

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**You Have Lost Your First Love**

**Revelation 1:4-2:7**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness. I just thank you for this word that you've given us, the book of Revelation. Lord, again we just acknowledge, people have acknowledged for years and years how difficult this book is and we don't see it as difficult, we see it as impossible as everything in your word is impossible without the power of your Holy Spirit, Lord, they're just words on a page. And so we pray this morning, Lord, that you would give us the grace and the power of the presence of your Holy Spirit and that you would accompany us and make this of lasting value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are examining -- quote -- "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.*"

This is our second time out. The last time we took a look first at

Revelation as a three-fold document. First it was a -- it's a pastoral letter, it's a letter from John to the church that understood all too well that persecution is normative for the church. And can secondly it was a prophetic letter. It was prophetic on two different fronts. It's prophetic in that it declares the truth of God to the reader which is first and foremost what prophesy is; and secondly it's also prophetic in that it is unfolding what's going to be taking place in the future. And finally it's also apocalyptic in that it's a letter intended to reveal a triumphant returning Christ who had previously been known to the world as the suffering servant, and this unveiling would no longer be as that suffering servant, it would now be as the lion of the tribe of Judah.

We mentioned last time that John said there would be a blessing specific to simply reading this book aloud, and part of that blessing is because Revelation is designed not just to be read, it's really designed to be experienced. It's full of vivid images, and the vivid images be designed to be heard and pictured in your mind to drive home what the images are portraying in a way that just reading cannot do.

I could quote all kinds of statistics that point to our collapsing economy or I could just show you a picture up here. I mean, that

cartoon instantly captures a collapsing economy and the panic that accompanies it and just think of how many paragraphs it would take to describe what that cartoon does instantly. Now bear in mind as we go through the images that pop up constantly in this book that that's what they're designed to do, give us an impression that sinks deep into our consciences. So let's read.

*This is Revelation 1:4-8: John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*

Well John is bringing all three members of the Godhead forward here as witnesses. We've got God the Father, the one who is, who was and is to come; we've got the Holy Spirit represented by the seven spirits before his throne; and of course there's Jesus Christ, the ruler of kings on earth.

Well John turns his attention to Jesus and once again this is the Jesus who is no longer the suffering servant but now the King of kings. And his return as King is to two very different groups of people. The very first being those who have already given their lives to Christ who long for his return and cry out -- quote -- "To

*him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

But the second group, of those who reject Christ, he says in verse 7: *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. Well all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him, that's not describing sorrow and repentance because the time for repentance is over and the time for judgment has begun.*

In verse 8 he says: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* Jesus is saying I'm the first and the last, I'm everything from A to Z and just as was said of God the Father in verse 4, so too it said of Jesus *"Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* So John's describing all three members of the Godhead and then he describes what happens next in verse 9. He says: *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.*

Well we know John's on the island of Patmos because we know he's been exiled there. It's a penal colony. They had the task of supplying stone for Rome. John is in his 90s or his late 80s, it's the Lord's day and he's clearly worshipping when he says he's in the spirit and suddenly he hears behind him a loud voice. This is certainly something that's not going on inside his head. He hears something and he turns to see what it is and then he hears a voice say -- quote -- *"Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

Well these are the churches that have been established by Paul on his missionary journeys and Jesus, turns out has a lot to say about each one of them. John says: *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

Well, you know, you hear a description like that, super white hair, eyes on fire, feet glowing in metallic, voice like crashing waves, face glowing brighter than the sun with a sword coming out of his mouth and in his right hand he's holding seven stars, all right, we're presented with a very bizarre picture. I mean to our 21st century senses this is something out of Transformers or Hollywood at the very least. What John is trying to do is he's trying to describe the same Jesus that he spent three years with and the very same one that he walked with, that he ate with, that he fellowshiped with, but this an entirely different Jesus. He's actually much more like the pre-incarnate vision that Daniel saw and described thousands of years before.

This was Daniel's description. He said: *I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.* So we see John is just like Daniel here, I mean they're both at an absolute loss for words to describe Jesus. And John says: *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.* So John is reacting just like Daniel reacted, just like you and I would react if we saw the same thing, we just fall at his feet as though dead. Jesus then sums up

what he's accomplished in two simple sentences. He says: *But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."*

Now just this past week a very dear friend of mine from high school, a friend who had been dealing with cancer died somewhat suddenly. He was one of the first persons that I ever shared the gospel with, and by God's grace he had been gloriously saved for some 45 years. And you know I got the word and the word spread very quickly, I got his obituary, I wound up sending it out to the bible study that I was part of in San Francisco some 45 years ago when all of us were young marrieds with little toddlers, little ones. Now all of us are facing the very same mortality that everyone in this room is going to face. All of us, we're experiencing our bodies are breaking down, we're all full of physical challenges and everyone knows that death is not nearly as far off for us as it was 45 years ago. The difference is each of us knows who has the keys of death and Hades. All of us have the gift of hope.

I thought also the young gal in my son Benjamin's church, young gal who we prayed for a few years back, she had colon cancer, she died as well last week at age 17. Her obituary said: "True to her deep

faith in God and vibrant spirit she faced tremendous adversity with remarkable grace and an unswervable eternal hope as witnessed by her friends, neighbors, family, and medical personnel." And again there it was, it was this gift of hope. You know, believers have it; non-believers do not. I think the one thing that you can say that just about everyone in this world is concerned of, the one thing that many are literally obsessed about is the fact that every one of us is under a death sentence.

You know George Bernard Shaw famously said the statistics on death are one out of one. Barring the Lord's return every one of us has to face our own mortality, the appointment every one of us has with death. I think of my friend John, I think of this young girl Rebecca and the pain of loss in each case is huge, but it's so different among those who have hope and those who have none. Both John and Rebecca faced death knowing it was not the end but in the end it was really a brand new beginning. That doesn't mean that it was painless and easy because death never is, but for those who know Jesus Christ, it's never without hope. And in that Christianity is unique. I mean, every single religion has to answer the question of why. I mean, why is there so much suffering? Why is there so much pain? Why is there death itself? Buddhism says pretend it doesn't exist and then hope for

non-existence itself. Islam says hope is only for those who perform exactly the way Muhammad described, and Judaism's hope is centered on Messiah who is yet to come in spite of overwhelming proof that he already has. I mean, Christianity alone says that God hated death even more than we do, so much so that he came down from heaven itself and endured not just any death but the worst death that human minds could ever come up with; also he can ultimately heal us from the power of death. That's what Jesus is telling John. He says: *I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*

I think all of us naturally have a fear of the process of dying but the believers that I know like John, like Rebecca, they were able to look past that temporary fear to the joy of what comes next. I also have someone who's very dear to me whose body is failing as well, but she has no use or desire for Jesus Christ and I just can't help but see a huge difference in her experience. I mean my non-Christian friend, she's angry, she's bitter, she's contemplating suicide. She has absolutely no hope whatsoever but on the hope that death ends everything and that she can end this cycle of life as fertilizer for something else. What a sad, empty, bitter and hopeless way to live, especially in light of what Jesus has done for us.

I think about what Jesus said to John. He said, *Fear not, I have the keys of death and Hades.* Darrell Johnson says it well. He says: "Literally, Jesus says, 'Stop being afraid.' Why? Because Jesus Christ has walked into the gaping jaws of the greatest enemy there is. On the cross he let all the powers that threaten to undo us have their unrestrained way with him. He let death take him captive. And then he burst out of the prison and carried away the prison keys!" (Johnson, Darrell W.. *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (p. 48). Canadian Church Leaders Network. Kindle Edition.)

You see, it's the triumphant conquering king who then gives instruction to John about what to do next, and along with that he gives two distinct answers to the symbols that John is observing. This is what Jesus says in verse 19. He's speaking to John, he says: *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

Now these seven stars that Jesus is holding in his hand, they represent more than simply seven angels. You see, at the time that this was written there were only seven planets known in Roman

mythology and Roman mythology along with their kings often depicted their rulers as gods who were controlling the seven stars. Well when the emperor Domitian's son died at age 10, he issued a coin declaring that his son had been made a god who was now ruling over these seven planets, and the coin pictured the emperor's son as holding these seven planets in his outstretched arms implying that he ruled the heavens. Well John's response speaks to his people who were tempted to think that Rome has far more power than it actually does and that God's sovereignty somehow doesn't really apply to Rome. You see, John sees Jesus as holding those very same stars in his right hand demonstrating that the one who is truly all powerful is the one who has the abiding interest in all things. And he says: *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands'."*

Well we already know that the seven stars in his hand are the seven angels assigned to the church and that the lampstands themselves are the churches because Jesus has told us so. Just to go back, he says: *As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

What is different now is that now we see Jesus and he's walking among these seven golden lampstands. It's not the White House that he's walking in, it's not the United Nations, it's not any other place of grand political power that we see Jesus walking among, it's the very institution that he laid his life down for and his instructions to husband Paul makes this clear. This is what Paul says. He says: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* So don't think for a moment that this tiny little church on Sullivan Avenue in Port Jervis, New York is not important to God. I don't mean the building because the building isn't important at all, it's the people inside this building that matter to him.

You know the word for church in the original language is the word "ecclesia." It never refers to a building; it always refers to a group of -- quote -- "called out ones." As R.C. Sproul says: "Simply put, the invisible church, the true church, is composed of those who are called by God not only outwardly but inwardly by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus calls someone to discipleship, He is calling that person to Himself, to belong to Him, to follow Him,

and to learn from Him and of Him. However, every time Christ saves an individual, He places him in a group. There is a corporate dimension to the kingdom of God that we must not overlook. The Christian life is a corporate thing, for Christ places His redeemed people in the church to learn together, grow together, serve together, and worship together."

So what we have this morning is Jesus, he's looking at seven of these churches and you notice he identifies them not by a denomination but by a geographical location. He says: *"Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

Well the first church that Jesus is examining is Ephesus. So we ask, okay, where is it? How big is it? Well just looking at the city of Ephesus we know it was a big city between 200- to 250,000 people. The church was barely one percent of the population, that would have been 2500, and that number's certainly possible. I mean we know from Acts 2 at the very beginning that at Peter's first sermon after Jesus had ascended into heaven it says the church there added 3,000 souls. So we hear those numbers and we think, okay, that's -- that's a reasonable number. But we hear those numbers and we think, oh, it's probably a megachurch. I don't

think these folks walked into massive auditoriums with sound systems, staged lighting and chariot parking. I think they were scattered all around various house churches and they were all under the same leadership, because back then church was more a united network than one big institution.

You know, this past summer I attended a conference, I had mentioned it before and there was a church planter there and he asked the question, he said, okay, fellows, how many churches are there in Port Jervis? And everybody gave their answer, it ranged I think from 14 to 6. The conference leader wisely said, no, I hate to tell you you're all wrong, there's one church in Port Jervis, just like there was one in Ephesus, there was one in Smyrna and Pergamum and it consists of all the called out ones in all the various little house churches that were there. And so God looks down on the church in Port Jervis and he may see 50 from this church and 90 from this church and 20 from this church and 10 from this church and none from that church; and collectively each of those blood bought brothers in Christ represent the church of Port Jervis. And so it was when Jesus spoke to John about the church in Ephesus, he told John: *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands'."*

Now did you get the very first part of what he said there? I mean what I find very interesting, Jesus tells John to write not to the church, not to the pastor but instead to the angel in charge of the church at Ephesus. Once again commentators struggle exactly with what John meant, I mean, the word angelos, it actually means messenger. You know some folks think Jesus was telling John to speak to the pastor or to the one responsible for preaching to the church because he was the messenger. Others think that Jesus is telling John to address the spirit of the church itself knowing that churches can take on individual personalities often for better or worse of those in leadership. Well the problem with both of those is that throughout the entire book of Revelation John refers to angels many, many different times and one hundred percent of the time he's referring to supernatural beings. And so the preponderance of evidence points to every single church having its own guardian angel, one responsible for overseeing the affairs of the church. I mean have you ever imagined there might be a Grace fellowship angel who's responsible for this church? I think we think well, does God actually cares that much? Again I think it goes to the notion that most people don't think that highly of churches these days. Much of that is well deserved based on the fact that many churches have been extraordinarily disappointing in the way they've represented Christ and his kingdom.

You know, my response that I gave once to someone who asked why is it that the firehouse down the road can have all kinds of great things happening for years and years and years, this church and that church is splitting and this one's got this kind of terrible thing happen and this kind of terrible thing. I said to that person, I think I have an answer for that. I said, I think it's because the enemy doesn't much care about firehouses. He's quite content to let them go on however they want because they're already part of the world that he's in charge of. I said, but churches are a totally different story. Churches represent an affront and a challenge to the ruler of this world, and you can bet that he will pour all of his energy and all of his cunning into monkey wrenching anything that he knows is precious to Jesus.

Jesus goes on to say: *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands'."* See, at the beginning of the letter he's just standing with these lampstands, the churches. Now as he begins his critique he points out that he's now walking among them. So some say it's kind of like an inspector general inspecting his troops. And this is what Jesus says, he says: *"'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and*

*found them to be false.'*"

So Jesus starts out with a commendation, it's wonderful words that he said and it's rooted in his specific and detailed knowledge of everything that's going on inside the church. And this was a church that was a hub in an extremely wicked city. This is a city that had been given over to the worship of Artemis and Diana. This was a church in that city that stood rock solid for truth in spite of the attacks that were coming at it from every single direction. I mean, from outside there was the constant pressure to worship Caesar from Rome and from inside there's the constant pressure from false teachers, those who -- quote -- *"call themselves apostles and are not."*

And so we see in some areas the church is -- as outstanding. This was a church established by Paul himself; Paul even taught there for a number of years. And this is a church that had an incredible pedigree when it came to being doctrinally sound and tradition has it that John came to stay there and that he brought with him Mary, Jesus' mother, who he had promised to care for. No one knows for certain if any of that's true but it's clear that the church at Ephesus at one time stood out for its doctrinal clarity and purity. And not only did they endure trials and tribulations but they tested the faith of those who were within the church and exposed

those who were false teachers. Jesus said: *Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* We'll get to them later. That was a sign of doctrinal clarity. Jesus goes on to say that in spite of the persecution they're experiencing they continue to press forward proclaiming the truth. He says: *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.* So much for the good news.

Now comes the bad news. You see, the sobering fact behind all of these letters to the churches is that virtually all of these churches that he speaks of have disappeared. There's no modern expression of the Ephesian church or any of the other churches for that matter. You see, the testimony to God's sovereignty and power is that God the Holy Spirit just continually moves on from time to time, from place to place, from church to church, such that we are hopefully one of the places 2,000 years later where the Spirit is still alive.

You know, I think it was John MacArthur who said that people have only two choices when it comes to handling the Spirit of God within them and that applies to every single one of you, it applies to the entire church, you are either an aqueduct in which you are a channel of the living water of the Holy Spirit to flow through or

in some way you're acting as a dam which hinders, slows down or stops the flow of the Spirit. The church in Ephesus was marked by a leadership that acted like aqueducts. They allowed the spirit to flow mightily through them but eventually -- and it happens over and over and over again -- they started acting like dams.

How do we know that? Well, unfortunately we have Paul's letter to Timothy. In his letter to Timothy he gives them an ominous warning about what's going on in Ephesus. This is *1 Timothy 1:3*. He says: *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.*

See, there's a downward pull of false teaching and error that always acts like gravity on the church. It's ubiquitous, it's always there, its direction is always downward, never upward. But thank God that him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands, he still prevails. You see, every time the Spirit encounters a dam, that living water simply rises up and eventually just flows around the dam to start a new work somewhere else. And we see it on a national level. You saw from the very dawn of the church at Pentecost where the

Spirit's alive in Israel and the Middle East and as the waters of that spirit become damned up through persecution, we see it move on to Europe and what does it bring to Europe? It brings civilization and light and prosperity and it's been that way for centuries. In Europe the gospel is flourishing and growing and just like what happened to the Ephesian church, the aqueduct once again starts turning into a dam, the living water just flows on and it moves around it and where does it go? Goes to the United States. There it brings light and prosperity until we too centuries later start acting as dams for that same spirit. And once again because nothing can stop the Spirit, it simply wells up and flows over those dams to where now while Europe and America are considered post Christian, Africa and China is alive and flourishing because the Spirit's now at work there. I mean it's sobering to see the big picture but it's there for a purpose. And the book of Revelation is not only pastoral, it's also prophetic. It's opening God's word to us as a warning of the process that's been ongoing for over 2,000 years.

And so we ask, okay, well, what is it that caused the demise of the Ephesian church? Well, God states his case in his warning to them. This is verse 4, he says: *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.* Now spiritually do you remember your first love? I mean to me I remember it like it was

yesterday. I remember the very first time I actually felt connected to the living God, the very first time in my life that everything started to make sense. I didn't know much about God but I knew he was real, I knew that Jesus had died for me and since I had confessed him as Lord and Savior, I knew that I was going to rule and reign with him forever. And I remember that not as some kind of deep theological propositional truth but as a living reality that just lit up my soul. I also remember I couldn't keep it contained if I tried. I mean the first thing I did was I wrote to all of my friends that I, the one who was known among my friends as someone who used to laugh and mock at the gospel, that I'm now somebody who buys this lock, stock and barrel. Well, that was in 1973. It's almost fifty years later. And the question that Jesus wants to know from me is the very same one that he wants to know from the Ephesian church: Have I abandoned my first love? Jesus knows how easy it is, how easy it is to turn a heart that is on fire into a heart that barely has a pulse not by doing bad things but by doing good things in the power of the flesh.

You know, Tim Keller hit the nail on the head when he described the difference between loving Jesus because he's useful and loving Jesus because he's lovely. All of us come into the kingdom aware and astounded at the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us; and for many of us, that's all we know, that's where

we start out but that's not where we want to end up, loving Jesus because he's useful, loving him because he died for us, not because he's altogether lovely.

You see, as wonderful as that knowledge is that Jesus died for me while I was still a sinner, it's knowledge that I could turn into cold orthodoxy because it's just rooted in utility. God wants more from us than an appreciation of his usefulness and he's deserving of so much more. The Ephesian church understood all of the propositional truths of Christianity. They knew that Jesus left heaven itself, that he had become a man, that he lived a perfect life and he took that perfect life to the cross and offered it up so that we by faith could appropriate his righteousness as our own and stand before God worthy of heaven. I repeat those propositions all the time and yet Jesus still had something against them. They had abandoned their first love.

And so we say, okay, what does that mean? Well, it means that you do all kinds of good things for all the wrong reasons instead of for your love for Jesus. I confess it's very easy to get caught up in the church thing. You know, make sure we provide five songs and a sermon each week so that people can gather and think that they've met the living God and think they've done this, that's all they need to do. See, I think what Christ -- at least I know what

Christ expects from me, is that my job is to grow your capacity to fall deeper in love with Jesus. That's much more of an art than it is a science. And it's kind of like a marriage, I mean, you can do everything right and still have no love at all for your spouse. And in the end that's not really a marriage, it's just a partnership of convenience because there is no love.

So what does Jesus expect of us as his bride? Well, exactly what you would expect of any bride. That we would all work at loving Christ. Well, how do you do that? Well, you do exactly what Jesus told the Ephesians to do. Listen to what he said. He said: *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.* There's two things that Jesus tells the Ephesians they need to do, they need to repent and they need to remember. And what he's saying is if your pathway is one of cold orthodoxy, turn around, do a 180; that's what repentance is.

So, okay, how do I do that? You do it by remembering. Just like Jesus said, you work at learning how lovely Jesus is, you work at remembering how lovely Jesus is. For someone like me who's attracted to cold orthodoxy and propositional truth, it means pushing me to the emotional places where I learn on an emotional

level of the loveliness of Jesus. And that's why for me it means more reading and studying and learning more about who Jesus was and just what he did to grow my understanding; and then as my understanding grows, my love for him has got to grow.

You know, I'm always talking or I've talked a lot about the show *The Chosen*. One of the reasons why I really enjoy that show, I think it's astounding is because it challenges and grows me emotionally in places where I really need to grow. I know it's a TV show and I know there's a certain danger about identifying with a show that mixes fiction in with scripture, and you have to be discerning. You also have to recognize that this is simply an actor portraying Jesus. Jonathan Roumie is the one who does, and he does an excellent job. In fact he spoke at the March for Life in Washington D.C. just last week and I really appreciated the way that he introduced himself. He said, look, he said, at the very start I want to clear something up, I am Jonathan Roumie, I am TV Jesus. Real Jesus; TV Jesus (indicating). He says, Jim Caviezel, movie Jesus. TV Jesus; real Jesus (indicating). And I get it. That's an important thing to say.

I have no doubt that people -- see, what I think is the people who put *The Chosen* together truly understand Jesus in a way nobody in Hollywood has ever understood him before. And so they touch on

things artistically that takes me emotionally to places where I can identify with him that I haven't been before. One scene -- I would just point out one scene I found particularly touching involves Jesus and he's alone at the disciples' camp and it's in the dark, and he's trying to start a fire by rubbing two sticks together. The scene is just beautifully crafted to show Jesus' determination to start this fire the hard way. So you're looking at this and he's all by himself and he's, you know, rubbing it and blowing on it, trying to get it going and I'm looking at this, I said, you spoke the sun into existence by your very word. Then here he is portrayed working hard, trying to coax a spark out of two pieces of wood. And I just think, I look at that and I say how wonderful, how marvelous is the depth of the love of God for us, that he would go so far in identifying with our human experience that this character on the screen is demonstrating.

I've been frequently brought to tears by *The Chosen* and that takes some doing. For that I'm extremely grateful. I want my heart to be soft, I want my passion to be for Christ and I want it to never stop growing. And by whatever means I choose I want that to help me repent and remember because all of those means are worth pursuing, that includes fellowship and reading and books and Bible study and small groups but most of all it means prayer. Jesus said in *Matthew 6*: "*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the*

*door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Just think about this for a second. When was the last time you went into your room, shut the door and asked the Father specifically to help grow your love for his Son? You think that's a prayer that God wouldn't delight to answer? You are the bride of Christ and this is a marriage, just like any other marriage, it takes work, it takes effort or else it grows cold and dies. Jesus finishes his examination of the church at Ephesus with this promise. He says: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*

Now that phrase "tree of life" may sound familiar because the tree of life was the tree that was cut off from Adam and Eve when they decided to rebel against God. If we go all the way back to the beginning to the fall itself, we find God telling us in *Genesis 3: He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.* Well ever since that day we've lost our access to the tree of life. There's been a piece of us that is absolutely missing and that piece is the source of our deepest longing. *Romans 8* says: *For the creation waits with eager*

*longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* It's a longing that deep down inside we know nothing can satisfy because it's a longing literally from another world.

C.S. Lewis says: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Well it turns out we were made for another world. It's a world that was cut off from us the moment that Adam and Eve gave up our perfection for a piece of fruit, and we are creatures created and designed by God for the sole purpose of bringing honor and glory to Him. And when we are denied that role by the sin that separates us, we lose our connection to the very one that Paul said, *we live and move and have our being in.* That's why on this side of eternity we have to work at a relationship that should have come naturally. But it doesn't anymore.

Jesus makes a promise to us in our text this morning. He says: *'To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'* Well, that's the same tree that we find at the very beginning of scripture. Guess what, it also shows up at the very end. At the very end of Revelation we're told this tree of life contains the ultimate missing piece and guess what it is? It's Jesus. This is what they say. This is the very

end. This is Revelation 22: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. See, the lamb is the missing piece that all of us are longing for. And Jesus says he's ours just for the asking. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word, I thank you for this incredibly challenging word to those who at least hope to make the claim that they are doctrinally sound like we do. Lord, you say you are doctrinally sound but you've lost your first love. He says, repent and remember. And so my prayer, Lord, is that each of us to the point that we are just believing in cold doctrine and nothing more, that we've got all of our ducks lined up, we know what we need to do to get into heaven, that we would repent of that and we would passionately seek from God the Father the ability to grow our love for his Son. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.