

You've Got Mail - Ephesus

Scripture: Revelation 2: 1-7
Date: September 20, 2020

LETTERS

Communication is a significant part of life. It helps us stay strong and sane when we know that others are aware of our existence and respond to affirm it. In times of crisis – pain – struggle – it helps to stay connected sharing sorrows and celebrating successes.

The book of revelation has a series of letters from Jesus to several churches in what we now know as Turkey but was then called Asia Minor. They were written by a man named John on an island called Patmos just off the shore from a major seaport called Ephesus. Ephesus was a major city and was a hub of commerce, social gatherings and spirituality.

COMMENDATION

Healthy relationships – healthy communication – sees all aspects of life between people. The good and the bad. Many conversations – in a healthy context – begin with affirming the positive. In the letter to the church of Ephesus - Jesus begins by recognizing the good within the people there. The letter is clear in its affirmation of the people's lives.

It identifies that the determination of the people to live as Christians. Despite the many trials and tribulations, despite the many persecutions and despite the many hardships – the people there were affirmed for their good works / deeds. Their perseverance was evident in that the word is repeated in the text as an affirmation of the character of the people in Ephesus. Regardless of the difficulties they had to face – they did not get weary in doing them.

The letter from Jesus also affirms their other strength of diligence. They were consistent in maintaining a strong theology of who God was and what God had done for them. Paul wrote letters to the church in Ephesus encouraging them to put on the armour of God in responding to the persecution threats from without but also the heresy threats from within.

CONDEMNATION

The letter – the communique – to Ephesus though raised some issues. This pattern will be repeated in each of the letters to the churches. Something (mostly) good will be followed by a challenge – a check – a condemnation.

The people in the church in Ephesus were challenged by Jesus for forsaken the love that they had earlier in their faith. The word forsaken – in Greek and in English – is an interesting one as it speaks of releasing, abandoning, walking away. It can be context of a legal proceeding as a divorce where one is charged with abandoning a spouse or of abandoning the responsibilities as a spouse.

What the church in Ephesus was charged with forsaking was the love they had at first. Some speak of this in the understanding of a first love - like when you're in high school and you see

someone and WHAM you're in love (at least until someone else crosses your path !!!) But the context here is not the first love but the love you had at first. In this context the love is less about a person or a thing but more about the laser focus, the zeal, the simplicity towards that love. The simplicity of your life when you have one focus – one purpose and the love of your life is the central passion in your life.

For the church in Ephesus there is some debate about what the focus of the love lost that Jesus is referring to. Perhaps the love lost is that which they first had with Jesus. Where the early simplicity and focus of in their life faded. Where the early zeal and passion in their gratitude to Jesus had waned through time, distractions, fatigue.

Other commentaries contend that the love lost is that which they had with each other. The early camaraderie and teamwork and the early awareness of need and willingness to serve waned through lack of appreciation and community. And Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus also speaks about how the church community needs to grow and connect more and more together.

Regardless of the focus it is clear that that they were doing good things for God and that they were keeping good theology for God BUT that they were missing out. They had a good head for theology, they had good hands for serving but not so much of a good heart for loving.

The apostle Paul wrote about such things in I Corinthians 13 where if we can eloquent words and amazing deeds – without love they are only clashing and banging sounds and they mean nothing.

CALLING

But Jesus does not leave the Ephesian church there - He offers hope and He offers life. Despite their failures and their forsaking of Him Jesus – through this missive letter – still speaks of opportunity.

The text in verse 5 tells the church to consider how the church has fallen. In other words, to remember where you are at in your life. Where you are at with theology and practice - compared to God's calling and where you are at with God's love - for Him and for each other.

Next the church is challenged to repent. To confess its wrongdoing and accept its responsibility in drifting away. To accept that it has forsaken the love it had with God at first and – perhaps – had become a religious group concerned more with right thinking and right doing than right loving.

Thirdly – this verse is crammed with commands from Jesus – to return to their first love of Jesus. To turn away from this heart attitude of loveless living and thinking and turn towards Jesus. The repentance here implies turning 180 degrees and moving in the opposite direction. To make Him – again – the centre of your life. To make Him – again – the centre of your focus. To make Him – again – the centre of your agenda.

To return to the things you once did. The deeds – the works of that love for God and for others. Deeds can be seen as specific actions but deeds can also be seen as an attitude – an atmosphere. To become – again – intentional about not releasing or rejecting the life God is calling you into and the passion God is calling you into.

In verse 7 Jesus gives a reward that will allow the church to rejoice. Those who are victorious will eat at the tree of life – which is in the paradise of God. A full and abundant life here and now AND a full and abundant life in the world yet to come.

A reward that is offered by Jesus but also made possible because of Him. His life – His death – His resurrection. This letter is from Him to ensure that Ephesus – and us - continue in the calling of God. That we would continue to dwell in Him and live for Him. That despite our waywardness and despite our forsaking of Him - He never forsake us !!

In fact the rejection aspect of forsaken is where Christ takes our sins upon Himself BUT then it gets reversed when the penalty of our sins is then forsake from us. Not longer are the penalty of our sins cast upon us. They are released, they are abandoned, they are rejected because of the work of Christ on the cross.

This freedom – this forgiveness – allows us to have our faith re-invigorated. It is like a pilot light in a gas fireplace. While the fireplace may be turned off or extinguished – the pilot light remains available to re-ignite the fire.

CHALLENGE

Letters written are only as good as letters read and advice given is only as good as advice taken. The challenge at the end of the letter – is repeated in each of the letters - *to those who have ears to hear – let them hear*. The calling remains before the church in Ephesus – and us – to remember that God is faithful to us and calls us to be faithful to Him. In our deeds, in our thinking but most importantly – in our love.