

Do You Remember When?

by Derek Melton

The sermon emphasizes the authority and power of Christ over his church, and his intimate engagement with his people, despite persecution and hardship.

Duration: 1:14:20

Scripture: Revelation 2:1, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "First Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares his personal experience of being deeply moved by a specific portion of biblical text. He emphasizes the importance of paying attention to these moments as they can be defining and transformative. The sermon addresses the issue of waning devotion to Christ and a lack of enthusiasm for attending church and studying God's word. The preacher urges the congregation to recognize their fallen state and calls for repentance, emphasizing the need to turn back to God and return to the fervent devotion they once had.

Transcript

This sermon is called, Do You Remember When? You know, there are times when my heart becomes deeply burdened with a portion of biblical text that's transcendent to that which would be called ordinary or normal. There's times when my thoughts are so permeated with a portion of scripture that I find it very difficult to focus upon any other subject or upon any other biblical text. And these seasons are not the norm for me.

My wife probably knows me better than anyone in this room and then my children. These seasons aren't the norm. And I'm going to refrain from super-spiritualizing these seasons, but at the same time I'm not going to discount them.

There are certain influences of the Holy Spirit of God that move upon the hearts of His people. And I'm certain that these impressions that God's been moving upon me with this particular text are from Him. I ascribe these certain seasons to the Holy Spirit because it's consistent with the scriptural revelation of the operation of the Holy Spirit's working.

In John chapter 16, verse 14, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit will glorify Christ and that He will take of Christ and disclose it. He'll communicate it to you. And so whenever my heart has been saturated, my mind, my dreams have been centered around this portion of biblical text and at work at the police

department trying to enter in data into the computer, I'm being bombarded with thoughts about this particular portion of text, these seven verses that we're going to walk through this morning.

Something's going on. God's moving in my heart. And I will say there's not been in many, many years such a profound shaking of my soul as that has been taking place in the last month, month and a half regarding these seven verses.

Throughout the years I've learned to pay attention when my heart is being deeply and richly moved upon regarding a certain truth or a certain portion of text. These are very important moments. These are defining moments, really.

So today's sermon is the outworking of an occasion such as this. This passage is directed to my own heart. This exposition of scripture is directed to my own heart.

Yesterday I had the blessedness of having the whole mall to myself with Stacey gone and Lindy and Rachel and Hallie all went to a wedding and I was left to be at home to be alone with God. For God to deal with my heart and to work through this text to be able to share with you. And not only is this directed to me, but it's also directed likewise to all of our hearts in this particular church, this particular body of believers.

And so having disclosed this burden, I want to take some moments and open the text and I'm asking that you will track with me. I'm asking that you will listen to me intently. I'm asking that you will discern with me wisely.

Do not make the fatal mistake of flippantly, tritely receiving this sermon. Turn with me in your Bible to Revelation chapter 2. Today's sermon is, Do You Remember When? And once you're in Revelation chapter 2, if you'll stand with me to read the holy word of God. In verse 1 the Bible says, To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.

The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand. The one who walks among the seven golden lampstands says this. I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance that you cannot tolerate evil men.

You put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not. And you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake and have not grown weary.

But I have this against you. That you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen and repent.

And do the deeds you did at first or else I am coming to you. And will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent. Yet this you do have.

That you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will grant to eat the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

Lord help me to open up these texts in a way that honors you. Help us to receive these texts in a way that honors you. So we might live them out Father and bring glory to your name.

In Jesus name. Amen. You can be seated please.

The book of Revelation is the culmination of all of the books of the Bible. Revelation brings to conclusion all the prophecies that are in the Bible. It puts into context the end time events that are for God's purpose, that are for God's creation.

The author of the Revelation is none other than John the Beloved. This is the same John, the same author of the Gospel of John. Of which we are attending on Sunday mornings as we are walking verse by verse through that wonderful Gospel.

There are some arguments about the authorship of Revelation. About who authored Revelation? Because there are those dissenters out there that just flat do not agree that John wrote this book. There are so many infallible proves that their arguments hold no water whatsoever.

Justin Martyr from the first century, one of the first great theologians after the apostolic times, directly affirms John is the author of the Revelation. Also, Erranius who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Beloved, said this, John wrote the book of Revelation. And of course the best proof of all is the Bible itself.

The Bible itself. In Revelation 1.1, and in Revelation 1.4, and in Revelation 1.9, and in Revelation 22.8, it tells us that John the Beloved penned the Revelation. Having said that, you must understand that all Scripture is inspired by God.

All Scripture is inerrant, even the disclaimer of its authorship. John wrote the book. Revelation was given as a direct command.

I'm just going through some stuff first before we get into the meat of this. And this is going to build as we go along. But this is important that you understand this.

That Revelation was given to the apostle John as a direct command from God. And that's in Revelation 1.10-23. It was given to John in very difficult times in Christendom. The Christians were under stark persecution.

Persecution was aggressively rampant. Martyrdom was common. And in fact in chapter 2, verse 13, it identifies a specific martyr whose name was Antipas.

Who was a faithful witness of Jesus Christ. But he was killed among them where Satan dwells. So amidst all the persecutions that we find here, there were also problems in the church.

So not only was there persecutions from without, there was indwelling problems from within the churches of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Some of these troubles were horrible troubles. The Revelation was written around 96 A.D. from Patmos.

Patmos was a penal colony. A place where they sent vile criminals, lepers, the rejects of society. Those who were banished from the ordinary occurrences of society.

And this is a place that the apostle John was banished because of the sake of the gospel of Christ that he preached. He was banished to Patmos. Patmos was a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea.

It was about 30 miles from Ephesus. It was about 6 to 8 miles long and it was about a mile wide. And the purpose of it is to give the final truth about Jesus Christ.

It's an unveiling of the person of Christ. It's an unveiling of the power of Christ. And it's an unveiling of the purpose of Christ.

We see this all in the first verse of the Revelation. Revelation shows to us the final triumph and the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of Christ. It shows us a new perspective on history from God's angle and then it incites you and I as Christians to holy living.

It also shows us that God has in fact a plan to deal with the problem of sin. And we see it. God puts away the problem of evil forever.

This is also a book of future events. It's an eschatological book. The theme of the book is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This book is Jesus Christ centered. It's the capstone of all of Scripture. You all know what a capstone is? Have you ever laid bricks? The capstone is the one that completes the edifice.

But Revelation is the capstone of all of Scripture. It is the only prophetic book of the New Testament. It bears a lot of similar features to the book of Daniel and the Old Testament.

It's the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those who read it. That's in Revelation 1-3. It has 22 chapters, 404 verses, 12,000 words, 285 verses that contain Old Testament type languages.

There are 70 references in this book to angels. And there are no direct quotes, not even one, from the Old Testament. The book itself is divided into three categories.

They are this. There are things that you have seen. This is chapter 1. There are things which are.

That's chapters 2 and 3. And then there are the things which shall be. That is chapters 4-22. But our focus today is upon those things which are.

Those things which are. And our text deals with a particular church that was close to Patmos geographically, 30 miles of which were separating them. Ephesus was a biblical church.

They were doctrinally sound, ecclesiastically sound. And the outline of the sermon today that you're going to hear has seven points, and each one of them has a multitude of importance affiliated with them. I cannot overestimate the importance of this sermon to this church, to each member of this church.

I'm sad that there are people missing today. They need to hear this sermon equally as bad. Once again, I'm going to go back and say that this has captured and conquered my heart.

It's asserted its dominance. It's asserted dominance over me, first and foremost, as an elder of this particular assembly. And I'm begging of you to listen to every word that's going to be spoken in this message, because everything from this day forward hangs in the balance of this message that the Lord speaks to this church.

The first thing we see is the angel being addressed, the angel. Look with me at verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus' right, the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this. Chapter 2 of Revelation begins the messages of Jesus Christ to seven churches in Asia Minor.

There were more churches in Asia Minor, but these are designated churches. These are specific churches that are mentioned by our Lord that model the rest of them. Does that make sense? In other words, these seven churches that are mentioned by our Lord in chapters 2 and 3 are a representation of the types of churches that exist.

These churches are representative of all churches, both in the day of John and at any time given in the history of our Lord's church, both then and now and in times that are to come. And just as the letters were written to the church of Corinth, or not just for Corinth, but they're for all churches, both whether past, present, or future, these letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor are written in this same similitude. The conditions that are addressed in these churches by our Lord and sovereign Savior are characteristic of the conditions that are in churches throughout all of history and even now.

This letter is addressed to the angel, the angelos, the messenger of the church. This is the overseer, the overseer of the local assembly, the local body of believers, the local church. Our Lord is addressing the pastor.

He's not bypassing the order that He Himself has established whenever He has set some over the church. The divine pecking order, the divine chain of command, the Lord. God places men into leadership positions in His church, and then He holds them accountable.

And if you'll notice in this verse, and in verse 1, He makes a mention of seven stars, which are the angels, and that they're held in the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you'll look in the last verse of chapter 1, we see an identification of these stars as the very angelos, the angels of the seven churches. These are the elder pastors.

These are the elder teachers. These are the leadership. This position, being held in the right hand of Christ, it denotes the authority of Christ over them.

The right hand is the right hand of authority. This is to say that the Lord Himself has chosen these men, these angelos, He's chosen them to shepherd His flock. They belong to Christ.

And in fact, they are secure in Christ. It doesn't mean that they're not prone to human error, because they are. It doesn't mean that they're not prone to sinful possibilities, because they are.

But it does mean that the Lord's called them. And it does mean that the Lord has triumphed over them. And it does mean that He is sovereign regarding them and their office.

And they're secure. He holds these stars in His own right hand. Christ.

Authority. Power. Omnipotence.

The word hold here in this context comes from the Greek word kratos. And it means to prevail. And it means to be strong.

It means to be mighty. It means to prevail. It means to possess power.

And of course we know this isn't referring to the angelos, but to the might of the one that holds them in His own right hand. These are soldiers underneath His command. The command of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

They're His messengers. They're His spokesmen. He holds them in His right hand.

He holds them secure. They are protected, but they're also responsible. They're responsible.

He holds His messengers accountable. The right hand is indicative of the authority of God. There's also a retributive side here of this authority.

He holds them in His hand, but He holds them under His command. To speak what He speaks. To share His heart and to carry His heart.

To not operate upon their own whims and by their own desires, but to only operate by the will of the one that holds them. He's the commander in chief. He's the commander in chief of His church.

And of the leadership that He's set over His church. And in this letter, our Lord speaks to the angelos of the church in Ephesus. He doesn't circumvent that authority that He's established.

He's called them. He holds them in His right hand. He addresses the church through His messenger.

The next thing I want you to see is the assembly. First we saw the angel. Next we see the assembly.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write. Write. To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write.

So we see the assembly is the Ephesian church. This is a particular body of believers. You've got to understand something about Ephesus.

Ephesus was a wicked city. And this goes along with what Pastor Jason has been preaching. It was a major commercial metropolis of all of Asia Minor.

It was located on a seaport. It was a massive center for trade. A massive center for travel.

For culture, for religion, for business. It was the seat of the Roman provincial governor. It was located right there in Ephesus.

The population of Ephesus was around 225,000 citizens. And one of the amazing things, one of the seven wonders of the world was there. The great temple of Artemis.

One of the great wonders of the world. Acts 19, 24, 27, 28, 34, and 35 identify this. The temple of Artemis was 425 feet long and 220 feet wide.

It had 120 columns within it, 60 feet high, which were gold covered. Artemis was a deity, a false deity, that had been raised up. It was a squat, black, man-breasted image.

It was a vile, heathen, wicked, perverse thing that was worshipped. And the Romanization of Artemis was called the Goddess Diana. It was a vile, heathen religion.

Ephesus was the epicenter of this vile, heathen religion. It was a wicked, perverse place. But God raised up a church right at the very threshold of hell by the Apostle Paul.

On his third missionary journey in the 19th chapter of Acts, we see the establishment of this church in Ephesus. We know that God, by His grace, established the church and placed a young man by the name of Timothy over the church as an overseer and an elder. Also, we see that John was there at Ephesus,

both before his banishment and exile to Patmos, and after Patmos, that John was part of Ephesus and the church of Ephesus.

Paul came to Ephesus around 53 AD, and he stayed there longer than in any other city that he went to. In fact, his ministry turned that city completely upside down. The silversmiths of the city were making a mint.

It was a very lucrative business making shrines of this deity called Artemis. And they would sell them. And the influence of this powerful church of Ephesus caused a fatal decline in their trade, and it incited a riot.

This is recorded in the 19th chapter of Acts. The church of Ephesus was about 40 years old whenever John wrote this letter to them. But in fact, the book of Ephesus, the epistle, the letter to Ephesus that was penned by the apostle Paul was written about 15 years after Paul established, by the grace and calling of God, that particular body of believers.

But John is writing from Patmos to Ephesus about 40 years after the birth of that church. So we see Ephesus. The next thing I want you to see, that there is authority that is given here.

It says also that the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who is walking among the seven golden lampstands, says this, authority, the authority of a supreme Christ, a sovereign over his church. The Lord Jesus here is making his authority known to the members of Ephesus and then the members of every church from there on out. His message is backed up by his deity.

And in fact, this statement, this message, it falls on the heels of Christ's revelation of himself that is given in a vision to John the Beloved in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, where we see in verse 13 through 17, in the middle of the lampstands, I saw one, listen to this, like the Son of Man, clothed in a robe, reaching to his feet, girded across his chest with a golden sash. His head and his hair were white like wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.

His feet were like burnished bronze when they had been made to glow in a furnace. His voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars.

And out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all of its strength. And whenever I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man.

And this is the one that holds the seven stars. But this is the one that is speaking to Ephesus in divine authority. Authority.

This is none other than the monarch of the universe. This is the sovereign sage of all times. When he announces that he's walking among the seven golden lampstands, he is announcing that he is sovereign over his church.

He's demonstrating his lordship. He's announcing his omniscience. He knows them intimately.

He knows their weaknesses. They're known by Christ. Their strengths are known by Christ.

He's walking among them. Not only is he omniscient, meaning all-knowing. He's also lovingly walking with them amidst the plight and their suffering.

Remember, this is a time of unparalleled and unprecedented affliction. Persecution. Martyrdom.

Death. Blood shed by the saints. This shows us, church, listen to me, that our sovereign is not some remote and distant figure who rules from afar and separated from intimacy.

No! Never! He walks among the seven golden lampstands. His church is that which he has purchased with his own blood. He's intimately engaged, intimately aware, intimately knowing of them in every facet about them, caring for them, nurturing them as a mother does a child.

In the midst of their persecution, he's walking with them among the seven golden lampstands. In the midst of their hardship, he's walking with them. Underneath the threat of martyrdom, he's walking amongst them.

He sees their tears and he's comforting them. He sees their afflictions and he shares them with them. He's walking among them, omnipotent but tender, sovereign but rich in sympathy.

We see his authority. We see the angel. We see the assembly.

We see the authority. Now we turn in verse 2 to the accolade. The accolade.

For those of you kids that don't know what that means, the attaboy. I know your deeds. Look at verse 2 with me.

I know your deeds, your toil, your perseverance. But you cannot tolerate evil men. You've put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not.

You found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake and you've not grown weary. Here our Lord is giving kudos to his church.

He's giving them a pat on the back regarding the virtues that they exemplify in his name. Ephesus wasn't an off-track church. In fact, Ephesus would eclipse modern churches in their fortitude, in their faithfulness.

There's some key elements that our Lord identifies in his accolade or in his applause. First of all, the Lord mentions here that he knows their deeds, their toil, and their perseverance. And as mentioned previously, he's walking among the lampstands.

He's walking among the churches. He knows them intimately. In fact, from the very foundation of the earth, he's known them.

They're foreknown by God. They're his people. There's not one drop, there's not one morsel of sweat that forms on their brow apart from his intimate knowledge.

He knows their deeds. He knows their toil. Other translations term it this way.

He knows their works and their labor. I believe that's what your translation would say, Chris. The Greek meaning for the word deeds means to work to the point of exhaustion.

Church, bear with me. This is to say that the believers that comprised the church of Ephesus were very relentless in their labors for the kingdom of God. They were not couch potatoes.

They were vigilant. They were laboring to the point of exhaustion, physical collapse. This toil, this kapos, k-o-p-o-s, it stresses the depth and the degree of their labor for the Lord.

Paul uses this very same word when addressing the churches of Colossae in Colossians 1, 29 through 2, 1. He says, for this purpose also I labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had on your behalf for those who are at Laodicea and for all those who have not personally seen my face. Struggle, labor, hardship to the point of exhaustion.

Not only were they laboring to the point of absolute weariness and exhaustion, they were persevering in it. They were continuing, they were enduring, even amidst the heavy load, they were pressing on in the face of terrible persecution, unprecedented hardship. They were abiding.

They were continuing. They were relentless in their labor. They were flawless in their commitment.

This is what James meant in James 1, 2 through 4, when the apostle James had counted all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Let your steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

And then we see the Lord saying this to Ephesus, you cannot tolerate evil men. Ephesus was doctrinally sound. They were biblically orthodox.

Not only were they orthodox, but they were passionate regarding the place of orthodoxy in the Lord's church. Very passionate. And the Lord praised them for it.

He praised them for their commitment to scriptural truth. Listen, church, we're living in a time that's unprecedented, really, where we're striving for unity in every way, except in the way that matters. Scriptural unity.

Doctrine has become a word that's been sealed in the theological vaults of yesteryear. And I want you to note that that mindset's not Christ's. Accolades are given for their doctrinal soundness.

You cannot tolerate evil men, and this is not talking about those that are just living perversely. This is talking about the evils of heterodoxy. Of false doctrine.

The intolerance of evil men was doctrinal here. This statement that's given is addressing the evils of false doctrine, and also the men that propagate it and that spread it. The Ephesian church held doctrinal truth to a high bar.

They had a high view of scripture. Sola scriptura was their mantra. Scripture alone.

Then we find in chapter 2, in verse 6, when the Lord is addressing the church's, the Ephesian church hated the Nicolaites, what we find is, is that whenever the Nicolaites came in with their heresies, their gnostic antinomianism, they confronted them and refuted them biblically. I have this in my notes, but those of you that don't know what the Nicolaitan group was, it was a subgroup calling itself by the name of orthodoxy that were not orthodox. In Acts chapter 6 there was a deacon appointed, his name was Nicholas.

Nicholas went aloof. He went astray. He began to embrace, not only to embrace, but to also teach and to purport the doctrines of antinomianism, a very wicked and evil gnostic doctrine, and tried to bring the doctrine into the church of Ephesus, but they wouldn't have it.

The people used the word of God to refute them. They had such a high view of scripture, they knew their Bibles, they were committed to scriptural truth, they were committed to the words of God, and whenever those liars, those false prophets, those false teachers came in from without, even in the name of the Lord, they refuted them with the Bible and rejected them, and for this our Lord gave them kudos, accolades. He praised them for it.

It says, you put the test here, those who call themselves apostles, and they're not. He found them to be false. These Ephesians put them in their claims, the self claim to be an apostle, they put it to the scrutiny of scripture.

They found them to be liars. They remembered the words of these false apostles that would come in a previous mention by the apostle Paul to the particular church at Ephesus, the church that he had raised up. In Acts 20, 28-31, Acts 20, 28-31, Paul's talking to the church at Ephesus, and he says this, Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, savage wolves, Nicolaitans, Antinomians, Gnostics will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among yourselves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert.

And the Ephesians remembered his words, and they acted on his words, and they found them to be false. There were three major tests that were given to see whether or not there was validity as to whether or not they were true spokesmen for God. Listen to me.

The first of this is that their message and their doctrinal belief had to be right. 1 John 4, 1 and 2 declares that. Secondly, the manner of life.

The manner of life. That is in 1 John 3, 10, and 4, 8. And then lastly, the audience to whom they do they appeal. 1 John 4, 5, and 6. And this just goes to show that a false prophet will have a message for a false convert.

And not the true church of Christ, because Christ's people know his voice. Christ's people know the anointing abides on the inside of them, and they need not any man to teach them. They know his voice.

They know truth from error. They know heresy from scriptural truth. These phonies were unmasked as the very fakes that they were.

And Jesus gives them applause. He gives them accolades. Don't think for a moment that our Lord is slack about false doctrines and those that propagate them, those who teach them.

No, he's walking among the seven candlesticks, the lampstands, in vigilance. And he cares, and he cares immensely. Jesus says this, and you have persevered.

Church, do you see the depths of his praise? His accolades? You've endured for my name's sake, he says. These Christians were under attack from the Roman Empire. These Christians were under attack from pagan religions that were blossoming and being propagated in Ephesus.

The city streets were stained with the martyr's blood. It was not a safe time in human history to be a Christian. The ruins of Ephesus stand today, looming over time, with the great coliseums to which many

Christians died.

Being a Christian in Ephesus wasn't easy. Standing for biblical truth would cost you your life. These Christians were pressed by forces from every side, from every front.

But they persevered. They endured. These were men and women that were purposed to live for the glory of God.

You have endured for my name's sake. For the glory of God. Enduring hardship as soldiers of Christ, suffering, arming themselves with this kind of a mind, like Christ, suffering for the Lord.

And they were patient amidst suffering. They were enduring hardship of good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was their captain.

And the captain was commending the soldiers. You've endured, you've persevered, you've suffered for my name's sake. And then he says that you've not grown weary.

They just keep on. Year after year of hardship hadn't squelched the fervency of their labor and the endurance that they bore as Christians of the church of Ephesus. Although their labors were intense, the threats were real.

The blood of martyrdom imminent. They continued on. They labored without relenting.

They preached. They witnessed. They taught.

They studied. They upheld. They tore down.

They built up. And they did such with tireless vigilance. Tireless vigilance.

And in many ways, Ephesus casts so much light as what a church should be. Listen to me. We sit in the very shadows of Ephesus.

We sit in the shadows of Ephesus. Listen. The Lord commends them for their gallantry.

He commends them for their vigilance. And I want you to understand that divine accolades are not handed out by our Lord cheaply. They're not handed out cheaply.

Ephesus wore the ensigns of nobility and they were placed on their collars by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He came down and placed the rank on their shoulders, committed, enduring hardship, doctrinally sound, biblically acute, biblically orthodox. This church was not a second-rate church.

It was a labor-intense, doctrinally sound, robustly engaged group of believers. And for this Christ commends them, I know you. I know your works.

I know your deeds. I know your toil. I know your perseverance.

I'm walking among the seven lampstands. You have the angel. You have the assembly.

You have the accolades. And now we see an accusation in verse 4. But I have this against you. You've left your first love.

Accusation. Christ's accolades are followed by His accusations. He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, seeing not only their strengths but also seeing their weaknesses.

And amidst all of their tremendous strengths and emphasis we find a flaw, a fatal flaw. Somewhere along the way, somewhere amidst all of the fervency and the zeal of their labors, somewhere amidst the zeal of their biblical theology, they lost their fervent love for the person of Jesus Christ. And I want you to notice that the text doesn't say that they lost their first love.

They left it. This means they neglected their personal devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. Their intimacy with Christ was in jeopardy.

They compromised their passion and fervor for the Savior Himself. They didn't love Jesus the way that they did in the beginning. Church, are you listening? Just as Israel's tender devotion to Jehovah mentioned in Jeremiah 2.2, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, you following after me in the wilderness through a land not sown.

Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of His harvest. And our Lord too remembers the devotion of Ephesus' youth. The love of their betrothals, their following heart after Christ, but now it's a distant memory.

And the Greek language when it makes the statement, you have left, you see those three words? You have left is emphatic. The strongest sense of human language that can be asserted is being asserted here. You have left your first love.

They didn't just take their eyes off the Lord momentarily. They lost fellowship with Him altogether. After 40 years of being established as a church, although holding to a strong biblical doctrine, Ephesus didn't love the Lord the way they did in the earlier years.

The devotion of their youth was not only waxing weak, it was in danger of going out altogether. What does it mean, first love? How do we define it? What is it? Listen to me. It's the love that we had for our Savior when we first became Christians.

This is the burning love that we felt whenever we firstly discovered that our sins were forgiven and that we had in fact become children of God, adopted into the family, the household of faith, that we were elected and that we stood before God, innocent before God through the substitutionary, vicarious work of Jesus Christ. This is that ferocious love, that jealous love, that passionate love that we had for Christ when we first knew Him savingly. Listen to me.

Ephesus' problem was not orthodoxy. It was orthoproxy. You all are looking at me saying, what in the world is orthoproxy? Listen to me.

I'm going to explain it to you. Orthoproxy is the belief that right actions are as important as religious faith or heart motive. Let me say that once again.

Orthoproxy is the belief that right actions are as important as religious faith or heart motive. In other words, orthoproxy is more concerned about the mechanics or the workings of the religion rather than the loving creator around which the religion is centered. Let me put it this way.

Orthoproxy is more like Martha, all busy, working for Jesus, while orthodoxy is more like Mary that is sitting at the feet of Jesus in intimate communion. Does that make sense? Ephesus had become more like

Martha and less like Mary. Ephesus had chosen the lesser and they had forsaken the greater.

They're working well, but their love was in danger of going out altogether. Let me ask you this question. Is this you? Is this you? Are you going through the motions? Working relentlessly? Ferociously defending the faith, but it's all just mechanical because this is exactly what Ephesus was doing.

And I would almost dare say this that I would say that most of us sitting in this building are just as if not more than guilty than Ephesus was. How can we diagnose this fatalistic error if it's in us? There's questions. Let me ask you some.

Are we as zealous for Christ, the person of Christ, as we are for the work of Christ that we're doing for Christ? Are our motives behind the work based upon abiding in a deep love for Christ? Let's look at it from this direction. Are we as committed to communing with Christ in prayer, are we as committed to Christ in the study of Scripture as we used to be? Are we laboring with Thunderbird cadets, with the children, the children's ministry, and the nursery, cleaning this building, the classes that we teach, the studies that we do with just a great devotion to the work alone while the devotion to Christ is ever waning or waxing weak? We had an accusation. And from an accusation, we had an accolade, an accusation, now we have an admonition that's going to give us some instruction.

Look at verse 5. Therefore remember Therefore remember And this is where it gets real hard. Remember from where you've fallen. Repent and do the deeds you did at first or else I'm coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent.

Therefore remember. Church, open your ears and listen to the Spirit of God. Do you remember whenever you once joyfully prayed into the night? You enjoyed sweet fellowship with Jesus? Do you remember that? Do you remember when it was the very delight of your soul to come to church? To hear God's sweet word preached? To be with God's blood-bought people? To joyfully sing songs, praise, and hymns of worship? Do you remember that? But now it's just all mechanical.

Your love has grown cold. Your faithfulness is cold. But your love is cold.

You're coming to church without any joy. You sing the same songs that you used to sing with such valiant passion. But now it's nothing more than hollow rhetoric that's echoing out of your mouth.

Your heart is cold and your words have become empty. Do you remember how it used to feel to worship God in spirit and in truth? Do you remember? Do you? Do you remember how much joy you used to feel when you were teaching children, when you were working in the nursery, even when you were scrubbing the toilet with someone's bodily remains on it? But now it's just a burden you're serving out of guilt. The joy is long since gone.

Do you remember when you used to work all night on the night shift and you would set up attentively in church and you'd hold on to every word that was spoken in the sermon and you yearned to know Christ better? But now it's just easier to sleep in because your love's grown cold. Do you remember a time when coming to church to worship Jesus Christ was so valuable to you? Hearing God's word expanded was so necessary to you that you would have walked five miles in the snow just to be with the saints of God. But now the sky has turned cloudy.

It's enough excuse to justify your lack of desire so you just stay at home. Do you remember when it wasn't this way with you? Do you remember the fervent, hot love that used to carry you out to the streets to

witness Jesus Christ to other people? You would have joyfully been arrested so that you could have went to the county jail to witness to inmates that didn't know about Christ. Do you remember those days when the Lord calls you to remember? Remember.

Remember, child of God, as painful as it might be. Remember the devotion of your youth. Remember your first love.

Remember. Do you remember when now the thought of witnessing is just simple drudgery? And if there's any efforts made, it's made on the account of guilt. It's made on the account of just mere obligation.

The desire is long since gone. The fire has waned. It's gone out.

And the smoldering embers are soon to be extinguished. Remember! Please! Remember! Do you remember the nights that you spent with your Bible open in your lap? Remember the joy of the Lord that flooded your soul as Jesus spoke to you through the Scriptures? Do you remember the clock used to pass midnight and then it would go to one o'clock and then it would ebb to two a.m. in the morning and your knees were still bent and your heart was still yearning to know Christ. And the very thought of losing sleep because you had to get up early and go to work it didn't hinder you one bit.

Do you remember? Do you remember that old Bible? That old Bible's rarely cracked with the exception of coming to church under obligation. The simple yawn in between. The days of it speaking to you are over.

Now it just seems that the Bible's nothing other than a confusing conglomeration of synthetic words that are better suited for someone else rather than you. It just lost its luster to you. Do you remember when it wasn't so with you? Do you remember when it just wasn't so? Do you remember when your heart begged the pastor to not cease from his servant even after an hour or more? Do you remember that? Do you remember whenever your notebooks were brimful of biblical notes that you had taken down from the sermon to help you remember all of the principles of the truth of Scripture that you wanted to learn and to apply to your life? That very same book now is empty and closed.

It's never opened. Now that same sermon is just too long. It's become boring to you.

That once acclaimed preacher is now just a dripping faucet. He's become nothing other than a dripping faucet that is sounding tones out that are none other than an irritant to your soul. Do you remember? Do you remember when the temptations of Satan used to be grievous to your soul? Do you remember? Do you remember whenever your heart used to wage war against them, everyone? Those little lusts that were enemies instead of friends, and you audaciously resisted them with bitter tears, but it's not so now.

Those little lusts that you used to despise are now coddled and loved more and more while Christ becomes a distant memory to you. What you once fought against with vigilance, you now surrender to without resistance. Do you remember? Do you remember? What about your spouse? Your spouse, married people, that you used to esteem so dearly as belonging to Christ? Do you remember the times with the marriage partner that God had given you, that you loved them so much and you cherished them? But now it's just become nothing other than a legal obligation just simply to appease it.

You go home from work and you do nothing but pronounce demands on your spouse. You give no thought to their feelings whatsoever. All you just care about is yourself.

Do you remember whenever it wasn't so in the marriage? Do you remember being anxious just to want to be with them? Spend time with them, to be near them, to talk to them? But now it's just quiet. It's quiet. Do you remember when it wasn't this way? Do you? The Lord calls you to Him.

Do you remember when it was a high priority to train your children in the ways of Christ? Do you remember whenever you used to share diligently the word of the Lord with your kids every night? You brought them to Sunday school every week. You prayed for their teacher. You fasted for their souls to be saved.

Do you remember this? Now with the blank stare on your face and another football game on the television, another hunting show, another soap opera, another love novel, a glazed look in a nun's heart. Do you remember? Do you remember in the slightest conversation that lent itself to complaining about the Lord's church or its leadership and cited holy anger in you? Do you remember whenever you used to hear the evil tone of such slanderous sentiments against those stars that are held in the right hand of the Lord Christ? Do you remember those feelings but now you chime in in agreement? The preacher's sermons are too long. They're too wordy.

They're too theological. They're too heavenly to be any earthly good. And you look at that star in Christ's right hand with scorn and with dissidence while Christ kisses His star.

You spit upon them and splatter the face of Christ with your spit on them. Do you remember? Do you remember whenever you used to hear gossip and it would drive you to your knees for the person that was slandering another Christian? Your heart broke and you took that burden to the Lord in fervent prayer. Now you just join in and you spread the gossip.

You post things on Facebook that are indecent for Christians to post and you disguise it with biblical terms. You disguise your sin under the guise of Christian verbiage. It's nothing other than sanctified gossip.

Do you remember when it wasn't this way with you? Do you remember when serving in the local church was the highlight of your week? The classes you taught, the carpets you swept, the services you gave, the labors you joyfully rendered? Do you remember the sweet sense of praising God Himself with service and sacrifice? Do you remember? Now it's just a cold mechanical work. It's nothing other than a thorn in your side. It's a stench in God's nostrils.

Do you remember whenever you labored without grumbling? Do you remember the times that there was delight in your service? Do you remember this? Do you? Do you? Has your heart grown cold towards Christ? Has your devotion to Christ been laid down while your labor for Christ continues forward? Christ has this against you that you've lost your first love. Remember when it wasn't this way. Do you remember when your heart used to beat to His rhythm? Do you remember when your devotion to Christ used to fuel your labors for Christ? But now look at it.

Now look at it. The devotion is dimmed. The heat has dissipated into lukewarmness.

You're just going through the motions while your heart is just displaced and it's fixed upon yourself. Remember, beloved, from where you have fallen, let me ask you, is this sermon nothing other than a pesky nuisance to you? It used to not be so with you. It used to not be so with you.

Christ remembers the love of your youth. He remembers how you used to love Him. Therefore, repent.

It's a divine command that He gives to us. Repent. There must be a change in your mind that is so deeply seeded that your affections are turned back.

Turn back to Christ. Turn back to Him. Do it today.

Cry out for God to renew your heart, to renew your affections, to enliven your desires. David cried out for God to restore unto him the joy of His salvation. His heart had fallen into a sinful trap, a snare, a slump.

We know the story. The joy of His salvation was in the morgue. David prayed with God to raise it up again.

But will you? Yes, I'm talking to you. Will you? But listen, repentance is God's command and it's your only hope. There's got to be a change in your heart, your mind.

We cannot continue in this blasphemous frame of mind any longer. God will not permit it. You're His possession.

He'll not permit us to treat Him so coldly. He'll not allow us to continue so foolishly. He commands it.

Repent! You might say this, I don't know how to repent. I have lost, Pastor, I have lost my way so profoundly. I can't find my way back.

Let me ask you a question. Do you see your condition? Do you see from where you have fallen? And if you do, repentance is very nigh to you, very close. Turn from this condition, church.

Listen to me. I'm giving you some solid biblical instruction. Turn from this condition by calling out to God in your weakness for God to create in you a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within you.

And as God gives grace, and He always does, turn to Him. But it doesn't end there because repentance demands more. Do the deeds you did at first.

Are we hearing these words? Don't fill your mind with foolish vanities while the sword of the Spirit is being wielded. Don't allow the sleep because of the foolish lack of wisdom to stay up into the wee hours of Saturday night to rob you of an inheritance Christ has provided for you. Time and eternity hangs in the balance, don't you see? Do the deeds you did at first.

We must remember repent. Remember from where we have fallen. Repent and redo what we used to do at first.

What works righteousness? No. This is simply telling us that we have to once again pick up what we laid down. Listen to the church.

This is so important. It's the elementary childlike biblical principles that we've abandoned. Simplicity.

Bible reading. Structured Bible reading. Structured memorization of Scripture.

Basic prayer time. Christian fellowship and Christian witness. The immediate and direct context of this instruction is to do the very things that we were doing in the beginning phases of our Christian life.

That's what it's saying. Go back to the basics. True biblical repentance will always go back and redo.

It will always go back and redo that which has been abandoned. How about just picking the Bible up again? How about once again praying into the night? How about looking at worship and looking at teaching as we used to? Do the deeds that we did in the beginning. Go back.

Do you remember old Christian? The pilgrim's progress. Do you remember him? Old Christian was climbing up the hill of difficulty and he came to a small arbor that was provided, a place that was divinely provided by God for Christians that were weary in the way for a short rest. A short rest.

Well, as we know old Christian fell fast asleep and in his state of sleep his scroll, the Bible it rolled all the way back down to the bottom of the hill. And whenever Christian realized that it was gone, and it was just a few moments before he did so realize he had to go back down the hill of difficulty and pick up what he had lost. Here's our options.

Continue to head forward in our stubborn Christless condition or repent Remember, repent and redo the first works. We've got to go back down the mountain pick up the scroll get your Bible and get back going but get back going in the right way looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith.

Let me read you a quote from Sammy Rutherford a Scottishman, reformer what he said he was locked up in the prison of Aberdeen for the gospel hardship cruel conditions this is first love exemplified quote Oh my Lord if there were a broad hell betwixt me and thee and if I could not get at thee except by wading through it I would not think twice but I would plunge through it all if I might embrace thee and call thee mine if there's a broad hell between us and Christ that we would head long into it and swim across the lake of fire to get to Jesus Christ to embrace him, that's first love and then he says or else I'm coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent I know the time is going past us this is a remaining judgment for those who refuse to repent this

is directed to church members who've lost their first love and they've grown cold in their heart the Lord will come to the unrepentant and he will remove their lampstand from its place, and what does that mean? let me give you the Puritan's definition that the Lord's going to come and take our gospel away from us our gospel historically we know that Ephesus did not heed Christ's warning and Islamic invaders came in and snuffed out the gospel out of Ephesus and there was no more Christianity that remained there and then God destroyed the whole city they would not repent it became an Islamic stronghold Islam came in because the gospel was taken away the lie of the gospel the whole city lies in ruins today the church is both the pillar and the bulwark of the truth the gospel Paul told

Timothy 1 Timothy 3.15 but in the case I am delayed I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God which is the church of the living God the pillar and the support of the truth the lampstand when the lampstand is taken away the gospel itself is taken away let me ask you a question could this be what's happened in America I have people calling me we have people driving two and a half hours to come here and hear the gospel why is that because there is no gospel where they live why isn't there a gospel in that community why isn't there a church Christ centered gospel driven church I will say by according to scripture that the gospel has been removed because all across this nation we've become materialistic and godless and we're lying up on ourselves

and our first love has grown cold and Christ has come in judgment and taken the gospel away from our nation men and women, boys and girls have left their first love let me read to you from the great Puritan Stephen Sharnock the man of God says this in regard to this particular text in Revelation 2 let us prevent by repentance and prayer let us prevent by what? repentance and prayer the removal or eclipse of the

gospel listen the loss of your estates at your home the massacring of your kids your children the chains of captivity are a thousand times more desirable than this deplorable calamity estates may be recovered, new children raised fetters may be knocked off, new houses may be reared upon the ashes of the consumed ones the possession of the country regained but it is seldom that the

gospel returns when carried away upon the wings of the wind listen let us therefore seek to him, chiefly to him only to him he only can remove the candlestick he only can put his hand as a bar upon the light listen the gospel is our only hope Jesus Christ is our only hope let us repent and redo the first works then lastly we go from the admonition to the award verse 7 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to him who overcomes I will grant to eat the tree of life which is in the paradise of God I want you to notice that this is a particular church is being addressed but this church is and this admonition is for churches you see that verse 7 says to the churches dealing with emphasis but this is not only for all of us the key verb here is the word overcomes

it's the hinge of the entire verse it's a military term that has the meaning of showing you and I the nature of the strike it's a battle Christianity is a war not so much in the sense of doing works outwardly but it's fighting the good fight of faith inwardly the battleground is the what?

God our first love the battle is for the preeminence of Jesus Christ the preeminence of Christ in our hearts, our lives the preeminence of Christ in his church to the overcomers he grants to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God and this is none other than the joyful reward of heaven that's given to the very warriors of Christ that have overcome this reward is of unspeakable value Paul saw things there that were not lawful for him to speak the reward for the overcoming saint William Grinnell in his book the Christians labor and reward said this of the paradise and the tree the Christians reward is infinite God himself is the reward as well as his rewarder who is infinite in all of his divine perfections and what proportion is there between a poor nothing creature and his nothing service to having this infinitely glorious God as his possession as his proportion Grace Life Church listen will we be like Ephesus will you be a follower of Jesus Christ and then become as one of these will you continue losing your first love will you continue walking apart from your loving Christ if so we will lose our gospel we'll lose our gospel light the lamp stand will be taken away from us because of our deficiency in the greatest gift that's been given to us and that's a burning heart for Jesus Christ let him he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches do you remember when

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