



Message **Transcript**

The Performance Driven and the Persecuted

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- Lord Jesus, we give You all the praise, glory, and honor for who You are. And Lord, we consider it a privilege that we can gather in Your name to hear Your word proclaimed. So Lord, have Your way with Your word today, and Lord, as we study Your word, as Your word is proclaimed, do a work inside of each and every one of us. Lord, we believe that every time Your word goes forth, it does not return void. Which means You are gonna accomplish everything You set forth for Your word to do. Do a work here today among us, in and through us, as we hear what You have to say. And for all God's people who have gathered, who are ready to receive from the Lord and believe what He says about you, and by faith put into practice the things that He shows you, will you very loudly this morning agree with me by saying the word, Amen. Amen.

We've been doing a study in the book of Revelation. In Revelation chapter one, we got to see a great picture of the vision of who Jesus Christ is, and the importance of that vision. Because when Jesus Christ came to earth the first time, when He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, His final words on the cross were, it is finished. It's paid in full. Then He went to the grave and when He arose from the grave, He arose in a glorified body. He was on the earth for a period of days and then ascended into heaven. And when He comes back, friends, He's coming back as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is not coming back in His humiliation, He is coming back for His coronation, and it is going to be an awesome time for us to celebrate who He is.

And so we spent the first two weeks taking a look at why even study this book, why study the Revelation? Why do that? And we came up with five great reasons, and

then last week we took a look at the person of Jesus and who He is, and how He appears to us. But we're gonna begin to see in this Revelation that we see now, it's in chapters 2 and 3, we're gonna take a look at seven specific churches that are gonna be highlighted, that Jesus wants to send a letter to, for them to understand what He's trying to tell them.

Some people think that this is a historical narrative and that what we see in these seven churches is a picture of the church throughout all generations. I don't believe that. I believe these were seven specific living churches that Jesus wrote a letter to, and much like any other New Testament letter that we would read, whether we're studying Philippians or Colossians or 1st Corinthians, or any other book in the New Testament, we would read what was specific for that church still has application for us. And what you're gonna find as we study these seven churches, even though they have different strengths and weaknesses, you're gonna discover a hybrid at BRAVE Church, and some of the things that apply to you and some of the things that may apply to you, and God has revelation for you as we study these churches.

Now, as we go through these, there's seven. Seven's the number of completion, so as we study these seven churches, we're gonna see God's word to His church and what He wants us to understand. And it's really important that when you hear this, that you read this in such a way that you know that God's speaking directly to you. I've heard sermons preached on the seven churches and the book of Revelation. They're great. I wish I had the time. I wanna get through this book in a way that by the time we

get done to chapter 22, you still remember what chapter one was about. And so I don't wanna take too much time, so we're gonna go through this part of scripture in the next three weeks. We'll cover all seven churches, Lord willing, and today we're going to look at the first two.

So I want to invite you to open your Bible up to Revelation chapter 2, verses 1 to 11, and I'm gonna read these and then we'll unpack these. And what I'll do is once I show you the text and we read the text, I'll talk to you about the seven churches in general, the ground we're gonna cover, and some specific things you can begin to look for in the text as we read.

Here, the word of the Lord this morning. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lamp stands says this: I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and that you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not, and you found them to be false. And you have perseverance. And you have endured for my name's sake and I've not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first or else I am coming to you and will remove your lamp stand out of its place unless you repent. Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, the first and the last, who was dead and has

come to life says this, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich. And the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."

And here you have God's word to the first two churches in the book of Revelation and what He wants to tell them. Now, to give you an overview of these churches, let me just walk through them quickly. There's seven of them, I'll talk about them really quickly, and then we'll spend time on them over the coming three weeks. The first is Ephesus, I call it the performance-driven church. This was a faithful church who had forgotten and forsaken their first love, which we're gonna talk about today and what that means. Then there was the church of Smyrna, which we're also gonna look at this morning. This was the persecuted church. This was a poor, suffering church who was continuing to endure under difficult circumstances. Then we have the city of Pergamum, and the church that was in Pergamum. This was the compromised church. This was a church that was compromised and tolerant because of false teaching that had infiltrated in. Then we have the church of Thyatira, which was the immoral church. It was a church that gave way to the appetites of the flesh, and the church really didn't look any different than the culture it was in. Then we have the church of Sardis, and the church of Sardis was a dead church. It was a church that had a reputation of being

alive, but it was actually spiritually dead according to Jesus. Then we had the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love. It was a powerful church. It was a church that was perceived in the world as weak, but it was very powerful in faith. And then finally we have the church of Laodicea. It was an apathetic church, oftentimes called a lukewarm church. And this lukewarm church was one who continued in its complacency.

And we'll go through all these churches, and what you'll find when we do that while God's speaking to the church, He's often talking to individuals within that church of what needs to change and how churches need to wake up and how individuals need to respond to our living Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

So I wanna give you a little structure you can lay over these texts for those of you that read ahead, and I'd encourage you to read through chapters 2 and 3, and really take a look at all the churches. And if you do, you'll see a structure in all these letters.

There's really six items that you can begin to look for, and the first is this. In all the letters, you'll see these six items. The first is the recipient. The recipient. Who is being addressed? Who is this letter being given to?

Number two, you'll see an attribute of Christ. You'll see some of His character qualities and who He is. And some of the things that you see are things that you've already been taught about who this resurrected savior is, and who is the one who's writing, and why is He the one who's giving the message.

Number three, you'll see strengths. Jesus is gonna talk about the strengths in these churches, and what it is that's going well and what you're doing well, and how it's going well.

Because Jesus always starts with the affirmation before He's gonna go to item number four, which is really the weaknesses in the church. Here's some things that need to improve. Here's some things you're not doing so well. Here's some things you can get better at. Really interesting when you go through this, notice, are there any churches that don't receive strengths? Are there any churches that don't receive weaknesses? Very fascinating to find out why.

Number five, what you're gonna see is a challenge. Jesus is our Lord and savior. He's perfectly Holy righteous and good, and oftentimes he's not just telling us what we're doing good and what we're not doing good, He expects us to be changed. And so there's gonna be a challenge given to each church, which is a call for us to respond.

And then finally, you're gonna see this. You're gonna see a promise to the listener. You're gonna see these words often, he who has ears, let him hear what He says to the seven churches. It doesn't mean if you have ears on your head, it means if you're listening spiritually to what God's saying. And isn't it interesting that the promise is not given to the entire church, the promise is given to those within the church that are actually listening to what Jesus is saying through the messenger in the church, so that they can respond accordingly, which means this.

There are promises for every believer in every church that we read about. If you

have spiritual ears enough to hear, and if you'll take the step of faith that God wants you to take. And that's what you'll see in all these churches. A recipient, an attitude of Christ, strengths, weaknesses, challenge, and a promise to the listener. I'd encourage you to put that grid over the churches as you read them, and today we're gonna take a look at two churches.

The first church we're gonna take a look at is the church of Ephesus. I call it the performance-driven church. The performance-driven church. If there's one lesson that you can take away from this church in Ephesus is this, it's do not forsake your primary ministry to passionately pursue Jesus Christ. If there's one takeaway from this church, like only one, you only get this one, do not forsake your primary ministry. Your first most important primary ministry is to passionately pursue the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let's take a look at this. Notice who He addresses, notice who the recipient is. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write. We talked about ἄγγελος in the Greek means messenger. Oftentimes it refers to angels, but as I told you before, in this section, I don't see anywhere else in scripture that talks about an angel given to each and every church, so messenger can mean those who are proclaiming the message, it can be the leaders in the church. I think this is Jesus writing to the pastors of the church in Ephesus, the plurality of elders in the church of Ephesus, here's what I want you to write. So He's writing them the church of Ephesus.

Now, just so you know, I'll give you a little background on Ephesus, but you don't need to know a whole lot about Ephesus to get the message of what God is trying to say. You know why? Because the word of God is true, and if you'll read the word of

God and take him at face value, you'll understand. Ephesus was not the capital city, Pergamum was, which we'll talk about next week. Had about 250 to 500,000 people in the city at that time. It perhaps was the most important city in Asia minor. Asia minor would be what Turkey is modern day for us today. They had a harbor, they hosted athletic events that rivaled the Olympic games at the time, and the goddess that they worshiped was Artemis. Artemis of the Ephesians, the Romans referred to her as Diana.

You'll remember when there was all sorts of an upheaval in the book of Acts? I think it was around chapter 19, because Paul was leading so many people to Christ and the church was leading so many people to Christ, the silversmiths business and economy was going down because all their shrines being made to Artemis were going out of business, 'cause people started worshiping Jesus, and so there was a riot in the city. That was in the city of Ephesus. In the city of Ephesus, Paul helped to start the church there along with Priscilla and Aquila, and then their buddy Apollos who was probably the greatest speaker in the 1st century, was part of that church. It is a great church. For 40 years, they've been thriving as a church.

Paul wrote a letter called the book of Ephesians, which you have in your Bible, to talk to that church. And the first three chapters spells out the gospel of salvation, and in the last three chapters spells out how you work this out. It's one of the greatest books that we have in the New Testament.

So here we have this message from Jesus to the leadership of the church in

Ephesus, and what does He say? He says, the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lamp stands, says this.

Remember what the seven stars are? The seven stars are those who are leading the churches. It's the pastors or the angels. It's the messengers of those churches. Jesus holds them in His mighty right hand. His authority is on those who are leading the church.

And where do we find Jesus? As we talked about last week, He's walking among all the churches. What does Jesus care about? His church. What is He involved in? His church. Where does He want His people to gather? In the church. I belabored the point last week, so I won't belabor it again. But just so we know, what does Jesus care about? Tell me. The church. He cares about His church. He's walking among all the churches. The one who holds all the leadership, the one who's there.

And we talked about the church being a lamp stand. Why? Because a lamp stand gives light. And what does the light do? Light gives light into the darkness. What is the church's responsibility? To be the light of the world. Like that's the responsibility, so that is where Jesus is at. That's what He's doing, that's His character. So He's writing to Ephesus, He's saying, this is who I am, and now he's gonna begin to highlight their strengths.

Notice verse two. I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to test those who call themselves apostles and they are not, and you found them to be false. And you have perseverance, and you have endured for my namesake and have not grown weary. When I read that list,

here's what I began to do. A plus, A plus, A plus, A plus. I mean, what a great church that is? I mean, it's an awesome church. I mean, not only was it founded by the apostle Paul and Priscilla and Aquila, and they had Apollos who was one of the best speakers, and it's 40 years of fruitful ministry.

Brave Church is 10 years old. This is 40 years of fruitful ministry, so much so in a city where they worshiped other gods, they were stopping and worship of their other gods to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Great job. And what does Jesus commend them for? What are some of their strengths? Well, they exhibit good deeds and strive even under duress. They're doing the things that they're supposed to do. Like they're living out the Christian mandates of the gospel. They're being obedient, they're gathering together. They're praying together, they're seeking the Lord together, they're doing the right things. I mean it's very commendable when you're doing what Jesus wants.

And notice these words in verse two of chapter 2, I know. He's not talking about the word like I know, like I'm aware of, he's talking like I know. Like I'm acquainted with. Here's what you need to know about Jesus. He knows everything about you. Like He knows. Nobody else may know you, He knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your sins, He knows your struggles, He knows your joys, He knows you. He's like, I know. He goes, I know your deeds. I know you endure under duress. That's good. I'm aware that you're doing the right things.

What else does He say about this church? He says that they have no tolerance

for evil men. This church is a church that doesn't tolerate evil either within its walls or outside of its walls. Is that commendable or what? They don't let people be treated in an evil way, they don't treat other people evil. It's intolerable. You treat people that way, we're not gonna put up with that. Evil men, get out or repent. We wanna have a pure church. That's very commendable.

How about this? They put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false. They test false teachers, and they have no tolerance for false teaching. Now, why is that important? 'Cause the greatest threat to the church is never anything on the outside, it's always on the inside. A greater threat to the church is not persecution of those on the outside, it's false teachers on the inside, right? That's why Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 11, I believe, he says, that's why some of Satan's greatest servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Why? Because Satan knows that if he can get somebody in the pulpit that's not preaching the word of God, and it's just a little bit off or just a little false, and can get people away from true North center of who the Lord Jesus Christ is, he's gonna do more damage to the church from within than he could ever do from without.

And here's what He's saying about the church in Ephesus, you test them. You make sure that they align with the word of God. You test them. You make sure that they have the testimony of Jesus, or you don't listen to them. And when they're false, you remove them from your church. Praise God for that. We need more churches like that. That when people don't open their Bible and preach what Jesus is saying, and their preaching their own ideas, they get removed from the church, 'cause they're not

helping the church. The church in Ephesus is doing that. Is that commendable? I think it's super commendable.

What else? He says in verse three, you have perseverance, and you have endured for my name's sake which means you've suffered, you've been under trial, and yet you haven't given up. It means you haven't made excuses like we're too busy right now, or this is getting too hard. Or the expectations of Jesus are too much. You've continued to do everything I've commanded you to do. Like, I mean, is this church awesome or what?

And finally He says this, He says, and you have not grown weary. That's talking about spiritual weariness. I mean, they've kept up in doing this. It's not like, "I have to." We're gonna make it til the finish line. It's like, "We're enjoying this. "We love to gather, we love to be obedient. "We love doing the things. "We're doing all this stuff." I mean, when I read those first three verses, if that's all I had to know about the church in Ephesus, I'd be like model church, unbelievable. We need to do that.

Do we not need to model the things that I just said? We need to be like that. We need to persevere under trial. We need to be spiritually renewed. We need to not tolerate evil and false teachers, right? We need to be like the church in Ephesus and show deeds that are aligned with our faith. That's awesome. I mean, way to go.

But there is a weakness in this church, and He spells it out in verse four. He says, but this I have against you, that you have left your first love. And collectively we should all be like, like that's a big deal. That's a big deal. Left means to be departed from. It's

the word used in 1st Corinthians, to be divorced. To be removed from. In other words, here's what happened. What started off as a church that was founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ and a relationship with Him was turning into a church that just had the rhetoric and the rituals and the routines of Jesus, and everybody's doing all the right things and they're doing all this and they're going through the motions, but Jesus is like, I see your heart, and here's what I know, you don't want me anymore. You just wanna play church, you don't want me to be the Lord of the church.

And I would tell you this, how quickly it is for us to move into that place. How quickly it is for us to be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, and then find ourselves doing Bible study, praying, sharing the gospel, and doing all these things out of obligation rather than out of a passion because we love the Lord Jesus Christ. And He says, you've left me. You've left your first love.

Your primary ministry is always to passionately pursue the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, in case you ever get scared, like if you're in a room with 10 of the most learned theologians ever, and they ask, "what's the most important thing we can do?" here's what you're gonna say, your most primary ministry is to passionately pursue the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why when Jesus had to spell out the law, they said, what's the most important commandment? What does He say? Love the Lord, your God with what? All your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's the first. Second, love your neighbor as yourself. What's the central part of the gospel? A relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, why is this important? Listen, listen, listen, you need to hear this, BRAVE

Church, because for many of us, we have a false understanding of what the gospel is. We think the gospel is making bad people better, or bad people good. Or if you had bad behaviors, you need better behaviors. That has nothing to do with why Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead. Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, not because you were bad, but because you're dead, and Jesus Christ rose from the dead so He could offer life to people who were dead.

And the gospel is not about getting you to be a better person, the gospel is about taking you in your dead sinful self and raising you to new life in Christ, so that was once dead, you are now alive. See, the gospel is about a relationship with Jesus. And if that's where it starts, that's where it continues. And the same grace that saved you is the same grace that grows you. That's the gospel.

And how easy is to forget that this God that took us from death to life, we start thinking, "No, now I gotta perform my way into heaven. "Now I gotta do good." And instead of having a relationship where we presently pursued Jesus, we start thinking about, what do other people think about me? And how's my behavior coming? Am I getting better or not? Well, at least I'm better than that person and that person, and if they see me, they'll think I'm a pretty good Christian. And we lose the fact that Christianity is not about comparing ourselves to anybody else, it's about passionately pursuing Jesus the life giver, the one who wants to continue to grow us in the faith. Amen?

- [Congregation] Amen.

- And the church in Ephesus started that way, but here we are 40 years later, and guess what's going on? They're losing their zeal and their passion for Jesus while all the activity is staying the same. And Jesus says, that's not good. That's not good at all.

Here's what Jesus is saying, in every church, Jesus says, I wanna be central. I wanna be the light. I wanna be known as the life. I wanna be the reason people gather. I wanna be the reason people assemble. I wanna be the one that's dispensing all the good. It's about me. It's about me. I'm Jesus, I'm the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Why are you making it about something other than me? 'Cause if you do all the right things and you're doing all the right behaviors and you're doing all the right stuff, but you're doing it without Jesus, you've just missed everything.

Jesus is central and primary to every single ministry in your life. And so I just wonder, a BRAVE Church, in a church our size, and for those that are listening online, I just wonder, perhaps you're in a season where you know that you've trusted Jesus and you've gone from death to life, but your life's becoming more behavior-centric when it comes to your relationship with Him, and instead of pursuing Him afresh all over again, instead what you're doing is you're trying to figure out how to do the right behaviors and change certain things and look better to other people, and Jesus would say, enough of that stuff. Just come to me. All of you who are are weak and heavy laden, I'll give you rest. Come to me, I'm the center of all things.

That's what He was telling the Ephesian church. That's what he's telling us at

BRAVE. He's telling us that all those things that you do that are good are good, and I appreciate that, but if I don't have a relationship with you, it's meaningless. That I'm still supposed to be central to everything you do.

And here's the deal. When you come to Jesus Christ because you were dead and you're now alive, here's the joy of the gospel. Through new birth, being born again, you've been given a new identity. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have been made new. You may look the same on the outside, but inside you are fundamentally altered and different, 'cause you were dead and now you're alive. And because you're alive, you have a new identity. There's a new person that you are, and there's a new way that God sees you.

When we talk about BRAVE, the R in brave stands for being resolute in your identity. It's the opposite of performance. There's too many people who have been saved that are still on the performance plan with Jesus. If I do this, then he'll do this. If I do this, then he'll do that. I gotta perform. I gotta perform. I gotta perform. I don't feel like performing today. I'm gonna take a couple of months off and then I'll come back and perform later.

Performance doesn't work. It didn't work to get you saved, and it doesn't work to grow you in Christ. Right? What grows you in Christ is repentance and faith in Jesus. That's what saved you, and that's what continues to grow you. You were dead and now you're alive, and you have a new identity. And here's why that's so important friends, because you have an enemy called the devil and he will lie to you all the time and tell you what an awful person you are as a Christian, he will tell you why you're

bad, he'll tell you why you're no good, he'll tell you why you shouldn't even go to church anymore because if people really knew who you were and they really knew what was going on, they wouldn't even accept you anymore. You need...

You ever hear that voice? Am I the only one that's ever heard that voice? Come on, help me out. We hear that voice all the time. That's why we have to know our identity. There's a guy by the name of Neil Anderson who wrote a book called Victory Over the Darkness some years ago. I believe it was 1990 when it was published, and part of what he did in the book was he took some scriptures and he would have them read, and then he would summarize those, so that we would know who we are in Christ, and who I am. So rather than how I'm performing for God, I would just say this about myself. And Romans chapter 8 and verse one it says, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever heard that verse before? It means that if you've trusted in Christ, guess how much condemnation there is for you. Guess how much you should beat yourself up. Guess how much God is beating you up. zero. He never beats you up. There's no condemnation for you if you're in Christ Jesus. You ever feel like you have condemnation? You ever hear the enemy tell you that you should be condemned? He ever tell the enemy you shoulda, coulda, woulda?

Romans 8:1, it says, I am free from the punishment or condemnation my sin deserves. Man, when you walk around like that, instead of walking around saying, yeah, I know I should've known better. I could have done better. I'm such a lousy

person. I know I need to go get right with God. No, no, no. There is no condemnation for me because I'm in Christ. I'm a new creation. Yeah, I shouldn't have done that, but I'm new. That's not who I am. I didn't act according to my identity. There was identity theft that took place and I acted that way, but that's not who I am. God sees me as completely whole, and I'm not condemned.

What about Romans chapter six? In Romans chapter 6, it says, therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised to the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Man, I love that verse. Christ died for my sins and was raised.

Neil Anderson quotes it this way, Romans 6 : 1-6, the sinful person I used to be died with Christ and sin no longer rules my life. That's who I am. But if you're gonna sin, you're gonna sin. Sin doesn't rule my life. My identity says it does not. And the more I walk in my identity, and the more I realize I'm adopted, I'm forgiven. I'm already holy, I'm already righteous. I'm already perfected in the Son. He's gonna present me faultless before the Father. I can walk with my shoulders back differently, not because of who I am, but who I am in Christ. That Christ lives in me.

And I'm not on a performance plan, because I know my performance didn't get me into heaven, and my performance not gonna grow me. Christ got me into heaven, and Christ is gonna grow me. So I'm gonna honor Christ by saying I am who He says that I am.

And friends, listen to me. For many of you, even those of you who are believers,

you're still in a performance plan of behavioral modification. I'll just save you a ton of time. It doesn't work. You didn't hear me. It doesn't work. Name the sin and try to fix it. It doesn't work. Well, I cuss a little bit, but I didn't cuss as much this week as I did last week. Well, good luck next week. Or I was sexually immoral this week, but I wasn't as sexually immoral as I was last week. I'm getting a little better. Good luck next week. I mean, when you start counting your times, that means you're in the behavioral performance plan. When you get done with that and you come to the cross of Jesus, Lord by your blood, I know I'm already forgiven. I know I'm already a new creation. I know I'm already somebody different. Lord, let me live out my true identity for you. That's when you'll see behavior change. Not because you changed it, but the God of the universe on the inside that changes it for you. Amen?

That's good news. So He was telling this performance-driven church, Hey, I see your deeds. I mean, there's some love there, there's some things, but you've lost your primary love. You're not in love with me. I'm the one that saved you. I'm the one that will sanctify you. You remember how joyous you were the moment you met Christ and realized all your sins were forgiven? It was all done away with, and you were like, "Thank God, this is awesome. That's how you should be every day. Not only are you free from the penalty of sin, you're free from the power of sin. Sin no longer has mastery over you because of who you are in Christ. You as an individual, sin can own. You as a believer in Jesus, He's more powerful, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

And when you start calling yourself by your true identity, it's not arrogant, it's

actually humble to tell the Lord, I am all the things that you say about me. Amen?

That's really good news.

So what's He gonna tell this church? Lots of good strengths, but your main weaknesses is you've lost your primary love, which is me. So what's He gonna tell them to do? Here's the challenge. Listen to what He says. "Therefore, remember from where you have fallen". Now, where have they fallen? I mean, physically, they haven't fallen anywhere. Nobody's fallen on the ground. Where have they fallen? They've fallen from their position or status as to what they've already attained in Christ.

Do you know that when you trust Christ, the Holy spirit comes to live in your life. Ephesians 2 : 6, says that you're seated with Christ in the heavenly places. That's my position. While my feet are still terrestrial, I'm still on planet earth, my soul, my mind, my body, I'm in heaven, seated with Christ. That's my position. That's the authority I have in Christ. But when I forget that that's my identity, and I begin to try to live my Christian life on my own or try to work it out, it becomes frustrating to me, and I've fallen from the place of authority that I've been given in Christ Jesus. So what do I do?

What do I do when I know that I'm saved? What do I do when I know that God is in me, but I'm not living the life He wants because I'm on the performance plan? Here's what He says to do. He says, repent. Repent. Repent and do the deeds you did at first.

Repent. Now, we don't like that word. Metano³ is a Greek word. It means with your mind. It's a turning. It's a 180 turn. Here's what it simply means. I'm going this

way, but now I'm coming back to Christ. I'm making Christ primary in my life. John the Baptist's first sermon. First word of His first sermon, repent. Jesus' first word of His first sermon we ever recorded, repent. Peter in Acts 2, first word of his, you know, when people asked, what must I do? Well, you need to repent.

And then Paul and the book of Acts calls all men everywhere to repent. And by the way, repentance is not a one-time thing where I would say to you, Yeah, Young Life Camp like 30 years ago, I did that thing. I repented and we're good. I've repented thousands of times since then. I've repented tens of times this week, because I'm aware of who I am, and I'm aware of the times where I don't live who I'm supposed to be, and it's a way of telling God, repentance is not me telling God, Here's what I'm gonna do for you. Repentance is God, I'm aware of what you wanna do in me, and I want your best, so I'm racing to you and I'm coming to you for relationship. That's what it's about.

He says, repent. He says, come to me. I'll say it to you plainly, have you ever felt like when you're in a sinful place where you know you've done wrong, and perhaps you know you've done wrong again and again and again, it's the same thing. Where you hear that voice of the enemy that says, just stay away from God for a while, work on it a little bit. Get to get a little bit better. Once you get a little bit better, then you can come to God. You ever heard that lie? Only six of you have heard that lie? Maybe that's just strategy for me. I don't know. I'm gonna try to fix this, I'm gonna get better. I'm gonna let people know... It's a lie.

What does Jesus say? Run to me. What does the prodigal son do? He comes to

his dad. And he can't get there faster than his dad can, because as he's walking to his dad, his dad's sprinting towards him. That's a picture of repentance. Not just that I'm aware of what I did wrong, but I'm gonna go back to my father. That's repentance. And the father is the one that comes sprinting.

This is this beautiful act, and in the book of 2nd Corinthians chapter 10, we see how this is spelled out. 2nd Corinthians, I'm sorry, chapter 7, verse 10. It says, for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. The sorrow of the world is this, "Yeah, I should get better. "Yeah, I know I'm a Christian, "but I need to change a bunch of behaviors. "I'll work on it this year. "2021 is my new year of resolutions." Or, "I know I'm not right with God yet, "and I know I'm probably not saved, "but I know when I get to heaven, God will work it all out. "And I'll try to get a little better this year." That's worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is also, sin gets found out in your life and you blame everybody else and you're mad that you got caught. That's worldly sorrow. I'm sorry I got caught.

Godly sorrow produces a repentance that looks like this, I don't care who knows, I don't care who hears, I'm going to my Father and He can forgive it all. And I don't care what holes people see in my life because I was dead and now I'm alive, and Jesus is the one that did it. And even in part of my deadness, that's my testimony to the world. I'm not perfect, but the one I serve is. That's repentance. And it's ongoing in the life of a believer, because the Holy spirit is inside of you prompting you and convicting you and growing you.

Some of you that are here today, and some of you that are listening that aren't Christians, you can get offended at a message like this, because you're like, "You're saying, I'm not a Christian." I'm not saying you're not a Christian, God is. Right? That's why you're upset. So turn from your sin and turn to God.

And some of you that are Christians are offended, because you're like, "Hey, he loves me no matter what." I'm like, yes, He does. He loves you enough that he'll take you as you are, but He also loves you enough He won't keep you there. That's who our God is. So in our life at all times, there's things that he's working out.

Now, maybe you go through a season where you're so close to the Lord. He's not pressing on that. I've been through seasons like that. Like finally, I'm walking with the Lord now. We're good. I mean, I don't think He's gonna point out anything sinful in my life. Boom! Three things. You know?

I mean, He never stops His work of growing us. That's just who He is, and we need to accept that. And what does He say? He's like, here's the challenge, remember your identity, remember where you've fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first. Deeds are important, but only deeds that come from the right motivation. If you love Christ, there will be good deeds in your life. The good deeds in your life won't make you saved, the good deeds in your life are just a reflection that you are saved. If you were dead, acting like a dead person for a number of years and living like a dead person for a number of years, and now you're alive, you will act differently than you were when you're dead.

If you say I was dead and now I'm alive and I live the same way. I have news for you, you've never been made alive. There will be evidence over time if the Spirit of God is in you, that He's working it out in your life. You're not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, But God, because he's alive in you, is gonna grow you in a different way than He did while you were dead.

So works are important, in that it reflects the living God inside of our life. Works are not important to get saved, works are important to demonstrate that we have been saved. So that's what he's talking about here.

So repent, turn to him, remember from where you've fallen, or else, what does He say? Or else I'm coming to you and I'll remove your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent.

Well, what's the lamp stand? That's His light in the church. Jesus says, if I'm not the center of your church, I'm gonna come turn out the lights in your church.

There are some churches that Jesus turned the lights out on a long time ago. Now they still have a building and they still have a name on the side of it, the only person that's not in attendance there, Jesus. Because Jesus doesn't wanna be in a place for a long period of time where he's not the one that's in control and on the throne. Jesus is like, "Hey, if you're not gonna put me first, "then I'm not coming to church there. "And if I'm not coming to church there, "the lights are going to go out really fast. "Now, you can change it with smoke and mirrors "and glitz and glamor, "and you can get a crowd, "but here's what you won't have in that crowd. "You won't

have me. "Cause if I'm not put on display there "I'm not showing up there."

It's a pretty big threat, right? Why? Because Jesus wants to be central in His church. He goes on to commend them a little more in verse six. He said, yeah, this you do have. You also hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Notice, he doesn't hate the Nicolaitans. He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

We're gonna talk about the Nicolaitans next week. Just so you know in advance, nobody knows who they are. So we'll talk about who we think they are, and likely there were people that were teaching false doctrine that was leading to immoral behavior, and we already found out that the church in Ephesus hated that. They didn't like that.

But notice the challenge, after He does the challenge to repent. Here's what He says. Here's the promise to those who will listen. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says in the churches. Again, this is not physically hearing. This is spiritually hearing in your heart. If you're hearing God say anything to you, to him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. He who overcomes.

Well, think about this. In 1st John five, five, it says, who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the son of God. So simply by believing, we're overcomers. So what's He talking about? I thought I was already an overcomer. Yes you are. If you believe in Jesus, you are an overcomer, but just because you have the right orthodoxy, doesn't mean you have the right orthopraxy. Or another way of saying it is just because you have the right belief doesn't mean you

have the right practice.

And here's what he's saying, if you are an overcomer, live out your overcoming nature. Be an overcomer. Live the overcoming life. And what does He promise? He promises us to eat from the tree of life. Remember that tree?

Remember why we started in Genesis? And Genesis chapter 2, we hear of this tree of life that God put in the garden. I believe it was in Genesis chapter 2 and verse nine, in Genesis 2:17, God said, don't eat off that tree. and they ate off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they never ate off the tree of life. And because they sinned, what did God do? In Genesis 3 : 24, He protected the tree of life. Why did God do that by putting a flaming sword around it? Because God knew that in a sinful state, with us dying, we will die. If we ate off the tree of life, we would be stuck in that sinful state forever. And God being a loving and protective God says, tell you what I'm gonna do, I'll take that tree and I'll put it in the paradise of God, and we'll read about it at the end of this book of Revelation, and for those who are overcomers, who have believed Jesus Christ shed blood and the word of His testimony, we will all eat of of it and live forever and ever. Amen? Is that good news or what?

He says, so for the one who hears, listen to me. Jesus is saying, I wanna be central, not only in the church, I want to be central in your life. So for those who listen, this is what it is. So for the performance-driven church, which could be any of ours, especially in North America, don't forsake your primary ministry to passionately pursue Jesus. Passionately pursue Jesus. That's primary for anybody's ministry anywhere. And it's a reminder to us that Jesus wants to be on the forefront.

Next, we move to church of Smyrna. The church of Smyrna. If there's one lesson you can learn from this church, it's this, do not fear tribulation or death in the work of Christ. Do not fear tribulation or death in the work of Christ.

Let's walk through this passage. Notice what He says, "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna", right? So now he's writing to the leadership or the pastors or the elders in the church of Smyrna. They're the recipient.

Now, Smyrna wasn't as well known as Ephesus or Thyatira. It was a port city. It was a noted city for science and medicine, and it was a beautiful city. And so that's about all we know about Smyrna. And here's what He addresses, notice the character of Jesus. The first and the last who was dead and has come to life, says this, now this is awesome, that Smyrna would get this revelation.

We've already talked about how Jesus is the first and the last, which means before time began, Jesus was, when Jesus brings this age to a close, Jesus still is, and where is He right now? He's the great I Am. He's the one who started time, He's the one that will bring time to a close. That's who He is. He's the first and last. He's the beginning and the end. He's the alpha and the omega. He's like, I'm in control of all things.

And what does He tell us? He was the one who incarnated flesh, who died on the cross for the sins of the world and Rose from the dead. I mean, is that important or what? Especially when He's gonna tell a church not to fear tribulation or death, here's what He's saying. I've already modeled tribulation and death for you. Follow my

example. Follow me. Wasn't that Jesus' message to the entire church in the world anyway?

So He's telling them, Hey, I've been through tribulation, I've been through death and I overcame, and so can you. That's His character.

Now, what are the strengths of this church? Notice the strengths. He says, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich.

Tribulation is the word we get for suffering. It can also mean great pressure. These people were under attack. Whatever was going on in Smyrna, the church in Smyrna was being ostracized. The church in Smyrna was dealing with a lot of tribulation and a lot of suffering. So to be part of the church in Smyrna, you were getting blasphemed from the Jews who really weren't Jews that we'll read about in a little while. You'll have people coming and attacking you, you got hard stuff going on. So to say, I'm a Christian, wasn't just wearing like a WWJD bracelet and being cool, it was, it's gonna cost you something if you go public with your faith in Smyrna. That's what was going on.

And He also says, I know of your poverty, but you're actually rich. Now this word for poverty being used in the original, it's the word used for extreme poor. I mean, it's like, you're the poorest of the poor. Isn't it interesting how man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart?

Isn't it interesting from the world's standards, this church is under tribulation and persecution, and they're extremely poor, and God says, Yeah, but you're rich.

Because you belong to me, so you're a co-heir with me and all of my riches, and I own cattle on a thousand hills, so if you're with me, I'll provide all of your needs according to my glorious riches in Christ, Jesus.

Isn't it interesting that the world can look and say, totally poor, totally in tribulation. And Jesus looks and says, I'm with you, and you're actually rich. Isn't it interesting how Jesus can see other things?

Now, here's one thing you have to be aware of that nobody here can be aware of, that I can't even be aware of. That materialism kills the work of God. Now, how do you know if you're materialistic? You are. I mean, we swim in it. I mean, asking if we're materialistic is asking like a fish what it feels like to be wet. I mean, we live that way, right? I mean, can you imagine a world where you never thought about whether you'd have a place to live? Where you never thought about how you were gonna make money, where you never thought about retirement, you never thought about where you're gonna take a vacation, you never thought about the kind of car you're gonna drive, 'cause you're not gonna have one, and you don't need to insure anything, 'cause you have nothing to insure? I mean, you don't have anything. So what would people do if they didn't have... They'd make disciples.

Materialism kills the work of God. Kills it. Now, let me be clear on something. I'm not talking about how much money you have. I'm talking about how much your money has you. There's a big difference. You can have a lot and be generous enough that money doesn't have you, but you may have a little, and care about it so much that it owns you. Materialism has nothing to do with the amount of stuff you have, it has to do

with the amount of stuff has your heart. I mean, if you're thinking about materialism, think about it like this. How much do I think about my stuff? How much do I think about stuff I want? How much do I think about stuff I need, which you really don't need? How much do I think about other things that cost money? How much do I think about the vacation?

Like how consumed are you with that, versus the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His call in your life to make disciples? Like that's the issue. So you could meet somebody that's a multimillionaire, money doesn't have them. You can meet somebody that's a multimillionaire, money has 'em. You could meet somebody that's poor, money has 'em. You can meet somebody that's poor, and they're very generous. Right? Again, it's not for us to look around and decide, well, what's rich and what's poor?

Y'all are rich. I've been to some of the poorest places in the world, where families make about \$7 a month. I've been to the largest slum in Asia, which is in Dharavi, India. I've walked through sewage to get to a place with a group of about 50 kids where it's 100 degrees and stinks, where all these kids have the brightest eyes and smiles on their faces, just because somebody's gonna come and tell them about Jesus. And you look at them and at first when you're there, you begin to feel sorry for them, and by the time you're done speaking, you feel sorry for yourself, because they have more going on with Jesus than what you do.

Materialism kills. Just because the church in Smyrna was poor, that's why Jesus was telling 'em you're rich, because you have me and you have me only, and you're

relying on me in such a way. I mean, he's affirming them in huge ways. And then He talks about some of the people that are speaking blasphemies about them. And the blasphemies by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. What's He talking about?

For Jesus, the true Jew would be one that realizes that Jesus Christ was a Jew and is the Messiah. And a group that meets that doesn't understand that Jesus is the Lord of all, what does He call it? A gathering spot for Satan. If Jesus is not central in the church, and if Jesus is not the one being lifted up, lots of people can meet and speak about those who really believe in him in a blasphemous way, but that's all they are, is a synagogue of Satan. That's all.

Jesus says, I know that you're being blasphemed by those who pretend that they're spiritual, but they're not. They're under their father's rule, the devil. and they say what he says. But Jesus says this, I know you. I know you and I know that you love me.

Now, He's gonna move on to a challenge here, but do you notice what He doesn't have here? He doesn't have any weaknesses for this church. This is one of the two churches no weaknesses are highlighted. It's pretty impressive, right? It's interesting, when you think about the persecuted church and all the things that they deal with, that Jesus doesn't give them any weaknesses. I mean, when you're holding on for dear life through all the tribulation and maybe even death, he's not gonna point out different things that need to improve, 'cause he's walking with you all the way.

You say, well man, Smyrna, long time ago, a couple thousand years ago. I guess they persecuted Christians back then. They still persecute Christians today. There are still people around the world that are dying for their faith. You can read stories about it online, it's tragic. I mean, you can read about like North Korea and Somalia and Afghanistan is the top three places where Christians are being killed, and they don't even always report the numbers of people that are being killed.

And we're not talking about being killed in a way that the world knows, we're talking about in private where nobody would even care about their body anymore. It's going on all the time. It's rampant. And instead of sharing stories about that, I think that we need to be aware for what could possibly happen to us. I'm gonna tell you this as your pastor, you need to listen really closely. Jesus said, in this world, you will have tribulation. But take heart. I've overcome the world. If you continue to walk with the Lord in our culture, you will have tribulation. Some of you may even die. I can't guarantee that, I don't know that. I'm not God, I'm not promising anybody would. I'm just saying, we need to be ready and not fear that if that were to be the case and that were to come.

I was sent a story this week about a church in Egypt. If you'll remember in 2017, there were two Coptic churches that were bombed, killing 50 Christians and 100 others injured. And shortly after the churches blew up, there was a Father George who gathered and assembly, and there were not only the Christians that were left alive but there were people from all over the city, and he preached a sermon to them. It was a three-part sermon. I won't do it any justice, but I'll tell you what his three points were.

For a group of people that had terrorized and killed 50 people in his congregation, here was this three-point sermon. He says, number one, for those who killed all the people, he goes I just wanna tell you this, thank you. Thank you. He goes, it was an honor for them to die as Christ had died. And it shortened the victim's journey home, which was the ultimate goal of their faith anyway. And it made all of us mindful that our eternal destiny is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, so thank you.

Secondly, he said, we love you. We love you. He says, even murderers and thieves love their own, but Jesus tells us to love our enemies. So I just want you to know, we love you no matter what.

And then his third point was this, we're praying for you, because Jesus told us not only to love our enemies, but to pray for those who persecute us. And if this tragedy had to happen so that some of you could experience the love of God from us then it was completely worth it. You talk about a sermon that's sobering, but it's true, isn't it? If our eternal destiny is in the hands of Jesus, and that's the ultimate goal of our faith, then that's where we need to be.

Now, we don't live with that kind of tribulation and we don't live with that kind of persecution yet, and we don't live with that kind of suffering, we could. I mean, some of the suffering we deal with now are like Karens and Brads calling Tri-County Health to tell on us and stuff like that. its true, but I would tell you guys the same thing. Thank you for doing that, because it's caused me to press more into the Lord and to trust him even greater. I would also tell you this, and I mean it from the bottom of my heart, that

we love you. Because Jesus loves you, we love you too. We really do, and we're glad that you're here. And third, I would tell you this, we're praying for you, because I want you to know the love of Jesus Christ in a way that you currently do not know, and want you to know him.

And that's true. I mean, when you see this church and what they're going through, here's what Jesus then challenges them. He says this, do not fear what you're about to suffer. Do not fear. You'll see those words all throughout the Bible, right? Do not fear. Do not fear.

Why are they all over the place? Because we in our humanness have a tendency to do what? Fear. Do you know why? Because God's sovereign and he's ruling the universe, and we're not, so we don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow, and so we're fearful about what could happen. And we're fearful about all the wrong possibilities. We're fearful...

Jesus says, do not fear for what you're about ready to suffer. Jesus is not sobering, and He's not telling them, Hey, don't worry. If you trust me, nothing bad's gonna happen to you. It's gonna be bliss. He says, don't worry. He goes, just don't fear. Don't fear the suffering.

What else does He say? Behold, He says, the devil's about to cast some of you into prison. What's He telling you? The devil, in order to do anything he does has to run it across Jesus' plan and schedule first before Jesus allows it, which means that Jesus is gonna allow the devil to do this to this church. Some of you are gonna be cast into

prison, so that what? So that you'll be tested and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Some people try to elongate 10 days to be the complete period of time and all this. I see no reason exegetically to do that, and I'm like, I think what he's telling them is, some of you are gonna go to prison, but it's gonna be for a short time. You're gonna be tested, but it's gonna be for 10 days. It's gonna be a short time. And here's what He says. Be faithful unto death, and I'll give you the crown of life. He said, you've seen in the Olympic games where people wear a laurel wreath on their head, signifying that they're champions. He goes, I tell you what, if you're faithful all the way to death, and He's not just talking about during those 10 days, He's saying, be faithful as a church until you breathe your last breath. And I will give you the crown of life.

God will give the crown of life to those who love Him. Who are eagerly awaiting for His appearance. The crown of life means we get to spend eternity with Jesus. I can't promise you your best life now as a Christian, but what I can promise you as a believer is if you love the Lord, Jesus Christ, your best life is on the way. And it's worth having Jesus in your heart. And it's worth enduring anything it takes until you meet them face to face.

And when I read the book of 1st Peter who had a first eyewitness view to Jesus being persecuted, who says in 1st Peter chapter 2, and when He was reviled he did not revile back, but kept entrusting himself to the one who judges righteously. I think we get a picture of Jesus that when we deal with suffering, there's this tendency in our heart to wanna get angry with people or to be upset with people, but I think even Jesus on the cross, when He was stretched out with His arms, He wasn't looking at the

human humanness of people, He was looking at the poverty of them. He wasn't just saying, Father, get 'em. This is the stupidest thing human beings have ever done. And I'm so angry, right? No, that's not what he's saying. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

What do you mean they didn't know? They were yelling, crucify him. They were yelling, if you're really the son of God, then why don't you bring yourself down on the cross? If you said you could save others, you can't even save yourself. They knew what they were doing, but they didn't know what they were doing. They didn't realize the spiritual demonic oppression that was over them doing Satan's work for them. They didn't realize it and Jesus was saying, even for people like that God, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Because why? 'Cause Jesus wants to be in relationship with everybody.

And We're gonna have opportunities as we go through tribulation and suffering, to show a world that doesn't "deserve it", what love looks like? You know why? Because we didn't deserve it either, and Jesus showed us. Right? And that's the message He's telling the church in Smyrna. Don't fear suffering. Don't fear prison. Don't fear persecution. Don't fear testing. Don't fear tribulation, don't fear death. Don't fear death.

And then He says this, he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the church is he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. See, here's the reality, in this world, you have the chance to die once and live twice, or you have the chance to live twice and die once. Meaning this, if you live for this world, you will live once. And when you die physically, that's just your first death. Your second death will

be eternity in hell, separated from Jesus Christ in a place of eternal torment.

But if in this life that you're living, you die to yourself, you get to live this life and the moment you breathe your last breath, I'm telling you, life begins in a way you didn't even know that was possible. And what he's telling these people as overcomers is, will you trust Jesus Christ when you go through anything?

And the only way you can go through anything is to know that Jesus Christ is on the throne of your life and in your heart. Here's the question, Brave Church, is Jesus Christ on the throne of your life and in your heart? I'm not asking you about your performance plan, I'm not asking you how many Billy Graham crusades you went to, or how many times you walked in, signed a card, met a pastor, shook a hand, cried a tear, I'm not asking that question. I'm asking, when did you know that you went from death to life? When did you know that Christ came in on the inside and you have a new life in Him? When did you know it wasn't about you being a bad person, it was about you being a dead sinner, and that Christ wanted to make you alive? If not, make today your day.

And for those of you who are truly born again of God, what's the spirit of God been saying to you? For some of you today is, don't miss out on your primary ministry to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. That's number one. For some of you, He's saying, do not fear, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. We're gonna end our service today by singing two songs. And when I have you stand and pray here in a second, you have every right to leave and do that, but I'm just going to tell you this,

Jesus, who is sending the letters to the churches is worthy of all your worship, and I would just encourage you if you can to stay and be a part as we celebrate the Lord together. Would you stand with me as we pray?

Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who You are. And Lord, as we come to You in song, Lord, we wanna sing from our hearts that You are truly the God who died for us, who rose from the dead. The first and the last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. The one who walks among the seven lamp stands and the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand. We come to You and we give You all glory, all honor and praise in the mighty and the matchless name of Jesus, Amen, and amen. Can we give God some praise this morning?