

“Have You Lost Your First Love?”

Revelation 2:1-7

Today we begin a journey into a new series of sermons that will focus on the seven churches of Revelation. These seven churches represent a snapshot of early Christianity and a look into the issues facing the early church as it was just beginning to get its mission and ministry focused and in the right direction. The seven churches of Revelation have a message for us today that is still real and important for us to learn from today, in our day and age.

To start this series off, I plan on giving a short introduction into Revelation as a whole, then dive into the text we have today. There are three points to our sermon today that need to be taken note; these three points are sticking to the faith when it might seem difficult, keeping our first love in Christ, and pushing through the challenges we face as a community and as a church as a whole.

The book of Revelation is actually one giant letter. It was written by a man named John, and there two theories about who exactly this John. One theory is that he is the Gospel Writer of John, which is supported by evidence of similarities between the style of the Gospel of John and Revelation. The other is that John is a separate writer from the book of John. From here on out we'll refer to this John as John the Revelator, to give credit to the writer of the book. Regardless of what theory your embrace about who wrote it, we can give credit to John the Revelator

for his role in the writing of the book and for the visions he received of Christ and of the visions of heaven. What is accepted by both scholar camps is that the book was written from an island, the island of Patmos near modern-day Turkey.

The book of Revelation would have been sent to seven churches on the mainland of Asia. These would have been prominent churches that would have been known throughout the early Christian culture. For example, the church in Ephesus would have been well known, because Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. As an aside, this is important to know, as the church we focus on today is the church in Ephesus.

The basic layout of Revelation is like a pastoral letter, with heavy doses of apocalyptic images and information. Now, in this series we won't focus on those apocalyptic images, but we will refer to them occasionally as needed. Apocalyptic images refer to images of great changes or a great revealing of what is to come. Apocalyptic information can be information that pertains to the end of the world or the coming days in the future. There are lots of options for interpreting apocalyptic images, which in this series fall outside of the scope of what we will be covering directly, but they are there.

I encourage you to read through all of Revelation as we go through this series in the coming weeks, so that you can get a better feel for the message that John the Revelator presents. Here is one hint in your reading and a theme that

stands out, is that in the midst of the doom and gloom of the book, because there are some pretty dark images present, the resounding message of the book is a message of hope. The coming of Jesus Christ, the restoration of the people of God and the new heaven and a new earth are all images that are to be of hope. The goal is to not put us down and make us fearful, but to encourage us, that in the midst of what may seem like difficulties and hardships, there is hope present for all people who claim Jesus Christ as their Lord and King.

So now that we have that general introduction into the book, let's dive into the text for today's study. We have the beginning of Revelation with an image of the Risen Christ visiting John the Revelator. Christ tells John to write these messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor, also known as modern-day Turkey. The church in Ephesus is the first church that is mentioned in this letter. The church in Ephesus is the same church that the book of Ephesians is written to by Paul in the New Testament, so we've heard about this church before through its placement in our bibles.

Our first section that we will cover will be verses 2-3, which read (read 2:2-3). John is transcribing for the Risen Christ by praising the church that they have tried to stay true to proper teaching. When we did the sermon series on the letters of John we learned that there were many false teachers out there who did not stay true to the gospel, and instead were proclaiming a false message of Christ. The

situation had not changed by the time Revelation was written and it was still a challenge for churches to sort through all of the false messages of Christ. The church in Ephesus challenged teachers or apostles, and took in those who proclaimed the true Gospel of Christ and rejected those who preached a false gospel.

The church in Ephesus is also praised for enduring persecution in Christ's name and that they had not grown weary from all of the things that were thrown at them for being Christian. It is believed that much of the persecution the early church faced may not have always come from the Roman authorities, but from other people who thought the Christians were a strange people and should not be trusted. Their faith as Christians was a faith that challenged the status quo of their day. Their faith was one that spoke out against the abuses of those in power and stood up for those who had not voice.

The persecutions would have made the faith of early Christians a difficult one to live in, yet they did so. Much like today, our faith is often challenged by those who do not understand what we do. We have to remain true to our faith, true to Jesus Christ, so that others will see the joy and peace that come through a relationship with God through Christ. Even when it might be difficult to be a Christian, we must remain true to Christ, which brings us to our next section of scripture.

The next chunk of scripture is verses 4 and 5. (read verses 4 and 5). We have the Risen Christ telling the church in Ephesus that they had lost their first love as a church. What is that first love? Scholars have debated what that might be, and I lean towards this view because I believe that it is pertinent for us today, and that is the love of Jesus Christ.

I believe that it is easy for us as a church to actually forget the first love we have in Jesus Christ. We get so caught up in doing church that we forget about being a church in Jesus Christ. We get caught up in the details of the life of the church, that we forget why we are here in the first place. We as a church have worked on a mission statement, that we are a congregation that prayerfully shares the light of Jesus Christ. That should be our first and complete goal. We should not be focused on things that in the end don't matter, but we should focus on sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is a real and serious challenge to our church today as Faith Church. As an older church, we get stuck on the past and wishing things would be like they were before. This is a congregation that is ready for the church of 20 and 50 years ago to come back. But here is the dirty truth, that is not going to happen. We have to keep pushing forward, not living in the past and wishing for things of old. We have to remain focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our first and true love. Our first love is not the institution of the church, but on Jesus Christ.

If your first love is the institution of the church, then we need to have a serious talk. I believe the church in Ephesus was getting so caught up in themselves that they forget their first love in Jesus Christ, which is why the Risen Christ said those things that he did in Revelation. Here is the good thing though. We can start today on being the church that loves Jesus Christ first and foremost. We can push away our difficulties of loving the wrong things and start loving Jesus Christ today. That is the purpose of this statement. We don't have to dwell on what we did wrong, but live forward in Christ.

Our portion of scripture that we will focus on this morning comes from the tail end of the statement to Ephesus. It is verses 6 and 7. (Read verses 6 and 7). Here we have another praise that the church in Ephesus is doing the right thing, and that is rejecting the Nicolaitans. Here's another scholarly point that is important in the understanding of the text. The Nicolaitans would have been considered the "progressives" of their day. They were set on blending pagan culture with that of Christianity and really did not have an interest in following the Gospel that Christ had laid out. Does any of this sound familiar to you, when thinking about the church not as Faith, but as a church of a greater whole, beyond these four walls?

I find that too many times as a broader church we get caught up in conforming to culture and not allowing the true gospel to shine through. This is not something that modern-day progressives face, but people on the other side of the

aisle face as well. Some forms of conservative Christian are just as guilty of conforming to culture as the more progressive or liberal forms of Christianity. Again, this is not problem that faces just Faith church, but the church as a whole today.

What we can do today as Faith Church is to stick to the true Gospel and Message of Jesus Christ. We can do this by sticking with scripture, turning to scripture first when facing difficulty amongst ourselves, and praying above all guidance from God so that our church may be guided by the Holy Spirit so we can be the church that God calls us to be. We shouldn't allow outside culture ruin what the Gospel is, but allow the Gospel to speak for itself. We keep at our first love in Jesus Christ, of sticking with the truth that is found in the Gospels, so that we might truly be for ourselves the people God calls us to be as well as the church.

These are all heavy points to consider, and much more could be stated and learned from this message placed in the book of Revelation. What we must take away from here is the desire to love Christ first and foremost, above all other things, so that we might experience the true life and resurrection that is found in believing in Jesus Christ. We must stick with our faith, and not allow outside sources corrupt our faith. We must always seek the truth, so that others might live eternally. Our goal is prayerfully sharing the light of Christ.

Today, I encourage to be encouraged, that while we may have committed sins in the past as a church or personally, we don't have to live in those sins. We can live in a new day, a new hope, a better tomorrow. That is what the book of Revelation is about, the hope for a brighter and better future in Jesus Christ. Today I challenge us to take a solid hard look at ourselves, and ask the hard questions to ensure that Jesus Christ is at the core of who we are. We can be the church God calls us to be, we can be the believers as ourselves that God calls us to be. We must turn to Christ, and allow his life to shine in us. In Jesus Name, Amen.