

Revelation: The Love You Had First

April 22, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Isaiah 43:1-7

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Read Isaiah 43:1-7 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

What in your life has captured your imagination and why (a story, movie, nature etc....)?

Text for Discussion: Revelation 1:20-2:7

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The book of Revelation isn't as much about foretelling as it is about truth telling – proclaiming the truth of who Jesus Christ is. Chapters 2 and 3 of this letter focus on teachings intended for specific churches but meant to be read by all. Christ first encourages a particular church, then gives criticism, and then makes a promise. These are tangible instructions given in light of who Christ is.

Then as now, churches were in constant need of teaching, being called back to God's promises and who their true identity is in Christ. Though this might sound discouraging, the beauty is that God doesn't wait for us to get this right. He calls us out of our brokenness, before we've cleaned up our messes. That's why this image of Christ walking among His churches is so powerful and encouraging (Rev 1:13). God hasn't abandoned these messy churches; He interacts, pouring His love over them. Even today, He is active in our church and in our city.

Christ first addresses the church in Ephesus. It was a place of sound theology. Paul had ministered there for three years, followed by Timothy and then the apostle John. Christ encourages them, commending them for their patient endurance and their dismissal of false apostles. But then He offers criticism, saying they "have abandoned the love you had at first" (Rev 2:4). This isn't just to convict them that their emotional feelings have faded; their commitment to the Good News has as well. They have allowed their knowledge of God to unnecessarily get in the way of their relationship with Him.

How did their love fade? The same as it often does in our own lives: other commitments slowly consume our time and our hearts. And the soundness of the theology in our heads allow us to excuse the lack of love and commitment to God in our hearts. We need to repent and rekindle our passion for God – to see Him not just as useful but as beautiful in and of Himself. Only then will our actions be borne out of love for our Father rather than as an attempt to manipulate Him to gain a desired outcome.

This passage to the Ephesians isn't about calling them out so they'll be better Christians; it's about them needing to gain a fuller picture of just how much God loves them. This is the beauty of the Gospel. Our Father doesn't demand that we get our act together or live out His commandments before He will reveal His love and show favor toward us. Before we ever do anything right, God is committed to loving us. The foundation of our relationship with God has never been (and will never be) our devotion to Him. It is entirely rooted in His devotion to us. And our love is therefore a response to how much Jesus loves us. We then look outward and

love one another and our communities and our city as a response to that love. Because there is no other love like this.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can the book of Revelation help revive our imagination?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening Questions/Digging In...

- After reading Rev 2:1-7, what stood out to you?
- What do you know about the church of Ephesus? Look up Acts 19.
 - What good things characterize this church?
 - How might its strengths have been the cause of its failure?
- In Rev 2:2-3, why does Jesus begin his assessment of the church in Ephesus the way he does?
 - Why is his approach important?
- Looking at vs. 4 what was Jesus unsatisfied with in the Ephesian church?
 - What did Jesus command the church at Ephesus to remember?
 - How did the church of Ephesus need to change and what was the warning given to the church if they failed to obey His words?
- How has Rev 1 and 2 given you a bigger vision of Jesus? In what situation have you applied this knowledge and how did it help?
- Would you identify yourself as a big head Christian, a big heart Christian, or a big foot Christian?
 - How does that affect your relationship with Jesus, with others, the church and the world?
 - How would you like to stretch yourself to grow?
- If Jesus were walking among our church today, what would He say about PCC?
 - Where would He encourage us?
 - Where would He challenge us?
- What do worship and service out of a lack of faithfulness and without God's love look like?
 - How might we fall into this spiritual trap?

Application Questions

- Looking at your own life, what "at first" love has faded into the background of your walk with Christ?
 - What needs to change?
 - Name something measurable/practical that might help you return to your "first love" ways.
 - How can we help each other return to our "first love" of Christ?
- Spend some time in small groups sharing and in prayer remembering "first love ways" and repenting of the pursuits that may have caused you to abandon that first love.

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

- Write down a list of all the things revealed about Jesus and His character in Revelation Chapter 2. Come to the CG next meeting prepared to share what you have learned and how it helped to strengthen your love and trust of Him