

# Coach House Church **BEACONS**

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## **MOTIVATIONAL GLORY**

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**24TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

When you're working your back off, the last thing you want to hear is 'you're not doing enough' or, for that matter, anything that diminishes the quantity and quality of work you think you've been doing. I find that even the slight implication that I'm not trying hard enough is enough to make me angry. Why is that? Partly it's frustration: i.e. they don't understand how much I've done! Secondly, it can feel like a personal affront – why am I your target? Additionally, there is the disharmony, why is there needless friction and discouragement between colleagues or people who are trying to accomplish the same goal? I'm sure you find this a common situation as you work in teams or groups, whether it's at church, in the workplace, in a sports club, or really any joint venture at all.

Above the question of personal offence is the question of what is right. In other words, whatever this or that person thinks, have I done enough to a high enough standard, or, have I fallen short on an objective level? When you can, you pull out the stats or standards, whatever your context uses to measure performance: a post-match analysis in a football match can track which players have ran further than others or taken more shots on target. Many of us have performance reviews at work which often try to quantify whether or not we've done a good job, with more or less success depending on the boss and the company policy. Sometimes we're rightfully suspicious of the standards being applied to us and our work, or the person who's doing the applying – our bosses and superiors. While we doubt the efficacy of the process, most of us would agree that we want fair treatment with regards to our work, and an attempt to acknowledge what we have done and penalise people who can't be bothered.

The Ephesian Christians addressed in Revelation 2 didn't tolerate wicked people, chucked out the false teachers and endured a ton of persecutions and hardships for Jesus. They were putting in work. More than most of us do. I imagine they felt

pretty put out, then, when in the next couple of sentences, John says this in chapter 2:4-5 "4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." Outrage would be my response – who dares tell me that I'm not doing enough after all that I've done so far? The image of the lampstand being removed is them losing their place, before God, as a church who does what pleases God. It seems like the classic case of a bad manager failing to recognise the work of his employees, and then using a miserable performance tracking programme to try and 'prove' that they hadn't done enough.

However, as I said earlier, we're likely to respect the criticism depending on the person giving it, and the standards that they are applying. So how do we put this passage in perspective when we think of our own lives with Jesus? First off, it's important to say that we don't have a precise list of the exact things that were going wrong with the Ephesian Christians. Perhaps if we could see the ways they were not showing their love as they had at first, then maybe we'd easily agree with John about them. I suppose their other actions: not tolerating false teachers or evil, and enduring hardship and persecution could have become joyless, and loveless tasks. Perhaps keeping their rickety ship of a church going, under fire from so many things, meant that they lost their love and their grasp of the God they were serving. Even then, I bet we still find the criticism harsh.

These passages in Revelation are meant to motivate us by the image of the glory of God and his power, rather than by the images we see of a meek and forgiving Jesus (which is no less true or accurate). This short section addressed to the Ephesian church begins "These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand". The whole point of this harsh sounding passage is to remember who is telling them these things. If it's Jonny Knight the preacher from down the street or the casual onlooker, these criticisms would rightly be thrown aside with contempt. What would he or she know, after all? But in the first chapter of revelation, we are given this glorious image of the person who is speaking through revelation, God himself – and in light of this image we are meant to receive the words that he tells us. This is the glorious picture of God which John sees and passes on to us:

1:14-16 "14 The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven

stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

I cannot stress this enough, but when God, the God described right above, speaks to the churches, he is absolutely for them. He desires, and longs and hopes for their victory. Their existence as churches is dependent on the fact that Jesus has died for them out of love on the cross to take away their sins and restore their relationship with God. In other words, this is not a picture of detached glory, but of God motivating his people by showing them this glorious image of who he is. It's not there to intimidate, even if it feels intimidating, it is there to show the full weight of God's power that is on the Christians side – and listen to this, motivating them and enabling them to carry on through seemingly impossible circumstances. If we see this God clearly, we will know instantly that we can carry on. With his power, we always can. With his power, we can change.

On the other hand, it offers a response and a challenge to the literal and figurative demons we face. If this is the kind of God that we serve, then what hope do our problems have of overpowering him? If this is the kind of God we serve, then what hope does Satan have against us? If this is the kind of God we serve, then why can't I repent, change direction and love others with him helping me?

God's standards makes sense because of God's character and his love for us. Like the Ephesians, when we see him rightly, we are motivated to bring our lives into line with his standards because he is helping us. If we're working hard but we've lost the love we had at first, he is the one who can restore us and set us back on track. Unlike our earthly managers or performance review systems, we know God has done everything needed to help us come to know him and saved us despite our own shocking performances. However, with him, we also have the power to become better, and truly become the people he wants us to be as we rely on him.



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## JONNY KNIGHT



*Coach House Church*

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn