

Title: First Love
Primary Text: Rev 2:1-7
Speaker: Alex Chu

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1. Introduction

- a. Good morning church. My prayer for you today is that, just like the intro video said, you would know how much God loves you. He hears you (your innermost thoughts and prayers), He sees you (even when others overlook you), and He keeps His promises to us that are given in Scripture. As we move forward to the new year, Let's remember our first love.
- a. So I hope you all had a very Merry Christmas. Many of you have started taking down your holiday lights. We stayed in town this year. Michelle's family is from this area and so her brothers and parents are here. It was a great time gathering over Christmas, remembering God's faithfulness to us over the past year, having a feast together, and exchanging gifts.
- b. It is now the end of 2019. I don't know what it was like for you, but some of you have had a very up and down year. Maybe it has been a very long year. Or maybe it has been a long, difficult decade and you don't know whether to look ahead with hope or worry. As we enter the New Year, it is very important that we have 20/20 clear vision about who Jesus is. The last few weeks, we went through an Advent sermon series titled the thrill of hope. One book that gives the fullest picture of Jesus in the present and future is Revelation. We will be reading from Rev 1 and 2 today, particularly the letter to the church in Ephesus. Revelation is the last book of the Bible. As we enter 2020, let's begin with the end in mind. We need 20/20 clarity about who Jesus is. Revelation is clarity about Jesus.
- c. Have you ever experienced God so powerfully that you fell down onto your knees in complete awe before God? This is what happened to John in the book of revelation.

2. Context of Revelation 1

- a. Jesus Christ is the revealer, the author of the book. He reveals it to John through an angel.

<Rev 1 slide>

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his

feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

We see in verses 12-20 a lot of symbolism. Long robe and golden sash. Majesty of our Lord. His head and hair were white as wool. Jesus the messiah is the ancient of days. His eyes are like a blazing fire. His scrutiny sees everything. He misses nothing. Even Superman has nothing on him. His feet were like bronze, glowing in a furnace. He is our anchor. His feet are steady. His voice was like roar of many waters. Seven wonders of the world - victoria falls. We saw it from the plane above. The magnitude of it. Twice as high as Niagara falls. And much wider. We could hear the roar of its waters. That is like the voice of God. John uses that metaphor to describe the voice of Jesus. So nobody drowns out the voice of Jesus. Can you hear him today? Jesus holds seven stars in his hand. The seven stars are the angels of the churches. No power can pull us the church away from Him. From his mouth came a sharp double edged sword. Jesus' voice is like a speech act. A judge can make an action. His face was like the sun shining in its full strength. Imagine the sun shining right in front of you (remember solar eclipse). The sun is 91 million miles away yet so bright. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. 7 lampstands represent 7 churches. We are like a lampstand but he is like a sun. Jesus will outshine this world forever.

This is the resurrected Jesus. Can you see Him? How John acts is the correct response to who Jesus is. The image of the resurrected Jesus is not just for John, but or us too. We need to see this.

- d. How big is your Jesus? Does he just fit in your expectations, schedules, checkbook. Or is he bigger than your life such that he thrills you to hope, faith, and love? What everyone on the face of the earth must know is that the real Jesus is bigger and better than we think. Therefore, the most urgent business for you and me today is to see Jesus clearly and enjoy him wholeheartedly. Here in the Midwest, there is a lot of

religion but not much biblical power. What has gone wrong? A lot. But mostly, small thoughts of Jesus.

- e. A.W. Tozer said that the essence of idolatry is thoughts of God that are unworthy of him – not thoughts of false gods but thoughts of the true God that are unworthy of him. What's the remedy? A clear view of who he is. That is what Revelation 1 gives us. The Bible is all about Jesus. From cover to cover, in various ways, the Bible keeps on displaying Jesus.

Jesus does not rule distantly, but is with us. He dwells among us. He is right here, stirring us up, refueling us as his lampstands. Did you see where you were in the supernatural image in rev 1? You are the lampstands. God walks among lampstands. The same power that flows through the head flows through the body. (it is all one unit). We see why Jesus writes these letters to the churches because he has a high call for the churches. Jesus has a high call for the church to go onto maturity in Christ. The church displays his mystery, his wisdom. So we have a great responsibility to mature in Christ.

- f. In Rev 2 and 3, we can see the state of each of the seven churches - and the state of our own walk with Jesus by looking at what Jesus has to say to each church.

3. Main Points - Regain First Love by Remember, Repent, Recommit.

So now let's turn to the letter to the Ephesian church in Rev 2:1-7

A few comments about Ephesus. Keep in mind that this city was important in Asia. Metropolis. Very busy. Heavily populated port city. Similar to modern day HK, London, NYC. Famous for temple of Artemis, which was the largest of all the Greek temples at that time. In the temples were prostitution and worship of idols. Very secular city. In the midst of this city that Acts 18:18-19 Aquila and Priscilla along with Paul found the church. Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus, probably longer than any other place. To preach the Gospel, to disciple, to raise up leaders. He realized that this was a very important city. Ephesus was a church of great privilege. The word Ephesus means desirable, and it was certainly a desirable place to live. This letter was written 60 years after the earthly ministry of Jesus and 30 years after Paul wrote Ephesians.

<Rev 2 slide>

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2 "I know your works, your toil and 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. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have 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. 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who 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.'

a. Jesus describes Himself to the church at Ephesus (v. 1)

We are alive today because of one person, Jesus. That is how much power and reverence he deserves. Jesus is the head of this church, of all churches. That is the only way that Christ Church has been sustained for 40 years now. His Spirit has sustained us.

b. What Jesus knows about the Christians of Ephesus (vv. 2-3).

Rev 2-3 includes both an encouragement and a warning. Even Jesus sandwiches a warning (or as we call today growth area) in between praises just like many of our supervisors do.

- i. I know your works: Jesus looks at His church, and He knows what is going on. It is no mystery to Him. Jesus knows the 7 churches so well. He knows our church that well. Isn't interesting?
- ii. Hard working. Patiently enduring (many different opinions on how things should be run). No church history to lean back upon. They showed a godly perseverance that we should imitate. By all outward appearances, this was a solid church that worked hard, had great outreach, and protected the integrity of the gospel. It is like they had it all.
- iii. The Ephesian church pursued correct theology. They were pioneers of the NT church. They had to get it right. There were many false prophets. They had to stay true to Scripture.
- iv. Here is Jesus, who has intimate knowledge of hearts and actions of ppl in the 7 churches. It is He who is sustaining them. I hope you understand that Christ Church, which was planted 40 years ago, was planted by Spirit of God. It is also the Spirit of God that has sustained the church.

c. You left your first love. *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.* (v. 4).

Despite all the good in the Ephesian church, there is something seriously wrong. They have left - not lost - their first love.

Why is it that when things go well, we have a tendency to be complacent? We settle and are content in the way things are. This is natural tendency. It is good when we are not in control. It is good when there are different conflicts coming our way. It awakens us and helps us see where we are.

The Ephesians were so focused at doing well in ministry. They were doers. Hardworking in their careers and at church. So much that they left their first love. **We shouldn't focus so much on being amazing for God but rather be amazed by Him.** Everyone wants to do their best for God, especially leaders at church. So much that it causes us to lose our sense of wonder at the mysteries of life.

Jesus says these folks have abandoned their first love. NKJV - you have left your first love. NIV - you have forsaken. The Message translation - you walked away.

Leaving your first love means our heart has grown old and cold. They were still serving and doing great things. It is so easy to do a lot of things for God, but not to have done these things because we love God. You can do a lot of things for God, without any love for God. It is the heart motive that God is after. Jesus is asking this morning, where is your heart?

This reminds us of the story in Luke 10 when Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. Mary sat with Jesus and listened to him. Martha was running around serving, helping with hospitality, and complaining about Mary.

“Martha was distracted with much serving.” (v.40)

“But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (v.42)

Martha, just like the Ephesian church, forgot to check her heart motives. We can become distracted with our own serving. It is easy to serve and do things for God but in fact the very thing you are doing is distracting you from the one thing that is needed, which is to worship Him and love Him.

I am just challenging you to think - in 2020 will you focus on your relationship with God more than all things that you want to do for God. Do not be fooled by all

that you do. Question is your motive, are we loving people, are we loving God. Our love for people of our love for God. When we leave our love for God, we cannot be vessels of God's love for people.

d. Remember Christ's love. *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen" (v. 5)*

Verses 5-7 help us reload and prepare for the new year.

The first step in restoration for the Ephesian church is for them to remember.

What is "first love" ? Jesus initiating! God was the first to love. God the Father's first love was his son, Jesus, which he gave to us, to be an atonement for our sins. We should realize just how much He thinks of each one of us. We are worth so much to Him. He loved us first.

Looking back is so important in our spiritual life. Reflect on 2019 and see where you are now. Maybe you have grown so much in the past year. Maybe for some you have fallen in your passion for God. Sometimes it helps to look at old photos and listen to old worship songs that you used to sing.

The Ephesian church was a working church. Sometimes a focus on working for Jesus will eclipse a love relationship with Him. We can put what we do for Jesus ahead of who we are in Him.

In Ephesians 2 Paul reminded the early church (and us) from where we have fallen:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world.... carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4 But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Always remember where you were in your relationship with God when you did things when you loved him.

e. "Repent," (v. 5)

This is not simply a command to feel sorry, or really to feel anything. It means to change your direction, to go a different way. It is an urgent appeal for instant

change of attitude and conduct, before it is too late. It is a turning away from a life of folly to a life of wisdom in the Lord. What better time to change direction than at the beginning of the year? When you repent, God will not only forgive your sins, but also renew you by His Spirit.

Be like Mary, not like Martha. Be present with Him always.

Natural rhythms in our year give rest and reflection so that we can change direction if needed: Daily bread, weekly Sabbath, monthly communion, yearly/decade review.

f. Recommit / re-do the first works *“and do the works you did at first.” (v. 5)*

This means that they must go back to the basics, to the very first things they did when you first fell in love with Jesus. These are the things that we never grow beyond.

What are the first works? Begins when we heard the Word of God, believed, and received Christ.

Return to what you did at first. Hear the word and believe. Hear the Word of God such that you understand it. Allow the Word to enter in and be life changing, and allow it impact your decisions. Faith comes from the Word of God about Jesus!

Restoration of relationship of God had been broken by sin or sin of neglect. This coming year, you need good habits. Good habits are built upon other habits. Recommit to do things that help you with relationship with God.

Do things that you did when you loved God purely. But keep in mind that this does not mean that we rush to doing again.

Recommitting is like a New Year's resolution.

Our resolution is to remember Christ's love every morning. Our first love. To thank him. Our kids have a prayer song that we created. It is our heritage to them.

g. If we have no love for God and others, the church disqualifies itself as a lamp. *"If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."* (v. 5)

We must be reminded that God is love. If we have no love for God and others, the church disqualifies itself as a lamp. God's desire in Rev 1 is for all churches to rule and reign with him.

h. Speak the truth in love to those with differing views. *"Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."* (v. 6)

Nicolaitans were false teachers who altered the message of the Gospel. They tolerated adultery and compromised with sin. The correct approach when interacting with those we do not agree with is to speak the truth in love. Even in the midst of differences in views. There has been lost, the warmth of Christ, esp in our divided country.

i. We all need to hear what Jesus says to the churches. *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* (v. 7)

Churches of all time in history have dealt with the same issues. It is time to mature, walk in love, and grow up in every way into Christ.

j. The overcomer will receive a reward. *To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'* (v. 7)

Tree of life is also shown in Genesis 2 (garden of Eden), rev 22:2 (new heaven and new earth). This is where God dwells. As you do this - remember, repent, and recommit...you will have an abundant life.

Conclusion

Let us get back into the Word, designated times of prayer, fasting so we can focus. Take time to remember. You may have bookcases of journals untouched. Journal, so you can remember later on about God's faithfulness.

Tell your testimony. Something about telling your story over and over again that fortifies what God is doing. Every time I share, I am encouraged. Something in my heart helps me to remember my first love. Share that story.

The church is the light of this world. A lampstand is meant to burn brightly for Christ. We are called to be a radiant church. A bright church. A church has no

other reason to exist but to burn brightly for God. When our relationship with God is right, we will be able to shine our light. We are called to be the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

That is why we love the name “Christ Church.” It signifies that the church belongs to Christ and He is the only one exalted.

If any of you are wondering how the Ephesian church responded to Jesus’ letter? **In the early 2nd century, shortly after the letter of Rev 2 was sent, Ignatius praised the love and the doctrinal purity of the Ephesians.** “You, who are of the most holy Church of the Ephesians, which is so famous and celebrated throughout the world. . . you, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit. You are complete in Christ Jesus.”

Let us pray now...

Jesus, I pray we would be people of God in response to the grace that you have poured onto us. When you reflect on your goodness and all that you have done for us, we don’t want to forget what we used to do when we loved you. I pray that this year, we would go deeper, we would love you. Help us to love ppl more, so that lampstand would continue to burn brightly for you. Remind us that when we lose our love....help us to grow fervent in our love for you. Use our church. Break our hearts for the things that break your heart. Help us to see the things that you see. Help us to feel what you feel. In 2020, may it be less about us and more about you. Do the work that only can do. Do it right here in our hearts.

And now let’s take communion together as we remember our first love.

