



This is the second sermon in our “You’ve Got Mail” series. Last week, we looked over the shoulder of the church from a city called Smyrna. Jesus, through John, wrote a note to tell them what He thought of their ministry and actions as a church. You will remember the church had been going through tremendous persecution and had stayed faithful in their love of Jesus. The setting of these letters is when Apostle John (one of Jesus’ disciples), in his late 80’s, was an exiled prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. The work is hard as the rumours he hears about the churches back in Asia (modern day Turkey) have been discouraging so on a Sunday morning John sneaks away into a cave to get alone with God. To his surprise he has a glorious encounter with the resurrected Jesus, who is now robed in all the Glory of Heaven. It is in this cave that Jesus dictates letters to the very churches John has been worrying about.

The City

First, on the list is the church in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus was known as the New York of its time. It was the 3rd largest city in the world, whose huge harbour made it the gateway into Asia. It was called the Treasure House of Asia as it was a powerful city which was known to be profoundly religious. As you get near the city you will see its 25,000 seat Theatre on the hillside. As you walk down its marble streets, which were often covered with different coloured pebbles, you stand in awe. It was a city full of huge temples, frescos and its pictures on the wall of the Theatre are amazing. It was also a city with affluent houses. Then you see the amazing Library, the view into the city from the Theatre and here is Kathy reading the very passage we will be looking at today in this huge Theatre.

Ephesus was known for the huge Temple to Artemis on its highest hill that was so beautiful it was known as one of the 7 wonders of the world. It took 220 years to build and had 360 x 60 feet high ornately carved pillars all for the worship of Artemis (Greek word called Diana by the Romans,) the multi-breasted fertility god who was worshiped with 100’s of temple prostitutes and priestess. Sex was the religion of this city. Finally, let me show you the Church of St. John that was built about 300 years later, where John’s tomb is supposed to be and where they practiced the anointing with oil at baptism. Here is where they claim Mary, Jesus’ mother, lived.

If that is what the city of Ephesus was like, what was First Baptist Church in Ephesus like? Have you ever walked into one of those huge churches - you know the kind where the building is huge, the bulletin looks like a phone book, the website is amazing, the pastor is TV compatible and their history is full of amazing stories? Although the church in Ephesus didn’t have a fancy building that was what First Baptist Church in Ephesus was like. Let me tell you how it began. Its founder was, none other than, the apostle Paul. He began preaching in the local Jewish synagogue and then rented a school from a man named Tyrannus and taught there for 2 years. The result was as Acts 19:10 says, *“All...heard the word of the Lord.”* Plus, amazing miracles started happening. Paul would be working in his tent making shop, wipe his forehead, lay down his handkerchief which someone would steal it and take it to a sick friend and was healed instantly.

Why did God do that? Simple, if you compare the huge temple on the hill with its huge priest force and beautiful idols and a store-front church, there was no comparison. But, because Jesus came in real power as He was the God of the universe and because He was the real thing, it was no contest. The city was turned upside down to the point that a man named Demetrius, an idol maker said, *“There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the*

goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty," (Acts 19:27). I should also add that its second pastor was Timothy and John (one of Jesus' disciples,) at one time was their pastor who eventually became the regional minister. In the last 30 years, this church had an amazing faith history; it was a church that had made a huge impact in its city and the whole province of Asia.

When the letter arrived at the church from the Isle of Patmos from Bishop John, I'll bet they could hardly wait to read it on Sunday. Revelations 2:1 says, "*To the angel[a] of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*"- Most think that the word angel, taken from the word 'messenger,' refers to the one who would normally deliver the message Sunday morning - the pastor. So you can call me angel is that is a correct exegete of this word. Or it could be referring the guardian angel which God had placed over each of His churches.

The Saviour

Look at how Jesus describes Himself in Revelation 2:1. He says let me tell you who is sending you this letter. I am the one who holds the 7 stars (the 7 churches) in my right hand. It is the idea that Jesus holds us in His cupped hand, protected, under His care and in His control. (John 10:28, "No one will snatch them out of my hand.") I am the one who walks among the 7 golden lampstands. Each church is to be a light to those around it and Jesus walks among His churches. As we said last week, that means that when He says, "*I know your deeds and actions,*" He is telling the truth. He stands in the middle of every Call Committee Meeting; every small group Bible Study, every discussion in the Foyer and every offering that is given. This is Jesus' Church.

The Situation

In many ways this church is the exact opposite of the Smyrnan church which is just 35 miles down the road. Smyrna was a small, persecuted, struggling church and the church in Ephesus was larger, had more freedom in the city and was well established. I can just see the preacher starting to read what John had written and begin to smile as he hears Jesus say:

Well Done

Jesus is saying, "I know your deeds." (Revelations 2:2)

a) Your Diligence in your Service to God has been Exemplary.

You have a church full of doers and full of activity. Today, He would be saying, from the minute the church doors are open there is lots of activity in your church. I see that you have gotten your hands dirty in all kinds of ministry to those in need. You have cared for people's needs, there are great sermons being preached, wonderful activities happening across the city and your church is known for being an exciting place to attend. I know you don't tolerate wicked men

b) Your Doctrine is Right On.

You are careful about what is taught from the pulpit and from your Adult class and Family ministries you know good theology and stand firm on it. Concerning a group called the Nicolaitans, (not a 3 flavoured ice cream,) a group who love to claim they knew what was best and caused divisions and cliques in the churches. The Ephesian church did business with folks like that and stood against anyone who would cause problems in the church. (Revelation 2:6) You have persevered and endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. (Revelation 2:3)

c) Your Dedication has been Impressive.

When things got tough and people started to wear you down, ministries started to get far too busy and you felt like you were running on fumes, you didn't give up - you kept on going. Some time church stuff can wear a person down, people can steal your joy and there is always some new task to tackle. Yet through it all, not only did they hang in there but they kept at it. As I read that, I was impressed. What a great church!

Ignatius, a Syrian Bishop wrote, *"I ought to be trained by you for the contest of faith, admonition, endurance and in long suffering for you live according to truth."*

Wouldn't you like to be a member at a church that gets a review like that from the Bishop and from Jesus? I'll bet their preacher was popping the buttons right off his suit coat and the people were about to give each other a hi-fives and then Jesus added:

First Love

Revelations 2:4, *"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."*

I'll bet you could almost hear the air go out of the room. The whispers begin - but we have been so dedicated, so busy and so involved in our church's life. The shocking thing, the scary thing is that this was a great church, with a great history, a busy ministry and to their complete shock, JESUS (the one who walks in the middle of the lampstands and churches) says despite the fact that you thought you were doing so well, busy doing things for Him, and that lots of exciting things were going on, they had somehow put work in the church over their relationship with Jesus. They had gotten so busy doing things that they had gotten distracted from their love of Jesus.

Interview with Bob Gebert & Ken Castor:

Can I remind you what it was like when you first became a Christ follower?

- i) Tell me how you became a Christ follower?*
- ii) What was it like to be a new believer?*

Did you see the sparkle in their eyes as they talked about how they first met Jesus in a real way? Did you catch how that excitement touched them?

Now contrast that with what was being said about the members of the church in Ephesus. They have become like the couple who were deeply in love with each other and out of that love their children were born. Then they found out that their children needed a lot of their time and energy so they poured their lives into their children and sacrificed everything for the kids. Then one day their children left home and they found themselves looking across the table wondering who was the stranger who was sitting across from them and wondering how they lost the love they once had.

Here is the process I have seen happen in many people's lives, including mine at times. Because the church and my job yells louder than my Jesus, I can easily start getting caught up in all that is necessary and fun in ministry. Then one day I find I don't seem to have the same feelings I used to have when I first became a Christ follower. So being a good Baptist I decide to get more involved and work harder. (Mary had a little lamb. She thought she lost Sheep but they joined a Baptist church and they died of lack of sleep.) I just got busier and hoped the feelings would come back again.

Listen carefully to what I am going to say. First, I believe every single one of us needs to be involved in some type of ministry either within the Church or outside of the Church. It is key to growth and our calling as Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But second, understand that problems can arise when we start defining our relationship with Jesus by what we DO rather than the depth of our love for Him. The problem happens when we get DISTRACTED by what we are doing from who we are in Jesus. We end up needing Jesus. To do what I have asked Kathy to do if I get so caught up in work that I miss seeing her. Jesus, like Kathy, (in this passage) is waving His hands above His head and yelling, *“Dave I am over here. Dave have you gotten so busy doing important things that you have forgotten about me?”*

One day a minister in a smaller rural church went downstairs and blew out the pilot light on the church furnace and then turned the fan up as high as it would go. Half way through the sermon on Revelations 2, the people started to complain, *“The blower is still on but the furnace has gone out.”* He smiled and said that is what it is like when a church is still in high gear doing things when it’s heart is no longer on fire for the Lord.

Last week I was painting and caulking my windows because I knew bad weather was coming. As I worked on Mark’s window, (he said it always seemed chilly in his room all winter,) I happened to look up at the top of the window and to my shock there was a ½ inch gap between the window frame and the glass! Some of the casing must have been rotten and the glass was sinking, leaving a ½ inch gap that the wind had been blowing through all winter. I stopped and took time to examine the window; I was shocked by what I saw!

So, can I ask you? If Jesus was to look at your heart and compare it to when you first became a Christ follower would He say, that like in Ephesus’ Church, you have become distracted (with doing good things) and that you have lost your first love? (I know that my love for Kathy is different than when we were newly married, but I also know that over time it should have gotten deeper.) Has your relationship grown over time OR over time, have you slowly, maybe without noticing it, lost your first love?

The Solution

I love the fact that after grabbing their attention, Jesus didn’t leave the Ephesian church hanging or us hanging with what to do:

Remember:

If things have changed, and the description, *“You have fallen,”* describes you and I, then Jesus’ answer is to first, *“Remember the heights from which you have fallen.”* In other words, remember back to when your relationship with Jesus was fresh and sweet. Try to remember what it was like when you first asked Jesus into your life or how it felt when you said to Him, *“Jesus, I am yours for whatever you want.”*

Does what Bob and Ken remember, felt like when you and Jesus were walking close to each other? Jeremiah 6:16, The Message, *“Go stand at the crossroads and look around. Ask for directions to the old road, the tried-and-true road. Then take it. Discover the right route for your souls.”* I say this because I know that when it comes to finding something that I have lost, (keys, phone or car,) the place to find what you have lost is to go back to where you last had it. I believe that *“God hasn’t moved. He is waiting for us right where we left Him, waiting to get reacquainted once again.”*

I know of a pastor who was invited to go back to speak at the 25th Anniversary of the church where he grew up. The morning he was to speak he arrived an hour early. He sat in the very same pew he had been sitting in on the day he gave his life to Jesus. He sat in the

pew, began to re-live the experience and then he walked forward and knelt before the platform and said, "Lord I come to begin again, to give You my life afresh and to ask that You *'restore unto me the joy of my salvation.'*"

In your mind, go back to where you and Jesus were experiencing a depth of love that you aren't feeling now and ask to begin again.

Repent:

Someone has said, *"If God feels far away, guess who moved?"* In most cases, I don't think we have moved from God on purpose. I think, instead, we have taken short steps and small sins that have led us an inch at a time away from God. We have gotten busy and neglected God. Or we have allowed a sin of bitterness, pride, self-centeredness or anger grow slowly in our heart until our heart has grown cold. (Even while we may feel we are busy 'working for God'- we have long since stopped being in step with Him and our joy has long since left.) The result is that like the Nicolairians, work is more divisive than helpful for God's kingdom. If that is true of you and I, we need to stop and ask for His forgiveness. That means putting things in place so we don't repeat our old patterns again.

As I speak, has God brought something to your mind that you need to ask forgiveness for? Then do it right now so the joy can return!

Repeat:

"Do the things you did at first." (Revelation 2:5) What was it that kept you fired up spiritually when you were first a Jesus Follower? Was it regular attendance at worship services? Staying in the Word? Getting into a good group of believers? Sharing your faith? Remember what it was and then do it again. You will grow in faith, feelings and power for ministry.

Jesus' final comment in Revelation 2:5, *"I will come and remove your lampstand."* Jesus wants us to realize that when it comes to our relationship with Him, He will not fool around. He will blow out our lamp and will remove it. He won't take our salvation away but He will remove our joy, that feeling of closeness, His power and our effectiveness as a church or as individuals.

Anne Lotz Graham summed up this passage by saying, *"There was a time in my life I when I was afraid God would call me into His service. Now, I am afraid he will take it away."*

I need to make sure that I am always walking with a renewed first love with my Jesus. Are you listening? Apparently the Ephesian church wasn't and it cost them dearly. Don't get distracted!

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