

Stunning Generosity

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to be back with you. I was here last week. I know some of you! I know some of you weren't here last week. So just a brief introduction so I'm not too much! of a stranger. Do you have the photo of my whole family there? So this is my whole family.

I'm delighted this morning to have my wife with me, Jessica, and my son, Trevor, and then we have three others who are about to say youngsters, but they're less and less youngsters.

And so and then I'm part of a ministry called Promote Humility, and we do workshops and coaching and have some initiatives, focus on disability ministry around the world and other aspects of what it means to grow in humility. And so that's a little about me. And Pastor Mike, we actually went to the same seminary at the same time, and we have some overlapping relationships.

So he invited me here, and he's been in Alaska, where my wife and I served for 10 years. And so when I asked last week how many people have been to Alaska, I was very disappointed in the number of people who are here. So it's God's country up there. It's beautiful.

But we're in... So Pastor Mike said, you know, Phil, could you come with a two-part series? And so I thought, you know, let's just go to Revelation for two weeks, right? Just something really easy. But what I've been wanting to do here is to really rekindle your interest, draw toward this incredible book of Revelation. Pastor Mike said he preached it back in 2018.

[1 : 55] I'm sure you remember most of those sermons. But we always need to be refreshed in our memory of God's Word. Last week, and I'm trying to come at Revelation from some angles that you may not think about often. And sometimes you come to the book of Revelation, and people talk about timelines.

And I'm coming from a different angle of... Well, last week, we looked at this incredible imagery of the Lamb on the throne. Over two dozen times or so, he's called the Lamb on the throne. Not the Lion on the throne. A lamb on the throne. And so what we did was we took apart different layers of what that image, imagery is. He's a lamb. Image of weakness. But he's a lamb that was... But we don't just think of the symbolism just from thin air. We look at the context. And we saw in the context, there's emphasis this lamb was slain. And then we go another... We peeled back another layer of this onion. And we saw in the context in chapter 5 that this lamb, he was slain, but he's conquered.

And then he invites his sheep to follow him, to conquer along with him and reign with him. And so this week, I thought we would come at Revelation from yet another angle.

And we'll do that by looking at chapters 2 and 3, where there's seven messages. So if you turn, if you haven't already turned to Revelation, we'll focus on chapters 2 and 3. And you recall, if you were here last week, we talked about this very interesting genre of Revelation, where it's kind of three genres mixed. There's apocalyptic, so there's a lot of imagery and metaphor and all these layers. There's prophecy. It says very explicitly that prophecies are things it's saying will come in the future. And it's also a letter. It's a letter that the apostle John wrote to these churches.

I'm very grateful that was part of our passage today. And chapter 1 was read. So go back to chapter 1, because before we get to chapter 2, I want to just set the context there.

[4 : 39] But what I like to do before we start reading Scripture is to pray as we come to God's Word. So would you close your eyes and bow your heads and just take a moment, ask God to speak to you through his Word this morning.

Amen. You are a glorious Christ.

We want to stand in awe of you. We want to see you clearer. Father, would you send your Spirit to just open our eyes so we might see another layer of your majesty and greatness and goodness and grace. And our hearts, whatever our hearts need this morning, you would bring through your Word.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So, the passage this morning that was read was chapter 1, verse 12. But if you'd go back just a little before that to chapter 1, verse 9, just to set the context a little bit. And you see here, chapter 1, and if you're still looking for the book of Revelation, last book of the Bible, chapter 1, verse 9. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book and send it. So, it's a book that's made into a kind of a letter because it's being sent to the seven churches, Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. And in chapters, if you just flip the page there, chapters 2 and 3 are to those seven churches in that order. These churches were in the, what's geography, it's where Turkey is right now on the western side of Turkey. And it's as if these are all kind of in an order as if a mailman was going around to these different churches.

One thing to keep in mind as we look at the passage we are today, I just want, I titled this message Stunning Generosity. Last week, we saw this stunning reveal as the Lamb was revealed on the throne and we marveled at the fact that it's a Lamb. In the back of your mind here, I want you to think about the stunning generosity of this Lamb. And we saw the glorious picture of this Jesus as was read earlier of chapter 1, verses 12 and following of this glorious King in which John falls before.

[8 : 07] His face shining like the sun in full strength. We already see God's generosity. This glorious one is among the lampstands. Do you see that in verse 12?

There's seven golden lampstands. And then at the very end of chapter 1, it says in the seven lampstands are the seven churches. So there's this picture of this glorious, bright, really terrifying, conquering, glorious one. And he's walking among the churches. You think about Kenosha. This king walking among his people. And so you say this glorious generosity of this king coming along to this people and each church having its specific issue. He knows these churches and he knows the particular temptations of some, discouragements of some, where they need to be warned, where they need to be encouraged. He knows his people like a tender shepherd. By the way, something I was just thinking about. Isn't that interesting that he's described in such glorious terms here in chapter 1? So bright and fearsome. It could have been that the descriptions of Jesus for the rest of the book could have been the glorious one on the throne. But he's described as a lamb on the throne. It's very interesting how the book is put together. So it's written to seven churches, or this whole book is written to seven churches. But it's all within, and here's very interesting, it's all within one book.

So think about the other letters in the Bible. You have a book to Corinth. It's to, you know, one location. There may be some house churches in that book, but it's to Corinth. Or it's to Thessalonica.

But we have something very unique here, and something to keep in mind as you read the book of Revelation. It's one letter written to seven churches in very unique situations. They need the book of Revelation for a different reason. Again, some that need to be warned. Some need to be encouraged.

[10 : 48] So in a sense, you need to read the book of Revelation seven times at least. Having read the context of each of these seven churches, they are seven letters or messages in chapter two and three.

What was it like in that particular church? What were they facing? What were the temptations or discouragements? And then, read the book of Revelation. What did they need to hear?

What we're going to do today is, just like last week, we peeled an onion. Today, we're going to go the opposite direction.

We're going to be like an image of a telescope. We're going to focus on one of these churches.

We're just going to start with the first one. We're going to look at the book of, or the message to the church in Ephesus, chapter two, verses one through seven.

We'll focus in on that. And then what we'll do is, we'll take a, we'll change the lens a little bit. And then we'll, and then we'll change it once again.

[11 : 50] What was it like for Ephesians to get this message to them particularly? But then, what was it like for the Ephesians to read the other people's mail?

Do you realize that? These aren't just individual messages to this particular church, but they are given the opportunity to read other people's mail and see what was said.

And it's very interesting what the Ephesians need to hear as they read what was written to the other churches. Because the one phrase that's repeated exactly the same in each, each message, you can see it in chapter two, verse seven.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Ephesians? No, to the churches, all the churches. That same phrase is said each place.

Listen to what Jesus is saying to all the churches. You need this. And we'll find, especially with Ephesians, that the message of the Ephesians is that, and these seven, there's seven by the way, a characteristic of literature in the Bible often is a chiasmic structure.

[13:06] That means there's a similarity between the first and the last. There's a similarity between the second and the second to last, etc. And that's what we actually find here.

If you want to look at two churches that there was only encouragement, there was no warning, they only needed to be challenged to persevere, it's the second and the second to last.

And we'll find today is the first and the last, Ephesus and Laodicea. There's some similarities of what their challenges were and what they needed to hear.

So, let's look at the telescope here. Let's just look at Ephesus, okay? And what we have is a warning. Chapter 2, verse 2.

Jesus is saying, and by the way, back up in verse 1, to the angel of the church in Ephesus. Now, that could be just the leader of the church. The words of him who holds the seven stars in his hands and who walks, I love this, walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[14:11] That is, he walks among the churches. He knows what they need. And this is what this particular church needs. I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance and how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary. This is an amazing church. I'd recommend you go to this church by what's been written already.

Here are some, what's admirable about this, admirable strength. Do you notice there, they've not, they've not grown weary. Patient endurance. There's been, there's been hardship.

There's been persecution. There's been hard things but they have persevered. They're not like the seed that fell among the rocky soil that just died off when the persecution came.

No, their roots have gone deep and they've persevered. Admirable strength. And they have admirable minds. They knew what was right and wrong.

[15:26] Look at verse, verse two. But you have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

They knew what was right and wrong. They courageously stood up to these false teachers. Admirable minds, admirable strength.

And perhaps this could be said of Christ the King, Kenosha. You've endured through hard things. You've got bright minds. You're able to decipher what's good and bad.

But I was noticing that the description of Jesus in chapter one, his eyes were like a flame of fire. I.e. his eyes could see, bring light to dark places. He could see what was really going on. On the surface, you go, wow, great church.

[16:30] But something else is being unveiled. Verse four. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

So, admirable minds, admirable strength, but absent hearts. And what's really remarkable is this is Ephesus. If you know your Bibles, this is where Timothy was a pastor.

Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus. But that motivation out of a genuine affection for God were drained away.

It was becoming mechanical. They knew the right things to do. They knew the right things to say and do, but they no longer delighted in God.

Perhaps when they first fell in love with God, they loved to walk with Him and talk with Him. They loved to sing and their hearts were overflowing. They loved to tell people about Jesus out of that overflow.

[17 : 45] But now, it was just duty. It was good duty, great duty, but it was just duty. And this doesn't speak of specifically you've abandoned the love at first.

It doesn't say love toward God or love towards others, so it's probably a bit ambiguous as it's both. So when at first their love for one another was sacrificial and long-suffering now is just they just kind of put up with people.

They just loved the people that were easy to love, not the ways that was sacrificial and loving. So let's just stop here and reflect.

Think about a married couple. Imagine a couple that the husband is madly in love with his wife, but over time the wife's love just starts to grow cold.

Nothing that the husband has been doing, it's just her, just her attention as other places get involved in hobbies and activities, a side job, the kids, the friends, and her heart just drifts ever so slowly away over time.

[19 : 04] She's still faithful to her husband, still fulfills her responsibilities at home, but she doesn't delight in him. So a while back, Jessica, my wife, and I were on a walk and we were holding hands and a couple older folks were coming the other direction and I still remember one of them mentioning, oh, it's great to see young people holding hands and I was like, well, of course I'm going to hold my wife's hand, but it was just an image that caught me.

you know, I still remember my father who's passed away eight years ago or so, his big hands and my mom's very slender hands and all the way up till his, he could no longer walk, they'd be walking through the halls of the retirement center, and he'd have his big hands on her hands, like that affection.

And so I just, as an image for you, are you holding God's hand or are you just kind of marching and getting things done and knowing this is the right direction to go or are you actually holding his hand in affection?

Because if you're holding his hand, you'll go the right direction and you'll have endurance. Are we holding his hand? But this is no small matter.

Look, look at verse 4 again, but I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen.

[20 : 47] Repent and do the things you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

Wow. Lampstand referring to the church where God's spirit is working and he would just move away. I don't know how immediate, maybe over decades or something, but the life, God's life in the church would ebb away.

He would leave it. So it's a warning, a warning to love.

Well, what if you feel like your love has grown cold? Well, this is what he says, the Ephesians kind of the three R's, just briefly there, verse 5, remember, therefore, from when you're fallen, so remember, what was that when I was on fire for Jesus, what did that look like?

Again, I walked with him, I was talking to him, I was singing, I was telling, what was that like? So I remember, second R, repent, right, middle of verse 5, repent, just a humble recognition, yeah, this is how it is.

[22 : 13] My affection has grown cold, and so don't be dismissive, don't think about somebody on the other pew there, it's, it's, I need this, and then return, and do the works you did at first.

But I'm really glad, unfortunately, we read this, and that's all we read. I'm so glad that's not it.

That this message, the Ephesians, was put in another context. And so let's back up here with the telescope, and look at what the Ephesians would have read in addition to this message.

again, these seven books, and there's a similarity between the first message and the last one. Look at the last one, chapter 3, verse 14.

they would be reading this after they read about their own situation, and perhaps they're feeling like, oh boy, love is not like a, affection is not like a switch you flip, you know, just turn the lights on, and I have this affection for God.

[23 : 48] what's a good thing they keep on reading. And they run across the church of Laodicea in a very similar situation in which love has grown cool. Chapter 3, verse 14, and the angel of the church in Laodicea write the words of the amen, the faithful and the true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. They've lost the warmth of their affection for God.

Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. Consequence again, quite dramatic. For you say, this is, you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.

Too often we see the things going well and we think, well, we've arrived as a church. not realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold. That is, come to another market, as it were, which we find all these things are free in this market. Come to Jesus and you'll find gold, gold refined by fire, so you may be rich in white garments, so you may be clothed yourself, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salved to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

[25 : 17] Everything is at the Jesus market. And notice verse 19 though, very, very interesting. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Very interesting. The seven, that's this chiastic structure, you see the very first one, they're lacking love. And the last one, the emphasis is on God's love for his people.

And look at this beautiful image of Jesus' love for his church, a church that has grown cold in its love or cruel in its love.

Verse 19, those whom I love, I reprove discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, verse 20, beautiful image here. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.

[26 : 28] It's such a beautiful image. And this is for Christians. This is for a church. This is not for non-Christians to get introduced to Jesus.

This is for the church to be reintroduced to Jesus and he's offering himself to the church. He's ready to come in.

What do you do to grow in your affection for Jesus? Do you kind of work up this energy and this to love Jesus more? You just open the door.

You have him come in. he wants to be with you. He's the one taking the initiative. And it's this image of fellowship.

Come in and eat with him and he with me. So this idea, sitting around a table, being with him, enjoying his company. every day, we say, I need you.

[27 : 37] Come in. I want you. I want more of you. So if you look at the church in Ephesus, if you just looked at the message of them, there's this warning.

They're to repent of this lack of affection. But as you open the telescope a little bit, as they've continued to read, they learn about this generosity of this Jesus that keeps on knocking.

This is not the first time he's come, but he keeps on knocking. He wants to have fellowship and friendship with them. And so they've, that's the second, they've read the other mail because that's purposely here for them.

But there's yet one more. Because these letters don't end there. This, this whole letter, including the what's to the Ephesians, continues for the rest of the book.

So here's the question. This is why you need to read the book of Revelation seven times in each of those churches seats, as it were. what did the church in Ephesus need from the rest of the book?

[28 : 54] Because often we think, well, what the churches needed at that time with all the persecution and hardship, and some of these churches, they were suffering, and what they needed to hear from Jesus was endure.

Don't be afraid. And so as they would read the book of Revelation, they'd learn about this conquering king that they could depend on to bring full redemption to them. Yes, that's what they needed to hear.

But what did the church in Ephesus need? They needed their hearts rekindled. So for them, that's what the rest of the book of Revelation was for, was to rekindle their delight in God, to stir their affections afresh.

And so what I encourage you to do is read the book of Revelation with that lens on, Jesus, I want to fall in love with you again. And see what the book of Revelation does for your heart.

Let me just give you a number of the images that you run across the book of Revelation that I found just wow. In certain seasons, I need these images. Obviously, last week, it was the lamb on the throne.

[30 : 09] And you just meditate on, oh, my goodness, he's this symbol of weakness that conquers and when we feel weak, we're strong when we're in Jesus and depending on him, his power is

made perfect in weakness.

Incredible image you meditate on. One of the images I mentioned last week also is this spring of water, repeatedly in this book, to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

it's a beautiful image I can come to Jesus with as by greatest thirst and hunger. I don't have to bring anything.

I just come with my neediness and my lack and he is there with eternal living water. Wow.

And it's described in Revelation 22 as a river plentiful righteous the water of life. So maybe you need that encouragement.

[31 : 14] Or maybe you're just feeling a lack of you're feeling alone and then you run across this image of this wedding feast and the Lamb's delight in his bride.

In this wedding feast that's just overflowing and he's building a home for his bride. And so perhaps you are also feeling a sense of insecurity and you learn about this city he's building which is perfectly secure.

Safe. Oh and along the way you read all these songs that can stir our hearts in affection for this king.

Oh also to those of you who are in the midst of struggling through being taken advantage of.

There's injustice.

You're angry at how you've been treated. Oh Revelation is a good book for you. There's a rider on a white horse.

[32 : 23] There will be justice and as we sang earlier on everything will be made right. everything. It's a bloody book.

And for those who have faced injustice it's good news. And so what we find in this book is a feast.

So do you see what's happened as we have opened up the telescope if you were in Ephesus you've read the letter to yourself and you've had a warning.

You open the telescope a little more and you have this invitation of this king and wants to sit with you and you open it even further and there is a feast. Jesus is the feast for you.

And he comes in so many different images to satisfy your needs and that you might follow him and worship him for all that he is for us.

And so think of this stunning generosity of this feast. Talking to Jessica as we were driving up here I don't know if you've seen the websites where you can zoom really far in like to an atom or smaller and then zoom way out and you can see the galaxies.

[33 : 46] It's just a website that helps you see the big and the small. That's what I encourage you as you come to the book of Revelation. Think of that image. You come to these images and you kind of peel back the layers like that onion or you back up and you see all these incredible images and may it be a stunning generously stunning feast for your souls.

Let's pray. Father, I just want to give another moment of quiet for my brothers and sisters here and that they would just take this moment and what images perhaps that have already been mentioned do you want to feast upon for this coming week?

What is it about Jesus that you want to grow in your awe and your delight in? Take a moment and do that. And Father, as we see so often in the book of Revelation, your people turn to sing.

We have so much to sing about. You bring so many lavish blessings even though we don't deserve it.

We come empty handed. You are so, so generous to us. As we prayed last week, tune our hearts souls to sing your grace.

[35 : 37] Streams of mercy never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise. Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.