

Sermon: First Love

Text: Revelation 2:1-7

Discussion Questions:

These seven verses are the first of seven letters that Jesus tells John to write—addressed to seven different actual churches that existed at the end of the first century AD. Nowadays, in any particular city there are dozens and dozens if not hundreds and hundreds of different churches. But back in those days, there was more than likely only one church in the city. Only one pastor—and only one team of elders.

- Think about this for a minute. How different would it be if our town had only one church? What would the positives of this be? What would the negatives of this be? Would it even be POSSIBLE for this to be the case—given everyone’s unique preferences and opinions?

The first letter that Jesus tells John to write is to the church in Ephesus. The Book of Acts actually tells us quite a bit about this church. Reading through the account of Paul ministering in Ephesus for close to two and a half years is VERY helpful in understanding what Jesus has to say to this church 30-40 years later.

- Take a few minutes to read **Acts 18:18-22; All of Acts 19; Acts 20:1.**
 - Based solely on what Luke tells us in Acts, how would you describe Ephesus?
 - How effective was Paul’s ministry in this city?
 - How prevalent were the demonic forces in this city?
 - What do you gather about the importance of the goddess Artemis?

Ephesus was the major port city for Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey) in the first century. It was the fourth largest city in the entire Roman empire and thoroughly pagan in its roots and worship. A good analogy is to compare it to New York City. In the same way the world has been enamored with the Empire State Building—or the Statue of Liberty (think tourist attraction), Ephesus had what was then the largest building in the world. It was a temple built in honor of the Greek goddess Artemis (renamed Diana by the Romans). The building was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with great folding doors and 127 marble pillars covered with gold. The worship of Artemis was “religious immorality” at its worst! Artemis was considered the “goddess of fertility”, and the temple was swarming with hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of “temple prostitutes.” In other words, spending time with one of these “temple workers” was considered the highest form of “worship.” Ugh. There was also some sort of connection between the temple and a “world bank.” In other words, it was the Roman capital of sex and finance. Hmm...perhaps a blend of New York City, San Francisco and Vegas.

- How does knowing this about Ephesus impact the way you read Acts 19?
- Before we even dig into the letter that Jesus has John write in Revelation 2:1-7, what sorts of things might you suspect that Jesus would have to say to this church?

Examination:

- Read **Revelation 2:1-3**

- In verse 1, the seven stars and lampstands symbolize the churches; Jesus holding the seven stars represents His authority over His churches; His walking among the lampstands symbolizes His presence in the church. Why does Jesus need to remind them of His authority and presence in the church?
 - The church seems to stand theologically for all the right things – in what area then is Jesus' authority neglected?
 - How were they not living under God's authority? In what ways do we fail to observe His authority—even when we are outwardly serving God? How does God sometimes try to get our attention and get us back on the right track? In verse 4, Jesus speaks some very difficult words to the church in Ephesus. What are they, and why is this such a harsh criticism?
 - How were they guilty of neglecting His presence? Is the presence of the Lord a reality in your daily life? (see Matthew 18:20, Eph. 4:30)
 - When you worship God (in church, in quiet times, etc.), are you aware of His presence? How might we be denying ourselves the presence of God in our lives and worship?
 - What do worship and service without God's presence look like? How do we fall into this kind of spiritual trap?
- Read **Revelation 2:4-7**
 - In verse 4, Jesus speaks some very difficult words to the church in Ephesus. What are they, and why is this such a harsh criticism?
 - In discussing love of God, to avoid a merely abstract discussion, it might be helpful to quantify it in this way:
 - What elements define a loving relationship? (e.g., spending time with the person, thinking about him/her often, the nature of intimacy, etc.)
 - How does that apply to our relationship with God? What do you think spiritual intimacy means?
 - How about specific areas of attitude and time, e.g., do you desire to spend time with God; do you spend time with Him in prayer, quiet times, Bible reading, worship, etc.; do you make those a priority; do you do them with sincerity and depth, or just for the sake of doing them; do you maintain fellowship with God during your daily routine?
 - What do worship and service out of a lack of faithfulness and without God's love look like? How might we fall into this kind of spiritual trap?
 - What, in verse 5, does Jesus tell them they must do to get back on the right track? What happens if they fail to do this? Do you believe this same thing is true for us?
 - How does Verse 7 make it clear that this letter wasn't just for those people in Ephesus way back then—these words are for US NOW?

Application:

Take a good look at your own life and walk with Christ—have you lost your first love? What can you do to improve it? What do you need to repent of? What habits need to change?