or your arms are crossed or they are like this. He talked about where I would look, how long eye contact would last. Everything you could possibly think about, he told me.

So, here is my question: how would you feel if you opened an attachment of judgment and it was 50 pages long? Terrified, insecure, nervous? Before you answer, here is what you should know: before I opened the attachment, I knew something about my friend Jason. I knew that he was for me. Right? He was not some internet troll. He was not some comment section critic. He was not some bully from the local school. This was a guy who loved Jesus, loved me, loved our church, loved this ministry, and so every single word that he would send me whether it stung or put wind in my sails, every word of judgment was for me.

And that is probably the best way that I can describe what happens in the part of Scripture we are going to study today. In the beginning of the Book of Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3, we find seven separate letters that Jesus wanted sent to seven real pastors and seven real churches, and what we find in those letters is comprehensive and categorical and thorough and specific. It is good. It is bad. It is ugly. It is everything. But as we listen to these words, we should remember this - that whatever Jesus says to us, he is for us. And I really hope as you study these words today, and in the weeks to come, you start to believe that about the church. That if we are quoting the words of Jesus, whether it encourages us or convicts us, it is always for us. Jesus loves the church. He loves me as a pastor. He loves you as one of his followers and whatever he says to you, it is for you. He wants you to be the best, strongest, most peaceful, fruitful, gentle,

compassionate, faithful, content, satisfied Christian on the planet. So, let me tell you this: whatever we are about to find in the Bible, do not be afraid because it is for you.

Now, before I open the book and we jump into the first letter, let me just ask you this question. What do you think Jesus would say about us? Like, if you are watching at home and this is not your home congregation, maybe you can think about the place that you last worshiped, but just think for a second. If Jesus was here and my friend Jason was taking comprehensive notes about me and you and our strengths and our weaknesses, what do you think Jesus would say? What would he applaud so much that you would almost blush that Jesus was being so nice? And what would he say that you knew deep in your heart had enough truth to it that you kind of broke eye contact and slowly nodded? What would Jesus say?

Starting today and for the next few weeks, we are going to think deeply about that question because as much as I love our church right now, I love the thought of what our church could become. If we take whatever this is right now and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are full of more grace and more truth and more love and more hospitality and more generosity, can you imagine being a part of a church like that, where showing up on Sunday was not a have to and I am supposed to, and the Bible says I really should, but it was a get to and a want to, and I cannot wait to, and is it Sunday yet? "Mom and Dad, is it Sunday yet? "Dad, is it Sunday yet?" Like imagine being a part of a church like that. It is what Jesus wants for us for every gathering around this book and his name.

So, let us start down that path together as we open up our Bibles to Revelation 2, and we are going to study today the words that Jesus wanted spoken to a first century church in the metropolitan city of Ephesus. The chapter begins with these words, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." Now, last week we learned this incredible truth that Jesus walks among the seven golden lampstands. That was a symbolic way of saying that he walks among churches just like this one. And here, Jesus adds that he also holds in his hand the seven stars which Revelation 1 said were the seven angels of the seven churches, and that is why here in Verse 1 he says, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus here is what you should write."

The angel of the church. What do you think that means? Actually, let me give you a hand. Did you know when you walked into this church today there was an angel here? And on the count of three I want you to point to it. Okay? Even if you have to totally guess, I need everyone. Put up a pointer finger right now. On the count of three you are going to make your best guess to find the angel of the church. Ready? One, two, three. Point. Some dude is sitting with his girlfriend in the back like right here. It is a boss move. Right? No, the correct answer would be there is an angel, and here is an angel. And before you are thinking I am getting a big head, let me explain. The word that we translate, angel, the Greek word, *angelos*, literally means messenger. In fact, the footnote in my Bible says angels or messengers. We normally think of angels as heavenly messengers who come down from God, but the word can also be applied to earthly messengers who lead churches, like pastors. That is probably the interpretation that makes sense here since in a few verses Jesus is going to say to this angel, "Repent and change your ways," which is something a holy angel would never have to hear.

This is maybe a sermon just for me and this guy over here, but how crazy is it that Jesus holds pastors like us in his right hand? Like, you and I are not just two in a million. We are individual people that Jesus holds right here. We can talk about that later because I want to talk to the rest of you. Jesus has a lot to say to this pastor and to his church, and he starts with some really good news.

Grab a pen and write this down. The good that Jesus is about to say to this church is this: that they were filled with lots and lots and lots and lots of truth. The truth of the word of God, the church at Ephesus had tons of it. Let me show you the proof. In verse 2, Jesus says, "I know your deeds, 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. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary." In verse 6, he adds, "and you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate."

So, do you think Jesus would say the same thing to us? Two thousand years later, other side of the planet, different culture, different times, would he say that we are the kind of church that is passionate about this truth even though it costs us? I got an answer to that question last week when an 18-year-old from our church wanted to meet me for coffee. She had just finished high school and was just a few months away from leaving for her freshman year at an out-of-state college, but she did not want to talk to me about her major, tuition, or her roommate. She wanted to talk to me about church. She wanted as soon as she got on campus to find a church. Like, even if mom was not there, even if dad was not there, even if she did not have to, even if she would not get in trouble or lectured by her parents, she wanted to stay rooted and connected to the word of God.

What I was thinking in my heart was, yes, but then the best part. She pulled out her phone, and she said, "Pastor, I was looking at all the churches closest to my dorm, and I found this one and this one and this one and this one, and so I jumped onto their websites, and I opened the About Us tab where it says what we believe and what we stand for, and it seems like this church is really great at this and this and this and this and this and this, but I am not so sure about that. And this other church is really amazing, but it does not have a lot of information." And she flipped her phone around, and she slid it across the table, and she said, "What do you think?" And I did not say it out loud, but I thought, yes! Like, you're eighteen! What was I thinking when I was 18? She was not asking about the music or the styles. She was not saying is the pastor a dynamic speaker or is he funny? She was not asking does the church have a lot of people of my demographic? What did she care about more than anything else? The thing that Jesus cares about more than anything else: truth. She wanted it tested. She wanted it vetted because she did not want to be a Christian who gave into convenience and had only half of the truth. She wanted all of it.

And we could not hear Jesus' voice, but I think he said that day, "Amen." But did you know that Jesus does not just care about the truth? A passage in John 1 says that Jesus was full of grace and truth. He was filled up to the top with love and truth, and that was the problem with the church at

Ephesus. Good doctrine for sure. Good deeds? Write down the problem that Jesus saw in this church. He said the bad part about the Ephesians was that they had so little love. Look at Jesus' words. He starts in Verse 4. He says to the pastor, "Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Our church has become like the couple who gets married and has five kids. Parents, you get this? Like, I still love you. I am just really busy right now. Right? It is different and it has grown and we have invested in ministries and programs, and I think -- I could be wrong, I think what Jesus would say to us, "Do we still love?" I think he would say, "Yes, but be careful." The older a church gets and the bigger a church grows, the tougher it is for people to feel loved. Right? A little country church of 20 where we all know each other's names. It is easy to feel that. A megachurch of 2,000, even a church of 200, it is much more difficult to feel that. Just like a married couple with kids. It is more work, and it takes more intentionality because love does not just naturally happen. You have to strive for it.

And so, I am not so sure that Jesus would say to us what he said to the Ephesians, "Repent or else your church is done." I do not think we are there, but I think you and I need to be very careful. If God continues to bless this church or the church that you attend at home with growth, we will need to be very specific about the way we love each other. So, let me give you three specific ways.

How can we, if God decides to grow this church, maintain the level of our love? Number one, when you come here on Sunday, think "you first". Do you know what happens at old, aging, dying, crotchety congregations? I think that churches start to die when its members start to think "me first". Where do I want to sit? Where do I want to park? When do I want to arrive? What is my favorite service time? What are the programs that I like? Me first and then your relationship is what leads to a mess and to death.

And so, when you come to this church, when you step on this campus, I am begging you to think "you first". It is not about you. We love you, but it is not about you. It is about the person who is sitting one row ahead of you who is here for the first time. They do not know anyone, and the church is big enough that they are going to slip through the cracks unless you do something about it. And I know a bunch of you are introverts, and I know it makes you very uncomfortable, but let me repeat it is not about you. There is a reason that those who serve coffee and usher and greet at our church wear big, bright shirts that say "You first," and you and I need to go out of our way and get out of our comfort zone to come to church early, to stay a little bit late, not to sit in our own private section, but to find someone who is sitting alone, invade their space, and love them because even if they do not tell you it in the moment, everyone wants to be loved. Most of us feel uncomfortable with small talk, but no one gets to real talk until they get through the small talk. So, come to this church and think "you first". How can I meet him? How can I meet her? That kid's looking at his phone in the lobby. How can I start a conversation? Will it be awkward? For sure. Great churches are filled with awkwardness. Think "you first", and we will not fall from this love.

Number two, a church of this size means that you and I and all of us need a group. You need ten people who worship with you who know everything about you and love you just the same. Honestly, the hardest part for me emotionally about being a pastor right now is that I struggle just to remember everyone's names. Right? I know how meaningful that is when the pastor knows your name, and I cannot keep up with the people and the members and guests, multiple pastors, services. I wish I could. I am trying. I cannot. But you need someone who knows way more than your name. They need to know how to pray for you, how to encourage you, your blind spots, your sins, your addictions, your gifts, and the bigger this church gets, like, I do not expect you to know everyone's name. It would be a miracle if you could, but I need you to be known by ten people, and you can do that through life group studies. You can connect with other people in an unofficial way, but when a church gets big, it needs to be small. So, you first when you come here. Find people to do life with out there.

And then finally if we want to maintain our love, all of us got to go. To me the second key indicator of a church that dies is when most of its people do not invite anyone to church in a given year. Right? That kind of proves it is just about me and my comfort and I like the music and I get something out of the message and if my neighbor does not go to heaven, whatever. No. When you and I care deeply enough to pray, to invest, to invite, to have someone watch the show with us, watch the game with us, grill out with us, when we invite them to the next sermon series or the next Sunday you should come and sit with me, like the more percentage of us that do that, that care about that, that pray for that. My dream as a pastor is that one day the prayer requests on the back of the communication cards, as much as we pray about physical needs, the cancer, the surgery, we would double that in spiritual needs. Pastor, pray for my brother, my roommate, my best friend. They do not know Jesus. Pray for an open door. Pray for courage. Pray for the words. Pray for the spirit to convict them. Because at the end of the day what happens with our bodies is so short, but what happens with our souls is forever.

So, if my analysis is right, we are a church that cares about the truth, that does love, and I pray that we can take these words to heart as hard as they might be to hear, that the love we experience today would not just continue but would increase in the years to come. And if you need help with that, here is Jesus. He says in the final words of our text, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches." All right. Grab both your ears right now. You have got two of them? No Vincent van Goghs out there? All right. If you have got ears, open them up because the Holy Spirit is about to speak. He says, "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."

You do not think you can. Listen to what the spirit is saying to you. You do not think you can overcome or change to the one who is victorious, Jesus says, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life. That is a fancy way of saying you are going to live forever, that you are going to be one day in a place that is so full of grace and so full of truth, your soul will almost explode.

So, let us start practicing now. You and I are going to spend forever and ever and ever and ever with one another loving each other better than we ever imagined possible. So let us start now, and Jesus said, "I will give you a bite of the fruit that will allow you to conquer death and live



forever. I will give you an all-access pass. The angels will not stop you this time. They will say come and be with God." This Jesus lived for us. He died to forgive every sin of every member of our church of every human who has ever lived, and now he lives to help us, to become the kind of place when people walk through the doors, they say, "What is this?" The free coffee, amazing. The love freely given. Who comes to a place where the pastor yells at you and tells you to change and stop it, and then he shakes your hand, and he loves you like no one else in town? What is this?" And we would say, "Christianity. Full of grace. Full of truth."

And I pray with Jesus' help and the power of his spirit you and I can be just like that. Let us pray.

Dear Jesus, thank you so much for being here. Thank you that our church is not beneath you. Thank you that even though we struggle with so many things and it is so hard to be compassionate and courageous, you have not given up on us. You hold the pastors of this church in your mighty right hand, and you have promised to be with us always till the very end of the age.

Today, God, I thank and honor you for the founders of this church. They started with a passion not just to do religion and go through the motions, but with a sincere desire to seek you, to know your love, and to let the people of this community experience just a glimpse of that love.

Now, father, I am begging for your Holy Spirit to produce even more love in us. Things have changed and years have passed, but I pray we will be just as motivated and just as driven to love each other, to love this community, and especially to love you.

Jesus, thank you for your grace. Thank you for every time we mess this up or get stuck or go through the motions. You are there to forgive us, to cleanse us, and to empower us to try again. And I am asking you with all humility and boldness, do great things more than we expect or imagine. Do great things in us and through us. We ask this, Jesus, all in your powerful name. And all God's people said, 'Amen'.