

Revelation 2:1-7 "Truth and Love"

Read Revelation 2:1-7

Darryl Johnson speaks of these letters being the marrying together of two types of communication that would have been well known to the original readers. The first was a prophetic oracle – “thus saith the Lord”. The second was a royal edict sent from a Roman Governor to local municipalities – “I know this about you”. The letters are written to churches. At this time a church was not a religious building, instead it signified a gathering of citizens of the city who were conducting the business of the city. These letters then are the words of the true Emperor and God inviting his people to conduct the business of the city of God in the city that they live in.

1. Do you see our life as church in these terms? Why or why not?

In the sermon Tim reflected that many of us would not see our life as church in these terms. Instead we see church in a personal, individual way as nurturing that part of our lives that we call spiritual. Yes it has impact on our inner lives, and our personal relationships, but we don't see it as being central to our life as a city. The health of the church in a city will be directly related to the health of the city.

There could be many reasons for why we don't see it this way – the separation of church and state has relegated our religious convictions to simply the personal realm when to follow Jesus is intensely political with implications for every aspect of life.

Our emphasis on relativism in the area of spiritual truth means we don't want to impose our beliefs on anyone else. Your truth is your truth and my truth is my truth forces our convictions more into the personal and individual realm rather than the corporate civic realm.

2. Where do we need to grow to align ourselves to this picture of what it means to be church?

Turning outward.

Looking at the problems in our city and asking how can we as the church address them? (We set up our clusters in the hopes of them being communities that were directed in that way.)

Work out the implications of the gospel beyond my inner life and personal relationship and ask about what it means for poverty, city planning, inequalities, safe injection sites, racial tension, etc...

Each of these letters will tell us something of what it means to be a community that gathers for the sake of the city it lives in. By what Jesus praises in them – I know this about you – and what Jesus critiques in the them – but I have this against you – will tell us what it means to be this kind of community.

3. (vs. 2, 6) Jesus praises them for their holding onto orthodoxy, their holding onto the truth of the person and work of Jesus in the midst of the cultural idolatries of their day. What are some of the cultural idolatries of our day?

Tim in the sermon mentioned our secular worldview that says this life is all there is and so I have to fill my life with as many beautiful things and experiences as I possibly can. This worldview stirs up self-centered decision making, it leads to throw away relationships when the going gets tough (because if this life is all there is its too short to deal with the likes of you), it is inadequate for dealing with suffering because any diminishment of joy if this is all there is catastrophic.

Unlike the greeks and Romans we don't have temples on every corner but we still worship the likes of sex, beauty, power and wealth. (Many examples could be given here of how we still worship these realities)

We have made the individual the primary determiner of meaning and value. It doesn't matter what you believe and do as long as you don't hurt anyone.

4. What would it look like to remain faithful to Jesus and not compromise with the cultural idolatries of our day?

In the sermon Tim mentioned how living in light of the hope of the resurrection, that this life is not all there is will change us. We will be inclined to stick out difficult relationships and bring them to health. We are better equipped to face death and suffering. We can diminish our wealth to serve others.

Sex – we see it as a beautiful gift from God to be enjoyed as the complete joining of two people in love within the context of a covenant relationship not simply an expression of personal gratification outside of any commitment. Christians will treat sex as sacred and express it within that proper context.

Beauty – we can reject the world's definition and pursuit of beauty to know that we are beautifully made in God's image and delighted in as a child of the King.

Power – as Jesus let go of his power to serve others, we can do the same in the midst of a world that grasps for power for its own sake.

Wealth – we don't build it for our own sake – we diminish it and let it go for the sake of others.

We live out life in ways that are defined by obedience to the one who made us, in line with the true humanity that is revealed in Jesus.

5. (vs. 3) Jesus acknowledges what it has cost them to remain faithful in Ephesus. What would it cost us to remain faithful in Toronto?

This is a subjective question that will have different answers depending on where your discussion has gone earlier. Some common themes may be...

- *misunderstanding*
- *a different way of living may be perceived as judgement*
- *job loss, lack of promotion*
- *rejection*
- *other?*

6. (vs. 4) Jesus critiques them for being a community of truth without love. What are the symptoms of a community of truth without love? Do you see this in churches that you know? In our church?

Often such communities are marked by judgment, harshness, self-righteous gossip, nitpicking legalism, diminishment of others as "not faithful", lack of compassion toward the suffering of others and seeing it as punishment from God or wouldn't have happened if you had remained faithful.

There could be many examples you could give but I would encourage you as a leader to look at examples beyond little T only long enough to prime the pump of the discussion. Reflecting on our own community, on our own lives would be far more profitable to living into the fullness of who we are to be as church.

7. If we see this in ourselves John invites us to remember from where we have fallen, repent, and return to the works we did at first. How does remembering shape our repenting and our returning to the works we did at first?

John is wanting us to first remember the love that met us as sinners (Romans 5:8). When we remember his lavish, restoring, healing, forgiving love our repentance is not motivated by shame or guilt but rather by a desire to return to an experience of his love. When we remember his love, our returning to the works we did at first will be shaped and motivated by that love instead of by fear or pride. Both the shame and guilt, and the fear and pride are primary emotions in a community where truth trumps love and this remembering will bring us more to a place of truth AND love.