

# Ephesus

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 03 April 2016

Preacher: Tom Muir

[ 0 : 0 0 ] So tonight we're going to begin a new series and we're going to look for the next seven weeks in the book of Revelation of the letters to the seven churches. So, new series.

And I'm going to read just now our passage. So tonight, obviously, we're studying the first letter to the first church, which is the church, in Ephesus. But what I want to do is to lead into that reading. You've got the reading in your handouts, the Revelation 2, first seven verses. But I'm actually going to read from Revelation 1 into that reading.

So you can pick up the reading on your sheets. And the reason I want to do that is because I want to just say briefly a few things just to kind of set the picture about these letters, just to give a little bit of context and a little bit of background to what we're going to be thinking about.

Revelation is a book that in many ways a lot of people feel quite daunted by. Understandably, it's a book that we need to give a good amount of attention to. But it's a book ultimately about Jesus, the victor, Christ Jesus, the king, and the victory that has been won by him. And just to say a few things about the letters specifically.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] First is to say that I can't really read these letters, these individual letters to these individual churches without first taking note of the verses that I'm going to read in chapter one from verse nine, because they help us see that these letters are from Jesus to his church. And that's really important.

So this book, we believe, was written by John, but they're not just letters from John to the church because he felt like it. This is writing obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit, but these are letters from the risen and the glorified Christ, and we get this wonderful description of him that I'm going to read in just a minute.

So that's the first thing. Secondly, just to say that these letters deal with, maybe this is obvious, they deal with real life churches in time and space.

So we're talking about places that exist, existed, churches that existed, that had real issues, and the letters are written to address those issues.

Third thing to note is if you were to read through, if you were to take a bit of time tonight and go home and say, well, I'm just going to read through, it wouldn't take you very long, I'm going to read through these seven letters over chapters two and three, you may notice that there are patterns that occur.

[ 2 : 3 6 ] So the way they're written is roughly the same in each letter. You could say that the same kind of things occur, like each one starts with a description of Christ, a very vivid picture, but a picture of Christ nonetheless.

They most always then have a commendation, so they say to the church, this is good. This thing that we want to describe, this is good, before they go on to describe something that is a problem. And so then we have a rebuke often, sometimes a very sharp rebuke to the church. Remember we're dealing with real churches in real situations. So we have this commendation and a rebuke, and often then there's a solution.

So in the face of this rebuke that they're given, what should they do? They're given this solution, and the letters often finish with a promise.

So to those who overcome, for example, here is the promise that they will receive. And you'll see something of this pattern, if you like, when we come to the letter to Ephesus. But the final thing I want to point out, just before we read this passage, having taken notice of the fact that these are real letters to real churches in time and history, they yet apply to you and me today.

[ 3 : 5 6 ] Each one concludes with, or certainly the one that we're reading today, and many of them conclude with a note that the Spirit is speaking to the church. Now that was relevant to the church

who received the letters, and it's relevant to you and me also.

So by the Holy Spirit speaking to us through His Word, God still speaks to us today. So therefore we can learn from these letters, which is good for us.

So having said those, there's lots more you could say about the letters. There's lots of historical information, there's lots more about the way they're structured, all kinds of things. But I just wanted to point out a few of these things now.

But I really want you to really know, as I'm going to start reading from chapter 1 verse 9, the incredibly dramatic, powerful picture of Jesus.

Let me read from Revelation 1 verse 9. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[ 5 : 05 ] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash round his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like white wool like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.

And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

[ 6 : 22 ] I died and behold, I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and hades. Right therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

And now to pick up on the reading that you will have in your sheets as we move into chapter 2 and to the letter to the church in Ephesus. To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write, The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

I know you're enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you've not grown weary, but I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

[ 7 : 37 ] Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first, if not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Yet you have, yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. Amen. We ask that God will bless his word to us.

So Revelation chapter 2, the church in Ephesus. We often sing Psalm 23 and we know as we sing it, the Lord is my shepherd.

What does that mean? The Lord Jesus is my shepherd. How so? How is he our shepherd? I want you to think, as I mentioned when we were just taking a brief look at the outline of these letters, that startling, powerful vision of Jesus.

[ 8 : 49 ] I want you to think of these letters as coming from the great shepherd, the great pastor of the flock, Jesus, two shepherd and pastor, his flock. Remember even just last week we were looking at Pentecost, the impact of Pentecost, the fact that Jesus risen again and glorified, sent his spirit to the church to indwell every believer and so to lead them into all truth and to show them the way that they should go.

Now that means me and you, to show us the way that we should go. Jesus did not leave his church when he ascended to the right hand of the Father.

Jesus sent the spirit and Jesus still knows and cares for and pastors his people who he bought with his blood because of his great love.

So these letters are from the great shepherd of the sheep to the flock who so often need pastoring. In many ways we're foolish, aren't we, if we think we don't need pastored from that great shepherd, Jesus. Yes we believe, we believed those years ago but we need to go on believing and receiving help and guidance and the loving care of our shepherd Jesus every day.

[10:22] Now this, just to emphasise that, is the pastoral work of the great shepherd king. Now remember the context, these Christians are facing a whole load of trouble from if you like the king of the day, the kings of the day, the caesars, the Roman oppression is gathering momentum and believers are having a hard time.

And how do they deal with that life that they have to live in the face of that great oppression? All kinds of different troubles come their way and all kinds of troubles emerge in this church and in every church, if we're honest, down through the ages and into that context comes this letter written by John but from this great shepherd Jesus.

So I have three points tonight. I enjoyed Corey's confession this morning of his alliteration because it's my confession also. I had exactly the same experience this week.

I don't usually think like that maybe but three P's came to mind and I couldn't help it. So I have three P's, Corey had three M's. I want us to think of this letter in terms of Jesus's presence, Jesus's priorities for his people and finally Jesus's promises to this church that he is writing to.

So the first thing is simply to stick with this theme that I think we've already sort of started along which is that Jesus, the great shepherd, communicates vitally to his people to say, I am with you, listen to my voice.

[12:06] See the words that he uses at the start of this chapter. The angel of the church in Ephesus, right, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Now, you remember from the reading of the end of chapter one there, we've already had the explanation by Jesus himself of this imagery. Now you'll maybe be familiar with the fact that Revelation is full of imagery, sometimes very complicated imagery, but imagery that can be worked at and understood.

But the imagery that we're faced with immediately in this chapter, see verse 20 of chapter one. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, well the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

Some people would say literally angels, some would say the leaders of the churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. So these visions, these pictures that are being used are simply to describe physical realities, people.

The lampstands represent seven churches which are being written to of Ephesus being the first one. So what there we have at the start of chapter two then, look at the way Jesus describes himself and what he does.

[13:24] The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, upholding them, who walks among the seven golden lampstands, who walks among the churches.

See, Jesus didn't ascend to heaven and forget about the church. And Jesus didn't ascend to heaven and occasionally send out envoys to sort of see what's going on.

How are they doing? Send news from Scotland. How is my church doing? Because I really don't know. This is the shepherd who walks among his churches.

Now we know that he does that by his spirit now. But the connection between Jesus and his church is vital. Look at verse two. Jesus goes on, I mentioned that the body if you like of the letters expresses commendation.

So praise if you like for an aspect of their church life. And also rebuke, he goes on to detail things about them that are good and bad. But obviously that is because he knows them and he says that at the start of verse two.

[14:31] I know your works. Now again, he doesn't know about their works because he occasionally receives updates. He knows their works because he's with them.

Now, how does that sound to a church facing oppression? That sounds beautiful. That sounds encouraging, uplifting.

We're not alone. We're not doing this all by ourselves. We've not been told how to get on with our lives and then just left to it. Jesus is with his church. So Jesus's presence is really just the first thing I just want to highlight to you there.

Because that applies to this church and it applies to us now. Jesus's power isn't diminished. Jesus's interest in you isn't diminished by time because this is 2000 years later.

Jesus's interest in his church is as vital now as it was then. Because from the beginning of his work in drawing a people to himself, until the day that Jesus comes again, he is building his church.

[ 15 : 39 ] He is drawing a people to himself and every one of those people down through every age is known by this great shepherd king and loved equally.

And he holds all in the palm of his hand. I walk among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works. I know you.

Though you may not feel it right now. Let me tell you, I know you. So Jesus is intimately interested in this church. Jesus is intimately interested in our church. So he's intimately interested in you.

Our business, if you like, as a church is his concern. And don't think about that just like in terms of, oh, well, we have an AGM. He's interested in the accounts.

And I'm not trying to trivialize that at all. Every aspect of his church, of your spiritual well-being, of how you're going on in the faith is his concern.

[ 16 : 40 ] So Jesus's presence with his people is the first thing to highlight. But then what that does is it enables the church to know that he knows how they're getting on for good and for bad.

When we move into the body of the letter, if you like, into the middle chunk of the letter, there we get, as I said, these points of commendation and concern or critique, things that are going badly with them, that they really need to deal with.

And that's the second point, because this is Jesus's priorities for his people. So he doesn't just come and say hello. He comes very particularly to say this that you are doing, this is in accordance with my will.

But this that you are doing is not. And you need to stop this. You need to stop this. First thing, the commendation that he brings to them.

We see this in verse 2. We also see it in verse 6. He wants to commend them, because he says, I know you, I know that you hold to the truth.

[ 17 : 50 ] So see that in verse 2, I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. But then he goes on to describe this, how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

Okay, so they've got no time for people who are evil. But then look again at verse 6. Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

So Jesus recognizes in them that their distaste for that which is untruthful, ungodly and evil, is in accordance with the way he feels about evil also.

And he commends them. He says, this about you is good. He wants to encourage them with this. The church is to discern untruth.

We need to be very careful about that. Are we able to be aware of false teaching? Here's the thing. We sometimes think very immediately in that case of pressure that would come to us from outside the church.

[ 18 : 55 ] World views that are in discord with what we believe. That's maybe the most obvious way that we think about that. That was true for this church. They faced a lot of cultural, social pressures on their beliefs.

Ephesus after all held one of the seven wonders of the world, the great temple of Diana or Artemis, a pagan temple, huge discord with the Christian message.

So there was pressure on them, all right? And we presumably feel that pressure also, don't we?

The pressure not to believe, the pressure to just conform. And probably the pressure we feel is to water down what we believe.

Just to stop being so edgy and at odds with what everybody just getting along with each other is the same thing, more or less. But actually what's interesting about what is brought to their attention here is that the danger they've faced, obviously, as is described particularly in verse 2, is pressure from within.

So you have tested those who call themselves apostles, but who are not. So in other words, people who are coming and saying, we're going to be leaders and teachers in this church, but that their

teaching is an enemy with the truth of the gospel, that Jesus wants his people to uphold and to cling to.

[ 20 : 21 ] There are many reminders in God's word of the importance of this, aren't there? Of not being led away, of not being distracted. Paul writes of this also, Colossians chapter 2, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition and not according to Christ.

So that's really important. What that boils down to at a personal level for you and me, I suppose, is do you know what you believe and why?

Because if you know what you believe and why, and of course that is a developing thing, isn't it?

We go on knowing and understanding who God is and what it is that we believe.

But at a basic level, do you know and understand the gospel, what it is that you believe, so that you can give an account of what you believe? So that you're able to articulate what you believe when somebody comes expressing something that is false.

Now we maybe think, oh well there are no threats from inside the free church, our teaching is sound and solid. Just hold on to that fact that we are, to be those who know the truth of Jesus, and hold on to that.

[ 21 : 32 ] So that when somebody challenges your belief at work, or when somebody comes into church and expresses something contrary to the gospel, we are able to explain.

We're not haranguing them, we don't throw them back out the door, we don't despise them, but we hold to the truth. Jesus wants his church to know and to hold to him as the truth.

So that point is made very strongly. Jesus commends them for this, I know this, I know that you're persevering in the truth and in the gospel. That sits uneasily I think with our culture, talking again just for a minute about outside pressures on us.

Look at the language that he uses again, we go down to that verse 6 that we read, regarding the Nicolaitans. Now the Nicolaitans, there's dispute about exactly who they are, a sect basically that could have been a Gnostic sect that brought in teaching that wasn't in accord with the gospel let's say.

It was a threatening teaching to the gospel, and they are cast out if you like by this church. Their teaching is exposed as being false, but look at the language that's used.

[ 22 : 45 ] Look at how strongly it's spoken of. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Tolerance is a huge thing today, isn't it? I think what that means, what people want tolerance to be, is to be able to say everybody's right, kind of, everybody's kind of just the same, so that the only thing that's really spoken of as being wrong is when you say to somebody, no you're wrong.

And so ultimate truth is the thing maybe most under threat. But here, what we read of and hear of is a kind of righteous hatred of false teaching.

Is it the case that when you hear somebody blaspheming Jesus, when you hear somebody teaching against Jesus, when you hear somebody maybe even from within a church leading people astray by teaching a gospel that is no gospel, it bothers you or do we become kind of blasé about that?

That's a challenge, isn't it? Challenge to me. Maybe a challenge to you. Do we love the truth because the truth is Christ so much that when we hear that which is false, we recognize it as evil because it leads people astray from the true Christ, the true Savior, the one who is the way to life.

[ 24 : 17 ] So false teaching isn't just something we disagree with, it pains our soul to hear it.

Jesus says, you hate the teaching of the Nicolaitans. So they're commended for holding to the truth and rejecting falsehood. They're also commended briefly because they endure.

They're keeping going. Jesus is able to say to his church, you're still here. They're preaching on Ephesians at the moment in the mornings. Well, here we are reading this letter to the church in Ephesus. A few years later, they're still there.

They're still going. They're still holding services. They're still preaching the gospel. They're still identifying false teaching. They're still going. So they're enduring.

They're able to mark out heresy. They are seeking to be faithful. But here's the problem and this will lead us on to our next point. The problem is if all they're doing is enduring.

[ 25 : 20 ] You know, I was remembering an incident in my Sunday school career when I was young. When I was young, we were taught the catechism.

And I think I must have been being tested on the catechism, which I probably found no fun, but maybe it did me some good. And I was asked the first catechism. Now, if you know the first catechism, the answer is, what is man's chief end to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever? So my 10-year-old self managed to say, to glorify God and endure Him forever. So I was corrected, which is a good thing. But isn't that interesting? I think sometimes that can actually be what it feels like to be the church. We're just enduring. To be the church is to endure, to just get by, to put up with it. To know God is to endure Him. We don't like a lot of what happens in our lives. We don't like a lot of His providences. We don't understand Him. We endure Him. [ 26 : 26 ] Is that the case for you tonight? Because that leads us on, as I was saying, to the complaint that Jesus wants to bring to His church.

The commendation is that they're persevering, that they're identifying truth, that they're enduring, but it seems like enduring is all they're doing. And that, in fact, the joy and the love that should have been so evident amongst them wasn't there.

Verse 4, But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Now, He doesn't go on and develop that.

He doesn't explain it. It doesn't take a lot of time to say it. He says it in one very short, devastating verse. You have abandoned the love that you had. Look at the word He uses, abandoned.

That's strong language spoken of, by the great shepherd, pastor, king, to His people. You've abandoned the first love you had.

[ 27 : 33 ] It may well be the case that these people were excellent heresy hunters. They could spot false teaching, 100 yards off, but they were being poor brothers and sisters to one another.

They had very little spark of love towards their great Saviour, Jesus. They were cold. And the danger for them was a cold orthodoxy.

They tick the right boxes in their understanding and their teaching, and they're warming out of all the wrong teaching, but they were cold. People speak of a dead orthodoxy sometimes. I don't want to say this church had a dead orthodoxy.

They're not spoken of as being dead here. They're still the church of God. And Jesus comes to His church and speaks to them, to pastor them, but to warm them because they've gone cold, because their love isn't there, because that hugely vital aspect of who they are as individuals and as a body, it's not there.

It's missing. And so this is the big challenge that they are to face. And He calls them back to that love. Look what He says at the start of verse 5.

[ 28 : 51 ] Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. See, that's the way He deals with it. He challenges them. Your love has gone cold. Remember. Now, isn't that a very gentle but a very good way of dealing with this problem?

What is it that we need when we know a cold heart towards God? We need to remember. We need to be reminded again of what it is that our Saviour has done for us.

We need to be called back individually or as a people to say, you know, you're not just doing this because it's a kind of handy Sunday night routine. You're not just doing this because you like being at odds and having a bit of argument with everybody at your workplace, and you like to stand out from the crowd.

That's not much fun. Remember the love that Christ had for you. Remember that. And repent.

That's the other call that Jesus has to his people here. Remember the love that you had. Repent.

That is a grievous thing that you have grown cold. Again, there's a bit of disagreement about exactly the object of this love.

[ 30 : 01 ] Is this speaking about love between each other? Or is this speaking primarily about love between them and God? I think in many cases both are true. Both could well be true.

Because isn't it the case that one comes from the other? How is it that we're able to love one another? Well, because to be honest, that's often quite difficult, isn't it? To genuinely love one another, not just a fuzzy feeling, but going out of your way to serve, going out of your way to love your neighbour, even when your neighbour is difficult or gives you problems.

How do we do that? Well, it's because we were first loved. Because we first of all understood the great grace of God in dealing with us before we were lovely. We didn't deserve his love and yet he loved us and lavished that love on us at the cross.

And so we love one another. So remember that. That's the key to being able to have our hearts warmed again. You know, sometimes we think, I need to love God more. I've got to work at it. Well, there's a way in which that's true. But remember, because you'll never be able to work up a good enough love. If you do that, if you wind yourself up into a love for God, then you'll maybe find that come next week you'll just feel the same again.

[ 31 : 22 ] Remember, because your salvation is based on the love that he had for you. So Jesus says, remember, Jesus says, repent.

And he says repent because their situation is serious, but it's not irretrievable. So they're not lost. They're just struggling. They're just cold.

They're ticking the right boxes, but their hearts are far from God. So Jesus presences with his people. He knows his people.

He knows the good. He knows maybe the well-intentionedness of his church. But he knows and is able to speak right into the core of the heart problem that they have collectively, that the love that they had has grown cold.

And the third thing I want to just point out as we move towards the end of this letter is the promises that Jesus gives. There are two promises that he gives to his church.

[ 32 : 26 ] The first challenge follows on from what I was just talking about. The problem that the people had in their cold-heartedness, the lack of love that they had. And I think it's a really startling promise that he makes to this church.

Because look at what he says in verse 5, the second half of verse 5. Repent. Do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

In other words, you will be no more. I will remove your lampstand. I will remove you as a church.

There will be serious consequences for you if you don't heed my words.

You might think, well that's harsh language. He wants them to remember again the love that they had for him. And in order to do that, he wants them to remember the love he has for them.

But then he says, if they don't do it, he'll remove their lampstand. And he speaks such cutting language to them. How can he do that? But it's really important to remember the seriousness of love as a marker of the Christian church.

[ 33 : 41 ] I'm going to turn just for a minute to John's first epistle. So the letter of John. Because if you read particularly 1 John, love is all over the place.

What it means for God to love his people. And how his people then in turn love one another.

There's lots of references. It would be good for you to go home tonight and read that.

So let me just turn to 1 John 3. See what John says in this letter about love. 1 John 3 verse 14. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

We know that we've passed. If you like it's a marker of it's not how we get saved. It's not how we come into the kingdom. But if you like it's a marker, it's an evidence. We've passed from darkness to light, from death to life.

And so we love one another. Because all of our relationship, all of who we are together as a collective church is based on the fact that Jesus somehow out of his great grace loved us.

[ 34 : 52 ] So we love one another. And in verse 23 also. John says, and this is his commandment. That we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us.

Isn't that very clear and isn't that very challenging? We believe in Jesus Christ. That's how we get saved. And then we love one another.

You know Jesus was asked about priorities. And he says, love the Lord your God with all your heart. And love your neighbour as yourself. Out of the outworking of God's grace in our hearts we love one another.

And so, you know, if there's no love in our community, then we ask questions. We have to. We're challenged to ask questions.

And we're challenged to think then, well what does it mean to love one another? Because it's more than just the fuzzy feeling, isn't it? It's not just, you know this, it's not just feeling towards somebody because that comes and goes and it depends on the person and all kinds of things like that.

[ 36 : 05 ] But to love one another, remember the great expression of the Good Samaritan who saw somebody in such great need and he went out of his way to care for that person. He expressed he applied love.

We think carefully about what it means. But the point being the central place that love for one another has as a marker of those of us who are Christians who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. So, there's great challenges to this church. Remember, refocus on the love that you had because of the love that you have received or the consequence that is given there.

Now, that's difficult, isn't it? But we have to remember, you and I, that the discipleship that we have, the ongoing walk as a Christian, being a believer in Jesus Christ is based on gratitude.

We have been so loved that we love. It's based on submission and humility. Remember that great passage in Philippians 2 where it speaks of having the same love as Jesus Christ who came from heaven in all glory and all majesty and humbled himself to be the great one who served.

[ 37 : 26 ] You know, in many different human institutions, there's so often discord and a lack of love because what prevails so often in the human heart is self-interest. We think we know the right things to do.

We think we know what should be happening. We have personality clashes with all kinds of different people. And so there's discord and strife and a lack of love. But we are asked to submit to one another.

We have reverence for Christ. And we are asked to have the same mind as Christ. And we are asked to consider others better than ourselves.

We have to... that takes some thinking through, doesn't it? How do I do that? How do I consider my neighbour who I sit next to in the pew as better than myself? Even if I think I'm cleverer than them. Even if I think I do a better job than them. Even if I think whatever. So love for brother and sister as a marker of the church.

[ 38 : 25 ] Very important. We love because God first loved us. Remember. So that's the first promise. But then we get a second promise.

And it's a promise of... We see there in verse 7... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Now Jesus had to speak, and he will, we'll see this as we go through the letters, sometimes in uncompromising terms.

Jesus had to speak with clarity and precision about a problem in their fellowship. But we finish the letter with this hugely pastoral, loving promise to people who may be very beleaguered.

Again, remember the pressure that they have. Remember the environment in which they live in witness. And he says to them, remember again, remember the promise that you have always had that I've always given you.

[ 39 : 39 ] But if you prevail, if you persevere, if you endure with love, then the great words here, I will grant to you to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

These are the words of the great shepherd. These are the words of the one who knows his people, who knows that they go wayward, who knows that they need to hear his voice directing them and protecting them from going waywardly, and shepherding them back to see his loving promises to them.

And to remember that for them is this great future with him. This time when again they will know the presence of God in the renewed heavens and the renewed earth.

I will grant to eat of the tree of life. And we read of that later in Revelation. I'm going to finish by reading these few verses. That's a promise that still rings true for you and me as well tonight.

So sometimes we need to be challenged, don't we? Our hearts grow cold and we become selfish. And we need to be called out of that and called again to see the grace and the love of Jesus.

[ 40 : 54 ] But we also need sometimes the care and the love of the shepherd reminding us, I have great hope for you, so hold on.

I have a great future for you, so hold on. And what that looks like, we read of Revelation 22.

We get a great reversal if you like of the curse. What did Adam and Eve do? What did the first Adam do in the garden? He ate of the tree that brought the curse.

What does Jesus say to his church here? I will grant that you will eat of another tree, of that tree that was forbidden, that was banished, if you were banished from back in Genesis, the tree of life. But that promise of life, everlasting life, is yours again. And I will grant that you will eat of that. And what that looks like in Revelation 22, just hear these words as the outworking of the promise of Jesus to his people.

[ 41 : 59 ] The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city, also on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month, the leaves of the tree, worth for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Such is the promise of Jesus to his church, and such are the words that we can take to heart tonight, and believe on as those who are followers of Jesus. And pray.

Lord, we ask that you would allow us to, that you would help us to allow you to shepherd us, help us not to put up any blocks, help us not to close our ears, help us to be honest, and ask you in prayer to honestly, if you like, divide our hearts to see the problems that we have, to identify them so that we can repent, and so that we can draw near to you.

[ 43 : 32 ] And help us, we pray, to be reminded of your great promise to us. This great picture of the place where you will dwell with your people, and we will know peace, and we will know joy.

Until that time, Lord Jesus, when you come again, help us to endure, but help us to endure with joy and gladness, rejoicing as your spirit is at work amongst us, and help us to love one another.

Help us to think carefully what that looks like, and help us to remember that we love because you first loved us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.