

# Church with No Heart

## The Church of Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7 – December 6, 2020

Have you ever seen someone put little or no effort into their work? They do the bare minimum to keep from being fired. They're there bodily but absent in spirit. They can't wait for the clock to change so they can go home. When it's time to go home watch out, or you might get trampled at the door.

Certainly, the love they might have had for their job has worn off. Now at the water fountain, on their breaks, and whatever social opportunity they can find they talk about their new love: travel, hunting, golf, vacation home, grandkids, and more.

Imagine a congregation of believers in Christ becoming complacent in their worship. That which was once a vital commitment to Christ has grown cold . . . stagnant . . . indifferent.

Doctrinally they're still orthodox, evangelically they understand the message needs to be spread, and they know they must be socially responsible, but their orthodoxy and activities are no longer done out of devotion to the Lord, but out of habit.

Their spiritual fire for Christ has faded. Their commitment has grown lax and their zeal for the Lord has fizzled out.

Such was the church of Ephesus. They allowed their fire for Christ to grow cold. Here, Jesus confronts them in no uncertain terms. **“Regain what you lost, or I will remove you.”** And with this ultimatum He provided them with a solution. If you, lost your fire for Christ, it's not too late. There is good news, there is a solution.

**Terms found in our text:**

### THE GLOWING CANDLESTICK

In Revelation 1:20, John gives us the key to interpreting this passage.

**The stars represent** the angels, or the pastors who considered the messengers of the local churches.

**The candlesticks represent** the local assemblies of believers.

Therefore, Jesus has John write to the Angel or Pastors at Ephesus to tell them that He is examining their works. Ephesus used to be one of the glowing churches in Asia minor, and Jesus was standing in their midst.

## **Ephesus' Historic Background**

Ephesus was a glowing church **in the midst of a magnificent city**. It was the seat of the Roman government for all of Asia. A Roman proconsul sat there.

- Commercially, it was like New York City to the East Coast.

It was the seat of trade, art, learning and government, wealth and religion. The city was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. It featured the temple of Diana (sometimes called Artemis.) She was the fertility goddess. The temple was considered the major tourist attraction of the region.

Ephesus was ranked among the three top cities of the eastern Mediterranean. The three were Antioch located then in Syria; Alexandria, Egypt; and in Asia Minor there was Ephesus.

- It was **a glowing church with a magnificent history**.

The apostle Paul lived two years in the city and achieved some of his most brilliant successes in missions. He was noted for working miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, and people were even healed when they touched his aprons and handkerchiefs.

Ephesus was also famous for her exorcists and magicians of which the Apostle Paul had victory over them. Believers bought together their occult books before the church to burn them and renounce their evil practices. The price of their books equaled 50,000 pieces of silver.

Paul also debated the great doctrines of the faith in this city. Scripture says, he did this until "all Asia had tidings of the truth."

The blacksmith of Diana revolted against Paul's teachings because his trade was being ruined through Paul's teaching. Paul successfully argued against Diana's divinity and her worship and her shrines.

Paul's first letter to the believers at Corinth was written in this city. Later. Paul wrote to this church this letter. No wonder the people of Ephesus were once so zealous.

After Paul left, Timothy was appointed pastor. Timothy faithfully discharged his duties as an elder until he died, a victim of a violent mob. He was preaching against the luridness and frenzy of Diana worship and was killed at the festival of Diana.

The apostle John also made his home there until he was exiled to Patmos. Tradition has it that even Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived there with John and was buried in the city.

Another celebrity in the assembly was Apollos. He was converted to Christ in this city and it was here that he first exercised his powerful gifts of persuasion for Christ.

Next to Jerusalem, there are few other cities in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century with such a glorious history. **Ephesus was a glowing candlestick in a magnificent city, with a magnificent history.** Even as Christ walked in the midst of this local assembly, he commends them for their tremendous impact in the world.

## **THEIR MAGNIFICENT TESTIMONY**

**There are three areas of strength that Jesus acknowledged.**

**1. Their Powerful Works** – Rev. 2:2a (Works & Labor)

Living in a city of paganism with its runaway immorality is very difficult. The church worked hard to fight against it and had international success and fame. Their candlestick glowed brightly in this area.

**2. Their Perseverance of Faith** is noted – Rev. 2:2, 3

They were noted for standing up for the cause of Christ. Apparently, they did not back away. It took 100% of their effort to keep this up. They knew that the weak in faith or those lacking in commitment would quickly be eaten up by the world.

**3. Their Principled Stands** – Rev. 2:2, 6

For 40 years they were zealous. They quickly unmasked those that were false. They could not bear evil. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans today are a little-known sect. However, we have a few clues as to who they are.

**Clue #1:** Rev. 2:2b – Those who claimed to be false apostles but were rejected.

**Paul talked about them:** 2 Cor. 11:13-15 –

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

**Jesus warned against them:** Matthew 7:15, 24:5, 24

Matt. 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Matt. 24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Matt. 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

**The Apostle John warned about them.**

1John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

1John 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

**Clue #2: is in the name itself: Nicolaitans**

The term Nicolaitan comes from the compound Greek word, *Nikao*, meaning “Overcomer” and *Laos*, meaning “People.” It seems they were a group of self-ordained leaders who attempted to introduce a succession of hierarchy that would rule over the churches. They were known as those, “who conquered the people.”

This is a constant danger in the church at any stage. Men with strong personalities and with charismatic qualities who end up ruling over the people for personal gain and power.

We know an ungodly group of men did appear later in Church history who set up an ecclesiastical hierarchy that lorded over the churches. Jesus says he hates this, and Ephesus was guarding herself against this practice.

No wonder the Lord had good things to say about this church. I would love to think the Lord would say those things about us in this great city of Waterbury.

However, after Paul left the city, and the memory of Apollos faded, Mary, the mother of Jesus was laid to rest in Ephesus and after Timothy was martyred in the streets and the Apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos that the great light from this church began to flicker and dim.

### **EPHESUS: A FLICKERING CANDLESTICK**

It was a matter of the heart that caused this group to slip, not doctrine. Their heart grew cold. The church had a glowing past, but now prayer was taking second place in the church. People were failing in their private devotional life. Their devotion to the LORD was fading. No longer was Jesus first . . . even second. Sometimes they only thought of Him when they gathered on the first day of the week.

Remember when you first were saved? You told everyone. Everything was new. But now that is just a distant memory.

It's like walking up a mountain with the backpack, your knees get weak, your head gets light and you can't wait until you drop the back pack – finally it's off! You rejoice for a little bit, but the memory of the relief soon fades and gradually you begin to take on more weight.

Unconfessed sin builds. Lives are no longer in prayer. Hearts become more one with the world, than one with Christ. Worship becomes more a habit and feels like a hardship. Christian fellowship fades.

Drifting from the Lord begins in the heart; then it becomes a matter of lost zeal; and then a matter of lost commitment. So, the Lord says to the church of Ephesus and to all the churches like her, I will come and remove your candlestick.

**What does this mean?** *(I will come and remove your candlestick.)*

Well, I think I seen this happen. A certain church had a pastor who led the congregation into deep devotional life with the Lord for many years. During

his ministry, the church obtained a reputation for faithfulness and spiritual life. Its lampstand was prominent within the community, its witness for God was unquestioned. Then the pastor died.

The church pulpit remained vacant for a long time. During that time, the church turned its eyes from the Lord and toward its past reputation. Instead of looking for another man whose heart was anchored in the things of God, the church voted in into leadership positions carnal men.

It did not take long. Within a year the congregation's attitude and fire dimmed. They longer stood in the prominent position in their community. At that time, another church in the area was planted. They began to fill the spiritual void the first church failed to fill. In time the first church faded until they finally closed their door.

Such is the history of churches throughout the ages. History is filled with their wreckage. The first church of Ephesus was facing this same destructive path. This could be any church. We need to ask ourselves this question: "Am I committed to the Lord?" "Have I lost my first love for the Lord?"

## **HOW TO RECHARGE THE ASSEMBLY?**

### **1. Remember: Rev. 2:5**

Remember the time you began to grow cold toward Christ. It is now time to deal with the cause before it destroys you. Maybe it was a dispute you had with someone. Maybe it was a disappointment you experienced. Maybe it was the lure of the world that pulled you a way.

If this is so, then remember, (or recall to your mind) the time you were first saved. Remember your salvation. Share it again with others. Get back into the word of God. Revitalize your prayer life.

### **2. Repent – Rev. 2:5**

This means to turn back, change your mind. Change your practice. True repentance is a 180° change. This is a must. If you have slipped in prayer, confess it and change it.

### **3. Return – Rev. 2:5 – Do the deeds you first did**

Maybe you slipped in your devotion or attendance. Maybe it was something in your lifestyle that needs to be changed.

#### 4. **Regard** – Rev. 2:7

We are to listen to the voice of God. It may not be a bolt of lightning or a whirling wind. Often it is quite gentle and tugging. Because we have shut the Lord out it is sometimes a small voice pleading with us to return.

The Holy Spirit speaks to our conscience. We realize quietly that we are out of fellowship with the Lord. We know we should be doing things differently. We know we should be turning things off, and setting different priorities, and saying no more often to useless things.

#### 5. **Receive** – Rev. 2:7

If we do this, we will receive His blessings.

The church of Ephesus went on for another 350 years and became the seat of the eastern bishops. But its testimony slacked. The people gave up their individual rights to a ruling class of clergy. The city died away and today only ruins remain. It's testimony of greatness and faith never shown as brightly as it did in the early years of her inception.

Such could happen here. It is never the church building that dies. It's the people that gather in the church building that spiritually die. It begins with the loss of their first love for Christ. Then it overflows into their attitudes and into their spiritual walk.

It then ends with the church assembly withering away to nothing, then the windows are boarded up, the grass grows long, and the building is sold and made into a private home, office spaces or is torn down.

But remember it was the people's faith that faded first. Then came the loss of souls, i.e., people in the community who perished because the assembly selfishly indulged in their carnality and took their eyes off the Lord.

Maybe you are here today and you are examining your heart and you see that your first love has dwindled. Today is the day that we turn back to the Lord.