***~ INTRO ~***

LET’S START WITH A QUESTION…

* What’s the first thing that comes to mind…
  + When I say the word criticism?
    - Good or bad?

*During Abraham Lincoln’s presidency, he faced brutal criticism—not just from the South, but from people in his own party. One example is Edwin Stanton who had once called Lincoln a “low-cunning clown” and a “gorilla” unfit for office. What did Lincoln do to him when he was elected? – He promoted him!*

*Lincoln recognized Stanton’s sharp mind and ability to manage the War Department. Lincoln said, “If Stanton said I was a fool, then I must be one, for he is nearly always right, and says only what he means to say.” Lincoln didn’t ignore the insult—but he valued the truth behind the criticism enough to put the best man in the job, even if it bruised his pride.*

AI defines “valid criticism” as…

*“Feedback that is constructive and helpful, based on accurate observation and offering actionable suggestions for improvement. It aims to help the recipient grow and develop, rather than being purely negative or judgmental.”*

THE BIBLE SAYS…

* *To one who listens, valid criticism is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry. (Proverbs 25:12) NLT*

***~ STUDY ~***

TODAY WE’RE OPENING UP A STUDY…

- In the first 3 chapters of (Revelation)

* Where we see Jesus’ critical review of the church…
  + Offering both positive & negative insights…
    - Into their condition.
      * (Read 1:9-11)

BEFORE WE GET TOO FAR…

* Let’s lay the groundwork for the book of Revelation.

**~ IDEA 1 – How To Understand Revelation (1:9-20) ~**

(v. 1)

**#1 THE AUTHOR - JOHN**

THE DISCIPLE OF LOVE…

* One of Jesus’ closest disciples…
  + And longest living Apostle of the church.

EXILED ON THE ISLAND OF PATMOS…

* Because of his testimony of Jesus Christ…
  + Dipped in boiling hot oil…
    - But managed to stay alive.
* As he was worshipping…
  + He hears a voice that he has not heard…
    - In a long time!
* Sometimes it takes being in exile…
  + Before we are available to listen to the Lord!
    - My ankle!

**#2 THE MAIN CHARACTER – JESUS**

(vv. 11-16)

THE BOOK OF REVELATION…

* Was given to reveal one central figure…
  + Jesus Christ in His glory!
* This is what John hears & sees…
  + A voice of authority commissioning him (v. 11)
  + The Son of Man (he’s seen this before) (v. 13)
  + Description of greatness (vv. 13-16)

* With all the symbolism it’s hard to know…
  + What is happening in this scene…
    - But (v. 20) gives the interpretation!

(vv. 17-20)

THERE ARE A FEW DISTINCTIVE POINTS HERE:

* Jesus is *standing* in the midst of the churches (He’s alive!)
* He *holds* the pastors in his right hand
  + Signifying where their strength comes from
* He *speaks* His word to His bride

NOW… THE BOOK OF REVELATION…

* Has caused many people confusion…
  + Resulting in a reluctancy to read and study.
* Other’s have so sensationalized the book – twisting it’s meaning
  + That it’s often misunderstood.
* In reality when you simply read the text…
  + You come away with simple understanding!

**#3 A SIMPLE UNDERSTANDING**

FOR EXAMPLE… WHEN WE LOOK AT (V. 19)…

* We’re given a **basic outline** to follow…
  + Past (ch.1) / present (chs. 2 – 3) / future (chs. 4 – 22)

THIS HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND…

* The book was written to be taken **literally**…
  + The prophecies laid out in (Chapters 4 – 22)
    - Are future events that will actually take place.
      * Revealing how God will deal with humanity.

AS WE LOOK AT THESE LETTERS…

* There are four key ways we can **apply** what’s written…

1. Literally - written to actual churches
   1. Located in the region of Asia Minor (show map)
2. Historically - describing conditions of 7 eras of church history
3. Locally - to all churches at any given time
4. Individually - each believer can apply these letters to their lives

HERE’S WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT…

* When we read this book…
  + We’re promised a blessing (v. 3) NLT

THE LORD WAN’TS US…

* To *read* the Letters To the Church…
  + *Listen* to what the Spirit says to the Churches…
    - And to keep (obey) the counsel given…
      * Because the time is near!

**~ IDEA 2 – “The First Church” (2:1-7) ~**

(vv. 1-3)

CHURCH HISTORY TELLS US…

* John was an elder at this church…
  + For the last remaining years of his life.
    - Jesus starts with his church!

**#1 COMMENDATION**

*(v. 2)“I know your works…”*

JESUS BEGINS WITH COMMENDING THEIR EFFORTS…

* Which really ministered to my heart…
  + Because it tells me that Jesus sees what we do for Him!

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1Co 15:58 NKJV)*

* Jesus wants you to know today…
  + He sees what you do for Him!

*“… your labor”*

THEY’VE WORKED HARD IN MINISTRY…

* Toiling to the point of exhaustion…
  + To make sure people are cared for.

*“… your patience”*

NOT ONLY HAVE THEY WORKED HARD…

* They’ve been persevered difficult circumstances…
  + Remaining hopeful and not giving up no matter the trial!
    - They stayed committed for over 35 years!

*“… cannot bear… evil”*

THE CHURCH STOOD GUARD AGAINST…

* The impurity of the culture…
  + Refusing to let it infiltrate their fellowship

*“… tested apostles… proved they are liars”*

THESE BELIEVERS KEPT CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE STRAIGHT…

* Ensuring leaders were adhering to God’s Word…
  + And rebuking those who didn’t.

*“… labored for my name’s sake”*

AS THEY DID ALL OF THIS…

* Their motives were in the right spot…
  + Not serving for their glory…
    - But honestly pouring out their lives in Jesus’ name!

THIS IS A GLOWING REPORT…

* Given to the messenger (John) of this church.
  + How could you not be excited about what was said!?

(v. 4)

**#2 CORRECTION**

THEIR DOWNFALL WAS SINGULAR BUT SPECIFIC…

* Jesus would choose it over everything else they had accomplished…
  + It was that important!
    - (V. 4) NLT

JESUS IDENTIFIED SOMETHING IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP…

* That had not been the same as in the beginning.

EVEN AFTER ALL THEIR PRAISE & ACCOLADES…

* The Church of Ephesus is not without fault…
  + And the Lord doesn’t let them off the hook!
* He’s not willing to turn a blind eye…
  + To the things we need to get right in our lives…
    - Nor does he let the good outweigh the bad.

NOTICE JESUS TELLS THEM…

* They had *“left”* their first love:
  + Neglect – Forgetting the habit, pattern or discipline
  + Abandon – No longer trying, lost priority
  + Deserting – Stepping away because of lack of interest
    - Word used to describe divorce
      * This is a powerful statement!

(vv. 5-7)

**#3 COUNSEL**

JESUS GIVES THEM A WAY TO MOVE FORWARD…

* And it consisted of three things:
  + Remember
  + Repent
  + Re-do

REMEMBERING INVOLVES GOING BACK…

* And retracing your steps from the beginning…
  + To see where you’ve gotten off course.
    - (They *left* their first love)

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST LOVE?

* Full of passion & sacrificing everything to be together…
  + No complications & even a disregard to reason!
    - Lingering long together
* What was your life like when you first got saved?
  + A closeness with the Lord
    - Passionately desiring to learn more
      * Willful worship & praise
        + Unhindered church attendance.

REPENTANCE IS A PART OF THE PROCESS…

* And sometimes it’s obvious when we need to repent…
  + And other times its more beneath the surface.
* It describes a mindset that agrees with God…
  + And decides to move in the opposite direction.

RE-DOING WAS THE FINAL STEP OF RESTORATION…

* Repentance is repeated at the end of (v. 5)…
  + Suggesting the fact that re-doing specifies…
    - How repentance is demonstrated.

***~ IN CLOSING (APPLICATION) ~***

(v. 7)

REMEMBER OUR FOUR APPLICATIONS…

* We can look at this for our church…
  + What does Jesus say about W.C.?
* What is the Lord ministering to us individually?
  + Can you identify with Ephesus?

I THINK WHAT REALLY HIT ME WAS…

* A relationship is more than a commitment!
  + God didn’t save us for the work he could get out of us…
    - He wants our heart!

AND… WHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP IS RIGHT…

* We are naturally led into service opportunities…
  + Willfully participating with the Spirit.
    - Faith without works (James 2:26)

WHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP ISN’T RIGHT…

* We tend to serve out of habit & obligation
  + Rather than fervent desire & love.
    - Go thru the motions (without emotion)
    - Begrudgingly
    - Resist serving when there’s a need
* If this isn’t dealt with seriously…
  + We will dampen the light in our life!

TURN WITH ME TO…

* (Mark 10:17-22) NLT

JESUS WANTS TO HELP US OVERCOME TODAY…

* So we move back into a healthy relationship with Him.

***~ CALL WORSHIP TEAM ~***

DO YOU WANT TO EXPERIENCE…

* God’s grace in your life today?

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THAT YOU’VE…

* Moved backward in your relationship with Jesus?