



Sermon Series Notes

“The Message to the Church of Ephesus” (Revelation 2:1-7)

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Intro: John the apostle has been exiled to the island of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian. Domitian first tried to kill John by having him placed in a vat of boiling oil, but God did a miracle and John was completely unharmed. Domitian was terrified, and that is when he ordered John be sent to Patmos. Patmos was the place the Roman government sent what it considered its most dangerous prisoners. It was the Alcatraz of the ancient world. While a prisoner there, John received the message of the book of Revelation. It included seven letters to seven churches of Asia Minor – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were not the only churches in the region, but they were the oldest, the largest, and therefore the most influential.

2:1 The “angels” of the seven churches are most likely the pastors of each church. They would have the responsibility of delivering the message from the Lord to the congregations they had oversight of.

2:2a Hard work here describes a most difficult, exhausting, and wearisome kind of labor. It is often used to describe a farmer who works his field during the hottest season of the year with sweat pouring down his face. By the end of the day he is exhausted. How long had the church been going when this letter was written? (40 years?). My mind went back over the past 30 years of ministry here at CCSP. A few of you have been the entire journey with me, and you can remember the hard work. The Lord has helped us to persevere through some pretty exhausting days.

2:2b The church at Ephesus attracted a wide range of people who sought to gain notoriety and evangelize their particular doctrines. But the church was well taught, so false apostles and their false doctrines never gained ground there.

2:5b Removal of your lampstand from its place means the church would no longer be the beacon of light for Christ that it had once had been.

v.6 The practice of the Nicolaitans? Nikos means to conquer or subdue, and laos means the people. So, in some way, the Nicolaitans were conquering and subduing the people of God. Some believe this had to do with the leadership of the church lording it over the people. Another thought is that they were teaching that it was all right to have one foot in the world and the other in the church, producing a worldly type of Christian. My personal view is that it more likely was the former. With that said, it is interesting that John in chapter one refers to himself as their “brother and companion.” Though he is one of the greatest apostles, he does not see himself as being above the sheep. Even Jesus called his apostles “friends,” not servants.

v.7 There was a grove just outside of Ephesus called Ortygia, and it was alleged to be the birthplace of Artemis, one of the most venerated ancient Greek deities. She was said to be the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo (pic on power point?). Artemis was by far the top god worshipped by the people living in Ephesus, so they gave this grove another name - “paradeisos” (paradise). Others who worshipped Artemis would travel from all over the region to visit this sacred pagan place.

The city of Ephesus was considered the largest and most sophisticated city in Asia Minor. It was elaborately designed, lavishly decorated, and famous for its many pagan temples, schools of philosophy and learning, gymnasiums, theatrical performances, and stadium games.

The church of Ephesus was the largest church in all of Asia Minor at the time.

See Acts 18:18-21, 19:8-20, 23-34

A large church, but still a minority in the midst of a very pagan culture. Jesus commends them for their hard work, unwillingness to tolerate wicked men, ability to test and reject false apostles, & perseverance through hardships. That's quite a commendation.

The one thing Jesus held against this church: You have forsaken your first love. In the Greek the statement here is literally "because your love, the first one, you have left." Agape is the highest, finest, most noble, and most fervent form of love.

What does it mean that they had forsaken their first love?

1. A personal passion for Jesus Christ
2. Intimate fellowship with other believers

See Eph.1:15-16; 2:14-18; Incredible variety of backgrounds lived in Ephesus

Col.3:11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

I Cor.6:9-1...Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Eph 3:16-19; Eph.4:1-3, 16; 5:1-2; 6:23-24.

The spiritual fervency for Christ and His people that once characterized this church congregation was not what it used to be.

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

- Numerical Growth
 - People get neglected (See Acts 6:1)
 - Solving the problem (See Acts 6:2-7; Delegation)
 - Delegation is essential not only to keep people from being neglected, but to keep church leaders from burnout (see Exodus 18:13-26).
 - In order for a large church to be personal, small group ministries are essential. One of the best places to do small group ministry is in homes. This is the pattern given us throughout the New Testament (Acts 2:42-47; Romans 16:3-5; Col.4:15; Philemon 2).
 - Right now we have 42 home groups. If 10 people were in each group that would be 420 people. Over 3,000 people attend CCSP, so that's a little more than 10% of the congregation. I realize we have other small groups, so the % of people plugged in relationally is more than 10%. But meetings in the homes have a much different flavor than those in a classroom, or a restaurant. A home gives you that family atmosphere. Just a reminder that if you are a home group host/leader, food should be a part of your meeting on some kind of a regular basis. Food in the Bible is closely connected to fellowship (Acts 2:46b).
 - I started the original home group right after I became the pastor some 30 years ago now. I was single at the time, living with 5 other roommates in an apartment in Kenneth City. I

prepared snacks for the meeting, and had a plan as to the format for the evening. If I remember correctly, it was to begin at 7:30 pm (I forget what night of the week it was on). When no one showed by around 7:40, I began to eat some of the snacks. About that time the doorbell rang, I opened the door, and there was Todd & Jenny Pitney. They handed me a big bowl of chili Jenny had prepared, told me they couldn't stay, and left without even coming inside. No one else showed up. I've found over the years than when I'm down I tend to eat more. I probably ate half the bowl of chili all by myself!

- What's interesting as I look back is that when we first started our home meetings, the church was very small. But we did it because of Acts 2:46-47, as well as the other NT texts that mention house churches. We knew this was biblical, and practical. Even though the church was small at the time, the Sunday am meetings were not conducive for fellowship. A home setting allows for real fellowship, a place where you can be more personal, share meals together, etc.
- Time
 - Relationships became strained (Eph.4:2-6; Phil.4:2; Acts 15:36-40; the apostles' oft disputes). One of the realities of really getting plugged in personally in the church is that you will have to practice forbearance and forgiveness – repeatedly!
 - Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
- Serving became a greater priority than sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42)
 - Luke 5:15-16 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.
 - Mark 1:35-37 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"
 - Expound on personal devotional life. I have tried very hard to keep my devotional time with the Lord my top priority in life. Determine a time, choose a place, have a plan.
- Increased in knowledge but not in love
 - The church at Ephesus was well taught. They knew the Scriptures well enough to test & detect false apostles.
 - See I Cor.13:1-3
 - I Cor.8:1...knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
 - Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
 - John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
 - Note Acts 2 & 4

- Stopped singing (Psalm 7:17; 9:2, 11; 13:6; 21:13; 27:6b; 30:4, 11-12; 47:6-7; 57:7, 9-10; 59:17; 66:2; 68:4; 95:1; 96:2; 98:1a; II Chron.20:21-22).
 - Eph.5:19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual; songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.
 - Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...
 - Mark 14:26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
 - When I sing to the Lord, I immediately am drawn closer to Him. And when I am among others singing to the Lord, it is even more powerful. This past Thursday we had our once per month All Staff Meeting, and one of my favorite parts is when we all sang to the Lord, because it drew me close to Him.

WHAT REPENTANCE WOULD LOOK LIKE?

- Devotion to fellowship
- Personal priority of sitting at the feet of Jesus
- Renewed “one another ministry” (Gal.6:10)
- Every believer doing their part
 - Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

WHAT REPENTANCE WOULD PRODUCE

- Renewed passion for Christ
- Love as the greatest witness
- Bright light to the world