

The Candlestick

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of first love and the danger of losing it, which can lead to a church becoming unattractive to outsiders and children.

Duration: 40:34

Scripture: Revelation 2:1

Topics: "First Love", "Repentance"

Description

This sermon from Revelation chapter 2 focuses on the church of Ephesus and the importance of returning to one's first love for Jesus Christ. It emphasizes the danger of losing the initial passion and love for God amidst works and duties, highlighting the need for repentance and a return to the heart of worship. The candlestick symbolizes the light of first love that attracts others to Christ and the importance of maintaining that fervent love and relationship with God.

Transcript

Revelation chapter 2 please, if you will. Last book in the New Testament. I want to speak to you about the candlestick.

And as I get older, more and more I'm starting to understand this. I hope. Father, I thank you Lord with all my heart for the anointing of your Holy Spirit.

It's only when you quicken the Word that it lives in us. Would you help us Lord to grow by this today? Help us to grow in grace and knowledge and our love for Jesus Christ. Lord remove from us obstacles in our mind and our heart, in practice or lack thereof, things that we have allowed into our lives that have made this warning in this passage of Scripture a very present warning for each of us.

Help us as a church. I ask this in Jesus' name. Revelation chapter 2 beginning at verse 1, the candlestick.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil. And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars.

And has borne, and has patience, and for my name's sake has labored, and has not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat 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 will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which also I also hate. He that hath 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." It's very important for those of us who have been walking with God for any amount of time to pay special heed to these words, especially to this church.

We're going next year to be celebrating our 25th anniversary as a church that the Lord established here in Times Square in the center of New York City. And I do thank God with all my heart for the love of Jesus that is in this church. It's the one thing that I think I can say above all else, that the people who attend here love Jesus Christ.

I hear it in your song. I hear it in the way that you attend the church of God. You're coming in and you're going out in the house of the Lord.

But we need to be careful because we are a first-generation church in this regard, and so was Ephesus. Now Ephesus had become a church that was theologically sound. They were a working people.

They had patience. They had an intolerance for that which was not true. They did not receive and accept anything that people said from any pulpit.

They tested it, they tried it, and they found some to be liars. They had carried the weight as it is of the work of God. They had labored and they'd not fainted, but something had happened to them.

You know there's something so attractive about first love. That's why we love a wedding, isn't it? Every one of us, no matter how cold-hearted you are here today, you have to acknowledge that when you go to a wedding, something strangely is warmed inside of you. You're looking at first love is what you're looking at.

A young couple, maybe known each other a few years, they're at the altar, they're exchanging vows. They see no wrong with each other, at least at this point, and first love is attractive, and that's why stories often focus on first love. Now who would want to go to a movie or buy a book called, Oh, It's Only You, a love story.

Now I was in a seminar one time where five stages of marriage, the declining of a marriage, were documented through the common cold, and I'm going to give it to you as best as I can remember it. Stage one, this is the first year of marriage. Oh my dear, you have a sniffle.

You might be getting a cold. Just lie there and don't move. I will call 9-1-1 immediately.

We'll be at the hospital in a few minutes, and I will stay right beside you until you are well again. Stage two, after a year or two of marriage, oh my dear, you seem to have a cold. Try to get some rest and we'll call a doctor first thing in the morning.

Stage three, oh goodness, you have a cold. I'll go to the cupboard and get you some cough medicine. Stage four, there's cough medicine in the bathroom.

If you go to get some, it might help us both to get some rest. Stage five, if you're going to lay there and bark like a seal all night, the least you can do is sleep in the spare bedroom. Now the Church of Ephesus

was somewhere in its relationship with Jesus between stages three and stage four.

Remember, He said, I know your works, your labor, your patience. You cannot bear them which are evil, and you've tried those that say they are apostles and are not, and has found them liars. You've borne and had patience, and for my name's sake have labored, and you've not given up.

Ephesus was like the husband who's sitting at the bedside of his beloved bride at three o'clock in the morning, reading to her the healing ingredients of the cough medicine that he holds in his hand. Now honey, listen to this. Contained in this bottle is 6.25 milligrams of diphenhydramine, which is an antihistamine, and the coughs are present.

Also 2.5 milligrams of, I don't even know how to pronounce this, phenylephrine, which is a nasal decongestant. And she looks at him suddenly and says, why are you reading all this to me? He says, well there are a lot of frauds on the market, and I'm just not willing to go to all this effort and bring to you an inferior product. Suddenly she looks at him and says to him, do you love me? Of course, he says, it's 3 a.m. and I'm here discussing with you the truth of the healing that I hold in my hand.

John 21 and 15, Jesus looked at Peter and he said to Peter, do you love me more than these? Now I don't know what the these was, I guess when we get to heaven we'll find out, but it had to be something within hand's reach, because it was something he was referring to, something he was pointing to. These are things perhaps like the boats, the oars, the nets, the friends. These are things that Peter's hands were used to handling.

Must have been a certain satisfaction in Peter's life when he kind of grabbed the bow of that boat and pushed it out into the ocean, or the sea as it is, day after day, and fishermen love the implements of their fishing. That's part of the reason why they get in the trade in the first place. I think the handles of the oars probably had some wear and tear on them because of the hands of Peter having handled them for so many years, and his hands were familiar with these implements that could get him in a sense where he was going.

The nets of their interwoven rope, rather coarse perhaps in that generation, but just the touch and the feel of the nets, putting them into the water, gathering a few fishes and bringing them up into the boat. It would be the smell of the sea, it would be just the camaraderie that he had among friends that he traveled with every day, and suddenly Jesus is saying to him, do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than these things that your hands have become familiar with? Do you love me more than reading to me? Do you love me more than researching about me? Do you love me more than what you have grown accustomed to tasting, touching, feeling, and handling even in the house of God? Well Peter could have said, well I'm here aren't I? And didn't you notice that I left them all a few minutes ago and with great effort got here first? Scripture tells us that when he saw Jesus standing on the shore, and one of the disciples said it's the master, that he leapt from the boat into the water. There was a love in his heart and he said, haven't you noticed that I got here first? I had my seat reserved at the fire before the rest of the people even arrived.

Why would you ask me if I love you? You know that I do, or I wouldn't be here. You know I could ask you this question today in Christ's stead and say, do you love Jesus? Do you really love him? And some would say, well of course I love Jesus, I wouldn't be here if I didn't love Jesus. I wouldn't study the Scriptures if I didn't love Jesus.

I wouldn't examine truth if I didn't love Jesus. I wouldn't be going out on the occasional missions trip if I didn't love Jesus. It's obvious I love Jesus.

I wouldn't be here if I didn't love him. Why would you ask me this, Peter could say. It's fairly obvious I love you.

And so the husband carries on with his duty to properly represent and present the healing that he holds in his hand, when in a voice barely above a whisper, she asks him once again, do you love me? Now I want to give a word of advice to married men here. I've been married almost 35 years now. I have learned a few things.

Can I get an amen? When this happens, stop and think. Stop talking and start thinking. She is at this point on a completely different wavelength.

She's wanting a response from you that at this point you're not even aware of. Many of us are like, my wife has a lovely Boston Terrier. He knows about seven words.

And when you go outside of his vocabulary, he just kind of puts his head from side to side, trying to figure out what you're saying. And quite often I find myself in a similar position, wanting desperately to understand what she is trying to communicate to me. Have you ever been in that position where your wife says to you, you say to her, what's wrong? And she says, if you don't know, I'm not going to tell you.

There's not a married man here that hasn't been through this. And what a dilemma it is, because you can't pursue that conversation because you're going to dig a deeper hole for yourself. And it's worse to try to guess at what's wrong than to just be quiet and cast yourself on the mercy of God.

That seems to be what works the best. And so having just answered the question, Peter is probably settling down to the fire and he's probably revisiting some of his own thoughts, when suddenly once again Jesus asks him the same question, do you love me? Now he just says, yeah Lord, you know that I love you. You know, I want to caution you in this case, don't be too quick to answer, because you'll only be asked the same question again.

And now suddenly Jesus asks him again, the third time, he said, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. And Jesus said to him, feed my sheep.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou gird'st thyself and walked whither thou wouldst. But when you will be old, you will stretch forth your hands, another will dress you or gird you and carry you, whether into a place, I'm paraphrasing this, but carry you to a place where you don't have the strength to go. This he spoke, signifying by what death he should glorify God.

And when he had spoken this, he said unto him, follow me. The husband is sitting beside the bed of his wife. He's got the cough syrup in his hand.

He's reading the healing propensities of it. And he's very much like that church in Ephesus, very concerned about the right product, very concerned about getting up because of duty and doing the right thing. Very, very concerned about the appearances of love.

But Jesus says to this church, I've something against you because you've left your first love. Think therefore from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works or else I'll come to you quickly and remove your candlestick out of his place, except I'll repent. Think from where you have fallen.

You know, I often think about when I first came to Christ. I remember those days. I remember those days when winning the lost seemed to be as easy as breathing.

There was no program involved in it. I simply loved Jesus Christ with all my heart. I couldn't wait for opportunities to read the Word of God.

It was as natural to me to speak his name as it was to breathe. There was a season where people asked me, especially police officers, because I was a police officer then, what happened to you? What is the difference that I see in your life? Why do you always seem to be so calm? What is it that's coming? What is it that I see? Because police officers are quite observant and quite often I would be asked this question. You see, it wasn't a program.

I didn't open my mouth and say, well, you know, I've been testing and proving those that say they're apostles and I've found them to be liars. The answer wasn't because I've gone on a missions trip or I've been working in the house of God or I've learned not to give up and to keep on plugging away at this. The answer was simply, I love Jesus.

He's come into my heart. He's come into my life. He's transformed my mind.

He's broken the bonds of sin. He's given me hope for a future. He's teaching me how to be a husband and to be a father.

He's guiding my life. It was a simple answer. I love him and I loved him unashamedly.

There was nobody had to pull a program out of me and I didn't really base what I did on carrying any kind of a program in my pocket. It was in my heart. I loved him.

And people are attracted to first love. They're attracted to that relationship of first love. And Peter was exasperated and he says, Lord, you know all things.

You've asked me this twice. This is the third time now you've asked me this and you know that I love you. And the husband could say to his wife, sitting on the edge of that bed somewhere in between stage three and four of a failing marriage and say, wait a minute.

It's three in the morning. I'm sitting here and I'm ministering to you. You know that I love you.

Why would you even keep asking me that question? And Jesus answers it so succinctly in John 21. And he says, when you were young, you did what you wanted to do. You went where you wanted to go.

But as you're growing old, you're going to stretch forth your hands and you're going to be carried. And basically he's saying, Peter, hold me. Just embrace me, Peter, once again.

Do you remember, Peter, those early days around the table when I told you I was going to Jerusalem and I was going to be betrayed and I was going to be crucified? Remember that day when you said, I will go with you and I will die with you. And where you are, there I will be. You didn't do it out of duty.

You did it because you loved me, Peter. Now, Peter, I'm asking you to stretch out your hands and embrace me one more time. Embrace me in the way you did in those first years, in those first moments.

This was the controversy with the church of Ephesus. It had all degenerated into works and testings and provings and labors and not fainting. But it was a people who were losing that first love, that burning heart for God, where this relationship began in the first place.

And now it was just all about reading things and testing things and proving things and keeping the right and avoiding the fraudulent. But they had lost that heart. You see, this is what the bride is saying to her husband, I just want you to hold me again.

I just want you to embrace me. I just want to know that I'm not a laborer in your life, that I'm the love of your life. I want to know that I'm still as important to you today as I was that first day when we spoke those vows to one another.

And that first day when you were concerned about everything that concerned me and there was no journey too great, there was no price too deep to pay. Where I went, you went. Where I was, you were.

What I was doing, you wanted to be doing. I don't want you to read to me. I want you to hold me.

Would you simply stretch out your hands, Peter, and embrace me once again. He said in the book of Revelation again, he that overcomes, I will give to Edith the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. You know there are some men here, your marriage is not going well.

It's simply because you've lost your first love. If you will reach out and embrace your wife again, you'll find that she still wants to be given to you, to walk with you. God put it in her heart to be loved by you.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. You'll find a lot of healing will come into your home if you just simply reach out, stop talking, and start holding. To him that overcomes, I'll give to Edith the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Jesus was saying to this church, all that I have, all I want to give you, the full victory of the cross, if you will reach out and let me lead you, if you will embrace my will for your life, if you will walk with me where I go, no matter what the cost to you personally, I will unlock to you the full victory of Calvary and the full victory of that cross will be yours. It'll be yours to eat every day, it'll be yours to embrace, it'll be yours to understand, it'll be a strength to you, something that gives you life. Can you simply love me like you once did? Where you once said that no cost was too great, no journey too far, and you simply did it because you loved me.

Now what is the candlestick? In verse 5 he says, remember therefore from where you've fallen and repent and do the first works and I'll come to you quickly and remove the candlestick out of its place except you repent. The candlestick, really it's just simply the light of first love will be lost. It's that which makes Christ in us attractive to people who are outside of the kingdom of God.

It's that which is within us that makes our children want to follow God. The candlestick, it's that bright burning. Folks you've seen it, you ever seen in the restaurant where a young couple are eating together and assuming it's a legitimate relationship of course in our time, they're not even aware of the food on their plate.

They're staring into each other's eyes and the food is getting cold. Then you look at the same couple 25 years later, he's reading a paper, she's looking out the window and they're commenting on the potatoes, nice potatoes, yeah great potatoes, good peas, yeah good peas. There's nothing in that relationship that is attractive.

There's nothing that would cause you and I sitting there to say, wow I would love to be married someday and have a relationship like that. And when the church of Jesus Christ degenerates into just simply testing and proving and working and laboring and concentrating and not fainting, I'm telling you there's nothing attractive in that. There's nothing anybody out there is going to ask about.

There's nothing anybody out there wants in that because everybody out there is trying to make it through and laboring and trying not to faint and all we become is a testimony that's not much different than they are except we have the name Jesus attached to it. But oh that first love, oh that season in life when all you want to do is sing the praises of God, all you want to do is speak about his name, it's not a program, it's natural. God helped the bridegroom that needs a program to talk about his bride to be in the workplace.

Can I tell you about my bride? Wait I've got it here somewhere, there's a program here that describes her. I want to tell you about her. Oh no, just like the Song of Solomon, have you seen her? She is the fairest among 10,000.

Just one of her eyes has gripped my heart. That's first love. That's the danger that any successful church can fall into, that we degenerate into proving, testing, working, enduring, doing.

We lose our first love. That's the candlestick. And I don't know about you, but I want to finish this race the way I started.

I want my marriage to finish better than it began. I want my love for Jesus to increase. I don't want to travel this country or other places and have people look and say, wow is he ever theologically right on? Is he ever, could he ever rip apart the false prophets? Can he ever do this? Can he ever do that? Can he ever labor? Can he ever stand and not faint? I would rather an audience look and listen and say, does he ever love Jesus? Everything in his being, everything in his voice, everything in his eyes simply exudes a relationship that I would like to have.

And that's first love. Hallelujah. And Jesus said to this church, if you can overcome this declension, if you can get back, and I believe it's just as simple as asking, all that I have is yours.

Everything I am will belong to you. You don't have to die. I remember when I was a young Christian, I was so excited about the things of God.

And I remember an older gentleman telling me in the church one day, he says, no you'll calm down eventually. And I remember looking at him thinking, if it means I'm going to look like you, I'm not interested in going there. If that's what calming down looks like, I'm not going there.

By the grace of God, I'd rather stay where I am. I'd rather stay simple and in love with God. I'd rather love God and love people.

I'd rather do what I do out of a heart that's filled with compassion. My altar call is so simple this morning. Lord Jesus Christ, bring me back to my first love.

And I think today, the husbands here, you need to take your wife's hand and you need to come and meet me at this altar. I really believe that because you, sir, are the one who's called to lead your home and your family into this relationship. It's not your wife's obligation, it's yours.

The spiritual tone in your home will be set by you, sir, not by your wife. Although that will obviously help, but you are the one who bears the weight of this. I want to encourage men that are here.

And others, you don't necessarily have to be married to respond to this, but you started out so in love with Jesus Christ and somewhere down the line, it's just degenerating. And in your heart, you know it. It's becoming worse.

It's not what it used to be. But you can have that first love back by just simply reaching out and embracing Jesus again. It's really that simple.

Just reach out. He said, Peter, your hands, stretch them. And he was talking about the embracing of the will of God.

Reach out, Peter, and embrace me one more time. We'll walk together. And Peter did.

And thank God what a testimony his life has left us in our time. We're going to stand. We're going to worship maybe a little longer than usual because this message has been quite short this morning.

But it has had a depth in it. And I want to invite those who would like to just simply come back to your first love, whether you've walked with God for 50 years, 40, 30, 20, 10, whatever it is. And you just simply want to come back to that place where you loved Him with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength.

And you want that to be your testimony in this last hour of time. I'm going to ask you as we stand just to get out of your seat and come and meet me here at this altar. And we're going to worship for a time together.

Let's stand, please, if you will. I would just like to lead us in a prayer. One thing, I think this message spoken to me on a church level, on a personal level, but on a church level, it's so easy to become an Ephesus church and to do so much right at the expense of that losing what was so precious in the beginning.

And it seems like most churches and most people can go the way of right doctrine and right works and right programs. But it seems hard to be able to do that and maintain the first love. That's a work of the Spirit.

That's a trust issue. That's an honesty issue. And I know that the Lord is present here.

And He's present to heal. He's present to reveal Himself. He's willing that we be it all as a church.

Because when loving Jesus, we'll do the other better. We do it all when we love Him. And I think on the personal level, you know, in marriages, something even more beautiful about a first love that has been tested in the fire and gone through it all, and yet something beautiful is still alive.

And that's a work of the Spirit. That's an issue of trust. Ultimately, our marriages are mini churches.

And I know the Lord today wants to do something. It's a simple message, but heard, heard, it makes all the difference. Simple but sweet, just like Jesus.

So if we could pray together for this church, for all churches that the Lord is blessing. And then individually, I know the Lord will hear this prayer. And He will answer this prayer because He's good.

And He's worthy of all our love. Lord Jesus, I thank You for this word. I pray, O God, I thank You, Lord, that truly You can send Your word.

And Lord, we can become a discerning people, Lord. And we can see, Lord, the hour we live in. And we can see the fakes.

And we can see, Lord, what is not of Your Spirit. Lord, it was a word that says, repent because You've fallen from a place that I so cherish. And Lord, only You can bring us back to that place.

Lord, don't let us hide in the word, Lord, where we hide, read the word, and yet we don't obey. Lord, where we hide in the word, Lord, and yet because it just, Lord, it becomes form. Lord, don't let us hide in Your word, but be the living word in us, Lord Jesus.

Open our eyes and reveal to us, O God, who truly You are and what You will do. Lord, make this church and every church that loves You and preaches right doctrine. Lord, in this hour, only opening our heart to You.

And Lord, saying, teach us to trust You, Lord, to understand and love You, Lord. Let it be a love relationship that, Lord, our obedience will be swift, and our obedience, Lord, will be something that we don't call it obedience. We just call it love, wanting to please You.

Lord, You can do this in this hour because we're asking You to do it. This is of Your Spirit. Fill us with the Spirit, O God.

Make us a church that understands, Lord, that to love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, is which everything hangs. And I thank You, Lord. You renew this again in us.

We stand, Lord, as Your bride in Your church, Lord. And Lord, You are able to do this, and quicken, cause us to trust You, Lord. Thank You, Lord.

You will do this work in us, for we need You to do it. Thank You, Lord, that anything it hinders, anything, Lord, we've been replacing, Lord, we're losing our focus, Lord. We've loved something else, Lord, and we're giving our strength to it.

Thank You, Lord. You will come, Lord, and it's only You can do. You will take our hands and our, and everything we have wrapped around another thing, Lord, and You will, again, refocus us, Jesus.

Thank You. We hear You today, Lord. We return to our first love, Lord.

We return by faith. We return trusting. We thank You for what You're doing.

Lord, I pray for every couple, Lord, that, again, needs this issue of trust, where forgiveness can flow freely. That, Lord, that You will restore, O God, anything that the moth or the canker worm may have eaten. Lord,

where You, I pray, O God, where You would restore a first love, Lord, where there's a delight in each other.

There's a willingness to listen to each other. There's a willingness to please each other. Lord, we love first love, but when we find it, Lord, in the couples that have been tested by the fire, Lord, we understand that this is far more important because it's upon which all society rests.

That, Lord, these bonds will not be loosened or slackened, but, Lord, You will strengthen the marriages, Lord, and You will, the full weight of training children, of being the right example, Lord, of what it is to bear and love one another long. It does more, Lord, for this society and this nation than we know. So, Lord, I pray by Your Spirit, Lord, that Your love, Lord, would flow through marriages in a new and opened way.

That, Lord, they would truly forgive. They would truly, Lord, cherish one another. And, Lord, there's a glory to that.

And I thank You. That's exactly what You will do today. You will heal.

You will trust. We thank You for what You're doing in our midst, Jesus. This is evidence You love us.

And we can say today, we love You. And we thank You for it. And we praise You for it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Praise God. I was speaking at a ministers conference in another country, and I said to the ministers, I'd like to teach you a song after one of the sessions.

And I had it put up on the screen, and I began to sing it, only to realize that all the ministers in the assembly were singing it along with me. And they told me later, we're singing this song in our churches. And, you know, it's amazing how far a love song can go.

It was a song that I wrote many, many years ago. I was in my 20s. I was sitting in my kitchen one day at home in the farmhouse, and I had my guitar.

And I was playing with the tuning, and I tuned it to Ian. I remember just sitting down, and I started to write, and just to sing from my heart. And it was such an amazing thing to be in another country, hearing, like, four or five hundred pastors singing this song, knowing that it's in their churches.

You know, we can have right theology, and we should, but a love song goes a lot farther. Praise God. Let me, it goes like this.

I love you, love you, love you, Jesus. And I praise your name. You are the Alpha and Omega.

You're the first, the last, the same. I love you. I love you, love you, love you, Jesus.

And I praise your holy name. You are the Alpha and Omega. You're the first, the last, the same.

You left them hanging on a tree. You died for sinners just like me. I raise my voice up with a cry.

It's God and it drives my mind. I praise your holy name. You left them hanging on a tree.

My God, my God. You left them sinners just like me. I raise my voice up with a cry.

It's God and it drives my mind. I'm a sinner just like me. I raise my voice up with a cry.

It's God and it drives my mind. Lord, I do pray for Times Square Church. This be our testimony that everything that comes from this church would be a love song to you.

Every preached message, every saint of God that leaves the doors of this church and goes into the streets of this city. Every place we go, we would just be a sweet love song of the one who's the dearest to our heart. God Almighty, don't let this be taken away from us.

Don't let us forfeit it. We reach out, Lord, as you told Peter, and we embrace you. We embrace your will and your ways.

We embrace whatever you have for us in the future. And oh God, more than this, we embrace the love that you have for us. And Father, we thank you for it.

God Almighty, we give you praise. We give you glory in the mighty and holy name of Jesus. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah.

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