

## Letters from Jesus: Ephesus!

### Revelation 2:1-7

Things have a tendency to change over time. Do you remember the excitement of going to the mailbox and finding a letter addressed to you? Now we open our inbox to find dozens of emails sent to us...no excitement at all.

Words over time change as well. Take the word Christian for example. Much of Europe is referred to as Christian countries when in fact there are very few Christians living there.

The word in America can mean many things to many different people. For some it includes all brands of Christians...like Catholics, Lutherans, Methodist...pretty normal right...Pentecostals, Baptists, non-denominational...how about Mormon, Jehovah's witness.

We added the descriptor, Evangelical, to clarify that we are a part of the Christian community that believes in Jesus as being the only way to God in salvation. And even that word is being used by some

in a broader sense, even applying it to a part of a political belief.

Just as the meanings of words drift, so can beliefs within the church. This tendency is one of the big themes within the 7 letters to the 7 churches in Revelation.

5 of these churches are rebuked for tolerating sin in their midst and every church since then has had to deal with that natural drift toward worldliness.

Over the next couple months, we will take a look at each of the 7 letters of Revelation. Each of these letters were sent by Jesus and each letter shares the same basic structure. Each letter contains a correspondent, a church, a city, a commendation, a concern, a command and counsel.

Let's take a look at the first 3 elements to get started:

#### I. The Correspondent, The Church & The City

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

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."

The correspondent, Jesus, is writing each of these letters to the angel of one of the churches. In this case it is the angel of the church in Ephesus. Now, the word angel in Greek can also be translated “messenger” so who Jesus is addressing here is the messenger or pastor of the church in Ephesus.

The 7 stars being referred to are all 7 pastors, one from each of the churches being addressed.

The church and city being addressed here is Ephesus. Ephesus was the most powerful city in Asia Minor. Pergamum was the capital, but the Roman Governor lived in Ephesus. You might think of it like Minneapolis and St. Paul. St. Paul is the capital, but Minneapolis is larger and more influential.

The church in Ephesus was the church served by Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. Paul served there on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey for 3 years and in the book of Acts we see Paul call for the elders to come meet with him just prior to his going to Jerusalem where he would be arrested.

That encounter was powerful and demonstrated the impact of his ministry and relationship with this church and these leaders.

## II. The Commendation

Revelation 2:2-3, “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.”

This is the good news. The Ephesians worked hard and persevered. They demonstrated patience in trying circumstances. They refused to tolerate evil men when most would let it slip or just plain ignore the sin.

They exercised their spiritual discernment with those who would have led the church astray. And in all of this they did not grow weary.

Remember the warning in:

Matthew 7:15, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

John, the author of Revelation, also told us in:

2 John 10, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.”

We are too often worried about being a “nice” Christian when we should be worried about being a “true” Christian. A true Christian doesn’t open the door to false teaching which means we don’t open the door to the false teacher, keep them out.

A matter of fact, we should know it’s ok to even hate some. Notice this in the letter to the Ephesian Church in:

Revelation 2:6, “But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

There are things that people do that Jesus hates and we should hate. We don’t know what the Nicolaitans were doing, but it wasn’t good. Whatever this practice was it led to immorality and wickedness. The Nicolaitans are also mentioned in the letter to Pergamum which we will look at in a couple weeks. That church allowed them in the church to their detriment.

### III. The Concern

Revelation 2:4, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”

They lost their first love. To understand what that love was like, look at this from the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15, “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people,”

Ephesians 3:17-19, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 6:23-24, “Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.”

This church was built on the love of Jesus. Now, fast forward about 40 years and the issue is they lost this first love.

They were busy doing the work of the church. They were keeping out the false doctrine. THEY WERE DOING EVERYTHING RIGHT. They were just doing it out of some sense of duty and not out of love for Jesus.

How many churches are like this today? Are we like this today?

Do we serve out of obligation, without love? Do you come to church out of obligation, but are dry inside?

Over and over this past year we have spoken about the great commandment, to love God with our whole heart, soul and mind.

We have read Jesus' words in Matthew 10 about hating father and mother in comparison to our love for Christ.

The Ephesian church lost their first love, how are we doing holding onto our first love? And if, just if, we have lost that first love it doesn't mean we can't find it again. That is what Jesus is asking the church in Ephesus to do, get back your first love.

Here's how:

#### IV. The Command

Revelation 2:5, "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

When Jesus says consider how far you have fallen, He is telling you to **remember** where you were.

Remember when you were in love with Him. This applies to every relationship, doesn't it?

If you don't see that spark, that love in your relationship with your spouse you need to remember why you fell in love in the first place.

This is what Jesus asked us to do when we come to communion. He told us to remember. Once you remember, you need to turn in that direction again. This is called **repentance**.

Remember, failure to love God is sin. It's the violation of the greatest commandment. Failure to repent came with a warning that without repentance one was in danger of having their lampstand removed.

Once you repent, Jesus told them to do the things you did at first. Do you know what those things are?

Bible study, prayer, worship passionately. Maybe even tell people about this great gift you found.

You see, Jesus' goal wasn't discipline, it was restoration.

So, how did the Ephesian church do? Jesus told them if they didn't return to their first love He would come and remove the lampstand. What is the lampstand? It's the church.

Where is the church in Asia Minor today? Has their lampstand been removed?

#### V. The Counsel

Revelation 2:7, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

The victorious is the overcomer. Will you be an overcomer?

Again, John, the author of Revelation writes in:

1 John 5:4-5, "for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the

world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Will you eat from the tree of life? Will you be an overcomer? The gift of this is eternal life.

When Scripture uses those words, "Whoever has ears, let them hear" we need to pay really close attention to what is being taught. So, what is the lesson of Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus?

Being correct theologically is important, but it doesn't make up for having a cold heart.

Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Who does your heart belong to? We asked this question last week and it is still the very core of our faith. Who does your heart belong to?