

First Love Lost and Found
Revelation 2:1-7
Reading: Revelation 1:4-8

Bethany Baptist Church
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...pray...

We've just finished Paul's letter to the *Ephesians*!

Written in **62 AD**. Full of truth for the church.

Truth to make a church *strong*!

But did you know there is *another* letter to the Ephesians in your **NT**?

Written **30** years later & penned by the apostle *John*, **not** by *Paul*.

What do you suppose can happen to a *good church* as the *first generation* ages and the *next generation* or *so* comes on the scene? Will it be *good* or *bad*...?

What threatens a *good, old church*?

Read Rev 2:1-7

John is an old man. But the *Emperor Domitian* has exiled this dangerous old apostle to the *Isle of Patmos*.

There on Patmos, Jesus comes to the *faithful old saint* with all kinds visions.

Visions of things that *were*, of things that *are*, & mostly of things that *will be*.

Early in *Revelation*, Jesus dictates **seven** short *letters* to **seven** typical *churches*.

Some *good*...some *not so much*.

Jesus' *first letter* was to the church in Ephesus. As we've already seen, a *pretty good church*!

But this morning we're going to see...

Why a good church *might not be* good enough:

vv.1-2 - The Lord knows every church.

vv.2-3, 6 - The Lord appreciates our good

v.4 - But He also sees what's bad

v.5 - And the Lord has a remedy for our greatest need

v.7 - Which means there is hope – we can overcome our threats

The Lord knows our church (read vv.1-2)

1. There was a lot of incredible *imagery* in John's *visions*, and that *carries over* into the **seven letters**. You can see it in this *intriguing introduction*:
 - a. The *angel of the church* is best understood as symbolic of its *elder(s)* – the *pastors* of the Ephesian congregation.
2. More importantly, however, is “*The One*.”
 - a. You can probably *guess* who He is, and a look back *confirms* that this letter is from the *Son of Man* - Jesus (**1:13**). What do we *know* about *Jesus & His relationship* to the Church? He is the Church's ...
 - i. *Redeemer* – He *purchased* her w/ His blood,
 - ii. *Head* – we grow as a *body up & into* Him,
 - iii. *Husband* – who loves His *bride* perfectly & sacrificially
 - iv. *Cornerstone* – we are built up, as *living stones*, from our *foundation & cornerstone*.
 - v. *Builder* – (Mt 16) “*on this rock I will **build** My church.*”
 - vi. The *Son of Man* is the **Lord** of His Church – therefore, Christ has the right to *speak* to the church.
 - b. Friend, a church w/ **no** real *connection* to Jesus is **no** real *church*!
3. Jesus immediately *identifies* Himself w/ **four** *simple* but *powerful* actions; He is “*The One*” who:
 - a. **Holds** – The *Son of Man holds* the seven stars in His **right** hand. I see **two** levels of imagery here:
 - i. **Read 1:20.** The *seven stars* are the *seven angels* (2:1) & the *angels* are the churches' *elders/pastors* (1:20).
 - ii. Jesus is *holding* (present tense) the congregation's *leadership* in His *right hand* (i.e. *strong hand*).
 - iii. The Son of Man is *identifying* Himself as a picture of **strong & constant protection** for the *elders* & thus the *church*.

- b. Walks** – The *Son of Man* **walks** among the seven golden lampstands. As we just read in 1:20, the *lampstands* are the *churches*.
- i.** *Golden* speaks to the *precious value* of Jesus’ churches.
 - ii.** *Lampstand* reminds us that our *mission* is to *illumine* a *dark world* w/ *gospel light*!
 - iii.** Christ is *near us*! Our Lord is *walking* **among** us (present tense) for our *protection*, but also our *accountability*.
- c. Says/speaks** – The *Son of Man* is *near* w/a *message*. He is *building* & *leading* & *speaking* to His people.
- d. Knows** – Jesus says, “*I know your deeds*.” Here is a verb that is **not** in the *present tense*. The grammar of “*I know*” (2a – Gr. *perfect* tense) indicates that Jesus *knows* us & has *always* known us from the start – He knows us *perfectly* & *completely*.

Beloved, our Lord knows us & keeps us & He has something to say to us...

The Lord *knows* we are faithful. That's *good*!

1. **What would Jesus say to *our church*...?** When the *Son of Man* spoke to the *saints at Ephesus*, He first offered several words of *encouragement*.
 - a. **Read vv.2&3.** As you read, you probably noticed there was some *repetition*. That emphasizes what's *good* – like *perseverance*.
 - b. I'm going to divide Jesus' *commendation* (2,3) into: *hard work*, a *strict guard*, & a *long race*.

2. This was a *hard working* bunch of believers (v.2)!
 - a. Jesus began by simply recognizing their *deeds* – *works*. We've just read in *Ephesians* that God *saved us* for a life of *good works* (2:10): *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them.*
 - b. And they *worked hard*. "Toil" (2) is related to a Gr verb (κοπιαζω) which suggested *copious labor*. Maybe we could think of it as *spiritual ditch digging*...
 - c. The Ephesians had *perseverance*.
 - i. They were like the *Olympic Marathon Team* of the *Kingdom of Christ*.
 - ii. They had been *faithfully running the race* for **40** years!

3. And while they *worked hard*, they didn't neglect their *holiness* or their *teaching*. They kept a *strict guard*...
 - a. There was *no place* in this church for *evil men*. A generation earlier the apostle Paul had warned (Eph 5): *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, but rather giving of thanks. For **this** you know w/ certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ & God.*

- b. There was *no place* in their *pulpit* for *false apostles & teachers*. Almost **40** years earlier Paul had gathered the *Ephesian elders* around him w/ this *warning* (Acts 20): “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert...*”
- i. The church has always been threatened by *false teachers & predatory would-be leaders*.
 - ii. **Simon Kistemaker** notes the **NT** evidences of *true apostles* (2 Cor 11& 12): they **preach** *Jesus’ gospel*, **perform** *Spirit-powered miracles*, & **perform** *those signs with perseverance*.
 - iii. The Ephesian elders *tested* the *heretics & so-called apostles* against biblical standards and *found* them *false*.
4. The *Ephesian church* had been a *good church* for a *long time* (**re-read v. 3**). They had *run a long race*.
- a. This is the **second** time Jesus commended their *perseverance* (also 2). Being *faithful* for the *long haul* can get kind of *wearying* but these believers had a lot of *spiritual stamina!*
 - b. Their “*enduring*” (another repeated term) was *motivated* by the *honor* of Christ’s *name*. This could be a reference to *enduring* through *persecution...*
 - i. We’ve noted several times in the past year that *Ephesus* was home to the *Temple of Artemis*, one *the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*.
 - ii. By the end of the **1st** century, so by the time this letter was dictated, the *Empire* had built **another** temple in Ephesus, one to the worship of the *Roman Emperors*. Roman citizens were expected to confess that “*Caesar is lord.*”

- iii. But the *Ephesian saints* apparently held *fast*, knowing that **only** at the *name of Jesus* should every knee **bow** & tongue **confess** that **Jesus Christ is Lord** to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10,11).

- c. And though I've noted that for many, *persevering faithfulness* can become *wearying*, it seemingly was **not so** for the *Ephesians*. The *Son of Man* noted (3b) that this church *had not grown weary*...

- 5. *Hard work, a strict guard, & a long race*. These are *qualities* that many of us *prize highly*... What would you *think* of the church at Ephesus if Jesus' letter *simply stopped here*...?

The Ephesian church had *toiled & tested & endured* faithfully for four decades! Isn't being *faithful* good enough...?

No! Merely *toiling on* in the Kingdom is not *enough*.

1. **Read v.4. “But”** – in contrast to the *list of good* is **one indictment**. Just **one**, but it is the *most important point* in Jesus’ brief *communique*. **V.4** is the *most important sentence* in the letter: *you have left your first love....*
2. What is **first love**?
 - a. To be fair, it does seem the Ephesians had *some* love. All of the *good fruit* came from some good *soil*. But their love was not **first love**.
 - b. Christian love includes *love* for one another, *love* for God’s Word, *love* for the lost, *love* for holiness.
 - i. But **most** of all, *first love* starts **w/whole** hearted love for **Jesus**.
 - ii. Do you remember what the Lord asked (**3X**) the *struggling* Simon Peter, after the Resurrection (Jn 21)...? “*Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?*”
 - iii. Do you recall that just a few weeks ago we examined the closing words of *Ephesians* and read in **6:24** that *saving faith* is practically synonymous w/ *incorruptible love* for our Lord Jesus Christ?
 - iv. Can you *reach* back & *reconstruct* Jesus’ *response* to the question of *which* commandment is the *greatest*...?
 1. Jesus (Mt 22:37): “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.”
 - v. **First love** is *everything* – *all in* – **love** for our Savior Jesus!

3. We need to make **two** *soul-penetrating* observations from Jesus' words (4):

- a. Although **not** *all* Christians are *alike* in terms of *experience* or *emotion*, Jesus' assumption is that *every* Christian begins their *new life* w/ some sense of *whole-hearted first love* for our *Savior*.
- b. *Second*. This Christian "*first love*" is **huge**....
 - i. It's *huge* because it *towers over & against* that impressive list of *works* in the rest of the letter.
 - ii. But mostly it's *huge* because Jesus says: "*I have this against you...*" Jesus takes it *personally* when you scoot away from Him.

4. Do you *remember* your *first love* for Jesus?

- a. What did you *feel*, what did you *think*, what did *do*, where did you *go*, what *battles* did you fight, when you first *knew* that you were **His!**!?
- b. This week my thoughts *rewound* to **1972**; my:
 - i. first *prayer meeting* (H.S.; industrial arts class-room before first period).
 - ii. First *Action Group* (teen Bible study) in Kenny Chapin's basement.
 - iii. *The silver cross* I bought to wear around my neck.
 - iv. *Jesus patch* sewn on my denim jacket.
 - v. The *big white cross* I stenciled on the back my **m/c** helmet.
 - vi. Friends, do you remember you **first love**...?

The Ephesians *maintained* their building & *manned* their programs & *guarded* their pulpit ... but *neglected* their hearts.

There is a fix for “first love lost” (read v.5).

1. Now let’s make a **3rd** *crucial* observation from Jesus’ words: every Christian can **recapture** his *first love*...! That’s what that “*therefore*” is *there for*! ☺
2. Jesus gives **3 instructions** for *recovering* lost love: *remember, repent, repeat*. You need to follow **each step**.
 - a. **Remember**. Remember from **where** you have fallen. This is in the *present tense* – you should always have your *first love* on the *front burner* of your *heart*. ?What was your *Christian life* like when you *knew* that you **loved** Him *w/ every fiber of your existence*?
 - i. Your *relationships*? Your *patience*? Your *humility*? Your distaste for *sinful habits*? Your *spiritual hunger*? Your eagerness to be a part of Jesus’ *church*? Your concern for *lost friends*? Your *fascination w/ Scripture*? Your priority for your *prayer closet*?
 - ii. Jesus isn’t so much *asking* you **if** you *do remember*, He is **commanding** you to *bring it all back* to your heart & mind.
 - b. **Repent**. One you’ve *pictured* the *target*, **turn** towards it. **Want** it!
 - i. Don’t **excuse** yourself. → “*Hey! I come to church. I’m on a few committees. I’ve cleaned-up my life...!*”
 - ii. *Beloved*, don’t **minimize** this & **settle** for a *tepid faith* (“I’m just **not** a “*love*” & “*excitement*” kind of guy...!” Well, how *loud* are you gonna *scream* for that *football team* tonight?).
 - c. **Repeat**. **V.5** – **Do the deeds you did at first**...fueled by *first love*.
 - i. Real *repenting* means **pursuing & repeating** the *first love lifestyle*.

3. This is a *completely optimistic* word from Jesus!
 - a. You **can** recapture in your *first love* for Him!
 - b. You don't start by *mustering up an emotion*. You start by *repenting* of your *cold* ways & then, in faith, begin to **do** those *first love things*.
4. **Or else...** Jesus says if a *church* will not **repent** of its cold *formalism* & of its *deeds* **not** fueled by *first love*...
 - a. ...He *comes* & He *removes*.
 - b. Every church is a *golden lampstand* – a *precious* source of *gospel light* in a *dark world*.
 - c. But no matter how big or busy we are, if we won't *love* Him, He'll *snuff out* our *ministry*...
 - d. I'm not convinced He'll *close* our doors, but I think He'll remove our *bright gospel witness*.
 - i. Like the **OT Temple** after the *Shekinah glory of God* withdrew.
 - ii. The *beautiful building* was still there but *God* was **gone!**
 - iii. The Hebrew word is "*ichabod*" – "*the glory has departed.*"
We don't want **that** *inscribed over our door*...
 - e. **But if we don't love Him, maybe we won't even notice.**

That is a *chilling* threat but Jesus ends His letter w/ a word of *hope* (read v.7).

1. “*He who has an ear, let him hear...*” The Lord used to use that expression to *call attention* to His teaching while walking among us in Galilee & Judea.
 - a. The point is, *pay attention*. Please don’t *write off* this *complaint*!
 - b. Jesus speaks by His *Holy Spirit*. He *speaks* to the churches while our *lampstand* is still *lit* – while there is still *time* to do something!
 - i. *Heed* the **warning**: search your soul; have you moved away from your *whole hearted, first love* for *Jesus*?
 - ii. *Pursue* the **remedy**: *remember, repent & repeat the things you did at first*. ... When your love was *fresh*.

2. Because if you *do*, you will **overcome**!
 - a. To “*overcome*” is going to appear in the closing of each of the **seven Revelation letters**.
 - i. It comes from the Greek word for “*victory*” from which we get “*Nike*.”
 - ii. Jesus’ word, of course, is filled w/ *hope*: we **can overcome** the failure of which we’ve been *indicted*: ...*leaving* our *first*.

 - b. So the first characteristic of an *overcomer* is here (7): he/she *recaptures* his *first love*...her *initial devotion* to Christ.

- c. And... *you can!*
- i. The **NT** promises that *overcoming* is a part of your *new nature*. We aren't *perfect* but we keep *overcoming*. It's what Christians *do*:
 - ii. **1 John 5** (there the Apostle John wrote): *For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the **victory** that has **overcome** the world—our faith. Who is the one who **overcomes** the world, but he who **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God?*
 - iii. If it wasn't *possible* Jesus wouldn't say *so!*
3. And He wouldn't hold out the *promise* of an *overcomer's* reward: *to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*
- a. The *imagery* here (and *Rev* is colored w/ vivid *biblical imagery*) is straight out of *Genesis*. The same ***tree of life*** which held eternal life; And "*paradise*" a rare word which suggests an *incredible, beautiful garden*.
 - b. Which simply promises us (7) that the *overcomer's* reward is *eternal life* in a *glorious Heaven*.

Life forever with "the One"— the Son of Man – our Savior Jesus – our first love.

What kills love...? I'm sure there are lot's *threats*, but here are **three: distance, diet & time!**

1. **Distance.** You put too much *distance* between yourself & *Jesus' Bride*, the church.

a. Last year in Eph.4 we learned that the local church is God's *training center* for *equipping the saints*. The church is where we *grow*.

b. In this morning's letter, Jesus is *all about* the church! He *walks* in the midst of the churches. He holds them in His *strong right hand*. His Spirit *speaks* to the churches.

c. You can't have a *first love for Jesus w/o* loving His *Bride*.

2. **Diet.**

a. If you *work like a dog* all day long in the *hot sun* and you never stop to *rest & drink & eat...*

b. ...by the end of the *afternoon* maybe today's chores are *all done*, but you are *burned-out & dehydrated*.

c. Jesus calls you to *come aside & drink the Living Water*.

3. **Time.**

a. If you've been a Christian a *long time*, serving can become another *routine*. You focus on the *ministry*, the *tradition*, the *habits*, but **not** your *love*.

b. And there is *another aspect* of *time* that is particularly interesting in this letter to the Ephesians. By **90 AD** the church at Ephesus had been around almost **40** years. Many members in Ephesus were the *children/grandchildren* of the original members. Bible teacher **Simon Kistemaker** makes this observation about **2nd** generation saints: *This church Jesus addressed [in Ephesus] no long consisted of first-generation believers but of second & third generation Christians. These people lacked the enthusiasm their parents & grandparents had demonstrated. They functioned not as (champions) of the faith but as caretakers & custodians. ... They loved the Lord but no longer w/ heart, soul, & mind.*

To young & old I repeat Jesus' remedy for *love lost*: **remember** – the *warmth* of your first love; **repent** – of anything that quenches your *passion* for Christ; **repeat** – the things you did when your *love* was **new**. ☺ ...**pray...**