

# Lesson #2: Hear Christ's Call!

## *Seven Lessons of Revelation*

Revelation 3:14-22

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Wesley J. Gabel

Have you been afraid to read someone else's mail? I have been and I still am. I know if I put my finger into my children's letters, I would be in trouble. I can listen to them tell me what is in a letter, but I always do no more than deliver an unopened letter.

In contrast, I was struck by what Jesus said to his Apostle John. Jesus had John write letters to each of seven Asian churches. Each letter finished with these words:

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***  
(Revelation 2:7, 11, 29, 3:6, 13, 22)

Jesus intended that these individual letters be read by more than the involved church. He calls every ear to hear what was said to each church. Jesus did not want us to take just one of the seven letters, see its similarity to our situation and then draw some lessons. He wants us to hear what the Spirit says to all these churches. In some way, all these churches mirror our reality; and in some way, Jesus' word to them is a call to us.

At Bethany this summer, we are setting aside seven Sundays to examine *Seven Lessons of Revelation*. Obviously, there are more than seven things to learn from the book of Revelation.

However, the seven key lessons we will draw from Revelation will strengthen your heart, sensitize your eyes and open your ears to the reality God unveils.

Lesson #1 is to see who is among you. *Christ walks among us as an awesome and intensely passionate ruler who is unparalleled in power and resolve.* Things are happening in your midst now because Jesus walks among us. Our king who walks among us is neither impotent nor indifferent. His eyes blaze with passion, and he is acting now. Look for him.

The second truth resounds in message after message the Spirit says to the churches. Let's look at those messages.

Jesus created a five-fold pattern in his letters to the seven churches. First, he identified himself as the speaker by a feature of his. He mentioned his eyes, his feet, his position and so on. Second, he told the church what was right with them. He offered a commendation. Only one church, Laodicea, did not receive a commendation. Third, Jesus addressed something wrong. He rebuked them. Two of the churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, received no rebuke. Both churches endured terrible persecution. Fourth, Jesus called the churches to some action. Finally, he spoke of reward.

There is another important truth. Jesus did not address the individual congregations or house-churches within the seven cities. He addressed the believing presence in each city as one church with one angel over it. In other words, we do not go far enough if we attempt to apply this lesson to Bethany Church. Those who carry the name of Jesus and his gospel in this city include Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Protestants of all kinds, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics. That is our church... even if we rebel and never assemble as one. Therefore, Jesus' words must guide us in this wider relationship.

In the blue-colored insert, I listed the seven churches. I omitted how Jesus identified himself and what reward he promised. I did summarize his commendation, rebuke and call.

As we listen to what the Spirit says to the churches, there is a call of first importance. It is our connection with Jesus. Jesus chose to address Ephesus first and Laodicea last. In both those churches, he focused on their relationship with him.

Although the believers in Ephesus rigorously held to Jesus' teachings, they were guided more by moral teaching than a passionate love flowing from a vital relationship with Christ. Jesus warned them that he would remove them from Ephesus. They would not be the light for the city. He called to them to remember the height from which they've fallen. Once they were so convicted of their idolatry and reliance on sorcery that they created a huge bonfire and burned their books in repentance. They tasted forgiveness and were filled with joy. At times, they saw the name Jesus heal all kinds of diseases. They were thrilled with the presence of Jesus. Now they substituted teaching for his presence. They were obedient, but distant and impotent witnesses. Jesus called to them: "Do what you did at first." He was saying, seek me, not just my word. Brothers and sisters, those of us who read and study the Bible, do a good thing. The word can wash our minds clean of so much error. However, if we gather to hear the word, rather than see his face, if we substitute a written note for his full presence, we still reject Christ. We miss the fire that comes from meeting with him.

Jesus closed his call to the churches with his letter to Laodicea. Laodicea's northern neighbor, Hierapolis, had famous hot springs. Its southern neighbor, Colosse, had refreshing cool water; however, a six-mile aqueduct that exposed the lazy flow to outside temperatures brought water to Laodicea. By the time the water arrived in Laodicea, it neither warmed nor cooled

anybody. It mirrored its environment. Similarly, Jesus told the Laodiceans:

***I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*** (Rev 3:15-16, NIV)

I'm reminded of Jesus's words when he preached from a mountain in Palestine. He called believers the salt of the earth, and then he warned them that salt which loses its savor is useless. It neither affects taste nor preserves. It's worthless and thrown away. Jesus also called his disciples the light of the world, but a light hidden under a basket helps no one. If our light burns at the same brightness as our environment, if it does not roar in passionate fire or brighten through a powerful current, what does it offer? What hunger will it create? Who will be converted? How will God revealed? Jesus said:

***Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*** (Matthew 5:16, NIV)

Reading that, we may be tempted to work harder, but that is not Jesus' call. Jesus told the Laodiceans that he loves them and disciplines them. He told them that he stands at the door of their hearts knocking, waiting for them to open up where they can eat and share together. The problem is estrangement. The question is "are you close to Jesus?" Are you fired by his presence in your life? Are you being healed and growing in passionate love? Do you need to encounter God? Good news. He's knocking at your door. Open it. Welcome him.

Now let's think as a church. Is Jesus knocking on our corporate door? Have we substituted his word for his presence? Where are we as the church of Rochester?

There was a time in my life when nothing but the presence of Jesus mattered. I remember how we were all shaken and filled with his love at a church camp. I remember later how we

formed a 24-prayer vigil as youth to seek Jesus. Before the 24 hours was up, there was a visitation by angels. Some adults at camp were afraid of this emotionalism in their youth and so they filled our heads with skepticism. Do we really want to know Jesus and let him show us the world? I do. I want my eyes blazing with his passion. I want my feet glowing like bronze in a furnace because I have been standing where he stands. I'm willing to be misunderstood, ridiculed and seen as undignified.

Jesus called to his followers that were put down and opposed. He commended them. He told the believers in Smyrna and Philadelphia to stay faithful, hold on; vindication will come. Brothers and sisters, if you're put down because of your faith, you will be vindicated. Jesus walks among us, his love for you is intense; it won't be long.

Jesus had tough words for us believers who compromise to gain acceptance and approval. He warned us who tolerate compromise and say nothing. Silence may be golden, but it is also deadly. Love is not compromise. Love is commitment to value and sacrifice. You don't have to approve someone's ideas or behavior to love them. They don't have to receive your love for you to continue to love them. Your heavenly Father suffers heart-break over his rebellious, unbelieving, wayward children. As his children, and as siblings of those who reject him, why wouldn't we share in his suffering? Why wouldn't we too be misunderstood and maligned?

Do you hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches? First, see Christ among you. Second, hear Christ's call to reconnect with him personally. Third, stay with Christ's teaching even as it is compromised and abandoned by others. Fourth, speak up. You're Christ's witness. Speak up and act in love... even when you're rejected. The day of validation, the day of vindication, the day of reward will soon come.