



# THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

*"O, Darling"*

2:1-3

Calvary Hanford

The word **Ephesus** means *darling* or *maiden of choice*. The believers in the church at Ephesus were Jesus Christ's darlings. They were - all of them, men and women - His maidens of choice.

That may sound strange until you remember that the Bible often speaks of your relationship to Jesus as being like that of the **engagement** of a **Bridegroom** and His **bride**:

Jesus is called the Bridegroom by John the Baptist:

**John 3:29** "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

The church is described as the bride of Jesus:

Revelation 19:7 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Our time on earth, awaiting the return of Jesus, is called a betrothal or, as we would say, an engagement:

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Jesus is the heavenly Bridegroom, writing to His darling maiden of choice, His future bride, the church. He writes and says,

Revelation 2:4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

**First** is the Greek word *protos*, a descriptive word which means *foremost, former, and best*. This **first** love, the passionate, romantic love of the engagement, was no longer present in the church at Ephesus. They had drifted from romance to reality; there was motion but no emotion.

Jesus began His letter by commending His darlings. There were some things they were doing well. They are things we ought to do well as we await the return of our Bridegroom.

Revelation 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

**Angel** is the word *messenger*. While it is often used of a supernatural messenger - an angel in our sense of the word - it is also used both in the Bible and in Greek writings to refer to human messengers. (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52). It probably refers here to the pastor of the church through whom the message would be read to the congregation.

I like the idea of being a messenger. It's simple and focused. Though a pastor must wear many hats, his primary responsibility to the Lord is to deliver His message.

The Lord's message involves first of all teaching the whole counsel of the Word of God. But there is something else, I think. After you understand the doctrine, the history, the geography, the original languages and such, there need also be an anointing upon the teaching. The pastor must discern the message, or the emphasis, for the people he is addressing. And the people must listen as if God had a message just for them.

When John wrote the Revelation **Ephesus** was the most prominent city of Asia Minor. Ephesus was a city of ¼ to ½ million people. Archaeologists have uncovered a Roman amphitheater which seated 25,000 people. The city was renowned for the Temple of Diana, the goddess of fertility.

**Ephesus** was a place of great spiritual perversion. In Acts chapter nineteen you read of Paul's efforts there:

1. The citizens were involved in the occult. The preaching of the gospel led to the burning of occultic books.
2. They were heavily involved in pornography. Diana was represented by statues and figurines of a multi-breasted woman. The Temple was supported by both male and female prostitutes. The preaching of the gospel led to the failure of the silversmiths who made the pornographic images of the goddess.

More important than the city was the **church** within it. The apostle Paul had spent three years there (Acts 19). Paul's disciple, Timothy, likely followed as pastor. Aquilla, Priscilla with Apollos ministered in **Ephesus** (Acts 18). The apostle John is believed to have ministered as a kind of 'pastor-at-large' in **Ephesus**.

It was thirty years since the church in **Ephesus** was founded. We've been a church going on twenty-two years. It doesn't take centuries to succeed or to slide. We must be vigilant.

Jesus described Himself using a phrase from chapter one. In each of the seven letters Jesus picks a different description of Himself from the seven different phrases of chapter one.

Jesus **holds the seven stars in His right hand**. What an encouragement for both pastor and people to know that Jesus holds the leadership of the church in His secure, firm grip.

At the same time it is a reminder that the church on earth belongs to the Lord. It is His church. It doesn't belong to the leaders or to the laity. It doesn't even exist for us, but for Him!

Jesus **walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands**. The **lampstands** represent the churches on earth. Jesus walks in the midst of His assembled church. He is omnipresent, but He is especially present with power in His church.

One reason He is present is to empower the messenger to deliver His message meeting-after-meeting. Another reason He is present is to open the ears of the hearers meeting-after-meeting.

Jesus commended His church:

**Revelation 2:2** "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

These darling believers were renowned for three virtues. The first was their **works**, described further by the word **labor**. It means *labor unto the point of weariness*. It means *strenuous, exhausting labor*. We're not sure what these works entailed. The emphasis seems to be on the fact that they were all involved serving in some capacity. Every member was doing something wonderful for Jesus. They were faithful, diligent, and conscientious servants.

The next of their virtues was **patience**. If you read about **Ephesus** in Acts you'll see that the believers faced fierce local opposition from nonbelievers. They were snubbed in public and maligned in private. Some of their businesses were failing from lack of customers. In other cases merchants refused to sell to them. They endured it all with **patience**.

Their third virtue was what we might call orthodoxy. It means they tenaciously held to and defended correct Bible doctrine. Jesus said

of them, **you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.** **Ephesus** had been targeted by false teachers claiming they were **apostles**. In verse six they are identified as **Nicolaitans**.

There are two theories on why they were called **Nicolaitans**:

1. Some early church fathers believed they were disciples of Nicolaus, who is mentioned in Acts 6:5 as one of the original seven deacons.
2. Others think it is a description of their basic beliefs. One possible rendering of the Greek word literally means, *laity (people) conqueror*.

What was their false doctrine? Because they are mentioned again in the letter to the church at Pergamos in connection with the Old Testament character Balaam some commentators say they were among those who were casting a stumbling block before the church of God by upholding the liberty of eating things sacrificed to idols as well as committing fornication.

Hippolytus, writing in the third century, said the Nicolaitans followed the Gnostic heresy. The basic error of Gnosticism was the belief in a secret, hidden, mystical knowledge of God that could only be arrived at through personal experience. They believed that the only thing that mattered was your spirit. The result was that you could live any way you wanted – using your body in all sort of perverse ways.

Others charge them with establishing a priesthood over believers; hence ‘conquering the laity’ – the people - by lording over them.

We don’t know for sure. It was probably a combination. Whether they derived from anyone named Nicolaus, they were those who lorded over the people claiming to have some deep, mystery knowledge of the truth. They lived perverted lifestyles while claiming to remain spiritual.

The point Jesus was emphasizing is that the believers at Ephesus would not put up with any false or aberrant teaching.



They exposed them as **liars**. We should always be loving, but we must speak the truth. There will always be winds of false doctrine blowing in and through the church. There will always be doctrines of demons. We can't all 'just get along.'

In verse six Jesus will say,

**Revelation 2:6** But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Jesus used strong words. He used strong words before His resurrection when dealing with the hypocritical Pharisees who were putting burdens on God's people. Strong words are sometimes necessary. *Souls hang in the balance!*

Just be sure you are taking a stand on an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Don't go all dogmatic about nonessentials.

**Revelation 2:3** and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

Jesus got superlative with them, restating their virtues. He added that it was all **for My name's sake**. It's an important comment. In a moment – in the next verse, to be exact – the Lord is going to charge them with leaving their love. The things they were doing were good; they were necessary. They were for **His name's sake**. They should always keep doing them.

It wasn't because they were doing these things that they left their first love. We must do these things, have these virtues, AND remain in first love with Jesus.

Jesus' words about leaving our first love are so amplified in our hearts that we sometimes don't hear His commendations.

One commentator I appreciate, John Phillips, summarizes Jesus' commendations as *tasks*, *truth*, and *testings*. I like summary words because they give us a quick way to measure ourselves.

How are we doing, individually and corporately, regarding **tasks**? Is there a work going on for the Lord? Are we strenuously laboring at it? Is everyone involved?

What about **truth**? Are we, both individually and corporately, upholding the essential doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith? Are we speaking the truth with love in order to correct error in our midst?

How are we doing in our **testings** – again both individually and corporately? Do we bear our trials and troubles with grace?

**I want to be a church to which Jesus could and does address these words of commendation on a daily basis.**

