**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 1-3-2021
To the Church in Ephesus…**

One of my favorite movies, not just Christmas movies but favorite movies in general is *It’s a Wonderful Life*. It’s such a moving story and a meaningful story and I am deeply touched every time I watch it. I’ve seen it many times and Jimmy Stewart is probably my favorite actor. And he is a believer as well, so we’ll get to meet him someday in glory.

But his performance as George Bailey in *It’s a Wonderful Life* is so profound. He really owns that character. If you’re not familiar with the story, I would encourage you to watch it.

In the story, George Bailey was a godly person who put his dreams to see the world on hold in order to help in his family business. And after a series of events, those hopes and dreams do not seem to materialize.

George Bailey was married to Mary and it is exciting to see how in joyously in love he was with Mary in the earlier parts of the story. But as the movie progressed and worry and challenges mounted, his love seemed to wane. Yes, he was faithful to her but his marriage began to suffer because he became consumed in work and in his worries. Fortunately, the story ends with much joy and happiness.

This relationship between George and Mary reminds me of one of Jesus’ words for the church, found in Revelation chapter 2.

But before we dive into that passage of Scripture together, I would like to briefly review last Sunday’s message with you. Last week we took a closer look at Revelation chapter 1 and this vision that the Apostle John has of the exalted Christ. John has walked with Christ faithfully for years and was a leader in the early church for decades. But this vision of Jesus in His glory completely undoes John. John falls on the ground in worship to His Lord and Jesus strengthens Him to not be afraid and to record all that Jesus would reveal to Him. And this is what we have in the book we call Revelation.

And Jesus begins his long address to John with messages about 7 churches in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. These cities are all rather close to one another and each of them has a Christian community living within it. But even though these cities were near one another, their circumstances were not all the same. Not every church was faced with the same challenges. But in every church Jesus gave instructions on how they could live out the Christian life successfully.

I mentioned last week that 7 is an important number in Scripture. Seven is symbolic of fullness or completion. We have the 7 days of the week for example. Many of the books of the Bible were written in 7 sections or parts. It’s a number of fullness.

And so Jesus highlights 7 churches in Asia Minor. While these churches each had their own challenges, Jesus intended His words to speak for the church universal as well. So while it is important to understand the context that Jesus is speaking within for these 7 Christian communities or churches, His words are meant for Christians in fullness, in totality. Not just in Turkey in the 1st century, but in the United States in the 21st century as well.

And friends, I am excited to unpack these words and Jesus for you today. We need to remember that **these words of Jesus are as much His as His words in the gospels**. Jesus continues to lead and to build His church from heaven. And He desires to direct our steps to places of life and fullness in Him.

So as we turn again to the first of these 7 churches, the Church in Ephesus, please keep George Bailey in mind as we read.

**“To the angel[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30719a)**] of the church in Ephesus write:**

**These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.**

**4Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

**7Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

\*Jesus likely addressed the church in Ephesus first for 2 reasons. **First**, it would be the first one church that he would come to upon leaving Patmos.

**Second,** Ephesus was the leading city of the region and also the hub where Paul set up camp for a long time and from there reached out to these other cities and planted more churches.

And there is a lot in these words from Jesus that I’m excited to unpack with you today.

**First, Jesus begins by saying** **“To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write.”**

Jesus will do this with the other six churches as well. And this is a helpful reminder that Jesus has many, many angels that are working to be faithful to help His church be all that it’s called to be.

The word angel literally means messenger and God uses angels to help advance His messages for His church.

Scripture teaches us that angels are very much a reality and I believe that there are angels assigned to each of us individually as well as to us God’s churches.

\*This is another connection with *It’s a Wonderful Life,* as George’s angel helped him to see his life from God’s perspective, which made all the difference in the world.

So, like George Bailey and like the Christians in Ephesus and elsewhere, we should thank God for His angels that are at work around us and seek to help strengthen in our walk with Jesus Christ.

**Second, Jesus shares several good things that the Church in Ephesus is doing.**

He commends them for their deeds, their hard work and their perseverance.

A Christian’s life is not a comfortable and easy life and Jesus honors them for persevering and working hard for the Lord’s purposes.

Jesus goes on to tell them that they cannot tolerate wicked people and they test if people are truly apostles but are not. And Jesus tells them that they have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

At that time, it was fairly common for itinerant preachers and teachers to go to a town and claim that they were sent by God with messages. But not everyone was. Not everyone was preaching what Jesus revealed in the gospels and their messages were not to be received.

And the church in Ephesus did well with discernment and did not allow them to take over. Paul warned the church in Ephesus years earlier, found in **Acts 20**, that they needed to be watchful because in time there would be **“savage wolves”** that would come in among them and seek to destroy the flock.

But thanks be to God, the Christians in Ephesus did not buy into these false teachers. They knew that sound doctrine is very important. They understood that crooked teaching will lead the church very astray and they resisted it.

This reminds me of how George Bailey resisted the greedy man, Mr. Potter in *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Potter wanted to control everything and it was because he wanted money and power. He was a prideful man.

And doctrine is still very important today. It is wise for me and other leaders to be discerning on who teaches and preaches at Chestnut Grove. We do not want to give a platform for anyone that teaches heresy or false messages about God. We want to be faithful to our Triune God and to His Word.

**The third thing, however that Jesus highlights, is a much-needed correction**.

Jesus says this in verses 4-5, **“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”**

These are very strong words from Jesus. Like George Bailey, whose love began to slowly grow cold towards Mary as he became consumed in battling Mr. Potter to protect the town, the church had slowly fallen out of love with Jesus. They became so focused on guarding the truth of sound teaching and they neglected their relationships with the One who is Trust Himself – Jesus Christ.

**And this is a very big deal.** Jesus was telling that they could have perfect doctrine, but if you are not staying in love with your savior, their church’s days would be numbered.

And Jesus tells the church is told to repent. We often think of repent in terms of turning from evil and sin. But in this case, repenting involves turning back to Jesus and falling in love with Him all over again.

What would this look like for them? Jesus told them to **“do the things they did at first.”** What would that mean? What would they have done at first?

I believe that it would mean two main things.

**First, it would mean rekindling their thankfulness of God’s grace towards them in Jesus Christ.**

When they first came to know Jesus, they were so thankful. Thankful for the forgiveness of their sins. Thankful for eternal life with God. Thankful for being made new creations in Christ Jesus. Thankful that Jesus rescued them out of idolatry.

So one way for them to repent or to turn their thinking and living around, would involve them rekindling their deep thankfulness and appreciation of their salvation in Jesus Christ.

I remember a well-known healing evangelist named Benny Hinn, used to say, **“God’s greatest miracle is salvation**.”

God believed that God never wants us to give over the fact that Jesus has called us to follow Him and by us saying yes to Him and trusting in His saving work on the cross for us, we are saved from our sins, saved from eternal separation from God, saved from self-centered living.

The Ephesians were to rekindle this appreciation. Perhaps today you have been a Christian for a long time. That’s so awesome! But we are reminded from this word from Jesus to the church in Ephesus that we are to always remain excited about God’s amazing grace to us through Jesus. The good news of Jesus should always excite us and if it doesn’t excite us, then we need to tend to our relationship with Him until it excites us once again.

**Second, I believe that repenting for the church in Ephesus would involve prioritizing time with God.**

As George became increasingly focused on his work, he would not prioritize quality time with Mary.

Time is such an important resource that the Lord gives to each of us. We all have the same amount of it.

And God wants us to make sure that our highest priority is strengthening our relationship with Him each day. It is so important to be in prayer constantly and to be thinking about Scripture constantly.

This doesn’t mean that we need to become monks and live in a monastery. But it does mean that we need to be intentional in developing our walk with Jesus. It doesn’t happen automatically. For a relationship to thrive, it takes both parties to prioritize it. We know that God always holds up His end, so it is up to us to be intentional.

I know that tending to our walk with God may look like it is non-productive time, but it is quite the opposite. When we tend to our walk with the Lord, it actually makes us more productive for His purposes.

It would look like tending time to their walk with God. Sometimes people can become so focused and so busy working for God that they gradually lose their closeness with God. There are many pastors that burn out because they are not tending to their own love relationship with Jesus Christ.

So friends, as important as right doctrine is, the most important thing for us is to stay in love with Jesus. Our love level for Him and for others must be the most important thing for us.

Jesus concludes his message to the Christians in Ephesus by saying, **“whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”**

This promise of Jesus is profound. It is to remind the Christians in Ephesus that as they persevere in the truth and rekindle their love for Jesus, a glorious future awaits them. And they are told that they will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

The tree of life is also likely a reminded that tree life is found in remembering the sacrifice of Jesus for us. His cross became a tree of life for all who come to Him by faith and receive the life that He offers us in Himself.

So friends, on this first Sunday of 2021, I would like for us at Chestnut Grove to make a resolution with me. Our resolution is simply this, **I commit to growing in my love for Jesus this year.**

With God’s help, may this be true for each and every one of us.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

 [Revelation 2:1-7 NIV - To the Church in Ephesus - “To the - Bible Gateway](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A1-7&version=NIV)

Grant R. Osborne – Revelation : Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament