

Revelation Series – “The Letters/Sermons of Jesus”
Chapter 2:1-7 – Letter/Sermon to Ephesus

Revelation 2-3 – Seven Letter/Sermons to Seven Churches

1 – Number 7 – God’s number – Eternal realities – “complete” – in other words, seven LITERAL churches in actual places and seven FIGURATIVE churches that span time

2 – “Churches” – ekklesia – gatherings, communities, no buildings, no leadership, bands, liturgies...just Jesus followers organized by gifts and callings of the Spirit

3 - In these letters (traditionally called) - Jesus is addressing his people (that’s why they have now become seen by most scholars as what they are – sermons, messages, “oracles” – prophetic consistency – comfort, challenge, repentance, promise of new life)

- These oracles are primary sources for showing us the challenges and tensions that each of John’s congregations were facing (in addition to the pressure and problems that accompanied being part of the Roman culture)
- They also spell out how John is encouraging these congregations to respond
- They do provide rich example of the use of biblical prophecy
- In Chapter 1 – Jesus is walking among the lampstands (by the way, image of light to the world would not have been lost on his audience)
- Jesus knows who we are and what we are doing
- Application point here – you cannot “FOOL” the Lord
- Jesus sees things, lives, community of faith from different perspective than our own
- We are tempted to compare ourselves to other churches/Christians

That is NOT God’s agenda – God has a Kingdom agenda that cannot be based on our comparisons

There is a UNIQUE challenge to every Christ follower and every gathered community of faith

4 – So, here’s the question – how would Jesus address our gathering?

How would Jesus address you? What would HE see? Point out? Reveal? Challenge?

5 – Each letter/sermon/oracle has a specific format:

- 1) Command for John to write – divine dictation on scholar noted – Angels (human figures, guardian angels, metaphor for the churches themselves)
- 2) Statement of who Jesus is (drawn from chapter 1) - Who is addressing them, commanding them, confronting them, calling for specific responses, actually presenting consequences

- 3) Affirmation/Exhortation/Rebuke/Challenges – Jesus knows the challenges each faces and what they have been doing to act on those challenges - pros/cons if you will – law/gospel – gets attention because it is so “pointed” to uniqueness each church faces – each faith community has endurance/perseverance challenge
- 4) Promise for faithfulness – what faithfulness looks like to each church – many of these look forward to the future God has in store (end of the book)
- 5) Decisional challenge to faithfulness – said first couple of weeks, urgency and decisional character, here it is – this isn’t a game, aren’t playing church – there are eternal consequences at play - LISTEN UP!

Consistent with Jesus’ gospel teachings (“if you have ears to hear” – many times in gospels)

LET’S continue with some life application...ok?

6 – Now there is a **purpose** behind these letters – Jesus wants to address the condition of the heart – the heart of the 7 churches, in this instance, Ephesus but also of YOUR heart and my heart

Jesus wants to tell them with utter candor, where they're working well, where they're on track, and where the warning lights are on.

2:1 - "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write"

- It's possible that angel, "angelos" means messenger or leader of the communities
- Or it could be an angel that oversees the community of faith, guarding it and so on.

2:1 - "Write: These are the words of the ONE who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the ONE who walks among the seven golden lampstands...says this..."

Description of Jesus straight from chapter 1

- Jesus is the Lord of Lords – He desires to address us – Lord of “heaven and earth”
- Jesus is reminding them/us what a precious thing the Church (people of faith) is to God.
- Grammatical note...on word HOLD - John, when he uses the verb "hold," uses a real strong verb "kraton" – “to hold on with power, to seize, to retain”...in other words, these aren’t going anywhere
- What that means is Jesus is holding the whole cosmos in his hand. He holds the entire church in his hand. He holds every church in his hand...nothing going to change that.
- Isn’t that amazing? Don’t you need to know that when you are facing life?

2:2-3 "I know your deeds and your labor, your patience, your perseverance (Christians do experience hardship – James 1:2-4) your toil. I know your patient endurance. I know you can't tolerate evildoers/evil people...these people have a high character – internal fortitude, resist falsehood – hanging on tightly to the Lord

“and that you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you have found them to be false...” this is Pauline-esque – must have been a HUGE problem in antiquity with spiritual posers, spiritual charlatans, Judaizers in Paul’s time.

And he goes on to say, ***"and you have perseverance and have endured on account of my name and have not become weary/I know that you're bearing up for the***

sake of my name and are enduring patiently and that you have not grown weary."

Question - What is the affirmation of Jesus for this church in Ephesus?

EXTREMELY high praise! Here are these people in a hostile environment and they are holding on to Jesus AND they are growing AND they are getting harassed and staying faithful AND, here's a bit one, they are serving one another tirelessly

You see, the idea here has not only to do with growing FAITH but also with action – in that that they have not grown weary of serving the Lord

These are people that are being commended by John because they diligently serve God through their faith communities

So, I'd like to ask you to consider at this point, would Jesus say to me, would he say to you what he says to those at Ephesus, "I know your works. I know your toil."

2:4 - Well, after Jesus tells this church who he is, he commends the church at Ephesus for their work and toil...I mean they get it - but as said, every church gets encouraged AND exhorted/challenged (very serious warning) Look at verse four. This is what Christ says to the church:

"But I have this against you, that you have left/lost your first love."

Question - what does that mean to you?

Friends, here's my opinion on this – those words are some of the saddest and most poignant words, I think, in all the Bible.

- Jesus is basically saying, "You put in lots of hours. You're zealous for the truth. You don't tolerate false teaching. You know a lot of doctrine. You're heavily involved in Christian service, but something in your heart has died. “
- “There's a hardness and a coldness about you. You've lost your first love."

At Ephesus there was a time when love flowed like water....but now, ONE Statement says it all...it has all be left behind, lost...misplaced...essentially, you might think this is a bit extreme but this love issue is a big deal

Question – how does that happen? How do you lose love? How do you keep it fresh, kindled?

Let me ask you to be real honest just between you and God:

Where are you with your FIRST love? That love of Jesus?

Is it fresh...strong...growing...or have you lost your first love?

Do you find that Christianity has become more about things you do than a relationship that gives you life?

Do you find that you have more love in your heart for a host of other things in your life...yeah, Jesus is important but you find yourself squeezing him into what really is of utmost importance to you

And what is REALLY going on in your heart? You know, Jesus knows...He sees it, he really does

Jesus says, vs. 5 “Therefore” (comment) “Remember, remember from where you have fallen...the heights from which you have fallen.”

Spiritual heights – the intensity of love and passion for Jesus

Question - When did you have some spiritual “height” that even today you recall as a precious time?

Rhetorical question - You know how easy it is to have love wane, don’t you?

You know how easy it is to get so busy in life and have so much time pass that you end up feeling cold and hallow?

I’ve seen it friends...I’ve witnessed cold, dead hearts in marriages and families that were created to be passionate and loving...I’ve witnessed cold, dead hearts in people who have trusted in God’s grace and love and followed Jesus all their lives...only to see their hearts empty and their lives in Christ filled more with criticism, anger, resentment, and fear or worse, apathy...

How easy it can be to lose your first love...that’s why Jesus follows up his words with the challenge -

The Challenge vs. 5 – “Repent, and do the deeds/things you did at first.”

That's why we do what we do...some people wonder why we do a confession weekly...not because we are gluttons for punishment but rather so that we can come back to the basics of Jesus and His amazing love for us

That’s why we have holy communion. That's why we do it so regularly. We come back to the cross, just as we did at first, and remember what is most basic

That’s why we sing old songs, new songs, whatever expression of music we can that touches our hearts...for some, the old songs remind them of that first love...for others, it is new songs that stirs something so deep

“Jesus loves me, this I know” ...we just come back to that again and again.

So, where are you with your “First love?” Maybe you need to repent.

Maybe you need to acknowledge to God, "I've lost my first love. My heart is kind of cold towards you."

Maybe you need to repent to some people and ask forgiveness because you haven't loved as you should.

Maybe you need to return to what you did at first, unhurried times of prayer, sincere confession of sin, open-hearted reading of Scripture, freely offered acts of service. Is this a minus or a plus for you, this first love?

2:5 – So, that’s why this letter and every letter in these two chapters, ends with a decision time...“**THEREFORE**”...application and action

- 1 – See how far you have fallen...what happened to leave your first love?
- 2 – Repent – turn around
- 3 – Do what you did at first – *Question - what rekindles lost love?*

2:5 – Warning – “***or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place-unless you repent***” – that should get our attention! Jesus wants you to know this is serious!

2:6 – “***But you have this – you hate (harsh word) the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.***”

An Early Church Father, Irenaeus said, “they are followers of a man named, Nicolaus, unrestrained indulgence”

Another Church Father, Hippolytus claimed that they were a PROTO-Gnostic group

2:7 – “***The One who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***”
LISTEN and hear – where is your heart?

2:7 – Promise – “***To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which in in the paradise of God***” - tree of life – source of life – deeper reality, deeper country – back to Eden, restoration of the promise.