

The Candlestick - Ephesus

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon highlights the necessity of returning to a first love for Christ to avoid spiritual decline and maintain the church's light in the world.

Duration: 50:44

Scripture: Psalm 119:97-139, Matthew 13:13-15, John 20:22, Revelation 2:1-2

Topics: "Ephesus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher warns the audience about the danger of losing their love relationship with God. He emphasizes the importance of remembering where they have fallen from and turning back to God. The preacher uses the analogy of a marriage ceremony to illustrate the initial love and cherishing that should be present in their relationship with God. He also highlights the danger of becoming complacent in ministry and losing the passion for serving God's children. The sermon concludes with a reference to the book of John, where Jesus questions Peter about his love for Him, emphasizing the need for a genuine and enduring love relationship with God.

Transcript

The book of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament. I'm going to bring to you a message today that's entitled The Candlestick. It's about the Church of Ephesus.

I'm going to be, over the course of the next while, I'm not going to say that it'll be every time I stand up and speak, but over the course of the next while, the Lord has put upon my heart to speak about the seven churches in Asia that are mentioned in Revelation. To invite the Lord Jesus to walk into the very deepest recesses of each one of our hearts, reveal to us the things that are good in our lives, and also reveal to us the things that He would like removed from us, that we can know Him with a greater intimacy, especially considering the hour that we're living in. I know in my heart that we're living on the threshold of His return for us.

I know that someday soon I'm going to be in His presence. I'm going to stand before Him as John stood before Him, as Isaiah and Daniel stood before Him. I'm going to stand before Him.

I want to stand before Him now in this generation and have His light and His countenance reflected in my heart and through my life. And I trust and pray that that's the desire of your heart also this day. Now, a bit of background before we get into Revelation 2. The book of Revelation was given to John on the island of

Patmos.

It was the apostle John, the young John that leaned and put his head on the breast of Jesus. John so loved Jesus. And you see, revelation of Christ comes when you love Him, when we have a loving heart.

There's no other way to get it. You can't get revelation through just study. You can't get it any other way than to long for Him and love Him like John did, and love Him like David did.

And many men and women throughout the course of biblical history and throughout church history, you'll find a common thread when they have been given a great revelation of Christ is that they have had a great love in their heart for Him. This revelation was given to John about 63 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In this book of the Revelation, seven churches are mentioned.

Jesus wants to speak now to these seven churches. Now they were literal churches that were established on missionary journeys, but yet there are traces of the key elements in each of these churches that have been found throughout church history and are found today, both collectively as we gather together and individually. And so if you will let Jesus Christ walk in the midst of your heart today, you will find things that He's about to speak to the church of Ephesus.

You will find these things in your heart, sometimes in full bloom, where we have gotten to a point where we really need to get back to God, and other times it's a word of preventive maintenance to stop us from getting to a place or to turn our feet from a path that's not good in our walk with God. All of these churches, no doubt, thought they were doing good. However, it was with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You see, this is not just a book. It's a revelation. In Revelation 1.1 it says the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It's the revelation of Christ, which is the revelation of the very heart and essence of the church. And it was with this revelation of Jesus that the pathways which these churches had taken, which had become a diversion from the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and that purity of that calling were revealed. It's got to be a heart's cry in us today, and if you're going to get through to the end, you and I, it's got to be a heart's cry that we want a continual revelation of Jesus Christ in our inward man.

You can't get to heaven without it. You can't get to heaven just through Bible study and service in the house of God. It doesn't work that way.

If that's what you think, then you will wind up one of those persons that Paul talked about when he addressed a letter to Timothy and said there are people in the last days always learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. There's got to be a desire for Jesus Christ to be revealed within us. That revelation very often will make us very uncomfortable because when Christ is revealed, it exposes religiousness.

It exposes things that we have espoused and are holding dear to and think that are good, but they're not good in the sight of God. And when the revelation of Christ comes into our lives, it comes into the midst of a body, that everything that's not of Him, if you truly loved Him, and we've heard this morning through that word of prophecy how much He loves us, and He's going to be asking us this day for a response of love back to Him. In Revelation chapter 1 and verse 4, these words are written, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, Grace be unto you and peace from him which is and was and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, unto Him that loved us and washed

us from our sins in His own blood.

And didn't we hear about that this morning? And He has made us, verse 6, kings and priests unto God and His Father. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. So He's made us kings and priests.

And so that's the beginning of the revelation. It's who Jesus is and who He desires that we should be in Him. The apostle Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9, You're a chosen generation.

You're a royal priesthood. You're a holy nation. A peculiar people that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

That's who we are, kings and priests with Christ on this earth. Called to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. In Revelation chapter 1 again in verse 12, John says, I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.

And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot and a girt about the paps with a golden girdle. Now we'll learn a little later on in the book of Revelation that those candlesticks represent the seven churches.

The light of Christ that's supposed to be in those churches. He is in the midst of it. In verse 14, His head and His hairs were white like wool.

There's a purity about Jesus, an absolute purity as white as snow. And His eyes were as a flame of fire. Nothing is hidden from Him.

Nothing. There's no darkened corner. There's nothing that you and I can hide from Him.

He is an all-piercing eye. He can see right into the depths of everything that's within us. So what senselessness to try to hide anything from God.

His feet were unto fine brass. He stands firm, Jesus. He stands strong.

He doesn't need anybody to support Him or to prop Him up. As if they burned in a furnace. And His voice was as the sound of many waters.

He had in His right hand seven stars. And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. And His countenance was as the sun shining in its strength.

And when I saw Him, John said, I fell at His feet as dead. The revelation of Jesus is an end to all flesh. These churches needed the desire of that revelation to return to the purity of their calling.

John that loved Jesus. John that sat at the table with Him at the Last Supper with His head on His breast. Sees Him now in His purity walking among the seven candlesticks and falls down like a dead man.

Doesn't that remind you this morning of Isaiah prophesying for 28 years to Israel? In the year King Uzziah died. He's lifted up into the presence of God. And Isaiah says, Woe unto me, I'm undone.

I'm a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And this came to Isaiah because he had had a revelation.

He had seen Jesus in His fullness. I think of Daniel in the Old Testament when the Lord appeared to Daniel. And Daniel fell on his face on the floor.

Daniel, a man greatly beloved by God. But he fell on his face on the floor. And out of his own mouth, he said, it was like I had no breath left.

My breath was taken right out of my body. Because he had seen the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Scripture says in the Old Testament, No man shall see the face of God and live.

And that Scripture is true for us today. No one shall come into the presence of Almighty God. No one shall come into the presence of Jesus Christ and retain areas of death in his human body.

And retain things that are unchrist-like. To see God is to die. We need to understand that.

To hunger for Him is to die to all of our own desires. To die to things that are not like Christ. To die to thoughts.

To die to deeds. To die to actions. That's what the revelation of Jesus Christ is all about.

And I pray with all of my heart that you have that desire and that I have that desire today. To see Him revealed. Because one day we're going to stand before Him and everything is going to be revealed.

How much better on this side of eternity to have a heart to say, Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Come into my heart. Walk in the chambers. Walk in the midst of the candlesticks in my heart.

Let everything that's within me be put to the test of your holy fire. My covenant God. Let's stop and pray that for a moment before we continue.

Lord Jesus, Search our hearts today. You've come to give us life and not death. You've come to give us joy and not sorrow.

You've come to give us hope and not despair. You've come to give us strength and not weakness. You've come to give us sight and not blindness.

And hearing and not deafness. You've come to give us a purpose in life. And to take away the purposelessness that comes when we're led and governed by the flesh.

Oh Jesus, walk through the candlesticks of our hearts this day. Walk in the midst of this church, oh God. And send a glorious revival, oh God.

Oh Lord God, it was your desire to revive these churches in Asia. That's why you gave this revelation of yourself unto John. You sent a message to them, oh God.

Grant to us hearts to hear this day, oh God. Grant to us desires to want to know you, oh God. Oh Jesus, Jesus, don't give us any... Block our escape routes this day, I ask in your precious name.

The holes that we want to hide in, oh God. The little places on the wall. Block them, oh God, block every last one of them.

Don't let us find refuge in lies. Jesus, Jesus, walk in the midst of our hearts. Touch us this day.

Touch us in the inward man. I ask it in your precious name. Revelation chapter 2, beginning at verse 1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write.

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand. Who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience.

And thou canst not bear them which are evil. You've tried them which say they are apostles and are not. And you've found them liars.

So there was a lot of good in this church. And Jesus always starts by acknowledging the good. The things that he sees that are pleasing at his sight.

This was a working church. A church that hated evil. And could not bear evil in their midst.

A church that had put to the test every word that had been spoken. Perhaps not only in their midst but words that had been spoken in other places. By those that had exalted themselves and claimed to be sent by God.

They put it to the test because these people seemed to have a real resting place in the word of God. And they had found them to be liars. And this was pleasing in the sight of God.

In verse 3 again he says, You've borne and you've patience for my namesake and you've labored and you've not fainted. Nevertheless, verse 4 he said, I have someone against thee because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works.

Or else I will come unto thee quickly and I will remove thy candlestick out of his place. Except thou repent. But this thou hast that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

Now we'll be speaking about that at some future day. Which I also hate. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life. Which is in the midst of the paradise of God. And so now Jesus is being manifested right in the midst of the seven candlesticks.

And one of these candlesticks is a church that's called Ephesus. He says to this church, I know your works, I know your labor. In verse 3 again he says, I know you've borne and you've labored.

So this was a laboring church. This was a working church. But he found such an incredible deficiency in the midst of this church.

He said, I found something and I have someone against you because you have left your first love. You have left off loving me and you have substituted that love for labor. And this was so serious in the sight of God.

That he said, if you don't repent of this thing, I'm going to come into your midst and I'm going to remove your candlestick except you repent. Now the church of Ephesus had been founded on one of Paul's, the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys and you'll find it, we don't turn there please, but in the book of Acts chapter 19. It was founded around the year A.D. 55.

It was 22 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And 41 years before the revelation of Jesus Christ was given to the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. Ephesus had some notable characteristics about it.

It was in Ephesus that a man had arisen up called Apollos. A very powerful preacher and teacher of the word. Who led many people in that city of Ephesus to Christ.

But yet Apollos didn't know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And only was able to preach about the baptism of repentance, which was John's baptism. But Paul came on the scene and Paul brought the fullness of God with him.

And those original disciples that had been led to Christ by Apollos were baptized in the Holy Ghost. The scripture says there were about a dozen of them in the beginning. It was a place where God worked and did special miracles.

The scripture says that handkerchiefs were taken from the body of the Apostle Paul and sent out by couriers I suppose. And even a handkerchief touching the body of a sick person would heal them of their sickness. God worked powerfully in this little church in Ephesus.

Acts 19 verse 17 says that fear fell on all the people and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was magnified. Now that was right after the seven sons of Sceva had tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. You remember that story? And the devil said, Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you? And so the demon possessed person got up and virtually almost beat these people to death and it was right after this that fear fell on all the people and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was magnified because even demonic powers were identifying that they knew him and they understood who he was.

Verses 18 and 19 in Acts 19 said the place had been given to idolatry. Ephesus was a place of idolatry. You remember it was a little later on that all the craftsmen were making images of the goddess Diana of the Ephesians and the whole place came into an uproar because the gospel of Jesus Christ was being preached and the craftsmen felt that they would lose their income.

And so they stirred up the whole city against Paul as usual. Everywhere he went there was a revival or a riot or sometimes a combination of the two. The whole place had been given to idolatry but God began to move in power and in this little church of Ephesus the scripture says that people repented of their sin they came and they burned their books of witchcraft and their books of idolatry.

They were given to the, I guess you'd call it the dark arts and they came and burned, there was a great burning in this area of Ephesus under the preaching of the apostle Paul and Apollos and the scripture tells us that when they tallied up the value of all the things that were burned it was 50,000 pieces of silver. I don't know what that translates into today but that was a lot of money. A lot of burning went on there.

In Revelation chapter 2 and verse 4 Christ mentions the love that this church had for him. They didn't do it because they were under compulsion. We could possibly look back in church history and make an argument like that but Revelation chapter 2 and verse 4 puts an end to that argument because Jesus now is speaking to the church of Ephesus.

He says, I have something against you because you have left your first love. And what Jesus is saying, I remember the things you did. I remember the burning of all your artifacts that you used in idolatrous worship.

You burned all of these things because you loved me. You didn't do it because you were under compulsion. And that's what Jesus is talking about.

But now you see in verses 2 and 3 their love had been reduced to labor. Isn't that an awful thing when that can happen in a church? Or when it can happen in an individual Christian's life? Jesus is saying, you used to love me. And because you loved me you obeyed me.

You walked with me. Whatever I spoke, that was what you did. And even if it cost you 50,000 pieces of silver, you willingly gave it up because of your love that you had for me.

That's what he's saying to Ephesus. And you still are laboring and you still are working and you're still trying and you're still founded in the Word of God. And I acknowledge your labor, but you've left your first love.

And he says, if you don't come back to that first love, I'm going to come and remove your candlestick out of its place. What an incredible, what an awesome warning. Jesus is telling this church, it's more important that you love me than do all of this labor that you're doing, than all of the study that you're doing.

It's more important that you love me. He says, if you don't love me, I'll come into your midst. Now this is a solemn warning for Ephesus, but it's also a solemn warning for every church throughout every age of history.

It's a warning for every church that's in existence throughout the world today. It's a warning for every church, for this church today. It's a warning for every Christian that's sitting in this house today, individually, as well as all of us collectively together.

He says, if you lose your love for me, number one, I'll take away your candlestick. And I want to share with you three things that God spoke to my heart that this means. Number one, I will take away from you the deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit.

I won't walk in your midst anymore. All you'll be left with is religious works. You want to work? You'll have a lot of work, but you won't have any more deep, deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit.

I cherish a lot of things in my walk with God. I cherish the goodness that He's given to me. I cherish His leading in my life.

There are a lot of things I could talk to you about today that I cherish, but there's one thing I cherish more than everything else put together. I cherish the deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit in my heart. I cherish the fact of knowing that Jesus Christ is still walking in the midst of the inner chambers of my heart.

That He is still God in the midst of my heart. He has access to my heart. He can walk in the midst of the candlesticks of my heart.

He can speak to me about things in my life that are displeasing to Him, as well as tell me the things that are pleasing in His sight. Deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit is a direct result of intimacy with God. You can't get that just from study of the Word of God.

And you'll never get it from labor, but you will get it from intimacy with God. You will get it from coming into His presence with that gut cry that Pastor Gage so speaks about. That gut cry that says, Oh God, search my heart.

Oh God, Lord Jesus, I want You. I yearn for You. I long for You as a deer pants for the water brook.

Search my heart, oh God. Search my heart. Proverbs 20, 27 says, The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

There's a searching going on in your life right now. That's why you're sitting here in the house of God. God's Holy Spirit is speaking to you today through His Word.

And there's a deep searching going on. Is Jesus walking now in the midst of the candlesticks of your heart? Have you given Him access to your heart? Will you let Him speak to your heart this day? Jesus spoke of the spirit of Phariseeism. And it's rightly said that the spirit of the Pharisees was all labor and no love.

Let me just read you something. Don't turn there please. Matthew chapter 13.

Jesus said, Whoever has, to him shall be given. And he shall have more abundance. But whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he has.

Therefore I speak to them in parables. Because seeing, they seeing see not. And hearing, they hear not.

Neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which said, By hearing you shall hear and not understand. And seeing you shall see and not perceive.

For this people's heart is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing. And their eyes have they closed. Lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears.

And should understand with their heart. And should be converted and I should heal them. But in verse 16 he's speaking now to his disciples and he says, But blessed are your eyes for they see.

And your ears for they hear. Blessed are your eyes if you're in this house today and you can see. Blessed are your ears if you can hear.

You're blessed if Christ is still walking in the midst of your heart. You're blessed if you have a deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter what kind of a background you come from.

Or what kind of a church movement you're involved with. Or whether you're here or whether you're visiting here. Or where you come from.

But I want to tell you something and if you don't hear anything else. Then hear this. If you're not in a place.

It doesn't matter what kind of a church or manifestation or what's going on. In the particular movement you're a part of. If you're not in a place where there's a deep inner searching of the Holy Spirit.

You're not in the presence of God. People can gather together. They can have a physical exuberance.

There can be manifestations of all sorts. There can be an appearance of godliness. But if there is no inner searching you're not in the place of God.

When God is moving there's a revelation of Jesus Christ. That revelation will cause an undoneness in the heart. In every area of our lives that are not right in the sight of God.

That revelation will also bring us comfort. Jesus brought comfort to the churches. It was not all condemnation.

There was comfort that He brought to the churches. God will speak to you of what you're doing right. God will minister to your heart.

God will tell you He loves you. But then He will go deep into the heart. A deep searching.

I've cherished that with all of my heart. Over the years as a pastor and as a Christian I've met people. And they've told me.

People have been in evident sin. Sin that I can so easily point out in the Word of God. And show them that what they're doing.

How they're speaking. What they're watching isn't right. And I've had people tell me.

Well I'm not convicted about that. And they take that to mean that because they're not convicted it's not sin. But I take that to mean.

That the one who walks in the midst of the candlesticks. Is no longer walking in the midst of their heart. Because you can't willfully sin.

If the knowledge of the truth is working within your life. You are blessed because you love me. Jesus said.

My words came into your heart. Removing the scales from your eyes. And the dullness from your hearing.

You are blessed He said to your disciples. If you've got an open heart. If you love the reproofing Word of God.

My word to you today is that you're blessed. Because in hearing God's Word. The scales will come off your eyes.

And the dullness will come out of your ears and your hearing. And Jesus Christ will be lifted up and revealed. Listen to David's love for God.

It was David's love for God that caused this cry to come out of his mouth. Psalm 139 verse 23. Search me O God and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way of life everlasting.

Look at Psalm 119 please with me quickly. I want you to see the words of the Psalmist. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Psalm 119 verse 97. These are the words of a man who's got the manifested presence of Jesus within his life.

Psalm 119 verse 97. Oh how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day.

How I love your word. Do you love His Word? Do you love His Word? If He's walking in the midst of your heart. You have to love His Word.

To love Jesus is to love His Word. You can't say you love Jesus and not love His Word. The two don't go together.

If you love Him, you love His Word. Verse 101. He said, I have refrained my feet from every evil way that I might keep thy word.

I love your word O God. Your word can prove me. Your word can examine me because I love you.

And it keeps my feet from every evil way. Verse 103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste.

Yea sweeter than honey unto my mouth. Even the woebees. The woebee unto you for this and woebee unto... Even that is sweet.

For the hungry soul, the scripture says, every bitter thing is sweet. Through thy precepts. Verse 104.

I get understanding and therefore I hate every false way. There's an absolute hatred for falseness in your own heart when you love Jesus. And He's walking in the midst of your candlestick.

Secondly, removing the candlestick speaks about the removing of an ever living and present testimony of Jesus Christ within us. 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18. The Apostle Paul says, but we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.

From glory to glory. Even as by the Spirit of the Lord. One of the things, one of the ways of knowing that Christ is walking in the midst of your heart and that you love Him with all of your heart is that you have an ever present testimony.

You are being changed. You're not perfect. The Apostle Paul, what did he say in his own words? I've not arrived, but nevertheless I'm leaving behind what's behind me and I'm pressing on for the goal of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

We all with open face beholding the glory of the Lord are changed. If you're walking in the midst... If Christ is walking in the midst of your heart, there's a continual change. It's a metamorphosis.

You are being changed from image to image and glory to glory. Even as by the Spirit of the Lord. It's not that we're ever perfected on this side of eternity, but we're continuously changed, reflecting Jesus everywhere we go.

Our thoughts change. Our actions change. Our motives change.

Our loves change. Everything that we are changes. Because the two are no longer two, but they become one in Christ Jesus.

It's a wedding relationship that takes place here on this side of eternity, preparing us for that great day of celebration when Christ comes for us as His bride. Revelation, speaking of the bride, it says they overcame Him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. And they loved not their own lives unto the death.

There's a testimony that's in the heart of those who have the proving walk of God within them. And it's not a yesterday's testimony. It's not a testimony of ten years ago.

It's a testimony of what God has done since I woke up this morning. Because there's a continual revelation in my life of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah.

Paul, Jesus said to Ephesus in Revelation 2-7, To him that overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. To him that overcomes living for himself. To him that overcomes the so prevalent desire to set into a comfortable standard of living for God.

There is not a wholehearted love for him. He won't settle for anything less. In this day he has told us so clearly how much he loves us.

In this day he's asking us to allow him to walk in the midst of our hearts and to reveal to us how much we love him. The third aspect of removing the candlestick and probably the most fearsome, one of the most fearsome of all, is the spiritual death of our children. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 47, don't turn there please, let me read it to you.

Isaiah 47 verses 8 and 9. He said, Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasure, and dwell carelessly. Dwelling carelessly is playing carelessly with the love relationship that we have with Jesus Christ. You say in your heart, I am, and there's none else beside me, and I shall not sit as a widow, and neither shall I know the loss of children.

But these two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day, the loss of children and widowhood. In other words, he's saying, in a day, in a moment, that you don't expect it, like Christ said to Ephesus, the church of Ephesus, I will come into your midst and I will remove your candlestick. If you don't turn back, if you don't remember where you've fallen from, if you don't put down this careless dealing with me, in a moment that you don't expect it, I will come into your midst and remove the candlestick.

And it will become evident to all, even if not to you, that you've lost the love relationship with your husband. It will become evident to society. You see, people standing even on platforms such as this, and they're getting married, and they don't even care if there's a hundred or ten thousand people there.

All they can see is each other. I love wedding ceremonies. They're so beautiful because they so remind me of what it's going to be like when we meet Christ.

And there's such a love, and there's such a cherishing. And it's unfortunate sometimes, or maybe it's fortunate that we don't have a video of some of these marriages ten years down the road. That when the wife has to begin to work now to get the pleasure, or to feel the pleasure of her husband.

What a sad thing. He's going to be displeased when he comes in the door if the carpet's not vacuumed and all the dishes are done right. And supper's not on or made exactly to his perfection.

You see what's happened there? A relationship that started out with love has turned into labor. And there's so many husbands... Be careful of this. The scripture tells us to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

Be careful of this. Don't ever put your wife in a position where she feels she has to stay young and beautiful, or she feels that she has to perform at home to get your love. That's not what Jesus wants from us.

It's a love that is birthed in relationship. It's got nothing to do with how we perform. When love goes out of a relationship, then all that's left is labor.

And all these people in Ephesus now are trying to show that they love God by their labor. But that's not what he was looking for. And he said, you'll suffer the loss of your children.

In other words, your candlestick, your light and your hope for the future. There are people perhaps in this church that you have had a godly heritage. There may be not too many in New York City, but there are some that your parents were Christians and you were raised in a Christian home.

You then are the candlestick of your forefathers. Turn with me please to Psalm 90. Psalm 90.

This is a prayer of Moses. Verse 16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us. Yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it. That's a cry in the heart of everyone who loves Jesus.

Oh God, let your work appear to us, and your glory unto our children. Touch our children Lord. God, don't let them look upon the church as a slave ship.

A place where you just go and... Can you imagine coming home to your son one day? If you were living maybe a thousand years ago and saying, Son, there's a place in this slave ship for you. Most children don't want to be in a place of just labor. Where people come home and complain about how hard it is and how much they have to do.

It's a relationship that our children need to see if they're going to walk with God. Psalm 127. Please turn there quickly.

Verse 1. The Lord says, except the Lord build a house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It's vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, for so he gives his beloved sleep.

Verse 3. Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them.

They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. Children's children, Proverbs 17, 6, are the crown of old men. Hallelujah.

Psalm 132. Just turn ahead there please. Verse 12.

If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children also shall sit upon thy throne forevermore. You see, Christ desires not only that we love him, but that through the love relationship that we have, that our children find him. For the Lord has desired Zion, he has desired it for his habitation.

This is my rest forever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.

There will I make the horn of David to bud, I have ordained a lamp for my anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame, but upon himself shall his crown flourish. Hallelujah.

I've been in churches over the years where they have lost their candlestick, they've lost their light for the future. People who earningly love Jesus, but all of their love has been turned into labor. It's a known fact that children who have grown up in a home where there's no love or open display of affection will have either, firstly, no desire to enter into a marriage relationship, or secondly, if they do enter into it, they will have difficulty adjusting to that relationship.

In a similar manner, children who come under the ministry or the headship or the leadership of those who have lost their love for God, they'll either have no desire to enter into that relationship with Christ, or if they do, they will have difficulty understanding that relationship. The candlestick, the light, the future of the church will go out. And brothers and sisters, we have seen this all throughout church history.

Churches started by people that had a burning zeal and love and drive for God. They served Him, they loved Him. It's not that Christ is saying, I don't want you to serve me, I don't want you to labor.

He was saying, I don't want your labor to take the place of your love for me. I want what you do to come out of a heart of burning love for me. I want to flow through your life.

And so many organizations that have started with this burning zeal, within one or two generations have died out. Their children, they've lost their candlestick, their hope for the future, because their love turned to labor. And all of a sudden, their children looked at it and said, I don't want it.

I don't want to live like this. Who are these people? It's the pastor, it's the leaders, it's the elders, it's the deacons, it's the mom, it's the dad, it's the Sunday school teacher, it's the Christian education worker, the youth leader, the counselor, who used to love Jesus with all her heart or his heart, who once took the time to prepare spiritually and took seriously the charge of ministry to God's children. Now he prepares at the last minute and doesn't prepare himself spiritually or pray for the class and views the calling of God upon his or her life as tedious labor.

Jesus said, I know your labor, but you have lost your first love. Now please turn with me to one last scripture. The book of John, chapter 21.

Jesus has been raised from the dead. He has appeared to his disciples in John chapter 20. He has said to them, receive the Holy Ghost in John 20, 22.

Peter was there. He has commissioned them. He has told them that whoever sins you remit, they're remitted.

Whoever sins you retain, they're retained. They have seen him. He has done signs in their presence.

He has walked in the midst of them. He's raised from the dead. And shortly after this, Peter, in John chapter 21, says, I'm going back fishing.

John chapter 21, verse 3. And Simon Peter said unto them, I go fishing. And they said unto him, we go also with thee. They went forth into a ship, and that night they caught nothing.

Brothers and sisters, there's nothing back there. If you ever think of going back where you came from, there's nothing back there. They fished all night, and they caught nothing.

And so, in the morning, there was a man standing on the shore. And we know who that was. It was Jesus.

And he said, children, have you any meat? In other words, is there anything back there? Have you found something back there? Are you satisfied? They said, no. He said, cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find something. So they cast it out, and they were not able to draw it in for the multitude of fishers.

Then said the disciple, whom Jesus loved, that's John, said unto Peter, it is the Lord. Hallelujah. It is the Lord.

When we begin to walk in obedience with Him, we cast the net where He says. And all of a sudden, the net is full. And so they came to land, and Jesus had already fixed up breakfast for them.

And He said to them, verse 12, come and dine. And so they're sitting there and eating. And all of a sudden, He turns to Peter.

Peter, who had denied Him. Peter had cursed that He'd ever known Him. Peter had failed.

He turns to Peter, because He wanted to make a leader out of Peter. And Peter had a continuing problem with fear. He feared man.

And you'll see it later on, even in the book of Acts, when the apostle Paul had to rebuke him for causing the Gentiles to live as Jews, because he feared the people. But there was an element that Jesus was about to speak to Peter that was going to get Him through. And that same element will get you and I through every trial of this life that we'll ever face.

It will get us into the presence of God. It will cause the presence of Christ to be manifested within us. Verse 15.

So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? Now, He was pointing to something. I find that word these in there that you don't find in the other two verses. He was looking at something and He was reflecting on something.

He said, do you love me more than these? It is possible it was His friends. The other men that were around. Do you love me more than these, your friends? Do you love me more than the fish that have so evidently almost broken the net? There's so many of them.

Do you love me more than your nets, Peter, and your boats? Do you love me more than your security, your comfort? Do you love me more than fishing? Do you love me more than all your needs? Do you love me more than all your labors? I believe with all my heart, I believe that Peter loved fishing. He was a fisherman's fisherman. He was rough, tumble.

You can tell by his very character. He was a man born and bred in the natural sense to be on the seas. And Jesus is pointing to all of these things and all of these labors.

Because He knew that Peter would have a tendency to always labor in the church. He was the first one that says, well, there's a need. We don't know where the Lord is.

He's gone again. And we're all hungry. And our families have got to be fed.

So let's go fishing. You see, Peter was a leader. And Jesus wanted Peter to lead the people in a different way than his natural mind could think.

It was later on in the book of Acts that the apostle Peter was among those that said, it's not fit that we should lead the word of God in prayer and serve tables. Let's seek out seven men full of the Holy Ghost to do these things. But we will give ourselves continually to the ministry of prayer and the ministry of the word.

And Jesus was saying to Peter, do you love me more than all of these things? Do you love me more than your love labor, Peter? Because I feel in my heart that Peter would have had a tendency to be the one that just would jump in to get everything done. If there was a carpet committee, Peter would be on it. If there was a church building committee, Peter would be on it.

But Jesus said, Peter, I want you to love me more than you love these things. Not that they're wrong in themselves. They're necessary.

But I want you to love me. And he said unto him, yea, Lord, you know I love you. And then he says to Peter, feed my lambs.

Now he starts out with the little ones. I was talking about children this morning. Feed my lambs.

Let the love relationship that you have with me be what feeds my lambs. I'm going to give you a revelation, Peter, of myself. I'm going to give you understanding of what it's like to walk through perseverance and prayer.

And you're going to become a strength unto the church. Peter, when the little ones look at you, I don't want them to see a slave in the house of God. I want them to see somebody that's so in love with me that that very love relationship that you have with me feeds the lambs that are under your care, Peter.

Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me more than these things around you? It's so easy to come into the kingdom of God in a love relationship and before you know it, it's been reduced to labor. It can happen to any one of us. Then he looks at Peter again in verse 16.

He says, Simon, the second time, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Now all of a sudden, the word these is not there anymore. And now he's saying, Peter, do you love me? Do you love me, Peter? I need to know this. Remember the lawyer that came tempting Jesus and he said, What's the most important commandment in the law? Without hesitation, Jesus said, Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.

And the second is like unto it, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets. Love God with all your heart.

Now Jesus is looking at him and saying, Peter, do you love me? Are you mine, Peter? Does your heart fully belong to me? Peter, can I go into the innermost recesses of your heart? Can I walk in the midst of the candlesticks of your heart? Can I reprove you? Can I change you? Can I challenge you? Like he did in the book of Acts through the apostle Paul. That was God through Paul challenging Peter. Do you love me enough that I can rebuke you? Do you love me enough that I can reprove you? Do you love me enough that I can continuously walk in your life, changing you, Peter, from image to image and glory to glory until you're home with me? Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me? Do you love me? And Peter said, Yeah, Lord, you know I love you.

Then he said unto him, Feed my sheep. And I believe what he was saying to Peter is, I'm going to give you revelation if you love me. If you let me walk in the midst of your heart, I'm going to give you revelation.

And you're to bring that revelation to my people. And you're to be a strength to the church, Peter. And lastly, he said unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? The third time he asked him, Do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. Now, what Jesus is saying to Peter now this time, the first time it was just simply, Do you love me more than your labor? The second time is, Do you love me enough to let me walk in the midst of your heart? Like he was doing in the candlesticks of the church of Ephesus. And the third time he said, Do you love me? He was saying, Peter, do you love me enough to let me work out my plan for your life? I have a plan for you, Peter, and my love, and my love alone will lead you on that pathway of that plan.

You can't find it through works, but you can find it through loving me, Peter. You can't find the pathway of God through works. Church of Jesus Christ, you can only find that path through loving Him.

And Jesus was saying, Peter, do you love me? And then he says again, Feed my sheep. Verily I say unto you, when you were young, you girded yourself, and you walked whither you were. In other words, you dressed yourself, and you walked, and went anywhere you were, you wanted to.

But when you shall be old, you will stretch forth your hands, and another will gird you, and carry you, or take you into a place that you don't want to go. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said unto him, Follow me.

Peter, I have a plan. That plan is going to take you into a place that you don't want to go. And if you don't love me with all of your heart, you're not going to be able to follow that plan.

You're not going to be able to walk that path. You've got to love me, Peter, with all your heart. Or you're going to turn.

If you don't love me, in the moment it doesn't suit your purposes, you're going to turn. And what a great man of faith would have been lost if Peter would have said, Well, I'm not sure I love you. But Peter said, You know all things.

And God's Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart this day, and to my heart. And he's saying to us, Do you love me? Peter finally said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

Then he said, Let me work my plan out in your life. Let me lead you and guide you. I have a purpose for you, and it's going to cause your death, Peter.

It's going to be a hard path in the end. But if you love me, you'll follow me. You'll walk the path that I walked.

And I'll be with you. I'll be your guide. I'll walk in the midst of your heart.

It'll be glory to glory. Hallelujah. Even in the midst of trial, you'll learn to persevere.

And Peter, you'll be a strength unto the church. You'll be able to strengthen those lambs and those sheep that are going to come in behind you. You've been a weak man.

But in me, Peter, you're going to be strong. When I am weak, then I am strong, the Apostle Paul said. Don't dismay.

You don't need great talents, church. You don't need great abilities. You need a heart that loves God.

You need a heart that longs for Him more than the things of this world. You need a heart that says, Lord God, walk in the midst of me. Walk in my heart.

Walk in the recesses of my heart. Prove me and try me, O God. See if there be any wicked way in me.

And lead me in the pathway of life everlasting. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Psalm 51, David says, create in me a clean heart.

And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, O God. Take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Hallelujah. That's a love relationship that David's talking about.

Give me back that love relationship. I lost it somewhere along the way. I got bogged down.

There are pastors that are visiting here today. I'm going to give an altar call. You need to come to this altar.

You loved him at one time. And he loved you and still loves you. But somewhere down the line, you've gotten bogged down in all kinds of works and committees and programs.

And you've lost your love for God. If you will humble yourself before God, He will give back to a hundredfold this day. And challenge you and change you.

We need to allow Him to come and walk in the midst of the candlesticks. Would you stand please? Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. I want to sing that song this morning.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. God wants to give you back your love if you've lost it. He loves you.

He spoke prophetically before this message how much He loves you. How much you could hear the yearning in that voice this morning. It's the yearning of the heart of God for His bride.

If you've lost your first love, if you've lost it, would you please come to this altar this day as we sing this song. And we're going to pray it. I'm trusting God for a miracle.

I'm trusting Him for a literal miracle in your life today. Hallelujah. To restore the joy of that love relationship.

He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcomes. Now what Jesus is talking about is overcoming this loveless relationship that has a tendency to want to develop in every one of our lives.

He who overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. I will nourish you. I will strengthen you.

I will draw you back. That's what the Lord said. I'll give you an eternal inheritance.

I will prepare for you a place. There will be a joy that's beyond anything that you can understand or you can imagine. Come back.

Pray with me now, Jesus. I hear your word. Give me the strength to overcome.

A labor-filled and loveless relationship with you. I remember how much I used to love you. You were the most precious thing in my life.

Somehow I have foolishly let that slip through my fingers. I'm coming home. I'm coming back.

I want you with all of my heart. Every part of my heart. Jesus, walk in the midst of my heart.

I love you, Lord. I love you, Lord.

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