

**Series: Letters from Jesus / March 2, 2016 / Message: The First Love / Scripture: Revelation 2: 1-7**

**Introduction:** In Revelation chapters 2 & 3 we find letters from Jesus to 7 churches. These letters were sent to real churches. Many believe these churches also describe 7 periods of time from the beginning of the church until the rapture. These letters are also applicable for every church and every believer until Jesus returns. Our focus will be to seek together what the Holy Spirit may wish to teach us as a church and as followers of Jesus today. The first letter is written to the church in Ephesus. This was a prominent city in the region of Asia Minor. Paul was used by God to plant this church. In Acts 19 we read of the demonic stronghold in this region which came from the worship of Artemus or Diana. A temple and great theatre were evidence of this worship. Although Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire when John recorded Jesus words, today this location is a small city in Turkey. Jesus mentions a second group which this church was standing firm against. They were the Nicolaitans. The word means “conquering the people”. Some believe these people were the beginning of the clerical hierarchy which developed in the church and robbed from the laity the spiritual freedom Christ had given them. Others believe this group taught it is okay to satisfy all of your fleshly desires because of Jesus forgiveness. The angel is most likely the lead pastor in the city. He would be the one receiving and distributing the letter. The 7 stars we believe refers to the Church leadership and the 7 lampstands refer to the churches. Jesus has these leaders in His right hand. This is a symbol of His authority, power, and protection. Jesus walks among the lampstands which means He is ever present in His churches.

**The Praise (verses 2-3)**

1. Jesus starts with a simple “I know”. Jesus knows everything about the church. He sees each member and He sees the body and knows all the good and the bad. Nothing is hidden from Jesus. This is an intimate knowledge. This truth can be a source of encouragement or discipline.
2. Jesus points out the good He sees from this church:
  - a. Jesus commended their service- deeds and toil- They worked hard to serve the Lord, each other, and the community
  - b. Jesus commended their endurance in the difficult times – patience or perseverance in trials
  - c. Jesus commended their stand for the truth. They stood against evil men
  - d. Jesus commended them for their discernment and purity in truth- they put teaching to the test
  - e. Jesus commended them for their refusal to grow weary in the work for His name

**The Problem (verse 4)**

1. This church would have been recognized as a church doing everything right in the eyes of most. They were doing well yet something vital had been lost which, if not recovered, would cause the destruction of this churches influence. Jesus looked beyond the activity to the place of motivation. Here Jesus found a dangerous concern.
2. Jesus words must have pierced the heart of this church as He declared you have left your first love. To leave could mean to willfully abandon. Most likely Jesus used the word, “left”, to indicate a departure that results from a neglect over time.
3. Love here refers to their devotion for Christ. This love speaks of the intimacy with Jesus which produces or motivates one’s praise, worship, fellowship and service.
4. When Jesus was visiting in Mary and Martha’s home He said one thing is necessary. Mary was sitting at His feet listening to Him. This relationship of love for Jesus is the vital need according to Jesus. (Luke 10:38-42)
5. Warning signs of a departure from our first love
  - a. When we accept and practice personal service with little or no personal worship. This is when we give our service yet do not really give ourselves. We continue to be busy yet barren when it comes to lasting fruit for His kingdom
  - b. When we find ourselves serving out of guilt or necessity rather than as an overflow of thanksgiving & Christ’s love

- c. When our focus is inward and we choose to use our God given resources out of a motivation of fear, selfishness, or survival. Some examples of resources we have are time, talent, spiritual giftedness, finances, and stuff we have collected. The love of Jesus leads us to a lifestyle of:
  - i. seeking first His Kingdom
  - ii. seeking to pierce the darkness to reach the lost with Jesus love
  - iii. walking by faith, obedience, and dependency upon God
  - iv. Giving of ourselves and all He has given to us to serving others
- d. When we no longer are burdened by the truth that people around us are lost. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus wept over His city because they rejected Him. Can we really be walking in intimacy with Jesus and at the same time be without a burden or passion for people
- e. When we find ourselves focusing on what divides us rather than on what God has called us to do.
- f. When we are so busy doing religious service that we have no time to build relationships with people who need Jesus

### **The Solution (verse 5a)**

1. Jesus said to start with remembering. Take the time to remember the joy which came as a result of your salvation. Remember the devotion and how the worship of Jesus motivated us to love, to live, to serve.
2. Jesus said once we remember we are to repent for our neglect of our relationship with Him. To repent is to express to God a desire to be changed by the power of God which will enable us to turn from sin and to follow after Christ.
  - a. Repent of confidence in self- displayed by action without consulting God
  - b. Repent of self-sufficiency displayed by trying to handle things on our own without God
  - c. Repent of our need to be in control displayed by a lack of full surrender to Christ
  - d. Repent of contentment with going through the motions when no lasting fruit is being produced
  - e. Repent of contentment with a maintaining where we are rather than doing whatever is necessary to reach the lost
  - f. Repent of an unwillingness to trust God and be fully abandoned to Christ's will
3. Jesus said the third step is to repeat the first things. He said to do the things you did at the first. **Key thought:** When the feelings of love are missing one must do what love would do and trust God to restore the full experience of love. Love is a choice and a commitment. Love can produce wonderful feelings but love is not defined by feelings

### **The Warning (Verse 5b-6)**

1. If they did not remember and repent they would lose their lampstand. This refers to their spiritual power, influence, and testimony as believers and as a church.
2. This decline happens in stages. Here are a few of the steps:
  - a. Cooling of spiritual love- neglecting time with Jesus
  - b. Replacing devotion for Christ with either religious service or things of the world-accept new source of passion
  - c. Compromise the faith
  - d. Loss of effective testimony

### **The promise (verse 7)**

1. There was hope because they could hear and respond
2. They were reminded that as overcomers they would one day experience the joy of being in God's presence permanently
3. This letter is not condemnation. It is Jesus calling us to return to the joy and intimacy of our love relationship with Him

### **Application**