

EPHESUS: LOST LOVE

Text: Revelation 2.1–7

Theme: Jesus calls us to make sure we never lose our love for Him or others

INTRODUCTION — Revelation of Jesus Christ

- we've learned revelation is a revealing, a "peek behind the curtains" if you will
- like an audience at a theater production, you see the whole show
- you get the story line delivered as a whole
- what you don't see is what goes on backstage

Backstage is, well, quite different

- you'd see actors milling around, fixing make-up, adjusting costumes, rehearsing lines
- stage hands & assistants all over the place
- some readying scene changes, others working on lighting and more

Revelation is like that backstage look

- Jesus let's us see a brief glimpse of future drama
- we're reminded: whole lot going on we don't see
- don't often know how it all fits together or when it comes about
- best thing to do: watch unfolding action on the stage
- what's even better here: we know the story line & how it all ends

Jesus is the story's main character

- so, make sure you see Him as the main focus of entire letter
- if all you want is timeline to end time...
- if all you want is attempt to match headlines to Scripture...
- if all you want is to get your scheme in order...
- you're going to be sadly disappointed
- but if you read this book to see Jesus, well, you'll be amazingly satisfied

Within larger letter are seven smaller ones

- occur right at the start: chapter 2 & 3
- seven letters to seven churches
- commonality in nearly every letter
- first, each letter is addressed "to the angel" of that particular church
- second, Jesus announces what He has to say
- He also describes himself in terms of the vision John had of Jesus, seen in ch. 1
- third, Jesus tells the church that He knows them
- He also describes what he knows about them in particular
- sometimes this includes words of commendation.
- fourth, in most of the letters Jesus says, "but I have this against you,"
- then He tells the church where they have gone wrong.
- fifth, having announced to the church what He has against them, He calls them to repentance
- sixth, following this call to repentance, Jesus threatens to church with the consequences that will follow if they do not repent
- seventh, the letters are concluded with a command for those with ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches

- finally, eighth, the churches are motivated to heed the contents of the letter by the promises made to those who overcome.

Jesus is speaking to all churches, us as well, thru His Word

- as we read each of these letters, we must listen
- why? Because He speaks as One with authority
- listen to this: “the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands”
- this means He has authority over each angel of each church
- and He walks among His churches...He is present with each one
- Jesus is Head and Lord of His church: sovereignly leading and graciously present
- does this change how you sit here right now?
- knowing that resurrected, glorified, reigning Savior, Lord of universe is right here with us?
- how would we hear Him? Receive Him and what He had to say to us?
- perhaps there would be a commendation or warning or promise for us

Well, letter to church at Ephesus is our focus this morning

- what about this church at Ephesus? What do we know about it that will help us?
- Ephesus would have been like an ancient New York City: a gateway to Asia
- about 200-250,000 lived in this great city
- and like most large cities, center for immorality and paganism: no godly roots here!
- Heraclitus, ancient historian once said, “One could not live in Ephesus without weeping for her immorality”
- emperor, Caesar, was worshipped everywhere you went, with small temples for offerings
- greatest temple, however, reserved for Artemis, goddess of fertility

Remember, Christianity & gospel came here

- Paul stopped once; Priscilla & Aquila grounded great teacher Apollos in gospel truth here
- Paul returned and spent over two years preaching & teaching, building the church
- then Timothy would have pastored the church even as Paul was about to be put to death
- finally, apostle John was overseeing the church before exiled to Patmos
- so, while thoroughly pagan and wicked, city had a great light of truth within it
- now, some 40 years later, they hear from Jesus Himself

What is it they hear? They hear the...

I. DILIGENCE ACKNOWLEDGED, 2.2–3, 6

- Jesus sees and knows: how comforting – He knows all we do & all we go thru
- sees what Ephesians had been doing for 40 years & commends them

1. Hard work & hanging in there, v. 2a, 3

- *“I know your works...”*
- many good deeds done in Jesus’ name; what they were saved for
- Ephesians 2.10 *“...we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*
- then Jesus commends their *“toil”*: hard work, they really went at it!
- and third, He knows their *“patient endurance”*:
- they kept on doing these things even when opposed
- one writer put it this way:
- known for performance – perspiration – perseverance

- Ephesus had much going on; they were busy about work of God & His church

2. Testing for truth, v. 2b

- a second triad of commendations comes at end of v. 2
- they *“cannot bear those who are evil”*:
- Ephesus had no time for those who loved to sin
- the world exalts tolerance of evil of all kinds today; all the while hating the good
- even if the world thinks we’re intolerant, we dare not seek to win the world’s approval
- we are not to harbor those whom Jesus calls “evil”
- just who are these evil, wicked men, though?
- *“false apostles”*: not just false teachers, but those trying to exert authority over whole church
- the Ephesian Christians tested them; sought evidence of their so-called authority
- but Ephesus would had John’s words just a few years prior
- 1 John 4.1 – *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*
- Ephesian elders had heard Apostle Paul’s words as well:
- **Acts 20.28–31a** — *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them....”*
- these believers kept truth of Word up front & turned away these wicked men
- and so should we: any claim to apostleship should be tested; & it will be found to be false
- they won’t be welcome here, nor will their teachings
- so, they do not tolerate what is NOT from God’s Word
- they put the likes of these thru a crucible of testing
- and they reject that which is false—good for you, says Jesus
- how strongly this speaks to us of knowing our Bibles
- how can you know what is false if you do not know what is true?
- how can you tell a false, empty gospel if you don’t know the real gospel?
- how can you spot false doctrine if you don’t know any theology at all?
- let’s make this our aim this year, shall we?

3. Patiently enduring, v. 3

- Jesus commended the Ephesian church for its endurance already in v. 2
- He returns to it again, so it must be an important matter to Him
- it is not easy standing for righteousness and the name of Jesus
- when the world hates nearly everything about you & your beliefs...
- Jesus says, *“Stand firm; and having done all things, stand firm.”*
- in this third triad of commendations, Jesus mentions they are *“bearing up for His name’s sake”*
- *“If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”*

(1 Peter 4:14 ESV)

- *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”*

(Matthew 5:10–11 ESV)

- and again, in all these things, they have *“not grown weary”*
- Christ never promised a rose garden life in this world
- how do you do this, though?
- *“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”*

(Hebrews 12:3 ESV)

Well, we've heard Jesus' commendation, but now, let's hear the...

II. DECLINE EXPOSED, 2.4

- Jesus commends His church for confronting lovingly and clearly
- He's given nine things that He is pleased to see in them
- He encourages first, sees signs of grace, yet shows no hesitation to point out error
- He's clear, concise and He calls them to repent of their sin
- *"But this I have against you..."*
- *"you have abandoned your first love"*
- Jesus will not simply give the church what they're doing wrong
- He does not act to simply inflict guilt
- He will lay out a plan of action
- but let's consider what He means by the decline He has just exposed among this church

1. First love?

- NIV differs from ESV here
- both solid and reliable, but what's the difference?

1) Love for Jesus

- many hold this & NIV seems to make that decision
- but if lost this love for Jesus why so many good deeds and hard work for Him?
- why still bearing up for His name's sake in face of persecution?

2) Love for one another

- ESV leans this way: acknowledging when you received Christ, you grow in love for others
- Ephesians 1.15 – *"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints"*

3) Probably best to join them

- NLT does this: *"But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"*
- John was the author/apostle of love, after all
- there is the upward love we must have:
 - **John 14.15, 23**— *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"*
 - **1 John 2.3–6**— *"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."*
 - and there is the outward love we must show:
 - **John 13.34–35**— *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
 - **1 John 2.10–11**— *"Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."*

2. Abandoned

- no matter, these Christians had forsaken a prominent love for a peripheral one
- doctrinally astute, holding strong convictions, unwavering for truth
- but becoming cold to those brothers/sisters not holding all finer points they did
- were allowing bigotry toward those who didn't believe exactly like they did to grow
- Jesus' rebuke is clear: you claim love for My truth, but show little love to others in Christ

3. A word to us?

- doesn't seem like this church fits Albion, does it?
- see great love for Jesus, His work and His truth
- also hearing of & witnessing great love for one another, even experienced receiving it
- so can we just pass on Ephesus?
- remember: other churches were to hear what Spirit said to churches...plural!
- caution & warning to us then
- don't pride self on doctrinal positions or just on how loving we are
- one will lead us to cold hearts; other allows unsanctified mercy to creep in & no true gospel
- humbly follow truth with arms locked together in love for one another

After all this, we, along with the Ephesians must hear the...

III. DUTY URGED, v. 5

- aren't you glad Jesus loves us?
- are you not glad that He disciplines us BECAUSE He loves us?
- can you imagine just hearing the rebuke with no love at all?
- but Jesus gave Himself for us & wants absolute best for us
- so He says...

1. Remember

- Ann & I together, boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife 47 years
- I can still remember our first date, quite vividly:
- where we went (with parents), what we ate, my 8-year old brother staring a lot!
- remember your first love, Jesus says
- be continually mindful, keep on recalling, is what He says
- in other words: don't grow lax, don't forget where you were
- how long has it been since you've felt this way about Jesus?
- do you remember what made you feel desperate enough to "sell all & follow Jesus"?
- do you remember those times holiness of God so strong and powerful
- sin exposed, selfishness laid bare, trivial things of world truly being a waste
- how long has it been since sensed weight of all your guilt...
- realized you had no deals to make with God, nowhere to flee from His Spirit...
- knew no hope apart from Jesus Christ and Him alone?
- each morning, rehearse the gospel: sinners saved by grace alone...all of us!
- but, not saved to no nothing; saved to perform God-ordained good deeds

2. Repent

- change your heart toward God
- change your heart toward one another
- not a one of you NOT saved by grace alone
- turn from this sin & turn to Jesus in humble obedience

- maybe you've begun to grumble about your service here at Albion
- you think you're the only one who does what you do
- no one takes notice, no else volunteers, grumbling, complaining
- maybe to no one else but to God
- you're losing your first love: not serving to get noticed, but because you love God

3. Return

- do those things you once did: love each other, care for each other, help one another
- solution is not to gripe about not enough volunteers or leaders
- solution is to remember the gospel, that which has saved you in first place
- meditate upon gospel, and you'll become people who love God & love others
- you'll lay down your life, your time, your service, your abilities for others
- others will see this and say, "I really need to be like so-and-so more; they're so like Christ"

4. Be hearers & overcomers

- hear and do, we're told in Scripture, right?
- James 1.22 — *"be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"*
- you other churches: take note & don't let it happen to you! Jesus is saying
- pride will bring this on: "Oh, it could never happen to us!"
- instead, be an overcomer – word used of victorious soldiers
- know that it is by grace you've been saved, by grace you live, by grace you love

Conclusion — Promise held out to those who listen & obey

- given to eat of the tree of life in paradise of God
- what a glorious promise!
- this simply means we get the blessing Adam & Eve lost in Garden of Eden
- we get the perfect fellowship with God, living in light of Christ's glory
- infinitely satisfying, infinitely blessed, eternally present
- threat against this is given: no lampstand, no light, no glory, no one sees Jesus in us!
- same as promise: infinite...but hardly satisfying
- imagine rejecting the promise for simply praising things other than Jesus?
- but if you conquer in Jesus' name...and He is called the conquering One later
- if you overcome in His name, the promise is yours
- the promise of eternal life with Jesus in the very presence of God Himself
- it will be an eternal feast of joy & love with our Lord