

Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesus: Everything Except the Main Thing

I. Good morning ICF!

A. This morning we are beginning a new series of messages for the next 7 Sundays.

aWe are going to look at a block of passages from the book of Revelation.

1. In the very beginning of this fascinating book, Jesus Himself will specifically address 7 churches in Asia.

a) Jesus sends 7 specific and unique messages to 7 churches.

b) Over the course of the Summer we will study each of these messages.

c) Let's be clear from the beginning! Just because we are reading someone else's mail. . . doesn't mean the instructions in the letters don't apply to us.

(1) As we'll see today, Jesus' instructions are good and saving words for any church in any age.

(a) Like one of Paul or Peter's epistles, these letters were not written TO us but are written FOR us.

(b) So it would do us well, as we study these mini letters. . . to take to heart Four things in each letter:

- i) 1. What truths about Jesus are being revealed?
- ii) 2. What does Jesus commend the churches for doing/ believing.
- iii) 3. What does Jesus condemn/rebuke for doing/ believing?
- iv) 4. What instructions are given?

II. This outline of four simple questions will help guide our study over the coming weeks as we will follow this basic outline, which reflects the basic format or outline of each of the 7 letter's

III. Let's dive right in. We begin in Ephesus.

A. Read Revelation 2:1-7:

- B. “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.
- C. “ ‘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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.
- D. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 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.
- E. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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.’ — Revelation 2:1-7

IV. Pray

- V. The Apostle John, the last of the living disciples of Jesus, was in exile. . . a prisoner on a remote island called Patmos.
 - A. An old man at this point, John is in prison because he was a follower of Jesus Christ.
 - B. The emperor Domitian, has ascended to the throne as the Emperor of Rome and he introduced a systematic persecution and suppression of Christians.
 - C. John, being a senior elder in the church, was imprisoned and exiled because of his influence and faith. . . .so much like the Paul, the only way he could communicate with his church was through letters.
 - 1. Although he was in exile . . . and separated from his family and friends. . . Jesus is with him.
 - 2. And through the Holy spirit, Jesus comes to John and reveals to him. . . things that are and things that will be. . . we are told in vs Rev. 1:19.
 - a) And he tells John to write down the things Jesus will reveal to him and send them to the seven churches in Asia.

(1) Write down the things that ARE and the things that WILL be.

(a) Most of the book of revelation is about the things that will be. . .the future unfolding of God's plan.

(b) But these seven letters to the seven churches are about what are: the current situation of these seven churches.

VI. So, let's dive into the letter Jesus sends to the Ephesian church.

A. The Ephesian church is the oldest and probably the largest of the seven churches.

1. Paul planted the church. . . Apollos and Timothy pastored the church. . . Aquila and Pricilla served the church. . . and church tradition tells us that the apostle John served there at the end of his life.

2. This is a church that was esteemed, established, mature in the faith. . . they had everything . . . they were wealthy, had a robust ministry, planting several churches. . . probably each of the seven churches called the Ephesian church their mother church.

a) As we will see, the Ephesian church was doing everything right. . . but they lacked the main thing. . . they had everything except the MAIN thing.

VII. Let's turn to vs 1, as we see how Jesus addresses this church:

A. "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.'" — Revelation 2:1

B. So, remember we want to ask four simple questions to each of these passages. . . the first is what does it reveal to us about Jesus.

a) Jesus here is described as the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven lampstands.

b) If you go back to Revelation 1:20, we learn that the seven stars are the seven angels of the churches and the seven lamp stands ARE the seven churches.

(1) What does this tell us about Jesus?

(a) Each of the stars are one of the seven angels of the seven churches.

- i) In greek Angel means messenger. . . and an angel of the lord can be a human messenger or supernatural messenger. . . balaam's donkey was an angel of the Lord.

(1) Angel simply means messenger.

- ii) The angel of the seven churches is probably a combination referring to both the natural messengers; to the pastor/teacher/elders at the churches and the supernatural messengers/angels protecting/guarding the churches.

- iii) But either way if its one or the other or a combination of the two the point is that Jesus holds the messengers in his hands. . . the image here is he grabs with a tight fist. . .

(1) And this is a word of encouragement for us. . . Jesus upholds the message of the church. . . he is holding up the teaching of the church. . the message of the gospel. . he holds the seven messengers of the seven churches in his hands.

(a) This was an encouragement to a persecuted church as everything around them seemed to be crumbling apart. . . Jesus reminds them I got you in my hands. . . nothing can snatch you away. . . I uphold you.

(2) Two, we learn that Jesus: walks among the lampstands.

(a) Jesus is present in the church. . . he is with us and is among us.

- i) He is watching, loving, encouraging, nudging here and there. . . guiding here, convicting there. . .

- ii) This is also a great encouragement for us, we ought not to forget that Jesus is:

(1) Here with us this morning.

(2) He is in our prayer meetings. . . our small groups. . . our counselling sessions. . . our meals and He is with us. . . even online Jesus walks among our homes and families.

(3) He is present and walks among us.

VIII. And in Ephesus, what does he see in vs 2-3?

A. '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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.— Revelation 2:2-3

IX. Three things here Jesus commends the Church in Ephesus for doing:

A. Now, this week I sat up a bit as I read these things. . . Jesus is complimenting, and affirming these things in the church. . . these are things a church ought to strive to do well.

B. So, let's briefly see what these are:

C. **One:** I know your works. . . your toil . . . your hard work. . . (toil = working to the point of exhaustion) . . . your sacrificial service and your patient endurance and discipline in serving those around you.

(1) works means good deeds. . . those works of service to those around them. . . caring for the sick, walking with those who grieve, loving the lost, reaching out to the foreigner. . . Ephesus was a lively active church doing ministry to both the community outside and within.

(a) Jesus commends them for their good works. . . their hard work.

i) What interesting to note that Paul left Timothy in Ephesus as the teaching pastor. . . and Paul instructs timothy this in his letter 1 Tim 6:18:

(1) Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.— 1 Tim 6:18

(2) So, Ephesus was known for their good deeds, their sacrificial service to others.

(b) We too ought to strive to gain a reputation for our generosity, our loving kindness to all as we serve our community within and without.

i) This is why caring for one another, walking with the grieving (Thomas mother), and reaching out to our community is so important for us as a church.

2. **Two:** He commends them for solid beliefs. . . their right doctrine/ right living.

(1) vs 2a: “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.”

(2) Ephesus didn't tolerate false teaching nor did they put up with sinful living.

(a) They tested carefully, the messages coming into their community. . . like the Bereans. . . they searched the scriptures and remained steadfast and strong against false teaching.

i) Ephesus was a biblically sound, biblically grounded church.

(b) Not only did they have good deeds but they also didn't tolerate evil deeds. . . works of the flesh.

i) In vs 6, Jesus says: 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

(1) If Jesus hates something we ought to also hate it.

(2) The Nicolaitans were an early Christian heresy. . . which taught moral permissiveness. . . claiming to be a Christian, yet living in sin. . . taking the name of Christ, yet walking in a way which denies Him.

- (a) The Nicolaitians affirmed the sinful behaviour of their culture and expected other Christians to tolerate their behavior.
- (b) But the Ephesians church did not tolerate evil works.
- (c) From church history we know that a mark of the early church was church discipline. . .as Jesus outlines in Matthew 18 and Paul advocates in his Epistles.

(3) So, Jesus, affirms the Ephesian church's right doctrine and their right living. . . the two go hand in hand.

(a) This is why at ICF we do strive to watch our life and our doctrine. . . our beliefs and our living.

(b) It is a good thing to strive for holiness and purity and good theology. . . Jesus affirms this.

b) **Three:** Finally, Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for their Perseverance:

(a) vs 3: I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

(b) The Ephesian Christians see the long view. . . they suffer with a view towards God's eternal plans.. . . and so they can persevere.

(c) The long view is always going to be the key to persevering. . . as we often hear the christian life is a marathon NOT a sprint.

(d) So, Jesus commends the Ephesian church for three arenas:

i) If Jesus affirms something, then we also ought to strive for these in our life and in our church.

- ii) **Sacrificial Service**
- iii) **Right doctrine/right living**
- iv) **Perseverance.**

X. So, the church at Ephesus sounds pretty amazing. . . they were doing all the right things. . . they were sacrificially serving, they had strong teaching ministry, and they were diligently persevering under pressure: they weren't afraid to be called a christian.

A. It seems like the church in Ephesus had it all!

1. On the outside, it looked like a great healthy church, but remember Jesus is walking among them. . . he is in their midst and sees something is off.
2. Something that subverts and nullifies all these great good deeds, and right theology and moral living. . . and even threatens their diligent perseverance.
3. What is it? Look with me at vs 4:

B. **4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. — Revelations 2:4**

1. The church in Ephesus was doing everything EXCEPT the main thing.
2. They got caught up in doing all the right things, they forgot about the main thing.

a) Love. . .

(1) love for Jesus, love for the lost, and love for the brothers and sister within.

(2) The whole law is summarised like this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul and your strength. . . and love your neighbour as yourself.

(a) The Ephesians had lost this first love.

i) You remember what it was like when you first tasted the love of God? . . how freeing it was to be freed from the burden of our sin and hopelessness of chasing after things that never satisfied.

ii) To spend time with Jesus and just soak in the **joy** of our salvation.

iii) The Ephesians had lost the love, the joy. . . they were doing a lot of great and right things. . . but with a frustrated and angry spirit.

3. The Ephesians had great deeds, impeccable theology, steadfast focus. . . but they lacked love. . . .

a) The Ephesians needed to repent. . . to turn back. . . NOT from their evil deeds. . . but sometimes we also need to repent of our good deeds.

(1) Even our good deeds can be evil. . . if they are done for the wrong reasons.

(2) Tim Keller in his little book *The Prodigal God*, writes this:

4. “What must we do, then, to be saved? To find God we must repent of the things we have done wrong, but if that is all you do, you may remain just an elder brother. To truly become a Christian we must also repent of the reasons we ever did anything right. Pharisees only repent of their sins, but Christians repent for the very roots of their righteousness, too. We must learn how to repent of the sin under all our other sins and under all our righteousness – the sin of seeking to be our own Savior and Lord. We must admit that we’ve put our ultimate hope in both our wrongdoing and right doing we have been seeking to get around God or get control of God in order to get hold of those things.

5. It is only when you see the desire to be your own Savior and Lord—lying beneath both your sins and your moral goodness—that you are on the verge of becoming a Christian indeed. When you realize that the antidote to being bad is not just being good, you are on the brink.

6. If you follow through, it will change everything—how you relate to God, self, others, the world, your work, your sins, your virtue. It’s called the new birth because its so radical” — Timothy Keller *The Prodigal God* (Dutton Books 2008) pp 77-78

XI. The Ephesian Church was doing everything except the main thing. . .

A. How about you this morning?

1. Are you finding yourself caught up in a lot of busyness. . . a lot of good deeds. . . concerned about other people’s weak theology?

2. Do you find joy in serving the Lord? Or is it burdensome and weary?
3. Maybe you too are doing all the right things, but missing the main thing. . . .have you lost your first love?

XII.How can we find that first love again? How can we go back to the beginning?

- A. How can we find it again? Look with me in vs 5. Jesus gives us a step by step guide on how to go back to our first love.
- B. 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. — Revelation 2:5
- C. Remember, repent, and repeat the works we did at the beginning.
 1. This is the basic rhythm of the Christian life. . . we never really get past the basics of the gospel message. Remember, repent, repeat.
 - a) The gospel begins with the fact that we are sinners. . . we are far from God in our hearts. . . we are prideful. . . lustful. . . lovers of self.
 - (1) We tend to forget this don't we. . . we tend to think that now we are saved we are better than others. . . but let me remind you:
 - (a) just because Jesus saved us doesn't mean we are special. . . we are still **completely** undeserving of God's grace.
 - (2) When we remember our sin, NOT just our past sin, but our ongoing sin. . . when we remember our ongoing rejection of Jesus, then and only then will we find the gospel message of God's forgiveness to be like a cool glass of water on a hot day.
 - (a) Remember, repent and repeat.
 - b) Once you remember from where you have fallen. . .remember how it was. . . then repent.

- (1) Repent just means turn around. . . repent of your evil deeds and your good deeds done for the wrong reasons.
 - (2) Go back to the cross, kneel before Jesus and give up your striving and burdensome spirit. . . don't just say you're sorry, but also give up your empty striving and rest in the cross.
- c) Once you have repented. . . then Jesus says repeat the works you did at first.

(1) What are the works we did at first?

(2) Remember what you did when you first became a Christian. . . how you poured over the scriptures, excitedly shared the gospel, how the joy of worship overwhelmed you with wonder and awe. . . how gratitude drove your prayer life.

(a) How JOY characterised your good deeds. . . go back to the beginning and do the basic things we did at first.

i) Whoever has been in love. . . knows what first love is like.

(1) You just are filled with an almost adrenaline like feeling of joy in the presence of your lover. . . I would do anything to make Melanie smile.

(a) I could just spend hours just being with her. . . . finding out more about her.

(b) Singing her praises to my friends. . . writing her long letters. . . thinking about her with happiness in my heart.

(c) THis is first love.

2. Remember, repent, and repeat. . . . go back to the beginning, where JOY and gratitude powered your deeds.
3. Remember, repent and repeat. . . this is the rhythm of the gospel-centered life.
4. Martin Luther knew this rhythm well and he writes in his commentary on Romans:

D. “To progress is always to begin always to begin again” — Martin Luther, Commentary on Romans

E. Remember, repent, and repeat.

F. So, if you have lost your first love . . . if you find yourself doing a lot of great things . . . maybe even doing ALL of the right things.

1. Sacrificial deeds, impeccable theology, high moral standards. . . endurance and perseverance . . . but no joy, no gratitude. . . but concern and worry and frustration dominate your heart.

a) We need to fight self-righteousness with the same veracity that we fight moral permissiveness.

G. If you have lost the first love, then we need to go back to the beginning:

1. Remember: Remember how it was to be forgiven and given amazing grace for the first time.

2. Repent: Turn away from from self-righteous good deeds; from doing things in our own strength.

3. Repeat the first works: Do those things we did at first, when we first became believers.

XIII.Conclusion:

XIV.As we wrap up today. . . Jesus has one final promise for us all to hold on to. . . to take to hearts. . . to rest in with joy.

A. 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.’ — Revelation 2:7

XV.All of Jesus’ letters to the seven churches end with the same promise and the same call to hear. . . hear what the Spirit might be saying to YOU this morning.

A. Don’t be deaf and blind to what the Spirit is saying to you through this message.

1. Maybe some of you need to be more like the Ephesians church. . . stop being so self-centred and lazy and get up serve others rather

than yourselves. . . stop following our culture's sentimental view of God. . . and base your theology on scripture and not our cultures sentiment. . . and some of us need to be more resilient and have a long-view of the Christians life. . . These are things Jesus commended.

2. Maybe others among you have lost that first love. . . and you need to go back to the beginning. To remember, repent and repeat.
 - a) We can do a lot of good things, but if we are missing love, then it is all for nothing. . . are you doing everything except the MAIN thing?

Remember, repent and repeat.

PRAY

Transition slide- Sermon application

Application: Taking the Word to Heart

1. Ephesus was commended for doing three things: Sacrificial Service; Right doctrine; Perseverance. How can you grow in one or more of these areas? Where do you need to be challenged here?
2. Ephesus was rebuked for loosing their first love. Have you lost your first love for Jesus?
3. Jesus gives us three ways to come back to our first love:
 - * Remember: Remember how it was to be forgiven and given amazing grace for the first time.
 - * Repent: Turn away from from self-righteous good deeds; from doing things in our own strength.
 - * Repeat the first works: Do those things we did at first, when we first become believers.