

Revelation Ch2v1-7 - Our First Love

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Revelation, chapter 2. We've begun a series here in Revelation just a few weeks ago. If you've missed any of the talks, please do find them on our church website.

You can follow along there. And we're going to read from chapter 2, verses 1 to 7.

Revelation, chapter 2, verses 1 to 7. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. 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.

[1 : 51] You've persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Consider how far you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

But you have this in your favour. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Words from our reading. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[3 : 08] Father, we pray and ask that you would help us not just to hear physical, audible words, but that these words would penetrate into our hearts so that you change us and form us and mould us into the kind of people and the church that brings you glory and honour and will be good for us today and for all eternity.

So help us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if you remember your first love.

Can you remember? I remember mine. Her name was Mandy. I found a piece of chalk and I wrote on big letters in the back of the toy cupboard door, I love Mandy, and then drew a great big heart.

I was about seven years old, I think. My love remained strong until one day my brother saw it. Well then the slugging started, the laughing and the mocking.

Johnny loves Mandy. Well in desperation I rubbed it out and denied that I ever wrote it, nothing to do with me. I had forsaken my first love.

[4 : 49] Now I know it's a bit of fun but it makes the point, doesn't it? Under pressure from others, from the outside, we too can forsake our first love.

That's what was happening it appears to the church that John wrote to. Verse 4 I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Their love for the Lord Jesus had become cold and distant. Remember, Revelation is a series of visions which has been given by God to John for the church and the purpose of these visions is to strengthen the church in a time of opposition and persecution.

You see, if the church is going to be strong, then we must know where it is weak and where we identify where the weaknesses are, then we can fortify the church and fortify our lives.

in chapters 2 and 3, we have seven messages to seven churches. You can just skim the headings through chapter 2 and 3.

[6 : 04] Seven, as we've seen already in our studies, represents fullness and completeness. So rather than see these as individual messages to individual churches, we should read it as one message which is relevant to all churches in all times and all places.

I mean, we're even given a hint of that in verse 7. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Plural.

And we are a church today in our time, in our age, so let's see what we can learn about our church today. First, Jesus loves his church.

You say, I know that, but this is foundational. Jesus loves Karageline Baptist Church. In fact, it's all because of Jesus that we are actually a church.

Just have a look back at chapter 1, verse 5, the middle of verse 5. It says, to him, to Jesus, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

[7 : 35] To him, to Jesus, be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. in love. Jesus died for you and for me so that we would become a kingdom, his special people, his church, that we would serve his purpose.

Now, this love is not just a past love in the distant, far off past or a fleeting moment of emotion. No, this is a continuing, never failing, always faithful love.

love. Let's go to chapter 2, verse 1. To the angel or to the messenger of the church in Ephesus write, these are the words of him, of Jesus, who loves us, who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

We're being taken back, aren't we, to the vision of Jesus in chapter 1 and we're reminded of two things. First, that Jesus walks among us.

Have a look back there at that vision, chapter 1, verse 12. Here, John, he heard a voice and he turned round to see the voice that was speaking and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was one like a son of man, that is, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one with absolute power and authority.

[9 : 21] What are these lampstands? Well, if you have a look down at the end of verse 20, the lampstands are the seven churches.

And now in chapter 2, verse 1, we're told explicitly that Jesus is walking among the lampstands. He's walking amongst the church.

Right here, right now, Jesus is present by a spirit. We cannot see him physically. You don't feel him bump up against you. But Jesus, the one with absolute power and supreme authority, is right here, right now.

The one who died for our sins and made us a kingdom is walking by his spirit among his people. He's with us.

His love for the church is so great that he longs to be present with us, dwelling with us. He loves his church.

[10 : 28] And second, Jesus holds his church in his hands. Again, look at verse 1. These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

Again, it's taking us back to the vision in chapter 1. Have a look there again, chapter 1, verse 16. Speaking of Jesus, in his right hand he held seven stars.

And we're reminded of what those seven stars are. Down in verse 20, you saw in my right hand the seven golden lamp stands.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. Jesus. Now, the focus here is not who is the angel or what the angel does, but that the angel represents the church.

In other words, Jesus has the church in the grip of his hand. He doesn't let go. It's not us who are holding on to him, but Jesus who holds on to us.

[11 : 39] His love for the church is so great that he cares deeply for us. We should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus loves his church.

He is with us and for us. His presence and his power are at work among us by his spirit. Now, isn't that comforting and encouraging for us today?

As the church is continually under threat, when we feel weak and we're struggling to keep going as a Christian, what is it that's going to keep us going?

Well, listen to his words. I walk among you. I hold you. I identify with you. I understand. I'm with you and for you.

The glorious risen Christ loves Carigoline Baptist Church. He loves us. sinners. And that means he loves sinners.

[12:49] You see, you might be thinking, well, Jesus might love other churches, but I'm not sure if he loves us. And I'm not sure actually if he even loves me.

You see, if you knew what I knew about so and so, or if you knew what I was like, if you could peer into my heart, there is no way that Jesus would love us.

Well, Jesus knows exactly what we're like. He sees the beauty and the ugly. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. Look at verse 2.

I know, I know everything about you. I know your deeds and your hard work. Yet, verse 4, I hold this against you.

You've forsaken the love you had at first. It's the same for everybody else who he writes to. Look at verse 13. Chapter 2, verse 13.

[13:54] I know where you live, where Satan has his throne. I understand that Satan is against you and the pressure is on. yet you remain true to my name.

I know this. Verse 14. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because I know this too. There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam.

Well, he was the one who led people away into idolatry. Or verse 19. Jesus again says, I know your deeds.

Your love and your faith. I see what's going on in your church, your service. Verse 20. But I know this as well. I have this against you.

You tolerate that woman Jezebel. Again, here, symbolic of the world that seduces and pulls us away from Christ. You see, he knows us inside out.

[15:00] He sees our heart. He sees what we do in public and in private. He sees my failings and he sees your failings. Yet in it all, he doesn't abandon us.

He's with us and he's for us and he faithfully walks among sinners and he faithfully holds sinners in his hands. Because Jesus loves his church.

Jesus loves Carigoline Baptist Church. Isn't that good news today? Well, Jesus loves us for sure.

But the question for us today is do we love Jesus? On the surface it seems here that the church does love Jesus. Jesus loves deeds and doctrine.

Look at verse 2. I know your deeds. Here comes the commendation. I love your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people and that you've tested those who claim to be apostles, those of the truth but are not and have found them false.

[16:20] wickedness. This is a church that is most definitely tough on sin. They can't tolerate wickedness. And they're solid on teaching.

They're able to identify false teachers. And those are great marks of a healthy church. They score high on deeds and doctrine.

But it wasn't easy to do this. Remember Ephesus was a city that celebrated liberty and behaviour and loyalty to the various gods.

In fact, within that city was a huge temple that was right at the heart of day-to-day life. It was there to honour the fertility goddess Artemis and the Roman emperors who were put into statue form and to be treated as gods.

And so the pressure day-to-day as you went about your business and hanging out your friends was to join in and to compromise and not to take part in those activities meant you were socially ostracised, you were a threat politically.

[17:30] It put you in the firing line. But no, they did not give in, did they? Verse 3. You have persevered, you've endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

A strong church. They were faithful in right behaviour and in right belief. In fact, verse 6, we're told that they have this in their favour as well.

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. Now we don't know a lot about them but one reasonable view is that they taught compromise.

compromise. They were teaching amongst the churches. You know what? It's hard to be a Christian, I get it. But it's okay if you kind of just slip up and visit the temple prostitutes every now and again and bow to the emperor in the temple and keep your job.

I mean, that's alright. A foot in both camps, that's the best way. But no, the church was firm in their stance. They did not buckle. They hated such practices.

[18:48] Now as we look in at Karageline Baptist Church, what do you see? Well how we behave and what we believe is important, isn't it?

Deeds and doctrine matter and so we give them our utmost attention. We don't compromise. We're to be strong and steady. Yes?

Yes, I got one nod, thank you. But underneath, is there something amiss? Look at verse 4.

Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first. They're morally strong and theologically sound, scoring high on deeds and doctrine but yet in it all they've abandoned their love for Jesus.

In their pursuit of being tough on sin and strong in their teaching, they've left Jesus behind. You see, the danger is this can happen to us too.

[19 : 57] perhaps it already has. You see, we can be so proud that the world view of marriage and gender doesn't take effect on the church and you know, we're strong but yet we can forsake Jesus.

We can be confident that false teaching doesn't get a foothold in the church but we can forsake Jesus. You and I can be so clear about what is morally right and biblically sound.

We can have the right behaviour and the right beliefs but, verse 4, you have forsaken the love you had at first.

You see, we need to be so careful that we don't divorce our deeds and our doctrine from our devotion to Jesus.

We can point out the danger of sin and hold to moral standards but if it doesn't grow our love for Jesus, it's all nothing.

[21 : 15] It's all nothing. We can fit our heads with sermons and go to our podcasts and go to NBC and learn theology but unless it leads to a love for Jesus, it's all a waste of time.

All a waste of time. In other words, the reason why we want to be serious about sin is because we want to be more like Jesus.

And the reason why we want to be so clear in our teaching is because we want to know Jesus better. Our goal and our purpose is that our love for Jesus would increase.

Think back with me to the first time you became a Christian. Christian. I'd guess, and I know this is generalising a little bit, I'd say that for most of us we knew little of what Christian behaviour looked like.

We knew little about Christian belief and doctrine. But there was a passion for Jesus. We talked about him, didn't we?

[22 : 33] sang about him with gusto. We served him. And we read Christian books and we told others about what we were reading and how we were encouraged.

We just joined in the outreach events with excitement and anticipation. We delighted in Jesus because we loved him. Now fast forward to where we are today.

I'd say, I'd guess, we know tons more about Christian morality. We know heaps of theology.

We've got all the arguments. We can be clear on justification and sanctification. We're sensitive to ethical standards. But sadly, our love for Jesus has not increased, but it's decreased.

When it comes to responding in praise and prayer, oh, we just cross our arms and we just mumble along. Our heads are somewhere else.

[23 : 50] We find that when it comes to praying, we've got nothing to say. We've lost our joy. We've maybe grown cold and the fire's gone out.

Reflecting on this is frightening to think that I, that you, that we, that we could forsake our first love. We need to be so careful that we do not divorce our deeds and our doctrine from our devotion to Jesus.

So what are we going to do? Well, we want to renew our love for Jesus. We want to pursue him.

We want to desire him. We want to long for him together. But how do we do that? How do we set alight that flame? How do we return to our first love?

Well, let me suggest two things that we can do. first we can repent of our sin. Have a look at verse five. Consider how far you have fallen.

[25 : 16] Think about it. Meditate. Think how far you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.

Repentance, what does that mean in practice? Well, let me give you three practical steps for us all. I think it starts with confession. That's repentance, isn't it?

Turning from and turning to. Confessing how we have forsaken our love. Consider how far you've fallen. What is it for each one of us that has taken our eyes off Jesus?

What is it that's got your attention? What is it that's captivating your heart so that when you wake up your very first thought goes to there or when you're daydreaming your thoughts go to there? What is it that's capturing your heart away from Jesus? Acknowledge your sin. Ask him to forgive you and he will.

[26 : 25] second, meditate on his love for you. Remember how we saw at the very beginning that Jesus loves his church.

Just think about that deeply, how he's with us and for us. Take time to read scripture and see the beauty and the greatness of Jesus. Revelation is full of visions about Jesus and as we go through we'll see that as people, the angels and all creation as they're captured by Jesus, what do they all do?

They fall down and burst into spontaneous praise because they've seen him. We can confess, we can meditate and we can pray.

Ask God to give you a hunger and a thirst for him. pray that the Holy Spirit would give us a longing for more of Jesus, that you would experience his love in your life each and every day.

The best way of course to do this is in community. Remember this is written to churches, not an individual. As we join together we do these things in community, we confess with one another, we meditate on God's word together and we pray in response.

[28 : 02] We relight the fire, we fan the flame, we encourage each other on until the hearts are set on fire for Jesus. That's why we meet in our home groups, because we want to encourage each other in our love for Jesus.

That's what it means to repent. It's reorientating our life around him. Now, if we ignore this, please hear the warning.

Look at the rest of verse 5. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

You see, a true church, a healthy church, is one that takes Jesus seriously. As we're shown our sin, we confess it, we meditate upon him, we pray for a change of heart, but not to do so, to not respond like this means the Lord Jesus will, verse 5, remove your lampstand.

He will remove the church. Why? Well, because it's not a church. A church is a church that repents and turns back to him and seeks him and desires him.

[29 : 37] And we can say with confidence that he walks among us and he holds us in his hands. Maybe you find this uncomfortable and challenging.

I'm finding it very uncomfortable. But Jesus isn't out to berate us. He isn't showing us our sin just to kind of heap the guilt and the shame.

but because he loves us. He longs that we would respond in love to him. He wants our best because he knows that when Jesus has our heart's attention, it's going to be good for us.

It's going to be best. So we renew our love for Jesus. We repent of his our sin. And then the second step is to remember his promise.

Look at verse 7. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Verse 1 said something similar, didn't it?

[30 : 49] These are the words of him. Now in verse 7, hear what the Spirit says. It's not that the Word of God and the Spirit of God are separate. No, they always operate together.

the Spirit of God takes the Word of God to do the work of God in the church of God. So what is the Spirit saying to us?

The rest of verse 7. To the one who is victorious, to the one who overcomes, that is, the one who responds in repentance, the one who turns back to the Lord and seeks his help for a change of heart.

I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

This is God's promise to his church, to us today. It's a picture of the new creation to come. Have a look with me in Revelation chapter 22.

[31 : 53] We get an expanded version of this tree of life in the paradise of God. Chapter 22 verse 1. Again, it's another vision John sees.

And as John looks, we have this wonderful garden scene, a beautiful garden. chapter 22 verse 1. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit for every month, abundance and plenty, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

This is what the church can look forward to. The church that loves Jesus will be in the presence of God's love in all its fullness and completeness forever and forever.

[33 : 13] Just as God walked in the cool of the garden with Adam and Eve way back in that first garden, so we have a picture of God and his people walking together in the new eternal garden.

At last our love for him will be unailing and undistracted. Sin will be gone, opposition will end and we will delight in his love forever and together we will join in with all God's people and we will sing with the angels worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. So we renew our love for Jesus. We turn in repentance.

We remember his great promise. Jesus loves Cargilline Baptist Church. Let's renew our love for him.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord God, our Father, gentle and caring and good, thank you for your great love for us.

[35 : 09] Thank you for your faithful love. your steadfast love. We do love you.

We do. And yet so often our love for you is distracted. We fail.

We love ourselves more. We love the gifts that you give us more. we love other things and other people more than we love you.

Would you please give us a hunger and thirst for you? Would you increase our love for you? Would you show us the wonder of Jesus afresh?

That we would delight in him and love him? Father, send your spirit upon us and stir us afresh, thanking you that you walk among us and you hold us and you work in us what is good and best.

[36 : 25] we trust you to do this for us and thank you that you will. Amen. Well, we're going to sing a song that's going to help us to respond to what we've been thinking about together this morning.

The chorus knowing you, Jesus knowing you, you're my all, you're the best, you're my joy.