

## **A Church Out of Balance**

Revelation 2:1-7

(preached Pine Grove 11/6/16; Sunday PM)

### **Introduction**

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Revelation 2...

Let us read the text that we will be looking at today from 2:1 - 2:7.

***2*** ***1*** *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks [a]among the seven golden lampstands, says this:*  
***2*** *‘I know your deeds and your toil and [b]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; 3 and you have [c]perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the [d]deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 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.'***

Let us pray.

Nick Wallenda is a man with a love for tightrope walking.

Over the past five years, he had walked on tightrope over Niagara Falls, across a portion of the Grand Canyon and between two skyscraper buildings in Chicago.

When he walked across the Grand Canyon, he did not put a net below and he did not use a safety wire to keep him attached to the wire in case he fell.

He simply walked across the wire in jeans, t shirt and ballet shoes, while holding a 30 feet pole that weighed over 40 lbs to keep him on the wire.

The pole was special built and engineered for his exact height and weight to keep him balanced on the 2 inch wide wire...

In the middle of the walk across the Grand Canyon, a gust of wind sent one end of the pole into the air, but Wallenda was able to gently bring it back down...

Eventually, Wallenda and the pole made it the 1/4 of a mile across the canyon, where Wallenda jumped off and kissed the ground.

Now balancing acts make me nervous...

I am terrified of heights, and I can get off balance just watching someone try to balance...

But balance is extremely important if you are on a high wire 1500 feet above the Grand Canyon or even as a church in the world...

Now, what do I mean by balance in a church?

What does a balanced church look like?

When I speak of balance in a church, I am speaking of a church that is balanced biblically...

It doesn't get too hung up on one point of Christianity at the expense of other points of Christianity...

For instance, you may know churches that are King James Bible churches only...

That is a church out of balance over an issue that isn't necessary for salvation...

You may know of churches that are out of balance on what they allow their members to do on a Sunday.

That is a church that is out of balance on something that they perceive to be more important than the gospel...

Every church can be and probably has been out of balance at times on certain issues...

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be visiting 7 churches that existed in John's day...

We are going to be visiting 7 churches that Jesus had something to say in the mid 90s AD.

We are going to see in that these 7 churches represent most any church that has ever existed since the church was founded after the ascension of Jesus in 33 AD or so...

Today, we meet the church at Ephesus...

You can see from our map that the Ephesian church was closest to John physically on Patmos.

But that church was probably also closest to John in his heart.

John had ministered there.

John had pastored there for many years before he was exiles to Patmos.

And the Ephesian church was a solid church.

It was founded by Pricilla and Aquilla and Paul spent more time at the Ephesian church than he did at any other church in the NT.

Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to that church.

Timothy pastored at that church.

It had an incredible foundation laid by some incredible men of the faith...

But it was not without its problems...

Ephesus was located near the sea and had a very transient population...

Sea travelers usually bring new sins from other parts of the world...

Ephesus was also home to the temple of Diana that people worshipped...

Ephesus was also a great place for false teachers to sneak in from the sea and try to take up residence in the church there to spread their lies...

So, the people in the church there had to be on constant guard...

Now, its roughly 95 AD in the book of Revelation.

John has been sentenced to Patmos because of testimony of Jesus in the world...

It is Sunday and John is visited by a glorified Jesus that we met last week...

Jesus has asked John to write down all that has happened to him..

And then he asks him to write down some thing to the churches that existed in his day...

The first church to hear from Jesus is going to be Ephesus..

The Ephesian church was a church that was getting out of balance, and Jesus had one simple command for it...

Return to your first love.

What did he mean by that?

And what can we learn today from that simple statement?

Well, we will answer both of those questions today...

But the point of this passage is to see two characteristics that Jesus desires to see in a biblically balanced church...

Followed by a wonderful promise from Jesus to a church who has these two characteristics....

Let's look at characteristic #1....

## **I. The Biblically Balanced Church Discerns (1-3; 6)**

In verses 1, we see that Jesus is delivering this message to the church at Ephesus...

He is described just like we saw him last week...

He is holding 7 stars in his right hand and walking among the 7 lampstands that represent the 7 churches...

The stars represent the angels that he will send to communicate his words to each of the churches...

The Greek angelo could be used for a heavenly angel or just a simple human messenger...

I think it is best to see this as a human messenger who took the words of this to the church at Ephesus...

Jesus spoke and John wrote, and God called a messenger from each of the churches to Patmos to get the words from John...

And now, let us see what Jesus has to say to the church at Ephesus...

Verse 2...

***I know...***

Let me stop right there for a minute...

When Jesus says he knows, he truly means it...

WE say it and we may simple be taking a shot in the dark about what we truly know...

But Jesus knows about his churches because he walks among them...

Jesus knows all about Pine Grove Baptist Church..

He see the faithfulness of so many of yall.

He sees your generosity and your service to his church.

He sees your love of the Bible.

He sees your hospitality and love of the poor.

He also sees the not so good qualities as well...

He sees it all and he knows it all.

Jesus sees and knows this church better than any of us see or know this church, regardless of how long you have been here or what you think you may know.

And Jesus saw the Ephesian church, and he had much good to say about it...

Look back at verse 2...

The Ephesians were workers...

They were full of good deeds...

They weren't quitters.

They persevered through all their trouble and attacks on the church...

They were a faithful church, and they were faithful in an area where many churches are not...

They were faithful in their defense of the Lord Jesus Christ....

Look at the middle of verse 2...

The Ephesians didn't put up with evil men..

They didn't accept just anyone who said they were a teacher representing Jesus Christ...

You couldn't just stroll into Ephesus and say, "Well, I am a Christian and I want to preach a sermon to y'all today."

Not a chance in Ephesus!

They were going to put you to the test...

They were going to quiz you about your views on Christ.

Did you believe he was fully God and fully man?

They were going to quiz you about your view of sin?

Did you see sin as a bad thing to put off and fought against now that you were a follower of Christ?

They weren't gonna put you in a class to teach others until they had examined you from head to toe..

And why was that?

Why were they such a tough church to enter and be put in a position of influence?

Was it because they had been burned before by other false teachers?

Was it because they had gotten such good training from Paul and Timothy and John?

No, it was simply what you see at the end of verse 3...

They had a strong desire to defend and protect the name of Jesus Christ...

You just couldn't come into their church with a wrong view of Jesus or wrong teaching about Jesus and stay long....

They were going to put you to the test and if you failed, you were gone...

They were zealous for the name of Christ and for his reputation...

Skip down to verse 6....

Jesus tells them....

I commend you because you hate the deed of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus also hated...

Now, who were the Nicolaitans?

They were a sect in the church who were teaching that you could be saved and still live in sexual immorality...

They taught that being a Christian didn't mean you had to live a life of holiness....

They said as long as your soul was right, your body could do all sorts of evil and it was perfectly fine...

Many Nicolaitans called themselves Christians, but engaged in all sorts of evil immorality and encouraged others to do the same...

Jesus said I hate the deeds of people like that, and I am glad that you Ephesians join me in hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans...

So, this church was filled with a strong desire to protect the name of Christ at all costs...

You couldn't teach just any old thing at Ephesus and you couldn't live just any old way there...

This church defended the name of Christ, and they had done it for years with endurance and steadfastness..

And let me tell you Pine Grove, Jesus loves a church like that...

He loves a church that takes truth seriously...

He loves a church that takes his Word seriously, and holds everyone to it...

I have preached it 100 times in 2 years, but the church today needs discernment...

It needs the ability to call truth truth and a lie a lie..

And I am not talking about truth in the world...

I mean the church today needs the ability to call out liars who stand in pulpits and write Christian books..

It needs the ability to see a man and say he is biblical or unbiblical.....

Too many Christians hear the word Jesus out of somebody's else and they immediately get a free pass....

Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will get into heaven...

And not everyone who calls Jesus Lord needs to be welcomed into the church with open arms...

The church needs discernment that comes from knowing the word of God...

The church at Ephesus had that discernment, and Jesus commended them for it...

But his commendation turned to condemnation in verse 4...

The second characteristic of a Biblically balanced church is this....

## **II. The Biblically Balanced Church Loves (4-5)**

In verse 4, the message to the Ephesian church takes a turn when Jesus says...

***“4 But I have this against you,”***

Where had the Ephesian church got out of balance?

They had left their first love...

Now, what does that mean?

The Ephesians had grown cold in their love of God and in their love of their fellow man...

You can think about your own life if you are saved in here this morning...

In the days, weeks, and months after salvation, your love for God is enormous and it causes your love for man to be enormous as well...

You go around telling everyone that you are saved and that God loves them enough to save them too...

Our love right out of the gate after salvation runs wild...

We love God, we love others.

We love the church.

We love the Word.

We love praying.

We love serving.

But what happens?

Well, in some cases, we get away from those habits that grow our love for God..

We get away from Bible reading...

We get away from praying and talking to the Lord all the time..

We get away from the things that help us love God more...

Churches can also grow cold in their love for God as well..

Now, how does this happen?

It is simple really, and it often happens in really good churches like the church at Ephesus...

And here is how it happens....

It occurs when a church gets out of balance in their discernment....

Let me explain....

When you have a church like the Ephesian church who was constantly fighting off false apostles and prophets and false teaching, they end up growing cold in their love of God and their fellow man...

Instead of defending God, they become more consumed with defending truth for truth's sake...

They forget that their love of the truth is because they love God...

Let me give you an example...

In the world of politics, I stand against abortion not because I hate the people who support it but because I love God who is the only one who has the right to give and take life...

Some Christians stand against abortion today simply because Democrats are for it...

That is wrong...

We stand against abortion because we love God not because we hate those who support it...

When people who claimed to be Christians were bombing abortion clinics in the name of God, nothing could have been further from the truth...

We hate the deeds of abortions, but we love abortions and we pray that God would save them with the gospel...

Many churches fall out of love with God even while claiming that they defend His name...

And they pick fights for the sake of picking fights...

They wage war not to honor God's name but to make a name for themselves...

Look, God's truth is worth defending...

The Ephesians had been faithful to do it, but they had allowed their love of the truth to overshadow their love of God...

And they had left their love of God and their love of people...

And when that happens, Christ is not pleased....

Look, love drives us to call people out in their error and sin...

But it never causes us to lose our love of them...

We are discerning because we love God...

But we also love people because we love God...

And we constantly have to keep both of those in balance...

The Ephesians were out of balance and not loving very many people but themselves...

So, how do you fix that?

Easy...

Verse 5...

Remember where you were when you truly loved God and his truth, but you never let that overshadow your love of others...

Then Repent of growing cold in your love for God and others...

And then Return to doing what you did at first...

The Ephesian church had come out of a very ungodly culture when they were founded...

And they lived holy lives in the midst of that culture, and they shared the truth with that culture and others came to Christ in those early years...

The Ephesians were committed to truth in the beginning, but they were also committed to loving people and sharing the gospel..

And if you are in here today, and you have grown cold in your love for people...

You are either unsaved or you need to Remember, Repent, and Return to your first love this morning...

Churches also love the truth and defend the truth, but they also love God and they love people...

And they keep both of those in balance..

Or else, Jesus will put out their light as he threatened to do the Ephesian church at the end of verse 5...

***“...or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place.”***

If you ever wonder why some churches lose their influence in the community, it could be because they lose their love of God and people...

Jesus' threat to extinguish their lamp stand shows that Jesus takes a church leaving its first love as serious business...

And he made take away their light in the community as he threatened to do to the Ephesian church unless they repented and returned to their first love...

Tradition and church history tells us that the Ephesian church must have taken this warning seriously...

It seems that they did repent and return to their first love and the church ended up serving the Lord well into the 5th century AD...

And there is great blessing in getting things back in balance in the Lord's church....

If a church is balanced in their discernment and love, there is the promise of verse 7...

### **III. The Biblically Balanced Church is Rewarded (7)**

*7 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.'*

Every one of these letters to the church will end with a promise to a church who listens and obeys what Jesus has to say to them...

For the Ephesians, if they open their ears and hear and obey and return to their first love, Jesus will grant them to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God....

That tree is mentioned in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from it...

That tree is also mentioned in the last chapter of the Bible in Revelation 22, where everyone in the new heavens and earth have access to it and eat from it...

The promise is clear, the church that loves God and people is a church that shows the way to heaven...

A person who keeps love of truth and love of God in balance is a person who is to be with God forever.

I would ask you personally this morning...

Have you left your first love?

Has the love that you had for God at salvation grown cold?

Remember, Repent and Return this morning to your first love.....

## **Conclusion**

And there is no greater way to return to you first love  
this morning than to return to the Lord's Table...

Because this is where it begins for all of us in here today  
who are true believers...

There was a day when our sin hung over our head like a  
grand piano tied up with a shoelace...

There was a day when our sin was clutching at our throat  
ready to strangle us and leave us for dead...

There was a day when we didn't know very much at all  
about Christianity...

We had never had our eyes opened and been taught the  
truths of God...

But then all of sudden, the gospel came to us...

The truth of Jesus' death in our place made sense for the  
very first time...

There was a day when we needed to repent of our sinful  
lives and trust in the substitutionary death of Jesus  
Christ...

There was a day that we didn't know all the books of the Bible, but we knew that we were a great sinner and we knew Jesus was a great savior...

And we bowed our knee and our hearts to Him, and we felt the relief of the forgiveness of God...

And it sets our hearts of fire to love Him like we had never loved anything or anyone else..

And it cause us to love people like never before...

That is what the Lord's Table symbolizes this morning...

It helps us Remember what salvation is in its simplest form...

It is the blood and body of Christ being offered up to God in our place...

It is Jesus' paying our debt in his life and death....

If there is anything that should cause you to return to your first love, it the remembrance of Jesus' death...

And we get to remember it this morning...

Now, some of you cant remember what it was like to first love Christ...

Because some of you have never loved Him...

Sure, you may have been in his church and around his people, but that doesn't mean you are in Him...

Being in Christ is not a matter of where you go or who you are around, it is simply a matter of the heart...

Where you give up your sin by repenting and you stop trusting in yourself or good works to get you to heaven...

And today, you will experience the first love of Christ...

You will know what it means to have your sins forgiven and the burden of guilt lifted...

You will know what it means to take part in the Lord's Supper which symbolizes the body and blood of Christ that was offered on your behalf..

You will know the love of God and you will have a love for God...

Today is a day of first loves...

For anyone who has grown cold, repent of that this morning and comes to the Lord's table..

For anyone who has never loved, repent of your sins and come to the Lord's Table...

As our men work their way to the front, please prepare your hearts for the Lord's Supper.

It is not something that should be taken lightly, but it is not an event in the church that should occur without joy this morning....

Today is the day to celebrate our Savior and his death on our behalf....

Today is a day to celebrate our first love for Him...

Let us pray...