

The “Voice” & Message to Ephesus Revelation 1:9-2:7

Raise your hand if you were here last week for our first Sunday studying the book of Revelation. We studied John’s prologue in verses 1-3 and then his introduction from verses 4-8. If you missed it, turn to your neighbor who was here and ask them to catch you up real quick... Just kidding- I would suggest looking on our website for the transcript of that message or watch the live stream recording- as we’ll be periodically referring back to some of the concepts introduced in that introduction to the book of Revelation. Today we’ll be continuing where we left off in verse 9 of chapter 1, where John explains how exactly this revelation came to him, and as he reveals to us some of the first things that God revealed to him. Let’s look at **verses 9-11** together...

Ok, so in **verse 9** John states that he is a participant in the tribulation along with those he is writing to. Now by tribulation, he is not referring to the *great* tribulation, which will be described later in this book, but rather he is referring to the *general* tribulation that was currently happening in the world against Christians. The year is most likely the year 95, and the Roman government now for several decades has been hunting down followers of Jesus, mostly because followers of Jesus declare their allegiance to King Jesus, and not to any earthly government- which didn’t sit very well with political leaders of the time. The island of Patmos is an Island off the coast of Turkey, it technically nowadays belongs to Greece- but historically it was used by the Roman Empire as a place of exile for convicts. We don’t know the exact details, but it appears John got in trouble with the Roman government authorities for being perhaps a little too vocal about the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He was previously in Ephesus, which is kind of cool that we’ll see here shortly in chapter 2, that Ephesus is the first out of the 7 churches addressed. So the progression for John goes as following: He hung out with Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem, then had to flee Israel to Ephesus (in Turkey) due to persecution by the Jews and Romans, and now is exiled from Ephesus to Patmos due to prosecution by the Romans.

Ok, so John is experiencing tribulation, as are his fellow citizens of the kingdom to whom he is writing- these who are also having to persevere in their faith where they live. And then in **verse 10**, John says he was “in the Spirit,” on “the Lord’s day.” Let’s attempt to define each of those phrases: “In the Spirit”- maybe that phrase gives you the imagery of a person running around the pews shouting and dancing- *maybe* John was doing something like that- or maybe John is just expressing him being in the Spirit in the sense as how the book of Galatians tells us to walk in the *Spirit* and not carry out the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16), or in the sense of how the book of Ephesians (5:18) says to be filled

with the *Spirit*, or how John himself in his Gospel book recorded Jesus saying worship the Father in *Spirit* and in truth (John 4:23). But I think he probably means something a little more than those options. If we look ahead at **Revelation 4:2**, John uses the same phrase “in the Spirit” again, to specifically describe his state of being as he is seeing a Heavenly vision. So most likely, he probably wasn’t running around pews doing a dance, but he was surely living a life in the Spirit connected to the Lord, and worshiping God in the Spirit, but more than that there was a particular anointing of God’s Spirit on this day for the specific purpose of God revealing His divine plans concerning the end of the world and Jesus’ return that will occur in the future.

Concerning the phrase “on the Lord’s Day”- the Lord’s Day was the name the early church gave to *Sundays*- Sunday being the day Jesus arose from the dead and appeared to His followers. Ever since that resurrection Sunday, historically followers of Jesus have called Sunday the Lord’s Day, and have gathered together regularly on Sundays in memory and in celebration of Jesus conquering death on that day. Now this is not to be confused with the phrase “*the Day of the Lord*” -that slightly different phrase is actually in reference specifically to the time in which Jesus will return to judge His enemies and to save His followers. That “Day of the Lord” is described in different ways throughout the events described later on in this book. So rather, on a Sunday- the *Lord’s Day*, my guess is that John is describing to us perhaps a bit of a personal Sunday worship service he was having. I think in my mind I imagine him perhaps being isolated from other believers, yet even so he maintains a tradition of setting aside some time on Sunday morning to sing in worship, to pray, to meditate on God’s word- and during this time he hears behind him a loud voice that sounds like a trumpet. This is really interesting to imagine- you guys know what a trumpet sounds like, right? (Sound effect) Now imagine that sound, yet with words being voiced. (Sound effect) And the trumpet voice says “write on a scroll everything you’re about to see and then send it to these 7 churches.”

Now, these churches from **verse 11** weren’t the *only* Christian churches of the time, it’s historically safe to assume there were still churches, for example in the cities of Colosse, Corinth, Thessalonica, and other cities- but perhaps these specific 7 were chosen to represent the others in reference to the various current states they were in that perhaps others were also experiencing. I’m sure that when each of these churches received this letter, they read it to the church, and then copied it several times and passed it on to other churches in other cities, as was the tradition of that time. Ok, so what happens next? **Verses 12-16...**

So when John turns around, **verse 12** says he sees 7 golden lampstands, think of these perhaps kind of looking like gold metal candelabra posts. These lampstands will be later described to us in verse 20 as representing the 7 churches. Hold on to this imagery of lampstands- we'll come back to it later. **Verse 13-** in the midst of them is one like "a son of Man"-again, from last week- this is the name it seems like Jesus most favored for Himself, most likely because it's the term used in Daniel 7 describing the Messiah figure that would come with the clouds, appearing from the Heavens, who would rule over all peoples in a Kingdom that would last forever. Jesus in code was like, "hey that's me guys!" This term "Son of Man" in the context of Daniel 7 gives us the imagery of a human being in the setting of a very other worldly spiritual type environment- an environment that you wouldn't typically expect a human-like figure to be in. As described here in Revelation, verse 13- this human being-like figure is clothed with a long robe, chest wrapped with a golden sash. This imagery probably reminded the reader-of-that-time of the clothing the Temple priests used to wear many years ago, with a long robe and a sash. Traditionally the priests wore a sash that was white, and then the high priest- the main guy in charge- would have a sash embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread designs, and so the idea of *this* person wearing a *golden* sash gives the impression that this guy is a level up from even the high priests of the temple days. **Verse 14-** His head and hair are white like snow, and eyes like a flame of fire. Ok, so he appears to be in human-like form, but obviously there is something very *extra human* about him. **Verse 15-** His feet are described as looking like burnished bronze that has been heated to glow in a furnace- in other words the feet look golden metallic bronze, yet still glowing from the type heat that a blacksmith would use to mold metal.

It's interesting to note that from Daniel chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that Daniel interpreted, and in that dream there was a large statue figure that consisted of different materials- a head of gold, chest of silver, belly and thighs bronze, legs of iron, feet of iron and clay- each representing different kingdoms that would arise throughout history. And for time sake I won't go through the whole interpretation, but the feet made of iron and clay referred to kingdoms that didn't mix, and the iron one was much stronger than the clay one, and all these kingdoms came crashing down- signifying that they would be destroyed; and immediately after this interpretation Daniel is told that God will then set up a kingdom which will never crash down or be destroyed. And now here we are in the book of Revelation, having described to us the imagery of bronze feet- bronze is even stronger than iron, and there's no clay mixed in- conveying to us the strength, the unity, the firm, solid planted-ness of this being's rule.

And then we have at the end of verse 15, a description of the voice again- John's first description of the voice back up in verse 10 says it was like a trumpet, but now John says it is like the sound of many waters. I think John is attempting to describe a sound, a voice, one like he has never heard before, and the closest way he feels he can describe it is in terms of a voice that is like a trumpet, but also like lots of waters, as in if you were in a room surrounded by several different sinks, and you turned each of the faucets on at the same time. There seems to be a strong presence, resonating, layered, fullness, multiplied effect taking place. You have the "shhhhh" water sound... but trumpeted... but voicing words...) Think about this for a second. There are 3 combined sounds that are audible when this being speaks. There are 3 different voice layers that are speaking in complete unison and agreement, there are 3 distinct voices yet they are one in the same voice.

Verse 16, in His right hand he holds 7 stars, and out of His mouth comes out a sharp two-edged sword, and His face is shining bright as the sun in the sun's full strength. The 7 stars are explained later in verse 20 as representative of the 7 angels of the 7 churches. We'll take about what that means when we get down to verse 20. The sword coming out of the mouth is probably not descriptive of an actual physical body component, but probably more represents the idea that His words are cutting, sharp, fierce, powerful, authoritative. And the concept of a face shining brightly is consistent with other scriptures- Moses' face temporarily shone brightly after meeting with God from just absorbing some of the brightness of God's glory. When Jesus was transfigured as described in Matthew 17, it says Jesus' face *"shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light."*

I think you probably have it figured out who this being is at this point, but if not, there will be more clarity here soon in the next few verses. But before we get there, there is another similar description recorded in Revelation 19, that should help us in determining who this being is. Revelation 19 the chapter I described last Sunday as being the ultimate climax of Revelation as well as the ultimate climax of all of history- Revelation 19 describes a being who appears out of Heaven, His eyes are a flame of fire, He's wearing a robe, and has a sharp sword coming out of His mouth, and on His robe and thigh is written "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." That should clear it for us who this is, but let's keep reading. **Verses 17-20...**

And so in seeing this being, John physically can't take it- it's gloriously terrifying, it's too bright, it's too intense, it's too shocking- and **verse 17** tells us he

collapses in fear. But the being says *“Do not be afraid,”* and then proceeds to describe *Himself*, in His own words, in addition to the description we get from what John sees. The being says He is the first and the last, which is interesting because the *Lord God* was just recorded as saying basically the same thing back in verse 8- the Lord God just said that He is the *“Alpha and the Omega,”* which is like us saying the A to the Z, the beginning and the end of the alphabet- the first and the last letter- so I think it’s safe to say that this being is the same as the Almighty Lord God of verse 8, but then we have the further description in **verse 18** that this being was *dead*, but is now *alive*- which should instantly affirm in our minds that this is *Jesus* who was alive from the beginning of time, who came to earth in human form and *died* on the cross, but then who resurrected and is now *alive* forever.

So Jesus, who is also the Almighty Lord God, states that He has the keys of death and of Hades. In other words, He alone is the one who opens, and closes, the doors to death and Hell. He’s the judge, He’s the One whose standard has to be met in order to avoid that door of eternal judgement being opened up for you. **Verse 19-** this “Jesus-God” says write the things which you *have seen* (that’s past tense), the things which *are* (present tense), and the things which *will* take place after these things (future tense). So we’ve already read about the things John *has seen*- this incredibly amazing Jesus-God being, and in chapters 2-3 John is going to write about the things which *are* (the 7 churches in their present state at this time of history), and then in chapter 4 and following John writes about the things which *will take place after these things*. This is confirmed in **chapter 4 verse 1**, when this same Jesus-God being says *“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”*

Then **verse 20**, as I mentioned earlier, the 7 stars are imagery representing 7 angels of the 7 churches, and the 7 lampstands are the 7 churches. That’s a lot of our “just the right number,” fullness number 7- let’s flesh out the meaning behind all this: Jesus-God is in the middle of the churches (the lampstands), holding “angels” in his hand that are assigned to the churches, and then think about this- what rests upon a lampstand? *The actual lamp itself*. What did we learn from last week is represented by 7 lamps or 7 eyes or 7 horns? *The 7 Spirits of God*. So the churches have Jesus in the middle of them, angels assigned in the right hand of the commander and chief King Jesus-God, and the churches have God’s sevenfold Holy Spirit “lamp” resting upon them as their light.

I don’t know about you, but for me this conveys the idea that Jesus has got this thing. That’s the place I want to be, that’s the community, family, I want to be a

part of- Jesus with us, angels at His command, His Holy Spirit upon us- with all that, yeah He's right, we don't have to be afraid.

Ok, but what is the significance of the angels of each of the churches? John is about to write to these 7 churches, and with each one he starts off his writing with the words "to the angel of the church in ____." Now there are a few differing ideas about what is being meant here. Some say that the angels represent *church leaders*. I don't really like that interpretation because it would be a little weird for Jesus to say the stars represent angels and then not add, and the angels represent church elders or shepherds. Right, why not just say from the beginning that the stars represent church leaders if that is the true meaning? Others take this to mean that there are specific spiritual beings, guardian angels that were assigned to these specific churches (with the assumption that maybe there are even *today* assigned guardian angels to churches, or at least the cities where multiple local congregations gather at different times and places.) We are given a little Biblical support for this idea from the book of Daniel- in Daniel chapter 10, Daniel is told by an angelic being that there is a prince of Persia, and Michael is one of the chief princes who fights in the spiritual realm who is assigned to Daniel's people, and that there is a prince of Greece- so this type of language would seem to convey that there are indeed mighty angelic beings assigned to territories or to groups of people, that fight other (demonic) spiritual beings in a spiritual world beyond what our eyes can see. So maybe nations, cities, churches get assigned an angelic being to help protect them.

I think this is plausible, this idea is obviously conveyed in the book of Daniel- the only thing that might make us question if this is or isn't what John is talking about here, is the fact that it would be a little strange for John to be writing to church guardian angels about the church's situation, and what they need to fix, and what events are coming that lead up to Jesus' return. I mean, why would Jesus tell John to let the angels know about what's going on? That doesn't make any sense. If this is talking about guardian angels assigned to churches- the angels would *already* know these things, and they would know them to an even deeper extent than John as a human would be able to communicate. So if that's not the understanding either, then perhaps it's worth noting that the Greek word for angel is actually also used to just plainly mean "messenger." Jesus, referring to the prophecy fulfilled by John the Baptizer being sent ahead of Him to prepare His way, in **Matthew 11:10** says '*Behold, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.*' That word *messenger*, referring to the man John the Baptizer, is the same Greek word also translated as "angel" in other places. So perhaps we have a mistake in our English translation here, and this word should have been translated *messenger* instead of angel- and then if

so, what is being referred to here is that John is to write to the “messengers” of the churches- the messengers who will deliver the letter John is writing, and that would then mean that the 7 stars in Jesus’ hand that I mentioned earlier would not be angelic warriors in the command of Jesus’ right hand, but rather they would be real people from that time period, and the sense of Jesus holding them in his hand would then convey the idea that they’d be protected in their journey to preserve and deliver these words to the followers of Jesus in these churches, who would then preserve, copy, deliver these words to other churches, who would then preserve, copy, *translate*, deliver these words to other churches, so that eventually even you and I right now in 2025 would have a copy of John’s Revelation here in our own hands, in our own language. If this is the sense, then we can *still* take encouragement that Jesus is with us, and that the Holy Spirit is resting upon us as we are a part of His global, universal church, AND we can still take encouragement from Daniel 10 alluding to the idea that there’s probably an angel assigned to us- at least our nation, maybe our city, maybe even our specific One Church. Now I don’t know if anyone can say with 100% complete confidence, but maybe that’s the interpretation that makes the most sense. Ok, let’s look together at the first church addressed, let’s read **verses 1-7 here in chapter 2...**

Alright, so there are 7 different real-life, then present day churches that are being addressed. And there’s a similar pattern that’s followed that’s consistent with each church: The letter is written to the angel, or like we said, perhaps the *messenger* of the church, then there’s a description of Jesus (the One from whom the words originate), followed by an assessment of the current state of the church, followed by a charge to do something in response to these words, ending with a promise of reward for obedience to these words. And the consistent overall theme to each church is for them to *overcome* so that they may receive the reward- every single address to each of the 7 churches includes at the end a statement to the tune of “to the one who overcomes, there will be such and such reward.” The other consistent theme that is present in at least 5 out of the 7 is the idea that there is *repentance* called for. 2 of the churches, the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia- to them there *isn’t* a call to repent- rather their assessment is followed by encouragement to continue to be alert, persevere, and overcome. We’ll look at these 2 anomaly churches later, there’s some interesting things to consider concerning what’s written to them, the address to one of them has been used as a strong proof-text for the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture, but we’ll take a good look at that when we get there.

And while these words were written to specific real-life churches of the day, the words, warnings, encouragements, rewards are very universal and timeless

for followers of Jesus in churches today. I think it makes the most sense to interpret these passages as we do all the rest of scripture- the words written had specific time/cultural meaning and application to real life people in that day, but the truth carries over to us living today and is very applicable to us in this current time period as well.

So this passage addresses the church in Ephesus, the church John was a part of, the church Paul wrote a New Testament letter to that's titled "the letter to the Ephesians." What we know from Paul's letter and from history is that the city of Ephesus had a very "spiritual" cultural climate to it. Lots of "spirituality," lots of opportunities to worship many different Greek "gods" and "goddesses," there was a very strong cultural following that rallied around the Ephesian temple of the Greek goddess Artemis. Acts chapter 19 tells us that a huge riot broke out in Ephesus as a result of Paul's preaching, because his preaching was damaging local businesses that benefited from the worship of Artemis. That was years ago at the time this was written, but that at least that gives us a little background. When we read the letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes a big deal out of our identity in Jesus Christ- which makes sense given the fact that there was lots of other "counter-Jesus" type spirituality going on in that city. I think the idea is that culturally it would be easy for the church there to either: get worn down from being a minority faith being persecuted *or* there was a temptation to acknowledge Jesus verbally, while embracing a lot of the cultural spiritism. So Paul made a big effort to remind the Ephesian church who they are in Jesus, to encourage them to remain faithful to Jesus through persecution and cultural pressure.

And so now, years later, Jesus Himself is wanting to address a different issue going on amongst the believers in Ephesus. Jesus, the One who holds the 7 stars (angels/messengers), the One who walks among the 7 lampstands (churches) tells them that yes they have been working hard, and have persevered- they've endured in that intense cultural environment, and they've been alert- recognizing some who said they were apostles (sent out representatives of Jesus) but who really weren't. Maybe these false apostles were teaching subtle deceptions, or they didn't really believe in Jesus themselves but were traveling around using "Jesus" as a way to earn money- whatever the case, the church is praised for recognizing false Christianity. They are then praised again in verse 3 for having perseverance, endurance in their faith, not becoming weary- but here's the thing that needs to change, verse 4: they have left their first love. What does that mean exactly? It's probably fairly easy to assume that their "first love" must be Jesus- He after all should hold all a Christian's love and affections, and He would be the first one to awaken us to this

love of Him and love of others- but I think the following verse 5 more clearly defines what is meant by this statement. Let's read **verse 5** again...

So, they have fallen from where they were previously- they were in a much better condition than they are in now. So they are to repent, which means to turn 180 degrees- to turn from going one way to now going the other way- and the way in which they are to turn things around, the way in which they are to repent and get back to their first love, is described in terms of them returning to do the *deeds*- the things, the actions- that they used to do. It seems like Jesus, in saying they have left their first love, what He is implying is not that they necessarily have stopped loving Jesus in their heart/mind- no, rather they have "stopped loving Jesus" in their actions. Their actions are giving the impression that they don't love Jesus anymore. And it's probably not negative actions (like outwardly, conscious sinful actions) that's being referred to, but rather more like the *absence*, the *lack* of positive, active, good outward actions. Maybe the cultural environment there has become even more stifling towards Christians, and as a result the church has become more fearful, less motivated to share Jesus with others, scared to outwardly represent the name of Jesus, lazy in engaging with the community of Ephesus. And Jesus says repent of this- change this, or else He will remove the lampstand (remove the church) from it's place. And it seems that the church at this time listened to these words- from history we know that the church in Ephesus continued meeting there for the centuries that followed.

In **verse 6** Jesus gives another praise for a good thing the church is doing- they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. We know from history books of this time period that the Nicolaitans were a small group of people who identified as "Christians," yet who encouraged eating things sacrificed to idols and living sexually immoral lives. They are described by Clement of Alexandria who lived during the 2nd century as a people who "abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." It seems these Nicolaitans and the Gnostics who we've mentioned before had a similar method of operation. The idea that they propagated was that God was good with you entertaining your body in any way you wanted to, just as long as you still believed the right things in your mind. In answer to this philosophy, pretty much the whole New Testament screams back "NO"- you cannot live like that and still be considered a follower of Jesus who will inherit eternal life with Him. Later on in this chapter, in the segment addressed to the church in Pergamum, we are given more details on why the Nicolaitan philosophy is wrong, verses 14 and 15 of this chapter 2 connect the Nicolaitans to those who hold the teaching of Balaam and Balak- 2 guys from the Old Testament who interacted with people of faith, but did so out of selfishness, greed, and a desire for personal gain.

Then in **verse 7** the church in Ephesus, as well as today, are told to hear what the *Spirit* says to the churches. Here's another cool trinity reference, we know from verse 1, and from what was described to us in the 1st chapter- that this is Jesus saying this to the churches. And Jesus connects Himself to the Alpha and Omega Lord God of chapter 1 verse 8 with the "first and the last" statement of chapter 1 verse 17. And then here in chapter 2 verse 7 Jesus Himself says that it's the *Spirit* saying these things. Are you seeing what's going on here? We have the trumpet voice, the waterfall voice, the speaking words voice "Being"- moving in and out of referring to Himself as the Lord God Almighty, Jesus, and the Spirit. So this Spirit-Jesus-God ends the address to the church of Ephesus with these words, verse 7 again...

I mentioned this theme of overcoming- it's pretty much the only element that is repeated in basically the same type of phrasing and emphasis in each of 7 addresses to the churches. I think it's the over-arching theme, the one main point that should not be missed: church- overcome, because there is reward in store for you. There are different rewards mentioned in each address, and I don't think the idea is that only this certain church receives this specific reward, or that only these specific churches will receive the rewards mentioned and not future believers/churches- no, the different rewards mentioned all seem to be general rewards that will all be received by every overcomer in Jesus, after persevering through this life in faith. The reward mentioned here in this address to Ephesus is the reward of getting to eat from the "*tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*" We know what the tree of life is from the book of Genesis- it was a tree there in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve could eat from, yet they had *not yet* eaten from it. Rather, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the one single fruit tree they were told *not* to eat from. As a result of this disobedience, God banished mankind from the Paradise Garden so that they would *not* be able to eat from the Tree of Life, because if they then ate from the Tree of Life, they would live forever trapped in the sinful corrupted state that they had caused themselves to be in by disobeying God. And so now in Revelation, we are coming back full circle to the original design in Genesis that God had for mankind- the ability to live forever, yet in a state of redeemed goodness and perfection. The reward of eternal life that was once taken away for disobedience, is now given *back* to those who choose obedience to Jesus. The symmetry is beautiful- what mankind corrupted in the beginning is now being redeemed and restored by God in the end. We'll find this reward of the Tree of Life mentioned again later on in chapter 22's description of the New "Jerusalem"- the new Heaven and Earth. It's described as being on both sides of a crystal clear river flowing from the throne of God Jesus, with 12 different kinds

of fruit bearing every month of the year, and it's leaves containing the power to heal the nations.

That's sounds like a pretty good place to be. I want to be able to eat that fruit. And I hope that you do to. I think you'll like it even if you're someone who doesn't like apples, peaches, cherries, blueberries, oranges, or pears. I imagine that life-giving fruit is absolutely amazingly delicious.

This morning I want us to consider if any of what Jesus says to the church in Ephesus could apply to us personally. Let's consider in our own lives, have we "left our first love?" Have we more recently kind of just been going through the motions in our relationship with Jesus? Have we lost a passion, have we been less inspired to talk with people about our faith, have we become a little more self-absorbed and therefore less active in helping, loving, encouraging others around us? I want us to take a few moments to prayerfully reflect and ask ourselves these questions. Let's search our hearts and meditate on God's word here, and may His Holy Spirit guide us in truth as we seek Him together. I'll give us a few moments to do that, and then I'll voice a prayer for us.