

”You’ve lost that lovin feelin” Revelation 2:1-7 3/16/03

Reaching high above the earth into the oxygen-starved air Mt Everest stands 29,035 feet tall. It is a spectacular place. Did you know that between 1300 and 1600 people have made the summit? Since 1921 over 160 people have lost their lives trying to reach the top of its ragged peaks. That is about 1 in 8 die and for that they put down \$60,000 + dollars and give up 90 days of their lives. What drives these people to attempt this awesome feat? Part of it must be the attraction of joining a very exclusive club, for others it is the pure adventure and challenge and for some it is a compelling desire that may bring them back again and again because most who attempt never succeeded. One of the truths about Everest is that the greatest loss of life does not happen going up, but coming down. This includes both those who must turn back because of weather or deteriorating health and those who actually made it to the top. More people in fact have died descending from the mountain than have died on their way up. There is a spiritual application to that statement that I want to explore with you this morning. It relates to the care we must take in our spiritual lives after we have come off a great high. I believe a lot of you right now are in the position several disciples found themselves in as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 17. It is the story of the transfiguration and those who are with Jesus want to stay right where they are. They want to build some little shelters and camp up there with Jesus, and Moses and Elijah. But that was not an option. In fact the Bible is really the stories of highs and lows more than anything. I have been reading Genesis in my devotions the past weeks and it is filled with highs and lows. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and of course Joseph. Think about the life of Daniel or Jonah and even our Lord. From the richness of his baptism right into the struggle of the wilderness temptation

And so this morning I want to look at a text of Scripture that contains instructions for a group of people who are in a low and how they are instructed to turn that around. Take the message this

morning as a pre-emptive prescription for what I know is coming. The text is found in the book of Revelation, the second chapter. READ 1-7.

Now just a bit of history for those of you who like to root it in the larger context. You can see on the map where Ephesus is. Great city of commerce and diversity. A city that had no Roman garrison because it enjoyed the privilege of being a free city. The church was founded by Paul in around 55AD. Later pastured by Timothy and then most believe that John the apostle himself pastured there for about 20 years and now, in an island off the coast he writes again to his dearly loved friends of Ephesus and the rest of the Asian churches.

John begins with strong words of affirmation. The church at Ephesus has several distinguishing characteristics. **They had served with great distinction.** John states in the King James “I know your toil”. What John is referring to here is not their external contention for the Gospel. That will come later. What he is referring to is their consistent living out of the model of church life found in Acts 2:24. They gave themselves to each other. Caring for needs, ministering comfort and counsel, providing food, shelter, clothing and jobs. They had been a church that took care of their widows, took care of the orphans, extended the love of Christ in their community that was known world wide for its sensual perversity. And the church loved people in powerfully tangible ways. John Stott describes it this way. “Every member was doing something for Christ.” They understood their SHAPE. Over the past several weeks more of you have committed yourself to serving the church of Jesus Christ out of your SHAPE. We already have a very high level of volunteerism here at Ridgewood and it keeps growing as newer folks discover the joy and satisfaction of service.

John next goes on and acknowledges that **they stood with strength.** They evidence endurance according to verse 2. Perseverance. The local opposition to Christianity is well documented in the Acts of the Apostles. Craftsmen feared for the sale of their silver idols, emperor worship was of great importance and was a primary vehicle for carrying on business and commerce. Increasingly

the community tried to squeeze the growing community of Christ followers because they stood in opposition to everything that defined life in Ephesus. But John said that the Christians would not be bullied by their community. Over the past weeks you have shared with me how being a purpose driven Christ follower has led some of you to make both large and small changes at work. To be more sensitive to how you do business, how you make decisions, how you treat those around you and it has made you stick out a bit. Some of you have targets on your backs but you have stayed firm.

Lastly John says **you have believed without wavering.** Ephesus, because it was such a central city was very soon visited by men claiming apostolic authority. But the church came through with flying colors. They evaluated the teaching, examined the character of the teachers and concluded they were apostolic pretenders. And 20 years later Ignatius would write that the church at Ephesus continued to be “a deservedly happy church. Filled with good deeds and harmonious love.

Blameless in unity and good discipline. They regularly tested and found wanting those who John identified as liars.

But there was a problem and John brings a very **pointed criticism.** Like a tire with a leak so small you don't really notice the church at Ephesus had lost their first love. Again the King James uses the word forsaken but the problem with that is it sounds so intentional and that is not at all the case.

They did not consciously choose to forsake rather they had slowly let it leak away. Now, let me be clear here. They were still doing all the right things, but they were not doing them out of a burning love for Jesus. They were going through the motions with diligence and faithfulness but something was missing. That inner joy that Jesus had promised to give all believers in his high priestly prayer of John's Gospel. Let me again quote John Stott, “A new generation had arisen in the church at Ephesus. Their love was faltering, weakening dying. They toiled with vigor, but not with love. They endured with fortitude but not with love. They tested their teachers with orthodoxy, but not with

love. John is addressing issues of the heart. What is deep inside that provides the motivation and the empowerment. God created us to love Him and our response is to love him back in and through all that we do.

And so John gives them three **specific directives in our text beginning in verse 5.**

Remember the past. Not to live in the past but to remember the past. Not to wish for the past but to draw upon the lessons and history of the past and to move towards the same closeness and sense of god's work in us. It is to honestly say there has been some major slippage.

And that leads to the next step. **Repent of your sin.** Now you ask, what exactly was their sin? To serve Christ in their own strength. It was as simple and yet as serious as that. They believed they had it all under control and could handle things themselves. Again it was not so much a time specific choice as a culmination of increasingly not inviting Gods into everything. And you know what I am talking about. You stop praying about certain situations, decisions or relationships. You slack back on your personal time of study, prayer and reflections.

And lastly John says, **resume what you did at first.** He is not telling them to go back to days of spiritual immaturity but to return to the days of total dependence. To return to the days when every room and closet in your personal life had the light of Jesus shining brightly. To the days when there was no coldness to forgiveness, when grudges were not held when others needs came first.

Rekindle, refire, and reignite what you once had. And if you do that you will **receive your reward.**

The tree of life that all humanity was removed from in the Garden of Eden will be forever enjoyed by all those who live in the love that God has for his people.

Will you pray with me?