

## Postcards – The Pre-occupied Church

2.2.20

Revelation 2:1-7

Sunday AM

This AM we're starting a series on the (7) churches found in Revelation – entitled, *Postcards*. The focus of this study is to help us learn from these ancient churches *what to do* and *what not to do* if we're going to be a church of significance for the glory of the Lord.

On the heels of our previous series about *who we are* and *where God is leading us* as a church, I was convicted that if we're to reach forward for the call of Christ, then we'd be wise to learn from those churches who've gone beyond us. This AM, we'll begin our study by looking at the church at Ephesus.

Before we read the text, let me remind you of a few things regarding Ephesus. As most of you are aware, Ephesus is the church that I pattern my philosophy of ministry b/c no church in history has had as profound an impact upon its culture as Ephesus:

- More has been written in the NT about Ephesus than any other church – including *Acts 18-20*, *Ephesians*, *1/2 Timothy*, and *Revelation 2*.
- Ephesus was a church greatly influenced by the Apostle Paul who spent 3 yrs in Ephesus helping to get the church off the ground.
- It was a church w/ stellar leadership that included Paul, Apollos, Timothy, and the Apostle John.
- It was a church that succeeded in a grossly immoral, pagan culture – likely the largest church in the NT.

**As a city** – Ephesus was unique. It was a very wealthy commercial center located on the Castor River just inland from the Aegean Sea known for its magnificent harbor which brought goods to/from Asia to the rest of the world. It was a city of extreme wealth/prosperity.

It was also a city given the right to be a *free city* under Roman rule – *meaning politically*, they were able to govern themselves instead of being ruled by Rome.

And, it was a very religious city and the home of the Temple of Diana (one of the 7 Wonders of the World). Meaning pagan worship, black magic, and prostitution were rampant and unbridled.

And yet, in this wickedly, secular climate, a church thrived for God's glory for many yrs. W/ this in mind, let's read what Jesus wanted to say to this church.

*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the (7) stars in his right hand and walks among the (7) golden lamp-stands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:1-7*

Notice, the Ephesian church from the outside looking in – after some 30 yrs of shining brightly for Christ – had a real problem – she had lost her first love and was just going thru the motions. As we continue in worship this AM, I want to encourage you to check your heart to make sure you're engaging God not out of habit or religious routine, but out of a genuine love for Him.

If we're going to be the church God desires us to be, then what must we learn from the church at Ephesus?

It was mid to late January in Dallas, TX, that I found myself driving across the metroplex to meet a friend for lunch who wanted me to meet a friend of hers. On that day, I was to meet a girl for the first time, but if I was being honest, I had zero expectations. I knew I was about to move and I was quite aware that this girl had no real interest in dating a pastor-to-be.

Then we met. I'll never forget the moment Meg came around the corner. I still remember what she was wearing. After she introduced herself, she went back to her desk, and I went around the corner of the office waiting area – and looked up toward heaven and said, “Yes! Thank you, Jesus!” Long story short, after our lunch, I jumped a plane to NM where I was speaking for the weekend and connecting w/ a family I had spent the previous summer – and the wife asked, “Are you dating anyone?” And my reply was, “No, but I think I just met the girl I'm supposed to marry!” Well, it has now been 26 yrs since Meg and I met, and this week – 25 yrs that we've been married.

**Now why do I share this story?** B/c in 25 yrs, there have been many good times and a number of tough times. There's been (4) kids, (6) churches, (11) moves, (1) doctorate, (1) master's, and a host of blessings and challenges in b/w. ***Life has happened.*** Believe it or not, I was once skinny w/ hair – and now I sport the dad-look! Here's the point – after 25 yrs of life, of untold mistakes, mishaps, and mess ups – it'd be really easy to lose the fire of our love – but we haven't! Yes, it has changed. It's grown/matured – but it's certainly different than it was in those first 6 mo. of courtship.

Sadly, this isn't everyone's story. We all know too many people who've lost their first love. For whatever reason, what once burned brightly, now has grown cold. And the same can happen spiritually if we're not careful to fan into flame and stoke the fire of faith.

In considering the church at Ephesus, I believe there are (3) key lessons we must learn.

I        Honorably Seek a Good **REPUTATION**

*I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

**The Ephesian church had it going on.** In fact, by today's standards, it was a church to be modeled. B/c of how this church engaged one another and the city around them, they'd earned a stellar reputation for:

- Their **service** to one another and to their city
- Their **separation** from the culture around them
- Their **stand** for doctrinal correctness and purity
- Their **steadfast** commitment to the faith

**deeds** (*kopos*) laboring to the point of exhaustion

Simply put, they were a busy church, w/ high spiritual standards, who was determined to be relevant.

Kind of reminds me of most Baptist churches – the energizer bunny of denominations – always having something going to meet the needs around them. It also reminds me of a funny poem I found this week.

*Mary had a little lamb, would've been a sheep; joined a local Baptist church, and died from a lack of sleep.*

In all seriousness, the words used here in the Greek signal that Ephesus was **NOT** a Sunday AM only church. They were a church diligently/sacrificially engaged in making a difference in the name of God.

**Listen** – it's commendable the Ephesus church made a difference in their community – *as all churches should*. But there was a problem. They'd become driven by their reputation instead of by a love for God.

Which brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson from Ephesus.

## II Honestly Address Your **PROBLEMS**

*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first...*

The church at Ephesus was a privileged church w/ an incredible public reputation who apparently had lost their priority b/c they had become pre-occupied w/ everything other than their relationship w/ God.

So, Jesus looked at this church w/ whom He loved and for whom He died and told them that they simply didn't love Him like they used to. Yes, they still had a flicker of love, but not for God – but for the things of God. *They'd lost that loving feeling* and their hearts no longer burned w/ an insatiable passion to walk w/ God and serve His mission. Thus, they might've loved their church; but they didn't love Him. They might've loved their doctrine; but they'd lost their passion for Christ. They might've loved their work; but they weren't motivated by His love. And the result was that they were busy, but their hearts no longer burned for Him. The flame that once burned so brightly for Him was now but a smoldering ember. They had lost their love for God.

I'm reminded of an old pastor who went to church one cold Sunday AM. The church had a gas furnace w/ an electric blower. Wanting to make a point, the pastor turned off the gas but left the blower running so it would blow cold air. When the people arrive at church that day, it was really cold, yet they were confused b/c they could all hear the blowers blowing. About the time that a few of the people were getting upset, the pastor stood and gave a message entitled – “The Blower's Still Blowing, but the Fire's Gone Out!”

Could this be true of your life or of our church? The blower's still blowing – we're still going to church, we're still diligent in service, still going thru the motions, and showing up for LIFE Group – yet there is no passion for the Lord. We're driven by habit or religious routine, instead of by an all-consuming love for the Lord who's first loved us. If this is the case – then you're a candidate for having lost your first love.

Unless we're honest w/ ourselves both individually and collectively, we'll never treat the problem of a heart that's grown cold towards God. Thankfully, God shows us how to rekindle the fire of our faith.

## III Humbly Respond to God's **PRESCRIPTION**

*Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.*

### A **REMEMBER**

Jesus calls on them to **remember** that moment when they came to know Him – to **reflect** on what He did for them – and to **recall** the joy they had experienced in those early days w/ Him. He wants them to remember when they were motivated by their love for Him.

### B **REPENT**

To **repent** is to have *a change of mind that leads to a change of action/direction*. Jesus tells them to repent of the sin of not loving Him and return to loving God w/ all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength – to search their hearts and change their direction. **Choose**

## C     REFOCUS

Finally, Jesus invites them to *do the things they did at first* – meaning, He wants them to *refocus* their lives and *recapture* their love/intimacy w/ Him. They're told to start doing the things they used to do again – **get back to the basics of the faith.**

One of the best ways I can think of rekindling and refocusing our faith is in the partaking of Communion.

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