

THE SALTSHAKER

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This Little Light of Mine

By Rev. Sean McCann

Along the beautiful and expansive North Carolina coastline there are seven strategically-placed lighthouses. Navigating the Outer Banks and the Intracoastal Waterway is a treacherous ordeal, and these lighthouses were built to warn passing ships of imminent danger. Today many of these historic lighthouses have been deactivated and are nothing more than historical monuments, or as our state travel website tells it: "Lights That Once Warned Travelers Now Welcome Them." Like these old lighthouses, hundreds of deactivated churches now dot the landscape of our nation. These houses of worship once hosted vibrant communities of believers who fulfilled their calling as salt and light in a dark world. While many church plants today scramble to find places to worship, these old buildings have been turned into museums or coffee shops, or they've just been boarded up to rot away. Of course while it is discouraging to see beautiful, historic buildings no longer serving their intended purpose, we all know a church is more than just a building. As sad as it is to see old buildings sit unused, it's not like the church itself has turned out the light and been boarded up, it's just the building, right?

As we read earlier this month, Jesus warned the church at Ephesus to repent of their lost love, or he would remove their lampstand (Revelation 2:5). Jesus didn't mean he'd turn off the lights in the building: he was warning that he would take his light – the light of the gospel – out of the church. Is there any more haunting threat that could be leveled against a local body of Christians than this? Worse than a building without people is a people without Christ. It seems impossible, yet we've all seen churches like these – full of people, yet empty of the gospel. "How many churches are but shells of their former selves? They have all the trappings, but there is no light in them."¹

As we consider the struggles of the churches in Revelation, it does raise the question of what exactly is a living church. How can we tell if the light of Christ is still in a

church? How do we know if a church still functions to warn and guide passing generations, or if they have become like those historic lighthouse on the NC coast that serve no purpose today except to attract tourists?

This is not a new question, but one that theologians, pastors, and laymen have wrestled with since the early church. The question of what constitutes a true church was especially pressing during the Protestant Reformation. If the Catholic Church is defined by its relationship with Rome and the pope, and sustained by observing the sacraments (all seven of them), then what would define a church that rejected all of those things?

It was John Calvin who gave the simplest definition of a true church by teaching that there are essentially two marks (or defining characteristics) that must be present to constitute a true biblical church: biblical preaching, and the right administration of the sacraments (just two in the Protestant churches: baptism and the Lord's Supper.) Mark Dever sums up the importance of these two marks: "The first mark is the fountain of God's truth that gives life to his people, and the second is the lovely vessel to contain and display this glorious work. The church is generated by the right preaching of the word. The church is distinguished and contained by the right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper."² Calvin himself states the matter more bluntly: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."³

So how do we reconcile these things? On the one hand Jesus rebukes the doctrinally strong Ephesian church for lacking love, while on the other hand Calvin – from his study of scripture – defines a church by the presence of biblical preaching and the sacraments. As I said a few weeks ago, good doctrine is the firewood we must use to fuel our burning love for the Lord and for others. Those

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Upcoming Events

November and December			Weekly Events		
November 6	Noon	Elder Groups	Sunday Morning: Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
November 13	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Sunday School	9:45 am	
November 13	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Morning Worship	11:00 am	
November 20	Noon	Fellowship Meal	Wednesday Evenings: Supper	6:00 pm	
November 23	6:30 pm	Thanksgiving Service	Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm	
November 27	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper			
November 27	6:00 pm	Evening Worship			
December 11	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	For Men: Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
December 11	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out) at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge	8:00 am	Every Thursday
December 18	Noon	Fellowship Meal			
December 24	5:30 pm	Christmas Eve Service	Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
December 25	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	For Women: Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
			Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
			Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

December Schedule: Elder groups will *not* meet; no Wednesday night dinners or prayer meeting on December 21 or 28; no Sunday school or evening worship on December 25.

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with zeal for true doctrine bypass the damp and rotten wood that burns poorly for the dry hardwoods to stoke the fire. The problem with the Ephesian church was not that they failed to preach, but that their preaching was all head and no heart (they found the right wood, but they just stacked it up and failed to use it to fuel the flames of their affection for Christ). Theology done right is the best fuel for worship – preaching that is true to scripture not only informs and disciplines the church, it compels her towards an ever-increasing passion and love for her Lord.

As it regards the church in Ephesus, John leaves us in suspense as to what comes next, so I'll let Dr. Douglas Kelly tell that story: "[Revelation] does not tell us what happened to the church at Ephesus in later history. But we know from early Christian history that there was a wonderful bishop, Ignatius of Antioch, who about fifty years after this was written was on his way to be martyred and during which journey he wrote letters to several churches... Among these ancient letters of Ignatius is one to the Church at Ephesus. From what this good bishop says, something wonderful had happened at Ephesus. They had regained their first love. They were back in the center of God's blessings. Is that not something? They had accepted the rebuke; they were realistic about how far down they had slipped, how cold they had grown. They remembered the Lord; they remembered Calvary and the empty tomb; they remembered the

Holy Spirit and the fire came back down in force into their lives, bringing them back to the place of blessing. Apparently, the Church at Ephesus lasted until the conquest of the Turks in the late Middle Ages. Their remembrance of the Lord kept them alive for hundreds of years."⁴

If you were to travel to the NC lighthouses today, you would undoubtedly visit the Cape Hatteras lighthouse. Built in 1870, it is the nations tallest and most recognizable lighthouse. Yet despite its beauty, the best sight of all comes after the sun goes down and you can see her light that still shines for twenty miles over the dark Atlantic. May our theology and our preaching never be an end in themselves, but by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit might they fuel the fire in our hearts that would burn within us and shine into the darkest corners of our city.

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, page 61.

² Mark Dever, *The Church*, page 21.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume 2, page 1023.

⁴ Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation*, page 18.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



We are halfway through our sermon series looking at the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, and already we've seen the wide variety of churches in the first century. From the lost love of the Ephesian church to the tribulations in Smyrna to the mixed state of the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, Jesus is giving us a realistic view of the church in the 1st century, as well as the church in the 21st century. The constant refrain to every church ("he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches") should by now ring in our ears as a constant reminder that the stories of these churches are the stories of our church. It is impossible to read these letters without thinking, "What would Jesus write to Covenant Reformed in Asheville?" Would he challenge us or comfort us? Or more likely a bit of both. Of the seven churches, only two (Smyrna

and Philadelphia) are found without fault. The rest of the churches suffer from a variety of different issues, yet to each of them Jesus gives the same solution: repentance. Guilty of false teaching? Repent. Immorality? Repent. Apathy? Repent. So he calls us all to repentance; but he not only calls, he also stands ready to forgive. Every letter ends with a picture of the merciful Savior holding out the promises of a blessed eternal life to all who overcome. In the words of Jack Miller, "repentance can only be genuine and lasting when the evildoer sees that God's mercy is available to him."

After Revelation, we will turn to the opening chapters of the book of Luke in a series entitled *The Songs of Christmas: Advent in Luke*. One thing that sets the Gospel of Luke apart is the poetic responses to the announcement of the Savior's birth. Over the Sundays in December - and Christmas Eve - we will consider the words of Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds and angels, and finally on Christmas morning, the long-suffering response of Simeon. Unlike the lukewarm church at Laodicea, the news of the Messiah's arrival engendered nothing short of glorious praise in the hearts of the true believers. I hope that during the increasingly secular and commercially driven "holiday season" in our land, we can be a people who - like Elizabeth and Mary and Simeon - cannot remain silent, but must turn in praise to bless and magnify our Lord Christ with all that is within us.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Nov. 6	Rev. 3:1-6	
Nov. 13	Rev. 3:7-13	John 3:1-15
Nov. 20	Rev. 3:14-22	
Nov. 27	Rev. 3:22	John 3:16-21
Dec. 4	Luke 1:39-45	
Dec. 11	Luke 1:46-56	John 3:22-36
Dec. 18	Luke 1:67-79	
Dec. 24		Luke 2:8-14
Dec. 25	Luke 2:22-35	

Help from the Past

By Rev. Bill Clark

Most of you know what Cecelia and I recently went through as we followed Eloise, Cecelia's mom, in her final illness, death, and the aftermath of the funeral and other things associated with the loss of a loved one. If I might, I will use this column to say to you all, "Thank you for your love, prayers, cards, visits and other means of support; they were invaluable to us."

During this time I have had opportunity to read portions again of what is considered a classic concerning heaven and the comfort it brings to believers at all times, but especially in seasons of sickness and frailty. The book is, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* by Richard Baxter (1650). The following is a statement about the certainty of a heavenly destination for all Christians.

That this rest shall be enjoyed by the people of God, is a truth which the Scripture clearly asserts in a variety of ways; as, for instance, that they are foreordained to it, and it for them. God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. "In Christ they have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will". And "whom he did predestinate, them He also glorified."

They are redeemed to this rest. "By the blood of Jesus we have boldness to enter into the holiest," whether that entrance means by faith and prayer here, or by full possession hereafter. The saints in heaven sing a new song unto Him, who has "redeemed them to God by His blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and made them kings and priests unto God."

This rest is promised to them. Christ says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom."

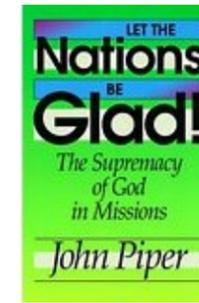
Scripture assures us, that the saints have the beginnings, foretastes, earnest, and seals of this rest here. "Though you have not seen him, you love him.

Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And does God seal us with the Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of their inheritance, and will He deny the full possession?

May such truths of our eternal rest encourage us in our present walk with the Lord.

Book Review

By Rev. Sean McCann



Many years ago, as Lindsey and I were preparing to embark to Costa Rica, and eventually Honduras, as missionaries, we would go around and visit individuals, missions committees, and churches. One of the most common questions we got at every stop regarded how we sensed God was calling us to missions. My standard answer was that I first felt the call while reading *Through Gates of Splendor* by

Elisabeth Elliot, the story of five young missionary families and their ministry to the Auca Indians in South America. Lindsey's answer to the question was always just as clear and succinct: "In college I went to a conference where John Piper spoke on missions, and if you can't get fired up about missions listening to John Piper, then something is wrong with you!"

While I don't know exactly what John Piper spoke on at that conference two decades ago, I am sure it was something from his book *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. In addition to speaking at missions conferences, John Piper is founder and teacher of desiring-God.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, and for over 30 years, he served as senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. If you have ever heard Piper speak, you know he is passionate about the Lord, and that passion spills over in this book. Preachers often quote the first line itself: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship does not." Worship is ultimate, thus it is the fuel for our global mission efforts.

While many Christians are motivated to share the gospel and support missions by a compassion for loved ones or a sense of duty or responsibility, Piper helps us see that the ultimate motivation must be the glory of God. He begins his book not with mission strategy, but with an overview of the biblical teaching on the glory of God in all the nations. From this starting point of the supremacy of God in missions through worship (the *purpose* of missions), Piper goes on to explain the role of prayer (the *power* of missions) and suffering (the *price* of missions) in global evangelization, before closing by challenging us to consider how the Lord is calling us to the task of reaching the nations.

If our sermon series through Jonah taught us anything about ourselves, it was the twin dangers of spiritual pride and apathy in the hearts of God's people. If you felt a twinge of either of those, then let me encourage you to pick up this book and have your heart stirred and eyes opened to see that "the ultimate goal of God in all history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."