

LET THEM HEAR

Revelation 2:7,11,17,26-29; 3:5,12,21

Years ago one of the strong emphases in the business and industrial world was on proper communication. Many times when problems happened an analysis of the problem came to the conclusion “What we have is a communication problem.” Passing along the right information and receiving that information was a lot more difficult fifty years ago than it is today. We had radio and TV, photocopying of documents was beginning to be more easily accessible, and people went to a lot of meetings. The purpose, of course, was communication. Now we have the internet, computers, smart phones, copy machines everywhere, and we still have a communication problem.

Back in the days prior to World War II, a little known Austrian radical wrote a book entitled *Mein Kampf* that was an autobiographical manifesto by National Socialist leader Adolf Hitler, in which he outlined his political ideology and future plans for Germany. Very few people paid attention to what he said and that failure to receive the communicated information led to global chaos and the loss of millions of lives.

How many times have we listened to someone and then asked the question to someone who was also there, “Did you hear what he said?” That may seem like a silly question since the person was there with us. However, many times we hear something and fail to really get the message.

We can go all the way back to the first century and we find that many times the communication problem is not a problem with sending the information but is a failure to receive it and really hear it. Even God encountered the problem of a failure on the part of people to hear and heed the messages He was sending to the world and even to those who were part of the church. In Christ’s messages to the early churches in the Revelation we see a repeated emphasis or encouragement to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In our present study we will be focusing on parts of the messages to seven of the churches in the Asia Minor area. The various letters generally followed a format of Description of the Author, Commendation, Reproof, Advice, Warning, Additional Commendation, Exhortation to hear, and a Promise. Not all of them had a commendation and not all had a reproof but all were encouraged to hear and all had a promise given to them.

Promise of Life – 2:7, 11, 17

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’ (Ephesus)

¹¹ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’ (Smyrna)

¹⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’ (Pergamum) Revelation 2:7,11,17 (NASB95)

One of the foundations passages of the Old Testament that was known by practically every Israelite was from Deuteronomy 6:4 which is called the Shema. It called for those who are God’s people to hear Him with an intent to understand and obey. We find this same emphasis in the final book of the Bible that tells us the continuing importance of knowing God and what He expects.

There is a definite linkage between hearing (so as to obey) what God tells us and having victory in the way we live. We can find that in the Old Testament in such passages as Deuteronomy 28 when we see victory in the physical realm related to keeping God’s

commandments. In the New Testament this linkage is related to victory in our spiritual lives and it starts with hearing God's message to the churches (born again children of God) given through the Holy Spirit. We can recall how John in 1 John 5:4 linked those who were born again with being victorious and that "the victory that overcomes the world is our faith." To complete the hearing-victory linkage, we simply toss in Paul's statement from Romans 10:17 where we see "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

In all seven of the letters each promise was directed toward those who were victorious. The implication from the verb form of the Greek word "nike" (which is a present participle) tells us that the promises are for those who are experiencing or participating in the victory in an ongoing manner. Another way of stating this is to say that these promises are for the faithful.

As we have frequently noted, the Old Testament promised physical blessings or benefits and we can see in the promises recorded by John spiritual blessings or benefits. The first promise is stated by Christ to be "permission to eat of the tree of life" in the Paradise of God. What is the result of eating of the tree of life? It would seem obvious that the most straightforward answer is that the outcome is eternal life. Who has eternal life? The answer has to be those who are born of the Spirit of God. In this context, the promise is really an affirmation of what we already have in Christ as a result of our salvation.

This same idea is implied in the promise to the church at Smyrna that assured the faithful that they would not be harmed by the second death. It is likely that the promise was stated that way for them since some in that area were being physically killed for being Christians. Just as we have seen in recent events in the Middle East with ISIS, those who profess Christ and will not deny Him have been martyred. The benefit of eating of the tree of life is eternal life and the benefit of eternal life is that Christians will not experience spiritual death or being cut off from God.

For the church at Pergamos, the promise was two fold. The first benefit was "hidden manna." Again we have a reference to the Old Testament provision of God for His people in the daily supply of manna to feed them. Considering the spiritual implications of this seems like an obvious reference to Jesus who identified Himself as the Bread of Life. In John 6:33 we see "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Here we are shown the physical world event of a substance that could be eaten to sustain physical life and the parallel spiritual world reality of the true "manna from heaven" that is the provider of spiritual life to all who will receive Him.

It may be that "hidden manna" is also a reference to spiritual truths that are available to us in the written word of God. It would be "hidden" from the world since those who are of the world system either cannot understand spiritual truths since the "gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing" or they simply will not acknowledge the existence of a spiritual realm.

The second provision mentioned for Pergamos was a white stone. There is no clear explanation in the Scriptures as to what this is related. Some speculations are that in a trial by jury, the votes were cast by the jurors have a white stone and a black stone. They would use the white stone for acquittal and the black stone to vote for guilty. We could think of the "white stone" as our salvation as what is described in Ephesians 2:8-9. "It is by grace that we are saved through faith, etc." The white stone is God's vote for our justification.

Some have suggested that the white stone was used as an "admission ticket" to feasts or other events that people might attend and that the white stone that we receive is our ticket to heaven.

What is even more mysterious is that stone has a name written on it that no one knows

except the one who received the stone. The name written on the stone is thought by some to be representative of the new character or nature that each Christian has as described in 2 Cor 5:17 which tells us “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Another possibility is that the “name” is a reference to the character (name) of God or Christ. In this context, it would be indicative of the new relationship that a believer has with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The allusion to it being hidden could be related to what we see in the exchange between Christ and His disciples in John 14:19-24. Jesus told them that the world would no longer see Him, but they would see Him. This prompted a question of how could He show Himself to them and be hidden from the world. The answer to that was “My Father and I will come and make our abode with those who love Me.” This, of course, was about the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in each believer.

Promise of Life (Continued) – 3:5,12

⁵ ‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

¹² ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. Revelation 3:5,12 (NASB95)

Those who are familiar with the “end of the book” have noticed a correspondence with the promises for those who live victoriously and the descriptions given regarding those who are residents of the heavenly city (the new Jerusalem that comes down from God out of Heaven). The white garments are mentioned in connection with the martyrs in chapter six and with the wife of the Lamb and the heavenly armies in chapter nineteen. Jesus mentioned the need to be “properly dressed” in the parable of the guests who were invited to the wedding feast (see Matt 22:1-14). In Paul’s letters he made frequent references to a result of our salvation being like taking off an old garment and putting on a new one. We remember some of those: exchange works of darkness for the armor of light and corruptible mortality replaced with incorruptible immortality. We are to put on the new man created in righteousness and holiness (connection to the purity of a white garment), put on Christ, put on the whole armor of God, and put on love.

The obvious implication of not erasing the names of those who are victorious from the Book of Life would be the doctrine of the “security of the believer.” Some have compared the Book of Life to the citizenship role for Heaven or the Kingdom of God. Those who have been born again of the Spirit of God are listed in the Book of Life. Those who attempt to come in by any other means would not be found in the Book. The confession of the name of those who overcome by Christ before the Father could simply be a confirmation that their name was in the Book which was mentioned in the prophecy of Daniel (7:10) and later in the judgment scene in Rev 20:12. This promise is also directly related to the words of Christ in Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8.

Those who overcome and live victoriously provide the stability in the church which is some times called the temple of God. The picture of a pillar in the temple was mentioned for the church in Philadelphia. This region experienced frequent earthquakes which would require that buildings (such as a temple) have a good foundation and strong pillars to withstand the shaking caused by earthquakes. In the same way, the church needs to have people who are strong in their faith to withstand the persecution and the shaking associated with the judgment of God on the world.

Some have noticed that this particular promise apparently has no counterpart in the new

Jerusalem since there is no such sanctuary. However we see in Rev 21:22 that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the city. Since we are “in Christ” then we do have permanent place in the temple.

Each pillar will have the name of God and the city of God written on him or her. Since the concept of “the name” is related to “character or fundamental nature,” then we can expect to be able to see or recognize Christians as being like God and His Church. This can be contrasted with those who are associated with the world system who have the name or number of the “beast” written on them. Since no one expects a physical mark to be on those who are in the Kingdom of God, then why would we expect to see a physical mark on those who have the mark of the beast?

Promise of Purpose – 2:26-29, 3:21

^{2:26} ‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; ²⁷ AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ (Thyatira)

^{3:21} ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Laodicea) Revelation 2:26-29, 3:21 (NASB95)

God saved us for a purpose. The “how” of our salvation is summarized in Ephesians 2:8-9. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Following in verse ten we find the answer to “why” God saved us. We were saved “to do good works.”

We can generate an unending list of good works with which we could be involved. Many of these good works on the typical list we find are related to helping others and growing closer to God in our spiritual walk.

In the letter to the church at Thyatira we see a spiritual work that God has for us to do that is related to “powers and principalities” in the spiritual realm. Here we find an Old Testament messianic reference from the second Psalm which David saw the “anointed of the Lord” having victory over the kings of the earth. My guess is that David saw himself in that role in the physical realm. If we look for the spiritual significance of this passage, then it is obviously related to Christ and the Kingdom of God overcoming the kingdoms of the world system.

How will this victory over the “powers and principalities” be implemented? God the Father granted the authority to rule the nations to Christ. We see that Christ has granted to the church (believers) the authority to carry out this mission. Not only has the authority been granted, there is a promise of victory in the battle. This is the meaning of verse 28 regarding the morning star. The Romans regarded the morning star (planet Venus) to be a symbol of victory and sovereignty and it was used on their battle flags.

This same idea of shared authority is seen in the passage from the letter to the church at Laodicea. Christ was granted to sit down with the Father on His throne and we are, likewise, granted sit down with Christ on His throne. Christ alluded to this concept in the parable of the talents as we can see starting in Matthew 25:14. “The kingdom of heaven is like a man going on journey and entrusted what he had to his servants.” You know the rest of the story. Some were faithful in carrying on with the business of the owner and one was not faithful.

A legitimate question that we should ask at this point is “how is that part of the work of the Kingdom of God coming along?” We can think of various attempts of the church getting involved in how things are done in the world. There was strong influence of the Roman Catholics in the political realm of Europe for more than twelve hundred years that came to an

end around A.D. 1800. This influence was wielded by the religious leaders becoming part of a coalition of governments and church that was more worldly or political than it was spiritual. The growth of worldwide evangelism followed this time and significant impact of the gospel was made in the world. An attempt to physically impact the political processes was made about fifty years ago with movements such the “Moral Majority.” However, as we know there is little influence being exerted effectively in this area today.

It seems that we are really not hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. It would appear that in many cases that what we are battling is the physical expression of ungodly influence in the world. We see the symptoms and the people who are promoting ungodliness as the problem. We are attempting to fight the battle on the enemy’s turf and we are not seeing a lot of the promised victories. The key to victory is to conduct the battle in such a way that we have a decided advantage. The battle is spiritual and we have the assurance that “greater is He Who is in us than he who is in the world.” The victory is ultimately won in the prayer closet as we realize that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”