

Revelation 2:1-11 // Faithful Until Victory

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Preacher: Jamie Payton

[0 : 00] Our passage tonight is in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, on page 1234 of the Church Bibles. We're reading chapter 2, verses 1 to 11.

Revelation chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Consider how far you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

[1 : 13] But you have this in your favor. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. To the angel of the church in Smyrna, write, These are the words of him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again.

I know your afflictions and your poverty, yet you are rich. I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[2 : 18] The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. Amen. Well, good evening.

My name is Jamie. I'm another one of the ministry trainees here at St. Silas, and let me add my welcome to Andrews. It would be a great help if you could keep your Bibles open at page 1234, and you can also find an outline of the sermon in the server sheet, which I hope you will find helpful, even if I did go slightly overboard on the alliteration.

Let me ask for God's help in prayer as we turn to his word. Heavenly Father, ruler of all creation, we thank you that you reveal yourself in your word.

We thank you that you know all things and have given us all we need for this life. Please, as we look at your word now, may you speak to us. I ask that my words would be yours and that you would be at work in all of our hearts as I speak tonight.

We pray this in the all-powerful name of the risen one, Jesus Christ. Amen. What is it that keeps you going in life?

[3 : 35] Is it just squeezing the most out of it, finding all the fun you can have in every moment? It's worth it because there's more to get, right? Or maybe it's the next break.

Do you spend your mornings looking to your evenings and your weeks looking to your weekends? Is it the Saturday night takeaway that motivates you to slug through those Monday morning emails? But more importantly, not just what keeps you going in life, but what keeps you going in the faith. If you here tonight follow Christ, then what is it that means that you continue to live for him?

You see, the Lord Jesus has secured the eternal victory. He has defeated death. He has won. And yet his church right now still waits for that victory in full.

And in the meantime, wow, life is hard. There are many temptations and much pain and suffering. And so about half a century after his resurrection and ascension, Jesus reminds his church of who he is.

[4 : 49] He encourages their faithfulness, warns them of their complacency, and expands their vision of just how glorious his victory is. Reminders that we still need today.

So first, let's get our bearings. Revelation is an awesome book. John receives this glorious vision filled with loud trumpets, swords coming out of mouths, terrifying beasts, angelic armies, and an overwhelming multitude of people worshipping and praising the living God.

It's a book that is sometimes avoided because of its strangeness, but the Spirit didn't inspire this in order to confuse. It has tricky bits within it, but the imagery is there to help us see.

Jonathan helpfully reminded us last week that it's a picture book, not a puzzle book. The book ends with the dazzling, ferocious, universe-changing victory of Jesus.

And the whole book looks forward to this and is written to equip the church to live now, knowing what is to come. And it begins with these seven letters to seven churches.

[6 : 00] Seven is a number we're going to get used to in our time in Revelation. The creation narrative in Genesis takes seven days, and ever since, it has represented completeness and perfection throughout Scripture.

And so while these letters are written to specific churches, the sevenness also demonstrates that they are written to the church as a whole. Through them, we see Christ's message to his church, not just at the end of the first century, but for us today in the 21st.

Now, I'm sure that you, like me, love formulas, you love structure, and so we'll be delighted to hear that these letters all have a similar form. Each letter begins with a description of Jesus, which is taken from John's vision in chapter 1.

What generally follows is a commendation. Jesus encourages his church in its faithful actions. For five of the churches, there is then a warning, a rebuke with a call to repent.

The dangerous consequences of disobedience are laid out, but always with a chance to be redeemed. Finally, a triumphant declaration is given for those who conquer with Christ.

[7 : 17] So now, as we understand the shape of what's to come, let's get into the detail of these first two letters. With our first point, weighty words. See how in verse 1 and verse 8, both letters are written to an angel.

Why an angelic being is involved, honestly, I'm still unsure, but regardless, we know that Jesus works in both the natural and the supernatural. And crucially, he uses both the natural and the supernatural to convey his word.

And the true importance of this word is because of whose word it is. Look at the great weight that Jesus holds in verse 1. These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

He is a star holder. This mysterious image draws us to Jesus' role in creation. The sevenness shows that he doesn't hold a few stars in his hands, but the whole totality of stars in the universe.

And yet, this mysterious image is not actually so mysterious. Flick back over the page to chapter 1, verse 20. Here we see that the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this.

[8 : 40] The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Jesus is creator, but he is also personally involved in creation.

In fact, he holds the angels to the church intimately in his hand, and he walks among the churches themselves. The churches that reflect his own glorious light are never separated from him.

But the weight of Jesus, his significance is even greater than all of this. See how the second letter is introduced in verse 8. To the angel of the church in Smyrna, write, These are the words of him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again.

The first and the last. Before everything and after everything. Not just at the start and end, but at every point in between. Eternal.

The vast expanse of the cosmos pales in insignificance. Now some of you may know that I previously studied maths at university and enjoy some time with big numbers.

[9 : 54] In fact, this isn't even the first time. I've talked about them in a sermon, and I considered describing some to you here, but I won't. Because there is no number I can think of or describe that is big enough to demonstrate what it means that Jesus was there before time itself.

He is the almighty. Sovereign over everything. Ruler of the universe since it began. King of all creation. Yet, Jesus is also the one who died and came to life.
Later on in the book, Jesus is seen as a slain lamb. A sacrifice who paid the price for the sins of many. But he is not only a slain lamb, but a risen one.
His death and resurrection are the basis of all hope. The triumph of his victory. The reason it's worth listening to all of this weighty word is because of this.
Because of who he is. But we should also listen because he knows what we need to know.
Because he knows it all. Past, present, and future.
[11 : 03] He knows the present. See verse 2. I know your deeds. I know you cannot tolerate wicked people. He knows the past. See verse 4.

You have forsaken the love you had at first. And he knows the future. Verse 10. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison. Jesus knows everything.

And so he knows what these churches then and us now need to know. So let's see what Ephesus needed to know. This is our second point.

The Ephesian church is one that you may be familiar with. A few decades before this letter, Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesians. Where he shows the reconciliation Christ has brought between humanity and God.

As well as how Christ has united all people together in his church. And Jesus commends this church for its endurance and perseverance.

[12 : 06] Let's have a look at verse 2 again. I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people.

That you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not. And have found them false. You have persevered and endured hardships for my name. And have not grown weary.

Recall that Jesus gives this wonderful picture of himself so that the church can continue on even amidst the difficulties of life. And life has been difficult for this church.

We see that there have been false teachers. Those claiming to be apostles of Jesus. But in fact having their own agenda. Not leading people towards Christ.

But away from him. Fighting on against this is hard. The mental strain. The pain of seeing people led astray. The difficult conversations.

[13 : 04] The conflict. The agony of seeing Jesus' name besmirched. But in their standing firm Jesus encourages them. For when facing hardships the temptation is to grow weary.

And then when weary it's not long before you give up. And at that point having given up you're never going to do the deeds you've been called to do. But they haven't grown weary.

Jesus knows their deeds and congratulates them on perseverance through every trial. But somehow. Amidst all of this endurance and perseverance they've lost something.

In fact they've nearly lost everything. Love. They have forsaken the love that they had at first. Despite them holding out the name of Jesus.

They somehow seem to not be loving him. And not loving each other. They do and say the right things. But when it comes down to it. They're turning their backs on the gospel itself.

[14 : 12] Think of the footballer who's still scoring goals. His passes are still well timed. He works hard and builds up a sweat on the pitch. But he doesn't love the game anymore.

And so while he still turns up to the games. He doesn't train as often. And in fact the last few months he stopped altogether. And he doesn't hang out with the rest of the team. Because well they only talk about football don't they?

And that's not what he cares about. It won't be long before a bad team dynamic and dwindling fitness. Mean the goals will stop coming. And it'll all be over.

Consider how far you've fallen. Christ Jesus in verse 5. Is that a challenge for us as a church here? Do we say the right things. And hold out to the name of Jesus on the surface. But inside not love him?

Do we obey him as we used to? If Jesus were to write to us now.

[15 : 11] Would this be his warning to us? Do we just look like we're working hard? Do we care about saying the right things? Or care about Jesus?

Do you still love Jesus? Because Jesus doesn't mess around with those who don't love him. Those who don't love him have rejected him.

They cannot share his victory. Look at verse 5. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

The warning here is severe. Jesus isn't quietly saying that he doesn't want them to fizzle out. He's saying that they have unrepentant sin and so are against him.

The Ephesian church will lose its place in Christ's kingdom if they aren't being a church. If they aren't a people who love Jesus and love each other.

[16 : 13] Saint Silas will lose its place in Christ's church if we aren't a church. If we're not people who love Jesus and love each other. But there is hope.

This warning, this discipline is an act of love. It's a chance to return. To do what they did at first. The letter ends with striking hope for the victorious.

But we'll come back to this after we have a look at Smyrna. Our third point to Smyrna. Suffering against slander. Let's have a look at verse 9.

I know your afflictions and your poverty. Yet you are rich. I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not. But are a synagogue of Satan. The word Jesus has to Smyrna is challenging yet greatly positive.

Similarly to Ephesus, the church in Smyrna is suffering. They have been afflicted and are poor. But how should we measure wealth?

[17 : 22] Even if they are hungry or poor or have been beaten or chased out of their homes. Then while they may be materially poor. You might think that they lack. But not in the most important things.

In what matters, they're rich. They're spiritually rich because they are in Christ. They have value and worth and hope in him. Note also the cause of their affliction.

Jesus has a great enemy. Satan. The adversary. The one who is more than any other against Jesus.

Against the almighty and all loving God. Satan, the evil one. So why then are these slanderous Jews referred to as a synagogue of Satan?

It's because any Jew who has not turned to Jesus is no longer a true Jew. Those who followed Moses were waiting for the Messiah.

[18 : 28] Therefore, anyone who rejects Jesus as the Messiah is against Jesus. And hence is satanic. All who are against Jesus are on the side of the adversary.

And so Jesus knows that this church which he loves is being slandered by those who have rejected him. But what does he say to this church in poverty and affliction?

Do not be afraid. To this faithful church. To a church which he has no rebuke to give. He says, don't fear.

These are the comforting words that everything is going to be okay. Words we may often say to comfort in a time of distress. But ones which are sadly sometimes hollow.

Not so with Jesus here. He tells them not to fear because he knows what is worthy of fear. And astonishingly, Jesus declares that it is not this affliction.

[19 : 33] It's not prison, nor poverty, nor pain. It's not even death. Look at verse 10 with me. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you. And you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Be faithful, even to the point of death. And I will give you life as your victor's crown.

The sufferings of this life are not to be feared. When there is a crown awaiting you. Even the devil, supernatural evil himself, is not to be feared.

His schemes and tests are horrific. The church in Smyrna is about to go through things that most of us can't imagine. Few, if any of us, have suffered imprisonment.

And to state the obvious, none of us have been killed because we follow Jesus. But even if we were to be killed, that would be no reason to fear.

[20 : 33] For the faithful church, Jesus doesn't ask them to do anything new or different. Keep being faithful. Keep it up. Stick with Jesus.

Be faithful till the end. So as much as we are faithful at St. Silas, we too can see that Jesus sees us. He knows where we persevere in faithfulness.

He knows any slander we may face. And he says, keep going. Jesus says to us, don't fear. Trust Jesus.

Be faithful till the very end. Do that and no matter what you lose, you don't need to be afraid. Because they can't take your riches from you.

They can't take your life from you. Because your life belongs to Jesus. And he's won you a victor's crown. And this leads us to our final point. A vision of victory.

[21 : 34] All of these letters we said end in a great point of hope. See first the familiar call of Jesus. At the end of the first letter, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And again in verse 11, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Almost identical to what Jesus said during his teaching ministry in Galilee.

Particularly in the parables. These are the words of Jesus. These are the words of the Spirit. After all, within the mystery of the Trinity, they are one. And their words to be heard.

And they conclude with a glorious vision of life. To the one who is victorious, verse 7, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

This phrase of the victorious, I've used it a few times tonight, but it seems slightly odd. In what way is the church victorious? Well, for the full answer, we need a full sermon series in Revelation.

[22 : 42] But the climax of Revelation is that it shows how Jesus is victorious. And not just him, but the great multitude of faithful who are washed in his blood.

In short, Jesus the Lamb is victorious by laying down his life. As a sacrificial lamb, Jesus the Lion achieved victory. He conquered, he defeated death.

He defeated the devil, sin, and all evil. His resurrection is the greatest conquest in history. And so his people, by following him by faith, amazingly, ridiculously, gain the spoils of his victory.

First and foremost, they gain life. Peaceful, joyful, and ending life with Jesus. The tree of life was in the center of the Garden of Eden.

All good things, and indeed, all life in the garden were nourished by it. Life in the garden was abundant, was full of life, and amazingly, we walked with God himself. So it shall be in the paradise of God.

[23 : 51] Anyone who trusts Jesus, who does not fear the world, but turns to him, will one day be in that paradise, will eat again of the tree of life forevermore, will eat and eat, and never have their life taken from them.

And never will they be separate from God, never separate from Jesus. It's his paradise, and he gives the right to be with him all who are victorious with him.

What beautiful words, what a glorious hope. And have a look at verse 11. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

The second death, the terrifying destruction of all that is evil, of all injustice, and idolatry, and sin. If anything was to be feared, it would be that. But the message to not be afraid covers even this.

Because those who are victorious shall not be scratched by it, completely unharmed. No death, just life. That's what awaits the victorious.

[25 : 06] We need this. We're just not going to be able to keep going unless we see Jesus as conquering all his enemies. Unless you are certain that Jesus is going to win, then you can't know no fear.

And without that, life will drag you down. When work gets too much, when relationships collapse, when those close to you die, then you need to know that these things aren't all there is.

Why bother standing proud for the name of Jesus if it doesn't end well? Why bother to repent and return to godly love for one another? Bother because it does end well.

Jesus is the sovereign conqueror who holds everything in his hands and his victory is secure.

Bother to listen to him to persevere despite all else because you have this vision of a victorious Jesus.

Ephesus needs to wake up to love Jesus again. Smyrna just needs to stay true to not fear. Since I was well, we need this too.

[26 : 22] We need to love Jesus. We need to stay true. We need to be faithful until victory comes. Let me pray and the band will come up to lead us in song.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for Jesus' victory. We praise you for the life that he has won for us. Lord, we pray that you would help us to love you.

You would help us to stay true. you would give us faith in that great victory. So Lord, as we live our lives, let us always be living them for the glory of Christ Jesus, the victorious one.

In his name, Amen.