

Revelation 2:1-7 “The Loveless Church at Ephesus”

Context/Intro:

- a. Begin with a question... “How do we determine the health of a church?” Better yet, “Who determines the health of a church?” Today we begin a series through the second and third chapters of Revelation.
 - These chapters include seven letters, written by the apostle John, but spoken by Christ himself... to seven influential churches in Asia Minor
 - Letters which would have been sent and circulated amongst the churches... providing God’s people with helpful and needed words from their Savior and Lord...
 - And these letters contain in them commendation, correction, and instructions which were not just needed for the original audience, but that all churches across all times have needed...
- b. We begin this journey with a letter to the church at Ephesus... the same Ephesus that Paul preached at in Acts 19-20... the same Ephesus that Paul wrote...
 - The city of Ephesus was the large, influential, and corrupt...
 - And the xray that Christ gives them will reveal something that many of us have dealt with before... it will reveal that something or someone can seem healthy on the outside, there can be unseen issues lurking within...

M.I. “The health of the church is not determined by its religious activity, but by its loving adoration for Jesus, who first loved us.”

1. Jesus is Intimately Involved with His People

- a. Jesus then begins, as he does in each of these letters, by introducing himself using words and phrases we read in the description of him in chapter one... and notice the description in v.1 of chapter two... “Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands:
 - Let’s get some language clear before we get into the reality of what Jesus is saying about himself... when Jesus speaks of the “seven stars” he is speaking of the angels (messengers/pastors) of each church...
 - As the church sat around hearing this letter read aloud, it would have been the messenger, the pastor, who spoke the words... so the letter is written to him to then give to the people...
 - The “seven golden lampstands” refers to the churches themselves... those who shined bright in the darkness...
 - So the stars are the messengers or pastors and the lampstands are the churches themselves...

- b. And Jesus says that he “holds the stars in his right hand”... The word for “holds” means to grasp, or to seize... He is in control...
- The church at Ephesus had many great pastors and leaders over time... Aquila, Apollos, Paul, Timothy, even John...
 - But the one to whom the church truly belongs is Christ!
 - we define churches based on who the pastor is... “yeah, I go to Pastor So and so’s church”...
 - But what Jesus makes clear here is that the church, His people, are His... Jesus has the authority to lift and to lower... he has the authority to exalt and to humble... it is Jesus who is in control...
- c. But not only is Jesus in control... not only does he hold the seven stars in his right hand, but he is also **near**... he is the one who “walks among the seven golden lampstands”...
- Jesus is not a distant figure... Jesus is a present savior... he wants the church to know that he is there with them... that he dwells among them... that he knows them!
 - How would we describe this type of presence? This type of insight? David says in Psalm 139: “LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me.”
 - Jesus knows you... he is present here with you... he is intimately acquainted with his people... he is the ultimate shepherd of the church... he is in control...
 - What does this mean? This means that Jesus alone gets to determine the health of his church... Jesus alone has that authority and ability to discern what needs to change...
- d. How does this letter begin? It begins with a command... a command from Jesus to John... “Write”... to who? To the angel of the church in Ephesus...
- I am just so thankful that we serve a savior who cares enough about us to give us his Word! To write to you and to me... do you truly get how special it is to have God’s Word?
 - That he cares enough about his people to correct, commend, and instruct them through His word!

2. Your Heart is Vitrally Important to Jesus

- a. Jesus begins in v.2-3 with his commendation to the Ephesians... He says about them “I know your works, your labor, and your endurance...”

- It is clear right away that this is a hard-working church... the word used here for “labor” when to work until exhaustion...
 - These are busy people... and not just busy in life but busy in good and Godly works
 - Not only did they work hard, but they endured... they kept going in spite of internal or external pushback...
- b. It even says down in v.3 that he knows they have “persevered and endured hardship for the sake of my name and not grown weary.”
- Ephesus would have been a tough place to be a Christian... Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis... full of Paganism and idolatry... many people practiced the worship of the Roman emperor...
 - But these people are pursuing Godly behavior in the midst of it all... they are working hard to do good works and God sees that...
- c. Not only do they have moral behavior, but they also have Biblical discernment...
- In v.2 it says that they can’t tolerate evil people, they have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars.”
 - When Paul was leaving Ephesus in Acts 20 he warned that fierce wolves would come and they took that to heart... they fought back against false teaching...
 - Unlike Galatia and Colossae, it doesn’t seem like false teaching is a problem... And in v.6 it says they hate the practices of the Nicolaitans... most likely people who compromised with pagan immorality... but unlike the Corinthians the Ephesians were strong on this front as well...
 - The church at Ephesus was hard-working, discerning, Biblically knowledgeable, morally pure, and culturally distinct... and Jesus commends them on all of that...
- d. From the outside looking in the church at Ephesus is the picture of health... but what we must remember is that Christianity is a religion of the heart first...
- And so the one who walks among the lampstands sees a problem no one else could see... v.4 “But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.”
 - Notice the language here... There is something that Jesus holds against this church in Ephesus... the master, the savior, is concerned...
 - What is his concern? The Ephesians have “abandoned” (left, forsaken) the love they had at first...
 - Now what love is Jesus referring to here? Some say it is love for each other... some say love for the lost... both are most likely a part of this... but **primarily it appears that they have forsaken their love for Jesus!**
- e. In the midst of their hard work, of their endurance, of their perseverance... they have turned their backs on the “why” of their works...

- They are performing the right actions, but without the right motives... their focus has shifted to what they are doing rather than who they are doing it for!
 - For the church at Ephesus Jesus has become a means to an end rather than the prize himself!
 - And so Jesus looks at them and says... “ I see your good works, but, my people, you have abandoned the love you had at first...”
- f. How does this happen? What does it look like to become a church which has forsaken its first love? In Jeremiah 2 we see a clear example...
- In **Jeremiah 2:1-3**, God describes Israel's love at first...
 - God says that he remembers the love they had at first... the devotion... they followed where he went, they were holy and set apart for him...
 - But in verse five it says that Israel became worthless, useless, by following idols... and then in **v.6** it gives the explanation of how the Israelites went from a God-loving bride to a worthless idol worshippers...
 - They stopped asking... “Where is the Lord?” We can become so focused on where God has brought us that we forget the God that brought us there... we can become so focused on the land where we are, we forget who led us there...
- g. And I want us to be aware, church, that is a threat to the soul of every Christian... the same scenario that the church at Ephesus finds itself in is a threat to each of us...
- We can become so focused on our programs, our weekly meetings, our Christian fellowship, how the livestream looks, how excellent our sound is, our Bible study plans... that we become more passionate about those things than we are about Christ! **It is possible to perform Christianity well and to not please Christ**

3. Repentance is Graciously Offered by Jesus

- a. The church at Ephesus was likely devastated by v.4... hearing that Christ had noticed this lack of love within them... possibly realizing for the first time that their hearts had grown so cold to the Savior...
- But Jesus' grace towards them is seen on full display in v.5... this isn't where they have to stay...
 - Jesus offers to them a course of action that will bring them back to their first love... that will stir their hearts back to affection... that will bring them back to a place of passionate and pure love for Christ...
 - **He gives them three steps: Remember, repent, and redo...**

- b. First, he says to them “Remember then how far you have fallen”... this is a call to humility... for the church to recognize the difference in where they once were and where they are now...
- Jesus is telling the Ephesians to stop... stop rushing around, stop moving in the wrong direction, slow down and focus, for a moment, on him... and what he has done...
 - Ephesians 2:11-14... without hope, without God... but Christ!
 - So we need to take time to consider, reflect upon, look back to the beginning of your walk... remember the first baby steps of your salvation... back to when you were completely in awe that Jesus would save someone like you!
 - Reintroduce the grace and mercy of Jesus back into your hearts... be amazed by him once again...
- c. Second, we are to repent... to not love Jesus first is sin... that is what we read from Mark at the beginning of the service... Love God first...
- We must recognize that even to love the things of God, before loving God, is idolatry... it is a sinful offense against God, and we must turn from that and get our priorities in order...
 - We must reorient our lives in such a way that we are fueled by love for Christ and the gospel rather than fueled by love for ourselves and our works...
 - This is why when Jesus restored Peter in John 21 he didn't ask him, “Peter, do you love theology? Peter, do you love Christian ethics? No! He said Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep! Repent and reorient...”
- d. Then he says redo... “Do the works you did at first.” Now, we know that the Ephesians are already doing good works... so what does Jesus mean? It seems that the focus is not primarily on what they are to do... but how they are to do them...
- In Acts 19:19-20... **CONFESSION, WORSHIP**
 - Jesus is telling them to do what they are doing now, with that heart!
 - Worship, sing, praise the Lord and do so like no one is watching you but Jesus!... Read your Bible, but do so to know Christ, not just to know about Christ... Pray, not to receive anything from Jesus, but to just be with Jesus...
 - Confess your sins, burn your idols, be brokenhearted, remember the Gospel, and worship him
 - Jesus wants them to do the works they are doing... discerning truth, working hard, enduring, serving in nursery, teaching Sunday school, but to do it fueled by a love for Jesus!

4. Jesus is Specifically Speaking to You/Conclusion

- a. Jesus finishes this letter the way he will finish each letter... “Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the churches”...
 - That word listen, in the Greek, doesn’t just convey a sense of hearing, but more so a sense of heeding... Jesus isn’t saying simply “hear me” but “hear me and respond”...
- b. Jesus has given us an xray, an MRI of our hearts this morning... do you see yourself in the Ephesians? Are you busy for Jesus, but doing it without him?
 - Do you love the works of Jesus more than Jesus himself? What is the treatment? What are we to do...
 - We are to turn our eyes upon Jesus! Jesus, the one who first loved us. If you want to love Jesus wholeheartedly, look to Jesus and see his love for you! See the one who died that you may eat from the tree of life
 - Remember Ephesians 2:4-5, Remember Romans 5:8 ⁸But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - Jesus’ love for you hasn’t changed... how is your love for him?