

Remember And Return

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[0 : 01] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the book of Revelation chapter 2 and verses 2 to 5 in particular.

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 also particularly these verses, 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 that you did at first. Now the book of Revelation is a book that we all find fascinating.

We find it very hard to very often just work out parts of it, what is being said. It's a book certainly that deals a lot with prophecy, and prophecy is something that always intrigues us.

[1 : 18] An American humorist once said, Don't you ever prophesy, because if you get it wrong, nobody will ever forget it. And if you get it right, nobody will ever remember it.

And I think there's a lot of truth in that, but that may be true at a human level, but it is certainly not true at a spiritual level. And this is the Lord's word and his prophecy, which all of it is true.

Now the book of Revelation isn't just about prophecy, there are many other things in this book as well. And at the beginning here we have the letters to seven different churches.

And these letters were sent through the apostle John to these churches by the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the things that strikes us as we read these letters is that there's no such thing in this world as a perfect church.

People are always looking for the perfect church, but it doesn't exist. You can have the most, at many levels you might say, Oh well you know, that's a great church.

[2 : 29] It might be warm, it might be a church where there are so many committed believers doing a great work. It's vibrant, it's alive, and people say, you know, this is really a wonderful church.

And it may very well be, but it's not perfect. It will never be perfect. Because none of us are perfect. And you cannot have a perfect church if you have imperfect people in it.

So, as we say, there isn't such a thing. People sometimes, you'll sometimes find people that are looking for the perfect church. Well, they'll never find it. And once they join it, it won't be perfect. Because we're all filled with imperfections and sin.

But of course when we talk about the church, we look at it at different levels. Yes, in its main emphasis, a church is the body of Christ. Very simply, it is, that's what it is, it's the body of Christ. But also we talk of the church as what we will have in a particular locality. We talk about the church in Stornoway. And the church in Stornoway have many different buildings.

[3 : 38] And there are so many different denominations in different buildings. And very often there's very little that separates between these different denominations. But at the heart of it all, despite that we talk about different churches, really different denominations, all believers are still part of one church.

And that church is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. So although we can talk about loads of churches, at the end of the day there is only one church.

And that is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's in glory that it will be discovered there. Because there will be no denominations, and there will be no divisions, and there will be no separations in glory.

The unity of the church, which should be existing here in this world, will be seen then for the fullness of that unity. where it will all be one in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when it's this message that the Lord gives to the church at Ephesus, and part of it really that I want us to look at this morning. And as Jesus is talking to this church, Jesus alone knows what this church is really like.

[4 : 56] Because when you come to see it, the church at Ephesus must have got a wee bit of a shock when they find the Lord saying, I have this against you.

Because when you look at the church, it seems to be a church that's thriving. In fact, you would say to yourself, if I was to pick a church to go to, this looks like a really good church to go to.

Because it says, I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance. In other words, that is the kind of church that they're working so hard, they're working virtually to the point of exhaustion.

That idea of the toil and patient endurance. This is a Christian church who are very, very dutiful, and they're very active, and very vibrant, and there seems to be, everything you would say initially, is going really well for it.

And you would say, this is a church that is to be commended, and the Lord does commend. There's a lot within this church that the Lord does commend. But the Lord understands, and he gets right in, and he knows exactly when there are problems, and what is the cause of the problems.

[6 : 10] You know, we always have problems in life, and we have problems within churches, we have problems at work, we have problems all over in life. And very often, we can have problems, and sometimes we're not able to work out exactly what is the cause of the problem, what is at the very heart of the problem.

Because sometimes, what we may see as a problem, isn't really the problem, that's only the result of something else that's causing the problem in our life. But Jesus was able just to put his finger exactly on what the problems were.

He can pinpoint, because he knows absolutely everything about us, right down into the very depth of our being. And so Jesus has this message for the church, and I want us to seek to try and apply that to ourselves.

And you'll notice the description, the designation that the Lord gives of himself at the very beginning. And at the beginning, he says, Now most commentators agree that the stars pointed to here are the ministers that are given to the seven churches, the different ministers given to the different churches.

And we've also got to remember that at the end of the day, a minister is somebody who is called by the Lord and is appointed by the Lord, and he has the ultimate authority over where that person goes.

[7 : 46] You know, so often, sometimes when a minister might be called, and people will say, Oh, he will go. No, he won't go. He might go. At the end of the day, it's between the Lord and that individual minister.

That's how a person first goes into the ministry. They are called by the Lord. And then they will be appointed to that place of ministry by the Lord. Not up to us to choose when or where or any of these things.

It is of the Lord. It can take a lot of time to try and be able to work through what it is that the Lord is saying. But at the end of the day, a minister is only an instrument in the hand of the Lord.

Nothing else. And we must always remember that, that we must never seek to get in the way of the message or of anything. That's all we are. We're there to point people to Jesus Christ and to try and teach people what the Word of God is saying.

That is the main thrust, the main responsibility that is placed upon us. So it's not in us to bring all our own opinions about things or to try and take over things.

[8 : 55] We're there simply as an instrument in the hand of the Lord. It's very like what Jesus was highlighting, remember, in the wilderness. And he was using that illustration of the serpent being raised up in the wilderness by Moses to his own being raised up.

Remember the great verse, John 3, 16. Well, prior to that, it tells us, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

You remember the story how Israel had been grumbling, as they were prone to do, grumbling against God, grumbling as to why they had been taken out into this wilderness.

And they were saying, we want back to Egypt. We would rather go back. And they were fighting against Moses and fighting against Aaron and above all, fighting against God.

And the Lord allowed poisonous snakes, poisonous serpents amongst them. And these poisonous serpents were biting and they were killing them. And in the end, they cried to the Lord.

[10:00] And God told Moses to make a serpent of bronze and to put it up in a pole. And whoever was bitten by the snake was to look to that serpent, the bronze serpent on the pole.

And they would be healed. Now, of course, it was by faith they would be healed. I mean, there might have been Israelites bitten and they would say, what's the point in looking to that serpent on the pole? Do you honestly think that that will heal me?

Well, Jesus is saying, just as Moses put that bronze serpent on a pole, lifted it up, then people were asked to look at it.

If they didn't, they wouldn't be healed. If they applied human logic to it, they wouldn't be healed. It was a look of faith. They had to look by faith to it in order to be healed.

That faith was simply believing the word of God. And Jesus is saying, it's exactly the same with me. People may apply human logic and say, do you mean to say that all I have to do to get right with God is to look to Jesus?

[11:08] Surely there must be something else. I'll have to do this. I'll have to do that. And at the end of the day, ministers are like that pole that Moses erected in the ground to hold up the serpent.

That's all we are. That's all that, whatever you're doing for the Lord, that's what we are. You're just there to point, to be someone to hold up in order that Jesus may be proclaimed and Jesus may be seen.

And so, we find here that the Lord Jesus is saying, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden candlesticks.

And that, of course, is speaking about the church. And it tells us here that Jesus walks. That's what he's saying, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks. He walks among the churches.

And what he did then, I believe he still does today. That Jesus walks among us. We've got to, if we read through the seven letters, some of the churches were very, were great churches and vibrant churches and some weren't so good at all.

[12:24] And yet, Jesus walked amongst them all. And that's, that's a great encouragement to us. Jesus walks among us. And it's a wonderful thought that he, Jesus isn't just passing by, he's here in our midst and he's here in order to bless.

But, as we said, he knows absolutely everything about us. And so, as we said, here was a church and that is what he's saying. It's a serving church, it's a busy church, they're busy doing what the, the Lord's work and as we said, they were working to the very point of exhaustion.

They remained loyal and true, they were faithful even in the face of trial. And they were also a discerning church, they were able to work out what was right and what was wrong.

They were able to figure out when false teachers came, when people who weren't teaching the truth, you know, it can be very hard sometimes to figure out when people can teach the truth but it's not quite the truth.

It's close to the truth where the truth is mingled with deceit. And that often happened, still happens to this day but back in the early churches that was often happening and people were being drawn away bit by bit and once you mingle the truth with a lie, it isn't long before the truth will get sucked further and further away.

[13:47] So it's always absolutely imperative that the truth be held, that the truth be held to and that the truth be proclaimed. And that's what this church were credited in doing, that they were doing this thing.

However, the Lord says to them, you know this, I know your works, but he said, I have something against you. And I'm sure they were shocked with that when this letter came and they were saying, whoa, didn't realize that, but I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love that you had at first, that first love.

In other words, the church in Ephesus had one problem and it was heart trouble. They had, they had, there was trouble with their heart. That was the problem.

And the Lord is saying that you have left your first love or you have abandoned the love you had at first. And so as he's searching in the mouth, so what, what is this first love?

Well, in many ways, it's like the, like the honeymoon period when a person becomes a Christian. Do you remember when you first became a Christian? Do you remember, can you put your mind back?

[15:03] Can you remember the newness, the thrill, the excitement, the realism, the sense of purpose you had, the sense of belonging?

There was an understanding about who you were and more of why you are here in this world. Things that you just didn't really think too much about, the big things began to make sense. And you had this, it's like you, you were brought onto another dimension altogether. Life changed. And the, it, it, this affected you because at the very heart of it all there was this love. a love that had never been there before. There was our love for instance for God's house. Maybe, and I'm sure many of us have gone through that, many of us because it was the way we were brought up went to church.

Sometimes we were dragged to church. And then maybe we continued going to church but we did so out of our duty. There was no particular enjoyment in it. There might be the odd Sunday here or there there was something and you say oh that's alright.

[16:11] But by and large you went there and you just allowed your minds to drift and you went there it was out of your duty or whatever you went in and you went out. But it didn't really mean much it was part and partial of just what you did.

But that changed. When you came to know the Lord that whole thing it all changed for you. Church rather than being a duty became a delight.

Something you wanted to do somewhere you wanted to go. As the psalmist said I joyed went to the house of God go up they said to me. That's the way you went. Because you wanted to meet with the Lord.

Because it's when you came to the church you knew that the Lord was there and you came with a sense of anticipation. Because you were wanting that the Lord would speak to you out of his word. And as you went there you said Lord I need feeding. I need something for my soul. And that's the way we should come to church. We should come prayerfully and say Lord please today give me a just something.

[17:17] It doesn't matter at what point within the service but give me something. And that's how you came. There was always this sense of eagerness, sense of anticipation, sense of desiring to have something for your soul.

And again it was the same in your own private times with God's word and with prayer. Maybe some of you were brought up reading God's word and praying.

Before I became a Christian I think I read through the Bible twice. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. I did it out of duty. I'd read a wee bit in the morning, a wee bit at night. Sometimes I hadn't the first clue what I read but I read it. because it had been kind of the way that I was brought up and it had become a kind of duty within me. But very often that Bible reading had little or no impact whatever upon me although it did afterwards because it helped my Bible knowledge.

And I would recommend that whether today whether you're a believer or not read through the Bible. Because you know when you come to faith it makes a huge difference to have Bible knowledge, to have a knowledge of the Word of God.

[18:36] But then that changes when you become, when God's love comes into your heart. Bible reading and your own private devotion, it all changes.

There's a kind of an excitement in it. And you're opening the Word with anticipation and you're saying oh Lord speak to me today. I want to hear your voice in the Word.

It's wonderful. And so often the Lord gives you the Word for today. You know you sometimes get a little booklet, Word for today. Well that's what the Christian is looking for, the Word for today.

And see when you first became a Christian it was so important, there was a priority in your life.

God's Word in the morning, God's Word at night, time to speak with the Lord.

All these things were really at the very heartbeat. And again you all of a sudden when you became a Christian fellowshiping with God's people.

[19:34] It became something you looked for. That you were able to hear what people and you could talk to them about the Lord before you weren't interested in that. But now this is all important, it's vital in your life.

Then you have a love for the Lord's cause, for the Lord's day, for everything that is the Lord's. And of course there's many other things beside. So what does it mean then where we lose our first love or where we're beginning to abandon it?

How do we know, how can we discern that we're not where we once were? Well I think even in these very things where you lose, you begin to lose your appetite for the means of grace. Where God's house no longer has the appeal that it once had. Even as a Christian, you find yourself trudging along. And you go and sometimes you go and you say, oh that was good. And other times you go and it's just, it's not how it used to be. You're struggling. And it's the same when you come to your own private devotions, your own personal walk with the Lord. [20 : 48] And sometimes you'll say when you're going to bed at night, you know this, I never opened my Bible today. And you couldn't think of that after you became a Christian. You couldn't wait to open the Word of God.

The Word of God was just, it was alive, it was a book, you couldn't get over how you had this friend, this person, this creator of this world who has a special interest in you, who loves you, who cares for you.

And you just couldn't get enough of him. But now you can find that sometimes the day goes by and you don't think too much about him. You might a wee bit here and a wee bit there. You're still a Christian, you're still going to church, you're still involved, you're still doing things, but the heart's just not in it in the way it used to be.

And that's a picture of where we're beginning to lose that first love. Even your attitude to God's people is changing. Instead of seeking them out, you might be even trying to avoid them. you might be afraid that you're afraid in yourself that your speech will be kind of almost hypocritical. You start speaking to them about the Lord, you're saying, this is not what I've been thinking about. [22 : 01] And so there's all these sort of things. And you begin to lose your interest in the cause. That you're not so concerned about it.

when you see God's cause being trampled underfoot, it doesn't bother you in the way that it did before. And you might find yourself looking back over your shoulder to the world more and more. And being maybe sucked in and drawn. That all of these things can happen to a Christian. And yet they can still be part of the church. They're still Christians, part of the church, involved in the church, all these things.

But the heart is distanced. And that's what was happening in the church in Ephesus. Hard-working church. They were exhausted with their toil.

They were a very careful church in many ways. They hadn't fallen into error. But there was a problem with their heart.

[23 : 05] And that's really the key to everything. And if their heart goes wrong, kind of everything goes wrong as well. And you know, one of the things, one of the most obvious things when the heart, when the love, we begin to abandon the love, is we begin to see the faults in other Christians.

We begin to pick up their faults. You know, when you become a Christian at first, you don't notice people's faults. You're not interested in them.

Because that, you know what the Bible says, love covers a multitude of sins. But you know, when the love begins to wax cold, you begin to see all the faults, and sometimes you begin to even look for the faults.

In fact, Jesus tells us as we come to the end times, he says the love of many will wax cold. And I believe we're living in such a day. because one of the evidences of a love waxing cold is this absolute determination to pinpoint every fault within a person's life.

We're living in a day that it's just like a determination to put every person's life under the microscope and to highlight every fault and every blemish that's within them.

[24 : 31] That's the kind of society we're in. a finger pointing, tongue wagging society that is seeing the wrong in everything and exposing the wrong in everything. That is foreign, the very opposite of love.

If you love your neighbor as yourself, that's not how you will live. And that's part of, that's a reflection, our society is a reflection of how far we have fallen away, how far we are removed from God's word.

from God's love. Because love, love wants to build up, love wants to restore, love wants to encourage. So, the Christian was talking to another Christian and he says, you know, you should be the kind of Christian who has two bags, a we carry a bag at your front and a bag at your back.

And every good thing you hear about somebody, you put that in the bag in the front. And every bad thing you hear about somebody, put that in the bag at the back. And at the end of the day, see that

bag at the back with all the bad things, tie it up and throw it away. Don't look at it again, forget it. Put that bag in the front, take it out, share it with other people. That's love. And that's how we should seek to be.

[25 : 53] And that's an evidence of the love that that should be. And so the Lord then says to the church, what are we to do?

Well, very simply, just with this, that we are to conclude. He says the first thing is remember.

Remember. Remember how it was.

Remember what it was like. Remember where you were. Remember these days, how it used to be. And then he says, you have fallen, you must repent.

And that means coming to the Lord. And today if you're saying to yourself, you know, all this is true of me. I wish it wasn't, but it is. Then the Lord says repent.

Repent of where you are. You need to get back. Where is that love that first I knew when first I came to know the Lord? I can't remember how that to him goes.

[26 : 54] It's lovely. Well, that's how we need. And you have to say to the Lord, Lord, forgive me my sin. Forgive me the things that are taking me away from you. And I know we live in a very stressful society.

And we live in a world that puts unbelievable demands upon our time. And it's harder to be a Christian today in many ways than in a day where the pace of life was different.

But the pace of life today is crazy. And that makes it much harder to be a Christian. We've got all these forces and powers that are opposed to us. But that doesn't excuse us.

And we've got to get the heart right. Lord, please help me. And we need to repent and do the first works.

We need to get back to how it once was. And ask the Lord to melt your heart. And make sure that you give the time. I know as we say we've got very little time in our day.

[27 : 58] Make sure you begin the day with the Lord. Even if it's just a little while. A wee bit of Bible reading and a time of prayer is essential.

If you go out of the house without the Lord, without spending a bit of time with him, the day won't work properly for you.

You'll be playing catch up all the time. time. You never lose time by giving time to the Lord. That's one of the things you often discover. That time given to the Lord is never ever wasted time.

And sometimes when we say, Lord, I don't have time, as the day goes on, we say, you know, I should have made time. So seek to do the first work, to get back.

And that is what each and every, I need this as much as you. and ask the Lord to make us right with himself in our heart. Let us pray. Lord, we pray to bless us today and we pray that we will know your love and that we may indeed repent of our sin, that we might get back with you.

[29 : 06] Because so often we're aware that it's not how it should be. We're not exactly where we should be. And oh Lord, help us, we pray, and lead us in the way of truth. Guide us. We give thanks Lord for the breakfast that was provided today.

We give thanks for all who helped and all who provided and gave of their time, of their energy in different ways. And we pray Lord to bless now, again the time in the hall after, a time of tea and of fellowship.

We pray your blessing upon this. And we ask Lord that you'll take us all home safely, do us good and take away our sin in Jesus name. Amen. Let us conclude singing from the 80th Psalm, Psalm number 80, 80.

And we're going to sing the last three verses of the Psalm. We're singing to the tune Evan. Psalm 80, and that's on page 334.

O let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand, the son of man whom for thyself thou madest strong to stand. So henceforth we will not go back, nor turn from thee at all.

[30 : 21] O do thou quicken us, and we upon thy name will call. Turn us again, Lord God of hosts, and upon us vows save, to make thy countenance to shine, and so we shall be saved.

Psalm 80, 17 to the end, the tune of Evan. O let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand, God Sá█ heard.

O man, look for thyself, thy need is strong to stand.

So export we will not go back, nor turn from the adult.

O do thou wicked us, and we upon thine will call.

[31 : 39] Turn us again, O Lord of hosts, and upon us our stay.
To make thy countenance to shine, and so we come to his face.
Amen. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and
abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.