

REVELATION – SERMON 5

THE STARS AND THE CANDLESTICKS

Revelation 1:12-20

INTRODUCTION

- We live in a day when churches are despised by the world, and disregarded by many professing Christians
- But that which is despised by man is treasured by God.
- In this study of Revelation 1, we are presented with a picture of the church that gives us insight into the nature of the church and its vital role in God's programme for this age.
- Today we will study the two elements that are associated with Christ in this vision: the seven candlesticks and the seven stars.
- In v.20, both of these are designated as a "mystery" – something hidden or unclear, but here revealed (cf. Ephesians 3:3-9; 5:32)
- The words "mystery" and "revelation" are counterparts.
- Verse 20 demonstrates an important principle in interpreting the symbols of Revelation. God's design is not to hide the meaning, but to reveal it, and most symbols are explained either within the book itself, or in other parts of the Scripture.
- There is no greater or more important institution on the face of the earth today than the church; Christ's presence, protection, guidance, nourishment and love is not promised to any group, organisation, government or nation, but only to His churches.
- Your relationship to Christ can be seen by your relationship to His church; if you have little regard for the church, you have little regard for Christ.
- In these verses we are given a vivid picture of the church and how precious it is to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. THE SEVEN STARS SHOW THE CHURCH'S LEADERSHIP

- A. These are the angels of the churches
 1. "Angel" (aggelos) means messenger, and can either be angelic spirits or human
 2. The strongest argument for these being literal angels is that John uses this word sixty-seven other times in Revelation, always referring to heavenly angels

3. On the other hand, this would be the only case in Scripture where a man was commanded to write to an angel
 4. Churches are nowhere else in the New Testament said to have angels through which God conveys messages to them; their messengers were always men (Philippians 2:25)
 5. This Greek word is used of human messengers elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24; 9:52; James 2:25).
 6. In Christ's letters to the angels (ch.2-3) they are addressed as members of the churches
 7. God's heavenly angels "do his commandments" (Psalm 103:20), yet these angels are blamed and held responsible for the failures of their churches (Revelation 2:4-5)
 8. The best interpretation is to view these angels as the pastors of the seven churches, to whom John wrote letters which they would convey to their churches
- B. These stars are in Christ's right hand
1. They are under His possession, protection and sovereign control
 2. Pastors are shepherds who lead the flock, mindful that the Chief Shepherd is their head to whom they must give account (1 Peter 5:1-4)
 3. False teachers are also described as stars, but they are not in the Lord's hands, they are "wandering stars" (Jude 13)
- C. Stars burn with great heat
1. Like John the Baptist, preachers should be "a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35)
 2. Like Epaphras, preachers should be "labouring fervently in prayers" (Colossians 4:12)
 3. Paul requested prayer that "I may open my mouth boldly" (Ephesians 6:18-19)
- D. Stars provide guidance for navigation
1. Pastors are shepherds who are to lead and guide their flocks (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3)
- E. Stars are most visible in the darkness of night (Romans 13:12)

II. THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS SHOW THE CHURCH'S LIGHT

- A. These are the seven churches of Asia Minor (v.11)

1. These should be understood as seven literal churches that existed in John's day
 2. They are also indicative of the state of various churches throughout history
 3. The churches do not represent seven consecutive periods of church history
 - a. This requires a spiritual hermeneutic, which is a departure from a literal, grammatical-historical interpretation.
 - b. Instead of exegesis (deriving doctrine out of the text), it requires eisegesis (forcing into the text a pre-conceived doctrine).
 - c. This teaching would destroy the concept of the imminent return of Christ, seeing He could not return until the Laodicean age
 - d. Churches in scripture are most often viewed and treated on an individual basis, rather than generally
 - e. It ignores the glorious history of the true churches that always existed, and takes the Protestant view that the true church ceased to exist for over 1000 years where Roman Catholicism is represented by the Thyatiran church
- B. The seven candlesticks hearken to the seven-branched candlestick (menorah) of the tabernacle
1. Imagery from the tabernacle is used throughout Revelation (Revelation 8:3-4)
 2. While the candlestick in the tabernacle was one piece, here there are seven distinct lampstands
- C. Christ is in the midst
1. After His resurrection He appeared in the midst of the church (John 20:19,26)
 2. He promises to dwell in the midst of His church that is gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20)
 3. He sings in the midst of the church (Hebrews 2:12)
 4. He promised His church, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20)
 5. He also "walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (Revelation 2:1)
 6. This shows the importance and centrality of the church to Christ
 7. As High Priest, Christ maintains the lampstands

- a. He lights them – the church is established and built by Christ (Matthew 16:18)
 - b. He observes them (Revelation 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15)
 - c. He supplies their oil – the Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17)
 - d. He trims them – purging them so they will produce more light (Leviticus 24:3-4; John 15:2)
- D. The church is to be a light to the world
- 1. By proclaiming the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4)
 - 2. By opposing error and unrighteousness (Ephesians 5:11)
 - 3. By godly conduct (Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:15-16; Titus 2:14)
- E. The continually burning lamp indicates service and readiness (Luke 12:35)
- 1. Many churches have let their lamps become dim
 - 2. Many that were once true churches have had their candlesticks removed and are no longer churches in God's sight (Revelation 2:5)

CONCLUSION

- 1. "The church is essential to the Christian, not because it brings him personal advancement or even inspiration, but because, with all its failures, it is an indispensable instrument for the redemption of the world." (Elton Trueblood)
- 2. It is the place where God is worshipped, where God's word is taught, where God's service is rendered, and where God's people fellowship
- 3. The first thing John saw was the candlesticks, but his attention was soon drawn from them to Christ
- 4. The church's role is not to bring glory to herself, but to glorify Christ, to draw all people to Him (Ephesians 3:21)
- 5. The metaphors of the church show how precious it to the Lord
- 6. The church is the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15); His building (Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5); His flock (1 Peter 5:1-4); the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27); the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27)
- 7. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25); will you also?