

## Revelation 2:1-7

### Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church *Have You Lost It?*

Have you ever you ever wanted to just sit down with God and have a heart-to-heart?

You don't know what to do about something, you have a crucial decision to make, you're not sure how to respond to someone. You don't know what to do about your rebellious child or your alcoholic parent. You're not sure if you should leave the job your in and take the new one you've been offered. You'd just like to be able to talk with God.

We've probably all been there more than once in our life. But you know, sometimes the problem isn't that God's not showing up at our kitchen table and giving personal advice to us. The problem is that we've been too busy to spend time with Him, to really get to know how He thinks, to really understand how to apply the life principles He's given us in the Bible.

God has spoken. And in a real sense He continues to speak. Not that He's giving out new messages and information. He doesn't have to. But He's spoken through the Bible.

Here's what the Bible says about itself,

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (II Timothy 3:16)*

That word translated "inspiration" is *theopneustos* in the original. It comes from *theos* which is the word for God and *pneuma* which means "breath." Literally the verse says that all scripture is "God breathed."

It's God's message from His heart. Now follow this. The phrase "The Word of God" is used 47 times in the Bible. The phrase "The Word of the Lord" is used 259 times. And to top it off, the phrase "This is what the Lord says" is used 413 times.

That's 720 times that the Bible is telling us that this is God's message to us. He's a God who communicates. He's created us as people who communicate. The Bible is His communication to us.

II Timothy 3:16 says because it's God-breathed it's profitable for understanding truth, for applying truth to our lives, and for continuing to live in that truth.

The more we learn about the heart of God through the Word of God the better prepared we'll be to live life.

Now, let's shift gears for a minute away from God sitting down at the kitchen table with us individually to God speaking to this congregation corporately. The same Word of God, the same Bible has something to say to us as a church body, just like it does to us as individuals.

So if Jesus had something to communicate to us as a church what might that be?

We're starting a series this week we're calling *Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church*. This is going to be like Jesus shows up on Sunday and says, "Can I have a few minutes in the service. I'm concerned and I'd really like to talk with you about something."

The basis of what we're going to look at in the coming weeks is Jesus message to the 7 churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

### **Open your Bible to Revelation 1 page 1203**

The Book of Revelation is the second in a pair of bookends. The first is the Book of Genesis. Genesis is the book of beginnings. It is absolutely crucial to let us know where the earth came from, where we came from, where sin came from, and what God's plan is for redeeming us.

The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the bookend at the conclusion. It's absolutely crucial to let us know the finality of all things. In the Book of Revelation we find out that God defeats Satan and evil, establishes a new creation, and blesses His people forever.

Now I'd like you to look at **Revelation 1:9-11** **Read**

The time is about 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The other disciples have been martyred and John is banished to a small Greek Island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos.

It's on this island that God gives a 90 year old John a vision of how things are, how they shall be, and how it will all end.

And in chapter 1 God says, *What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.*

What we have in chapters 2 & 3 is God's specific message to those 7 churches.

Now you might be saying , “Wait a minute. I’m not a member of some 1<sup>st</sup> century congregation in Asia Minor,” or what we’d call Turkey today. What’s this have to do with me?

First of all remember, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...* Anything in the Bible has benefit for us.

But now look at chapter 2 and verse 7. **Read 2:7**

This isn’t just for these churches at that time. This is for anybody who’s listening. This is for us.

And so what we’re going to find is a series of questions from Jesus to Faith Community Church.

Today we’re going to look at the first of those questions. Here it is. Have you lost it?

*I. A Commitment To Serve God Is The Natural Outflow Of A Sincere Faith*

**Read 2:1-3**

If you’ve ever felt like a stranger in a strange land trying to live for God in our culture maybe you’ll be encouraged to know that you’re not the first.

Two thousand years ago there was a group of believers living in the city of Ephesus.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, which we call Asia Minor today.

According to Acts 19, an apostle named Paul started the congregation there among a group of people who were originally pagan idol worshippers. He spent 3 1/2 years in Ephesus, which is longer than he spent in any other location.

Ephesus was a strategic spot. Ephesus was a very religiously pluralistic, cosmopolitan city. At the time of the book of Revelation it had over a quarter of a million people living there, which was sizeable for a city of those days.

Along with being cosmopolitan and on a strategic trade route, Ephesus was famous in the ancient world.

It boasted wide streets, huge public buildings and squares, and luxurious private residences.

But it's real claim to fame was that it was the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis the twin sister of Apollo. Artemis was the virgin goddess of the hunt, wild animals, wilderness, moon, and childbirth. She was worshipped as a fertility/childbirth goddess. Her followers believed that her image had fallen from Jupiter.

The temple served as the bank of Asia and the depository of vast sums of money. It was also an art gallery displaying the masterpieces.

Ephesus was also known for the worship of the god Bacchus, the god of wine. Today you'll see wine festivals called Bacchian festivals named after this Ephesian god.

If you get overwhelmed by the anti-God culture we live in, just think what it must have been like for the Christians in the Ephesian church. There wasn't a hundred other churches in the Ephesian phone book. They were like this small group in the midst of a sea of paganism. Talk about being in the minority. Everyone else in town thought they were in a cult.

I have to believe this congregation must have wrestled with questions like, Is our church going to be able to survive in this overwhelmingly pagan hostile culture? Can our little weak marginalized church possibly, in any way, make the slightest dent in this overwhelmingly pagan society?

They might have wrestled with those questions but here's how they responded. They did what any good Bible-believing, evangelical congregation did, they got busy and worked hard.

This was obviously an evangelical church. They're orthodox theologically. Look what they did.

They identified false teachers, those false apostles in their midst. That's because they knew their Bibles. They were theologically perceptive, they were on target.

These seven churches were independent. The whole idea of denominations hadn't developed yet. Ephesus was non-denominational but they weren't interdenominational. They didn't say we just need to be tolerant of everybody's belief system. They said we'd better carefully search out God's truth and then stick to it.

What kind of false teaching did the Ephesians refuse to tolerate in their congregation?

### **Read verse 6**

Who are the Nicolaitans? We don't know that much about them except that they were a group within early Christianity that apparently confused the Christian liberty of grace

with the unchristian license to idolatry. They were the ones within the church who wanted to be religiously pluralistic. They wanted to compromise the faith and hook up with the surrounding paganism. They were the ones who compromised on sexual purity. They were the ones saying, “Hey, my body’s mine, I can do with it whatever I want and still be in good standing with God.”

One of the early church fathers who lived about this time, Clement of Alexandria, said the Nicolaitans “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self indulgence.”

The Ephesian church said, “We can’t compromise with truth. We can’t live in opposition to God’s truth and still honor Him.”

Now where’d all this come from? Why were they so patient? Why did they persevere? Why were they so concerned about God’s honor? Why were they busy doing good works?

### **Turn to Ephesians 2 page 1146**

Ephesians is the book of the Bible especially written to the church that we’re reading about in Revelation 2.

### **Read verse 1**

I can’t think of a stronger term than “dead.” The Bible doesn’t say that without Jesus we’re really sick. It doesn’t say we’re on our death bed, desperately ill, almost dead, half dead, it says we’re dead.

If you think God has too many rules sometimes, remember this, originally the human race only had one rule. Just don’t eat from that tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Man, that would be easy, wouldn’t it?

So what did Adam eventually do? He broke the one rule, sin entered the world, and Adam died.

He died but he didn’t drop over on the spot. Adam died spiritually.

And ever since that day the descendants of Adam have been born into the world in the same condition. Dead in trespasses and sins.

We’re born into the world spiritually dead.

Now you say, “Man, that’s strong terminology!” You’re absolutely right.

There isn't a stronger term than dead. This is a concept that you won't find in any other religion. It's unique to biblical Christianity.

Now look at this, **Read verse 4-9**

The Bible says that there's one way to pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. Here it is...

Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.* (John 5:24)

The Bible says, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.* (Acts 16:31)

This is for you. If you haven't received Jesus Christ as Savior the Bible says, believe.

Now look where salvation by grace through faith leads... **Read verse 10**

Why was the Ephesian church a working church? Why were they faithful to serve God and persevere with patience? Why did they reject the Nicolaitans?

Because God had given them new life in Jesus Christ.

Why do we have so many people serving God here at FCC? Because they have to? Because they're trying to earn their way to heaven? Because they don't want me to point them out in a church service as slackers?

*I. A Commitment To Serve God Is The Natural Outflow Of A Sincere Faith*

*II. It's Possible To Be Committed To Serving God And Not Have A Real Love For God*

**Back to Revelation 2 (pg 1203)**

**Read verse 4**

I believed if we could have hung out with this congregation for a week or two we would have been totally impressed. We would have seen the purity of their belief system. We would have seen a congregation busy getting things done for God.

If they were having a conference on how to do ministry we would have sent a leadership team down to learn how to do church better. This is America. We like busyness and activity. In fact we equate busyness with success, don't we?

But in the middle of all that very positive action and sound doctrine Jesus has a stern message of criticism for the Ephesian Christians. He doesn't say they should stop serving. He doesn't say they're too strict when it comes to how their living. He doesn't say they're too narrow in their beliefs.

He says, *I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

What's that about?

Skye Jethani is the senior editor of *Leadership Journal* and the author of *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God*

Jethani writes about the time he was attending a leadership conference in the Alps. (How come I don't get to go to those?)

As they were looking at a group of rock climbers making their way up a sheer cliff, a leader Roger who had spent decades serving Christ and planting churches on four continents made this statement...

He said, "There's a first-rate commitment to a second rate mission."

And then he made this shocking admission, "I've given most of my energy to a second-rate mission too. Don't get me wrong. Church planting is vitally important but someday that mission will end for me. My first calling is to live with and for God. That must be my first commitment."

Jethani goes on to say, "When meeting with or counseling a struggling church leader, one of the questions I'll ask is: 'Assuming you're not engaged in some kind of disqualifying sin, why not? What's keeping you from open sin?' The answer I most often hear is: 'I wouldn't want to do anything to jeopardize my ministry.' That response often reveals where a leader's true devotion is.

Sadly, I rarely hear a pastor say, "I wouldn't want anything to disrupt my communion with God." So few of us have been given a vision of a life *with* Christ, and instead, we seek to fill the void with a vision for ministry--a vision of a life *for* Christ."

Jesus said, *I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

You may not recognize the name Phil Vischer, but most of you know his work. Phil Vischer created VeggiTales. He created a way to get the message of the Bible out to millions of kids through creative cartoon characters.

He lived to work for God. His heroes launched ministries and made a huge impact for God. And that's a good thing. We want to make an impact for God in our world.

The problem was Vischer began to believe that impact was everything. This is what he wrote: “God would never call us from greater impact to lesser impact! How many kids did you invite to Sunday? How many souls have you won? How big is your church? How many people will be in heaven because of your efforts? Impact, man!”

He was going great guns and then his ministry started to unravel all round him. Finally in 2003 he lost his company.

That’s what it took to bring Vischer to the point where he began to question the validity of the “work for God” values he had inherited and which had driven his early career.

He would later write, “The more I dove into Scripture, the more I realized I had been deluded. I had grown up drinking a dangerous cocktail—a mix of the Gospel, the Protestant work ethic, and the American dream...The Savior I was following seemed, in hindsight, equal parts Jesus, Ben Franklin, and Henry Ford. My eternal value was rooted in what I could accomplish.”

*I. A Commitment To Serve God Is The Natural Outflow Of A Sincere Faith*

*II. It’s Possible To Be Committed To Serving God And Not Have A Real Love For God*

*III. God Always Provides The Way To Restore Intimacy With Him*

## **Read verse 5**

It’s possible to do wrong things with a right motive. Parents are masters at this. I’ve watched some parents bail their kids out problem situations over and over again. They have a great heart. They think they’re helping their child. But their methodology isn’t helping their child stand on their own two feet. Right motives but wrong actions.

But the flip side is also common. It’s possible to do right things with wrong motives.

I believe we’re being told here in Revelation 2 that it’s possible to teach Sunday School, work in the nursery, hand out bulletins, hold services at the rescue mission, talk to people about Jesus...

even get up here on Sunday mornings and preach sermons, it’s possible to do any and all of that with wrong motives.

God wants our service. We’re His hands, feet, and mouth during this age. He wants to show Himself to a hardened and rebellious world through us.

But there’s something He wants first. Before all the work and all the words. God wants us.

What if today Jesus is saying to Faith Community Church, “Guys, I’m glad to see all the stuff your accomplishing there in Gambrills, MD. I’m glad your sticking to the Word.



I'm glad you gave \$280,000 to missions last year and you're on your way to top that this year. I'm excited about all the people who served faithfully in VBS and worked so hard at the Rescue Mission. I know your works, your labor, your patience."

"There's just one thing. For some of you it's fresh and new but for a lot of others it's just routine. Here we go again. There's a job to do, let's get out there and do it. Somebody's got to do it."

Here's what I believed happened in Ephesus. Their love for God and others cooled down. The passion for the glory of God and the worship of Jesus Christ was turning into mere performance.

### **Turn to Matthew 22 page 970**

During Jesus' day there was two main religious groups in Judaism, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They formed an uneasy alliance to try to keep things going under pagan Roman occupation.

The Pharisees were the middle class religious conservatives of the day. The Sadducees were the aristocratic liberals. They denied a resurrection, an after life, and the spirit world. The Sadducees said, "When your dead, you're dead. That's it." That's why they were sad you see!

Sorry about that. But now you'll never forget that the Sadducees were liberals, right?

In Matthew 22 Jesus kind of blows away one of the Sadducees best arguments against the after life which causes a big commotion.

So here's what happens... **read verses 34-36**

There are some 613 laws in the commandments given through Moses. Just like in our legal system the more laws you have the more lawyers you need to interpret the law.

In Jesus day those lawyers were a special group within the Pharisees. One of the things they debated was, which is the most important of all the laws of Moses?

Here's why that question was so critical to them. While the Pharisees had the utmost respect for the Law of Moses they recognized that it was impossible to keep all 613. Since they believed the way to heaven was through keeping the commandments they came up with an idea.

If they could identify the most important law and then make sure they kept that one, then if they blew a few others they'd still be OK with God. It was kind of like the Jewish version of Mortal and Venial sins.

So what's the greatest commandment? They weren't approaching this for the right reason but they were actually onto something.

### **Read verse 37-40**

Listen to Jesus' answer. It wasn't that you could keep this one and let the others slide but if you kept this one you'd keep the others to. It would be natural.

What's the greatest commandment? Love God. Love Him with your heart. Love Him with your emotions. Love Him with your intellect.

What does that look like? Does that mean we get goosebumps and feel weak in the knees when we hear the name of Jesus? Are we going to sway all around? What is the love that God wants us to have? What is the love that the Ephesians seem to have lost?

### **Look at one last passage, John 21 page 1067**

I don't know if you're a breakfast person or not but imagine this. Breakfast with Jesus after His resurrection. Peter goes back to fishing and the resurrected Christ meets him where he is.

Peter was one of the closest disciples to Jesus but he blew it big time. Maybe you've blown it big time with God. You're in good company.

Jesus gets arrested and hauled off to be brutalized and then nailed to a cross and Peter totally disavows Him. Three times he says I don't even know this Jesus, and the last one he curses and swears for an added dramatic emphasis.

That's bad. But instead of Jesus consigning Peter to a life of misery and regret look what He does.

### **Read verse 15**

Peter do you love me more than these fish you've gone back to trying to catch? And Jesus uses the verb *agapao*. Peter, do you love me with a divine, unconditional kind of love? And Peter says Lord you know I *phileo* You. It means, "You know I like You a lot." *Phileo* is where we get the name Philadelphia, city of brotherly love.

So Jesus asks him again... **Read verse 16** Same words. Jesus, You know I really do like you a lot.

**Read verse 17** This time Jesus uses *phileo*.

Was Jesus being cruel to Peter? Not at all. But He knew what had to be done to reestablish Peter. It was like He was saying *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.* (Revelation 2:5)

Peter got it. He'd realized that he'd lost it. He put his heart, soul, and mind into loving this Jesus who had died and risen. Into this Jesus who had forgiven him of the worst of sins. He spent the rest of his life feeding the sheep. Teaching people about Jesus. And at the end of his life when the Romans crucified him he said, "I'm not worthy to die like my Lord. Hand me upside down." And they did.

What happened in Ephesus? Eventually they lost their place of influence. Their lampstand was removed. Today Ephesus is in Islamic Turkey.

How about you? Have you been keeping Jesus Christ at arm's length because you're afraid of what closeness to Him might mean for your life? Have you set up boundaries to make sure that He stays out of certain areas of your life because it's too uncomfortable to think about Him touching those areas?

Working for God is important. He's created us in Christ Jesus for good works. But if we substitute working for God for passionately loving God we're missing out on the very thing we're created for.

This morning pray this prayer as a church body: "O Lord, shake us up this morning, move us outside of our comfort zone, back into a passionate, growing relationship with you. Lord if we've lost it help us to recover that first love that you desire."