

Focus
Revelation 2:1-7
#2 in a Series from the Book of Revelation
Faith Community Church, July 22, 2007

Introduction

1. Have you ever wondered what Jesus thinks about the way you are living as a Christian? What would he praise you for? What would he tell you needs to be changed?
2. Revelation 2 and 3 contains seven short letters addressed to seven churches in Asia (map).
 - a. These were real churches at that time, but these letters deal with issues are common to churches and Christians of all ages, including ours.
 - b. The letters follow a pattern –
 - i. “To the angel”
 - ii. A description of the character of Christ.
 - iii. Strengths and weaknesses, and a call to repent.
 - iv. A call to listen.
 - v. Challenge to overcome and a promise.¹
3. As we look at these letters, we’re going to see examples that we should be following and patterns of behavior that need to change.
4. Read the first letter, to the church at Ephesus, in Revelation 2:1-7.

About Ephesus

1. While we have an entire letter written to this church by Paul, Acts 18-20 tells us a great deal about the beginning and early days of the church at Ephesus. In addition, we get a sense of what the church was likely facing 30 years later when Revelation was written.
 - a. Occultism – Acts 19:11-20. Note that the value of the books containing supposed magic rituals and instructions was 50,000 pieces of silver. A piece of silver was the equivalent a day’s wage. Putting that into some figures we can understand, that would be a common salary drawn over 188 years, or somewhere around 6 million dollars.
 - b. Artemis (Diana) worship – Acts 19:21-41. Artemis or Diana was a goddess of fertility, and Ephesus was the home of a huge temple dedicated to her. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and was reputed to be 350x180 feet, which would be approximately the size of the playing field at Citizen’s Bank Park. Worship of Artemis involved ritual temple prostitution and was a common part of the fabric of life in Ephesus.
 - c. False teaching – Acts 20:28-30. The variety of ideas present in Ephesus led to the existence of different groups who tried to combine Christianity with other belief systems. We are told about a group known as the Nicolaitans that we

¹ Osborne, Grant: *Revelation*, 105-106.

see in other places in Revelation 2 & 3. Suffice it to say that the concerns that Paul had for the church were realized.

- d. Emperor Worship. Ephesus had a temple dedicated to the Roman Emperor, and guarded the honor of having that temple zealously. I won't take the time at this point to describe what was involved, but we should know that a person who wanted to remain loyal to Christ could not participate in worship of the emperor without compromising his or her loyalty.
2. Last week we spoke about the kinds of challenges that people in that day faced from the culture around them. They faced challenges to their allegiance to Christ, to their beliefs as Christians, and to their moral purity. In addition, being people like us, they faced some of the same spiritual issues that we face. So let's see what Jesus said to them and how his words relate to us.
3. Read Revelation 2:1-7.

The Evaluation of the Church in Ephesus

1. Commendation (2:2,3,6) We will see that from church to church the extent both of the commendation and correction varies. In this case, there is much to be commended.
 - a. We see a description of a church made up of people who were
 - i. Hard-working and active
 - ii. Able to discern truth from error
 - iii. Persevering in spite of opposition
 - b. These are good qualities and we should aspire to imitate them because they reflect a foundational quality of faithfulness to both the mission and message of the church.
 - c. As Jesus looks at us as a congregation (and we need to see ourselves in that way), does he see these qualities in us. Does he see those qualities in us as individuals (and we need to see ourselves in that way too)? Are we making a contribution to the work of God in any way? Do we do our work well? Do we know Scripture well enough that we can tell when someone is teaching something that is wrong? Do we hold on to our faith even when circumstances go against us?
 - d. Those things ought to characterize us, as a church and as individuals, and where they are not present, they need to be cultivated.
2. The problem though is that in spite of some things being very right, there is something very wrong. There is something missing, something so important that, if it is not fixed, will result in the church closing down. Look at 2:4-5. Jesus says, "you have abandoned the love you had at first."
 - a. How are we to understand what he is talking about? Lots of people have put forth different ideas to try to explain what this phrase means. I'd like to suggest that he is talking about a love for God that results in a love for each other. I don't think that these things can be separated (see 1 John 4:19-21). Let me tell you why I believe this is what Jesus is referring to:

- i. It is lacking in the praise of the church, yet is often found in the company of the qualities that Jesus does commend. See Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:3.
 - ii. It is a characteristic that was praised when Ephesians was written years earlier (see Ephesians 1:15).
 - iii. Fighting for truth and going through difficulty can result in a lack of love.
 - iv. The simple fact of human relationships is that as time goes on we can so easily take things for granted. If that happens with regard to people we can see, how much easier is it to happen in our relationship with God, whom we can't see?
- b. How is this problem resolved? Jesus, in verse 5, gives us two words that put us on the path of recovery: remember and do.
- i. What do we need to remember?
 - 1. Listen to what Paul had told the Ephesian church about what God had done for them: 1:3-10; 2:1-10. Read also 1:15-19b.
 - 2. Certainly they “knew” but my suspicion is that somehow they lost the sense of wonder of it, the grandeur of it.
 - 3. That is why I really hate a reductionist Gospel. “All you have to do is say you’re sorry to God for your sins and accept Jesus into your life.” It’s like looking at a phenomenal landscape and saying, “nice scenery.”
 - 4. Our love for God is built by an understanding of the Gospel in its fullness – our lostness, God’s unconditional electing love, our total forgiveness in Christ, our being free from sin’s penalty and power, our guarantee of eternal life in “the paradise of God (vs. 7).” That’s why so often through the NT we are reminded of what God did for us, so that we would love him more.
 - ii. But then we need to do the works we did at first.
 - 1. We all experience conversion differently. We are all made differently, so we respond differently. Some people’s coming to faith in Christ it is quite emotional. Some have a gradual growth in their understanding so that the moment of their conversion is almost imperceptible, and is not accompanied by great emotion.
 - 2. But regardless of emotional response, two things seem to be consistent in the life of a person who has freshly responded to the Gospel:
 - a. A desire, based on gratitude, to live under God’s rule. That is what Paul was appealing to in Romans 12:1-2.
 - b. A desire for significant relationship with other Christians.
 - 3. In other words, it is good to be busy, as this church was. But it’s also good to be holy. And it is good to be faithful, but fellowship is vital.

4. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3? That is why Jesus makes this such a huge issue. It is good that they are doing what they are doing, but all that we do as Christians *must* be fueled by a love for God and for each other.

How Should We Respond to What Jesus Says?

1. What would Jesus say to you about your love? Has your salvation become a ho-hum thing. Then consider the cross and what Jesus did and where you would be – both now and eternally – without him.
2. And then think back: are there attitudes, habits, priorities in your relationship with God and in your relationship with other Christians that have been allowed to fade away? What needs to be rekindled?
3. Finally, look at what Paul prays in Ephesians 3:14-19. That should be our prayer for our church and our prayer for ourselves. And we have a God who is able to do that for us, so that our lives are effective in serving God, and our church will continue to stand strong in the future and not fade away.