

Unshakable

Week 2: Lampstands

In 2002, a man named Rich Van Pham set out from Long Beach, California in a small sailboat. He was just going to make a short trip down the coast, so he didn't pack some essentials he should have had on board, like a radio or emergency beacon.

Unfortunately, Rich's boat drifted just a little bit off course. When he tried to correct it, the mast of his little sailboat broke, which meant he no longer had control. For nearly four months, Rich Van Pham drifted alone in the Pacific Ocean. Eventually, a Navy aircraft spotted him near Costa Rica, over 2,500 miles off course.

Now, you'd think that four months drifting alone in the open sea would make a person leery of getting back out on the water, but not Rich. He continued to sail. Nine years later, he left Long Beach on another small sailboat and once again, found himself drifting off course until he was rescued near the coast of Hawaii.

I think Rich needs to move a few hundred miles inland. Maybe find a nice lake to sail instead of the open ocean. And, I doubt those time Rich got lost that he woke up and said, "You know, today seems like a good day to just drift and end up thousands of miles from where I wanted to be."

Drifting happens slowly. Subtly. The winds shift. You stop paying attention. You let your guard down. And all the sudden, you find yourself off course. And, we've all been there.

- You start the New Year with a goal to hit the gym three times a week. Then you have a busy week and have to skip a day, then two, then five...and before you know it, your gym bag's collecting dust. You just slowly drifted away.
- You used to talk to that friend all the time, but then life got busy. One missed call turns into two, and now it's been months since you've talked. Relationships rarely break all at once. We just slowly drift apart.
- You made a budget and were sticking to it. You were starting to save some money, but then there was one unexpected expense, or an impulse buy, and now you're back where you started.
- You promise yourself you're not going to have a bowl of ice cream anymore after you put the girls to bed, but then you walk by the kitchen and it's calling out to you...

I imagine we can all think of our own examples where we started down one direction, only to find ourselves drifting off course. It's easy to do.

And we see this happening in the seven Churches in Asia Minor that the letter of Revelation was written to. They weren't making large, dramatic turns away from Jesus, they were just...drifting. They were drifting into compromise. Into complacency. They were drifting into cultural comfort. And Jesus has John write a letter to them, not to shame them, but to rescue them. To help them find their way back home so they didn't end up lost at sea.

I want to go back to Revelation 1 that Greg preached on last week. I think the picture John paints of Jesus is significant for us today. Look at it with me...(READ Rev. 1:10-20)

John's vision of Jesus isn't just dramatic imagery, it's a symbolic message that sets the tone for the rest of the letter, and highlights Jesus' authority for everything he says to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

- Jesus is walking among the lampstands. He's not distant from His church, He's present. He's intimately aware of what's going on in each one of them.
- His **robe and sash** are images of a priest caring for the spiritual condition of His people. Old Testament priests would trim the wicks and refill the oil of the lampstands in the Temple. Now Jesus is pictured as our great High Priest, tending to the lampstands of His Church.
- His **hair** like white wool symbolizes eternal wisdom and purity. His **eyes** are like blazing fire, piercing and purifying. Nothing is hidden from his sight. His **feet** are like bronze, symbolizing stability and judgement. He stands firm in contrast to the shakiness and compromises of some of the churches.
- His **voice** is like rushing waters, filled with power and authority. The **double-edged sword** coming out of his mouth symbolizes truth that is both convicting and freeing. And His **face** that shines like the sun is meant to lift our gaze to Him and be overwhelmed by His glory.

The Jesus who speaks to these Churches who are starting to drift isn't just a teacher or a moral guide. He is the radiant, all-knowing, all-powerful Lord who walks among His People. Not to destroy them, but to restore them. To rescue them from the winds that were knocking them off course.

And there were a lot of cultural winds blowing around these seven Churches that were causing them to drift. These churches were living in the shadow of the Roman Empire, which wasn't particularly kind to them. But John never mentions Rome in the book of Revelation. Instead, he calls it Babylon; this ancient nation and foe of Israel that was in itself a symbol.

Babylon stood against everything that God was for. They valued:

- **Power over Faithfulness.** They claimed divine authority, crushed anyone who dissented, and demanded total allegiance through force and fear. They worshiped political power, military strength, and national supremacy.
- **Wealth over Justice.** Babylon was luxurious and corrupt. They defined success by materialism, consumerism, and prosperity and they showed no concern for the orphan, the widow, or the foreigner that God calls His people to care for.
- **Sexual Freedom over Holiness.** Their culture was saturated with promiscuity. Sexual autonomy was held as sacred and any restraint was seen as repressive. They mocked God's design for sex and marriage.
- **Blending in over Standing out.** Go with the flow of culture and buy into its philosophies and worldviews. Don't be the nail that sticks out or you're going to get hammered down.
- **Comfort over Conviction.** Bow the knee to power and you'll be left alone. Kiss the ring and you'll be safe. Stand up for what you believe and your reputation and safety are at risk.

(Leave up until next slide.)

These were the defining characteristics of Babylon. And if they sound familiar, that's the point. That's what John is trying to do. **Babylon represents any system that elevates self, opposes God, and seduces His people.** Babylon isn't just a nation that once existed, it is the personification of systems and structures and governments and leaders and people who align themselves with the ways of the dragon, or Satan, instead of the ways of God.

Which is why, in Revelation 18:4, God pleads for His Church, **"Come out of her, my people."** Come out of Babylon. And He's not talking about a physical withdrawal, He's talking about spiritual resistance. These seven churches, the seven lampstands that Jesus knows and walks among, they had to decide, "Will we resist Babylon, or will we conform to it?"

And in Jesus' letters to these seven Churches, we see clues about how each one of them was responding to the Babylon around them. We can group them into three different categories.

Bright Light – Some lampstands were shining brightly.

- Smyrna – They were suffering for following Jesus, but were enduring it faithfully. Their light was burning strong under pressure and persecution.
- Philadelphia – Even though they had little strength, they kept Jesus' words. They were small, but unshakable.

Dim Light – The light from some lampstands shined dimly.

- Sardis – Jesus says they're spiritually dead. They look good on the outside, but there was no life in them. They were just going through the motions. No zeal for the Lord. No compassion for others.
- Laodicea – They were spiritually blind and naked. Their faith was useless because they had put their trust in wealth and comfort instead of Jesus.

Flickering Light – Sometimes bright, sometimes dim, but mostly just dull. Could have gone either way.

- Ephesus – They had truth, but no love. They were self-righteous and confident. They had all the right answers, but lacked humility and grace.
- Pergamum – They were holding onto faith, but starting to compromise under pressure. They were blending in to avoid conflict.
- Thyatira – They were growing in love and service, but were also tolerating sexually immorality.

Jesus is walking among these seven churches, some shining brightly for Him, some flickering, and some, their light is almost out. He sees them. He knows them. He loves them. And to the ones who are dim or fading, He doesn't abandon them, He speaks words to rescue them from drifting further away. He gives them words of encouragement and correction. He shows them how to get back on course.

And he ends each of the seven letters the same way, **"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** It's this plea from Jesus asking them, *Are you listening?* He's saying, *don't just hear these words, but put them into practice. Let them guide you out of Babylon and back to me.*

I think the question Jesus is asking these seven churches is the same question he's asking us today, *Are you listening?* Often times, we come to the book of Revelation trying to listen, but it's for the wrong message. We try to find a chronological order of events leading up to the end times, but I just don't think that's why Revelation was written.

I think the main point of this letter is a call to the Church saying **Don't alight yourself with things that don't align with God.**

Just like John saw images of Babylon in his Roman culture, we find Babylon in our culture today. And it's not just in some foreign national power, we see it in our own nation, our own community. Babylon's influence is not just out there, it's in here. It's in us when we value power over faithfulness, wealth over justice, sexual freedom over holiness. It's seen in us

when we just try to blend in instead of stand out. When we choose cultural comfort over conviction.

We are still living in Babylon today. Or maybe a better way to say it is Babylon is still living in us. Which means the temptations of these seven churches are our temptations, too. As the Church and as followers of Jesus, we are constantly tempted to give into external pressures that lead to internal compromises. And when we do, it leads to the same things we see in these seven churches...

- **Drifting affections** – away from Jesus.
- **Cultural accommodations** – buy in to the philosophies and worldviews of our culture to fit in.
- **Hollow religiosity** – go through the motions, but no passion for Jesus or those who are far from Him.
- **Comfortable consumerism** – our faith is in comfort and wealth more than Jesus).

So, what do we do as the Church and as followers of Jesus when we find ourselves aligning with Babylon? Aligning with the things that don't align with God? Jesus tells us, **"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent"** (Rev. 3:19).

If there is a conviction in you that means Jesus is inviting you to turn back to Him. To stop drifting and to follow Him. So, what might Jesus be saying to you today? If He were to write a letter to you, what would it say? I want to give us a few moments as we wrap up to reflect on this.

- **I see your...** Late night prayers that no one else knows about. Exhaustion from trying to please everyone. Quiet obedience when it would have been easier to just walk away. Doubts you're afraid to voice. Faithfulness in the small things.
- **I love your...** Compassion for people others overlook, willingness to show up even when you don't feel like it. Desire to grow, even when you stumble. Generosity with your time and resources. Heart that still breaks for what breaks Mine.
- **I want you to repent of...** Relying more on your own strength than Mine. Holding onto bitterness instead of offering forgiveness. Living for comfort instead of conviction. Making peace with sin instead of fighting it. Loving the approval of people more than Me.
- **Keep holding on to...** The hope that I'm still working, even when you can't see it. Your integrity when no one's watching. My promises that won't fail you. Your love for my Word.

Babylon is all around us, and it's loud. But Jesus still speaks. Babylon promises safety and success and status, but Jesus offers us life, freedom, and eternal joy.

Jesus walks among the lampstands, not to critique from a distance, but to lovingly call us back to Him. He's still speaking. The question is: Are you listening? If you've been drifting and feel like you've lost your way, Jesus is not here to condemn you, He came to rescue you and bring you back home to where you belong. (Invitation)

Communion

As we come to communion, I want you to picture those seven lampstands again. Some were burning bright, some were barely flickering, and some were pretty dim. And yet, Jesus stood among all of them. He didn't turn away. He didn't give up on them. He spoke to them. Not words of shame, but words of comfort and conviction to draw them back to Him.

Communion is that same invitation for us today. It's for those who are faithful. It's for those who are faltering. It's for anyone who hears Jesus' voice and says, "I want to come back home."

Communion reminds us that Jesus made a way for us to do that when He gave Himself for us on the cross. His body was given for us, His blood was shed for us. And they speak grace and love and freedom over all who believe.