

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.15-16.11

Good morning Crossroads. If you are joining us today we are actually picking up where we left off last time. We're in just a little mini-series called Rumspringa and if you're not familiar with that term I'll catch you up to speed with what we covered last week and then we're going to move forward. A Rumspringa is actually an Amish term. It's kind of a mixture of Pennsylvania German derivation of a word that comes together that means someone who's jumping around or someone who's out sowing their wild oats. In an Amish tradition those who reach adolescents, somewhere between ages sixteen and eighteen are sent out into the world to experience the world among us English as they call us and if these adolescents choose to go the path of the world in their hearts wandering from the Amish community then they are restricted from ever coming back. Their rumspringa continues. But, on the other hand while they're out, their hearts kind of wander away from those Amish traditions, or they want to return. They're able to return and then they're baptized into the Amish community. They commit themselves to that lifestyle.

Now, last week I said when I first heard this term I thought man, this sounds an awful like what goes on in our Christian journey not just once but multiple times; when our hearts are close to God but we sometimes wander away into the world, kind of to experiment to see what it's like to live without God. And then we come back but sooner or later we find out that our heart again wanders away. This is why the author of Proverbs says above all other things guard your hearts for from it are the wellsprings of life. We talked about what it means to guard our hearts. Why? Because of what the hymn writer says: prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. We all understand that. We've all been there. But we had to answer the question why last week. Before could move on we had to understand why our heart is prone to wander. We actually went all the way back in the Old Testament into the book of Jeremiah where God was speaking through the prophet to the nation of Israel – His chosen people whose hearts would often wander from God and God answers the question why. Why is it that their hearts were prone to do that? And he says this through the prophet Jeremiah. He says it's because you hold fast to deceit. And we said that word deceit is actually the word illusion which means they were believing the lie that life is better without God. They were going off to experiment with themselves outside of their God. Isn't that exactly what we do? Our hearts, when they wander we're basically believing the lie that life is better without God; that we can manage on our own and what was the classic story of the New Testament that Jesus brought to us? The story of the prodigal son. We've all been prodigal sons and daughters where we'll leave the Father and the prodigal son goes off to investigate life on his own in distant lands but before long he runs out of money, runs out of friends, runs out of food, runs out of options and he finds himself feeding pigs. A Jewish boy feeding pigs at a Gentile pig farm and he's reached rock bottom. He doesn't know where to go and the question comes to him. It's the question of the human soul that after we've departed from the Father can I return? Can I ever go back.

And what do we hear in the prodigal son? What do we hear from the story? That God says yes. Why? Because God is the father waiting for his son to return. We are the sons. He says yes – you can return but this time when you come back I want you to acknowledge (yaw·dah יָדָה) – the Hebrew word to know, to understand, to see. I want you to know your sin. I want you to know what it was that caused you to drift far from me, your wellspring of life.

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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Well, this morning I want to further explore that concept of acknowledging our sin today, of recognizing it, of confessing it. And to do that we're not going to turn to the Old Testament. We're actually going to turn to the New Testament. We're actually going to turn to the last book in the New Testament – the book of Revelation. If you have a bible I want you to turn there. It's easy to find. If you don't have a bible there's one provided for you in the chair back. We're going to Revelation. We're going to be in chapters 1 and 2. This is another kind of rumspringa you're going to find out. This time it's not a nation. It's not a prodigal child. It's a church. Revelation is what is called apocalyptic literature so as you're turning there let me just set in context about what we're going to see here.

Apocalyptic literature normally speaks of end times. Just so you know the frame of reference we are in the end times according to 1 John. End times is just a category of time set over the purview of history. This is the last set of times before the return of Jesus Christ so when Jesus ascended into heaven; He finishes His earthly ministry the Apostles, as well as we today, two-thousand years later are waiting in the end times for the next event on the calendar of Christ when He returns. So, that's what that means. It doesn't necessarily mean a seven year period. It doesn't necessarily mean a thousand year period. We hear those terms often in the scriptures. But this just means this block of times. We're all waiting for the return of Christ. And the book of Revelation speaks to that. But it speaks to it not only as something in the future but speaks to what we can understand about it right now. The author is clearly Jesus Christ through the pen of the Apostle John. John receives a vision while he's in prison on the island of Patmos. And he receives it from Jesus Christ. You say, how do we know that? Well, look at chapter 1, verse 12. John himself says, then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. He receives this vision and someone is speaking to him. Then he says, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands. Now, don't get lost there we're going to come back and explain that. And in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man. Stop there for a moment.

Do you remember the favorite title that Jesus would often use for himself? He would say I am the son of Man. So, clearly this is an indication that this is Jesus. Look over at verse 17. Here John is flat out on his face before the risen Christ and Jesus says to him, middle of verse 17, "Fear not, I am the first, the last and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." Who else does that fit but Jesus Christ?

So, this is Christ speaking to John and he says in verse 19, write 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 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, here you are – are the seven churches. So, clearly he's writing to seven churches. You say, are these literal churches? Yes.

Now, go backwards to verse 11 of chapter 1 and you'll see the seven churches identified. He says, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergammum, to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Those are the seven churches. These are literal seven churches that have existed in history but, most of biblical scholars would say that these are also churches that symbolize

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

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Weekend 10.15-16.11

types of churches all throughout history because as you read through the seven accounts Jesus speaks to each one of them and He has a special word about their particular condition. Now, we're going to look at just one of them this morning. We're going to look in chapter 2, verse 1 at the church at Ephesus and we're going to discover that this church was on a rumspringa. But look at it. You wouldn't know it by first identifying.

He says, to the angel of the church in Ephesus write. Now, by the way the angel is not necessarily an angelic being. This word angel can be messenger. It might be pastor so he's saying write to the pastor of the church in Ephesus and tell him this. Now, let's stop right here. Let's make sure we all understand about the church in Ephesus before we get too far. If I would just meet with you collectively we probably could come up with an idea of what this church is. We probably know a little bit about it. Someone in the group would say, well, isn't there a book called Ephesian? Is that to the church in Ephesus? Absolutely. That's a book written in the New Testament by Paul to this particular church two decades before John had this vision. We could go on and we'd find a book later in the New Testament called 1 Timothy and then another one called 2 Timothy. We'd find out these were letters written to fall to his protégé, Timothy who was the pastor at the church at Ephesus. We go back into the history book of the New Testament, the book of Acts and we could discover around chapters 19 and 20 we could find the occurrence when Paul in his second missionary journey actually planted the church in Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila he had come together with him and join in leadership along with Apollos and then sent the church into that particular city to evangelize the city. By the time we come to the third missionary journey later in the book of Acts we find that Paul is now there again spending three years at Ephesus teaching these people. That's what you can find out just from kind of a biblical study. What you would discover is that this church, this church that had a period of time of involvement into the city was a church with a righteous reputation in an unrighteous city.

If you did a little bit more digging into your history about Ephesus you'd find out why. This city was a dark place. It was a city that centered in the black arts or black magic. And what you would find out is that this church was influential in bringing people out of the darkness to the light of Jesus Christ. You don't necessarily have to turn there but let me just read to you something out of Acts. Acts chapter 19 about what happened to the city because this city was so forth-right with the Gospel of Christ. We read in chapter 19, verse 18 says many of those who were now believers came confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. They counted the value of them and found, watch this, fifty thousand pieces of silver. Now, silver in the New Testament is actually the Greek word drachma. Drachma was a day's wage. So you have fifty thousand days wages basically represented in those books. Lots of books representing a lot of money and a lot of people.

So, what do we see here about this church? This church was active in evangelizing. We read on in verse 20. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. And it did. If you would keep reading in that chapter and on into the next you would find that the church of Ephesus was so effective in its ministry that it actually caused a riot to break out in the city, why? Because they were upending the

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.15-16.11

economic balance. People who were making their living out of the black arts were coming out of it in droves, becoming believers and this was causing problems to the city; caused a riot.

Now, right off the bat you're thinking this is an interesting circumstance here. Jesus is speaking to a church but this church seems like it is really doing incredible work and if you would keep reading over in Revelation 2 you would still be confounded because you would say this sounds like accolades and it actually was. Remember, Jesus speaking, verse 2, chapter 2 of Revelation – I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who have called themselves apostles and are not; found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently, bearing up for my name's sake, and you've not grown weary. Stop right there. What do you see? I mean, it's accolade after accolade. This was a powerful church. He says I know your works. The Greek word *érgon*, in other words he says I know your spiritual works. I see what's going on. I see your toils. This is the word *kópos* in the Greek. It means they work to the point of sweat and exhaustion. Usually used to mean those who work hard like a day laborer or a farmer. They work hard. What were the Ephesians doing? They were working hard at their spiritual gifts in their spiritual environment of Ephesus bringing people to Christ. But not only that, they had this patient endurance. They were enduring difficulties. *Hupomoné* is the Greek sense. They were enduring persecution.

Probably the greatest accolade is in verse 2. Did you see it? How you cannot bear with those who are evil. In other words, here was a church who was standing up for the truth. Drop down to verse 6. You learn more about this. Yet this you have: you hate the works on the Nicolaitans. Not nicklelodeans. That's a children's network. Nicolaitans, which I also hate he says. Who are the Nicolaitans? Nicolaitans, listen to this, Nicolaitans – false teachers. The church at Ephesus was standing up against false teachers. They were fighting for the truth. In fact, you go to chapter 20, book of Acts Paul is leaving the Ephesian church and you know what he says to this? He warns them. He says this: says keep watch over yourselves and the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be Shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood. I know after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

Paul was being prophetic. Paul predicting the future. He's predicting what later would be called the Nicolaitans, these false prophets who would arrive and what do we read of the Ephesians? They were standing strong against them. Impressive credentials, wouldn't you say? Joe Stowell, past president of Moody Bible Institute said, "I would nominate this church as Church of the Year. But Christ would veto my nomination." Why? Look at verse 4. Verse 4, Jesus speaking to the church, but I have this against you. Doesn't that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up? I mean, imagine being with Christ and Christ is giving you this commendations, these accolades, telling you what you're doing right and then in mid-sentence He says, but, I have this against you. What was going on? What was happening? Here they had great doctrinal orthodoxy. They worked tirelessly for the advance of the Gospel. They stood strong against unrighteousness. They were bold against false teachers. They were doing all the right things but something happened. What was it? Read on in verse 4.

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.15-16.11

But, I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. The word abandoned is the word *aphiēmi*. It means to dismiss. Jesus said, you just dismissed me. You went on living your life but you dismissed me. We actually saw this word a few months ago back in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7 when Paul used it for divorce. It's as if Jesus is saying you just divorced me. Now, what does Jesus mean by this? Well, look at this. He says, you've abandoned the love you had at first. Jesus is saying to them I was the center of your affection and you just dismissed me. Somewhere in our relationship Christianity just became a system to you. Your heart, at the heart level you abandoned me. What happens when you wander at the heart level from your source; from your wellspring? You know very well. I know very well what happens. I drift into apathy. It's as if the things that were the most to me seem to, I don't care at all at the heart level. I do all the right things on the exterior because that's the easy part but on the inside I find my heart far from God and Jesus said in Matthew 15:8, He said, these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. We've all been there, haven't we? We've all traveled this rumspringa road where our hearts drift from God. Clearly here was a church that was powerful in the present work of Christ but strip away and look down into their hearts and you find their hearts, their hearts didn't represent that. Their hearts were far from God.

What do we do when we find ourselves in that station of life? That we've wandered so far away as if we could hear Christ himself say to us you've left your first love. What do we do? How do we reverse that? Well, the scriptures tell us. Jesus tells the church at Ephesus clearly how to change their course of direction. Look at verse 5. He says, remember therefore from where you have fallen repent, and do the works you did at first. Three commands you find in this one verse. This is the epi-center of this particular chapter. Three commands. Back to back to back. Imperatives. Imperatives are commands that require action. Did you get that? They're not just things we listen to. They're not just niceties as if to say, ok, I hear that. No. These are commands that lead to conduct change. What are they? Three things.

First – you remember. What do you remember? Why would he say remember? What am I going to remember? Do you recall what happened in the story of the prodigal son? He's reached rock bottom. What does he do? He remembers his father, doesn't he? He remembers his home. Don't underestimate memory can be a powerful force to bring us back but what is it that we remember? Look here at verse 5, end of verse 5 actually. Remember therefore from where you have fallen. You remember where you were. You recall your former state. You remember what? I think what he's saying is you remember that initial commitment you had with Christ when you first came to Him. Can you recall that? Has that been too far away in your memory? For some of us it wasn't that long ago. For others, for many of us it's years ago when we first came to Christ. But do you remember those early days when grace was new and unbelievable? When you started to understand that God's mercies were directed at you as an individual as if He pulled you out of this massive humanity and said on you I'm going to place my love. Do you remember those early days when forgiveness was fresh and it felt like a cleansing when you would go to Him and confess those things that you knew were not Christ-like and there was this sense of growth and over and over as you move throughout the day you would experience something new about your Lord and you felt extremely close to this one who was your God. I think that's what he's saying. Remember that. Remember that.

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

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Weekend 10.15-16.11

And then what? Remember how far you've come from that. And he moves to a word – repent. What do you think of when you think of the word repent? It's a very Christian word, isn't it? It's a kind of thing you'd see on a sign some guy would be carrying down in some city center and yelling at you, right? Saying repent. It's a biblical word. Well, what does it mean? This word repent is somewhat similar to the word acknowledge that we saw last week out of the Old Testament. Acknowledge, I told you was directly linked to the concept of confession in the New Testament. To understand. To know. To see. And I actually directed you to a passage that was equivalent to the Jeremiah sense of acknowledging our sin. I took you over to 1 John, 1:9. Now, you're close to it right now. You're probably only a couple pages away if you go left in your bible. Probably 3-4 pages you're going to hit 1 John. I want you to turn there. 1 John, chapter 1, verse 9. See this text for yourself. And what does verse 9 say? If we confess. That's that idea of acknowledge. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess. The idea of confession is that with our mouth. This is one side of the coin of repentance. This is the side where confession is what we do with our mouth but flip that coin over. Repentance is what we do, listen, with our lives. You have that? How do I know that? Because the idea of repentance, the very sense of it is the word *metanoëō* which is where we get the word metamorphosis which literally means a change takes place. What happens when something metamorphosizes? It changes, right? That's the call of the scriptures. We change. We do what? See, if confession is what we do with our mouth and repentance is what we do with our life then what is it that we do? Well, here's what we do. We deliberately reject the sin that lead us from Christ. And here's the remarkable thing as us as believers. We can get incredibly far from Christ on our journey. We can get into thing that would be unimaginable to those who name the name of Christ. We can find ourselves depending on things in this world and moving us away from things of Christ to the point that it almost looks like we're completely separated from Him. And so what does He say to do? He says repent, which, by the way – this is a great indication of whether or not you're a true child of God. I say that carefully because I know as believers we can wander far from Christ. We're not always open to hearing but if you are authentically a follower of Christ, you, like the prodigal son will reach the end of your wandering, of your rumspringa. You will feel the intensity of the Spirit of God drawing you back. It's an indication of your salvation. It's an indication of the mark that you are a son; you are a daughter. You cannot wander forever. So, how do you return. You return, he says through repentance. You stop doing the things that lead you away from Christ. You start doing the things that lead you toward Christ. Do you get it? That's the sense of repentance.

And then he says you do. It's the next logical step, isn't it? You remember. You repent. Verse 5 of Revelation 2 – you do the works you did at first. What does he mean here? Well remember the idea that when we recall, we think back, we remember what it was like when we first began following Christ? He says you do the things you did at first. You go back to those early stages when you were a follower of Christ that was committed to every ounce of you becoming closer to God. How did you do that? You did that spending time in His word, through prayer, through confession, through obedience. This last week the directors of our ministry we get together on mid-morning Fridays and we work through all the different aspects of the ministry. We evaluate it. Study. Plan. The whole leadership aspect but one of the

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 2

Returning from the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.15-16.11

things we did this last week is, Wendell Anderson is the Director of our Spiritual Maturity. He's been doing a study on what is it that is the catalyst for our spiritual growth in all the different areas and stages of our life. And he discovered something that we probably already knew but he had it in black and white. He discovered that the thing that is the catalyst in our relationship is when we're committed to the word of God; when we're studying the word; when we're infusing the Holy Book into our life. And that when we move away from that practice that we find ourselves moving away and easily slipping into that rumspringa lifestyle where we find ourselves drifting far from Christ.

So, what do you do? You go back. You immerse yourself in the Word of God. You draw near to Him. Now here. Listen to me carefully. This is what is going to go off inside of you. The depraved side of you, that voice inside of you that spews forth doubt will say too you you've gone too far. You can't come back this time. You need to understand it for what it is. That is a lie. The father, remember - the prodigal son - waited to see his son coming. Over the horizon he came. Not waiting for the son to get to him. The father runs to the son. Your heart strangely moved this morning? Do you know what that is? That's the Father calling you home. Don't listen to the dark side, the depraved nature that says you've gone too far. No. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent. Change your way and do the things you did at first and return Jesus to His rightful first place in your heart. Pray with me.