

So we've been in this sermon series and I'm doing a swap on you.

I was talking with Rhonda.

What day of the week?

I don't know if that was a Thursday or something like that.

And whatever it was, him Friday, pulling these swaps, I decided I'm going to do a different sermon on Sunday other than what I already sent out and everything.

And so I'm swapping it.

And so what's in the program

is really what we're going to do next week for the final, number 7, okay?

But that's why.

It's not Rona's fault or Rob's fault.

It's my fault.

But I felt like this will fit what you're going to hear in the members meeting, the business meeting after church, where our leaders share some things with you.

And so I want to do this one.

So last week we talked about line #5, that we're just, you know, God understands that I'm just a saved sinner.

Remember that one?

It's only been like seven days ago, right?

And what did we say?

No, You are more than a saved sinner.

You have an identity in Christ and that gives you authenticity and power and privilege with God.

And it's a great way to fight sin is to say, no, I'm not going to do that.

I'm not a sinner.

I'm a saint, right?

So today we're kind of turning the page and today's big lie, it's controversial one.

As long as we have a biblical church, which I think we do, things should stay just as they are.

You know, like they are just as I am?

Just as we are, right?

Just as they are.

And so we're going to kind of unpack that.

Well, we're going to be in the book of Revelation.

And speaking of that,

In Revelation 12, 10, Satan, the accuser of our brothers and sisters, it says that he accuses them before God day and night.

So Satan, isn't this crazy?

Before Revelation 12, Satan still has access to the throne room of God.

And he's accusing you and me, the universal church, before God.

How crazy is that?

Revelation 13, 5-6 describes the beast.

Who is the beast?

The Antichrist.

And he opens his mouth to blaspheme God, slander his name and his dwelling place, heaven.

And so I'm assuming he's slandering us as well.

John 8.44 reminds us again that the devil is a liar, in fact the father of lies.

Both the devil and the future antichrist will blaspheme God and his people.

And so Satan will try to derail the church and its mission by these half-lies, these half-truths.

And he's going to do that to you in your life when you go through something really hard.

It's like,

Wow, God hasn't come through for you this time, has He?

It's the lie.

From Genesis 3, we see that Satan has been a liar and he's been speaking half truths.

And so the truth today is this, that a biblical church should never have to change its message.

Do you agree with that?

the Word of God stands forever and

The gospel is the message.

The gospel was the message in 40 AD.

The gospel is the message in 2026.

That should never, ever change.

The lie is that we shouldn't have to change our methods.

If we're a biblical church doing biblical things, we should not have to change our methods, our worship style, our leadership structure.

They've all worked in the past.

So why go through the pain?

And it is painful.

to make changes.

So that's where we're going.

Revelation 1.19 says this, you know, Revelation is a book.

It's what Jesus spoke to the apostle John on that island, and he did it through an angel.

But it's right there for the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

And I underline that just to remind us

that the Book of Revelation and the whole Word of God is for us now, like for Knoll Avenue Baptist Church.

This is stuff for us.

So when we talk, as we're going to in a few minutes, about this church in Ephesus, yes, it was written to Ephesus.

We get that.

But the application is for Knoll Avenue Baptist Church.

It's for you and it's for me.

we don't have time to do a big introduction.

We're not going to study through the Book of Revelation right now, but kind of an intro to these seven letters is that Jesus sees, now we see a picture of him in Revelation 1 with his eyes of fire that are glowing, that he can see into us.

Wouldn't it be great to have Jesus's omniscience and we could see everything about this church, everything about our own lives?

what's good, what isn't so good.

But it's like he's got this X-ray vision and he sees into the heart of seven churches.

He sees their strengths and their sins.

And in fact, he uses the plural churches when he says to each church, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So not just to Ephesus or Pergamum,

but to other churches as well.

What I'm trying to say to you is this letter that we're going to just peek into briefly, it's to you.

It's to me.

It's to this church.

It's to every church.

We can apply it.

We can be encouraged.

We can be convicted.

We can be challenged.

We can be rewarded.

To the background, of course, these were seven local historical churches in modern-day Turkey.

Maybe somebody here's been on a

a trip to Turkey where you went and saw the ancient 7 churches.

It's a great trip.

Well, this was one document to be passed around as a circular letter.

So think about this.

All the churches saw what was written to each one.

So each one needed to read the whole picture.

That's accountability.

So Sardis wrote what was written for Ephesus, what we're going to look at today.

Ancient Ephesus, you guys know this stuff.

A huge city, cosmopolitan city, the 4th largest city in the Roman Empire.

250,000 people.

The temple of Artemis was there, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

And thousands journeyed there each spring.

And there was 14 different gods that were worshipped.

And so it was this important port and commercial center.

And it's where a lot of people gathered.

And in the beginning, the believers gathered in a house church and then multiple house churches in Ephesus.

In Ephesians,

You can read more about it in the book of Ephesians.

That makes sense, right?

Not just in the book of Revelation or Acts, but you can read in Ephesians.

So the big idea where I'm kind of headed this morning is this, that a church can do many good things and yet get off track from the heart and the priorities of Jesus.

And so can I, so can you, so can individual Christians.

And so Revelation, let's read chapter 2.

Open your ears up, turn ears on.

Revelation 2, verses 1 through 7.

I'm reading from the English Standard Version this morning.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, symbolizing omnipotence, right?

All powerful.

Who walks among the seven golden lampstands, representing his omnipresence,

Christ is everywhere.

When the Emperor Domitian's infant son died, just to illustrate this, he ordered that this infant son be worshipped.

like himself as a deity, he thought.

And so coins were made showing the image of his son seated on a globe surrounded by seven stars.

And so here John is writing, no, There's only one who holds the seven stars, and that is Jesus Christ.

we can see this mystery.

We're not going to read it today, but I will jump in now.

Chapter 1, verse 20, as for the mystery of the seven stars, which you saw in my right hand, and the seven gold lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

So in modern day terms, this would be a lampstand, this church here, our church.

Verse 2, I know your works.

You toil in 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.

That's a good thing.

I know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake.

That's a good thing.

You've not grown weary, but I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

And it's not saying you don't have any love for me anymore.

You don't love Jesus anymore.

He just said, things have changed.

And you don't have that same committed, passionate, excited love as you did.

Verse 5, remember therefore from where you've 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.

Yet this you have, you hate the work of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate, that was a cult.

He 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.

Well, Ephesus, that name means desirable.

And there was a lot of desirable things about this church.

And so the first thing in this letter is we see some assurance, verses 2 and 3.

Some commendation, if you will.

It was a faithful, hardworking church.

It was a church that stood for the truth, unlike the Corinthian church that allowed some things to slip in.

They exposed false apostles.

They were plagued, this early church, by false teachers and false apostles.

And at Miletus, Paul prophesied that even some of the elders in Ephesus would end up distorting the truth.

So Paul, the last time he saw them and they were weeping and all that, he warned them about this.

They rejected this cult, as I said, the Nicolaitans.

That word means to conquer the people.

So a lot of scholars and Bible students think that it was a cult that kind of crept into the church and where there was big shots and then the rest of the people.

And so some scholars think that this whole thing of clergy versus laity even started back then, which by the way, the Bible didn't talk about that.

The Bible didn't talk about clergy and laity.

The Bible calls us believers.

We're all saints.

The foot of the cross is level, right?

Level ground.

And that's a distinction that people have put on ministry.

I'm a pastor because I have the spiritual gift of pastor teacher.

So I guess I should be a pastor, right?

You had different spiritual gifts.

We all have, but we're all ministers called by God to serve.

And so maybe scholars think this is where maybe that got started, this clergy lady thing, this artificial dichotomy that breaks up the church of God.

We don't know for sure.

It was a persecuted church, we don't know how much, but a persevering church.

So that's all good.

But here's the problem, and we'll talk about this, that they were good at fighting heresy and false teachers, false apostles.

They knew what they believed.

They were biblical, but they stopped being passionate about the Lord and His mission to reach outsiders, people far from God.

That's the assessment, verse 4, assessment.

You have abandoned the love that you had at first.

Literally in the Greek it means,

You've kind of pushed away.

You've pushed behind your love.

You know when you get busy sometimes in your Christian life and you kind of neglect your time with God.

Maybe you neglect service at the church or even attendance at the church.

You're too busy or not in a good frame of mind or whatever and you neglect it.

You've kind of push it away.

That's what they were doing in this church at Ephesus.

They were wrapped up in accomplishing deeds

They were working busily for Christ, but failed to fellowship with Christ.

An example of this, we can read about this thing that happened in Ephesus.

Remember when the people were convicted by the preaching and teaching of Paul and they burned 50,000

scrolls of sorcery and incantation.

Remember this story?

And they had this big bonfire.

Think about it.

That's a lot of scrolls.

They're books, right?

50,000 of them.

And scholars estimate that would be \$5 million.

So the original Ephesian church planted in 52 AD
had changed.

What we're reading now is 92 AD, right, the book of Revelation?

So 40 years had gone by and things had changed.

And they were still standing strong for doctrine.

But they weren't expressing their love for Christ.

They'd lost the mission of the church.

there's orthodoxy, right?

That's correct, biblical doctrine.

And I'm thankful that this church values correct biblical doctrine.

But there's also orthopraxy, and that's correct biblical practice or behavior.

And that's easy to lose.

It's easy to get off track and start focusing on minor things that don't matter and forget the souls of men.

It's easy to do.

And evidently, this church had fallen into that trap.

So that's the assurance.

And then Jesus, with His omniscience and those eyes He can see, that's His assessment, look at the appeal, verses 5 through 7.

We already read it.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen.

Repent and do the works you did at first.

Remember where you've fallen from.

And literally in the language it means keep on remembering.

You can't just remember once, right?

Just like your spiritual battles.

You don't do them once and you're done.

One and done.

No, you keep, that's sanctification.

You keep fighting.

You keep struggling.

You keep pushing back against those thoughts, those words, those actions, attitudes that you know derail you and are sinful against God.

And that's sanctification.

You keep fighting back.

And so it's keep on

remembering how it used to be.

Repent, that's change of mind, right?

Metanoia, the two Greek words, is a change in mind.

It means you're going this way, you turn around, you go this way.

It's then to return to the work, the love that you had at first.

Repeat the works of love, for God, for the word, for prayer, for service.

for looking for divine appointments is keep on looking.

In Ephesians, there's more than 20 references to love.

That's what it's about.

So remember, repent, return.

How do we apply that?

Well, right?

I have a certain history of churches that I've been a part of, either pastoring them or just a member of them, and they've been in Iowa

and Kansas and Missouri and Arkansas and Texas all over, and each one is different.

And all of them have had this struggle of keeping the mission.

And it's hard to do.

And this is a call to return, to remember, not the practices of the old days,

but the heart of the old days and what was going on.

And so I know in my church, my just not my ones from two or three back, but my most recent church in 30 years that I was there, I was thinking through this, we changed, we had to tweak, change our bylaws about five times.

That's no fun.

we went through, I've shared this before, I think, I had an Excel spreadsheet and I remembered back and went through more than 50 significant changes in the church just to keep the mission forefront and not to settle back in, well, this is what we looked like before and what we enjoyed before and this is how our worship was, this is how our leadership was, this was whatever.

We had to make changes to keep up, never ever changing the message, but always changing the way that we did our ministries.

Some ministries we had to cut.

They're not effective anymore.

And some of them we started brand new, and then after 10 years we had to cut them.

And it's just,

the church is an organism, not just an organization.

It's living and breathing and it's got to grow and change just like human bodies do.

I mentioned before that when I first came here, I met with Charles Rockledge and he gave me a lot of the historical documents of the church.

Now in the members, the business meeting that everybody's invited to right after this, I think Heidi is going to share, right, some demographics.

I'm not going to steal your thunder, but I was reading back to church history, right, from 1953.

That's like, somebody help me out, is that like 7 decades ago?

Yeah?

Do you think some things have to change in seven decades?

Some things have to change in four decades, 3 decades, 2 decades?

They do.

It's always changing.

We are to always keep in front love for Jesus and love for His mission, which is a love for people.

That's each other first.

By this all men will know that you're my disciples if you have love one for another.

But loving outsiders, people who are not yet here, loving the next generation, engaging the next generation culture.

And there's a warning, right?

We looked at the appeal, verses 5 through 7, but there's a warning.

God can remove the lampstand.

God can remove the church.

He writes in verse 5, I will remove your lampstand from its place.

Maybe this means that the church will die.

I don't know.

Commentators are split on that.

Maybe more likely it means that the significance of the church would be removed from its place of leadership among other churches.

Now, it's really interesting.

A believer

can never fall from grace, right?

The perseverance of the saints.

If you are born again, born above from God, you didn't do it, He did.

You were sealed with the Holy Spirit.

You can't fall from grace, that unmerited favor of salvation.

Amen?

Right?

And by the way, if you don't know,

that your destiny is sealed and that you have that salvation where you can never fall away, I would suggest that today you have your discussion with Christ.

Say, Lord Jesus, I need you to be my Savior.

I need you to seal me through your Holy Spirit forever where I cannot fall away in a bad moment, in a good moment.

When I stumble and fall, when I don't, I cannot fall away because it is the assurance of eternal salvation, the sealing of a believer.

I need that.

I pray somebody might call out to Christ today and find that salvation.

But having said that, it's really interesting that evidently, while true believers who have received Christ can't fall away from grace, churches can.

History records that Jesus did in fact remove the lampstand from the church in Ephesus and many others.

It's been gone for centuries.

Susan and I were just there, I don't know, like three years ago, and walking around ancient Ephesus and what an amazing city.

And there's evidence that Paul was there.

So it's not just biblical evidence, but archaeological evidence.

And what a cool city.

It was my favorite place to visit.

But the church died.

The lampstand was removed.

And that's a warning that should make us be just a little bit afraid that this business that we're doing of church, it's really, really, really important.

And

Jesus takes this as important, and He's not going to allow us to play around and just keep drifting along year after year, decade after decade.

He won't allow it.

I've got so many illustrations.

I mean, a grandmother church of mine died.

The mother was declining, and we were the granddaughter, and so we had some holy fear.

We don't want that to happen to us.

So we're going to make whatever changes you lead us to make, Lord, to keep growing and keep reaching people and keep your mission our mission.

Well, there's personal application here.

It's not just about the church.

It's about you and me.

What's your love life like these days with the Lord Jesus?

Do you think about the Lord many times during the day?

Are you in constant communion?

Do you have a set time to meet Him, to launch that communion that you're going to enjoy the rest of the day?

Does it grieve you when you sin against Him?

Do you want to obey Him and serve others to show Him

that you really love him and to say, I love you too.

Thank you.

Do you love the people that he loves?

And that's not just us.

It's them.

Are you willing to put them before your personal church preferences, your personal worship preferences, your personal, I really liked the way this church operated in 1970.

Are you willing to do that?

How important it is to you that the next generations are saved and lead Knoll Avenue Baptist Church into a dynamic future?

I mean, how big a deal is that to you?

Those are all thought questions.

See, I think, I know in my personal life, I can be a Christian, I can love Jesus, but sometimes I want my own way, yes?

But we know there's an adversary.

who wants to steal away our love for Christ and our love for people who are far from God.

And he's at work in everybody's life.

We have a constant enemy.

Again, what is he doing?

He's accusing us before God.

How dare he?

And that's what he's doing.

We've got to fight back.

Well, 1 Chronicles, chapter 12, I know, why are you jumping to 1 Chronicles, but this is what it says.

Men came to David, soldiers came to David after Saul had been killed and now the kingdom was David.

He met them at Hebron and these tribes came to David to say, David, finally you are our king.

And in 1 Chronicles 12, 32, we see this phrase,

But it's only after verses 23, 24, 25.

And what those verses say is the men of Judah came, and they were carrying their shield and spears, and there were 6,800 armed for battle, almost 7,000.

The men of Simeon, that tribe came, warriors ready for battle, 7,100.

Men of Levi, 4,600.

Men of Benjamin, 3,000.

men of just the half-tribe of Manasseh, 18,000 warriors came to make David king.

And then the men of Issachar show up who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.

Two hundred chiefs and some guys following them.

Why do I say that?

It's the minority.

It's always the minority who can see the future.

It's always the minority who get bent out of shape about some things and we can't let this slide.

It's always the minority who understand the times and know what they should do.

Right?

And that's what this message, that's why I swapped this message.

That's what this message is about.

Right?

I want you to be a part of the minority for the future

of this church.

Quickly, I wanted to share just a few things, and this is, can you have your toes stepped on today if they haven't already been stepped on?

I want to share a few things that, because I've been here, I'm more of a newcomer, Susan and I, than most all of you, and some things that I've seen.

Here's what I see.

My commendation, right?

Like the church at Ephesus, I see loving members.

I see committed.

I see people serving all over the place.

I see that when a new family comes, you guys kind of swarm them, right?

I see that you want this church to be a healthy church, a prosperous church, a church that's on mission and growing.

I see nice facilities.

I asked today when all this was remodeled, time goes by quickly, doesn't it?

You know, it's been 23 years since this was remodeled, the lobby was remodeled.

For some of you, I bet you think I was like last year, right?

Same way with homes, right?

It's a church that is community minded.

I'm so proud of our missions team that keeps

forcing us to do missional projects, right?

And I think the people I've talked to, you see the need for more young families, the future of the church.

But I also see, don't blame it on me, blame it on Charles Rockledge, one of the, right?

I see a church that has been in slow, steady decline

not just with the last pastor, but for years and years.

I'm just a messenger.

And a church that has hit the fork in the road stay this course and die, or make the necessary changes reinvent itself and move towards flourishing.

I see a church that is older, it's aged and it's lost,

young families or not attracted young families.

Demographically, would you agree with me that forecast just 10 years and they go by like this, don't they?

10 years?

One decade from now, who's gonna be here?

And Heidi's gonna help us with some of this.

I see senior leadership team, you'll hear about it.

I think

Christy's gonna give that report, right?

Some things you guys are working on, even with the bylaws, hey, are they up to date?

Are we living by the bylaws?

Some changes need to be made.

They always do in every church, right?

And so there's action plans.

I'm not gonna read all the stuff I have, but ask yourself, am I willing to give up my personal preferences and control so that Knoll Avenue Baptist Church not only will not die,

but will flourish with the next generation and the next generation after that and the next generation of new people, new leaders taking up the ball and running with it.

See, a lot of ways I think I've had my day in church.

You got to understand,

I don't need any church that I'm pastoring or any church I'm at.

I don't need to have it be about me and my preferences.

I really don't.

You know what kind of music I listen to on my own on Pandora, right?

It's like bluegrass and country hymns, right?

You think that I go to church expect it?

Why aren't we doing bluegrass, Rob?

Come on, man.

It's not about me.

That's the question now.

Am I willing to give up my preferences so that the next generation will see that this is their church and they will flourish and then they'll pass on to the next generation and the next generation?

Well, here's the promise.

We kind of skipped that, right?

The promise of all of this is the tree of life.

Verse 7, To the one who conquers, I will grant to

of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Remember, that's the other tree in the Garden of Eden.

Remember that story?

Not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that Eve took from.

This is the tree of life, of paradise.

This is the first time this tree has been mentioned since Genesis chapter 3.

In the last book of the Bible, it's brought up again, the tree of life, paradise.

That's the reward for those who return to their love of Jesus and His mission and the people He wants us to reach.

Well, somebody said this, the greatest use of a life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

So my prayer and my hope, and really just to be quite honest with you, my expectation is that Knoll Avenue Baptist Church will outlast you and me.

And it will be that place where generations in the future can find Christ, serve Christ, and pass on the faith to others.

And if we remember

From those early days till now, if we return and embrace the uncomfortable changes of what it

means to stay in love with Jesus and the people He loves, those things are going to happen.

I hope you're optimistic.

This is an optimistic book, and I'm optimistic.