

You don't bring me flowers anymore

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Date: 01 June 2020

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[0:00] okay today we're reading from revelation chapter 2 verses 1 to 7 to the angel of the church in ephesus write the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands 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 but i have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first remember therefore from where you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first if not i will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent yet this you have you hate the works of the nicolaitans which i also hate he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to the one who conquers i will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of god okay uh well good morning everyone my name's david it's uh great to be gathering together as christ people uh would you pray with me as as we begin let's pray father in heaven you know our hearts and you know that we are quick to listen to the world around us and we're slow to listen to you we're often quite deaf towards you so lord we need you to give us a spiritual ear to hear your voice to hear your truth we can't create this ourselves we ask that you give it to us please speak to us so that we might find life in you i pray this in jesus powerful name amen well uh when em and i moved to sydney for a few years we had to go church hunting uh it was a good experience to help us work out what makes for a good church what's essential and what's just our personal preferences and after this one particular church service uh i decided to do a little experiment to see if it was a good church on them in a crowd of around 200 people all around there's guys hugging each other welcoming each other laughing together i assure you this is before covid came i walked into the middle of the crowd and stood there by myself to see how long it would take for someone to come up and welcome me i didn't time it it was probably only five minutes standing there by myself but it felt like an hour it was such an awful feeling needless to say i didn't feel very loved or welcomed except for one young guy who came up and spoke to me

i think being authentically welcoming is a good mark of a healthy church isn't it is that your experience if the lord has welcomed us to himself as we are surely we will extend that welcome to others what other marks would you look for for a healthy church would it be the quality of coffee at morning tea obviously we're all missing john's coffee while we're online maybe you look for engaging teaching the quality of music a children's and youth program an invitation to lunch after the service what what do you look for what's your criteria imagine you're moving to newcastle again and you walk into grace evangelical church at clandale what criteria would you consider essential and what's just your personal preference have we been a healthy church while online will we be a healthy church when we regather at glendale i've got a book about this very thing it's called nine marks of a healthy church i'm just going to list off what's in the contents page i think there's some good stuff in here number one first mark expository preaching what we're doing right now going through a book of the bible bit by bit letting god set the agenda for the topic not the preacher listening to god's word bit by bit as our daily diet number two biblical theology seeing the whole bible as a unified message pointing to christ number three being clear on what the gospel is and what it isn't number four a biblical understanding of conversion number five of evangelism number six of church membership number seven of church discipline taking immorality seriously as a community number eight a concern for discipleship and growth mature spiritual maturity and number nine biblical church leadership now i'm not here to plug this book even though there's a lot of good stuff in it i've got a different point to make according to these nine marks i'd say we're a healthy church and i would gladly recommend any newcomers to many more healthy churches in the hunter region the church we're about to hear about in revelation 2 the church in ephesus from

what we know of it and according to our criteria they were a healthy church but as we lift the veil between earth and heaven christ reveals what's really going on in his church how does he see it because how he sees it is what is actually true he says ephesus had a fatal flaw so whatever our assumptions are about what makes a healthy church we need to listen to christ's assessment of his people

and that's what we're doing in this series listening to the letters to the seven churches so before we zoom in or i didn't mean to use that phrase as before we focus in on ephesus let's just briefly survey what christ thinks of his seven churches historically there was at least 10 local churches in the asia region at the time of john's vision so why only seven letters as john spoke about earlier seven is a pattern in revelation there's a rhythm to this book there's seven scenes it's in this picture book and the first scene is focused on christ's church and each letter has a seven point structure to it and where where a letter doesn't follow that seven point structure we should pay attention and ask why so seven seems to be important in revelation it seems to be a way of saying this is the complete story this is what the church is really like from a heavenly perspective it seems most natural to take these letters as speaking into real churches with real situations but every church needs to read every letter because it deals with topics that are relevant to all god's people at all times so we need to listen up and we also need to hear all seven letters not just align ourselves with one of them if we just pick one of them then we're taking charge of our own assessment of what we're like we need to listen to christ's complete word to his church to see what the church looks like from his perspective and notice something else that the local church are pictured as golden lampstands this reminds us of the lampstands in the lord's tabernacle and temple in his holy presence this is a priestly picture as christ was the faithful witness of god to us so now the local church is to be the light of the world witnessing to god's truth and love put simply lampstands are meant to give off light amidst the darkness so what does the risen and glorious christ think of his local church well the main thing to say is out of all heaven and earth local gatherings of his people are his primary attention he who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom priests to his god and father he died for his church and he is present walking among his people relating speaking through his word we might look at our church we might look at other churches and we might think they're pretty ordinary during lockdown

society might conclude that churches aren't essential but as the veil is lifted between heaven and earth we see that christ's consuming passion is his people and so our consuming passion should be to reflect christ's passion okay so now that we've spent some time looking at the big picture of the letters let's let's focus in on what christ says to ephesus and says to us in as much as we share in common with ephesus so have a look at verse one to the angel of the church in ephesus as david mentioned last week it's difficult to be precise whether the seven stars which are the angels represent human preachers or are they literal heavenly messengers whom the lord assigns to look after his local churches it's hard to tell but everywhere else in revelation angel literally means heavenly angel whatever the case it's clear by the content that the whole church is meant to hear and respond to the letters and who's speaking is it just john it's not just john the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven lampstands the lord who has the armies of heaven at his disposal as his church in his firm grip they are protected in his hand and no matter how ordinary our worship of christ seems on any given sunday whether the sermon is dull or our singing is a bit off key or our prayers are a bit muddled here we see what's really going on we are relating with the risen christ he is with us as in the garden of eden the lord is walking among his people he is near to us and so he sees the ephesians zeal and he praises them for it i know your works your toil and your patient endurance ephesus didn't put up with false teaching that leads people away from god and to death they hate the practices of the nicolations which christ also hates now we know little of the nicolations except by the teaching by their teaching they led people away from christ this wasn't a threat from outside the church it was people inside the church claiming to be the true and better version of christianity but the ephesians tested the teachers according to god's word and they found them to be false they love truth they love goodness they didn't put up with evil behavior they didn't put up with immorality they're even willing to endure hardship simply for being christians defending gospel truth hating immorality persevering for christ's sake even when

other people despise them for it christ is here he sees he knows and he praises what is genuinely praiseworthy i think we should remember that the next time you don't feel appreciated christ sees and he knows let's do it for his sake ephesus was a solid church it looked really good but one

thing's wrong despite so much good the one issue is so serious that christ warns i will remove your lampstand from its place i will come and shut the church down one thing what is this critical issue verse 4 i have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first is this love for christ or love for one another in the church that they have abandoned perhaps that's not even the right question love for god and love for one another are inseparable but one is first one is primary and leads to the other a heart consumed and devoted to the lord overflows in love for his children the church at ephesus they had the form of being passionate followers of christ but in their heart they weren't loving him they weren't worshipping him they had the form of a solid gold lamp stand but their light was barely flickering how does a person and a church get to this point how can we abandon our original love we're not told exactly and perhaps it's left open on purpose so that you and

[18 : 35] I reflect on our own hearts it's probably gradual bit by bit over time a man doesn't wake up one morning and decide to commit adultery that day it is a gradual redirection of his attention and his heart's desire the very deeds of serving his wife that once were the overflow of his devotion and passion for her can become the very excuse for letting his heart wander off somewhere else Christ is jealous to have your heart he is jealous for the heart of his bride the church I think we've got a choice now will you hear the

Lord's criticism as unfair and harsh because all the things you do aren't enough or you hear his call to redirect your passion back to him as the words of the one who will not settle for anything less than wholehearted joyful intimacy with him now I don't think true passion always burns with high emotions so if you're not feeling high on emotions feeling close to God I don't want you to feel guilty about that but we all know the difference between doing what feels like a joyless duty compared to when your heart is consumed with something so much so that your passion for it just propels you into action we all know the difference

Christ wants all of our heart our soul and mind and strength so how does he call us to respond he gives us three steps for us to do look at verse 5 remember therefore from where you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first so number one we need to keep remembering our original passion when we think back to when you first grasped how much God loves you in the death of his son for you how satisfied was your heart it felt like you need nothing else that was enough that commitment to change your entire life for his sake that desire for everyone around you to experience

God's love as you have keep on remembering that state of total worship from the heart and see where you've fallen from don't settle for going through the motions now my personal experience is that this is a daily battle my heart does not wake up in the morning in love with Jesus it wakes up in love with the world I think this is a constant call to remember and not to settle secondly we've got to repent this is a conscious decision to take action don't wait until you feel something before you do anything about it it's impossible to conjure up passion from within yourself you need to go to the object outside of yourself to stir up your heart's desire we need to go to him listen to him see him afresh then when you find him or he finds you the third thing is do the works you did at first here's the fruit of the first and second step like a fountain a heart that is satisfied in the love of Christ will overflow when you're contenting him you will overflow in love for other people the Ephesians were commended for their hard work but there's a difference between slogging it out and the loving service that is motivated by a content heart in him and we don't need to wonder where to find him we don't need to have a mystical experience or go to a lofty mountain we're told right here how we meet with him the Holy Spirit is speaking his words to us the Spirit is continually speaking the words of Christ written down for us that's where we meet him primarily the question is do we have an ear to hear him do we want to hear him and here's what's promised to you if you do to the one who conquers

[24 : 28] Adam in the garden was expelled from God's presence cut off from eternal life found only in relationship with the Lord and we've all followed in his footsteps our natural inclination is to follow the rest of the world to live apart from God but it doesn't work what faith looks like is to actively fight against that natural inclination and the ways of this world it is to believe that life can only be found walking with God in peace and fellowship faith is a struggle for a heart satisfied in

Christ if you're struggling excellent that's great that's what you're called to that's why we gather as his people to help each other in that struggle do you hear Christ promise to you the struggle will one day be over and we will be satisfied fully in the presence of God Christ alone has the right to give it

to you this struggle isn't an earning he's already got the victory over your sin by his death on the cross but we need to struggle to keep fighting the fight of joy in him he promises this is your reward you will have your heart's desire so are we at grace a healthy church if we think solid ministry programs and reestablishing all the good external marks of a healthy church is what will keep our light burning in the community then just as we're presuming that we're about to open the doors at Glendale Christ might be on his way to shut it down external form is not enough let's not settle for it let's let our light shine before the world what will determine our health as a church is down to each one of us to continually check our hearts returning again and again and again every day to our original love of Christ and we're not alone in that the spirit is here helping us and we are a church called to serve one another in helping one another keep that passion going if you're like me you might be fearing you don't have it in you to produce this passion and that's true you don't I don't I don't have the power to change my heart but there's one who does the one who holds the seven stars having all authority in heaven and earth whose words are like a sword that breaks through our hardness of heart he alone has the power to give us a spiritual ear to hear him I think we need to keep asking him for an ear to hear him he has the power and even if he feels a million miles away the curtain has been lifted remember he is with us he is walking among his people his spirit is speaking as we sing together and learn together and pray together and encourage and cry together as a church family let's do it in a way that's in tune with reality what's actually going on that Christ is present with us our passion will revive in as much as we anticipate the future he promises us one day very soon you're a day you're a week you're a year closer we will be walking with the Lord in his paradise we have a taste of it now in the church but gee it's going to be so much better we're going to be eating from the tree of life as a free gift going for an afternoon stroll in the cool of the day with the Lord trusting in his power trusting he is present trusting his promise is going to keep our light as a church shining will you pray with me let's pray to finish Lord God in heaven we thank you that you do have all power that you have conquered death that you have conquered our sin that you have conquered satan and the world that you hold us in your right hand that you are with us by your spirit through your word

[30 : 33] Lord we thank you that by your grace alone you promise to give us life in abundance with yourself Father I pray for each one of us that you would take hold of our hearts give us hearts that are consumed with you you know how prone we are to wander away bring us back again and again Lord bring glory to your name through grace evangelical church make us a people who love you from the heart and show it in love for one another keep us from just mere external works we pray in Jesus name Amen thanks for listening Amen or you are goingchs