

To The Church

Letters from the book of Revelation

All Out Of Love

Today's Text - Revelation 2:1-7

Context/Introduction

- Read Revelation 2:1

From last week's text, we discovered that John, one of Jesus' apostles, had been given a profound revelation of Jesus, at a time when he and the broader church really needed it. Jesus also instructed him to write to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Western Turkey). The seven churches were a collection of churches in the Roman province of Asia, which were being threatened by false teaching, persecution, compromise with surrounding paganism (through immorality and idolatry), as well as by spiritual complacency (Crossway, 2008). Some scholars believe that these seven churches are symbolic of end-time events but, as it is not really clear from the text, we will focus our attention on those parts that are clear.

The first church mentioned was that in Ephesus. The city was a major port city, with about 250 000 residents, and one of the largest and most influential cities in the entire Roman Empire. Due to its location, it became a center of international trade, finance and communications. It had everything one could need, as well as lots and lots to impress, along with the enormous temple of Artemis (the goddess of fertility), who was the most important deity in the city. Ephesus was also the 'center of the practice of magic and occult arts' (Longman, 2013) and considered spiritually tolerant.

The church had been a point of focus and development, particularly for Paul, who spent two years teaching there, and as a result, it became a center for church planting and leadership. But tragically, the church in Ephesus did not remain on this trajectory. Today, there is no sign of significant church growth. What once was has now gone. Jesus warned the churches in this letter, but they didn't heed the warning, and so he removed them.

So although this letter is not directed to us specifically, we can and should learn from what happened to the church in Ephesus.

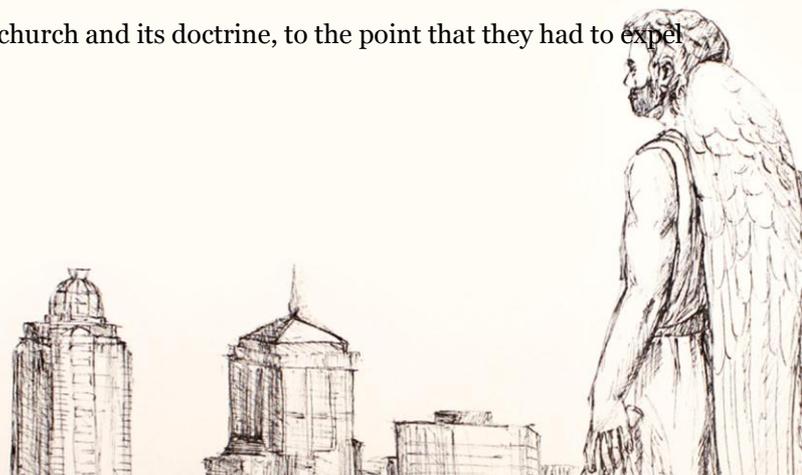
1. Jesus Sees, Knows and Rewards:

- Read Revelation 2:2-3

The realization that Jesus is all-seeing and all-knowing can be somewhat unnerving for us. We automatically think about all of the things we think, say and do that others don't know about, and feel full of shame. But at the same time, it can also be encouraging to know that Christ sees all of the faithfulness and small unseen efforts that honour him.

He saw the following good in the Ephesian church:

- Faith that works - they were living out what they believed in concrete ways.
- Faith that toils –their intense and faithful service was compared to that of manual labour – really hard work.
- Faith that endures – they stayed faithful to Christ in and through terrible persecution. They did not give up on God when circumstances pressed in on them.
- Faith that separates – they could not tolerate evil and turned away from it, and they did not tolerate evil in their own lives.
- Faith that fights – they fought for the purity of the church and its doctrine, to the point that they had to expel false teachers from their church.



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Q. Why is it encouraging for us to know that Christ sees all of the unseen faithfulness we sow into his kingdom?

Q: Which of the aspects of the Ephesians' faith (a faith that works, toils, endures, separates & fights) would also be true of you at the moment?

Q: Do you hold on to your faith when circumstances are dire. Or do you get angry, shake your fist at God, and give up?

Q: What do you think it would look like for us, in our daily routine, to separate ourselves from evil (ungodly living that affronts God)? Is this something you are known for or are you someone who blends so well into the culture that you are not known as a Christian?

Q: How would you feel if someone were "expelled" from our church for being a false teacher (teaching doctrine that is not clearly taught in scripture)? Would you want to protect the false teacher (to be 'religiously tolerant') or protect the purity and doctrine of the church, and why?

2. Jesus Opposes Empty and Loveless Service

- Read Revelation 2:4

Though the Ephesians were still faithfully working out their faith, God could see that their hearts had lost their passion and fervor for him. They had grown aloof and disconnected. This, Jesus held against them.

As a thriving church, we are most at risk for this very issue. Though collectively, we are committed to the church and serving faithfully, we do not have the zeal, affection and love for God and his people that we should. Our hearts are just not in it, which is not ok with God.

Things that cause us to lose our love for Christ include:

- Replacement – we love the good things that God has given us more than we love God.
- Rebellion – our love of sin makes our hearts grow cold towards God. It also makes our hearts cold towards others because we have to be deceitful in order to continue loving and holding on to our sin.
- Neglect – we do not spend time fueling our affections for God, and then months down the line we wonder why we do not feel much for God.
- Forgetfulness – we forget the significance of our sin, and we forget how much Christ has done for us.
- Fatigue – we either have such busy lives that we cannot find any time to invest into God and his people, or we are tired of serving and want a break. Our priorities reveal where our hearts are towards God and his church.

Q. Why is it important for us, when we look at what God had against the Ephesian church, to realize that they were actually doing well and being faithful in the ministry?

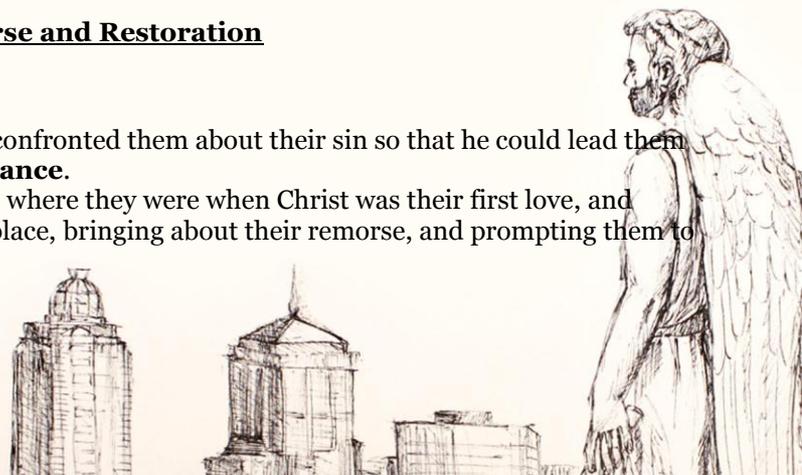
Q. Are you more prone to losing your love for Christ through replacing him with other affections, or through your love of your own sin?

3. Repentance Involves Remembrance, Remorse and Restoration

- Read Revelation 2:5

God did not leave the Ephesians with a pointed finger. He confronted them about their sin so that he could lead them back to him. This would come about through their **repentance**.

For the Ephesians, repentance would involve remembering where they were when Christ was their first love, and acknowledging how far their hearts had slipped from that place, bringing about their remorse, and prompting them to return to him.



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Q. Why is it important for us to grasp that repentance is more than just confession, but rather involves remembrance, remorse and restoration?

Q: If you are in the same space as the Ephesian church, and have lost your passion and zeal for Christ, what is repentance going to look like for you in your particular situation?

4. Great Rewards Await Those Who Conquer

- Read Revelation 2:6-7

Those who repent, turn back to God, and press on until the end will be rewarded with God's presence in eternity.

Bibliography

Crossway. (2008). Introduction to Revelation. In Crossway, *ESV Study Bible* (p. 2454). Wheaton: Crossway.
(2013). City of Ephesus. In Longman, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 511-512). Michigan: BakerBooks.

