

The Words of Jesus to the Seven Churches

A fact that most church people do not realize today is that the Book of Revelation was addressed to seven churches that existed back in the first century. (Rev. 1:4) Revelation 1:1,3 tells us why the Book of Revelation was written. It was written to show unto His servant's things which must SHORTLY come to pass; for the time was at hand. Blessings are pronounced on he that readeth and keepeth the sayings written in the Book of Revelation.

The first three chapters of the Book of Revelation is devoted to specific exhortation and instruction to these seven churches. The Apostle John is given specific urgent words to deliver to these seven churches by Jesus Himself. Jesus dictates words to John to send to each one of these churches who existed back in the first century. These epistles contained words which exhorted the readers to prepare for immediate events which would transpire in their very near future. For a clearer understanding of just what those saints in those churches were experiencing back in the first century, let's take a closer look at the environment in which they lived.

The seven churches of the Book of Revelation were facing a variety of hopes and fears, of dangers and difficulties in their daily lives. Just what were some of the things that those early saints were experiencing? In that first century, we find persecuted and suffering Christians; we find malignant and blaspheming Jews; we find a brutal tyrant on the Imperial Throne of Rome; we find stern Roman magistrates; we find false teachers among themselves who were drawing many away from the faith; we find widespread apostasy happening among those who had defected from the Church. Jesus discussed this apostasy in Matthew 24:10-12. The Apostle Paul also discussed this apostasy in I Timothy 4:1, II Thessalonians 2:3

In addition to all of this, we find a great expectation that the time for which all Christians had hoped had arrived; the hour of deliverance for the persecuted faithful was near; the day of retribution and judgment on the enemy and the accuser had come; they knew that the Lord was at hand because this is what they had been taught and believed. These phrases were on the lips of all the first century faithful saints: "The time is at hand" (Mk 1:15); "Behold, He is coming!" (Rev. 1:7); "He will not tarry". (Heb. 10:37) This thought was burned into their minds and into their hearts because this is what Jesus and the Apostles had taught them from the beginning.

The hope of the first century Church was not the hope of today's modern-day churches. Today, believers desire to live a long productive life here on Earth serving the Lord and then to enter into their new Eternal everlasting spiritual body that awaits them upon death. Those first century believers had an entirely different hope burned into their hearts. Their hope was not to die at all, but to live to welcome their returning Lord; to be caught up in that dimension to meet the Lord and so to be forever with the Lord.

This was the circumstance, the expectation, and the attitude of those saints who were members of those seven first century churches to whom the Book of Revelation was addressed. The content of each of these letters directly correspond with these circumstances. Each of these Epistles given to the Apostle John to deliver to each of these seven Churches all follow a similar format. Each one begins with a greeting followed by a declaration of the state of each church addressed. This is followed by a commendation or a reprimand. Next comes an exhortation to penitence or to persevere. A special promise to those who overcome comes next. Each Epistle ends in a proclamation to all to take heed. This is the format of each of the seven Epistles.

Although we will not go through each Epistle to illustrate this unity in format, we will take the time to point out the most important common point stressed in each Epistle. The most crucial point that we find in each one is this: we find a distinct allusion to a great imminent crisis when reward or punishment is to be given out to each according to his work. The commonality included in each Epistle is an expected catastrophe is at hand.

To the Church in Ephesus, it is stated, "I will come unto you quickly". (Rev. 2:5) To the Church in Smyrna, He says, "Thou shalt have tribulation 10 days". (Rev. 2:10) To the Church in Pergamos, "I will come unto you quickly". (Rev. 2:16) To the Church in Thyatira, "Hold fast 'til I come." (Rev. 2:25) To the Church in Sardis, "I will come on thee as a thief". (Rev. 3:3) To the Church in Philadelphia, "Behold, I come quickly". (Rev. 3:11) To the Church in Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock". (Rev. 3:20)

Why is this so important? Because it proves that these urgent words meant something to whom they were addressed. Each one of these short, sharp, concise utterances communicated intensely that not a moment was to be lost. Delay and negligence would be fatal. Unfortunately, many preachers today put off all of these urgent passionate utterances to some far-off future time of consummation. This indeed robs these words of all their significance to those first century Churches. It is wrong to resort to such an unnatural and unsatisfactory explanation when we know and can read in the Scriptures that there was an expected consummation of all of these events when these seven Churches still existed.

In Conclusion

The Apostle John was given the exact words to deliver to the seven first-century churches by Jesus Himself. All seven Epistles were laced with words of urgency and a call for immediate action, for the time was at hand. This period of retribution and reward referred to in all seven Epistles to the seven churches was indeed the approaching “Day of the Lord”. The “Return of the Lord” and the arrival of the Kingdom of God were declared by Jesus Himself to occur before the passing away of that generation which witnessed His miracles. (Matt. 24:34) Following the recording of the seven Epistles, the rest of the Book of Revelation depicts the Return of the Lord and the Day of the Lord in vivid symbolic apocalyptic images.

Just as the Book of Revelation begins; so it ends with the same imminence. (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20) Just as the tone of the seven epistles to the seven churches depicts; and just as the Book of Revelation ends; all proclaim the imminence of His Return. This is captured by this repetitive phrase used by Jesus “Behold, I come quickly” throughout the Book of Revelation.

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