

The Seven Letters of Highly Effective Churches – A Jesus Church

15th Sunday after Pentecost

September 13, 2009

Welcome to Sunday number two of Rally month! We've seen the puppets, we've heard the kids sing, and after church we're continuing the worship with Sunday School and the Adult Discussion Time.

Today we're starting a new sermon series taken right from the opening chapters of Revelation. Chapters two and three are seven letters that Jesus dictated to be sent to seven different churches. We're going to be looking at those letters and seeing how they apply to us today in our local congregation and the Christian church as a whole. I have to tell you, I'm rather proud of the title of this series – "The Seven Letters of Highly Effective Churches."

Before we jump into the letters, though, let's ask the question, "Why do this?"

We do this because Jesus tells us to! He tells us what He wants in a church, in a body of believers! He lays it right out for us in black and white. If we don't do it, we're purposely ignoring what Jesus says He wants a church to look like! And that's really, really not a good idea. The last thing you ever want to say to Jesus is, "Yeah, I just decided I would ignore what You wanted and thought I'd figure things out on my own. Hope you don't mind!"

Before we get into the letters in this series through, today we're looking at the opening chapter of Revelation. I invite you to pull your Bibles out and open them with me to Revelation chapter 1. Revelation is the last book in the New Testament, and it was written by the last living disciple and the only disciple to die a natural death, John.

Who is Jesus? Verse 8 says it all: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." There was no one who existed before Him, no one who can match Him now, and no one who will best Him in the future. Look over at verses 17-18: "When I saw Him I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'"

Why did John fall down? You can make a note of this in you Bibles: he fell down because He was in the presence of the Most Holy God. He fell down as though dead because when we are in the presence of what is Holy, we realize how un-holy we are; how sinful we are.

You see that's the thing about us. We say we are by nature sinful and unclean because it's true! We can't come to a Holy God on our own. Good thing, too! If we could we'd be killed because of our imperfect nature entering into the domain of the perfection of God.

But here's the thing: though we can't approach God on our own, He comes to us. He came to us in Jesus when He took on flesh and bone. He comes to us for one reason and one reason only: He's wildly in love with us. The Creator loves His creations with a passionate love! No, let's make this more personal – your God loves you (and me!) with a fiercely passionate love. He knows we can't be where He is on our own, so He comes to us and brings us into His presence.

Let's go back to our verses. Notice what Jesus did: he touched John. Jesus reached out to John, the one who was face down like a dead man, and touched him. "Don't be afraid", He said. Literally – and you can make a note of this in your Bibles, Jesus said, "Stop being afraid." I've come to you, because I want you to know some things and share them with others.

Jesus gave this 'dead' man life, raised him back up to his feet, and set him to work.

He does the same for you and me too.

We are raised to new life out of those sins we've confessed and repented of. Confessed – those sins we've gotten real about, those sins we've gotten honest about and named so they don't have the same power over us they once did. Repented – metanoya, literally meaning a change of mind that results in a change of life or lifestyle. Those things are gone and will not be recalled to mind again by the Father.

And then we are set to work, too. We are released to be the people He intends for us to be, and as that relates to the church, the church is released to be the church He wants it to be.

It's His church to begin with, not ours. He gets to call the shots on how it works.

It's His call as the head of the church on what is and is not to be done. He purchased it with His own blood.

It's His church and His people that He holds in His nail scarred hand, and His church and His people He gives instructions to on how they should conduct themselves, live in the world and be a witness to Him. How they should be a Jesus-church.

What's a Jesus-church?

A Jesus-church is one that is based on the Bible, not on the best answers the world can give!

A Jesus-church is one empowered by the Holy Spirit!

A Jesus-church is one filled with people who pray!

A Jesus-church is one with a compassion for the lost who don't know Jesus, as well as a compassion for the ones who think they do, but don't! And then *do* something about it!

A Jesus-church is one that lets nothing get in the way – not tradition, not like's or dislike's, not opinions – of telling the Gospel message of the forgiveness of sins and the new life that awaits those who believe, both in this world and the world to come.

A Jesus-church loves being corrected when they are erring, and continues to listen for the loving voice of Jesus to guide!

A Jesus-church is one filled with people who understand from what they have been called out of, and what they are called to, and can't wait to get to it!

And that's the point of this series. Jesus tells us in the seven letters to the churches in the next two chapters of Revelation who we are, *whose* we are, and what He's looking for us to do. It's a wonderfully exciting thing, and something we are going to dive into one letter at a time.

For today, walk away with this: our God loves us, *in spite* of us. He loves us enough to come to us, and though His holiness knocks us down on our faces, He reminds us that He is our Father, and we do not need to be afraid. If He didn't love us He'd leave us alone, He wouldn't bother with us. It's *because* of His love for us He bothers us. It's *because* of His love for YOU He will not leave you alone, but comes right beside you, shows you His heart, invites you in to His presence, and releases You to be the church to a world literally dying to know the Truth.

And that's where we end it today... and that's where we'll pick it up next week. What is it that Jesus wants us to know about 'doing' church His way? For some, these things from Jesus in Revelation will be a revelation (pun SO intended). For others, these things may make you a little uncomfortable. But that's okay – it's Jesus' church; we need to know what He says.

Will you please pray with me?

Jesus, Lord of the Church, and Lord of us, thank You for the words You gave to John that he wrote down for us in Revelation. Thank You for caring enough about Your church's to give us direction, to give us praise, and to give us correction. If you didn't love us, you wouldn't do it!

Holy Spirit, I pray that You would be with each and every one of us here at LCC. Touch each of our hearts, and open our minds to understand, our ears to hear, and our eyes to see all that you would have us know. Bless this series, bless our time in the Words You have given, and bless our going out to the world You have placed us in – our work, our schools, our neighborhoods, our communities, to be the light to a world in darkness.

Teach us, change us and release us! We pray it in Your most Holy name, Jesus. Amen.