

Rev 25-09-21b

Once again, we are here in Revelation chapter two, looking at the first of the seven letters that the Lord Jesus dictates to these churches that are found in what we would now call southwestern Turkey, that was the province of Asia minor in Roman days. The city of Ephesus is the designated recipient, geographic position, it was called the queen of Asia, proud capital of Ionia, chief harbor of that province of Asia, extremely wealthy and beautiful city, located near the mouth of the river Kastur, which is now the lower Meander River, was the principal line of communication between Rome and the eastern provinces. One major road ran eastward through a pass to Sardis and then to Galatia and beyond.

Another led to Magnesia and up the valley of the river Meander to Iconium. A third ran through Colossae and Laodicea to the Euphrates. So as a crossroads of these major arteries, it of course prospered due to trade with Greece and Italy, as well as the port traffic.

It had beautiful architecture. There was a 500 foot in diameter theater that held 25,000 people. It had the marble way lined with statues and fountains that ran from the temple of Artemis through the city to the Magnesia gate.

The Arcadian way, another main road from the theater to the harbor, was 1,735 feet long, 70 feet wide, lined with columns and shops, illuminated at night. The most outstanding architectural feature was the Temple of Diana. As you may remember from mythology, she's the daughter of Zeus and the sister of Apollo.

The Temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was four times as large as the Parthenon in Athens, stood on a platform 425 feet by 220 feet. I say all of this to emphasize the environment of the church is secular materialism, prosperity, idolatry, surrounds the believers who live there.

This is a big city church. And has all of the distractions and the potentials for suppression, oppression, persecution, and attack that comes when you're in a highly urbanized, secularized, materialistic environment. So the reason for this background is to the extent that we are influenced by commerce, economic pressures and factors, politics, and the ideas that flow across routes of travel.

Now we have electronic routes where in the ancient day, when you were on these major arteries and highways, ideas from all over the Roman Empire would be imported and discussed, and in some cases advocated and pressed. That's the environment in Ephesus. There were of course, pagan rights with temple prostitutes and so on that took place.

And when Paul came there in earlier years and began preaching the gospel of Christ, it threatened the income of the temple at Diana. And you will see this shortly in Acts. But in the New Testament period, Ephesus was the largest city of its day.

Paul's first visit there was brief. You can turn back quickly to Acts chapter 19. We're not going to dwell on this.

We've seen it when we did the book of Acts, and when we reviewed Timothy's service as pastor in this very city. But look at Acts 19. We'll just breeze through this pretty quickly.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. He found some disciples there, and he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They said to him, we haven't heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. He said to them, into what were you baptized? They said, John's baptism, the baptism of John such as took place at the Jordan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the forerunners introduction.

Paul said, John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on him who would come after him, that is on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

There were about 12 men. Well, how many disciples did Jesus start with? And how many does Paul start with in Ephesus? He went into the synagogue, verse 8, spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. When some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Notice Paul's response to opposition is not to continue to argue, debate, and throw pearls before swine. He withdraws with those who are receptive and are sympathetic and goes to the school of Tyrannus. This continued for two years so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

All who dwell in Asia, who's that going to be? This is going to be Ephesus, Pergamos, Smyrna, Thyatira, and so on. These seven churches in Asia will have all heard the word because of Paul's ministry in Ephesus that we find detailed here. God worked unusual miracles.

Jewish exorcists came, seven sons of Sceva there in the middle of chapter 19. And in verse 18, many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Those who had practiced magic brought their books together, burned them in the sight of all, counted up the value.

The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. Verse 26, you see in here that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people saying that they are not gods, which are made with hands. The trade of ours is in danger of falling into disrepute.

The temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised, her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship. This is the environment into which the Lord Jesus is sending these seven letters. A few decades earlier, this is the founding and the grounding of Christianity in this region.

So verse 28, full of wrath, cry out, greatest Diana of the Ephesians. The whole city is filled with confusion. They rush into the theater and so on.

Verse 35, the city clerk quiets the crowd, men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of Ephesians is the temple guardian of the great goddess Diana? The image was fell down from Zeus. Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. You've brought these men together, who are neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of your goddess.

Chapter 20, verse one, after the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples, embraced them and departed, goes to Macedonia, various places in verse 17 from Miletus. Remember, this is north on the coast of these seven churches we're looking at from Miletus. He sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

He doesn't want to go back through Ephesus. And you remember this, we've seen it many times, his witness and testimony to the Ephesian elders. I want to look specifically at verse 28, you elders take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Notice they have oversight. They are not necessarily co-pastors. They are overseers.

They certainly have jobs. They can teach below the authority of the pastor. Timothy is eventually going to be the pastor here.

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. Of course, this is the blood of Christ. And you have here the same emphasis on the identity of the Lord Jesus and God, the father, Jesus is God.

He is the one that he purchased, who purchased the church with his own blood. Verse 29, pay attention here. I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

I just posted a devotional this past week from Dr. Criswell, drawn from a sermon that he titled those grievous wolves taken from this passage. I found a great picture of a bunch of fierce looking wolves all in a pack. Therefore watch verse 31.

And remember for three years, I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Be careful about those who will come in. And what do they do? They speak perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves.

They rise up from among yourselves. They start from within and then they depart. They speak perverse things and they draw people after them.

Notice they spring up from within. What is the pattern of movement in our generation? People

from within the church. Oh, I was an evangelical.

I even pastored. I grew up in, I was in this ministry and that, and now I have deconstructed and reconstructed. I'm progressive.

I no longer believe the inspiration of scripture. I no longer, you know, I'm having to find a new and different way because Christianity that's based on the Bible doesn't work for me anymore. And they are drawing people away by the tens of thousands with podcasts, with online debates, with books that they publish, with viewpoints and perspectives that, that criticize and take genuine failures on the part of Christians and use it to lever Christian faith itself out of people's hearts.

Therefore watch verse 31 and remember, brethren, I commend you, verse 32, to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up. What builds us up and gives us an inheritance among all those who are set apart, sanctified? What builds us up? What sets us apart? It is the word of God. He goes on to give the lost beatitude in verse 35 and all of the beatitudes recorded in the gospels.

This one's not there. Paul picked it up in his discourse with the Lord Jesus. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus.

He said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. I have shown you the way in verse 35 by laboring that you must support the weak. We all from time to time have needs.

We are brought low and we look to our brothers and sisters in Christ for support, for encouragement. And there are times when we are the supportee and there are times when we are the supporter. But widows and orphans, Old Testament truth, transfers to the New Testament, we bear with those.

We put a shoulder under the load, bear one another's burdens, encourage one another, and so on. It is a priority. Paul is giving what he believes are his final words to the Ephesian elders.

And this is what he closes with. You must support the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

There are times when we need to receive, but we look for opportunities to give prayer support, whatever kind of support God has positioned us to provide. So that is Ephesus. That is its founding.

That is Paul's beginning and ending of ministry to the Ephesians, other than the proxy ministry that he has through Timothy. When you go to 1 Timothy 1.3, Paul is writing to Timothy, who is the pastor there. This is also that you find Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians while he is at Ephesus. And the apostle John, we learn this from church tradition, not scripture, but it is believed based on that early church father witness that

John spent time in Ephesus with Mary, the Lord's mother. And Eusebius and others indicate that John returned there after his release upon the death of Domitian and spent his closing years there.

There traditionally is the tomb of both John and Mary in that area. The original form of fellowship of these churches was house churches. Unlike the temples, even unlike the synagogues, Christian fellowships took place in homes.

And if you still have your finger in Acts and you look at chapter 20 verses 21 through 26, Paul says to those elders, I kept nothing back from you that was helpful. I proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the heart of the gospel.

I testify to you that I have not shunned to declare all the counsel of God, verse 27, the whole counsel of God, take heed. He did it both publicly and from house to house, out in the open square and from house to house, verse 20. So this is background as Jesus speaks to the church in Ephesus here in Revelation chapter two.

I know your works. This word works is air gone. This is what is accomplished.

The tasks that you perform, the efforts that you undertake, Jesus says, I know them, your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. You tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars. Evidently Paul's exhortation is well-founded and has traction.

Evidently the Ephesians took this to heart and they have been careful about the possibility of grievous wolves, ravening wolves, springing up among the flock. And Jesus says, you've done well. You don't bear those who are evil.

You've tested those who claim apostolic authority. I can give you information that has as much weight or more than what is reflected in scripture from the apostolic witness. I will give you a new and better way.

So in the light of what we see in Acts, it appears that the warning was heeded. Timothy did a good job, feed the flock of God. We saw this in our studies of first and second Timothy, the warning against false teachers, let no one deceive you, rebuke those who introduce falsehoods.

And it appears that up to this point, the Ephesians took that message to heart. So that's good. But as we begin this letter, these things says, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands.

You get the idea that these churches are going to be representative of every church in every generation. But even more so, the church of Ephesus is going to be definitional and applicable for the remaining six. And so when Jesus of his descriptions from chapter one, when he chooses holding the seven stars and walking in the midst, there is an advance from what John

saw.

He saw seven stars in the Lord Jesus hand and saw him standing in the midst of the lamp stands. What do you notice that's different here? When Jesus introduces himself to the Ephesians, he is holding the stars in his hand. They aren't just present.

He's got a grip on them. This is emphatic. This is progress beyond.

And what does it tell you? Pastors are uniquely accountable to God. Those who take up a communication function and are messengers. You can also have teachers.

You can have many teachers. Paul said, you have many teachers. You have one father in Christ.

You have one who brought you into the fold. But holding the seven stars in his right hand, that same right hand that strengthens John is the right hand. And this is the third reference to Jesus right hand in just a few verses.

The stars are there. He lays his right hand on John. And now he tells the Ephesians, I am he who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

And who isn't just present in the midst of the lampstands, he walks in the midst of the lampstands. This represents active observation, active presence, movement. The Lord Jesus isn't observing from a heavenly perspective.

When it comes to the churches, when it comes to Ephesus, he says, listen, I've got your pastor and every other pastor held in my hand. And that has both benefits and accountability aspects. He walks in the midst of the lampstands.

I know your works. I walk around. I am present.

I am in your midst. And I've got a firm grip on the information that you receive. Then he lists three things.

I know your works, your labor. The word labor here is kapos, K-O-P-O-S. And this is, ergon means what are the tasks.

You can list, most of us have a to-do list. And each of those involves work, mow the lawn, fold the laundry, whatever, work on the car. Those are the tasks.

Those are the accomplishments that need to take place. Kapos is the exertion involved. A good translation here would be, I know your effort.

And this is a reference to intensive physical labor, intensive labor that produces physical tiredness. You finish something where you really have to work at it. You come away ready to sit down.

Another good translation would be, I know your exertion. This combines the notion of work

with its result of fatigue. I know you work to the point of exhaustion.

That's what kapos is. It was used of soldiers in battle, manual workers, strenuous wrestling by a hero in Greek plays and so on. Strenuous work that exhausts one in the doing.

That's what kapos is. Jesus says, I know you are working yourself to exhaustion. I know your exertion, your labor.

Secondly, I know your patience. This is our friend seen many times, hupomene. This is to bear up under.

Hypodermic needle goes underneath the skin. That's how I remember the difference between prefixes. Mene is meno, to remain or to bear up under.

You're carrying the load. You're working to the point of exhaustion and you are enduring. You're keeping it up.

You're shouldering the load. You're carrying it. You're not getting burns on your shoulders from slipping the straps of your pack off.

You're working hard. You're efforting and you are enduring. This isn't so much emotional patience or an attitude of not getting riled up.

This is bearing up under a heavy load. Thirdly, you cannot bear those who are evil. The word bear here is somewhat rare.

It's found in the New Testament about 27 times and it is often paired with a word that means up, to bear up. So Iro or Pharaoh, to bear up. It is used for Jesus carrying the cross in John 19, 17.

It is used of the disciples who need to bear their cross and come after me. Jesus says in Luke 14, 27, whoever does not bear his cross, bastazo, and come after me cannot be my disciple. These people are able to bear up in terms of carrying the load.

They are working intensively, working hard to the point of exhaustion. They're expending all remaining and here they cannot bear those who are evil. And this idea of bearing comes to mean to bear with the scruples of the weak.

Paul says in Romans 15, 15, I'm sorry, Romans 15, 15, one, we then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak and not to please ourselves to support, to continue on. So you either support a thing or you don't, you either carry it or you don't. But this is an aspect related to those who are evil.

You cannot bear those who are evil. You don't put up with it. You don't carry it forward.

And this is obedience to the exhortations and the warnings given by both Paul and Timothy

under Paul's influence. Then he says, you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not. And the word tested here is our old friend Perazzo.

We've seen it in James to test or tempt, but no one say when he is tested, I'm tempted. I'm tempted by God. You have tested those who say they are apostles and you find the deceitful or false apostles mentioned by Paul in second Corinthians 11, verse 13.

These who are competing with Paul and trying to draw people away from Paul's ministry and doctrine, such as second Corinthians 11, 13, false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. No wonder Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their work.

There is a judgment coming. False apostles, deceitful workers, pretending to bring light and apostolic authority to the understanding of the scriptures. This is rife in our environment today.

Book after book after book is repurposing, redefining, reinterpreting scripture in the interest of things that are not a part of Christian faith and proper understanding. The Ephesians have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. Remember in our structure, we have the name of the church, the title that Jesus chooses for himself, and this third element is the commendation.

This is what they're doing well. You found them liars. Now there is a rehearsal of what we just saw in verse three.

You have persevered. This is another form of bastazo. You have borne up under hardship, and you have patience, hupomone, once again, and have labored, kopiao, the verb form of kapos.

When Jesus says, I know your labor, you have labored. Isn't it interesting? Jesus, these are very short letters. If he repeats himself, this is an emphasis, and this is what he is saying to the people in the church at Ephesus.

This is what they know about themselves. This is what they see when they look at themselves individually and as a group. Hey, I am sorting out what is erroneous.

I am doing the work of faith. I am enduring and bearing up under. I am purging out, rejecting, and eliminating the words of those who say they are apostles.

I find them to be liars, and I reject their message. So Jesus says in verse three, look, I get it. I've told you once.

I'm going to tell you again. I know you have persevered. I know you have endurance.

I know you have worked to the point of exhaustion for my namesake. You are doing a wonderful job in this area, and you have not become weary. This is the word that is used for becoming sick or fainting.

You haven't weakened. My great-grandmother used to say it's a great life if you don't weaken, if you don't become weary. You have not become weary.

This is Jesus' commendation, nevertheless, and you always take a step of sober reflection when you get nevertheless. I have this against you. What could Jesus have against people who are doubly commended, twice commended, for their work of faith, their labor of love, their patience of hope? What could he possibly have against them? I have this against you.

You have left your first love. Verse four is where we're going to close this morning. It takes some reflection to realize what this means.

This isn't the unbridled enthusiasm and ecstatic experience we have when we are newly saved, when we realize that we've been freed from our sins, that Jesus is a new and living way to the Father and all of the wonderful things. Many times, especially if we come to faith as an adult, there is just a tremendous experience and we love God and just want to tell everybody what he has done for us and so on. That's not this.

This is agape for love and protos for first. This is not first in sequence. This is first in priority.

You could translate this, and I would put a note in your Bible, foremost. Your foremost love. What is the first and greatest commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

This is my King James coming out. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your might. It's the first and greatest commandment.

They are doing the labor of love, works of faith. They've got the patience of hope, but they have left. And when it says you have left, this is the word *afiemi*.

This is sometimes used for forgiveness. What happens when sin is forgiven? It is separated as far as the East is from the West. It is forgotten.

Afiemi means to leave behind, to no longer think about. Just think this is the same word that is used for forgiveness. We love it when our sins are in the past and are no longer an issue.

This is that same word. You have let go. You have stepped away from.

You're no longer thinking about your foremost love. The doing, rooting out those who are in error and all of this strenuous effort has now become an end in itself. And what is love? Love is the measure of how well we're doing with our faith and our hope.

And they have abandoned. They've gone away from. They're no longer thinking about their foremost love.

What is the solution? It's the first word of verse five. And here's where we'll close this morning. Remember.

Therefore, remember. What do we know that we can remember? What did we see? Paul talked to the Ephesian elders about. I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God, the word of God.

It was the issue when Paul first came to Ephesus. It is the last word he gives to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20. Remember what you know.

Remember the God who gave the word, who created the potential, who as the Lord Jesus holds in his hand the stars and walks among the lampstands. You get so busy worrying about the lamp you're holding up. You forget about the Lord who is in the midst.

Remember from where you have fallen. Change your mind and do the foremost works. You're still doing these works and you're wearing yourself out doing them.

But without the foremost love, I've got something against you. We'll see the remainder of this letter next time. But how important is it for us to remember that the Lord Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

We come to the father. We don't come to a task list. We don't come to a religion that specifies works to be done and a definition of righteousness based on getting things accomplished, working our fingers to the bone, laboring to the point of exhaustion.

That's not where commendation is to be found. It is in keeping our foremost love at the center of our motivation because that love is appreciation for God, glorifying his mighty name, his wonderful and merciful self-sacrificial salvation offered to us. And there's a difference in doing housework because housework needs to be done or doing housework because you have loved ones who are there and you want it to be a pleasing environment for them.

You can cook a meal because it's your turn to cook or you can cook a meal because you're thinking about the health and well-being and enjoyment of the people who are going to consume it. There's a difference in doing work, even laboring hard and doing a great job, but why are you doing it? Are you doing it because you just think it needs to be done or are you thinking about the love that motivates you to do it to the greatest extent and with the expectation that it will enhance relationship and appreciation and draw us closer to those we love? There's a difference and it's worth thinking about. We'll see this next time and we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for this particular portion and as the Lord Jesus addresses us as a group and individually in this very explicit and telling way, we pray that the Holy Spirit will help us to see where we have aspects of Ephesus in our own fellowship and in our own individual actions and motivations, that we will remember our foremost love, our love for you, our appreciation and gratitude for all the things that you have done for us in Christ, our appreciation and love for him as our Savior, as our representative, our intercessor, the head of all things to us as the church, his body, and that as we engage in those meaningful and

productive tasks that you place before us, we will never forget the why, the reason for our fulfillment of these opportunities. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified in us and through us and we ask it in his name.

Amen.