

Remember your first love

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[0 : 00] Rookie error. So this is strange being up here. I think back to maybe five or six years ago, I was reading Revelations as a non-believer. And look at what God's done in my life. Now I'm standing up here! Telling you the truth of his word from the very same text. It's funny how things go around in circles like that.

It shows you how good and how great God is. So as Ben told you, oh this is good I don't have to stay in one place. I can be all over the place. As Ben told you, we'll be looking at the book of Revelation.

So we'll start with an introduction and we'll look at what the book of Revelation is. As you heard, it's not the easiest text if you haven't studied it. It's quite complicated. It's quite in-depth and can be quite confusing. So we'll look at what the book of Revelation is about.

And hopefully this will give us some perspective so that when we come to look at chapter two, we can see what God is saying to us in context. So we'll be looking at that. And we'll also be looking briefly at the language used in the passages. Because the language is very interesting.

But we'll get to that. And we'll see what Jesus is saying and how this applies to us now as a church in the modern times. And I believe that afterwards Chris will lead us in a time of sharing.

[1 : 40] And we'll have some time where we can pray in groups also. For the sake of time, apparently I've got about 20 minutes, I'll be breezing over some verses pretty quickly for the introduction. So don't worry too much about keeping up with me, but we'll be flicking from Revelation 1 to Revelation 2.

So the book of Revelation, what is it? Well the word revelation comes from a Greek word and it's called apocalypsis. And it means an uncovering. So literally an uncovering, a revealing.

Than if you've ever been to a posh restaurant and you order your food and a waiter comes over and he's got this big silver dish with a big silver cover on it. And everybody gets really excited and walks up to the table.

And he pulls the lid off and everybody goes, wow, it's chicken. Same principle, except this is much more exciting than chicken.

And if you know me, you know how much I love chicken. So it literally is an uncovering, but what is it an uncovering of? So if we look in Revelation chapter 1, I don't know if someone can shout out a page number for me if you've got it there.

[3 : 09] 1, 2, 3, 3. I'm sorry? 1, 2, 3, 3. Thank you. Okay.

So verses 1 to 3, I'll read them out. The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it, and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Okay, so there we have a very big answer to a relatively straightforward question.

So verses 1 to 3 tell us that it's revealing the things to come. Now, in verse 3, John tells us a prophecy, that it's a prophecy, and within that, in verses 1 to 3, it tells us a very important message in the order at which this message comes.

[4 : 27] So it comes from God to Jesus Christ and to John. And the prophecy is revealed to John in the form of a vision, which we'll come back to.

At the beginning of this vision, in Revelation 1, verse 11, Jesus, as we heard from Ben's reading, Jesus commands John to write to seven churches of Asia.

These messages are recorded in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 by John. So I'll be speaking tonight about the message to the church of Ephesus from chapter 2 of Revelation.

Are you all with me so far? Fantastic. Okay, so if you want to turn over to Revelation 2, and we'll read through that very quickly.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus writes, These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[5 : 41] I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people. You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

You have 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 favor. 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. And we'll stop there. Okay, so you can see it's quite an in-depth and complicated text.

[6 : 47] Myself and Corinne have been studying this recently with Pastor Phil, and it's not been easy. Not been easy at all, but we'll jump straight in as we look at verse one.

We have an angel. This confused me greatly for a long time. So the first part of this first verse, I think, what is going on here? We have a metaphorical form of address.

I know that some think that the angel, and there is debate about it, that the angel is a particular leader, is maybe the leader of the church in the context that it's used. I can see exactly why.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus, right. So it does seem like a specific address, but we'll get back to why I think that's metaphorical in a moment. So angel in Greek is angelos.

Excuse my pronunciation, it's not great. And it literally means messenger. Is it literally a messenger? These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[7 : 59] I remember the first time I read that. If you're a very literal person, you might be thinking, that sounds like something that's pretty dangerous.

Someone with a hand big enough to hold seven stars walking through some lampstands. Easily knocked over. So let's look at that now and find out what exactly is going on there because the imagery is very intense, isn't it?

So I explained earlier that Jesus came to John in a form of a vision. In Revelations 1 verses 12 to 16, that is hell. For the sake of time, I won't read it.

But that is how John saw our Lord. He was walking among lampstands and held seven stars in his hand. So what John is saying here is, you know, I'm writing this, but these are the words of Jesus and the message is by his authority.

So straight away, and it's a pattern throughout, you'll see throughout the churches that the messages start off like that.

[9 : 17] It's John saying, these aren't my words, these are the words of Jesus. His authority, his words. So now we know that it's Jesus, so what about the stars and the lampstands?

As I said, very intense imagery there. Jesus explains it himself, in fact. So if you look back to Revelation 1, and we go down to verse 20, wait if you're all together.

Okay. Jesus says, the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. So there, Jesus really lays it out there, doesn't he?

That's a very good explanation, but let's go a bit further in depth with that. So we have the stars, seven stars of the churches in the hand of Jesus, and we know that the stars are the angels.

[10 : 32] As we can see, Jesus is talking to the angels of the churches. So I think it's safe to say that, figuratively speaking, the stars are lights, aren't they?

At night, you look up and you have these lights in the sky. So what did Jesus say about lights? He said, you are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bolt. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. That's Matthew 5.14. So I think it's fair to say that for us at Calvary today, that we are the light.

And this is our lampstand right here. So, how encouraging is that? Knowing that Jesus has the light in his hand.

his right hand, sorry. Not two hands. I'd like to emphasize this. Jesus isn't struggling to hold us in his hands.

[11:43] He has us in one hand. He's just like, yeah, I've got this. Yeah, no problem. And that is really encouraging. And so, it is with the fellowship of Ephesus, the church that we're talking about.

In verses two and three, Jesus goes on to commend them and he says, you work hard, you persevere, you have been vigilant, you've endured hardships for me and it hasn't wearied you. I'm paraphrasing a bit there to save time. Can you imagine a commitment like that from the Lord? I couldn't. If I'm being honest, I couldn't.

That is such a commitment to work hard, to persevere, endure hardships for the Lord and not be wearied. I get wearied eating a big breakfast.

This is really something here. These people are really doing something right. But, you look at verse four. Yet I hold this against you.

[12:53] You have forsaken the love you had at first. The word used here for first in Greek is a word called protos. When I first studied this, I thought, oh, first, you first love, yeah, it makes sense.

In actual fact, the word protos, the Greek word, actually means not necessarily first on a timeline, but it can mean first in rank or hierarchy.

hierarchy. I thought, that's very interesting, isn't it? So, what's happening here is you have these people, the Ephesians, and what is happening is a forgetting.

It's a failure. For all the commandments, they're failing to keep the Lord first. What a failure.

What a failure. Shall we move down to church? Sorry, verse five. Consider how far you have fallen.

[14:05] 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. Now imagine that.

That's a frightening text. It's an intense warning.

If we go back to how we were thinking about it, the Calvary is our lampstand. Can you imagine coming here at one point and it not being here? So, what Jesus is saying, I think, to the church of Ephesus, essentially, is, if they don't repent, if they don't turn back, I think they will be disbanded. I don't think the text is talking about personal salvation. I have reasons for that, but I don't have time to get into that. We can discuss it afterwards if you like. Jesus is saying, I will come and I will take your lampstand.

But listen to the words. I will come to you and remove your lampstand. So, moreover, this is a personal visit and that's worrying.

[15:25] It will come in person and remove our lampstand. And it's what he's saying to Ephesus. But, the grace of the Lord Jesus is incredible and he gives them time to repent.

I don't know if anybody, I'm sure you will, we've all felt it at some point, whatever age you are, what it feels like to be left out, what it feels like to be not thought of, to be put on the back burner.

And this is what's happening with our Lord at Ephesus. He's being forgotten about. He doesn't have his rightful place as at the very top of the thinking.

Okay, they've put him down. Something else is coming before him. It's a personal visit.

It reminds me of Star Wars. I don't know how many people here are Star Wars fans. I'm a massive Star Wars fan. And in Return of the Jedi on the Death Star, you have the commander and he hasn't done the work that he was supposed to do.

[16:38] And Darth Vader comes along and pulls him up on it and says, you know, well, the Emperor's coming now. I'm paraphrasing, of course, he doesn't actually say that.

And the guy freaks out. You know, because up until that point, I guess he's had nothing much to worry about. Why he isn't scared of Darth Vader, I don't know. But now the Emperor's coming and he's scared and he starts blaming everybody.

And that's how I felt, you know, it was painful to watch. It's a very human response. I could see myself doing that. And in a way, this is what reminds me. The repentance is, it's an act of grace.

The fact that we have that opportunity. We've got the time to do that. The Ephesians had the time to do that. And it's something that we need to consider because Romans 3.23 says, for all have

sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, every single one of us. And it's something that we need to be thinking about a lot, I think. So John continues the words of Jesus with another commendation of sorts.

[18 : 03] It's verse 6. But you have this in your favor. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. So strong words.

Jesus hates the practices of these people. Now, not a lot is known about the Nicolaitans. I did some thorough research on it and found next to nothing. And I think, based on that fact, we can assume they weren't around for very long.

There is a reference, I believe, in verse 15, I think it is. Where are we? Yeah. Verse 15, in the same chapter.

And they're linked with teachings of idol worship and sexual immorality. So the text gives us hints of why Jesus hates the practices of these people.

And I think it's a strong enough hint for us to think about it. Think about the teaching. So, as this message to the Ephesians comes to a close, we have some very familiar words from Jesus, don't we?

[19 : 09] 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.

That's a reward right there, isn't it? If you study Genesis, if you've looked at Genesis, you'll know that the tree of life was in the middle of God's garden.

When I was studying, I took that as center of God's garden. And Chris was saying this morning, wasn't he, about about God's creation. You think of all the wonders in the world.

And it's an incredible amount to think of. You know, something as simple as the, just a blue sky and the impact that it can have on us. And here we have a tree in the center of his garden in his paradise.

What a promise that is. what a promise to be in the center of God's paradise forever.

[20 : 20] Okay? If we are victorious. If we keep Jesus first and through his sovereignty and for him overcoming for us on the cross, our reward is to be with him, with our savior forever in paradise.

So this rounds off the picture of this message, I think. And it's not just to the Ephesians. Jesus said, whoever has ears, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches.

So are we listening? Are we listening to what the spirit is saying to us? And it's food for thought for us as a body, I think.

And as individuals, you know, walk with Christ. And as Christians, you know, we have to ask, is Jesus my priority? That's a very important question.

And that's what the text is saying. That's what's happening, happened to the Ephesians. They failed to keep Jesus' priority. History actually shows that the church of Ephesus did have its lampstand taken.

[21 : 44] That happened. Even now, to this day, there's nothing there. It's very nearby. There's some tributes. But actually, the place where it stands now, in Turkey, there's not much there.

So, if you're here tonight, and you're not a Christian, there's also some very important things to consider.

Because what are you prioritizing in your life? What comes first? If you're not a Christian, it's not Jesus. Jesus is holding the light.

But if Jesus is holding the light, where will you stand when he comes back? That's something really to think about. I'd like to emphasize that, again, going back to the repentance, his grace of giving us time for that.

It's always time. Time is now to come to Jesus. Say to him, please, Lord, take what I have. Make something of it.

[22 : 56] I have sinned. Save me. Now's the time to do it. Will you buy grace and be given that space? Should we sing?

Should we sing? Should we sing?