

To the Loveless Church

A great desire that we all have is to hear from Jesus. How many times have you said something like “If God would only speak to me” or “I wish that I could hear the voice of Jesus”?

Church, that is what the Word of God is....God speaking.....TO YOU.

When we honor this bible as the Word of God instead of “the good book” we are saying that we expect this Word to speak to us and change our lives. How we view the Word of God dictates what we will receive from it.

We should read it with an expectancy for God to speak because that is exactly what this is...God speaking. It is filled with mercy, love, grace, promise, hope, and faith. The Holy Spirit wants to make it real to you and help you apply it to your life!

Today I’m beginning a series called “To the Church” where we will look at the letters that Jesus wrote to the 7 churches in Asia Minor, which John recorded in the book of Revelation.

Now these 7 churches were actual churches but they also represent the types of churches that exist throughout the church age. What Christ says to these churches is relevant in all times. Throughout these letters you find aspects of every church and every individual Christian.

Most churches will fit into one of these almost perfectly and so will most believers. We also certainly will recognize the big C Church in much of this. Our job is to hear what the Lord is saying and look inward.

If this is describing me, Lord help me overcome. If this is describing my local church, Lord help me do my part and help our church to overcome. If this is describing your world wide, global church, Lord help us to overcome, show us how to pray, how to do our part.

Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV)

1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

In this letter we see this description of Jesus followed by a compliment, reprimand, correction, and challenge which are given by the Lord to the church. We'll roughly see this same layout for the other 6 letters as well.

Revelation 2:1 (NKJV)

1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

The seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches (1:20). Now these seven angels may or may not be literal angels. The word angels may or may not mean literal angels. It's meaning in the original Greek is “messenger” so it could be a messenger angel or a human messenger.

Either way the description of Christ shows that He holds these messengers in His right hand. The right hand represents power and authority and in holding these messengers in His right hand, their power and authority is God given but Christ still possesses it.

As the pastor of this church, any power or authority I have has been given to me by God and is in complete submission to Him. Jesus is the ultimate authority in every single context and situation.

So Christ holds the authority and power which these messengers walk in, but we are also told that Jesus Himself walks in the midst of the lampstands.....the churches!

Listen.....it is critical that Jesus walks in the midst of the church. What does a lampstand do? It gives off light. We are to give off the light of Christ....how can we do that if His light is not within us?

It's also interesting that there are 7 lampstands and in the bible the number 7 represents completeness, so these 7 churches represent all of the churches. That's how you tell if a church is real, legit....does it have the light of Christ? If it's filled with darkness, it must not have the light!

Revelation 2:2-3 (NKJV)

2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

This is the compliment Jesus has for the church. He has seen their past. He has seen your past too!

Don't ever think that when you don't feel appreciated by men that what you do is going unnoticed. The Lord knows your works. He knows the works of His church too!

Works are good when they are fueled by love for God and others, and by faith. We must be doers of the word not only hearers. In fact James told us that without works our faith is dead! What do is good, it is evidence of the Spirit of God active in your life!

When works are done with the right heart, for the cause of Christ, God approves of those works!

As believers and as a church body, we are to stand against evil. No we are not the judge of a man's heart but we can surely observe the fruit a man bears. We are to help lead to righteousness (Jesus).

We must be moved by love. Love is patient, kind, rejoices in truth, protects, perseveres, it's not proud, doesn't boast or dishonor others, it's not self-seeking!

Romans 12:9 (NKJV)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

There is no room for compromise in the church. (Know if I say church, I mean you personally). We must stand for Jesus. But in standing for Jesus, you represent Jesus. The same Jesus who accepted everyone as they are, in their sin, but showed them the way to life through Him!

The Lord sees the stand against evil as well as against heresy. We don't take man's word as truth, we take the Word of God as truth. Certainly God speaks to and through people, but it is always to be checked against the Word of God. Anything that doesn't is a lie!

Then Jesus commends the church for perseverance and patience for laboring for His sake without growing tired.

Right now this says to you that Jesus knows that you have remained faithful. No matter what has come your way, no matter how hard things get, no matter if things have gone your way or not, you are still pushing through, holding on, trusting in the Lord!

Your works are not worthless or without real significance. He see's them and notice that verse ends with "labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."

If you are weary, or tired maybe you are doing things for the wrong reasons (self, obligation, fear, control) instead of out of love for Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

This is about grace and love. When we are living in the grace that God has given us and walking in love for Him and others, you feel rest.

After this great compliment for the works or laboring, patience, withstanding evil, Jesus lays out the reprimand.

Revelation 2:4 (NKJV)

4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

In spite of all the good you have done....you have left your first love. What is Jesus talking about here? This first love is your love for Christ.

How can He give such a compliment of all these great things we've done for Him and then accuse us of leaving the love we had for Him?

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about, some have no idea, others may be in denial.

When you REALLY come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, there is a love for Him that is so consuming, so overwhelming, so incredible that you don't even know what to do with it.

1 John 4:19 (NKJV)

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

When you realize that, your love for Jesus will overtake you. I remember when I first got saved. Not only could you not keep me out of this place, I would literally do anything needed at any time. I got plugged in everywhere I could....why? Because my love for Jesus was so incredible that I wanted to do all that I could for Him!

Love for Christ is the key.

The Lord is saying stop, take a hard look at your life, examine your heart and see if you really have that fervent love for Him. Have you let the things of this world draw you away? Life is busy, I get that, so does Jesus. But it's not a valid excuse to let your love for Him fade or take a back seat.

Jesus gave us one command, Love Him, love people. How often do we let "stuff" get in the way of one or both of those?

Once the love for Jesus is not our driving motivation, it doesn't matter what works we do for Him. The works should be birthed out of the love. Love is the key...

Revelation 2:5 (NKJV)

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

If you have lost the love for Christ, it's time to stop what you are doing, and trace your steps back.

How many of you have lost your keys? Without keys it's hard to get much accomplished, you can't drive anywhere, can't get back into the house, can't get into work. Because they are so important to you, you will do anything to find them.....

I've almost turned a house upside down looking for keys before. You are checking pants pockets in the dirty laundry, looking in couch cushions, under furniture, in drawers, on the floor, if you have little kids you are looking in shoes and toy boxes.

If needed you would to look everywhere in the house, side to side, top to bottom....whatever it takes to find them. Why? Because of their importance to you. Because without them you can't get anywhere.

Ultimately it's best to retrace your steps. You ask "Where did I have them last?", "what was I doing?". "what was I wearing?", you try to picture where you last saw those keys.

Jesus says you've left your first love. Why is it that people will walk away from something the need so badly? How is it that we can become so careless with our love for Christ that we can leave it behind.....possibly for so long that we really don't even know where we left it.

Jesus urges us today to remember from where you have fallen. This is to look back. Consider your spiritual condition right now vs when you first knew that tremendous love for Jesus. how does it measure up?

I'll tell you what didn't change.....Jesus. He is unchanging. He still IS love, He still IS true, He still IS faithful. It's you who changed.

It's time to retrace those steps to see where you lost that love for Christ and repent.

Jeremiah 6:16a (NKJV)

16 Thus says the Lord:

“Stand in the ways and see,
And ask for the old paths, where the good way is,
And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.

For the individual, FRCC, the big C church, where did we miss God? At what point did we leave the love of God in our pursuit to serve Him?

Have we fallen in love with someone or something else, allowing them to be the center of our heart instead of Jesus?

Where did I walk away from God or miss out on His presence?

There are times where every person must stop and realize that they are not as close to God as they should be. We can often tell if we have left that first love by our attitude, and what comes from our mouth. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

Remember from where you have fallen. If you were once on top of that mountain but have fallen to the valley, grab some water and get climbing. Retrace your path even if it's rocky.

Consider where God has brought you from. If you want to rediscover that love for Jesus (or discover it for the first time) you have to rediscover what Jesus has done in your life!

I praise God that I'm not a selfish, hateful, angry, cussing, drunken, porn addict anymore! I didn't do that....Jesus did! When I remember the amazing works that the Lord has done in my life I remember why I love Him.

He died for me while I was a sinner, while I was against Him. Then rose from the dead overcoming hell, death, and the grave. Then He called me by name that I may know Him and He delivered me from my sins. Now He lives IN ME!

That's why I love Him, because He first loved me! Can you find or rediscover that today???

You are to remember where you came from. Remember what your walk with God used to be. Remember where you lost the keys.....then REPENT!

Repentance is more than saying "I'm sorry". Repentance is a change of mind followed by a change of life! If you say you are sorry but don't have a life change, you didn't repent.

Remember and Repent.

Then do the first works, go back to where you first gave your heart to Jesus. Go back to where you first knew Him. Remember where you lost the keys and go back to them.

Revelation 2:6 (NKJV)

6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Nicolaitans were heretics whose deeds were sinful. They were false teachers leading Christians astray by eating foods sacrificed to idols and approving sexual immorality.

It's good to hate sin, evil. Notice they didn't hate the Nicolaitans, they hated their deeds.

Revelation 2:7 (NKJV)

7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

This is the word of the Lord to you this morning.

If you are tired and in need of rest, come to Jesus

If you find that you don't don't love people as you should, come to Jesus

If you feel that you are lacking something but you don't know what it is, come to Jesus

Come back and repent of your wanderings. Come back and draw closer to the Lord. Come back and rebuild your love for Jesus and let His love be known to your heart again.