

Text: Rev. 2:1-7

Title: "The Son of Man's Local Church of Ephesus"

Time: 3/12/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – Ivan Krilov was a Russian author known for his fables. One he wrote is called "An Inquisitive Man," and it goes like this:

"An inquisitive man was one day met by a friend who cordially hailed him: 'Good morning, my good fellow! And where do you come from?'

'From the Museum of Natural History, where I have just spent three hours. I saw everything there was to see and examined it carefully. It was all so astonishing that honestly I am not clever enough to describe the half of it. Nature is certainly wonderful in her rich variety! There are more birds and beasts than I ever dreamed of – not to mention the butterflies, dragonflies and beetles – some green as emeralds and others as red as coral! And there were tiny little gnats too – why, really, some of them are smaller than the head of a pin!'

'And of course you saw the elephant? What did you think of him? I'll wager you felt as though you were looking at a mountain!'

'Elephant? Are you quite sure that they have an elephant?'

'Quite sure.'

'Well, old man, don't tell anybody – but the fact is that I didn't notice the elephant!'"

As members of a local church, we can be a lot like Krilov's "Inquisitive Man." We are focused on and appreciate a lot of important detail and activity in our ministry together, but we miss what is truly the biggest issue of all. These letters of Revelation remind us that what is most important in

our ministry as a local church is the leadership of the Son of Man, the author of the letters (Rev. 1:13).

We may call New Boston Baptist Church our local church, and I hope we do, but we must never forget that first and foremost, New Boston Baptist Church is the Son of Man's church. Each of the churches mentioned in these letters was the Son of Man's church.

We are going to study "The Son of Man's Local Church of Ephesus," this morning, and as we do so my prayer is that we will learn much about the Son of Man's local church of New Boston Baptist. We will note four things from this first letter: the Son of Man's glory in the church, His encouragement of the church, His correction of the church, and His reward for the church.

I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (v. 1).

Ill: I am told that it is from the Krilov fable I read earlier that we get our idiom, "an elephant in the room." When we say that there is an elephant in the room, we mean that there is some important issue that is obviously a concern but that is being conveniently ignored by everyone present for greater comfort.

Appl: It is the purpose of the local church to magnify the glory of the Son of Man. When we fail to recognize the importance of this in our worship assembly, there is a massive elephant in the room.

On the About page of our church's website, we tell the world what our mission as a church is. It says, "As an independent, fundamental, family in Christ, the mission of New Boston Baptist Church is to proclaim the saving gospel of

the cross and to encourage believers to follow and obey the commandments of Jesus Christ. We determine to pass the faith once delivered to the saints on to the generation that follows us as a faithful witness that is true to the inspired Word of God *for the glory of our Savior.*" That last phrase, *for the glory of our Savior*, ought to define everything we do in the church. It certainly defines everything that is said by Christ in these letters.

In this first letter to Ephesus, Christ reminds the church that it is He who holds the stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the lampstands of the churches. Remember that the stars are the angels of the churches (1:20), and I said that these angel/stars are the local churches as viewed from heaven. Viewed from earth they look like lampstands, but viewed from heaven they are stars and angels that can powerfully bring the light of truth to a dark world of lies and deception. As a local church, Christ's angel and star, we are in His hands, and He walks in our midst. We want to be the local church He wants us to be, not the one man wants us to be. It is all for His glory because it is all accomplished through the sacrifice of His blood and the power of His Spirit.

II. The Son of Man's encouragement of the church (vv. 2-3, 6).

III: We live in a day in which local churches need encouragement. I saw a report on a George Barna study called "The State of Pastors" in which it was discovered that the average age of a pastor today is 54. Twenty-five years ago, that median age was 44. Over half of the pastors surveyed are over 55 years of age, and only 1 in 7 are under the age of 40. It also seems as though we find ourselves praying for many churches in need of pastors these days.

Appl: That is just one example of evidence that suggests that the local church needs the encouragement of the Son of Man today. Paul's letter to this church taught them that pastors are His gifts to local churches (Eph. 4:11-13).

In this letter, the local church of Ephesus receives encouragement from the Son of Man. He knows their works and their patience. He knows their willingness to bear the name of Christ. He commends them for their willingness to test the claims of false apostles and expose those claims as false. And He thanks them for their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, because He hates those deeds too. In all of these stand taken for the Lord, this local church needed encouragement.

Ill: The church father Irenaeus tells us that the Nicolaitans were followers of one of the original deacons of the Jerusalem church – Nicolas of Antioch (Acts 6:5). We are told that Nicolas began to teach that God is only concerned about our spirit, not our body. At its root his reason for teaching that was a desire to be conformed to this world. The teaching of Nicolaitans called for a compromise between the Greek culture and the church on the grounds that God is only concerned with our spirit, and this compromise specifically became the teaching that it was ok to eat meat that was known to be sacrificed to idols (see Rev. 2:14-15).

One author put that issue this way: "The existing rule excluded members of the Church not only from the public festivals which were the pride of the Ionian cities, but from the private clubs which connected their common meals with sacrificial rites, and met in buildings dedicated to a pagan deity. Those who desired to participate in gatherings of the latter kind might have had much to urge in their defense; it was only by such wise concessions that Christianity could hope to leaven the life of these Greek cities; to stand aloof

from all social reunions was to incur suspicion and dislike, and such conduct would end in a general uprising against the Church, perhaps in its suppression throughout Asia" [Swete, lxxvi].

Another author said this: "They were a people who used Christian liberty as an occasion for the flesh; against such Paul warned (Gal 5:13). The enticement to such a course of action was the pagan society in which Christians lived where eating meat offered to idols was common. Sex relations outside marriage were completely acceptable in such a society. The Nicolaitans attempted to establish a compromise with the pagan society of the Graeco-Roman world that surrounded them. The people most susceptible to such teachers were, no doubt, the upper classes who stood to lose the most by a separation from the culture to which they had belonged before conversion" [Drumwright, Jr., *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 4:436].

Appl: Jesus hated this kind of compromise with the world in the first century, and He still does today. The Ephesian church hated it. They were separatists. They maintained godly standards of personal holiness, not only for the inside of their lives, but also for the outside. Jesus encouraged them in that. He knew their works. Can He encourage us in our stand for Him against the sin, decay, and paganism of our culture, or have we compromised like the Nicolaitans, tolerating things in our lives that Jesus hates?

III. The Son of Man's correction of the church (vv. 4-5).

Ill: Can you remember the day you were saved? I cannot tell you the date, but I remember stopping under a tree on the way home from an evangelistic meeting, so burdened with my sin and my fear of God's judgment that I could not take it anymore. After trusting Christ that evening, my

heart was as light as a feather and overwhelmed with incredible joy and thankful love for Christ as I finished my walk home. It was kind of like the joy I felt after my first date with Maureen, when I got the sense that she kind of liked me and she would go out with me again.

Appl: Jesus had this against the local church of Ephesus – they had left their first love. In their faithful stand for truth, they had lost the thankful joy of being overwhelmed with the love of Christ. Our faith is not an emotion of the appetites or passions, but it does include the emotions of the affections. Our spirits should be stirred to love Christ by the truth of Christ (John 4:24). We lose that when we love other things more than Christ.

How could they get that first love back?

(1) Remember. Do you remember what the joy of your salvation was like when you were first saved? Do you remember what it is like to truly perceive how much He loves you?

(2) Repent. Do you see that it has been too long since you have enjoyed that joyous affection?

(3) Do the first works. First love produces first works. One first work is baptism, that ordinance by which we confess Christ before men. So doing the first works means at least this – letting others know about the joy of our salvation and the amazing love of our wonderful Savior. Worship in prayer and Bible reading are here too.

What happens if we do not get our first love back? Jesus says, “I will remove your lampstand from its place.”

Horatius Bonar said this about the importance of our first love: “It is living fellowship with a living Saviour which, transforming us into His image, fits us for being able and

successful ministers of the gospel. Without this nothing else will avail. Neither orthodoxy, nor learning, nor eloquence, nor power of argument, nor zeal, nor fervor, will accomplish aught without this."

Without the first works of our first love – the love for Christ that overflows into a desire to share our Savior with a lost and dying world, we ourselves will die. Jesus will shut our church down. He will remove our lampstand. Our church has come close to experiencing that at times in its history for loss of this first love, and it can happen to us again.

IV. The Son of Man's reward for the church (v. 7).

Appl: The reward to the local church that overcomes with saving faith is to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God. Man lost that privilege in Genesis 3, where the angel's sword expelled Adam from Eden and none since have been allowed to pass and eat of the tree of Paradise.

Robert Murray McCheyne said this of that sword: "And I beseech you to remark, that this flaming sword turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. If it had not turned every way – if it had left some footpath unglared across – then Adam might have stolen in by that footpath, and made his own way to the tree of life. But no: whatever avenue he tried . . . still this flaming meteor met him." But Jesus "advanced in our stead to meet that fiery meteor, He fell beneath its piercing blade. . . And now, since the glittering blade is bathed in the side of the Redeemer," we may come freely to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God [Bonar, *Memoirs of McCheyne*, 162-163].

Conclusion: Remember that it is saving faith in this crucified and risen Savior that overcomes the world. "Who is he

that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5). Will you overcome and come through the merits of the work of Christ for you to eat freely from the tree of life in the Paradise of God?

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching