



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Revelation 2.1-7

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I. Introduction to this Series and Study

Phone. Text. E-mail. Voicemail. Facebook. Twitter. Skype. Instagram. YouTube. We've come along way from the Pony Express: Answer this. Respond to that. Post, tweet, like, comment. We have so many ways of communicating. And it can all be rather dizzying, can't it?

Sometimes, all this fast-paced, non-stop communication seems so distant from our spiritual lives. Or worse, all the posts and likes and comments can even distract us from our faith.

What if, right in the middle of logging on, you saw a blog (and not just any blog)? But a blog written by God!? This Lenten season, we are reading those very blogs: God's blogs! Found in [Revelation 2-3](#), written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, we are doing what we always do when we click onto an interesting blog: Think through the challenge it presents us and respond accordingly.

This first week of our Lenten series (which we're starting a week *before* Lent begins – oops!) we're reading a blog written to the church in Ephesus, who had forgotten their first love. Perhaps we could say that the Ephesian Christians were great at growing and serving, but they weren't connecting with God. As such, the Risen Christ instructs them to do three things: Remember, Repent, and Resume.

II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever fallen in love? Describe how it felt. How did you know you were in love? How did your feelings change your outlook on life? Did you act on your feelings? If so, how?

III. Study the Text

- a. To understand the context of the seven "blogs" we'll study through this Lenten season, start by reading Revelation 1, noting especially verse 20, where some symbolism is explained.

Though it seems like a passing phrase, it is no mistake that Jesus declares that each of these seven congregations is "in [his] right hand." Why is it important that we know this?

- b. Read Revelation 2.1-3.

While verse 2 seems to list three things the Lord "knows" about the Ephesian church, the Greek actually reads more like, "I know your deeds: your hard work and your perseverance." That is, the deeds the Ephesians are "known for" are their hard work and perseverance. Good things to be known for, no doubt! If this was all you knew about these Ephesian Christians, how do you think they would fit in 21st century American Christianity?

- c. There is a pun in the middle of verse 2, which is lost in our English translations. The same verb is used twice, once positively, once negatively, essentially stating that the "Ephesians cannot 'endure' wicked people, while they are 'enduring' for the sake of Christ." It's a play on words, but it also reveals how "enduring" often takes place, among those who may – at best – disregard or – at worse – malign Christian faith. Have you ever had to "endure while enduring"? How have others you are aware of "endured while enduring"?

- d. At the end of verse 2, we read that the Ephesian Christians have “tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.”

Ephesus was built in the 10th century BC, with a temple to the Greek goddess Artemis, the goddess of hunt, wild animals, wilderness, childbirth and fertility. The temple was constructed as early as the 8th century and became known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In addition to such pagan goddess worship (for an example of their devotion see Acts 19.23-41), it was held that any and all criminals throughout the known world could be enjoy immunity once they were within an arrow’s length from Artemis’ temple. Ephesus was also the center of the known economic and political world, which included emperor worship. It was quite possible that such things could begin to infiltrate the church.

Do you think they did? Why or why not?

What outside forces can the Christian church be influenced by today? How have you seen this occur?

- e. Read Revelation 2.4-7.

How could the Risen Christ encourage the Ephesians in their hard work and perseverance but declare that they’d “forsaken the love [they] had at first”? How do you understand that allegation?

- f. Artemis, the “Lady of Ephesus”, was known as the goddess of fertility. As such, she was held in high esteem in marriage relationships. While the Ephesian church seems to have rightly kept from “marrying Artemis”, they had neglected their relationship with Christ. They’d lost their love!

Throughout the Scriptures, Israel – and then the church – is pictured as the Bride of God. Read Jeremiah 2.1-3, Hosea 2.14-20, John 3.22-36, Revelation 19.6-8 and 21.1-5. How do these passages speak of the church as the bride of God? How do they inform our understanding of Revelation 2.1-7 – that is, how do they speak of returning to (y)our first love?

- g. An important image to the Artemis cult was the tree – specifically the cypress. How do you see John engage a “tree” in Revelation? And how do you understand his allusion to a particular tree? What exactly is he getting at?

Read Genesis 2.15-17 and Revelation 21.1-2. How do these inform John’s use of the image of a tree? Do you think Jesus’ crucifixion on a “tree” factors in, as well?

- h. The Apostle John, who penned God’s Blogs while experiencing the fullness of God’s Spirit, was a good preacher. He uses three words, all beginning with the same letter, to reinforce Jesus’ call to the Ephesian church: Remember, Repent, and Resume.

Where do you see these words in Revelation 2.1-7? How could they lead you through this season of Lent? How could they lead Good Shepherd?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for our Congregational Representatives Team as they prepare to meet with Presbytery Representatives next Sunday, March 9th,
- b. Lift up the Good Shepherd as we enter the Season of Lent, that we would remember, repent, and resume in our journey of faith with our first love,
- c. Ask that God would continue to guide us in our mission of Connecting with God, Growing in Faith, and Serving in Love, as lead us as we seek to reach young families in our community.