

Introduction: Pg. _____. Kids. Greet FTGs. Couple of Heads Ups: LENT, Anger Conference. Today... "Dear Church"

"Get Back" Revelation 2:1-7

This past Monday night was one of the memorable nights of Community Group. (Explain CG). I have never been to a CG in our almost 8 years of existence when I thought, man, what a waste. They are always good as we invest into one another's lives, but this one was special.

Here's why: handshakes, hugs and fist bumps all around... but when one of our CG members came in, I could tell something was going on. They began to tell me how rough the past week had been. Then, when everyone sat down for group discussion, they shared with everyone else!

Here's the message: It's okay to not be okay! Jesus says, "Come just as you are."

As the conversation progressed, this person made a statement that probably all of us have thought or verbalized: "It would be easier if I could just have a conversation with God - face to face." Anyone?

Commend: We get that, right? It is a good desire because that's what God made us for and that's where eternity is headed. But until that time comes, we are not left alone. It was so cool for a few of our other Group members to remind this person of what they already knew.

Encouragement: God has spoken to us. He does speak to us (as if he were in the room) by his Word. He's given us prayer. He has sent his Spirit to be with us and in us, fully present. He leads us moment by moment (Psalm 48:12-14). As we walk by faith, he walks with us like a friend (did you know the Bible actually says that?).

As we jump into the Book of Revelation, we see this is the heart of God. While one of Jesus' closest followers, the "Beloved Disciple, John, was in exile (under persecution) on the island of Patmos off the coast of modern day Turkey, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and sent a message to his church in that day and for all who would come behind them, including us.

This clues us in on two keys to understanding the Book of Revelation. 1) Written to real people, 2) going through real persecution and distress. Message: Persevere in faithfulness to Christ (not only what you believe but how you live) because there are amazing promises ahead!

Over the next 7 weeks, we are going to focus on seven different letters Jesus addressed to seven different churches, but it's important to note that his words to one hold relevance for them all. We see this explicitly when each letter says: "hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The first letter is addressed to the church at Ephesus. His poignant message to them was this:

The Point: Get back to loving Jesus like you did at first.

Read 2:1-7

1. Be captivated by a vision of Jesus (2:1).

What does it mean to be captivated?

- To be captivated means our attention is fixed. We're locked in.

- We cannot take our eyes off of that which we're captivated by, because that thing or person or GOD is so stunning, so beautiful, so majestic, so attractive, so compelling, so glorious, that there is nothing else we would rather gaze upon.
- Captivated.

This vision of Jesus is how the letter begins: verse 1.

"The words of him..."

- The letters all follow the same pattern. Begin with a picture of Jesus, offer words of commendation, then all but two carry words of correction, followed by a call to listen to what the Spirit is saying and conquer, finishing with an amazing promise of what God has for us in the future.
- I love how Jesus begins each letter with a self-portrait in the salutation, each one specific to the circumstance of each church. The picture of Jesus holding the seven stars in his right hand shows us...
 - His Authority.
 - HE is IN CONTROL. HE is at the top of the Org Chart. CEO - of the world.
 - This was great news for them to hear because Ephesus was the center of Roman power in that area of the world, and Jesus reminds them, even as he reminds us in our national and global political context (with President Trump and Kim Jong-un meeting last week), HE is King.
 - And his authority is over the natural and supernatural realms. Chapter 1, verse 20, told us the seven stars represent seven angels. Angels were AND ARE (don't miss that) messengers of God, sent to serve his purposes in our world.
 - Angelic Realm - let's get uncomfortable. Our view?? :) Check *Supernatural*
 - They move at his bidding. (Awareness of the supernatural is climbing)
 - T: But this picture also shows us his...
 - His Presence.
 - Look at the last words of chapter 1: "the seven lampstands are the seven churches."
 - Jesus WALKS AMONG us. In Christ, we have a God who is near, intimately acquainted with what is up with us! Thank you, Jesus, I want to walk with you.
- Do you see Jesus like that? If you think that's good, there's so much more! Let's back up to...

Chapter 1

Read chapter 1 [Minimal commentary...] Listen to these words of HOPE! You need some confidence and hope? Read this book!

Post it in Bible for the vision of Christ:

- Long robe - Priest
- Like the Son of Man = Daniel 7 - Amazing vision behind this vision... (quotes or alludes to OT more than any other NT book)
- Hair White like wool & snow (we get that) = THINK PERFECT in WISDOM
- Eyes of Fire = think PERFECT in PURITY
- Feet like Burnished Bronze = think Strength
- Voice - Roar of many waters = Powerful
- Right hand = Covered that - All authority
- Mouth has a two-edged sword = Truth that _____
- And his face shining like the sun in full strength = PERFECT in GLORY! WOW!

App:

What captivates your attention? If we could put a timer on your eyes that counted the amount of time you spent focused on _____ (fill in the blank), what would that tell us about you? How much time would be spent captivated by Christ?

- Get on the mountain...
- Get alone with God...
- Come together with others and fix your eyes on him. (Worship)

T: Be captivated by a vision of Jesus. #2

2. Choose Devotion over Duty (2:2-3, 6).

Because he is present, he knows what's going on with us. The body of the letter starts with the words "I KNOW."

Verses 2-3 (only one Greek sentence) provide nine words of encouragement from Jesus to his people at Ephesus.

I KNOW your...

1. Works (good deeds)
2. Your toil (Working at it... the words means "even to the point of exhaustion.")
3. Your patient endurance (they were persevering).
4. You do not bear with those who are evil (pursuing holiness)
5. You tested AND
6. Rejected false teachers (don't believe everything you hear - even from a man with a Bible. Test it. Does it measure up with what God has said here (in this book)? This is what he also commends them for in verse 6. We don't know exactly what their works were but it seems from future letters it was more than likely false teaching that led to false action (idolatry and immorality) – and by the way, it always does.) – The next three once again address their perseverance...
7. You are enduring patiently (alluding to persecution)
8. Bearing up for my name's sake (ultimately doing it for Christ - his reputation)
9. Not grown weary. (Pressing on...)

Jesus looks at his church, and there is much to commend and celebrate, but he tells them something is very deficient in verse 4. "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

Here's the point:

We can do 1000 good things for Jesus, set up the lobby, greet people, teach the kids, sing the songs, serve the poor, but if we're not doing it from a HEART devoted to God, something is desperately wrong!

SO many times, I've allowed my duty for Jesus to eclipse my devotion to Jesus. It's not just WHAT we're doing, but HOW and WHY we're doing it.

Paul says it like this in 1 Corinthians 13:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

T: You say: "Tanner, I've been there, I am there. What do I do?"

3. Practice getting back by remembering and repenting (2:4-5).

UNDERLINE! These verses! Memorize verse 4 (medimemo) & 5.

What does Jesus want the most from this church? Get Back! Get back to the love you had at first!! You are here, but you were there. Get back! Verse 5: "from where you have fallen." There's a significant gap!

How? Get back by remembering what your love looked like at first.

Do you remember the days when you discovered Jesus was not only the Son of God who came for us - to show us the way back into a relationship with God, but revealed what his cross and resurrection meant for you personally?

- There was an intensity in your Love for God. You possessed a humble hunger...
 - "I have so much to learn and I *want* to learn. I want to spend time with him. It was not something you had to, it's something you absolutely wanted to do!
 - Let me ask you:
 - Does your heart beat fast to be with God? Is there excitement? Is there anticipation?
 - Do you enjoy turning your complete attention to God? Do you find yourself desiring him more and more and more?
 - This doesn't have to go away!
 - Remember from where you've fallen! (RI trip... 18 months ago... Fan the flame: Read. Retreat. Pray for and with others. Sing.)
- Love for God's People.
 - They want to be in the family. Sundays, Groups, serve opportunities...
 - New believers.... Bella would practice & then RUN here to catch the last 15 minutes of worship. WOW. FIRST LOVE.
- Love for those yet to become God's People.
 - G.K. Beale makes a strong argument that this first love was characterized primarily as love for those who need a relationship with Christ.
 - He gets there from the imagery of the church as a lamp, a light to the world. Again and again, the Bible talks about light as the means for people to discover salvation in Jesus. "I will make you a light for the nations, that my salvation shall reach to the ends of the earth." AND "You are the light of the world... that people may see your good deeds and glorify God."
 - And let me ask you this: what happens if we don't share the gospel? We die in the next generation.
 - Seeing our friends believe in Jesus, starting more churches, and seeing this room fill past capacity is the natural consequence of our love for Jesus and our love for people.

That's why our core values at Redemption Hill are: Gospel. Community. Mission. It's always a love in all three directions!

How? Repent... turning from/turning to.

Love is more than a feeling. We live in an age where love is little more than sentimentalism, so far from the biblical vision of sacrifice. Love stays. Love secures. Love serves. Love satisfies. And, oh yes... Love bleeds!.

Can we expect our sacrificial love to lead to feelings of affection and warmth? Sure. But love, in the biblical sense, is action. It is something we do. We see this here by what Jesus says: "Repent (turning from this way to that way - that's action)... Repent and DO the works you did at first."

So their love was observed not by what they said or what they felt BUT BY WHAT THEY DID.

T: Jesus tells us how serious this was at the end of verse 5.

"If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

- It doesn't mean they will lose their salvation. It means they will lose their witness, first in the eyes of others, then totally as their church will scatter and cease to exist.
- A church is a group of people. We are dynamic, not static creatures. Healthy churches flourish and grow. Unhealthy churches don't and ultimately die. Just look around the city of Boston.
- Sadly and tragically, if you visited Ephesus today, you would not find a vibrant community of churches.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (All churches, incl. RHC, listen up!)

T: So how can we keep that from happening here? And be on the flip side of the spectrum - remember, repent, love like we did at first. AND... finally #4...

4. Chase the Promise (2:7)!

Every one of Jesus' seven letters ends with a promise. Notice who it is to and what it is. First, who.

"To the one who conquers..."

- Remember, we're talking about real people under real persecution.
- The main message was: persevere. Conquering does not mean any kind of physical fighting but a call to follow Jesus and be faithful to him through it all. Keep going. Don't give up. Take the next step!
- But how? We persevere through promises!

"I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

- Friday morning, as we were praying for people who are hurting in our church, God gave me a picture of hope...
 - Lift your eyes. See what is ahead. Know what God is producing (Christlikeness & Glory).
 - Walking through times of suffering should not be like trudging through the February ice and snow, where you're always looking down at each step, which is what most often happens in trail - we're focused on the now, focused on our circumstances when Jesus is saying: LOOK UP!! Like a runner on Patriot's Day - Marathon Monday. Keep your eyes up... on the prize, on the finish line!!
 - Let your vision of Jesus, who suffered and endured the cross with patience, motivate your own perseverance in these challenging times.
- Eternity in the presence of God is the place of paradise! There is a tree of life that awaits us. This is the arc of the story of Scripture from Genesis 2 to Revelation 22.
 - God made us for life, where Adam and Eve enjoyed the blessing and provision of God in the Garden by God's Tree of Life.
 - We rejected his gift through our sin and have experienced death ever since.
 - Now in Christ, God has given us life now and the promise of life forever in his presence!
- That's the gospel.

Conclusion:

Do you need to return to your first love?

Do you need to start?

Set up Prayer during Lord's Supper... then pray, pass off to redy.