

Call to Obedience #465
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Jesus' Last Words to the Church

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Beloved, last words are important. Remember the many times you walked out of the door and Mother said: "Be careful." She meant what she said. Remember the last words of Moses: a stern warning to Israel to keep the laws of the Lord. Remember the last words of Jesus to His disciples BEFORE His ascension: *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Last words are important.

But now, let us consider Jesus' last words to His pastors AFTER His ascension. They are recorded in Revelations 2 and 3. Notice that each one of the seven last words to the churches is accompanied with an: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. Jesus repeated these words several times because He knew that we would have difficulty hearing them in our hearts. But if we do not hear what Jesus says to the seven churches, there is no point for us to read the rest of the Revelation! By the time this book was written in 95 A.D., three generations of the church had passed and our Lord was deeply, deeply disturbed that a doctrine continued to gain strength that backsliders can go to heaven along with the saints of God—in other words, the foolish virgins will join the wise at the throne (Matt. 25:1-13). Not so! This doctrine robs believers of the necessity of Christ's indwelling presence and power. It destroys the church and makes its message irrelevant. It prevents the church from coming to oneness so that the world may believe.

So then, Jesus' last messages to the churches is about how He will judge the believers, both the backsliders and the saints. That includes you and me, because we are the church. We are the seven golden candlesticks. And here, Jesus does not appear to His believers as a gentle shepherd in a rough cloak, but dressed in pure white with a golden belt, with eyes like flames of fire, feet like bronze, and a voice like mighty, rushing waters. The stars in His hand here represent the messengers or ministers which were to deliver these messages both of warning and comfort to their people that: 1) **no backslider will get to**

eat of the tree of life; but that 2) those who overcome will eat of the tree of life and walk with Jesus in white.

And although these truths are repeated to every one of the seven churches in one way or another, it is most clearly magnified in Jesus' message to the last church, the Laodiceans: *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, **because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth*** (Rev. 3:15-16).

This sobering message lets us know that you and I have the capacity to make Jesus vomit. From this passage, it is self-evident that lukewarm persons have reason to worry and tremble all their way to the Judgment Seat. However, despite this, the church's response to *vomit inducers* tends to tilt towards coddling them accompanied with reassuring words that God still loves them and since they are born again, they are still covered by the blood, while in reality they trample underfoot the very blood by which they have been sanctified (Heb. 10:29). What these poor souls need are not pillows of comfort to encourage them to remain in their present fallen state but repentance not to be repented of. We must not accommodate what Jesus rejects. Jesus rejects the lukewarm and there is no exception nor exclusion clause associated with this declaration. *He vomits them out.* My friend, to vomit is a systemic, compulsory rejection of a substance hostile to a body. Jesus tasted sin once at Calvary; He is not going to taste sin again. Indeed: *The soul who sins shall die...* (Ezek. 18:20). There is no love in us if we do not warn the backslider. But just as the wicked finds God exacting for refusing the way of holiness, he will find God most gracious when he repents.

Now let us examine how Jesus judges the churches (this is not about unbelievers). Notice, first of all that Jesus loves all that is good. In each message to His churches (the lampstands), Jesus first praises the good. For example, let us look at how He judged the first church, Ephesus. To them, Jesus said: 1) *I know your works, your labor...* which is good; 2) *I know your patience...* and patience is an inner thing, a virtue which Jesus likes; 3) *You cannot bear those who are evil...* which is also excellent and pleases Jesus; and 4) *You have persevered...* which is a wonderful accomplishment that Jesus likes. Jesus is fully aware of the good, religious things you have done and are doing in His name. But to Him, all of these things will not get you to heaven.

Notice these commendations of our Lord Jesus are followed by a sobering “NEVERTHELESS” that voids all of the good mentioned here. Is there a “NEVERTHELESS” in your life? You are busy for Jesus, you have spiritual virtues, but this will not allow you to eat of the tree of life. Jesus continues by saying to the Ephesians: *Nevertheless... you have left your first love. ... repent ... or else I will come ... and remove your lampstand from its place...* (Rev. 2:4-5). You will not make it to heaven without first love any more than the five foolish virgins mentioned in Matthew 25. Understanding this is a matter of eternal life and death.

What is first love? Let us start with the obvious. First love is not second love. First love is pure. When Jesus calls, first love does not say: let me first bury my father, test my oxen or examine my land. It does not say: I will come after my honeymoon. The devil does his best to pull you into second love or third or fourth love for Jesus to destroy you. But no, you cannot have the kingdom of God or heaven without this first, hot love any more than you can get water to boil below 212°F or 100°C.

First love is puppy love. It has nothing to do with maturity. Jesus says to the Ephesians: “Go back to puppy love.” Puppy love is crazy, unadulterated, reckless, self-abandoning and passionate. When Jesus said: “I am going to die,” Peter said: “I will die with you.” That was puppy love. When Jesus said: “I am walking on water,” Peter said: “me too.” That was puppy love. When Peter saw his risen Lord on the shoreline, *...he put on his outer garment and plunged into the sea* (John 21:7). That was puppy love. We all love puppies. God loves puppies even in their clumsiness because they always want to be around their master. Always! That is why first love is also perfect love. It cannot get any better. He wants us to be like little children. What little children are to us, puppies are in the dog world.

First love is without excuses. My friend, when you start making your first excuse after conversion for not being at the next prayer meeting or worship service you can attend, you have lost your first love. You are on the way of the backslider beginning to think that you do not have to be all for God. Then excuses follow one after another all the way to the grave. Perfect love is willing to go through the fire, through storms, through the darkest of valleys and sail on the roughest of seas to promote the gospel, to give light to the lost, to lose its reputation or to lose all things. It does not know the word “impossible” or “it can’t be done.” It is at home wherever Jesus is. Perfect love is focused, single-minded, sacrificial, ever persevering and unstoppable.

Perfect love is the security of the believer. Again, you can be imperfect in everything else in your life and still go to heaven. Isn't that wonderful! Oh, Jesus is not a hard task master. But there is one and only one area where He demands perfection and that is in your love towards Him and others. Therefore, we have: *...You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself* (Luke 10:27). This is beautiful and we also have: *...perfect love casts out fear... [of judgment]* (1 John 4:18).

Now let us go back to the Ephesian church. Jesus tells these "saved" people that if they do not have perfect love, they will not be able to overcome and eat of the tree of life. **This is because perfect love is the engine that drives the life of the overcoming Christian.** Jesus also said: *...To him who overcomes [conquers] I will give to eat from the tree of life...* (Rev. 2:7). This phrase: *...to him who overcomes...* is repeated seven times in Christ's messages to the churches. It is enriched with a list of blessings: if we overcome, we will eat of the tree of life; we will not be hurt by the second death; we will have a new name written on a white stone; we will be given power over the nations; we will not have our names blotted out of the Book of Life and we will sit with Jesus in His throne.

The requirement to receive all these gifts is to overcome. It is to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. We are to understand warfare as the Christians of the Roman Empire understood it. The key ingredient that made Rome last 1,000 years was the Roman soldier who would never surrender or turn his back on the enemy. Every Roman soldier died with his face towards the enemy and his sword drawn toward him. This is the way we must live and die if we want to walk with Jesus in white (Rev. 3:4-5). That is the picture that Jesus paints here for the heaven bound saint, the picture of an active warrior. This is Jesus' last message to the last angel of the last church. In summary, in Acts 1:8 we have the commissioning and anointing to make believers out of sinners; in Revelation 2 and 3 we have the judgment of the churches resulting in the everlasting separation of believer from believer, worshiper from worshiper and minister from minister on the basis of whether they have been OVERCOMERS. Today, I suggest that you take off your slippers, put on your combat boots and get with it, following your great Commander so that where He is, you will be also.

These are Jesus' last words directly to the churches: *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Rev. 3:21-22).

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