

Revelation: A Message to Ephesus

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Date: 19 October 2014

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[0 : 00] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bondservants, the things which must soon take place.

He sent and communicated it by his angel to his bondservant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this, I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men.

And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake and have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

[1 : 33] Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. And this is the reading of God's Word.

Okay, so we, if you're joining us for the first time, you're like, okay, I don't know what I got into with that scripture reading there. Oh, by the way, we had an amazing, amazing lunch afterwards with the church last Sunday for the fourth anniversary.

And Marcus, Marcus Tandra, Jeffrey, so Marcus, come here, buddy. So Marcus gave me this, we had this crossword puzzle we were trying to work out, and Marcus and I, we could not find out cupcake, right?

And you came here and you said, I don't think that it's on there. Your wife probably just did his trick. So I found it, it's right there. See that? Cupcake is backwards. Okay, it took me a while.

[2 : 43] I was like, oh, no, it's on here somewhere. Hey, you know, we are, hey, we had a great time last Sunday. Today, we are looking at a passage in a book that I heard often taught, and I was always kind of, man, scared, because the pastors I heard teach this book, they got up here and they said, let me tell you how it's going to happen.

This is what it's going to look like, and this is what the end of times are going to be like. And I sat there as a young Christian, just in awe, in fear, and then as a young pastor and as a seminary student, in awe and fear, wondering if I would ever have the confidence to say, this is how it's going to happen, and you can bet on it for sure.

And I can tell you that I don't. There's about four different interpretations for the Scripture, and God-fearing people who love Christ throughout the 2,000 years have interpreted some of these passages in many, many different ways.

Some of us, when we come to the Book of Revelation, I don't know if you've watched TV lately, but there are some significant shows on TV right now about end times and what happens when people get taken up and some people are left over.

And there's like four or five major shows, and it seems like the secular world is very fascinated with this idea of whether it's zombies that survive and we're trying to live, but they're very fascinated with this idea of apocalypse and the end of times.

[4 : 07] And we want to look at this passage, we're going to look at just chapters 2 and 3 to begin with. And in the book, some of your Bibles will probably say, they call it the apocalypse of Jesus

Christ.

Apocalypse means the end time. And again, sometimes as Christians, we think too, too much of this. We become embroiled in this idea of end times, and it consumes all of our life.

Joe Littlepache. So I was in this little high school, and Joe, I was a sophomore, I was a fairly young Christian, and Joe was a senior, and we had Bible class in our school, and we started studying Revelations, and Joe was studying with a teacher, and Joe was convinced that Jesus was going to come back in May of that year.

I mean, he just knew for sure that that was the end of the world, and Jesus was going to come back in May, and so Joe, he just refused to study. So Joe, his senior year, he didn't do his homework. So if you're a student in here, this is not a good thing. He didn't do his homework. He didn't study, and whenever we were asked, well, why aren't you doing it? He goes, well, it's the end of the world. Why do we have to worry about that? Because Jesus is going to come back, and I don't need to study.

[5 : 13] And you know what happened to Joe? Joe was with us next year in school because he failed out because the end of the world didn't happen, and he didn't study, and he had to learn all about that.

And then some of us, we just kind of think in our mind, well, it's not really important to me today. I don't really think about Jesus coming back because when he comes back, I'm just going to be dead.

And I can just live my life now, have a lot of fun, and get everything I need done, and I'm not going to worry about that because there's a lot of grace, and God will forgive me, and when he comes back, I'll be dead. But you know, when we look at this book today and these next couple weeks as we look at these churches that John is talking to, it's probably one of the most practical books we can look at as Christians.

It's probably one of the books that talks a lot about what does it mean to be a follower of God. It talks a lot about Christ and who he is, and it talks a lot about God. It talks a lot about the church, and there are so many things that we can learn from this time and this book, and so I'm excited to kind of dive into it and just swim a couple inches, and we'll get a little deeper, and we'll get a little deeper, but we're going to enter into this book of Revelations, the Apocalypse.

It was 1980, and don't tell me if you weren't alive then, okay? But I was alive, and I see people giggling. It was 1980, and we went on a senior or a high school mission trip.

[6 : 39] It actually was just a beach project. We went down to the beach to build houses and to fix things and stuff like that, and we were down in Fort Walden Beach in Florida, and I had just come off some swimming, and I sat down, and there's a group of us students talking, and we were hanging out on the beach shore, and the waves were okay.

It was a little rough, but it wasn't that bad, and I was talking to some friends, and unbeknownst to me, two of my best friends, Dwayne and Steve Elliott.

They were off shore, and they were playing in the water and hanging out, and we were all talking, and we didn't know anything bad was going to happen until all of a sudden we heard this mom scream, bloody murder, and she started screaming, my babies, my babies, and we were just talking and eating lunch and hanging out, and we looked up, and Steve and Dwayne, they were no longer on the shore.

They were like half a mile out to the sea. I mean, they were hanging out, and it was kind of calm, but they got caught in this riptide, and before they knew it, they were being drugged out to the sea, and people were panicking, and I mean, it was incredibly scary.

I was a young kid, and I just remember it so vividly in my mind, and people, adults were trying to get out there, but the waves were too strong, and they were just getting pulled out, and all of a sudden, like out of nowhere, the surfer came on a surfboard.

[8 : 06] I hadn't seen him all day, didn't know where he came from, but the surfer came on a surfboard, and he surfed out to them. The boys draped themselves around the surfboard, and the surfer brought them back into shore, and when he brought them back into shore, people were so, I mean, they're just crying and emotional, and they're surrounding Steve and Dwayne, and trying to get them hydrated, and what's going on, and all these things, and when we looked for the surfer, he wasn't around.

We didn't ever see him again. We didn't know where he went. We just knew that there was this thing that happened, and this surfer came up, and saved these boys. Now, I tell this story not because of the surfer, because we don't know what or who the surfer was, but I tell this story because I think this story represents the church sometimes.

What I mean by that is churches start off, and they stay close to shore. They're in the sweet spot. They're doing the right thing. They're hanging out. They're in the safe zone, but all of a sudden, this riptide comes along, and it's really gentle, and it starts to pull on people, and people don't notice it at first, but all of a sudden, before you know it, you've gone from being safe as a church where God has called you and what he wants you to do, to all of a sudden, you're way out in the waves in the ocean.

Sometimes you never get back. You just disappear as a church and as God's people. You start off safe. You start off in control. You start off on the right path.

You start off on the beach, but slowly, you get moved off a track, and we lose focus, and we disappear, and that's the message that John is talking to to the church of Ephesus.

[9 : 53] Bear with me, because I'm going to fill you in on some background knowledge. Don't go to sleep, but you need to know this because it's important to understand what John is trying to say. Now, John the apostle, he's the apostle.

He's the one that Jesus called from the shore. He was in Galilee. He was fishing with his dad and his brother, James, and they were fishing, and Jesus came, and he called them away from the fishing business, and they started to become his disciples. He was one of the sons of thunder. It wasn't called the son of thunder because he liked thunder. It was because he was loud. He was powerful. He was tough. He was part of Jesus' inner circle. He was in that inner circle, a group of people, that when Jesus went up to the Mount of Transfiguration and he metamorphed, he basically peeled back his skin, and you saw what he was like inside as he was outside.

He became as white as snow. He was there. He saw that happen. He was the disciple that Jesus loved. In the Last Supper, there's John who's laying down with his head against Jesus' chest, and so he had his place of honor.

A lot of people think that John was Jesus' cousin. He was at the crucifixion. All the other disciples were gone, but John was at the crucifixion. Remember the scene? Jesus looks down at him. He says, John, take care of my mom, and so Jesus gives John the responsibility to take care of Mary, and so he's at the crucifixion, and then he helps bury the body of Jesus, and then he runs off after the tomb is open, and he's the first one there.

[11 : 10] He beats Peter, and he's at the door, and he's looking in the resurrected Christ. The Christ isn't there. The body's gone. He's resurrected, and from that point on, John becomes this amazing church leader.

He becomes this powerful force amongst the churches in Jerusalem and all around Asia Minor, and we're told in this passage by the time we get to this point that he's been put in prison.

Most of the other disciples have been martyred. They've been killed. Peter was crucified upside down, so if you think crucifixion is bad, think about being crucified upside down, and John is becoming an old man, and he's on this island of Patmos, this prison island, and he's there, and he's writing these stories, God's word that God is speaking to him, and we're told in the first part of John that he's taken up into heaven, and he sees his vision.

He sees Jesus, and Jesus tells him to write a letter, to write a letter to the seven churches, to write a letter about what's going on in their life concerning how they're doing, what they're doing, what they should be doing, and he talks to them about what the end times is like.

So he's up there, he's in this vision, Jesus is telling him to write down everything, he's writing down all these things, and he's told to write a letter to these churches, to tell them how they're doing. My question for us is, you ever wonder what kind of letter Jesus would write to you?

[12 : 32] I mean, if John was up there, and he says, hey, I want you to take down a letter, and I want you to write to Tobin, or to Steve, or to Mary, or to Christina, or to Dwight, what would be the letter that Jesus would write to us?

I mean, as he looks at our life, and he sees us living life, what would he say about how we're living life? What would he say about what we're doing? What do you think the letter would say to the churches in Hong Kong?

If Jesus were to write a letter to the churches of Hong Kong, what would he say to them? What would he say to Watermark? And so he begins this letter to this church in Ephesus, and Ephesus

was this amazing city.

It was a significant city, and I know I'm going to get in trouble, but I think Ephesus is so much like Hong Kong. I mean, it was one of the most important cities in Asia Minor.

I mean, it was this huge city. The Romans called it Luminasia. It was the light of Asia. The light emanated from Ephesus and all the Roman Empire.

[13:44] The Romans had this special agreement with the community of Ephesus, and the Ephesus had their own government. They could make their own laws. They had this massive harbor that all these ships came into, and all trade flowed in and out of Ephesus.

There were about half a million people when John writes this letter. There are four major trade routes, and they all converge in Ephesus, so any kind of trade, any kind of commerce, anything that happened in that part of Turkey that had to go through Ephesus.

I mean, it was powerful. In the center of the city, there was this temple. It's one of the seven wonders of the world. And if you've ever been to Greece and you saw the Parthenon, this temple was twice as big as that temple.

It was a temple of Diana. And it was a center of pagan worship, and really, really, really bad things happened there. I mean, the city was out of control because of this temple.

Sometimes they call it the temple of Artemis, and there was a cult there. And this cult was all about sex, was all about debauchery, all about prostitution. The temple was actually an amazing place.

The temple was one of the first banks in history.

[14:51] It was said that it was probably one of the most secure places in history. If you were a criminal and you were in trouble of getting prosecuted, you would go into the temple because by the laws, no one could touch you in there. So a lot of bad things happened in the temple.

There were thousands of prostitutes that went out every night to sell their wares, to sell themselves because it was part of the worship of Diana. It was all about sex. And it felt like the more sex you had, the closer you got to God.

One Greek philosopher, I was reading some articles, one Greek philosopher who lived in Ephesus said this. I mean, he was a philosopher known as the philosopher who never smiled. And he asked him, why don't you ever smile?

And he said, how can I with the people in my city? They're full of wickedness and debauchery.

Another philosopher, when he wrote about Ephesus, he said this, the people of Ephesus are goats. They eat wherever they want, they poop wherever they want, and they fornicate wherever they want. So Ephesus was, in one way, this amazing city, but in another way, it was not a nice city.

[16:01] And in Acts 19, Paul comes and he plants this small little church in the midst of craziness. Can you imagine that? I mean, I don't know what is the worst city that you can imagine in your world or where you would say, if I had to plant a church, this is the one place that I would not want to plant a church.

It's probably someplace in Australia or South Africa or something like that. The easy places to plant church are in Texas, but I don't know what that would look like for you, but Paul plants this small church in there, and we're told that for three months he teaches in the synagogue.

He gets kicked out of the synagogue because he's too radical for the Jews. And then he takes over this small little school, and for the next three years, he basically teaches night and day, night and day to the people, and he teaches about Christ.

He teaches about the gospel. He teaches about the freedom. He teaches about grace. He teaches about all these things. And what we're told in Scripture and in Acts and other books that this major revival takes place. I mean, it's this massive revival.

I mean, it's out of control. People are coming to Christ. There's stories of people, they were really big into witchcraft in Ephesus, and so everybody collected books. And there's one story where people took all their witchcraft books and they burned them because they wanted to follow Christ and they didn't want those things in their house anymore.

[17:12] And we're told that the cost of those things was over 50,000 silver coins. That means it's 50,000 days labor, worth of days labor. They just burn it up like that. I mean, this revival happens and people, they don't go to the temple anymore.

They're not paying the prostitutes anymore. They're not going to the bank anymore. It's interesting when you put the banks and prostitutes together. That's a, I don't want to go there, but anyway, but there's this thing there. They don't do that anymore.

They're not buying the silver idols anymore. And the businessmen get really upset. The businessmen get really upset because their business is being hurt by the Christians and by this thing called the way and people are choosing to follow God.

And so they cause this revolt to happen. And they go out and they try to actually kill Paul. They try to kill him and basically he's rescued and he's taken away and after he leaves, Timothy comes in and he takes over.

And the church continues to grow and change the culture and change society and it's doing amazing, amazing, amazing things. I mean, you can read about it in scripture and other books. They're doing some incredible things.

[18:15] When Paul writes the letter to them in Ephesians and you can read it and we've studied it, he says like 20 times, you are a church that loves God. You are a church that's doing everything right.

You are a church that has the right priorities. He's saying all these things to them but 30 years later, Jesus tells John, I want you to write a letter to them. That's what we're going to look at.

So John writes this letter and in the very first verse what you see is he says, to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, to the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among you, the seven golden lampstands.

What you know from the first chapter is that's Jesus. The lampstands represent the church. So the churches are these light, they're the light and the darkness are the Christians in this church and these lampstands represent the church and the stars represent the pastors and the leaders and what he says is that Jesus is there, Jesus is with us right now.

Jesus sees everything that you're doing. Did you hear me? Jesus sees everything that you're doing. He knows what you're going through.

[19:21] There's nothing that's going to catch him unaware in your life. He's there amongst the lampstands, he's watching, he's in control. And in verse two he says this, I know your deeds and your toils and your perseverance that you cannot tolerate evil men and you put to test those who call themselves apostles.

And they are not and you found them to be false. Jesus says he knows their deeds. He knows that they're working, the word there is copious, it means in Greek that they're just working to the point of sweat and blood.

These guys in this church of Ephesus, they work tirelessly for the gospel. I mean they weren't just spectators, they weren't just watching, they were doers. So this whole church is this amazing church of people and they're just working and serving and doing and feeding poor people and going out on mission trips and doing all these things.

He said they persevered, that things got bad, things got rough, that people were trying to attack them and kill them but they stayed in there and they stayed it and they sacrificed and sometimes it even cost them their finances and their livelihood.

They were patient, they were patient, they were being afflicted with hardships and persecution but they were faithful, they didn't stand up to wickedness. Did you see that in verse two?

[20:32] That when wickedness came into their midst they didn't stand into it, they tested every teacher. I mean there's this thing about circuit teachers and they're going around from city to city to city and a lot of times these new people come in and it happens sometimes in Hong Kong, you just let them come in and they preach in your service and you don't even know what they really believe and what they're about but the Ephesians didn't do that, they listened to everything, they compared it to what scripture said, they compared it to the gospel and they found out who those who were orthodox and those who were not and they kicked out the false teachers and they kept the good teachers.

The passage says they hated immoral things. Verse six says they hated the followers of Nicholas and Nicholas was his Christian and he basically said, he started this cult and he basically said if you're a Christian you can basically do whatever you want because God loves you.

That if you're a Christian you can do anything you want because there's grace and there's forgiveness and so they started this cult and it all centered again around sexuality and so the followers of Nicholas were about sexuality and sensualness and John looks at them and Jesus looks at them and says I'm so glad you don't follow those people.

I'm so glad you don't follow your flesh. I mean they were the pastor's dream as a church. I mean they did everything right. They had good theology and in theological terms we call that orthodoxy,

ortho straight, doxy teaching.

They had orthopraxy, ortho straight, practice right on. So this church did everything right and they studied and thought everything right.

[22 : 02] I mean is that amazing? I mean most churches they spend all their time studying their Bible and doing all these different programs and they're so busy with their head stuck in God's word that they don't look at people around them and they're not serving and taking care of people and then other churches are just caring and taking care of people and doing things but they don't have theology and they just go by their feelings and their emotions and you ask them what does God's word say about that and they go I don't know but I feel like this is the right thing to do.

But in Ephesus they did both. They knew the word and they did the word. So I have a question for you. Would that be a church you'd want to be a part of?

Come on. I mean that's your dream isn't it? As a pastor that is my dream church. I mean they're doing everything they're listening to everything you said hopefully you're not the bad immoral teacher but you're the good teacher but they're doing everything you're doing and I mean they're out there serving and they're feeding people they're doing everything.

They're perfect. I mean doing everything that God expects of them. And then in verse 4 he says this but I had this against you you've left your first love.

You've seen the words there what he's saying? I mean Jesus is saying you did everything. You did everything I've asked you but you've lost your first love. I think in Chinese one of the translations actually says you threw away your first love.

[23 : 36] Who's your first love? Jesus. So this first church that John is writing to because Jesus wants him to write a message I mean they did everything.

They had all the programs they had all the buildings they had everything going on they did it all right. But when Jesus looks at them he looks at their heart. And he realizes they've lost their first love.

They've had no relationship with Christ. I mean Paul warned the church at Corinth of the same thing. Remember that? The church at Corinth had all the spiritual gifts they had everything they had all the teaching I mean they were an amazing church.

And Paul said to them he says you know in 1 Corinthians we read it all the time in wedding services right? We read it in wedding services that love is patient love is kind and we think well that's such a beautiful thing.

But in scripture it was a rebuke. Paul was looking at the church and they weren't doing that. And so he's telling them this is what love is. And he ends up saying you can have all these gifts you can have all these talents but if you don't have love you're nothing.

[24 : 42] And so the passage says in this center this thing that these people did everything but they didn't love Christ. And the Bible says that what Christ wants most out of all of us is our love.

He wants our relationship with him. Guys this was blew my mind. As a young Christian all I thought was God wanted my obedience. And so I did I did I did I did I did I did everything I was told to do I did all those things I did it all.

And if someone were to ask me did I do it right? I'd say yeah because I did everything that God has asked me to do but what he says here is he doesn't want that. He wants a relationship with us.

I mean I think it's why the Bible does this make sense? I think it's why the Bible talks about marriage so much when it talks about our walk with God. I mean you think about it you know you see it in marriages you see it in families you see it in churches and relationships I mean when you fall in love when you see that person I mean you just you go crazy right?

I mean you're just loving them you're thinking about them you want to date them every moment you're just talking about what you want to do with them you want to be together I mean Christina couldn't take her hands off of me she just had her hands on me all the time because she just wanted to be with me and yeah why not?

[26 : 08] but I mean that's that's what happens when you're in love right? Love consumes you when you're in love you want to be with that person you want to give them your heart you want to give them your time you want to give them your money I mean you become diligent you become passionate you become disciplined you forgive I mean Christina had all these conversations about trying to save our money and she was in Austin I was in Dallas and you know in America telephone calls are more expensive if they're in the same state it's cheaper for me to call Hong Kong than to call Austin and every week every month I'd get this phone bill it was like 500 US dollars and I was a

seminary student I had no money and I would call her up that Sunday night and say hey I just got this bill she's laughing I would say we cannot talk anymore I mean this bill I don't even know how we're going to pay these bills it's 500 US dollars I can't eat for the next week I don't know what we're going to do and she goes okay so okay what do you want to do?

I said well let's don't call for at least three weeks let's don't talk for three weeks we'll save the money just don't talk for three weeks okay okay okay that night hey how you doing?

I thought we weren't going to call yeah but I just want to hear your voice I want to talk how was your day? and you're like okay just give my wallet give it to AT&T; here you go sorry Bernard but that's what it is when you're in love right?

you don't become disciplined you become you're giving you're grace oriented you can't wait the next moment I mean we had these discussions like okay it's going to take two hours to drive down there and you take two hours for you to drive down here and we're going to 15 minutes together is that enough?

that's enough let's do it you drive four hours to spend 15 minutes together right? but that's what you did when you're in love that's what you did when you wanted to be with somebody that's what you wanted to be about that's who you were the question is when was the last time we felt that way about Jesus?

[28 : 09] when was the last time that spending time with him was all consuming? when was the last time you were going to drive two hours so you could spend that 15 minutes?

when was the last time you were willing to sacrifice all these things because the most important thing for you was to be with him to pray to be in his presence guys it happens to all of us it happened to this amazing church in Ephesus and I'm not speaking at you I'm speaking to my heart this has been an incredibly hard week for me as I go through this passage and keep continually examining my heart I mean what I realized in my life is sometimes I start to lose this joy I lose this joy in the joy of being with God or being with the person that you love and everything becomes normal everything becomes mundane everything becomes dull everything becomes your duty you just do it it's a chore you just do it and you lose your joy and the next thing that happens in my life often is I start to lose my ability to love other people I mean I lose my joy and I lose my joy of being around people

I mean the Bible says that the only reason we can love each other is because God first loved us and the moment we lose our awe and wonder of Jesus' love for us we lose our ability to love people did you hear what I said because I've been saying that over and over to myself the moment we lose our wonder and awe of Jesus and his love for us we lose our ability to love people people just become a distraction we become critical we become judgmental we complain we argue we're no compassion I mean if you're in that place if you feel that if you see someone who's a believer and they're nitpicky and they're arguing and they're complaining and they're judgmental and they're tough to be around you think in your mind

I wonder if they're in awe of how much God loves them you know I lose the ability to love people I mean I lose my joy then I lose my ability to love people and then the last thing that finally happens to me is I just get this weird perspective of myself I don't know if it ever happens to you but I start thinking of myself more importantly than I am I just start thinking thoughts like why I deserve this and you know I know I start thinking about things that I deserve and what's good for me and I think about myself being more important than other people and the scripture says we're to think of other people and how we're to please God but when we get down this road and we slide from joy into disliking people we start to think about ourselves and we put ourselves up on this pedestal and we say what do I deserve what do I need and our world becomes self-centered self-reliant and instead of pleasing God we think about pleasing Tobin have you ever been there if you ever wonder this is you you could ask yourself some questions here's one of the questions

I ask myself how long has it been since I've been in awe of God's grace to me how long has it been since I've thought about God's grace and I go wow how could he do that because I'm a sinner when was the last time you felt God's presence in your life when was the last time you felt that God was close to you I mean how often do we think we need grace in our life do we pray before our day begins do we pray before we head into the big meeting do we pray before we come home to be with our spouse and our kiddos when was the last time that you had joy praying and reading God's word when was the last time we cried when we thought about how God was so gracious to us when was the last time we cried when we thought about how gracious God

[32 : 43] Mr. Tobin are you if you can't answer those questions or if you have a hard time answering when those things happen it probably means that you like the church of Ephesus have lost your first love and you started to love something else and this is a big deal guys in verse 5 Jesus says hey come back turn around I want to be your lover I want to be in your life I want to be your first love and he says he sings he gives us these ideas of how we come back and so if we're sliding away if we've gone away we've lost joy we think differently of people we think differently of ourselves he says here come back come back come back I want you I want a relationship with you he says this is how you do it in verse 5 he says remember remember where you were remember where you fell from remember what it was like before Jesus opened your eyes and you walked in darkness do you remember that?

do you remember the darkness that you walked in and the confusion and the agony and the pain and the frustration and the guilt and the shame remember the joy of your first Christmas as a Christian do you remember that?

I remember that do you remember when all the songs finally made sense? I mean you heard them in the shopping malls and all these other things but then I mean some of them still don't make any sense like the little drummer boy and some of those songs I'm still trying to figure those out theologically but they sound cool but I mean do you remember when all those songs made sense? do you remember when Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so little ones to him belong we are weak but he is strong do you remember when that made sense to you for the first time? do you remember the first time you prayed and you knew that Jesus was there? do you remember the first time you had a Bible study? do you remember the first time you went into a Bible study? I remember I had to go to this Bible study these guys I wanted to be there I wanted to study but I didn't have a Bible and I was so ashamed because I didn't have a Bible I told my parents I want to go to this study I'm a new Christian but I don't have a Bible and there wasn't a Bible in our house because our parents my parents weren't Christ followers they followed themselves and so my parents went out and bought me this Bible it's this big King James Bible it's like this big so I walked in okay I'm ready for Bible study boom and people were like what?

[35 : 20] but do you remember that time you first bought that Bible? I mean I think some of us we go into our house there's probably 50 Bibles but do you remember the joy of seeing God's word for the first time?

Do you remember the first time you saw the cross and you knew it was for you but Christ took it instead? Do you remember that?

I do do you remember the first time you shared the gospel with your friends? They saw the changes in your life they wanted to know what was going on they asked you what happened to you and you shared about what Christ did in your heart some of them laughed but some of them said I want that do you remember that?

Paul says and John says hey if you've gone off if you've forgotten remember remember where you came from remember God's grace in your life he says in verse 5 repent ask for God's forgiveness turn away from the actions turn away from the thoughts turn away from the things that pulled you away from Jesus turn away from the things that pulled you away from him when you first loved him what are the idols in our lives?

what are the things we need to turn away from? I think we struggle sometimes because we want to keep them and we just say we won't pay as much attention to them as we used to but God is jealous he's a jealous lover just like your wife or your husband or your spouse doesn't want anybody else to have a part of you God doesn't want anybody else to have a part of you and John is saying hey remember where you came from and all these things that dragged you away all these things that made you prideful all these things that made you selfish all these things that made you arrogant self-sufficient all these things repent beg for forgiveness ask God to take them away from you and then he says return return to the things that you did in the beginning what were the things that you did in the beginning what were the things that you did when you first came to Christ what were the things that overwhelmed your heart when you understood God's grace what were those things do those things for me it was reading my Bible for me it was prayer for me it was talking to other Christians about what they were learning and the things that God was teaching them for me it was

[37 : 41] I know this is going to sound terrible and I'm not going to do it but singing songs I always know what I'm doing good spiritually because I can sing to God and when I'm not doing good

spiritually I have a hard time singing and Paul is and John is saying all these things hey remember remember repent repent return return and listen to me he's saying guys God's love is important and your love to God is important and he's saying here in his passage that if you don't turn around if we don't as a church turn around if we don't do these things he says that Jesus is going to come up take away our light take away our relationship and we don't want that to happen to us as a church we don't want that to happen to us as his people we want to be in the midst of his relationship with him verse 7

John finishes with this church remember this is the church that did everything but they had nothing and he says he who has ears let him hear it's Hebrew it basically means God opens the ears of his people true believers and true believers hear God's word and he says if we hear God's word God will grant to us all the privileges all the things that Adam and Eve forego forego forewent gave up all the things that they gave up in the garden because of their sin he says in this passage that Christ wants to give those things to us if we find ourselves lacking love if we find ourselves lacking joy if we find ourselves thinking of other people as distractions if we find ourselves thinking of ourselves as more important remember return continue doing the things repenting that God has done in the past and Christ has something special for you as a church does this make sense

I mean this isn't a church and remember this church this letter is not just being read to one church it's being read to all the churches and the question amongst this letter is how's your heart I'm not asking you how you're doing I'm not asking you what you're doing I'm asking do you love God is he the center of your life Ephesians was an amazing church but I think they struggled with the same things that watermark is going to struggle with and the other churches in Hong Kong are going to struggle with because after a while what's going to happen is we want to be great we're going to want to be amazing we're going to want to be excellent by worldly standards we're going to want to have bigger crowds we're going to want to have more programs we're going to have bigger buildings we want to have more staff we want to do all these things so that people can look at us and go wow and we can do the things that people expect us to do but John says if we do that and Jesus isn't our lover then it all means nothing it's all worthless he who has ears let him hear John Newton the ex-slave trader he's a wicked man talk about wicked men John Newton read his biography he was a bad bad man he's a slave trader killed thousands and thousands of people responsible for the imprisonments of thousands and thousands of people God's grace poured out on him God opened his eyes he came to Christ and he wrote the most amazing song you've ever heard I mean even if you're not a believer here today you've heard it amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see he wrote this poem I love poems

I hardly ever read them from up front but I want to end with this poem in evil long I took delight unawed by my shame or fear till a new object struck my sight and stopped my wild career I saw one hanging on a tree in agony and blood who fixed his saddened eyes on me as near his cross I stood sure never to my latest breath can I forget that look it seemed to charge me with his death though not a word he spoke my conscience felt and owned the guilt and plunged me in despair I saw my sins his blood had spilt and helped to nail him there a second look he gave me which said [43 : 45] I freely all forgive this blood is for your ransom paid I die that you shall live so while his death my sin displays and all its black his hue such is the mystery of grace it seals my pardon too father we thank you for today we thank you for the letter of john to churches of revelation we thank you for the lessons that it has to teach us we thank you that you are in midst our presence that you see everything that you're in control father we thank you for your patience because as your people we want to do do do do but what you desire most of us is your love our devotion relationship with you father we thank you that the church of ephesus got it and for 1,200 more years they served you and did mighty things for your kingdom because of your words spoken to them he who has ears let him hear father I pray for us as a church

I confess it is so easy to get caught up doing doing and being that we forget whose we are we forget what it means to love you we treat those people that we used to passionately pursue and desire and want and be around and we treat them as normal and mundane and dull we elevate ourselves as highly important and beyond the troubles around us all because we've forgotten your mercy and your grace to us sinful sinful people father I pray for those who aren't in the family they're here listening I pray that the words your words would stick with them I pray that they would consider what they cling to what is it that they hold as their hope and they would see that that thing will

quickly tarnish and fade away that it might last them for the next five years but it won't last them for eternity and that's where our journey is going eternity father I pray for us as a church that we would be a church that loves you that we would be a church that is about you that we wouldn't compromise time and prayer relationships because that's all you really want from us you want our heart lord we love you we need you desperately we pray these things in your son jesus holy name amen para hime