

Loveless

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well friends, lovely to be with you this morning and how great it is to gather together. Let me just welcome those. Maybe particularly it's been a good joy this morning just welcoming a few new folks in the building.

It's great to have you with us. Thank you so much for coming along. Let me just welcome those online as well. And let me invite you to grab a Bible and turn back to Revelation chapter 2. So last week we finished the first half of Ephesians. We've been in Ephesians for the last number of weeks and I hope that you've been blessed by that. You've been challenged by that.

We're going to take a little break and return to it at the start of next year. And so we're beginning a series this morning that will take us right up to the beginning of December and some of the opening few chapters of this epic last book of the Bible called Revelation.

So let me invite you to turn there now and maybe as you're doing that, let me tell you about a big life stage moment that our family hit recently. Hit a few months ago.

[0 : 57] Our oldest daughter, who in my head is kind of just fresh out of the womb, only yesterday. She started in her own words. She started big school. Now I've since heard from her that she loves it, right?

I take her there every day and she's skipping in now, which is great. She's loving it. But let me tell you what happened for the first couple of weeks when I asked her how school was going.

Right? I would say to her, darling, how's school going? And she'd respond, and I hope I quote her right here. She would just say, it's good. Okay? It's good. And every day, it's good.

It's good. And I'm listening to her thinking, I didn't know we had a teenager in the house. But I'm listening to her and I'm laughing because I'm thinking to myself, that's exactly the line that I used to spin my parents when I was at school.

Right? It was good. How was school? It was good. And do you know what? I got away with that line up until a point in the school year. And that point came when it was parents' night.

[1 : 58] Okay? And I'd be sitting there, remember this, watching and waiting for my bedroom window from behind the curtain, psyching myself up for the moment when I saw my parents' car come into the drive. I'm panicking a bit because I'd realized that they'd actually spoken to the one person who knew how things really were.

Right? And sometimes that came back that things weren't always good. Okay? They'd spoken to the person who knew how things really were. And so come with me, if you like, from Scotland in the year 2020 to Asia Minor and what is modern day Turkey in roughly 90 AD.

And to the risen Jesus, who beginning at chapter 2 speaks to these seven different local churches. And if you like, you want to think about it like this.

In these chapters, he presents each of them with their spiritual report cards of how things are really going, of what he thinks of them concerning their hearts and their lives as they follow him.

Now, before we get to chapter 2, let me just get you up to speed with chapter 1. Now, if you've got it there, let's do a quick skim of the text. Okay? The apostle John, who was one of Jesus' closest disciples, finds himself as a religious prisoner in this island of Patmos, which is just off the coast of Turkey.

[3 : 24] You'll get that in verse 9 of chapter 1. And it's there that John has this glorious vision of who the risen Jesus is.

Okay? Who is he? Scan your eyes over chapter 1. What is Jesus? Verse 12 onwards. What is Jesus? Eyes like fire. Check out these descriptions. Eyes like fire.

Feet like furnished bronze. Face shining like the sun. So here is a guy going into the back of his mind and pulling out every adjective that he can find to describe what he is seeing.

Realizing that his vocab is limited in trying to describe and convey the glory of what he sees. This is Jesus. This is Jesus. The Alpha and the Omega.

The Eternal One who holds the keys of death and life in his hands. And here John is trying to describe him in all his transcendent glory.

[4 : 23] He is the all-powerful Jesus. And who is Jesus? See what he writes in verse 5. To him who, and get this in your mind, okay?

And in your heart. To him who loves us. Quite literally the Greek word there, the one who is loving us. Right? He's just doing this all the time.

To what standard? With the same love that freed us from our sin by his blood. Do you see it? You want to know the standard of God's enemy loving?

Sinner pursuing hell rescuing love for us. Friends, look to the cross. He is the one who is loving us. And verse 13, where is Jesus?

He's in the midst of the lampstands. Do you notice that? Which in Revelation always represents his people. He knows them.

[5 : 25] He loves them. He's with them. And it's this Jesus who speaks to these churches. Now, just pause there for a second and ask yourself. Is this the Jesus that you have in your mind and in your heart?

Is this who he is? All transcendent. All glory. All power. And all loving with his people. So important, isn't it? That we grasp and know, particularly at a time like this, both of these truths about Jesus.

This is who he is. And he speaks to these churches. And you see his first address? First up is the church in Ephesus.

Verse 1 of chapter 2. These believers who find themselves living in this big, wealthy, prestigious, occultic, proud city of Ephesus.

Jesus has two things to say to them. And these are maybe our two points for this morning. If you're into taking notes, if your mind works like mine. Two things he says to them. One positive.

[6 : 30] Greatly positive. One concerning. Right? And as we journey through these today, I hope that we see just how much we have to learn as a local church as we understand what he's saying to these churches.

Ready for this? Okay. Here's the first one. Positively. Jesus loves their desires. He loves their desires, their ambitions, what they want to be as a local church.

And I think two of them kind of crop up in this passage, right? They have a desire, firstly, in terms of what they believe. They have a desire to be known as being, I guess, what we would call sound.

Right? Sound. They believe the right things. You see it, verse 2? Jesus is saying, I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people. That you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.

Right? Think of it like this. That's how I was picturing it this week. You know, my gran lives in a lovely little place called Largs on the west coast of Scotland. Right? And round about her, I remember every time we go see her, I notice it, that the house is round about her in the place that she lives.

[7 : 41] It's all these stickers on the doors that say something like, no ID, no entry. Right? No ID, no entry. So any person coming to the door, right, claiming to be the gas man, claiming to be the electrician, claiming to be a salesman, knows that if they cannot produce the ID that says that they were sent, they ain't getting in the house.

Right? Sensible, isn't it? Right? No ID, no entry. Prove that you were sent. And these believers in Ephesus are being commended here because they're really good at spotting a fake.

Right? That when a stranger turns up in their midst, just rocks up and is spouting the latest spiritual nonsense, the new inside track on how to know God and what God is saying, claiming to be an apostle, that is one just sent from Jesus, these Ephesians are good at holding back and saying, not so fast, son.

Right? Not so fast. The Nicolaitans get a mention at verse 6. I think this is probably how it's specifically playing out in their context. Nobody really knows what the Nicolaitans believed or what they were saying.

Probably something to do with the inside track on getting to God. And these Ephesians are enduring in the fight. They're persevering in the fight of the faith.

[9 : 06] And this is costing them. Jesus is commending them that they're always thinking. They're always willing to go the extra yard mentally. They're always chewing things over. They're always testing.

They're always discerning. Taking everything that they're hearing and holding it up against Scripture and saying, does this match? Does it match? Right? You've had that experience. Some of you know have got really back into jigsaws during lockdown. Right? Our family have done that as well. Love a jigsaw. You know that feeling when somehow another bit of another jigsaw has made its way into the current jigsaw that you're doing.

And you pick it up and you compare it to the picture in the box. And you say to yourself, this bit doesn't fit. Something doesn't feel right. That's these Ephesians to a T.

Right? And you've got to see. We've got to see that Jesus loves this in them. Right? He loves this in them. They have a desire to be sound. Right? To be orthodox.

[10 : 04] And matching that, they've got a desire to be active. Do you see it in verse 2? Jesus says, I know your works. I see what you do. I see the way you serve.

I see it. And I think we're to conclude that this is a very active bunch of people. And again, he's commending them for it. And we're encouraged, aren't we?

As we think elsewhere in Scripture, we are encouraged to not grow weary in doing goods. We are encouraged to serve the Lord with zeal.

To be known in our communities as people who really care. And we show that by the way that we serve. And I was on a call this week with fellow Christian parents whose kids are at the same school as our eldest daughter.

Right? We just got together and we just spoke on the Zoom call about how we can serve the school better. What are the needs of the school? How is the SU group going? How can we support the teachers there more, particularly the head?

[11 : 11] Right? How can we be known as people who genuinely love the school and want to serve the community? Because wouldn't it be a disaster, friends? If all we did was drop them off at half eight in the morning, went home, came back at three, picked them up and went back home again.

And had nothing to do with the school. Wouldn't it be awful if the first time that people heard from us was when we perhaps had an issue with something that was being taught at the school?

The first time they heard from us. We want to be known in the area as people who genuinely love to serve our community. And someone was on the call and they prayed and I scribbled it down because it was just so good.

They said, Lord, help us be known for being a people who serve and who care like Jesus for our community. Brilliant. Brilliant. Some of us, perhaps, I don't know, maybe some of us need challenge this morning as we look at these guys.

But how are we serving the church? How are we serving our community? Are we active as Christians? Are we putting our all into serving with zeal?

[12 : 20] But here's where I think we begin to see where the chink in the armor is when it comes to this Ephesian church, right? And the closer you look at it, you realize that it's not a chink in the armor. Actually, it's a gaping hole right about the heart.

Jesus uses that word toil or, as we read in the NIV, their perseverance up top at chapter two, verse two, rather. And the word toil, the clue, I think, is in that that word carries the sense of being busy to the point of exhaustion.

Okay, so could it be that these believers in Ephesus are so busy, they're so active, that actually they are in danger of burning themselves out?

Or could it be that they've just got so distracted in keeping church going and doing stuff, we can't let it drop, that actually they're in danger of missing the very reason that their church exists in the first place?

I was trying to picture it this week, going on the Ephesus church website, right? Just stay with me, it works in my head. Going on the Ephesus church website, right? Big picture of Artemis in the background, lovely picture of the sea.

[13 : 40] Okay, this is our city, this is Ephesus, right? And then you'd click on the what's on icon, right? Which I'm sure some of you did for Brunfield before you came. What are these guys doing? What's going on?

You click on the what's on icon, and a hundred different things drop down in the drop down menu. Okay, a packed weekday schedule. This is what we do. Monday night Bible study, Tuesday night soup kitchen, Wednesday morning toddler group, Thursday night prayer meeting, culminating in six services on a Sunday.

Here is a church full of worker aunts, right? Busy, busy. Can't stop, can't talk, got a meeting, can't talk, things to do. There would be a Zoom call every night with these guys.

You know, one of my favorite stories is from a pastor in the States called Warren Worsby, right? He tells a story of moving to a new church in the States, renowned for his busyness.

The locals there used to joke, they said, Mary had a little lamb, or perhaps it was a sheep. It joined the local Baptist church and died from lack of sleep. How easy is it to be busy, just busy with church?

[14:53] And I think here's the danger, and this is what we'll see in just a moment, and it's the temptation to draw a straight line between what our outer man is doing and how our inner man is doing, right?

That we get so caught up in the treadmill of service that our service of Jesus ceases to flow out of a deep love for Jesus. That we cease to serve having first wholly satisfied our spiritual thirst because we have drank from the reservoir of his grace.

Friends, Jesus loves their desires. But his desire is for their love.

He loves their desires, but his desire is for their love. Verse 4, and I think these are some of the most humbling words for busy Christians, right? In all of Scripture.

Yeah, I hold this against you, that you have forsaken the love that you had at first. That is to say that the gospel affections, which once in their heart were red hot, they have dwindled over the years to the point that they are now stone cold.

[16:15] What once was a fresh flowing stream of a spiritual life is now a mucky, stagnant pond. Right? A love for Jesus.

And I take that by extension. A love for others, both inside the church. Brothers and sisters, and those outside the church. You turn to 1 Timothy, right? Written, Paul writing to Timothy, who's the pastor of this church in Ephesus.

How much of the emphasis is on praying for the outsider? Praying for the world? Praying for those in authority? Loving the widow? Loving those who can't care and provide for themselves, right?

And it seems that this church somewhere along the line have stopped doing it. Which I guess they might get away with for a while. Okay?

They might continue on functioning fine. But give it a generation or two. And this church will likely have completely fizzled out. Why?

[17:13] Because the current generation won't have passed on anything to the next generation other than a list of spiritual jobs that need done.

Right? You just need to keep this thing going. Keep it going. Bills to pay. Get on the treadmill. And get it done. Spiritual jobs to be done. That's all we pass on to the next generation.

And before we think about the application of this challenge individually, perhaps we need to stop and think about it corporately as a body. Right? Here's the challenge.

Friends, what are we passing on to the next generation? What are we passing on to them? Right? All these young people. Which when I came, you could count them in the one hand, how many we had.

And now all of a sudden we've got tons of young people. Right? Or whatever generation you are at, the generation underneath you. Okay? Friends, what are we passing on to them? What do they see in us?

[18:14] Right? What do they see gets us up in the morning as they look at our lives? What do they see is the thing that brings us here Sunday after Sunday? Because surely this passage teaches us that if the answer to that question is anything other than hearts that within them exist, a sense of awe at our triune God, a sense of reverence when we come before and consider His holiness, a sense of amazement at His grace towards us, a sense of wonder as we contemplate the love of God for us shown at the cross, and a sense of joy at the thought of being His child, friends, if the answer is anything other than those things, then there is no guarantee that this church will exist in the future.

It's the number one rule that they tell you when you're running a baton race. Right? Really simply, what they teach you is that you can't pass on what you don't have.

Right? You can't pass on what you don't have. If you run a relay race with a baton, number one rule, make sure you get it. Number two rule, make sure you pass it on.

Okay? Remember once, running the Scottish School Championships down at Meadowbank, running there in the finals, number three on the bend. Right? Handing it out to get the baton, you're looking at my mark as to when I need to start running.

Went too early, waiting for the baton, didn't come. Okay? Didn't get it. And at that moment, when I realized I'd passed the box, looking at the guy who was on number four, who was the quickest guy in Scotland.

[19 : 58] Right? And he just looked at me and went, where's the baton? Where's the baton? The challenge here, friends, is to make sure that we get the baton.

A love for the Lord Jesus, and we pass it on to the next generation. Here is the challenge for these busy bees in Ephesus. The warning comes at the end of verse five. If not, if you don't change, so serious is this.

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. Now that is stark. It's stark. So what are they to do? Right? See the two R's at verse five.

You need to remember. Do you see the word there? Remember. And this is a call for humility. For throwing yourself down before the Lord, and Lord saying, let me recapture a wonder at your mercy towards me.

Reverence, humility, to revisit the joy that characterized their lives when they first became Christians. Right? I love how Jesus so often describes the kingdom of God.

[21 : 01] Right? It's never in boring language, never in boring metaphors. It's like finding treasure in a field. It's like finding a pearl of great price. This is a wonderful discovery. It's a life-changing discovery.

Friends, it's one of the greatest delights for me about this job. Seeing people for the first time, first time, coming to see the all-surpassing beauty of Jesus Christ.

Right? Just beaming. Beaming. It's all they want to talk about. And you talk to them about, actually, Jesus calls us to deny self, take up cross, and follow him. And they're like, yeah, we're really up for that.

Come on. Now, what's going on? In their hearts and in their lives, what's going on? I can't think of a better way of putting it than St. Augustine. Right?

You can check him out when you go back. He talked about in his own life from years ago, how he chased his worldly pleasures. And then he wrote this in his confessions. How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I once feared to lose.

[22 : 06] And then speaking to God, you drove them from me, God. You who are the true joy, the sovereign joy. And get this, you drove them from me, God, and you took their place.

You took their place. You'd found a greater joy in his life. I love it as well how often Jesus, when he's trying to help his disciples understand the kingdom of God, where does he point them?

To the great of society? To the kings and the rulers? Where does he point them? He points them to the children. Of course, there's an element there of realizing that like children, there's nothing we bring to the salvation party, if you like.

Right? And it's a way as well of teaching his disciples to care for those who have got nothing to offer you. But surely, surely there must be another angle on it. That he's teaching them that something off that same childlike excitement, right, should characterize their spiritual lives.

You know, think about the adverts you see in TV for children's toys. Right? The kids are never bored, are they? Never bored. Right? Imagine the advert, how's your time of gotcha, kids?

[23 : 17] How's your time of gotcha? It's all right. It's all right. It'll do for a couple of hours. It'll get you by. Yeah, it's all right. No, what do they say? They say, there's hours of fun to be had here.

Hours of fun to be had. You'll be at this all day. It's so great. The Ephesians need to remember their childlike love for Jesus that first characterized their lives. Friends, when they first understood who Jesus is.

And second are, they need to repent. which means to stop the way that the words tense there. It's to make a clean break. Right?

Not to let it go. Make a clean break. Do it now. Get out of the spiritual rut that you're in. Do the works that you did at first. There's the call. Okay? Presumably a reference to what they call the spiritual disciplines.

Right? The means of grace. Reading our Bibles. Listening. Praying. Singing. Communion. Hanging out with the Lord's people.

[24 : 18] Because let me just say, we can help each other on this one. Okay? As we keep on going in this season, I think we're going to have to get good as a church at going small.

Okay? And so being part of a home group or being part of a prayer triplet or joining the Zoom prayer times is going to be so helpful for us in addition to coming on a Sunday and maybe tuning in.

If you're not in on that, then let me encourage you to get on the website and find someone's address or you can contact to get in on it. But it's one sure way for our fire and our hearts for the Lord Jesus to dwindle is to just separate us.

Separate yourself from the Lord's people. You know, it's always on those nature programs, isn't it? What the young lions try and do to the zebras. What do they do when they're in a park? They just try and pick them off.

Just try and pick them off. It would be so much easier to catch and devour when I've picked you off.

And it seems to me that that is the same in the spiritual battle that we are in.

[25 : 18] Friends, there is power in staying together and together helping each other in terms of our affections for Jesus. If they do so, do you see how Jesus promises them that if they do that, verse 7, that he will grant them access to the tree of life which is entry into his kingdom.

And that's a glorious promise. A glorious promise. Friends, maybe you're here today and just as we maybe draw this to a close, you're, you know, if there was a doctor were to take your spiritual temperature just now, you know, I wonder whether the diagnosis would come back as you would be a little bit Ephesian.

That love that for the Lord Jesus that once characterized your life, it's maybe dwindling. Let me just tell you as we close what my prayer has been for us this week.

We all can find ourselves in those places, can't we? The prayer for us this week, try and illustrate it to you, right? I started by telling you about a big life moment for us as a family.

Let me just tell you about another one that's happened to us, right, over the last couple of weeks.

We bought a fire pit. Okay? Bought a fire pit. So at the end of the week, we get the girls out after they've had their baths, we've got the chammies on and we just sit around the fire pit and we toast marshmallows, right?

[26 : 41] And because it's a Friday, our eldest daughter, right, she calls it Fire Pit Friday, which I thought was quite good. Fire Pit Friday, don't have the heart to tell her that technically it's a chimney, right?

Just let her have it. Fire Pit Friday. And so last weekend, the girls, we get them down to bed, we have Fire Pit Friday and Alex and I just sat outside for a little while and we watched the fire dwindle, dwindle, dwindle, dwindle.

And then we realised that actually we wanted to stay out a bit longer. So what we did, what I did was just go down next to the fire and just spend a couple of minutes just breathing into it, right?

Okay? Get the oxygen in there and the fire, once you do that for a little while, it rekindles again.

Friends, the answer to our fusion condition, if that's us today, it can't come from inside of us, right?

We can't drum up some kind of religious excitement inside of us. The answer is to know the love of the Father for us, to come to the cross and marvel at the Christ who loved us and who gave himself for us and pray that God would breathe into our lives by his Spirit the knowledge of his love for us in Christ Jesus.

[28 : 01] Friends, what but a bigger and better grasp of the love of Jesus can possibly keep us focused on the things that really matter? Jesus holds out hope to this church in Ephesus and he holds out hope by holding out himself to this church in Ephesus.

The old song we used to sing and we close with this, I am so glad that our Father in heaven tells of his love in the book he has given wonderful things in the Bible I see.

This is the dearest that Jesus loves me. I am so glad that Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.

I am so glad that Jesus loves me. Jesus loves even me. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father we worship you Lord for who you are here today.

And Father we ask that by your grace you would help us to recapture a sense of your greatness and a sense of wonder at how much you have loved us in Jesus as your Son.

[29 : 10] And so Father I pray for any of us here today Father who are perhaps struggling spiritually in the fight who are finding things difficult just now and the sense of awe that maybe perhaps once characterized their lives as young Christians Father Lord that by your grace that you would breathe spiritual life into them and a knowledge of who they are an adopted son and daughter of the living God through faith in Jesus.

And so Father we just worship you for who you are and we pray all of these things confidently knowing that you hear us because we pray in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Amen.